

Who Jesus Congratulates

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[0 : 00] Why do we congratulate people? Think about it. When you congratulate someone, you go to someone and you say, Congratulations, what do you mean? What do we mean when we say congratulations?

Normally, it's when we recognize something good has happened to that person, that's when we'll congratulate them. So, if a person gets engaged, congratulations.

If they get a new job, congratulations. If they get a promotion, if they win a sports event, that's typically the times we say to them, Congratulations.

Effectively, we're saying, this is a good thing that's happened to you, be happy about it. Congratulations. This is the kind of thing that life should consist of, this kind of happy moment.

And so, we celebrate those things when they do happen in the lives of others. We're recognizing that this is good. This is what life should be like.

[1 : 00] That there's such a thing as a good life, an ideal life, and it looks like this, this thing that we're congratulating them for. That's essentially what we mean when we congratulate someone.

Well, do you know, that's what Jesus is doing at the start of the Sermon on the Mount. In these list of blessings that we call the Beatitudes, which just comes from a Latin word which means blessing.

But when he says here, blessed are, what he's actually saying is, congratulations. Congratulations.

This is a good thing. This is ideal for you. Be happy about it. That's what he's saying in these list of blessings.

He's saying congratulations. But as we read them, here in Matthew 5, we start to realize that he's congratulating people for things that we would never normally congratulate people for.

[2 : 05] Things that we don't normally associate with an ideal life. And that is exactly the point of how Jesus kicks off his block of teaching here.

You see, what he's doing here by congratulating people for these strange things that we would never normally congratulate people for, is he's wanting to challenge what we think is a blessed life.

What we think are real blessings. And he wants to perhaps show you this morning that you might be living a more ideal life than you think.

And so let's get into it. And let's see who Jesus congratulates first. We'll start from verse 3. And he says, Blessed are the poor in spirit.

For the kingdom of heaven is theirs. The poor in spirit. Now what does he mean by that? What does it mean to be poor?

[3 : 07] Well, it means to not have what you need. Right? To lack the essentials in life. But Jesus adds in spirit. To be poor in spirit.

So he's talking about something that's bigger than just physical need. To be poor in spirit is to recognize that in everything you are lacking.

You don't have what you need in and of yourself. And so you need God. You don't have what you need in life without God. Is that you?

Is that what you realize about your life? That you cannot live it without God? Well, that's to be poor in spirit. The world would say that's weak.

The world would call you weak. For being someone who is totally dependent on God. That you don't have what you need without God.

[4 : 03] They would say, oh, that's a crutch. You know, those kind of people are weak. Who need God as a crutch. You know what Jesus says?

Congratulations. Congratulations. And the reason is? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Congratulations to the poor in spirit.

Because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. That phrase that he uses, the kingdom of heaven is theirs, is actually the frame of these list of beatitudes.

It's in the very first one and the very last one in verse 3 and in verse 10. So that idea to possess the kingdom of heaven is the context of all of these congratulations.

But what is the kingdom of heaven? That Jesus is talking about? We might think we know what it means. But what does it actually mean?

[5 : 02] Well, Jesus first uses that phrase back in chapter 4 verse 17. Just turn a page back there and see how he uses it. Jesus says in 4 verse 17.

So it says, from then on Jesus began to preach. And he says, repent because the kingdom of heaven has come near. This is a very important verse, by the way, here in Matthew.

It's the beginning of the second major section in the book of Matthew. It's the end of Matthew's introduction. So underline it, highlight it, because it's going to set that verse. 4 verse 17 sets the tone for the rest of what we're going to read.

And Jesus says, repent because the kingdom of heaven has come near. So you see, the kingdom of heaven that he's talking about here in chapter 5, he's not talking about going to heaven.

When you die. That's not what he's talking about. But he's talking about a new kind of reality that is coming to earth. From heaven. And it's coming to earth with him.

[6 : 05] He is bringing it. That's what he's announcing here in chapter 4 verse 17. That he is bringing. This kingdom of heaven is coming near with his arrival. And what it refers to, we discover, is a new type of life.

