

Matthew 5:1-12

Mirroring God's Love

‘But what does that look like?’ Have you ever found yourself asking that question, if not out loud at least in your head? To give it some context, a leader in your workplace says, ‘we want to this to be a work place where everyone is pulling together, doing their bit, working towards a common goal, so we achieve a better outcome for everyone’, and you might be asking yourself, ‘But what does that look like?’ Our national leaders, or wannabe leaders, might get up and say in a speech, ‘this is a time when we need unity, everyone pulling together, in which we all work together for a better society for each and every person, showing that each and every person is an important part of this great nation of ours’, and you might be asking yourself, ‘But what does that look like?’ The school you attend, work in, or your children or grandchildren go to might have a motto or mission statement about promoting and developing the values which are the best for each person and for the good of all, and, when you look at this statement, you might ask yourself, ‘But what does that look like?’ Even in church, your pastor might have prayer cards and coloured dots which he encourages you to use to both give thanks for and share God’s love and grace in your life each day, and you might be asking yourself, ‘But what does that look like?’

‘But what does that look like?’ I wonder if that’s a question people were asking at the time Jesus began this teaching which we now call the Sermon on the Mount. In the lead up to this teaching, Jesus, now about 30 years old, has been baptised by John the Baptist, was tested and tempted in the desert by the devil for 40 days, and has then begun his public ministry and teaching by going around and telling everyone to turn back to God because God’s kingdom is coming soon. He has called the first of His disciples to follow Him, and begun both casting out demons and healing people. Jesus is talking about God’s kingdom, giving a glimpse of what it is to live in God’s kingdom, and is now calling people to be a part of God’s kingdom; to be His followers, His disciples. But it’s very possible that people are still asking themselves, ‘But what does that look like?’

The reading we have here today is normally called the Beatitudes, and it makes up the beginning of the much larger Sermon on the Mount, which takes up three chapters. There a number of ways to look at the teachings Jesus gives in this reading, but one of them is that we see them as both a picture and a mirror of what it means to be a part of God's kingdom; to be a disciple, to do all of those things Jesus has already been talking about. As Jesus goes up and sits on the side of the mountain, with the disciples gathered around Him and many other people getting as close as they can to hear, He uses the language of blessing to tell them exactly what turning back to God and being a part of His kingdom looks like. This is, in many ways, Christianity 101. Jesus is saying, 'if you hear my call and follow it, this is the love of God which you will mirror out and reflect in your life'. Instead of asking, 'But what does that look like?', we can now ask, 'How does this look in us?'

What do we see, or hear, in these words? It's important first of all to note that in talking about the blessings which belong to God's people, Jesus begins and ends the list by saying that 'theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven', and 'great *is* your reward in heaven'. Followers of Jesus, reflectors of God's love, don't receive God's blessings as a reward for what they do, the rewards are already theirs because they are members of God's kingdom. All the things which are in between these first and last blessings are attitudes and actions which we have and show because we can and want to, not because we must and are forced to. To pick up on our current running theme; as God's people we are who we are and we show what we show because we know God's love and grace, and because of that we are moved to show and share God's love and grace. The starting point, becoming a member of God's kingdom, is all done in Jesus dying and rising again for us, and us receiving that in faith. What Jesus gives us here is what that now looks like for us in our lives.

Have a think about the teachings Jesus gives us here. What do they mean, how do you go mirroring and reflecting them in your lives? When we look at them, they begin by describing the attitude that we, as God's people, are called to have towards God, others, and the world. 'The poor in Spirit' means to be humble, to accept that every part of our lives, everything we have, comes from God; it's all His gift to us to be used for His glory and our good. It calls for an attitude of humility and thankfulness. 'Those who mourn' is sometimes seen as those who aren't happy with the injustice and sadness in the world, and who

want to do something to change that; they care for others. The meek again refers to being humble before God, having hearts of kindness towards others. And to 'hunger and thirst for righteousness' is to seek God's will for ourselves, and God's justice and blessings for everyone.

