

Sermon – 13 March 2022

Last week Mike pointed out that, in his Gospel, Matthew shows Jesus to be the fulfilment of numerous OT prophecies. Today, Jesus provides his disciples with a set of promises whose fulfilment lies in the future, but the blessings of that future are to be seen as already present.

We are looking at the beatitudes, the most well-known part of Matthew's Gospel, and the beginning of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount.

There are two basic themes underlying the sermon.

Disciples think differently

Disciples Act differently

The disciples think differently or see things differently. They think differently about who is really "blessed".

In a series of short sentences, Jesus goes through a series of current 'states of being' and tells his disciples why people in these states are blessed. Almost invariably is because of a promised future.

What Jesus describes are not qualities which we should aspire to, but states in which people actually live.

As Matthew has shown that Jesus is the fulfilment of OT prophecies, so Jesus promises a future blessedness for those who are living in these states, But a blessing that is to be realised now through hope.

First – most difficult and controversial

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

The society of the day was very different from the society of our country – influenced by Christianity. More like India.

No middle class – but artisans. Poor or wealthy. Poor depended on the wealthy for jobs and resources – often having to beg to get what is necessary.

Reading through the Psalms there is a significant focus on the poor as the recipients of God's concern. The poor are mentioned 30 times.

Give the King Your Justice

72 Of Solomon.

¹ *Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to the royal son!*

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:3). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

² *[May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice!]*

³ *Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness!]*

⁴ *May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the children of the needy,
and crush the oppressor! ²*

Psalm 12:5 *“Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan,
I will now arise,” says the Lord;
“I will place him in the safety for which he longs.” ³*

Sermon at Nazareth quote Isaiah 61

The Year of the Lord’s Favor

*61 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
[he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
² to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn; ⁴]*

God (as king) has a special care for the poor as also the kings of Israel and Judah are expected to have – they have no other help other than relying on God. These are blessed in that they are the focus of the king – the kingdom of heaven is theirs – but not exclusively so as we will find out later that there is also another group to whom the Kingdom of heaven belongs

There is also the poor in spirit. Who would these be – include the poor as Luke’s Gospel makes clear.

Paul, in his letter write about being absent in the flesh but present in spirit. In spirit means not necessarily being physically poor, but alongside with the poor in their condition of need. This would include no doubt some who were wealthy. However, all this is not exclusive and Jesus is not making ‘poor in spirit’ a condition of salvation but a perspective to be held by the disciple.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Ps 72:title–4). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Ps 12:5). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Is 61:1–2). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”⁵

Consolation to those who grieve. Rev 21, John, in his vision, writes

¹³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.]⁴ He [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.”⁶

But in the context of Isaiah 61. Those who mourn are those who have been treated unjustly, the poor, the broken-hearted, the captive, the prisoner – those who suffer due to the exile. In Jesus sermon at Nazareth the time of Israel’s exile has ended in the coming of Jesus.

***Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*⁷**

Numbers 12 Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. ² And they said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” *And the Lord heard it.* ³ Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.⁸

Jesus also describes himself as meek, not one to put himself forward

Meekness involves a willingness to wait, not to rush into action.

Psalm 17

⁸ [Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way. ⁹]

¹⁰ In just a little while, the wicked will be no more;
though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

¹¹ But the meek shall inherit the land
and delight themselves in abundant peace. ¹⁰

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:4). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Re 21:3–4). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:5). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Nu 12:1–3). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ps 25:8–9). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ps 37:10–11). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”¹¹

To see right prevail. Longing in the heart of many Christians who suffer oppression. I would put some of you listening in this category. If so, you are blessed. Why? Because you will be satisfied. This promise is about the kingdom. Satisfaction needs to be waited with patience.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”¹²

The fifth beatitude marks a new emphasis in the beatitudes. Whereas the first four find their focus primarily in a state of mind or an attitude (and imply conduct only secondarily), this beatitude refers to the happiness of those who act, namely, those who are merciful toward others¹³

²¹ *Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner,
but blessed is he who is generous [merciful, LXX] to the poor.*¹⁴

The point is analogous to that made somewhat differently in Matthew 18:33; there a servant who had been forgiven a great debt refused to have mercy on his debtor, whereupon his master said, “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” Implicit in this beatitude is the judgment upon the wicked oppressors, i.e., the ones who have *not* shown mercy: to them mercy will not be shown¹⁵

James 2

¹³ *For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*¹⁶

Judgment is doing what is fair. Mercy is not requiring what might be considered fair.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”¹⁷

“Pure in heart” refers to the condition of the inner core of a person, that is, to thoughts and motivation, and hence anticipates the internalizing of the commandments by Jesus in that which follows in the sermon. It takes for granted right actions but asks for integrity in the

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:6). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:7). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

¹³ Hagner, D. A. (1993). [Matthew 1–13](#) (Vol. 33A, p. 93). Word, Incorporated.

