

1. What is a Christian? Finding God's grace in Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] Well now, turn up with me, if you would, that passage in Matthew chapter 5, page 809 in the Church Bibles. This famous passage of the Beatitudes that tells us so much about the shape of real Christian discipleship.

I don't know about you, but I couldn't help feeling a little sad that this year's Open Championship at St. Andrews was going to be missing the greatest golfer ever.

That is, without question, Jack Nicklaus, of course, the Golden Bear. It was in 2005, wasn't it, the last Open at St. Andrews, that he made his very last appearance in a golf major.

His 164th, imagine that. And if you remember, he went out in style by birdieing the last hole on the 18th green. In fact, apparently his playing partner, Tom Watson, was so overcome with emotion at the event that he started crying, and Jack Nicklaus had to poke him and tell him to pull himself together.

But Jack Nicklaus was a great, great golfer, and more than that, he was a great sportsman, wasn't he? In the true sense of the word. Actually, a friend of mine, when I mentioned I was going to mention Jack Nicklaus this week, he reminded me of that other great jewel in the sun at Turnberry in 1977, when Tom Watson pipped him on the very last hole, and reminded me just of what a great sportsman Jack Nicklaus was in congratulating him then.

[1 : 33] But he was a great ambassador, a great role model too. He's remembered, alas, unlike some of his successors, not for his misdemeanors, but for his very happy marriage of 50 years to the same woman.

Great, great golfer. You wouldn't think, would you, that a great golfer like Jack Nicklaus would have much more to learn about playing the basics of the game of golf after his first few years as a professional, after he'd won so many golf majors.

And yet apparently we're told that every year, right through his career, Jack Nicklaus would take himself back off once a year to his coach from his earliest days, to Jack Grout.

And he would go to him and say, Jack, teach me how to play golf. And he would put the club in his hands, check his grip, look at his swing, and go through all the very basics.

Sounds very extraordinary, doesn't it? But I guess what made Jack Nicklaus such a great one was that he knew that he would only go on making progress and getting better at golf if he never ever left the basics of the game behind.

[2 : 44] And I think that is a very powerful lesson for all of us as we think about living the Christian life. We too must never think that we can get beyond the basics or need to get beyond the basics about the shape of real Christian discipleship, what it means to be a believer.

So I want for these three Sunday mornings, the next few weeks, to have a back to basics, as it were, to look at some things that are so basic to the Christian life as the grip and the stance of the swing are basic to the game of golf.

I want us to go back to Jesus and to say, Jesus, teach me again how to be a Christian. Teach me the shape of true Christian discipleship.

And so what better place to go than to the Beatitudes, the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. We're going to go to Jesus' words there and we're going to listen as he teaches us.

Teaching us, first of all, that real Christian discipleship begins with finding God's grace. I guess that's our title for this morning, finding God's grace in Jesus Christ.

[4 : 04] The Sermon on the Mount, of course, is one of the best known, but the most misunderstood parts of the whole Bible. There are countless misconceptions about what this is all about.

The novelist Leo Tolstoy, for example, wrote about it in his last novel, Resurrection. He saw the Sermon on the Mount as a blueprint for society, that it would be attainable by concerted effort from the public at large.

And if only we could all live like that, there would be utopia. But of course that has never happened, because no one ever has lived like that, and no society has.

It's very common, I guess, in our country today, among many people, even perhaps in churches, to see the Sermon on the Mount as a sort of plan for acceptance with God.

If only you can live according to the Sermon on the Mount, in such a way as to notch up enough points, as it were, then all will be well at the pearly gates. You sometimes hear people, don't you, when they're asked about, do they have any Christian faith?

[5 : 13] They'll say things like, well, I try to live according to the Sermon on the Mount. John Stott says that when somebody says something like that, or especially if they say, I do live according to the Sermon on the Mount, the most charitable thing to assume is that they've never in fact read the Sermon on the Mount.

Because otherwise, they would probably be either the most pompous hypocrite you've ever met, or just a plain, downright liar. But what is the Sermon on the Mount, then, if it's not that?

Well, it's very simple, really. It is Jesus teaching us what his kingdom is all about. What life in his kingdom looks like.

What the shape of real Christian discipleship is. Matthew makes that very plain for us if you look at chapter 4 and verse 23. He tells us that at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction from among his people.

If we look over to chapter 9 of Matthew's gospel at the end, chapter 9, verse 35, you'll find a very striking little verse that echoes the one that we just read.