When we look at these words of Jesus with the cross behind them, we are reminded that in His life, and the love and forgiveness we still receive through Him, we see what these things look like. So, what do they look like in us? How do we mirror God's love, the love shown in Jesus, in these ways? Are we always humble and grateful in coming before God, or, like many people before us, are we sometimes quicker to complain about what we don't have than we are to be thankful for what we do? (a very human thing to do!) Are we moved to compassion when we see others in hardship or suffering, or quicker to think, 'I'm just relieved that's not me'? Are we always meek, humble, being willing to let things go, put others first, using God's grace and love as the pattern for how I relate to others rather than a desire for strength or revenge? And what is the most important thing for me, what do I hunger and thirst for; the quick pleasures and fixes which are around me, or seeking God's way of life and knowing that it's only there I can truly be fulfilled? You may have noticed that one thing about these Beatitudes is that they are the complete opposite of what the world often teaches us. So, as we look into the mirror of God's love, from which the cross of Jesus shines out, and the teachings of Jesus reflect back, what are we reflecting in the attitudes which are in our hearts and come through in our lives?

In many ways, the second part of these Beatitudes is often seen as talking about the actions of God's people; what now comes out and is shown by those who know God's love and are followers of Him. If we look at them, we see things like: showing mercy. Having a pure heart, that is having integrity. Being a peacemaker among others. Standing up for what we believe in, perhaps in both what we say as a witness but also in how we defend and help others against injustice. What Jesus is calling for here is not just having those attitudes of thankfulness and humility before God, and love and compassion towards others, but actively showing them out in our lives; our outward words and actions mirror the love of God which is in our hearts.

What does this look like for us then? Do we always show mercy, or do we sometimes hold grudges? Do we react against something which is done against us because we don't want to be seen as

weak, or at least sometimes put ourselves first because we don't want to miss out? Do we always show the mercy to others which we are thankful to receive from God? Do we always act and speak showing who we are in our hearts, so that God's love is reflecting out in us? Do we seek to help everyone to get along, to be able to live with and forgive one another, or do we find ourselves getting caught up in arguments or disagreements, taking sides, sometimes doing more to prolong division than to create unity? And how do we go in standing up for what we believe, as well as speaking out and acting for those who can't do these things for themselves? Do we at times find it easier to blend in than to stand out? Again, use the mirror which has the cross as its background, and the words of Jesus here written on it, to consider 'well, this is what Jesus says following Him looks like, but does it really look like that in my life all the time?'

My guess is that you're probably going to say 'no' in answer to that question, I know I am. But that's why the cross lies behind the words here. Even though we know we don't always do these things perfectly, we know that God in Jesus does. While Jesus does call all of His followers to have these attitudes and to show them out in these ways, we know, and can be thankful, that He does this much better than we do. And because of that, through our faith we receive the forgiveness God offers us through Jesus and the chance each day to try again. But still, our call then is to know the forgiveness which comes from Him, and to use that to keep trying to mirror God's love in our lives.

What does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus, to be someone who knows God's love in our lives and tries to live it out? It looks like someone who knows the blessings of love, care, and forgiveness which are given to us each day, and, even though we know don't always do it perfectly, to be trying to live out and show the love and grace we are given and shown in Jesus. Amen.

For Further Discussion/Reflection

- Can you think of any times when you've heard people make a speech, or you've read a motto or mission statement, and you thought to yourself, 'But what does that look like?'
- Think back over the attitudes which are in the first half of the Beatitudes; humility, thankfulness, compassion, a desire to follow God. How do you go mirroring these in your life? If there any of these attitudes you particularly struggle with bring them to God in prayer.
- Have a look at the ways we are called to speak and act in the second part of the Beatitudes. How do you go mirroring these in your life? If you struggle to speak and act in these ways in any parts of your life, bring this to God in prayer.
- Take time to think/discuss what it is to know the love and grace of God and to mirror them in our lives. Pray: thank God that we know that through Jesus we live in His love and forgiveness each day. Ask Him to help us to mirror this love in our attitudes, words, and actions.

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01.02.2026*