¹⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Pr 14:21). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

¹⁵ Hagner, D. A. (1993). [Matthew 1–13](#) (Vol. 33A, pp. 93–94). Word, Incorporated.

¹⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Jas 2:13). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

¹⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:8). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

doing of those actions, i.e., a consistency between the inner motivations of one's conduct and the conduct itself.¹⁸

³ *Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?*

And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴ *He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.*¹⁹

Pure in heart also has the implication of single-mindedness, a quality affirmed in James's letter. A quality that may have been highly regarded by the Zealots, the revolutionaries, some of whom were among Jesus' disciples and so –

⁹ ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”***²⁰

The Zealots by their militarism hoped furthermore to demonstrate that they were the loyal “sons of God.” But Jesus announces the kingdom entirely apart from human effort and indicates that the status of υἱοὶ θεοῦ, “children of God” (cf. Rom 9:26), belongs on the contrary to those who live peaceably.²¹

Col 1

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.²²

Jesus now prepares his disciples for the inevitable persecution that they will suffer. Like the poor in spirit, the kingdom belongs to the disciples who suffer persecution. Again, this is not exclusive.

¹⁰ ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”***²³

The theme of persecution is particularly important in Matthew, very probably reflecting the situation of the community for whom the Gospel was written. As they experienced persecution, especially from their Jewish brethren, they needed to know what Jesus had

¹⁸ Hagner, D. A. (1993). [Matthew 1–13](#) (Vol. 33A, p. 94). Word, Incorporated.

¹⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ps 24:3–4). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

²⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:9). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

²¹ Hagner, D. A. (1993). [Matthew 1–13](#) (Vol. 33A, p. 94). Word, Incorporated.

²² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Col 1:19–20). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

²³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:10). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

said about it, how to regard it and how to endure it (cf. the perfect tense of the participle δεδιωγμένοι).²⁴

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. ²⁵

This last beatitude makes personal what was said in the previous one and expands on it. When the disciples are reviled persecuted, misrepresented and lied about because they are followers of Jesus, far from retaliating, they are to “rejoice and be glad” in that they are sharing in the same sufferings as the prophets before them, and so will be given the same reward.

Apostles arraigned before the Sanhedrin. Conclusion of the hearing

So they took his advice, ⁴⁰ and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹ Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. ²⁶

The question we need to ask ourselves is “Do I think (or see things) like a disciple?” How do I take seriously what Jesus teaches in the beatitudes?

A disciple not only thinks like a disciples, a disciple acts like a disciple – the focus of much of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount

Jesus uses two elements, salt and light, to reinforce this teaching.

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet. ²⁷

Salt was an important commodity at the time of Jesus.

Commentators have spent endless pages on the qualities of salt and what it might mean for salt to lose its saltiness. Salt is used both negatively and positively in the OT. It was used in worship and as a sign of a covenant with God, It was also used to bring about destruction and barrenness.

We should note that the only quality of salt that Jesus mentions is its taste and he makes no mention of the uses of salt or any other quality. Salt is recognised by its taste! If salt could lose its taste, its saltiness, (an Jesus is not saying it can) then it would be useless for any

²⁴ Hagner, D. A. (1993). [Matthew 1–13](#) (Vol. 33A, p. 95). Word, Incorporated.

²⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:11–12). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

²⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Ac 5:39–41). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

²⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Mt 5:13). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

purpose. It would be thrown out and trampled under foot. So likewise the disciple who fails to exhibit the characteristics of a disciple

A disciple who doesn't act like a disciple is no better than salt that doesn't taste like salt.

Although Jesus will be emphasising the internal aspects of keeping the law, the external aspects still remain essential.

The second aspect Jesus draws on is light. The purpose of light is to give light. The purpose of being a disciple is to act like one, with the result that others may see you're the disciples good deeds and glorify, not the disciple, the Father in heaven. Again, this is made personal

Do you, do I, think like a disciple. We can only do that if take seriously the teaching of Jesus and even struggle with that which we find difficult. Jesus does not say that being a disciple is an easy option. But he does say that being a disciple guarantees a glorious future.

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. ²⁸

²⁸ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Mt 5:13–16). (2016). Crossway Bibles.