[6 : 32] And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

Well, that's two marker posts, two bookends, if you like, that Matthew puts there in his gospel for a very good reason. He tells us, in chapter 4, verse 23, Jesus was going to go about teaching about the kingdom and demonstrating that kingdom by healing every disease and casting out demons.

At the end of chapter 9, he tells us that's just what Jesus has been doing. And in between those two marker posts, we have the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 to 7, Jesus teaching about his kingdom, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.

And then if you read chapters 8 and 9, you'll find Jesus going out, healing every disease and casting out demons. So the Sermon on the Mount is simply that, Jesus teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and all its implications.

Put another way, it's Jesus telling us what a right response is to himself and his kingdom which has come in his presence. I feel like it's a manifesto for kingdom people of what Christ's kingdom life is all about.

[7 : 48] It's a portrait, if you like, that teaches us the shape of real Christian discipleship, what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Now there was lots of confusion in Jesus' own day, just as there is today, about what the kingdom of God looks like and is.

And that is why Jesus is such a great pains to teach people what it is all about. You see, people then were expecting and waiting for a kingdom that would be all about earthly things.

It would be all about political liberation from the Romans. It would be about social change. It would be about economic change and so on. It would be about throwing off the yoke of Rome and finding the great joy on earth that people had always longed for.

Actually, very little has changed. When people speak about the kingdom today, even within the confines of the Christian church, that is very often what people are talking about.

It's mainly about social work. And they think that the church is really mainly about social work and politics and so on, that the church is just a campaigning organization, campaigning about things like trident and nuclear weapons and make poverty history and so on.

[9 : 04] I suspect that's one reason why so many people in our country today are so bored with the church just as they're so bored with politics. But actually, Jesus is very, very clear that his kingdom is about much, much, much more than merely that.

Well, it's not, of course, about less than that. Verse 17 of chapter 4, Jesus' first words when he says, repent, for the kingdom is at hand, he calls it, very clearly, the kingdom of heaven.

And therefore, what he is talking about is not a merely earthly thing, but something that is about the transformation of the whole universe, the cosmos. And what he is saying is that that has already begun now in his coming.

So if we want to know about God's kingdom, then we're best to listen to Jesus himself. Surely he's the one who's best placed to tell us and teach us about his own kingdom and about what it really means to be people of his kingdom, to be disciples, to be Christians, to be people of the king.

Only Jesus, the king, the ruler of the kingdom, who has authority to teach us about his kingdom. And that's actually the first point that Matthew is making here in verse 1 of chapter 5 where he tells us, it seems rather innocuously, that Jesus sat down.

[10 : 30] Matthew is telling us that Jesus takes the authoritative seat in teaching us about his kingdom. And those days, the rabbis, the teachers, did sit down to teach.

These days, we stand up. I suppose if I sat down, you wouldn't see me and that would be a bit difficult anyway. But there's more to it than that. Jesus' heroes, they had the Bible, they had the Old Testament, the law and the prophets.

And they were longing, they had an expectation for God's Messiah, for his kingdom, for his great day of judgment to come when the heavens and the earth would be changed and renewed. So when Jesus comes along and says, the kingdom is at hand, the kingdom is upon you, they couldn't help but grasp just what a momentous claim that was.

He was saying that this kingdom, this promised day of the Lord, that our whole history has been waiting for, that somehow it's begun. And that is what Jesus' claim was.

He was proclaiming the gospel, the news of the kingdom, his kingdom. And therefore, he is claiming total authority to teach them about that.

[11 : 45] And that's the significance of these words, he sat down. If you look forward to Matthew chapter 23, you'll see that Jesus mentions the scribes and the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, and he says to the people, they sit in Moses' seat.

That is the great seat of authority. Moses was the great prophet, the great teacher, the teacher of all Israel. And so Jesus says of these teachers, you must do as they say, even if you don't do as they do, because they're hypocrites, they don't live up to their teaching.

They perverted God's teaching through Moses because they removed it from its rightful place, from a relationship with God and they turned it into a mere religion, into a burdensome lot of rule keeping that pressed people down and kept them down rather than lifted them up.

Jesus says in Matthew 23, they put unbearable burdens on people's necks and they won't move a finger to help them. That's what the scribes and the Pharisees did while they illegitimately perverted the seat of authority, the seat of God's teaching, the seat of Moses.

