

The Beatitudes, Part 2

BACKGROUND

- Last time: We decided *makarios*, usually translated “blessed” or “happy”, could also be translated *joyous*, *fulfilled*, *rewarded* or *content*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As mentioned last time, in the beatitudes Jesus is employing a type of saying found in the wisdom literature. For instance, from the Psalm 84:4-7, a pilgrimage song,

Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

As they go through the valley of Baca they make it a place of springs; the early rain also covers it with pools.

They go from strength to strength; the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

(NIV uses “blessed”; NRSV uses “happy”.) All but the last of Jesus’ beatitudes find echoes in the OT literature:

<i>Poor in spirit</i> [theirs is the kingdom of heaven]	Isa 61:1: “ The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. ”
<i>Those who mourn</i> [will be comforted]	Isa 61:2-3: “...to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn , and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.”
<i>The meek (gentle)</i> [inherit the earth]	Ps 37:11: “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace”
<i>Those who hunger & thirst for righteousness</i> [will be satisfied]	Isa 55:1(-3): “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.”
<i>The merciful</i> [will obtain mercy]	Micah 6:8: “And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”
<i>The pure in heart</i> [will see God]	Ps 24:3-4: “Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? 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.”
<i>The peacemakers</i> ¹ [will be called sons of God]	Prov 12:20: “There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace. ”
<i>Those persecuted for the cause of right</i> [theirs is the kingdom of heaven]	[couldn't find anything except passages in the Servant Songs, e.g. Isa 50:6]

The Sermon on the Mount is often referred to as the manifesto of the kingdom of heaven. What, if anything, is *new* here?

¹ Some ancient MSS include the gloss, “but not the cheese-makers”.

2. *Another stab at “poor in spirit”*: Guelich observes that being poor in spirit, if it refers to waiting only for God for salvation, has both an *internal* and an *external* aspect:

That this “external” element is not lost in Matthew’s redaction is seen by the redactional addition of the eighth Beatitude (5:10), which forms a synonymous parallelism between the *poor in spirit* and those *persecuted for righteousness’ sake* and thus an inclusion for all eight Beatitudes. Suffering for *righteousness’ sake* and being *poor in spirit*, therefore, are basically conditions, not attitudes. For Matthew, the *poor in spirit* are those who find themselves waiting, empty-handed, upon God alone for their hope and deliverance while beset with abuse and rejection by their own social and religious context.²

So for Guelich, the fact that the first and last in the list of those blessed are told theirs is the kingdom of heaven ties these beatitudes together. In doing so it indicates a connection, namely that to be poor in spirit (like the “righteous poor” of the OT, relying upon God for salvation—but in more than just physical matters) is to invite persecution. Do you agree with Guelich? Is he right to tie these together?

3. *More on the meek*: The Greek word *praus* for “meek” is translated variously “gentle, humble, considerate, meek” (BDAG). One might compare this to the Merriam-Webster definition: “enduring injury with patience and without resentment : mild; deficient in spirit and courage : submissive; not violent or strong : moderate”.

Last week we used Ps 37 to explore what it means to be “meek”, esp. 37:78:

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.

Carson writes,

According to Num 12:3, Moses was the meekest man who ever lived, and his meekness is supremely demonstrated in that chapter by his refusal to defend himself, by his controlled self-commitment to the Lord when his person and privilege were under attack [by Aaron and Miriam because of his mixed marriage].³

Do you think of Paul as meek? Or David? How about Jesus? (Do the gospels give you enough information to answer this?) Or William Wilberforce? Or John Calvin? Are there times when meekness is simply not the order of the day? And, given the pejorative connotations, is there a better English word we can use than meek?

4. To say one is a son (or daughter) of God is to say one does what God does; in the ancient world if your dad was a carpenter, you were a carpenter too. Was Jesus a peacemaker?

5. *Spiritual hunger*: Green writes,

It is those who hunger and thirst who are happy, not the bloated... There is a profound happiness in having a desperate hunger, a burning thirst for goodness (for this is the main meaning of ‘righteousness’ in this Gospel)... These hungry ones desire the whole thing, complete

² *The Sermon on the Mount*, Robert A. Guelich, Word (1982), 75.

³ Carson, *Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World*, Baker (2004), p. 21.

righteousness, rather than a part of it. The phrase breathes whole-heartedness. If we have a passionate desire to be right with God and stay that way, he is going to meet that desire to the full, and we are going to be happy.⁴

Does this refer to a desire for spiritual growth, a desire to know God better, a holy discontent with the church and the world—or something else? Is this sort of restlessness and hunger just preacher’s talk—a young person’s game? Or is this a lifelong attribute of a disciple?

6. Now that we’ve been through them all, what, if anything, ties them together? Are they best read as the way you need to be to enter the kingdom, or a description of disciples who already are part of the kingdom?
7. What implications does a beatitudinal (“blessed”? “happy”?) lifestyle have for our use of money?
8. Which of the qualities described in the beatitudes do you most resonate with? Which, if any, do you feel you need to cultivate? Aside from “read the Bible and pray more”, how might you go about this?
9. *Salt of the world*: Davies and Allison list eleven functions of salt in the biblical world: “accompanying sacrifice, part of a covenant, purifying water, a condiment for food, a preservative, a necessity for life, a sign of loyalty, peace, gracious speech, wisdom, and beloved of the gods”.⁵

From sermons you’ve heard and books you’ve read, what is the salient (hah) feature of salt which Jesus is ascribing to his disciples in 5:13?

Stott, Bonhoeffer, Blomberg, Carson, and (much earlier) Origen, Hilary and Chrysostom, see the primary function referred to here as *preservation*, not flavor⁶. After all, the danger given is that salt will lose its taste, and “the Greek verb is *moranthe*—‘[if] it be defiled,’ that is, corrupted. Besides, in a world without refrigeration, salt, particularly on meat, had to be used in such quantities as a preservative that it probably did not enhance the flavor the way we think of it doing today” (Blomberg, 5).

How are we in our small group acting as a preservative for the world around us? At a more fundamental level, how are we even different from the world?⁷

How does the church universal act as a preservative for the world?



Fun fact: “The rabbis used salt as a symbol for wisdom” (*New Bible Commentary*), so it makes sense that in 5:13, the second part of the phrase “when salt has *lost its taste*” (NRSV) is the Greek [is] *moranthe*, “literally, *become foolish or insipid*” [Gardner, *Matthew*, Herald (1991), 99].

⁴⁴ *The Message of Matthew*, IVP (2000), 90.

⁵ Blomberg, “The Most Often Abused Verses in the Sermon on the Mount,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 46 (2004), 1.

⁶ In contrast to Green; Gardner, the Jerome, the *New Bible Commentary*, and Guelich demur.

⁷ As Stott points out, quoting Lloyd-Jones, “‘The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is made to listen to her message, though it may hate it at first.’ Of course, if we Christians are indistinguishable from non-Christians, we are useless.” [*Christian Counter-Culture*, IVP (1978), 60.]