

January 15, 2012  
 First Baptist Vancouver  
 Darrell W. Johnson  
 Text: Matthew 5:3-12  
 “Beatitude People”  
 (Second in “Following Jesus Into His Sermon on the Mount”)

---

The Words we have just read together, the so-called “Beatitudes”, are probably the most widely known of all of the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth. We find them printed on posters hanging in bookstores and coffeehouses. We find them printed on greeting cards sent and received, even by those who do not know who spoke them!

I am drawn like a magnet to this opening section of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Partly because of the portrait of the new humanity Jesus is sketching. That is what the Beatitudes are: the poor in spirit, the gentle, the peacemakers - a portrait of the new humans the One True human is bringing into being in the world.

But I am drawn to the opening section of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount mostly because I want to hear Jesus speak His “blessed” to me! Given Who Jesus is, no one else’s opinion of me matters as much as His. I want to be the kind of person, the kind of human being, about whom and to whom Jesus can say “blessed.” I assume you want Him to say it to you too.

Would you now take a moment, and look again at the text, at the portrait and the promises. And as you do, ask yourself: which of the Beatitudes is most inviting? And ask yourself: which is most unsettling?

Two years ago, as some of you may remember, I preached a nine-Sunday series on the Beatitudes. One introductory sermon, then one sermon on each of the eight “Blessed are.” George Loewen has gathered the audio versions of all nine sermons in a CD set, available at Connection Point. Or, if you are listening on the Internet, you can contact the Church office to obtain your set.

So this morning, I am going to simply work with the Beatitudes as a whole.

Let us pray.

*Lord Jesus, as we now follow you into Your Sermon on the Mount, will You speak Your words into each of us, that each of us may become more fully human. Amen.*

I said last Sunday, when we listened to Jesus preach the whole of Matthew 5,6,7, that we must be careful to never separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount. Which is why we read today what Matthew writes about Jesus before he records Jesus’ sayings.

When the Sermon on the Mount gets disconnected from the Preacher on the Mount, things go wrong, terribly wrong. This is true of everything in the Christian faith: separate

it from Jesus and it goes off the rails. Separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount, and the Sermon becomes either frustrating idealism or oppressive legalism (E. Stanley Jones). It becomes a mountain we simply cannot climb, and we walk away in despair, or it becomes a heavy load we cannot carry, and we walk away weary and drained. The Sermon is neither idealism nor legalism. The Sermon is LIFE ... life as it is when the Preacher gets hold of us!

So, I ask again: Who IS this Preacher? Who is this Man who speaks as no one else ever has? Matthew says He goes up a mountain. Not like one of the mountains we see north of our city, but one of the hills surrounding the Sea of Galilee. One of those hills with a concave slope, forming a natural amphitheatre, with incredible acoustics. I have stood in the place most people think Jesus spoke. You can speak to thousands of people without raising your voice.

Jesus goes up the mountain. What does this geographical detail suggest? What is Matthew wanting us to think about Jesus the Preacher? Well, who else in the Great Story goes up a mountain? Moses. Yes. The human leader of one of the most massive liberation movements in history. Moses goes up Mount Sinai. He goes up the mount to receive the Law of God, the Ten Commandments. He goes up the mount to receive the revelation of the Living God's will for life.

Jesus sees the crowds flocking to Him, and He goes up the mountain. The new Moses, the greater Moses, the greater-than Moses. He goes up the mountain. BUT not to receive a new Law. He goes up the mountain to declare the fulfillment of God's Law. He goes up the mountain to announce the fuller vision of God's will for life.

Which means that the parallel with the Moses story is NOT Jesus and Moses. The parallel is Jesus and God! Jesus is not only playing the part of Moses, He is playing the part of God! FOR, unlike Moses, Jesus does not say, "Thus says the Lord." Unlike Moses, Jesus says, "Truly **I say to you.**"

Who is this "I" Who does not appeal to any higher authority? Who is this Man Who announces a more complete vision of human life and grounds it in Himself? This is the God Moses met on the mountain... God with us, God in our flesh and blood.

