THE BEATITUDES

Matthew 5:3-12
When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then 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. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
The Sermon on the Mount

- The SM is the first of five major blocks of teaching material collected in the First Gospel.
- Mt 5:1-2, When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying, and Mt. 7:28-29, Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes, form the narrative framework, with the words “the crowds” marking the inclusio
The Structure of the Sermon

- A Variety of Proposals have been offered to describe the structure of the Sermon
- In general, clear structural indicators are present in the first half of the sermon
- From Mt 6:19 to Mt 7:27, the structure is less clear
- The Beatitudes introduce the Sermon with an effective announcement of kingdom blessings
Matthew 5:1-2 as Setting

- The verb “taught” in verse 2 is imperfect (ἐδίδασκεν) suggesting a repeated pattern of teaching rather than a single sermonic event.
- The participle translated “sat” (καθίσαντος) indicated the “official” position for authoritative teaching in Judaism.
- The statement that Jesus “went up the mountain” echoes frequent references to Moses’ ascent of Mt. Sinai – does Matthew envision a “new Moses” giving a “new Torah”?
The Structure of the Beatitudes

- Verses 3-10 (the first eight beatitudes) are expressed in third person; verse 11 shifts to second person (which is maintained throughout the rest of the Sermon).
- The Lukan beatitudes (6:20-22) are in the second person.
- The blessing example of the first and eighth beatitudes is identical (for theirs is the kingdom of heaven) suggesting either a separate source for verses 3-10 or a distinct purpose for Matthew.
The Structure of the Beatitudes

- Each 3\textsuperscript{rd} person beatitude (vv. 3-10) begins with a predicate adjective (blessed) with no expressed verb followed by the subject and then the example of the blessing.

- The 2\textsuperscript{nd} person beatitude (v. 11) begins with the predicate adjective (blessed) with the expressed 2\textsuperscript{nd} person plural “to be” verb (ἐστε) followed a compound temporal clause describing the occasion of the blessing, but no example of blessing.
The Structure of the Beatitudes

- The blessings examples in vv 3-10 are:
  - V. 3 – theirs is the kingdom of heaven (present)
  - V. 4 – passive voice (future)
  - V. 5 – Active voice (future)
  - V. 6 – Passive voice (future)
  - V. 7 – Passive voice (future)
  - V. 8 – Act (middle deponent) voice (future)
  - V. 9 – Passive Voice (future)
  - V. 10 – theirs is the kingdom of heaven (present)
The Structure of the Beatitudes

- The subject of the first four beatitudes all begin with the Greek letter π
- V. 3 – the poor in spirit (οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι)
- V. 4 – those who mourn (οἱ πενθοῦντες)
- V. 5 – the meek (οἱ πραεῖς)
- V. 6 – those who hunger and thirst (οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες)
The Structure of the Beatitudes

- The subject of the first four beatitudes are all persons experiencing some lack or pain (poor, mourners, meek, hungering and thirsting)
- The subject of the second four beatitudes are all persons demonstrating some kind of virtue (merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for the sake of righteousness)
- This suggests Matthew’s strategic use of the beatitudes as kingdom blessings
Blessings and Macarisms

- Two Greek words are translated “blessed” in the New Testament: Εὐλογητός and μακάριος
- Εὐλογητός derives from two Greek roots meaning “a good word” or “to speak well”. The Εὐλογη- word group is frequently used to translate בָּרֻךְ in the Old Testament for effective words of blessing spoken by either God or humans
Blessings and Macarisms

- Μακάριος was also used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew אָשְׁרִי (‘ašrê) with the basic meaning of happiness or good fortune.
- Μακάριος also has a strong history in classical Greek (which Εὐλογητὸς did not have) describing the freedom of the rich from the cares and worries of life experienced by those who are not rich.
Blessings and Macarisms

- As early as Aristotle, Greek literature had identified a “macarism” or “beatitude” in the format “blessed is/are the . . .”
- This “macarism” extolled the good fortune accruing to fortunate people and came to be used for epitaphs on tombs
- The themes included material goods, children, a marriage partner, bachelorhood, riches, a good understanding, fame, righteousness, the release of death, and mystic initiation
Blessings and Macarisms

