

Sermon: Matthew 5:1-16 “Sermon of the King”

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Sermon text and audio available for download at www.waitara.anglican.asn.au

Where do you look for approval?

Michael Clarke – 329 n/o approval from the Australian public!

- If you want to borrow money, you usually need approval from a bank.
- If you want to travel overseas, sometimes you need VISA approval from the government.
- If you want a driver’s licence, you need approval from the RTA.

But whose approval do we look for in life? Who do we look to for those words of encouragement “You’re doing well. You’re doing the right thing”.

The word “blessed” is a word we hear so often in the Bible. Especially here in Matthew 5. But what does it mean? What does it mean to be blessed? It means to be approved.

“Bless” is a term the Bible uses to describe our relationship with God. When we bless God (e.g. Nehemiah 9:5) we are saying that we approve of him, we agree with his ways. It’s a statement of our relationship with him. When God blesses us, it means he approves us. We are in a relationship with him and we are right with him. So when we read this chapter of the famous sermon on the Mount, what Jesus is saying is this: “Here is the way to be approved by God.” “Blessed by God.”

We often seek approval from the people in this world. Our family, our parents, our friends, our leaders, our world. We want to be approved and accepted. But what’s more important is that we find approval from God. What’s more important is that in our life we live in a way that GOD approves of.

So how are we blessed? How do we live as people who are approved, blessed, by God?

What you’ll notice about verses 3-10, is that Jesus talks about blessing by talking about our **character**. He doesn’t talk about what we HAVE or what we DO to be blessed. He talks about who we ARE. He talks about our character.

III – Have you ever done one of those psychological personality tests? According to a Myers Briggs test, I am a “very expressed extrovert”. Apparently I have the same personality type as Sean Connery and Oprah Winfrey!

Famous tests like this measure our character and personality by how extroverted we are, how intuitive we are, how we depend on our feelings and our judgement.

But Jesus measures differently. Jesus talks about our character. And he doesn’t talk from a worldly perspective. He talks from a kingdom of God perspective. So he’s talking **spiritually** about our character as Christians. Let’s have a quick look at the 8 characteristics he mentions:

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

God approves the poor in Spirit. What does poor in spirit mean? It means he approves people who are humble and repentant with their own sin. People who aren’t self righteous, but are humbled by their sin before God. Like in Isaiah 6:5, Isaiah says to God: “Woe to me. I am ruined. I am a man of unclean lips.” Isaiah is poor in Spirit. He is humbled by his sinfulness before God.

2. ⁴ *Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

God approves those who mourn. Not people who are sad or **in** mourning, like when a loved one dies. But people who are **spiritually** mourning. Again, Jesus is speaking spiritually. He's talking about our grief, our mourning, at the **spiritual** state of the world. Again in Isaiah 6:5, Isaiah says to God: "And I live among a people of unclean lips". Isaiah mourns about the sinful state of the world he lives in. Does your character spiritually mourn for the sin in our world?

3. ⁵ *Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

The meek – not the shy and quiet people. The meek are the ones who are **spiritually** meek. Those who don't worry as much about themselves as they do about other people. The spiritually meek put others first and themselves last.

4. ⁶ *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

God approves those who spiritually desire to follow God's will, not man's will. Those who hunger and thirst, who have this deep desire to seek righteousness, to seek God's way in their life. Not chasing wealth or status or power, but seeking God's way. And God says: they will be filled. They will be satisfied.

5. ⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

God approves the merciful. Those who show compassion and kindness and forgiveness to others. God approves us when we reflect **HIS** character of being merciful, kind, compassionate, forgiving.

6. ⁸ *Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

Again, spiritually speaking – Jesus is talking about purity that is transparent. Psalm 24:4 – 5 says:

⁴ *He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to an idol
or swear by what is false.*

⁵ *He will receive blessing from the LORD*

A pure heart is a heart that is transparent. A heart that is honest and **genuine**. Not someone who puts on a show for others. Not someone who lives a double life. Not someone who acts nicely at church but is angry at home or unmerciful at work. Pure. Honest. Genuine.

7. ⁹ *Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.*

God approves those who have a desire for peace. Not only peace between people, but peace between people and God. That's God's heart – a heart that seeks peace. A character that seeks reconciliation. Like 2 Corinthians 5:20 - *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*" Is that our desire? To see peace and reconciliation? And finally,

8. ¹⁰ *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

When we align ourselves with the kingdom of God, when we put others first, when we show mercy, when we grieve at sin, when we humble ourselves, when we seek peace, when we are meek and pure and hunger and thirst to follow God, **we will face persecution**. We will face opposition. And what Jesus is saying is that WHEN you face persecution because you're following him, remember that the kingdom of heaven is yours. That's what you're aiming for. Not the approval of men. Not the riches of the world or the approval of the world. But the kingdom of God.

What Jesus gives us in these 8 verses is a way for us to check our spiritual health and character as Christians. TO look at ourselves and ask WHO am I? Am I a person who seeks **God's** approval in life?

III – There's a story about a police officer who was sitting a exam. And the question was something like this:

"You're on duty, walking down the main street, and there's an explosion. A car is thrown into the air, trapping a man underneath. The explosion causes a fire in the nearby shop and there are several people trapped inside the burning building. A pregnant woman runs out of another building having just gone into labour because of the explosion. A child falls into the nearby water and is drowning. And a power pole collapses across the street crushing a car with 3 people inside. What do you do first?"

And the officer wrote this: "The first thing I do is to quickly take off my uniform and blend into the crowd."

It's often feels easy to blend into the crowd. It's easy to take off our uniform and be the same as everybody else. It can feel difficult to stand out and have a different set of values to the world. **But whose approval are you seeking?**

The world asks us: What do you DO? What do you HAVE? That's how we measure people. What job do you do? What things do you have? A family? A car? A career?

But God doesn't ask that. God asks: WHO are you? He asks us about our character. And then he **tells** us:

*Verse 13: "**You are** the salt of the earth."*

Salt of course is a preservative. And it's also flavouring for food. Whatever the meaning here, what Jesus is saying is this: Salt has a purpose. If it stops being salty, it's useless. If a follower of Jesus stops following Him, we stop being useful. We lose our saltiness.

*Verse 14: "**You are** the light of the world"*

In a world of darkness, God's people are the light. You are God's light. So don't hide. You don't light a light and put it under a bowl. You put it on a stand so it lights the darkness. And it doesn't matter how small your light is. When you're in the middle of darkness, even the smallest light breaks the darkness.

As God's light in this world, when you seek God's approval, when you seek to be humble, and you grieve at sin, when you put others first, when you thirst for righteousness, and show mercy, and have a genuine heart, when you're a peacemaker, and when you face persecution, you are different from the world and you are giving light to darkness. And people will SEE that you are different, and because of that difference, because of your light, they may turn to God and be saved.

When we look in the mirror, who do we see? Do we look at what we **do** and what we **have**? Do we measure our value the way the world measures value? Or do we look at our character? **Who am I?** Do I seek God's approval and follow his values? His character?

Be salt. Be light. Be different.

Let's pray...