Just before God-with-us goes up the mountain, Matthew tells us that Jesus was going through the region of Galilee preaching, teaching, and healing. He summarizes Jesus' ministry around those verbs: preaching, teaching, and healing. Matthew will do this again later in his gospel (9:35-36). He will also use the same verbs to describe the ministry to which Jesus calls His disciples in the world: preaching, teaching, and healing - always together.

The verbs are tied up with Jesus' gospel.

Jesus came preaching.

What? "The kingdom of heaven has come near".

Jesus came teaching.

What? What it means to live in the kingdom that has come near.  
Jesus came healing.

Restoring and liberating. Healing all kinds of sickness and freeing people from the demonic.

Why? Because the kingdom that has come near is all about the re-creation of the fallen world. Matthew wants us to realize that before the Preacher Before He preaches His Sermon on the Mount, He preaches His gospel. Separate His Sermon from His gospel and it all goes wrong.

Matthew 4:17.

**“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”**

In the four Gospels, the phrases “kingdom of heaven” and “kingdom of God” are used inter-changeably; they refer to the same reality. So Mark renders Jesus’ gospel: **“The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near”** (1:15).

The gospel according to Jesus, the good news according to Jesus, is the startling and explosive announcement, and in Him and because of Him the long-awaited kingdom of the God of heaven is breaking into the world. What was thought to be wholly in the future is now breaking into the present. What was thought to come only at the end of history is breaking into the middle of history.

Before He preaches His Sermon on the Mount, before He speaks His Beatitudes, Jesus comes announcing His good news. Announcing is actually heralding: “Hear ye, hear ye!” Jesus comes heralding the good news.

Jesus announces the great fact that impacts all other facts. “The time is fulfilled . . . the glorious, re-creating Reign of God is now invading the world!” Oh, blessed be His name!

This is how I like put it.

- The gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because our sins have been forgiven and we have been acquitted before the throne of the universe.
  - The gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because we have been reconciled to God and adopted into His family.
  - The gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because we have been given the gift of eternal life and are being filled with the Spirit of God.
  - The gospel according to Jesus is such good news because in Him God’s “new world order” in entering the brokenness and injustices of the world.
- “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in the shadow of death, a light has dawned.”* A new day has dawned. The future is breaking into the present! Heaven is invading earth!

So Jesus comes preaching, teaching and healing. The Preacher and Teacher does not heal “to prove” that the kingdom has come near. The Preacher and Teacher heals because the kingdom that comes near is all about God re-ordering, re-storing, re-creating creation. Jesus’ preaching and teaching and healing are inextricably inter-twined. That is to say,

He preaches in order to free us. He teaches in order to restore us. God-with-us preaches and teaches in order to heal us.

In His Beatitudes, though, Jesus is painting a portrait of people who are being healed. He is painting a portrait of people who are being freed and restored. Jesus is painting a portrait of people who are turning around and embracing Him and His wonderfully good, good news. People who are poor in spirit, gentle, pure in heart, peacemakers... who no longer “fit” in the old order of things and get in trouble!

So look again at the Beatitudes as a whole. Let me make a few observations about the whole package ... and then suggest some of the implications of the observations.

1. Notice how the whole package is wrapped. “For theirs is the **kingdom.**” Kingdom. Surprised given His gospel? Beatitude one - “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Beatitude eight – “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” See that? It is what scholars call an “inclusio” – a way to bracket the whole. All eight Beatitudes are wrapped around by “kingdom.”

2. Notice the tense of the verb bracketing the whole. **Is.** Present. Beatitude one – “For theirs is ...” Beatitude eight – “For theirs is ...” Not, “For theirs will be ...” Not, “One day in the future theirs will be the kingdom.” But, “is” ... “theirs is” ... now, today, this very moment.

3. Notice that the eight seems to be given in **two sets of four.** Beatitudes one to four, and Beatitudes five to eight. One to four: poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek/gentle, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Five to eight: merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, those persecuted for sake of righteousness.

Get this. Beatitudes one to four are given in 36 words leading up to “righteousness.”

Beatitudes five to eight are given in 36 words leading up to “righteousness.”