- The Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount are macarisms. They all begin with Μακάριοι.
- Thus they extol the good fortune or the happiness of the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, etc. Thus the Good News Translation begins each beatitude, “Happy are . . .”
- This is absolutely counter-intuitive.
Laws or Effective Words

- A long history of interpretation has understood the beatitudes to describe kingdom virtues – the expectations of the “new Torah” of Jesus
- This view takes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” to mean, “You must be or become poor in spirit.”
- The beatitudes become imperatives – the laws of the kingdom
Laws or Effective Words

- In contrast is the view that the beatitudes are announcements of the blessings/blessedness of the kingdom.
- In this sense they are understood as effective words spoken by Jesus. Effective words begin to create the reality of which they speak.
- In this view the beatitudes describe the good news being announced to the subjects in light of Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom.
Matthew 5:3

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- This first beatitude should be understood in relationship to the first beatitude in Luke 6:20: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
- A common question is, “Is Jesus blessing the poor or the poor in spirit?”
Matthew 5:3

- The Greek word for “poor” in both Matthew and Luke is πτωχοί (ptōchos)
- The Greek word refers to one who is destitute and who must beg in order to survive. It is distinguished from πένης (penēs) which refers to those who are poor so that they must work to live
- The poor are not simply economically disadvantaged, but those in need of charity to sustain life. Not relative deprivation but real distress characterizes their situation
Matthew 5:3

- Matthew’s “poor in spirit” has been taken to mean people who have no spiritual resources for their own salvation. This view arises from a view of the beatitudes as kingdom commandments and seeks to make it possible for all of us to qualify for this first blessing.

- However, it is more likely that Matthew’s addition of “in spirit” recognizes the damage to the human person who suffers the deprivation of poverty. Matthew is not saying something different than Luke.
Matthew 5:3

- Thus Jesus speaks an incredible effective word of blessing to the poor – to those who have nothing and do not know whether they will survive another few days, he says, “How fortunate you are, the kingdom of God belongs to you”

- This is the gospel preached to the poor as prophesied in Isaiah 61. The arrival of God’s sovereign rule is good news for those with nothing and no hope
Matthew 5:4

- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- This second beatitude in Matthew should be compared to the third beatitude in Luke 6:21: Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.
- The Greek word “mourn” πενθέω (pentheō) is almost always used for the lamenting and grief in response to death.
Matthew 5:4

- There is no reason to interpret this mourning in a spiritual sense (except to allow those of us who are not grief-stricken to claim fulfillment of this kingdom requirement)
- Jesus is proclaiming the good fortune of who are grief-stricken
- Their good fortune consists of the fact that they will be comforted
Matthew 5:4

- The passive voice construction (they will be comforted) is almost certainly to be understood as a “divine passive.” God will comfort them.
- The Greek word for comfort, παρακαλέω (parakaleō), suggests that God will come along side the grief-stricken to encourage them in their loss. This is, in fact, what happened through the Incarnation.
Matthew 5:5

- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (There is no parallel in Luke)

- The Greek word “meek,” πραΰς (praus), is difficult to define with precision. It was popular a generation ago to translate the word here as “gentle.” Some recent versions use “humble”

- The question is both what πραΰς means and whether it can be captured in a single English word
Matthew 5:5

- In secular Greek πραΰς was used to describe animals who had been domesticated, especially riding animals who were controlled by the bit, and ships being steered by a rudder.
- Aristotle used πραΰς to describe the golden mean between too much anger and too little anger.
- Thus πραΰς suggests beneficial self-control; there is no Hebrew word consistently translated by πραΰς in the LXX.
Matthew 5:5

- The two biblical persons described as "meek" are Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus (Matthew 12:29)
- Perhaps Psalm 37:11 is the key to understanding the third beatitude. Its first line reads: But the meek shall inherit the land
- The LXX uses πραεῖς; the Hebrew text uses עָּנָו (ʿānāw) often translated humble
Matthew 5:5

