

Citizens of God's Kingdom
(The Core of the Message)

2d in a series on the Sermon on the Mount.

Text: Matthew 5:3- 11

Study Passages: Luke 6:20-24
Jeremiah 9:23-23
Matthew 18:1-4

One stroke of lightning, coming close to home, can shake us more than a week of drizzles. So it is with ~~the~~ ^{The Beatitudes} (versor 3) which ~~opens~~ opens the Sermon on the Mount. ^{chap 5, 6, 7}
^{In The Beatitudes} ~~Here is one~~ ^{you have some} of the most difficult verses in the Bible. ^{to interpret} But its difficulty reminds us of Mark Twain, who got ^{said} tired of hearing people talk about their troubles in understanding the Bible. He once answered that he was more bothered by the parts of the Bible HE COULD UNDERSTAND than by the parts he could not understand.

As ^{you} ~~we~~ study, ^{with Sermon on Mt} I hope ~~we~~ ^{you} can see that Jesus is upsetting the customary way ~~of~~ of looking at things. At the risk of being too simple, let's look at the issue in terms of two modern quotations. First, a Gilbert and Sullivan opera offers this advice:

If you wish in the world to advance,
Your merit you're bound to enhance,
You must stir it and stump it
And blow your own trumpet
Or, trust me, you haven't a chance.

Second, Eugene V. Debs, the labor leader and pacifist, said in 1918 just before he was sentenced to prison:

While there is a lower class, I am in it; while there is a criminal element, I am of it; while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.

Of course, the Gilbert and Sullivan quote is meant to be humorous, and Debs's statement is meant to be serious. But in our practice we are likely to take the former seriously and make the latter a joke.

And that is just what Jesus is trying to do. He is turning ~~out~~ ^{our} conventional judgments upside down. ~~To get at his more exact meaning~~ ^{In order to better understand the sermon} ~~we will~~ ^{spend} more time on these first few verses ~~of the sermon on the Mount.~~ ^{called the beatitudes} ~~of the sermon on the Mount.~~ ^{or meant}

Each of the first nine verses of the Sermon ~~starts~~ starts with the word BLESSED. Hence these verses are called BEATITUDES -- descriptions of blessedness.

~~I would like to consider~~

~~Before we look at verses three in detail, I would like to make~~ ^{one} ~~two~~ general ~~statements.~~

^{Please Notice}

(1) -- ~~It can be seen~~ that every one of the beatitudes has precisely the same form. Notice that in the KJV and the New English Bible (not RSV) the word "ARE" is printed in dark type. When a word appears in italic or dark type in the Bible it means that in the Greek or in the Hebrew, there is no equivalent word, and that that word has had to be added to bring out the meaning of the sentence. This ~~is to say~~ ^{means} that in the beatitudes there is no verb, (there is no "are").

Why is this? The answer is very simple. Jesus did not speak the beatitudes in Greek; He spoke them in Aramaic, which was the common language of his day. Aramaic and Hebrew have a very common kind of expression, which is in fact an exclamation and which means, "O the blessedness of..." That expression is very common in the Old Testament. For example, Psalms 1:1 begins in the Hebrew: "O the blessedness of the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." That is the form in which Jesus first spoke the beatitudes. The beatitudes are not simple statements; they are exclamations: "O the blessedness of the poor in spirit." (AND SO ON)

(Illustrate by reading each beatitude.)

Now, this is most important, for it means that the beatitudes are not pious hopes of what shall be; they are not pie- in - the- sky of some future bliss; they are congratulations on what is. *or What Can be in your Life* The blessedness which belongs to christian~~s~~ is not a blessedness which is postponed to some future world of glory; it is a blessedness which exists here **and** now. It is not something into which the Christian WILL ENTER: it is something into which he has entered.