“Righteousness” or Justice. Or, better, “right-related-ness.” Justice is about right relationships. Righteousness is all about right relationships. It is the theme of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

- “Unless your righteousness exceeds ...”
- “Be careful to practice your righteousness ...”
- “Seek first the righteousness of God ...”

Beatitudes one to four – 36 words ending with “righteousness.” Beatitudes five to eight – 36 words ending with “righteousness.” Cool, eh?

4. One more observation. The meaning of the word “**Blessed.**” *Makarios* is the actual term. Although it is often rendered as “happy,” to do so is misleading. Profoundly misleading. For one can be pronounced *makarios* and not be happy! You see, the word *makarios* does not refer to how you and I assess our situation. *Makarios* refers to **how God** assesses our situation. Whether you and I feel “happy” is not the point of the word Jesus uses. The point is whether God is “happy.” That is not quite the way to put it, but it does put the emphasis where it belongs. *Makarios* speaks of “an objective state, not a subjective feeling” (Peter Kreft, *For Heaven’s Sake*, 85). What matters is not how I feel about myself and my condition. What matters is how God feels about me and my condition. Contrary to how I, or others, feel about me and my condition, God might declare me *makarios*, blessed.

So, as I have argued before, we need to find a more helpful synonym for “blessed.”

- Some suggest “fortunate.” “Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” “Fortunate are the poor in spirit.”
- Some suggest “approved.” “Approved are those who mourn.” “Approved are the pure in heart.”
- Some suggest “congratulations!” That is getting closer. “Congratulations to the meek, the gentle.” “Congratulations to the persecuted.”

Karl Barth suggested we render *makarios* as “You lucky bums!”

As I am living in the Beatitudes this time around, I keep coming back to “right-on.” I think it best captures what Jesus is getting at.

- “Right-on are the poor in spirit; right-on are those who do not think they have what it takes to live the kingdom life.”
- “Right-on are those who mourn; right-on are those who lament the condition of the world without the Light.”
- “Right-on are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.”

Now, when I hear Jesus’ “blessed, right-on,” I might feel “happy.” But that is not the point. The point is God’s assessment of me and my condition.

Let me now suggest a few implications of these observations.

1. Because the whole package is wrapped with the word “kingdom”, I think we can read Kingdom with each Beatitude.

“Right-on are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom.”

And, “Right-on are those who mourn, for theirs is the kingdom.”

And, “Right-on are the meek/gentle, for theirs is the kingdom.”

And, “Right-on are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for right-relationship, for theirs is the kingdom.”

And, “Right-on are the merciful, for theirs is the kingdom.”

And, “Right-on are the pure in heart, for theirs is the kingdom.”

And, “Right-on are the peacemakers, for theirs is the kingdom.”

And, “Right-on are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,  
for right-relationship, for theirs is the kingdom.”

2. Another implication: Because the whole package is wrapped with the word “kingdom,” I think Jesus is telling us what the kingdom involves.

- The in-breaking kingdom is about receiving comfort in our grief.
- The in-breaking kingdom is about inheriting the earth. That is because the kingdom of God is very earthy; not earthly, but very earthy. I think the center of the Sermon on the Mount is the Lord’s Prayer. And I think the center of the Lord’s Prayer is “on earth as it is in heaven.” As we learn in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, chapter 21-22, our destiny is not to “go to heaven”. Our destiny is for the new heaven and new earth to come to earth.
- The in-breaking kingdom is about inheriting the being-redeemed earth.
- The in-breaking kingdom is about the satisfying of the deepest longings of the human heart.

- The in-breaking kingdom is about receiving and basking in and extending mercy. It is about experiencing the undeserved compassion of God.
- The in-breaking kingdom is about seeing God. Wonder of wonders! We will see God!
- The in-breaking kingdom is about being called and treated as children of God. The kingdom is about living in a new Family with a new Father and new older Brother and a new Spirit who binds us together in a new love.

Oh Father in heaven, cause Your kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven!

3. Another implication: all eight Beatitudes are inter-related. Like the so-called “fruit of the Spirit” the apostle Paul speaks of in Galatians. *“Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* (5:22-23).

