

THE NEW REALITY --- THE BEATITUDES

Water from Rock, January 10, 2017, Tim Smith

The Gospel of Matthew concludes with Jesus' Great Commission sending His disciples to the whole world:

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

The Beatitudes and the remainder of His Sermon on the Mount are at the heart of the things Jesus teaches and must be at the heart of our lives and witness.

THE BEATITUDES: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

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

11 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

CONTEXT OF THE BEATITUDES: Matthew 4:17-22

¹⁷From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.'

18 As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

1. **“Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”** When you read “the kingdom of heaven” in Matthew, read it as “the kingdom of God.” Matthew is a Jew writing to Jewish readers and does not want to cause offense by using the sacred word “God”. Thus, when speaking of the “kingdom God” he says “kingdom of heaven.” It is clear that these two expressions speak of the same reality, e.g. Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20).
2. To say that the kingdom of heaven has come near does not mean it “will come soon”, but that it has come. The verb form indicates a past, completed action. The kingdom of God is dawning. The coming of Jesus inaugurates the long-awaited reign of God in the world, a reign that will culminate in the new creation.
3. Those who follow Jesus may now participate in the reign of God’s kingdom, no matter their present situation. All are welcome! God’s grace is for all! The blessings are here now for you in Jesus! It is possible for Jesus’ followers to practice a new life now in anticipation of God making all things new.
4. Dallas Willard writes in *The Divine Conspiracy*: “God’s own ‘kingdom,’ or ‘rule,’ is the range of his effective will, where what he wants done is done. The person of God himself and the action of his will are the organizing principles of his kingdom.”
5. God’s kingdom, or rule of God, is among us, and is accessible now.
6. Dallas Willard adds: “There is no suggestion in scripture that the kingdom hasn’t happened yet or is about to happen or about to be here. Where God’s will is being accomplished, the kingdom of God is right

beside us. It is indeed The Kingdom Among Us.” Christ calls us to follow Him and be partners in His Kingdom.

7. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew Jesus speaks of the kingdom as any place where God reigns, where His will is done. Here is a present reality Jesus invites us “to receive”, “to inherit”, and “to enter.” In Jesus, God’s great future is now present!

REFLECTING ON THE BEATITUDES

1. The location of The Sermon the Mount is not by chance (as well as The Beatitudes): *“When Jesus saw the crowds; he went up the mountain”* (5:1). Matthew wants to show the symmetry between the Law-giver Moses on Mount Sinai, and Jesus in The Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is not simply a man, but the greater Moses, the Messiah.
2. “Blessed” is the translation of the Greek makarios which translates the Old Testament Hebrew ashere. Beatitudes are frequent in the psalms (1:1; 2:12; 32:2; 40:4, etc.). The word “blessed” is more of an expression than a word, an exclamation that might be translated: “O the blessedness of such a person”). In contrast to “happiness” which depends on what “happens”, blessedness comes from God and is stable. The world cannot take away blessedness.
3. Jesus’ Beatitudes are dealing with life’s profound question, “Who are well off in life?”
4. It is important to note that The Beatitudes are not instructions for how to become a Christian, a disciple. Jesus is speaking to those who are already His disciples.
5. The Beatitudes are Jesus’ announcement of the dawning of God’s kingdom; they are descriptive rather than prescriptive. The Beatitudes are not commands, but illustrations of the blessedness of living under God’s rule. Dallas Willard says The Beatitudes “are explanations and illustrations, drawn from immediate setting, of the present availability of the kingdom through personal relationship to Jesus. They single out cases that provide proof that, in him, the rule of God from the heavens

is truly available in life circumstances that are beyond all human hope.” (*The Divine Conspiracy*)

6. The Beatitudes are announcement of grace, of good news for all, the poor in spirit, grieving, and persecuted. Like other Gospel passages, including Mary’s Magnificat, they announce the presence of God’s upside down Kingdom: ⁵¹ “He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly” (Luke 1:51-52)
7. The “blessedness” is not in the person’s condition, but in being a participant in the kingdom of God.

THE FIRST BEATITUDE: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

1. There are two words in the Greek New Testament translated as “poor”; one is penes which describes a person with nothing to spare. He has zero denarii in his savings, but at least has not gone into debt. It is not penes that Jesus uses in this beatitude, but the word ptochos. This describes a person so poor that he is destitute, living in abject poverty, under a mountain of debt. In the kingdom of God such a person experiences “blessedness”, and well-being.
2. Note the tense of the verb: “*theirs IS the kingdom of heaven.*” Here is the present tense experience of the kingdom God rules.

The Beatitudes (*The Message*)

3 “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule. **4** “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. **5** “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought. **6** “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat. **7** “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for. **8** “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—

put right. Then you can see God in the outside world. **9** “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

10 “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom. **11-12** “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, *I* do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.