

# The Inspiration of the Saints

MATTHEW 5:1-12 — Revd Guy



**5** Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:1-12 (ESV)

## A Season of Celebrations

Yesterday began what I like to call the season of celebrations. Yesterday was Halloween, then, next week it is Remembrance Sunday where we celebrate those who gave their lives in areas of conflict; after that, the United States celebrate Thanksgiving which although we do not celebrate it here in the UK we do seem

to have adopted the celebration of all things consumerist that happens the next day with 'Black Friday.' After that it is only a few short weeks until Christmas and then New Years. Chuck in a couple of birthdays like my son and my father-in-law and it really is a busy time of year full of big celebrations!

Today is also a celebration as today is All Saints Day. Traditionally this is a day that celebrates all those who have died and are now part of the Kingdom of Heaven so that the faithfulness they showed in their lives might inspire our worship, faith, and service here in the present.

But I think that this takes a rather narrow definition of the word "saint". Within the New Testament there are 61 references to the word "saint" or "saints". Only 14 of these refer to saints who have died. Thirteen of these occur in the book of Revelation (Rv. 5:8; 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9) and so could arguably include those who haven't died and the only other reference is in Matthew's Gospel when 'many of the bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised' (Mt. 27:52) after the resurrection of Jesus. Every other time the word "saint" is mentioned in the New Testament it is in reference to Christians who are still alive!

The saints of Lydda are visited by Peter (Acts 9:32), written to by Paul (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph 1:1), they are imprisoned (Acts 26:10); they are aided by other Christians (Rom. 12:13) and equipped (Eph. 4:12). These are not things that happen to dead people! So today is as much about us as faithful followers of Christ as it is about those like St Matthew or St George or St Francis.

## **What does it mean to be a saint?**

If today is a day when saints, both living and dead, are celebrated then it seems only natural to ask - what does it mean to be a saint? Well our reading for today, a passage commonly known as the Beatitudes, offers us a template of what it is to be a saint.

If we look just before this famous passage, in Mt. 4:23, we get a summary of Jesus' earthly ministry:

*And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.*

Jesus has come to preach the coming of God's Kingdom, teach the way of God's kingdom, and demonstrate the purpose of God's kingdom by healing the sick.

The beatitudes falls into the category of preaching and teaching. Here Jesus is showing the disciples the blessings of the kingdom of God that those who follow him shall receive.

But more than that, Jesus is inviting those who do not already possess such characteristics, as described in the beatitudes, to become that kind of person and become members of the kingdom of God.

To be those who are poor in spirit, to be those who mourn, and are meek, and hunger for righteousness, and are merciful, pure of heart, peacemakers, that is what it means to be a saint. That is what we are striving for. That is what it is to be God's kingdom people and to receive God's blessings.

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## **Life as a saint**

It is all well and good to know that the beatitudes provide us with the description of what it is to be a saint, but what exactly does it mean to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be meek?

There is too much within these verses to explain in depth what it is to be someone who lives according to the beatitudes - people have done forty minute sermons on each one of them!

What I shall say is that each of the beatitudes shows us both a vision of God's kingdom that is to come, and provides us with a taste of God's kingdom here and now.

For example, the blessing of comfort in verse 4. It says that those who mourn will one day be comforted. We know this to be true from Revelation 21:4 where God will 'wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.' Yet we receive comfort here and now because we can rejoice in the midst of suffering knowing that this future promise awaits us.

Or consider the poor in spirit who receive the kingdom of heaven. To be poor in spirit is to be those who acknowledge our sinfulness and our need for Jesus Christ. Although we know that through Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection those who trust in Christ will receive the promise of heaven, we also get a taste of that now for as we live a life of faith, casting aside our own desires knowing they are fruitless and

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instead live for God, we build God's kingdom, little by little, here on earth.

## **Kingdom Examples**

Every person who follows Christ should be living according to the beatitudes.

But it is not always easy to live this way, the things of this world overwhelm our intention to live according to Jesus' words. None of us are perfect, we are sinful and in need Jesus, but each Christian offers a glimpse of the kingdom lifestyle set out in the beatitudes.

That is one of the reasons why we celebrate all saints day. Through the lives of the faithful, both alive and dead, we can be inspired in our striving to live for God's kingdom here and now. For example, through witnessing the quiet, faithful service of those in this church, we can see what it is to be meek; through the life of St Francis who sought to bring harmony between man and nature we can see an example of peacemaking.

In the life of every Christian we get a glimmer of what it means to be a member of God's kingdom.

Consequently, each of us are witnesses of God's kingdom to each other.

So let us strive to be the saints we are called to be, to be those who live as members of God's kingdom set out by Jesus Christ. Let us inspire the saints who walk this earth and seek inspiration from the saints who walked this earth.

Amen.

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