All inter-related, on the same branches.

So the eight Beatitudes.

- The poor in spirit are also pure in heart.  
The pure in heart are also poor in spirit.
  - Those who mourn are also merciful.  
The merciful are those who know how to mourn.
  - The meek/gentle are those who can make peace.  
The peacemakers are meek/gentle, and therefore make peace.
  - Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness  
get persecuted for the sake of righteousness.
  - Those who are persecuted hunger and thirst for righteousness all the more.
- On it goes, in and out, inter-related.

4. Another implication: the Beatitudes flow naturally from one to the other.

Jesus speaks the eight in the order He does because the first leads to the second, and the second to the third, and so on.

Poverty of spirit awakens mourning.

Mourning gives birth to meekness/gentleness.

Meekness/gentleness causes a hunger and thirst for right-relatedness.

Hunger and thirst for right-relatedness produces a merciful heart.

Mercy begins to cleanse us and create a pure heart.

Purity of heart makes us able to make peace in the world.

Seeking to make peace in the world gets us into trouble.

“Right-on!”

I know it does not feel blessed ... but it is... *makarios* says the Preacher...”right-on” says the Master.

- “Right-on are the poor in spirit.” It is what happens when the kingdom starts to break in. We see in the kingdom the way things were meant to be. And we realize we cannot make it happen on our own.
- “Right-on are those who mourn.” We meet Jesus the King, and we see all we were meant to be. And we lament that we fall so far short of being truly human. We grieve the poverty of our souls.

- “Right-on are the meek, the gentle.” When we see Him and see ourselves, we come off our high-horses. We humble ourselves before Him. Only three people in the Bible are called “meek.” Moses, Paul, and Jesus. Hardly “weaklings”! Which says that meek does not mean weak. Meek means willing to humble ourselves before the Living God, and trust God to run the world. And when we do, strangely, we are strong. Strong in a way Jesus is strong. And we, strangely, find ourselves inheriting the earth that belongs to Jesus the Meek.
- “Right-on are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” We were made for relationship. With God, with others, with the self, with the earth. When we meet the King in His in-breaking kingdom, we see the original design, and we long for it as the hungry long for food and the thirsty for water. Our appetites change, and we carve the full-orbed world God originally created and is re-creating.
- “Right-on are the merciful.” Of course, for the fact that the kingdom has come to us is a great mercy. We did not deserve it ... and never will. So we stop making others deserve it.
- “Right-on are the pure in heart.” Not, “perfect in heart.” Not yet, anyway. Pure – unalloyed. Like pure gold. Or pure maple syrup. The real deal. No faking it anymore. Coming clean before God.
- “Right-on are the peacemakers.” Of course, for the kingdom is the kingdom of peace. Shalom. Wholeness. In every dimension of our existence. Alive in a passion to make peace in the city. Not satisfied until all know the Prince of Peace Himself.
- “Right-on those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.” Not, “happy.” Only a masochist is happy when persecuted. And likely not for the sake of right-relationship. Right-on because in hungering and thirsting to see justice come, one comes up against forces that want to keep people captive.

See the inter-relatedness of the Beatitudes? See the flow?

5. Another implication, the last for today: none of us makes ourselves into Beatitude people. Oh, we do have a part to play in becoming new humans. We repent. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” We turn around. We turn around and embrace the King and His new order. But we do not make ourselves the kind of people He blesses. That is His job. He makes us the people He blesses.

He preaches the good news of the kingdom to us.

He teaches us what His kingdom is all about.

He heals us.

He makes the kingdom happen.

He frees us.

He restores us.

He makes us like Himself, truly human.

And then, looking at us, says “blessed”.

Like He did in the beginning...calling seas and stars and animals into being, and saying “good”! The Preacher, Teacher, Healer, gets hold of us...works in us. And, then looking at us, says “*makarios*” ...right-on!

Will you now take a moment and look at the text again. And as you do, ask yourself:

which of the Beatitudes do you see already alive in you? And ask yourself: which of the Beatitudes do you most want Jesus to now work in you? Express your answers to Him.