

BEAUTIFUL (AND NOT SO BEAUTIFUL) ATTITUDES

1 Samuel 19, 20

This morning in our study of 1 Samuel we come to that period in the story of David when two factors dominated his life. Saul hated him but Saul's son Jonathan loved him. He was caught between the twin polarities of love and hate. I have always thought that this part of David's life provides a wonderful illustration of the New Testament passage which we know as the Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5 have been very aptly named the Beautiful Attitudes and we see that in the friendship and loyalty of Jonathan, but at the same time we see some not so beautiful attitudes in his father, Saul.

Thinking about David himself we can see the truth of the very first beatitude, Matthew chapter 5 verse 3. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' In Psalm 40 verse 17 David says, 'I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay.'

As we know from the story of his encounter with Goliath David was no coward. Being poor in spirit doesn't mean hiding away from the challenges of life. But it does mean recognising our own weaknesses and failings and looking to the Lord for the resources we need. Indeed the story of David and Goliath illustrates that very point. 'David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty' (1 Samuel 17:45).

Coming to the New Testament the problem with the church at Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3 was that they were not poor in spirit. Jesus speaks to them in verse 17: 'You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'

The first step to receiving God's riches is to realise that we are poor. The first step to being filled with the Spirit is to realise that we are running on empty. The first step to coping with life's big challenges is to realise that we can't face them on our own. We need the Lord.

We can see the truth of the very last beatitude in the life of David at this point. Matthew chapter 5 verse 10: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

The word righteousness occurs twice in the Beatitudes. The other occurrence is in verse 6. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.' It seems rough justice that those who turn from a life of evil and a thirst for unholy things should be rewarded with persecution. Jesus says, 'They will insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me.' How can this be a blessing? Jesus said, 'Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.'

It was a hard lesson for David to learn. It was one thing to be despised by his brothers. It was something else to be hunted down by the King with all the resources of the nation's army at his disposal. How can that be a blessing? 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness' The answer is that righteousness is its own reward. It's better to do what is right and suffer for it than to do what is wrong and get away with it. Why? Because all of us will give an account to God, and there is a reward in heaven for those who love righteousness.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted' (Matthew 5:4). David was an outlaw. He had been forced to run away from the places he was familiar with and the people he loved. It was too dangerous to visit his family and friends. It was a bereavement without a death. At this low point when he might have lost heart Jonathan tracked him down. Chapter 23 verses 15 and 16: 'While David was at

Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.'

That's real comfort. Jonathan helped him find strength in God. That's why we're here today, to find strength in God. Whatever is going on in your life, whatever is going wrong in your life, whatever you may have lost and be grieving for, you can find comfort, you can find strength in God.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth' (Matthew 5:5). Jesus lifted these words right out of the Old Testament, out of Psalm 37 verse 11. To put them in context, we start from verse 10. 'A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the [earth] and enjoy great peace.' Who wrote that psalm? It was David.

The whole psalm is an exposition of meekness. Do not fret or be envious. Trust in the LORD and do good. Delight yourself in the LORD. Commit your way to the LORD. Be still before the LORD. Wait patiently for him.

The fifth beatitude is also illustrated in the life of David. 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy' (Matthew 5:7). We'll be looking at this in more detail next week, the way in which even when David had Saul at his mercy he showed him mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God' (Matthew 5:8). In all David's dealings at this dreadful time in his life he kept his trust in God. He kept his heart pure. Do you remember the LORD's word to Samuel when he was looking for the future king? 'The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart' (1 Samuel 16:7).

There's one more beatitude here which is perfectly illustrated, not this time in the life of David but the life of Jonathan. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God' (Matthew 5:9).

Saul was a troublemaker. He tried to destroy David. David was merciful. He refused to retaliate, but Jonathan was a peacemaker. He tried to conciliate.

In the world today there are many troublemakers, people who are a danger because they are out of touch with God and out of control. There is a need for peacemakers, those who make every effort to heal hurts and to reconcile enemies and to spread love.

I want you to notice just how hard it was for Jonathan to be a peacemaker. He was Saul's son. He loved his father. He was David's companion. He loved his friend. But Saul and David were enemies and the pressure was on Jonathan to choose between them. In fact his father made a very pointed accusation. It's in 1 Samuel chapter 20 verses 30 and 31.

'Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"'

That was a lot of pressure, family loyalty, his love for his mother, the prospect of being king himself some day. Jonathan loved his father and yet he loved his friend. He didn't want to fail either of them but he couldn't please both of them. What a dilemma. That's the dilemma a peacemaker faces.

The amazing thing about Jonathan is that, although it must have torn him apart emotionally, he never gave up on his love for his father and he never gave up on his love for his friend.

After Saul and Jonathan were both killed in battle David composed a lament for them. It's in 2 Samuel chapter 1. 'Saul and Jonathan — in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. ... I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women' (verses 23, 26).

Being a peacemaker is tough. It can tear you apart emotionally but there's a blessing in it. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.' To be a peacemaker is to be like God. That's what God is like, and the cost of making peace tore God apart. God gave his only begotten Son to be the sacrifice for our sins, to make peace. Paul said, 'He himself *is* our peace' (Ephesians 2:14).

Jesus was *the* peacemaker, but that peace was bought at a terrible cost. On the cross he cried out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed is *the* peacemaker, for he *is* the Son of God.

As we look at this episode in the life of David we have the benefit of hindsight. We know how the story ended. But don't forget that David didn't know that. All he knew was threat and flight, danger and separation. David came through because he knew the blessing of God's presence and peace, the peace that passes understanding.

The beautiful attitudes which were illustrated so clearly in the lives of David and Jonathan are seen supremely in the life – and death – of our Lord Jesus, the one who depended utterly on his heavenly father, the one who was meek and gentle in spirit, the one whose righteousness surpassed that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law, the one who showed mercy, the one who was pure in heart, the one who was the Prince of Peace, the one who was denied and betrayed, the one who suffered, the just for the unjust, the one who was crucified.

The beautiful attitudes, displayed against a background of the far from beautiful attitudes. Where do we stand today? What do people see when they look at us?