But Jesus is coming along here and saying, I am kicking them out of that seat. I'm taking the chair. And the truth is, it's always been my chair.

[13 : 07] Moses was a great man. He did his job well. You read in the book of Hebrews chapter 3, we're told that he was a faithful servant in God's house. He was a prophet with a gospel message.

His message was exactly the same as the message of the New Testament. Paul tells us plainly that in Romans chapter 10. But Moses, and Moses knew that though he spoke and taught with authority from the authoritative seat of God, Moses knew he was only ever keeping that seat warm for its true occupant, for Jesus himself.

Jesus is the one who is faithful over God's house, not temporarily, but forever as a son. And Jesus is saying, come to me.

Learn from me. Listen to the words that I give you with authority from the seat of God. Because only I can lead you into the fullness of God's grace that Moses pointed you to and taught you to long for.

Remember chapter 11 of Matthew's gospel. Jesus says, come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, burdened by religion and all its expectations. Come to me and I will give you rest.

[14 : 27] Come to me, says Jesus, and discover that God's kingdom is not about religion, burdensome religion. God's kingdom is about grace.

And it's about finding God's grace. It's not about what we give to God and what we do for God as the Pharisees and the scribes lead you to believe. It's all about what God has done for us and what God gives to us.

And what God gives to us is the Lord Jesus himself. Discipleship, being a Christian, being a member of his kingdom simply means following him, taking his yoke, not the burdensome yoke of the scribes and the Pharisees.

It means hearing his words, receiving what he gives, and yes, doing what he does because he's not a hypocrite like the scribes and the Pharisees.

So listen, says Matthew, listen to Jesus, to the one who takes his seat at last as the final authority to reveal everything about God and his kingdom to us and to reveal to us what a right response to Christ and his kingdom is.

[15 : 39] Listen to Jesus. And so the Beatitudes begin by teaching us the shape of real Christian discipleship, what it means to respond, to take his yoke.

Let me ask, who is it that is listening to Jesus here in Matthew chapter 5? Actually, it's a very interesting audience, isn't it?

Because Jesus is giving us a portrait of discipleship for those who have come to him, who have already taken his yoke and who have already found rest for their souls in him. Look at verses 1 and 2.

We're told he's talking to his disciples. His disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and he taught them. But of course Jesus also knows, doesn't he, that all of the crowds are listening in.

Verse 1, seeing the crowds, he went up onto the mountain and called his disciples to him. So everything that Jesus is teaching to his disciples, to those who are already following, he knows full well what the crowds are listening into.

[16 : 48] And therefore he knows that he's speaking indirectly to them because people love to eavesdrop, don't they? It's the surest thing to get somebody to listen to you and have full attention. If you say, this is not for you, I'm speaking to them.

Then you know they're going to listen to everything you say. That's why our politicians, when they go abroad, when Mr. Cameron is in America next week, is it, with Mr. Obama, every press conference he gives isn't for the Americans, it's for the eavesdroppers back home.

That's who he's speaking to. And so Jesus, yes, is talking also about the way into his kingdom to those who are listening in on the outside.

Just as he's talking about the way you go on in his kingdom to the disciples in the inner circle who are listening. And Jesus never changes, you see, because the way to Jesus at first, the way into his kingdom, is the way that you go on with Jesus right to the very end.

Because it's the way of finding God's grace. I guess that means that whoever you are here in this church this morning, whether you're a committed disciple of Jesus, already following him, or whether you're like the crowd, you're just listening in, wondering what it is that these Christians think about, then, well, actually, Jesus is speaking to all of us.

[18 : 05] He's a message for every one of us. So what is this shape of real Christian discipleship? What is the portrait that Jesus is beginning to paint of a believer, of a Christian?

What we find in the Beatitudes, we find it's a very surprising portrait indeed. Quite shocking to us, in fact, when we understand it. It's rather like, remember, when the Queen had her 80th birthday portrait painted, you would have expected it would be some great classical painter.

Do you remember who it was? It was Rolf Harris. Nobody expected that, did they? Well, in a way, this portrait here is almost as surprising as that, because it's a paradox.

It's all about the life of blessing. That's the word that comes all the way through, nine times in the Beatitudes. But all the way through, we find that the way to that blessing is the very opposite to what we would expect.

The way to that great blessing is in almost every case, well, it's like a way of death, isn't it? And that's the great paradox, that's the great scandal of the Christian faith.