A new reality. That is going to change this world. A new reality. A new rule. A new way of living that comes from heaven.

That is coming to earth and that is changing this world. And that ultimately will completely transform this world. That is what the kingdom of heaven is here in Matthew.

But what he's saying here in the first congratulations to the poor in spirit. He's saying that you can only be part of that reality.

That new reality that's coming to earth. The kingdom of heaven. You can only be part of it when you realize how much you need it. That you are in spiritual poverty without it.

[7 : 08] That's the qualification. That's why the ideal life actually begins there.

With the poor in spirit. Next, Jesus goes on to congratulate the kinds of people who are most ready for the kingdom of heaven to come.

Now, in verse 4 to 6. Have a look. Blessed are those who mourn. For they will be comforted. Blessed are the humble.

For they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. For they will be filled. Okay, so all three of these next blessings are referring to people in some situation that is bringing them down.

Those who mourn. What does it mean to mourn or to grieve? Well, you mourn when you've lost something or you've lost someone that was special to you.

[8 : 16] That's what it means to mourn. But in the Bible, it means something more. It also means to grieve at your own failures. Your own lack in your life. Your own weaknesses.

The ways that you've messed up. That's also, when you think of those and they're heavy on you, that's also mourning, grieving in the Bible. And so, do you feel like a failure this morning?

Do you feel like a failure? Are you missing something in your life that you don't have? Well, then you're mourning. You're actually in mourning.

Secondly, the humble. Now, humility can be an attitude to be humble. In the Bible, a right and good attitude to have in light of who God is.

But here, it's more likely Jesus is referring to a situation that people are in. A humble situation. In other words, they don't have power. They don't have influence. Influence. Especially the people he was talking to.

[9 : 21] They're not important in the world's eyes. They're not the movers and shakers. They're not the people who matter in society. Well, that's what it means to be humble.

In a humble circumstance. And then, next, Jesus talks about those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And that means a yearning for better things in this world and in yourself.

A dissatisfaction with how things are right now. Do you feel that? And he describes it as hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Think of the last time you were really hungry. I mean really hungry. If you're a teenager, that probably wasn't too long ago. But I'm talking about not just peckish.

I'm talking about hungry. You haven't eaten for a long time. And you've got that ache in your belly. You're all really thirsty. Or you've gone for a long walk or a long run.

[10 : 35] And it's a really hot day. I know you can't imagine a hot day today. But you've gone. And you haven't drunk. You realize you're dehydrating. And your whole body, there's just this deep urge to drink or to eat if you're hungry.

And you can't ignore it. You can't focus on anything else until that urge is satisfied. You know that feeling? Well, is that the kind of urge that you have for this world to be fixed?

Such a deep urge that you can't actually focus on anything else except that. Is that the kind of urge that you have for yourself to be fixed?

Well, if so, you are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. And if any of those things describe you in any way, Jesus says to you, congratulations.

Congratulations. But why? Why would he congratulate these types of people? I mean, it's almost mean to congratulate someone who's mourning. I mean, you don't go in a funeral up to the grieving widow in the front row and say, congratulations for your loss.

[11 : 57] I mean, that's inappropriate. Why would Jesus congratulate those who mourn? Why would he say, oh, it's blessed to mourn? Well, the reason he can say these things is because of the second line in each of these verses.

And in summary, the reason Jesus can say this to these people is because he knows that for them things are going to change. The reason he can say it to you is because he knows things are going to change for you if the kingdom of heaven is yours.

Verse 4, blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Are you experiencing loss? Are you grieving? Are you mourning?

Well, if the kingdom is yours, all that loss, all that pain, all that grieving will be more than made up for one day. Jesus knows that and he wants you to know it as well.

If you are his. Verse 5, blessed are the humble for they will inherit the earth. Do you feel like you're not that important in this world?

[13 : 06] That you're in a dead end job and you're not really going anywhere in life and you're not really achieving anything. You don't have much power and importance in the eyes of others.

