

‘People in Sync: A New Kind of Humanity’

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Would you now please open your Bibles to the first book of the New Testament , to the Gospel according to Matthew. And would you now please turn to Chapter 5, verses 3-12. I invite you to come with me into the collection of sayings which, for centuries now, has been called ‘the Beatitudes’, ‘the blessed are’. They are some of the most cherished of Jesus’ words; printable on all kinds of greeting cards and wall posters even by people who have no idea of Who spoke them. The sayings are also some of the most revolutionary of Jesus’ words. They ought to come with a warning label: ‘Warning; inhabit these words for a season and your world will never be the same’.

As I will emphasize again and again, wherever we read and study the Beatitudes it is so very important that we see and hear them in the original context in which Jesus first spoke them. So will you turn the page back to Mathew 4:12. Hear now the words of God.

Has someone switched the price tags, or what?

The brilliant thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century G.K. Chesterton once said: ‘On first reading you feel the Beatitudes turn everything upside down: but the second time you read them you discover that they turn everything right side up. The first time you read them you feel they are impossible; the second time you read them you feel nothing else is possible’.

Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ; Thank you for helping Matthew remember the words you spoke to a crowd of seeking people gathered before You on a mountainside. Now, will You please help us understand Your words. And more than understand. Will You help us actually live in the new reality. Your words are bringing into being. We pray this in Your name, and for the greater fame of Your name.

As I said, whenever we read or study Jesus’ Beatitudes we need to hear and see them in the context in which Jesus first spoke them. This is the case with everything Jesus says. But all the more so with regard to His Beatitudes. Separate His Beatitudes from the context in which He first spoke them, and His words , meant to give life, become either frustrating idealism or oppressive legalism.

Jesus first preached His Beatitudes and His Sermon on the Mount right after He first announced His Gospel, His good news. Let me say this again. Separate His Beatitudes from the context in which He first spoke them, and His words, meant to give life, become either frustrating idealism or oppressive legalism.

So, the question is ‘what is His Gospel?’, ‘What is His good news?’ It is the second most important question we can ever ask; the first most important question being ‘Who is Jesus?’. Who is this Jesus who walks into our lives and calls us to follow Him into a new life? Who is this Jesus who promises a different quality of life to those who hook up with Him? And what is the news he brings? What is His Gospel? Jesus is, after all, the first person to preach the Gospel! He is the first “good-news-inger”. The First evangelist. What according to Jesus is the Gospel?

‘The Kingdom of heaven has come near’. Matthew Chapter 4, verse 17. The Kingdom of heaven has come near’ The Gospel according to Jesus, the good news according to Jesus, is the explosive announcement that IN Him the long-awaited Kingdom of God is finally breaking into the present. The rule of heaven, the reign of heaven is, in Jesus and because of Jesus, breaking in upon the earth.

In the Gospel according to Mark we have an expanded version of Jesus Gospel. Mark, chapter 1, verse 15 where we find the only definition of the Gospel Jesus ever gave. Mark tells us, as does Matthew, that after John the Baptist has been put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee ‘preaching the Gospel of God’. And this is what Jesus said. Listen. Mark 1:15.

‘The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near’. ‘The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near’. ‘The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near’. Repent and believe in the Gospel, this good news’.

Do you hear Jesus? The Gospel according to Jesus is the announcement of a great fact. A great fact that impacts all other facts. The Gospel according to Jesus is that in Him and because of Him history has reached a major crisis point. ‘the time is fulfilled’. We are now passing from one era into a whole new era. The Gospel according to Jesus us that in Him and because of Him the long-awaited, glorious, e-creating Reign of God is invading the world.

The Gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because our sins have been forgiven and we are acquitted before the Judge of the universe. The Gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because we are adopted into the family of God. The Gospel according to Jesus is such good news not only because we have been given the gist of eternal life. The Gospel according to Jesus is such good news because God’s ‘new world order’ is breaking into our brokenness. The Gospel according to Jesus is such good news because, as David Wenham of England puts it, ‘A Divine revolution is under way’. “People waking in darkness have seen a great light; on those who live in darkness in the shadow of death, a light has dawned.’ The future is breaking into the present. Heave is invading earth.