[19 : 17] Because the shape of true Christian discipleship is in fact the shape of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that is a life that was shaped by the cross.

It's a life shaped by death and abandonment to all in the world, to all the approval and all the assessment of this world. In other words, it's a death to all religion. That's what religion is, isn't it?

Whether you think you're religious or not. There are many very religious people who don't consider themselves religious, but they're striving for a standard of performance. It might be serving a particular god or other, but it might be a philosophy, it might be a creed, it might be all kinds of things, but they're very, very religious.

There are many very religious atheists in that sense. But the way of Christian discipleship is a life that turns its back on that and instead is a humble grasping of the grace of God offered to us in Jesus Christ.

In other words, it's simply a relationship with the Lord Jesus. That's how Jesus constantly describes what being a Christian means. and its relationship is very, very foreign to this world.

[20 : 33] Matthew 10, verse 38, whoever does not take up his cross and follow me, says Jesus, is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Extraordinary, isn't it? Matthew 16, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. And that's the paradoxical shape of Christian discipleship.

Only the way of death, in fact, is the way that leads to life. Now, we often today, don't we, we talk about the problem of the great issue of low self-esteem.

Now, that certainly can be something that's psychologically crippling to folk, isn't it? But in a sense, what Jesus is saying here is that the real problem of the human heart is not low self-esteem but far too high for self-esteem.

And it's not therapy to increase our self-esteem that we need, it's death. Death to the approval of man and the world and society and ourselves.

[21 : 46] It's death to all of those kind of verdicts on us and it's an abandonment to the approval of just one, of God himself. It's only his esteem, it's only his verdict on us that counts.

And Jesus says that is the very essence of Christian discipleship. It's a life shaped by the cross of Jesus because only that shape, friends, is a life that is truly shaped by an understanding of God's grace.

And that's why the Sermon on the Mount begins as it does with these beatitudes because there are many, many demands in the Sermon on the Mount. As you know, very tough demands on Christian disciples.

But it begins with sheer grace. Because real Christian discipleship can only begin there with finding God's grace in Jesus Christ.

If you don't grasp that, you will never ever get anywhere near what Christianity is really all about. C.S. Lewis, wasn't it, who was once asked in senior common room debate, tell us, Lewis, what is so distinctive about Christianity compared with all the other religions?

[23 : 01] And he answered in an instant, oh, that's easy, he said. One word, grace. Let's just look at verse 3, the very first beatitude, to see if we can understand that.

Blessed, says Jesus, are the poor in spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. That's the first colour, if you like, in this portrait of what it means to be a true Christian disciple.

And it's summed up really in just two words, blessed and poor in spirit. I'm going to call it bankrupt. Let's think about that first word, blessed.

There are nine times in the beatitudes, but what does it mean? Some versions of the Bible, you might have one that translates it happy. But that's not really good enough, that's too subjective a term, although it does include that element of personal happiness.

No, it's an objective word, blessed. What it means is God's verdict upon us. It's God's pronouncement, it's God's commendation, it's God's acceptance, blessed, means God pronounces acceptance upon you.

[24 : 20] I find that in my own mind, the illustration that helps me with this most is of that old television advert from the 1980s, some of you will remember it, about the man from Del Monte.

Anybody remember that? If you have never seen it, look it up, you can find them on YouTube now. I looked it up this morning and I was amazed how many men from Del Monte adverts there were. If you remember the man from Del Monte, Del Monte is the fruit juice maker and they pride themselves on only using the very, very best fruit.

They had this marvelous series of adverts where you would begin by seeing this car driving down this dusty road into a farm somewhere in South America. Out of the car would come this man dressed in a white suit and a Panama and he would go to the little shack where little Pedro was sitting there with his bowl of oranges and a cup and the man would cut the orange and squeeze it into the cup and drink it.

Pedro would be sitting there holding his hat just wondering and then there would be the nod and he would say yes. And out Pedro ran to shout to everybody, the man from Del Monte says yes and everybody is rejoicing.

In fact, in one of the adverts, even all the oranges jump up off the tree. But that's what this word means, blessed. It's God saying yes.

[25 : 44] It's not what we feel or we think, but it's what God says we are. It's what God declares, accepted, blessed. It's the experience of God's wonderful gift of salvation.

It's God's verdict pronounced, saved. Well, who is it who gets that verdict, that great privilege of God's acceptance and blessing?

Well, surely it must begin with those at the very top, mustn't it? The queen and princes and dukes and people like that. People who come in the top of the echelons of birth and breeding and money and all the rest of it.

