Sermon on the Mount Bible Study 1

The beatitudes are the are Jesus opening words - the start of his preaching. Beatitude comes from the Latin Beatus (Be-at-us) which means blessed. But the people who Jesus describe as blessed certainly don’t match up with the world’s view of what a blessed person looks like.

Opening Discussion (over dinner)

What would a a Beatitudes for 21st century London sound like?
Who are the ones our society considers blessed? Is it those who grace the pages of hello magazines, with their glamourous lives? Models, sports stars, premiership footballers, Movie Stars. Those gilded youth, trust fund kids, the made in Chelsea generation for whom money will never be an issue, for whom life seems to come so easy.

If we aspire to be like these people what are some of the consequences?
It is a hierarchy in which the vast majority of people will never make it. Most of us will fall short, or miss out. Unless you are young, rich, and beautiful you are missing the boat. Everyone is faking it. Celebrities are terrified of getting old. Also it assumes that money and possessions bring happiness. Oscar Wilde said “In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what you want, and the other is getting it.” The tragic irony is that the people who seem to have it all are often the least happy.

Reflection
Read the passage slowly. Imagine the scene and reflect on how this would have sounded to the first hearers.

Matthew 5v1-11
5:1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, 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 will be comforted. 5 ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 8 ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 ‘Blessed are you when people 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 in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Study Question 1
Who are Jesus audience? - Who are the beatitudes aimed at? v1
It is obviously teaching for his disciples but can you see hints in v1 it is not just the disciples who Jesus is talking to?
The very end of the sermon on the Mount confirms it (Matt 7v28) “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching.” So the whole sermon on the mount is a public event.

Yes is is for the disciples - but it is a invitation. And who are invited? The weak, the marginalised, those whole have little or have lost much. Jesus says you are my people, and this is your kingdom.

Question 2 In what sense can it be possible that the people Jesus describes are blessed?
Not in this world - not in the Kingdom of Mammon. But in the place where God is King these are the blessed ones?

Question 3 What are the beatitudes that stand out to you?
Perhaps ask each member of the group to choose one beatitude that they find striking and reflect on what they think it means.
Below are some notes on the different beatitudes to help the discussion.

The poor in spirit – They are the opposite of the haughty or the proud. The poor in spirit are those who trust in God rather than themselves. Not simply the poor – though they very often will be. They they look to God for help, not imagining that they have any claim on God, or spiritual riches to barter with, a spiritual humility which draws out the compassion and grace of God. In this new world order blessed are you – for yours is the Kingdom of God.

Those who mourn – If is grief above all things that reminds us that this work is not enough, that if there is any hope then there must be another dawn, and new beginning. those who have lost love ones will be comforted, and Like Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. those who weep about the state of the world, and the church and their own selves, who long for things to be different. Jesus say, I have comfort for you.

The meek – I went to a school where the pushy, the aggressive and the arrogant got their way. That is true of much of the world. But this kingdom which will bring down the mighty from their thrones, and the gentle, the caring, the innocent, the meek will inherit the new earth.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Righteousness is the same word as Justice. dikaiosynē. English needs two words - one for outward, one for inward. But there is no real difference. Hunger for the
world to be right, those who’s soul cries for justice, fairness, freedom from oppression. Jesus says your hunger will be filled.

**The pure in heart** for they will see God. Our hearts are so often conflicted. Our love for God is distracted by our love for the things of this world. Is it any surprise that we struggle to hear that still small voice of God, when we are surrounded by noise. It is the pure heart who will catch a glimpse of the divine.

**The peacemakers**, for they will be called sons of God. In the ancient world a son is someone who does what his father does. Peter’s father was a fisherman… So sons of God do what God does and God is making peace. Jesus does what his father does, And those who do the same are sons of God.

**The merciful**, for they will be shown mercy. Jesus teaches us to pray ‘Forgive us our sins as we forgive others’. The heart of the gospel is forgiveness - not just for ourselves but towards others.

**Those who are persecuted because of righteousness**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The problem with righteousness is that it has an uncomfortable tendency to show up unrighteousness - selfishness, greed, injustice. Don’t be surprised if it gets a reaction.

**Question 3**

Each Beatitude after the first says ‘will be’ they are future continuous tense. When will this be?
The kingdom of God is literally the place where God is king. And while that is true everywhere, much of the time that kingship is rejected. And so there is both a now and a not yet to the Kingdom. It is announced with Jesus and his ministry, we catch glimpses of it in our lives and in our world, but it will not fully come until eternity.

**Question 4**

The beatitudes are an intriguing way to start Jesus Ministry. What do you think they are?

They can’t be a checklist to qualify to be in the kingdom. Are they things to aspire to?

Does anyone pick up the subtext here - who do the Beatitudes sound most like?

The kingdom reflects the king. Jesus says this is who I am and these are my people.

They are a statement of Jesus own Character - In Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

The way our world is the beatitudes do make no sense at all. It is the rich, the powerful who will inherit the earth, the wealth are filled, those with special privilege who will see God. But all of us will experience some of this during our lifetimes.

And they are really a blessing When we feel like we are missing out on life, when life closes in because of age, sickness, grief or cares - remember that Jesus says you are blessed. In his kingdom, you are the lucky ones.

Blessed are you for this is how things are going to be, this is eternity. This order of things is passing away, and your world is coming.

**Conclusion**

There is an inscription inside the Statue of Liberty that says.

"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Finish by saying the beatitudes together.