Well, Jesus says, don't worry if you're part of the kingdom, one day you will run this world. Verse 6, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.

Are you hungering for better things? Are you unsatisfied with the state of this world, the state of your own life? Well, one day you won't hunger anymore.

One day you will feast if you are in his kingdom. You will feast. You will be filled. Literally, the original word is more better translated to be stuffed.

To be stuffed. It reminds me of Christmas lunch. You know, I, given my job, I work on Christmas day. And, uh, work in the morning and by, by lunchtime I'm, I'm quite hungry.

[14 : 14] But let me tell you, that is the best hunger that I have throughout the year. Because I know how it's going to be satisfied. In this Christmas feast we're going to have with the family, that's a good hunger.

A hunger where you know it's going to be more than satisfied. Well, if you're experiencing that type of deep hunger for change, if any of these things describe you, it's good.

It might not feel it, to mourn, to hunger and thirst, to be in a humble situation. But Jesus is saying, it's good for you.

Because these things make you focus on what's important in life. These things make you hunger for the coming kingdom. And they make you not satisfied with what the world can give.

And so you're blessed. You might not feel it, but Jesus is redefining what it means to live the blessed life here. But then what he does next, in the next few blessings, is that he goes on to talk, not just about the things that make you ready, and look forward to the coming of the future kingdom, which he will bring.

[15 : 37] And we know that even more than his original audience knew that. Because of what he went on to do. His death, to atone for sins, his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven, which promised his return one day.

Those things are guaranteed. And so what he says about the kingdom is guaranteed. We can know it's going to happen. And these things are going to make us ready for it. But he doesn't only talk about what will make us ready for it.

He also talks about the ways that that kingdom is already evident in the present. Today. In the next few verses. Verse 7 to 9.

Let me read them. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

[16 : 59] Verse 8. What does that mean? Well, we might wonder, does it mean to be perfect? But actually, more accurately, it means to have an undivided heart. So in Psalm 24 that we read earlier, being pure in heart is defined as to seek the face of God.

To focus on Him. God is the most important thing in your life. More important than what the earth can give you. And worldly things. That is what it means to be pure in heart.

To be undivided. And then, verse 9. To be a peacemaker. To be a peacemaker. Is to actively seek to reconcile with someone you're in hostility with.

Rather than to pay them back. Or to get retribution. Or all those things that our human nature wants to do. You know what I mean? When you're fighting with someone. When you're at loggerheads with someone.

You want to get them. You want to stick it to them. You want to win. But being a peacemaker is to put that aside. And to say, you know what? What's more important is reconciled relationship.

[18 : 07] And not this person getting what they deserve. That's not my job. You know these things? You notice merciful, pure in heart, peacemaker.

They're all very rare in our world, aren't they? In our society. You don't often see them. I mean, imagine. Imagine you did. Imagine this was the norm. Peace rather than hostility.

Undivided heart. Giving other people the good that they don't deserve. Imagine how amazing our society would be. But you don't see that. Often. These things are rare in our world.

And the world doesn't congratulate these things. And yet they are exactly the things that mark out this new reality that Jesus has come to bring to this world from heaven.

And these are exactly the things that Jesus was. In fact, all of these things that Jesus is congratulating people for are things that He was.

[19 : 15] Situations He was in and attributes that He displayed. And so all who are truly saved by Him and united to Him will begin to display these attributes as well.

And that is why seeing these things in your life is proof that you are one of those people. Merciful.

Pure in heart. Peacemakers. Now, of course, we never do that perfectly. And we've got to realize that doing these things doesn't save us.

So, when Jesus says, blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. He doesn't mean when you are merciful, then God will be merciful to you.

What He means is if God has been merciful to you, that will be shown in you being merciful to others. If you really have experienced God's mercy, that will come out in you showing mercy.

[20 : 18] And it's the same for the others. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. These are not rewards for doing these things. They show that these things, being a peacemaker, being pure in heart, being merciful in an ever-increasing way in our lives, is actually evidence that you've really experienced the salvation that Jesus has come to bring.