Surely it must include the wealthy and the successful self-made people, the Roman Abramoviches of this world, who I believe is now offering 50 million pounds for Torres, the Spanish player.

Surely he must be blessed as he goes around the world in his 350 million pound yacht. Surely it must be the beautiful and the talented and the successful, the models and the celebrities that are all around about us.

[26 : 58] Maybe it's the very impressively religious with their fancy clothes and their processions and their great appearance of outward righteousness. That's the world's estimate, isn't it?

That's what we would naturally think. That would be our verdict if we were to pronounce it. Who's blessed in this world? It's all those kind of people. I'm sure if you look at your bank account at the end of the month, you rather wish you were blessed like Cristiano Ronaldo or Leo Messi or one of these footballers.

I read that Leo Messi is now being paid 13 million euros a year by Barcelona and he still couldn't score one goal for Argentina at the World Cup. Not a very good average, is it?

But no, that's not what it means to be blessed according to Jesus. It's not the wealthy, it's not the successful, it's not the admired, it's not those who appear to be very specially religious or pious either.

Who is it? Well, says Jesus, it's those who are bankrupt. And that's what poor in spirit means.

[28 : 10] It's an Old Testament word used often, it means humble and destitute and utterly dependent. It means somebody who's afflicted, who's totally unable to help themselves and they know that they're unable to help themselves.

it's a person who knows that he's got nothing and it's a person who knows that he deserves nothing. And yet those, says Jesus, are the ones who can be blessed, commended by God and accepted by God.

Those are the ones upon whom God says, yes. people. Isn't that extraordinary? How can that possibly be?

Because bankruptcy is such a terrible thing, isn't it? That's all too real and all around us in these days of recession. Every time I walk down Buchanan Street, I think what a sadness it is to see borders all closed up and changed.

Once a great bookshop, part of a great chain. Some of the banks and all the others, they're at rock bottom, they're in receivership, they're in administration. It's a terrible thing.

[29 : 25] Personal bankruptcy, that's a terrible humiliation too, isn't it? Well, I guess it's becoming less so, perhaps. But we saw that, didn't we, in the last recession in somewhere like Japan, where the great pride of these businessmen was so rocked that there was a whole avalanche of suicides because of the shame of bankruptcy.

But you see, that kind of humbling, that kind of swallowing of that bitter pill, that kind of acknowledging your own absolute helplessness, says Jesus is the first step to finding God's blessing, to finding his grace.

Just as it's the way of going on and on forever in Christ's kingdom. It was the great reformer Martin Luther who said that God made the world out of nothing.

And it's only when he brings us to an end of ourselves, that he can begin to make something out of us. Remember the context of who Jesus is speaking to here?

He's speaking, isn't he, to a very oppressed and poor and downtrodden people. They were occupied by the Romans, they were very unwilling vassals of that great empire, and they had been vassals of all the preceding empires for centuries.

[30 : 44] And they knew, this is the bitterness of it, they knew, because God had told them so through his prophets, they knew that the reason for that was very much to do with their own sin, with their own rejection of God as a nation that had led to God's judgment.

And that is a very devastating thing, isn't it? To your whole life, to your thinking, to your deepest heart, to know that the misfortune that you face is misfortune that you brought upon yourself.

It's a very bitter thing, isn't it, for the alcoholic who knows that he has lost everything, his life, his family and everything, because of his own behavior.

And he's helped us to change it. Or the gambler, or the adulterer, or whatever else it might be. It's a bitter, bitter misery, isn't it, to know that we are responsible for the mess that our life is in.

And we people. But Jesus says it's the one who sees the truth about himself and has stopped pretending to himself like that, and knows that he's got nothing to boast of himself at all before God, that it's that person alone who can be blessed.

[32 : 05] He's just saying what God had said through his prophet Isaiah many, many centuries before. This is the one, says the Lord, to whom I will look, the one who is humble and contrite in heart.

Not the one with lavish outward religiosity, not the one with proud moral rectitude, but the one who is humble and contrite in heart.

And Jesus says they are blessed now. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. You'll notice that most of the rest of the Beatitudes, in fact, all of them apart from the first and the last, regard the future.

But those who are in the dust in that way, bankrupt, spiritually, before the Lord, can be blessed right now, says Jesus. And they can be blessed because only those in that situation can really come to Jesus to find God's grace.

grace. And that, friends, is how real Christian discipleship begins. It can't begin any other way than that. In finding the grace of God, the God who says, despite all these things utterly lacking, yes, upon your life.