The beatitudes in effect say: "O the bliss of being a Christian. O the joy of following Christ. O the sheer happiness of knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The very form of the beatitudes is the statement of the thrill of the Christian life. In face of the beatitudes a gloomy - christian is unthinkable. *Today, I would love you understand Verse 3*

Now let us look at Verse 3

(2) Like I have indicated, each of the first nine verses starts with the word BLESSED. The Hebrews used the word "blessed" to describe God Himself. When applied to men, it referred to God's favor and mercy. We still "ask the blessing" at meal times - often without knowing what we are doing.

One might say that "blessed" means "happy." But the word "happy" often has a trivial meaning. Everybody wants happiness; not everybody wants what Jesus means by blessedness. (How many times have you heard this statement: "John had a few drinks and was getting happy.")

To describe "blessedness" we need a different word than "happy."

The Greeks had a common word for happiness, along with a special word which ~~means~~ is used in these verses. This word means a very deep, yet jubilant kind of happiness. It refers to the attainment of an ideal or goal. it is not a sanctimonious word; rather it carries the flavor of joy, enthusiasm, and exclamation. ~~The secret is not of that joy which seeks~~
us

"Your joy," said Jesus, "no man taketh from you." (John 16:22). The beatitudes speak of that joy which ~~seeks~~ ^{carries us through} carries us through grief, that joy which [']sorrow and loss, and pain and grief, ~~are powerless to touch~~, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away.

I So, Jesus is saying that the real glory and joy of life belong to those we least expect to have it -- the poor in spirit. *What does this mean*

The words in Matthew are disconcerting. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What does this do to our profit motive, ~~our~~ incentive system, our private initiative - these pillars of our society? Is Jesus condemning all our normal ambitions?

The truth is uncomfortably close to that. Jesus did teach that wealth can be dangerous (Luke 12:16-21; Matt. 19:16-26)

The word "poor" in Palestine was often used to mean "saintly." Especially when pagan foreigners ruled Palestine, the rich compromised their religion so as to protect their wealth and standing. The poor had nothing to lose so they were more faithful. ^{sw} When Jesus blesses the poor, he means those who feel spiritual need, who make no claims for their own adequacy, who "do not have an inflated spirit." (Augustine), those who are humble, and have put their whole trust in God. Therefore, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" should read:

O The Blessings of
"Blessed is the man who has realised his ~~own~~ ^{own} utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God!" *This has very little to do with the traditional meaning of the word poor - it is a spiritual word referring to a spiritual condition*

The lesson is that if a person realised his own utter helplessness, and has put his whole trust in God, there will enter into his life two important things: (1) He will become completely detached from things, ^{of the world} for he will know that things have not got it in them to bring happiness or security; and (2) he will become completely attached to God, for he will know that God alone can bring true and lasting happiness.

The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has realised that things mean ^{nothing} nothing, and that God means everything.

I must be careful not to have you think that this beatitude calls actual material poverty a good thing. Poverty is not a good thing. Jesus would never have called blessed a state where people live in slums and have not enough to eat, and where health rots the spirits and will of an individual. That kind of poverty is the aim of the Christian gospel to remove. The poverty which is blessed is the poverty of spirit, the spirit which realizes its own utter lack of resources to meet life, and which finds its help and straight in God.

Jesus says that to such a poverty belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. Now, why is this so? We receive our understanding to this verses from the Lord's Prayer.

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven

This means: The Kingdom of God is a society where God's will is as perfectly done in earth as it is in heaven. ^{That} means that only he who does God's will is a citizen of the Kingdom; and we can only do God's will when we ~~feel~~ realize our own utter helplessness, our own utter inability to cope with life, and when we put our whole trust in God. Obedience is always founded on trust. The Kingdom of God is the possession of the poor in spirit, because the poor in spirit have realized their own utter helplessness without God, and have learned to trust and obey ^{and do God's Will}

So, the first Beatitude means:

O the bliss of the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God, for ^{only} ~~one~~ in this way can he render to God that perfect obedience which will make him a Citizen of ^{God's} ~~the Kingdom of Heaven~~.