That this new reality from heaven is really working itself out, slowly but surely, in your life. If you are seeing these traits growing in your life, congratulations.

Because it means that this new reality that is going to transform and change this world one day, has already begun in you. And that is worth celebrating and thanking God for.

And yet, those things, this new way of life, this new character that God is forming in you, if you are one of His people, is something that the world will not congratulate, and the world will not recognize.

And you will not get credit for it from the world. In fact, it will bring more trouble from the world. And that is why Jesus ends the way He does. In the last congratulations, He gives in verse 10 to 12.

[21 : 40] Let me read it. Blessed are those who are persecuted, because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. And then He elaborates on that in 11 to 12.

You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven, for that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

And so what we see here is that being caught up in this new reality that Jesus is bringing from heaven, this new way of life, will make it increasingly more difficult to live in the old reality, which we are still living in in this world.

And so as this power of heaven is working in the lives of God's people, they will be more and more at odds with the world around them. And that will cause friction. You just won't fit in properly in the old world.

More and more. You'll rub up against the values of the world and the values of the people around you at work and at school. More and more. As this new reality grows inside you.

[22 : 54] And eventually you'll be mocked. And sometimes you will suffer for it. Paul says later in the New Testament, he says all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted in some way or another, sooner or later, because it's inevitable if this new reality is growing in you that you will be at odds with the world and it will cause friction.

But Jesus says it's a cause for congratulations if that happens. Because why does he congratulate you if you're persecuted? Well, because it proves that this reality is actually real in your life.

And other people can see it, even if they don't like it. It's there. You know, you wouldn't get persecuted if this reality wasn't real. You wouldn't choose to have that upon yourself. And so, congratulations.

Now, of course, Jesus is not saying we should actively seek out persecution. And it's good, actually, and we should be thankful that in South Africa, we face, as Christians, relatively little persecution.

But, still, if we are in the kingdom, we should be asking ourselves, can people see that about me? Do I not fit in with the world around me?

[24 : 17] It's a good question to ask. Do I not fit in? Or, do I fit in too much? Do I blend in to avoid trouble that my beliefs will bring at work and at school?

Do I just go along with the flow? Just blend into the crowd? Well, it's vital that kingdom people do not blend in.

It's vital. It's essential that if we are part of this new reality Jesus is bringing, that we don't blend in. And so, fight that urge.

Because we all want to avoid trouble. We all want to blend in. We all want to please people deep down inside, the people around us. So, we've got to fight this urge not to blend in. And we'll see why it's so important next week.

So, come back next week, when Jesus goes more deeper into why we shouldn't blend in and why the world needs us not to blend in. But more on that next week. But here Jesus is saying, if you don't blend in, if you don't fit in, well, good for you.

[25 : 26] Why? Because, look at verse 12. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

What he's saying there is, if you don't blend in, if it's causing you trouble to be a Christian, well, that shows that you are really caught up in what God is doing in this world, just like His people before you.

And that, it turns out, is the most ideal life you could be living right now. Even when it doesn't seem like it.

And so, are you suffering today? Are you mourning? Are you feeling loss? Are you poor of spirit?

Are you brought low? Are you unimportant? Are you unsatisfied with where this world is and where your life is?

[26 : 34] Are you experiencing difficulty being a Christian? Well, if so, congratulations. Congratulations, because you are exactly the kind of person that God is molding for a new reality that is coming into this world and you're right where you should be.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for challenging our thinking this morning of what the good life is and that to be blessed is very different to what we often think it is.

Lord, would you would you help us to have this new view of what is good for us? And Lord, would you would you cause us to come back and continue to hear what you have to say through this amazing series of lessons that you have for us to hear?

Lord, help us over the next few weeks and months not to let distractions stop us from coming to church but help us to be consistent to be here every day every week and every day to listen to your voice as we read your word.

And Lord, would you would you transform us and more and more get us ready for this new reality that is coming into the world? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.