

## Prayer

Touch us, Jesus; touch our needy mortal frame;  
Touch us where we need divine assistance;  
Touch us in those places where it hurts;  
Touch us so we rise above our troubles;  
Touch us with a vision of Your glory;  
And make the difference: AMEN.

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: World Politics

*Pray for the country of North Korea. Pray about the engrained mistrust between North Korea and other countries, and pray for a peaceful end to oppression and dictatorship.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those people who produce and market oil*
- *Give thanks to God for parents*
- *Pray for Afghanistan; its peoples and government*

## Meditation

Feel the breath of God, the Holy Spirit.

Feel the rush of air which comes afresh,  
And breathe more deeply of the things of God.

Accept His unconditional peace and love,  
Which sweeps away your troubles and your fears.

Rejoice in the challenge of the Spirit's power,  
To achieve the things of life which seem impossible.

Receive His loving, unconditional gifts,  
The guarantee of faith and means of ministry.

Be comforted by His awe-inspiring presence,  
And know the power of His healing deep within.

Wonder at the mysteries of the Spirit's touch  
Be caught up in what is greater than yourself.

Breathe on us, Holy Spirit; breathe.

## Bible Study - Matthew 5:1-12(b)

<sup>1</sup> *When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountainside; and when he sat down, his disciples gathered around.* <sup>2</sup> *He began to speak, and taught them. He said,*

<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

<sup>4</sup> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.*

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.

<sup>8</sup> "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup> "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup> "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people mock and persecute you, and wrongly say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## Review

In the previous study we briefly examined the Beatitudes as a whole, but now we will look at what each verse says. We will bear in mind the subtle structure of the 8 Beatitudes which we have already found, by which the first (v3) is explained by the three that follow (vv4,5,6) and the last (v10) is explained by the three before it (vv7,8,9). Remember as well that Jesus was not teaching wisdom in order to facilitate a good life Christian life, but the spiritual path by which a disciple could find and live the Kingdom of God. Ultimately, it meant following Jesus Himself (5:11) and bearing the consequences.

The first Beatitude is closely linked with Psalm 34; 'The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; He rescues those who are crushed in spirit'. This psalm encapsulates the heart of God to rescue the poor and downtrodden, that is, those who wait for deliverance. The phrase 'poor in spirit' could mean 'those who know their need of God', or 'those who do not have God's Spirit', or even 'those who wait patiently for God'; all of which can be justified from Psalm 34. However, the power of this Beatitude lies in Jesus' open proclamation of God's intent to save, and this is explained further in the next three Beatitudes.

Beatitudes 2,3 and 4 (5:4,5,6) consequently speak of God's intent to save those who 'mourn', the 'meek', and those who 'hunger and thirst for righteousness'. This describes many people, and we naturally think of these terms in a general way; people 'mourn' because of the loss of loved ones, or friends, for example, or people who are 'meek' need strength from others, or people who long for what is 'right', do their best to find it (as most do). Certainly, Jesus comes to meet these needs; but here, Jesus hints at more spiritual things. Those who 'mourn' is a quote from Isaiah 61:2, in which the Messiah comes '... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour ... and to comfort all who mourn'; so the 'comfort' given in verse 4 is, according to this quote, the coming of the Messiah! Secondly, the Beatitude about the 'meek' (5:5) reminds of Zechariah; 'Behold your King ... humble and riding on a donkey' (Zech 9:9), a prophecy of Jesus' humility in riding into Jerusalem (Matt 21:5). Then, the idea that the meek 'will inherit the earth' is of course a total reversal of the world's social order in which the powerful and godless rule the earth. In God's Kingdom it will be the other way round! Thirdly, those who 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' reminds us of the Bible's many stories about drought (for example Elijah in 1 Kings 17,18) during which God's people had to learn how to live by depending upon Him. The beatitude (5:6) tells us that in Jesus, our thirst for God and His 'righteousness' will be satisfied!

Now the next three beatitudes go together as well, and whilst the previous three were about the inner human qualities of those who would receive the Kingdom, the emphasis now changes to describe such people's external qualities. In what they do they are 'merciful' (5:7), 'pure in heart' (5:8), and 'peacemakers' (5:9). Most of us would readily understand that 'merciful' and 'peacemakers' are outward qualities which reflect on what people do to put their faith into practice, and most would agree that these are indeed godly qualities. What may be more of a mystery is why 'pure in heart' might be considered as an outward quality, because we might think of it as inner. However, the Bible uses the word 'pure' and

the word 'heart' differently to our common use today. 'Pure' means being set apart for God, not just mentally and spiritually, but in terms of what we do as a person; and 'heart' does not mean emotion because in the Bible the heart is the seat of the will (through our will we take decisions about what we do and why). To love someone with all your heart, for example, means showing this love in what you do, not just feeling it.

So 'mercy' is a costly human quality which demonstrates the Kingdom of God, as are 'peacemakers', and the 'pure in heart'. All of them show in their lives a commitment to God and His will. The climax of the Beatitudes comes in verse 10 when Jesus puts these characteristics together to say what must have been obvious to those who heard Him speak. The human qualities of mercy, peacemaking and purity of heart all bring persecution, because they are contrary to the ways of the world. In addition, they are uncommon because they are regarded by the world as 'soft'. Jesus, however, saw things differently, and said 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs' (5:10)

How can it be a blessing to be taught that people will 'mock and persecute you, and wrongly say all kinds of evil against you because of me' (5:11)? Yet this is the true of Jesus' message in the Beatitudes. Inward belief must show itself in outward action, and this will bring on us both the blessing of God the wrath of the world. This is Jesus' teaching in a nutshell! As we travel on through Matthew's Gospel we will see this principle at work throughout Jesus' ministry, and if we follow Jesus, we must expect the same!

## Questions (for use in groups)

1. Which of the inner qualities within the Beatitudes do you feel close to, and which do you feel far from?
2. Which of the outer qualities within the Beatitudes do you feel close to, and which do you feel far from?
3. Are Christians always persecuted? Discuss in your group what kind of persecution is found in your church and society.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*It is very difficult to try and explain a powerful piece of teaching such as the Beatitudes in a short study! There is so much for us to learn from which is highly valuable. Also, in a condensed piece of teaching such as this, we must expect that the conclusion is a powerful piece of teaching about the Christian life; and here it is. The combination of God's blessing and persecution is what all Christians should expect.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Read through the beatitudes over a week or more, learning each of them, one a day, and allowing your spirit to dwell on each of them and letting the Holy Spirit work in your life through them.
- Talk with a Christian friend about the subject of persecution, and discuss how Christians should seek to deal with persecution.

## Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You rule in heavenly places and are worshipped and adored by angels. May our worship of You reflect Your rule over our lives, and may Your church here on earth offer You the praise that is Your due. How can we ever praise You enough for the great gift of Salvation! Thank You Lord! AMEN