[33 : 29] Let me give you two implications to think about. God. First of all, that surely is a wonderful comfort. Because what Jesus offers is the very opposite of religion.

It's the very opposite of striving for a standard which is just out of your reach. That religion is poisonous. That is what shuts the door of heaven in people's faces.

And that was the Pharisees of Jesus' day. That's what he said. They said of him, oh, he mixes with sinners. They scorned him. They condemned him. Because, you see, religion, religion sets the bar so very high.

And therefore, so many cannot possibly ever attain a mark. Crippled people can't reach a religious bar that sets so high, can they?

And there are many crippled people in life, aren't there? many are crippled by their past. There are things in the cupboard that terrorize us, that haunt us.

[34 : 40] For some people it's guilt. And that is especially the problem of people who have got a religious background in one way or another. It's the commonest problem I find among people with a Roman Catholic background.

They're crippled by guilt of religion. It's the same often for people from a Muslim background or from simply a moralism background that actually was masquerading as real Christianity but in fact was just the Phariseism of Jesus' day.

Other people are crippled by a sense of failure and that may be true for somebody who's totally unreligious and yet they feel a very great sense of burden from the failure that they've had in their life.

It might be failure in a relationship, perhaps due to unfaithfulness or sexual sin or whatever it might be. But friends, here is the wonderful comfort from Jesus.

You can crawl into the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no bar that you have to scale over. Indeed, the only way into Christ's kingdom is by stooping because it's only the poor in spirit who can find it according to Jesus.

[35 : 53] And that is a very, very wonderful comfort. to me. I'm sure it's a wonderful comfort to many of you also. But secondly also, it is at the same time a very great challenge because the truth is that many of us are just too tall to enter by that way.

Because you can only enter on your knees. You can only enter by acknowledging your poverty of spirit, that you have no spiritual riches to plead at the gates of Christ's kingdom.

And so there's a real challenge. Here is the truth. Religion can't get you in to the kingdom of heaven, but it can very successfully keep you out of it.

Because the door is very, very low. and you must stoop to enter. And stooping to enter is the one thing that the religious heart, whether it be atheistic religion or some kind of other religion, is very, very reluctant to do.

Those of you who have been to the land of Israel and visited the church of the nativity at Bethlehem might remember that the door to that particular church is very, very low indeed. And it was made purposely low to make a point.

[37 : 23] You cannot just walk into the place where the Savior was born. You must stoop and go bent double. And friends, there's no other way to discover, to find God's grace in Jesus Christ.

It means a death to your pride, to your self-sufficiency, to any sense of your own self-importance. It means a death of pride even in your very good and best qualities and your best achievements because it's those things that very often have the greatest capacity to deceive us.

That's why it's so very, very hard for lovely and attractive and successful people to accept this. But it must be so. We must be humble enough to accept our membership of Christ's kingdom as a sheer gift of his grace.

Not something you can buy. It can only be received. Nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross I cling.

Naked come to thee for dress. Helpless look to thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me savior or I die.

[38 : 43] see only somebody who is poor in spirit who knows his bankruptcy before God only somebody like that can say those things. But Jesus says one who can say those things from the heart can be blessed can possess now the kingdom of heaven the favor of God the declaration yes accepted good enough for me.

So let me ask you this morning which are you? Notice the question is not are you bankrupt or are you blessed because Jesus says it's both of those together or it's neither.

Either you know that you're bankrupt in God's eyes and therefore you can be blessed by the grace of God in Christ or else you're proud and confident in your spiritual caliber yourself and therefore therefore friend you are insisting on being without the blessing of God because Jesus is very plain whoever would save his own life will lose it but whoever loses his life declares his bankruptcy for my sake will find it blessed are the poor in spirit but theirs is the kingdom of heaven that's the way to find God's grace it's the way we begin and it's the way we go on and on and on just like Jack Nicholas we need to keep going back to our teacher the Lord Jesus Christ in hearing him say it to us again and again and again let's pray

Lord how we thank you that what matters in heaven is not what we think of ourselves or what we might say of ourselves but it is what you declare to be true forever of us how we thank you for your grace and for the Lord Jesus who came that we might find the way to that grace and to find it abundantly teach us we pray how to be Christian people for his sake Amen Amen Amen