Will you say the Gospel with me; “The Kingdom of God has come near”. Again please ‘The Kingdom of God has come near’.

Understandably, Jesus couples His announcement of this Great Fact with a call . A call to conversion. Matthew 4;17 – ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near’, Mark 1:15 – “Repent, and believe this good news”. “Repent”. It simply means ‘think again’ or ‘think anew’. More simply, it means ‘turn around’. ‘You have been heading in the wrong direction. Make a U-turn and believe My good news’. “The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God has come near; make a U-turn in the road – and embrace Me and My Gospel, put your weight on My good news’

It is in that context that Jesus speaks His Beatitudes. And here is the implication for our understanding of His words. The clearest sign that human beings are in fact ‘turning around and believing’ is that they are becoming ‘Beatitude people’. The clearest sign that human beings are, in fact, making a u-turn and embracing Jesus and His Gospel is that they are becoming ‘blessed –are-people.’

Another way to make the point: In His Beatitudes Jesus is painting a portrait. Jesus is painting a portrait of people in whom He and His Gospel are taking hold. Jesus is giving a profile of people who are making a U-turn and welcoming Him and His Kingdom. He is drawing a sketch of those in whom Gods’ ‘new world order’ is emerging, those upon whom the Light of Grace is dawning’.

In his Beatitudes Jesus is painting a portrait of those, who in the language of the Gospel of John, are being ‘born again from above’. (John 3:3) In His Beatitudes, Jesus has put together a profile of Kingdom-people, twice-born-people, spirit filled-people. Jesus is describing humanity by Him and His good news.

In this first study in the Beatitudes, I want to simply make a number of observations. About the Beatitudes-as –a whole. In the weeks to come we will look at each Beatitude one at a time. I want to make five observations.

- 1) First observation: Notice how the eight Beatitudes are ‘packages’. They are bracketed, enveloped by the phrase ‘this is the Kingdom’. The first and eighth have the same reason for blessedness – ‘this is the Kingdom. Beatitude one; ‘blessed are the poor in spirit’ why? ‘for’ or ‘because’ ‘theirs is the Kingdom’. Not this will be the Kingdom’ ‘but ‘this is the Kingdom’. Beatitude eight: “blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake’ Why? ‘for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven’. Again, not ‘theirs will be the Kingdom’, but theirs is the Kingdom’

Now, because all eight are bracketed by ‘theirs is the Kingdom’, I think it is exegetically sound to read that clause after each Beatitude. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. But also,

- 1) Blessed are those who mourn, for theirs is the Kingdom.

- 2) Blessed are the meek, for theirs is the Kingdom
- 3) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness', for theirs is the Kingdom
- 4) Blessed are the merciful, for theirs is the Kingdom
- 5) Blessed are the pure in heart, for theirs is the Kingdom
- 6) Blessed are the peacemakers for theirs is the Kingdom.

Which means then that the specific blessings promised in the second through seventh Beatitudes are but different dimensions of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. Different ways of saying what this means. Looking at how the 'whole' is packaged, we discover what God's New Order is all about! It is about being 1) comforted (5:4), it is about 2) inheriting the earth (5:5) – note that it keeps us from over – spiritualizing the Kingdom – inherits the earth. It is about 3) receiving our desire for righteousness, for right-relationess, for justice (5:6). It is about 4) receiving mercy (5:7). It is about 5) seeing God !(5:8) – the greatest blessing of all. It is about 6) being called, and treated as children of God (5:9). The whole package is wrapped in 'theirs is the Kingdom'.

Second observation: notice the position of the pronoun their/ they. Theirs is literally 'of them'. In the original the pronoun stands at the beginning of the clause for emphasis. Not, 'for the Kingdom is theirs. Not 'see God they shall. But 'they shall see God'. 'theirs is the kingdom". The implication being 'theirs and only theirs', or 'them and only them', 'they and only they'. Reading the Beatitudes with this emphasis we hear the radical-ness Jesus intends. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs, and only theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek for they, and only they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they, and only they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers for they, and only they , shall be called the children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs, and only theirs , is the Kingdom.

