

Sermon Wesley Box Hill 1 February 2026

BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING – Matthew 5: 1-12

Greetings once again in the precious name of our Lord Saviour Jesus Christ.

In his early ministry Jesus was in the area around the Sea of Galilee in northern Israel. When Jesus wanted to teach his disciples, he often took them way up high, away from any distractions. In this high setting, we could interpret that Jesus is affirming he is the new Moses. In the past, Moses received the law and the ten commandments from God on a high mountain, now we are being shown Jesus revealing God's will on a mountain. The "baby" disciples had much to learn, but Jesus was a great teacher. He caught their attention by taking what they thought they knew and turning it upside down!

Jesus taught them about what was blessed.

"Blessed" in the Bible has a specific meaning. "Blessed" means "holy" or "reverenced" or loved by God. Sometimes it is translated as "happy" but this is an inadequate translation. To be "blessed" is to be in a good relationship with God or to be "holy". The opposite to "blessed" is "cursed"!

Jesus' society was a very religious one. People wanted to live Godly, blessed, "in tune" with God and God's purposes for the world. However, they lived in a very difficult period of history under the tyrannical rule of the Romans. They were a subjugated and humiliated people - not unlike today's Palestinians in the state of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank. The Romans heavily taxed and sometimes punished them very cruelly and punitively for perceived breaches of Roman rule.

As well as that, there was the reality that there was little in the way of effective medical care. Infant and maternal mortality was high, common diseases often proved fatal, and injuries like broken bones led to death or disability. The sick and disabled were often shunned out of fear of contagion or because they believed they were cursed. Sickness and disability were often blamed on sinfulness. So, the ill and disabled often suffered the double whammy of having to put up with their suffering and being blamed for this suffering, as if it was self-inflicted.

Sometimes, the suffering was blamed on the sinfulness of their parents. Life was tough and work was often back breaking. Many people barely got enough to eat as they had little in the way of arable land to cultivate and harvest foodstuff. Even food preparation was laborious. There were no labour-saving devices like a microwave, dishwasher or washing machine, but limited to the simplest of grinding devices. Hunger was the lot of many people, especially in years of drought or when the rains were late in arriving.

Consequently, many people were suffering. And because of the prevailing understanding of who was blessed and who was cursed and others blamed themselves thinking that they must have done something wrong to deserve this suffering.

This is the context of Jesus teaching what we call the Beatitudes. They might well be suffering now, but that is not an indication of wrong doing or sinfulness. The Beatitudes offer hope and comfort to people in awful situations, hope that they are not forgotten and hope that things will change for the better.

God has always had a special love and concern for those who are suffering. This is the God who used Moses to rescue the people out of slavery in Egypt because he heard their cries as they suffered the brutality meted out by their Egyptian slave masters. This is the central and formative story of the Jewish people - the Exodus. All of Jesus's disciples would have known the story of the Exodus as they recited that story every year in the Passover festival. So, they knew from that foundational part of their history that God cared about the sufferings of God's people.

Now Jesus was showing this same love and concern when he pronounced these blessings on the meek, the grief stricken, the impoverished, and the oppressed. But his words were never mere platitudes because he also used his life and ministry to empower the meek, to feed the hungry, to care for the poor, to heal the sick and to demand justice for the oppressed.

Jesus acted, he didn't simply speak blessings. He embodied it. He incarnated it, through his words, his hands, his feet, his life; he brought about the very blessings he promised.

Insisting that pain in and of itself is neither holy nor redemptive in the Christian story, Jesus worked in bringing healing, abundance, liberation, and joy to everyone who crosses his path.

Likewise, we are called to be blessing to others by embodying the gospel. We too, are called to be sharers of hope, healing, love, compassion and peace.

We, too, are called to shine light and love into its darkest places.

We are reminded by the Beatitudes, that even in the worst situations, God's love is always present.

Robert Humphreys - Epiphany 4