To make the point more boldly, Jesus is saying that those who are not poor in spirit have not yet received the Kingdom. Those who are not meek will not inherit the earth. Those who are not peacemakers are not acting as children of God. Those who are not persecuted in some way are not yet living the Kingdom life. 'Theirs and only theirs', 'they and only they'. Second observation: position of the pronoun.

Third observation: Jesus is not describing eight different persons. Rather, he is describing eight different qualities of the same person. I owe this insight to Martin Lloyd Jones and John R.W. Stott. Jesus is not describing eight different kinds of Kingdom people , rather He is describing eight inter-related qualities which emerge in every 'Kingdom -ized' person. Jesus is not saying that when His Gospel grabs hold, one of us becomes poor in spirit, another of us meek, another of us hungry and thirsty for righteousness. He is saying that each person grabbed hold of by Him and His gospel becomes poor in spirit, meek, merciful, pure in heart.

Or to come at it from another angle, the poor in spirit are also meek. The meek are also pure in heart. The pure in heart are also merciful. The merciful also hunger and thirst for

righteousness. One Beatitude flows into the next. Poverty of spirit – Knowing I do not have what it takes results in mourning over sinful conditions of the world and of our own souls. Mourning gives birth to meekness, to gentleness. Gentleness creates a hunger and thirst for righteousness. Which in turn produces a merciful heart. Which then issues in purity of heart. And so on. Am I making sense?

Each Beatitude, therefore, is interpreted by the other seven.

This is especially important for the seventh Beatitude, ‘blessed are the peacemakers’. Beatitudes one through six describe qualities of those who can make peace in our world. Beatitudes eight describes what usually happens to those who strive for peace. Jesus is saying that those who can make peace in the world, are those who know and admit their spiritual poverty; those who mourn over the violence in the world and their own heart; those who are meek, who recognizing their powerlessness throw themselves upon the power of Good; those who hunger and thirst for right-relationship, for moral – economic – psychological- spiritual wholeness; those who are merciful both to their allies and enemies; those who are pure in heart, who will this.

And Jesus is saying that those who try to make peace get in trouble with the status quo, they meet opposition they may even get hurt. So Peter, so Paul, so Jesus.

The point is, all eight Beatitudes are true of all upon whom the Kingdom comes... to one degree or another. All eight are inter-related and inseparable.

Which means we can move the ‘for theirs/ for they’ clauses around and attach them to any of the eight ‘blessed are’ clauses. Blessed are the meek for they shall be comforted and they receive mercy and they see God. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted but also ‘blessed are those who mourn for they shall inherit the earth’ and ‘they shall be satisfied’ and they shall be called children of God’. Yet, the order on which Jesus puts them is still important. There is a sequential flow (G. Campbell – Morgan) and it all begins in poverty of spirit. Third observation: all eight Beatitudes are true of all Jesus wins with his Gospel.

Fourth observation: the meaning of the word translated is ‘blessed’. It is, as someone said, a word ‘crammed full of meaning’ (E Stanley Jones) the word is makarios M-a – k-a-r-i-o-s. Makarios. Will you say the word with me? ‘makarios’ again please ‘makarios’. Although the word can be, and often is, translated as ‘happy’, to do so is misleading. Yes, by using the term, Jesus intends to impart a certain kind of happiness to our souls. But ‘happy are’ is misleading. For one thing, the English word ‘happy’ is too weak. ‘Happy’ is related to ‘happening’; which means ‘happiness’ comes and goes as favourable ‘happenings’ come and go. But the primary reason why ‘happy’ is misleading is that it puts the emphasis in the wrong place.

You see, ‘makarios’ does not refer to how you and I access ourselves or our condition; ‘makarios’ refers to how God accesses us and our condition. Whether you or I feel ‘happy’ is not the point of the word Jesus uses. The point is whether or not God is

‘happy’, this is not quite the way to put it but it at least shifts the focus to where it belongs.

Now, when I realize that God is ‘Happy’ about me and my condition I might then be happy. But my feeling happy is not the point. As Peter Kneft puts it ‘blessedness is an objective state, not a subjective feeling (For Heaven’s Sake, 85) What matters is not how I feel about me and my condition but how God feels about me and my condition. Makarios.

We need, therefore, to find a more helpful synonym for ‘blessed’. Some suggest ‘fortunate’. Fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Others suggest ‘approved’. That is better. ‘Approved are those who mourn’. Still others suggest ‘congratulations’ This is getting closer. It does put the emphasis in the right place. ‘Congratulations to the poor in spirit’, ‘congratulations to the gentle’. Yet that synonym can also be misleading, suggesting that the poor in spirit and the gentle achieved something. Karl Barth suggested we render ‘makarios’ a ‘you lucky bums’.

How about ‘right on’? ‘Right-on are those who mourn’. ‘Right-on are the merciful’. ‘right-on are the peacemakers’. Now, when I hear God’s ‘right-on’ I just might feel happy! But the emphasis lies where it should with God’s assessment of me and my condition.

What about ‘right-up’? or better yet ‘right-side-up’? ‘Right-side-up are the poor in spirit’ ‘right-side-up are the merciful. For the perspective of our un-kingdom-ized value system the qualities Jesus blesses are up-side-down. ‘the meek inherit the earth’? ‘Come on Jesus, be realistic’. ‘Those who mourn are to be congratulated’? Up-side –down Jesus.

‘No’ says Jesus ‘makarios’ ‘right-side-up’. The qualities He blesses only seem up-side-down because our old humanity is up-side-down. Jesus comes into the world with his Kingdom and turns everything right-side-up. Jesus affects what, German theologian Helmut Thielicke called ‘the transvaluation of values’. ‘Right-side-up are gentle’. ‘Right-side-up are the pure in heart’. What about ‘in-alignment’? I was taking our car to the tire station to have the wheels aligned, and thought, ‘this is what Jesus is doing, realigning our reality’. ‘in-alignment are the poor in spirit’. ‘in-alignment are those who hunger and thirst for right-relationship’.

Or what about ‘in synch’? or even “synchronized” I think it gets at the point of makarios best. ‘In synch with the kingdom of heaven are the poor in spirit’. ‘In synch with the Kingdom of God are the merciful’. In synch with God’s new world order are the pure in heart’.

Again, what you or I think or feel about these qualities is not the point. The point is that God thinks or feels. In His Beatitudes Jesus is announcing the Divine ‘blessed’.

- 1) Makarios
- 2) Congratulations
- 3) You lucky bums

- 4) Right-on
- 5) Right-side-up
- 6) In-alignment
- 7) In Synch

Which brings us to the fifth observation: Crucial to keep before us when we go on to look at each Beatitude one at a time. Fifth observation: the qualities Jesus blesses are not natural human qualities. That is, none of us can produce these qualities. Jesus did not come into Galilee looking for 'Beatitude people' who He could then call into His Kingdom. No, Jesus first called ordinary, broken people to Himself and into His Kingdom. As a result of contact with Him, as a result of submission to His rule, the qualities He blesses begin to appear in their lives.

You see the first line of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is not, 'blessed are the poor in spirit therefore theirs is the Kingdom. the first line is 'blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the Kingdom.' It is not 'in synch are the poor in spirit therefore you get the Kingdom'. It is, in synch are the poor in spirit because it is a sign that the Kingdom is breaking into their lives." Not 'therefore' but 'because'. If it were 'therefore' we would try to become poor in spirit in order to get in on the Kingdom. And end up being proud we were humble enough to be humble. Poor in spirit, mourning, gentleness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted are all the result of the Gospel breaking through to us. They are consequences of turning around and embracing the reign of Jesus Christ.

This is especially good to know regarding 'pure in heart'. Whatever it means it is not the result of our own self-effort; it is the result of on-going encounter and ever deepening relationship with Jesus. This is the result of being infused by His grace. It is the result of the kingdom breaking in and doing its re-creating work.

Does this mean that we are merely passive before Jesus? No. For he continually calls us to repent and behave. To turn around at ever deeper levels and embrace Him and His reign. As we do day after day, week after week, year after year, we are slowly, but surely, turned right-side-up in an upside-down world. We are synchronised with the really real.

The Kingdom of God has come near' and a new kind of humanity is emerging in the world'.

Let us pray.

I invite you to simply be still before Jesus. And in the stillness let Him show you where you need to be turning. And then welcome for the first time or for the hundredth time the invasion of His light and life. O Lord Jesus we bless You for Your good news! Will You cause the Kingdom to break into our lives as never before.