- The ways in which עָּנָּו (ʿānāw) is used in the OT suggests that it is a near synonym for the poor or destitute mentioned in verse 3.
- The translation of Psalm 37:11 – will inherit the land – is just as accurate a translation of Matthew 5:5b as “inherit the earth” but with a different connotation.
Matthew 5:5

- Perhaps we should understand the third beatitude to be the startling announcement by Jesus,
- Oh, the good fortune of the afflicted humble ones who are in control of their emotions and reactions, because, through the kingdom, God is now fulfilling his ancient promises of an inheritance and security
Matthew 5:6

- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- This fourth beatitude should be compared with Luke’s second beatitude (6:20): Bless are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.
- Is this another example of Matthew spiritualizing Jesus’ beatitude from physical hunger to hunger for righteousness?
Matthew 5:6

- Perhaps, but we should also consider that hungering and thirsting for righteousness can also be translated hungering/thirsting for justice (as found in the Rheims-Douai Version).

- Given the Old Testament concerns for justice certainly feeding the hungry was part of God’s concern. Thus Luke and Matthew may not be far apart in their differing ways of reporting this beatitude of Jesus.
Matthew 5:6

- It should be noted that the participles (hunger and thirst) πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες are present tense, indicating continuous or repeated action.
- The blessing example is not just that they will be filled, but that they will be satiated, have enough, and be thoroughly satisfied.
- The audacious announcement of Jesus is, “Oh, the good fortune of those are so hungry and thirsty for justice that their hunger and thirst is constant. The good news of the kingdom is that God will satisfy their intense longing.”
Matthew 5:7

- Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (There is no parallel in Luke)
- Compare with Proverbs 14:21b – Blessed is the one who has mercy on the poor
- The Hebrew word group most often translated “mercy” is חָּנַן (ḥānan) which is to be gracious
- Such gracious mercy was a divine attribute and a desired human virtue in the OT
Matthew 5:7

- The blessing example is that the merciful will be shown mercy.
- The passive voice construction should again be understood as a divine passive. God will be merciful to them.
- The good news of the kingdom is that those who extend the godly virtue of mercy to others are so happy because God will be granting mercy to them.
Matthew 5:7

- This beatitude encapsulates in a single line what Jesus taught in Matthew 18:23-35 through the parable of Unforgiving Servant.
- Both the parable and the beatitude teach the reciprocity of mercy and forgiveness.
- Authentic receipt of grace can only be demonstrated by granting grace to those who have hurt us.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (There is no parallel in Luke)

It seems likely that Jesus would have had Psalm 24:3-5 in mind: Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? 4 Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. 5 They will receive blessing from the Lord
Matthew 5:8

- In the biblical tradition the heart is the source of volition and the true expression of the person.
- Purity of heart is a figure of speech with the OT understanding of cultic purity behind it.
- In Matthew the heart reveals the reality of the person. A pure heart requires integrity, where outward actions and inward motives match.
Matthew 5:8

- Purity of heart is lack of duplicity, singleness of intention, and a desire to please God above all else (Davies & Allison)
- Purity of heart is to will one thing, specifically to will God’s will
- The reward of heart purity is to see God
- This expresses the ultimate human hope and ultimately the full restoration of relationship with God (that was lost in Genesis 3)
Matthew 5:8

- This beatitude is the most difficult to abandon the imperatival understanding of beatitudes for effective words of blessing (especially for holiness people)

- Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom was good news to people of integrity and single-minded focus on God. Their greatest desire, that of seeing God, was now being fulfilled (in Jesus himself)
Matthew 5:9

- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (There is no parallel in Luke)
- The Greek word “peacemaker,” εἰρηνοποιός (eirēnopoios) is a NT and LXX hapax legomena
- It is usually noted that this word does not mean “pacifist” or “peace-lover.” The creation of peace is a difficult and challenging task and one that is ultimately only accomplished by God
Matthew 5:9

- The interpreter should think of “peace” in this beatitude in terms of the Hebrew *shalom*
- It is the one who creates well-being for others who is blessed
- The blessing example is that such peacemakers will be called children of God
- The passive voice again denotes that God himself will call the peacemakers his own children
Matthew 5:10

- Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (There is no exact parallel in Luke)
- The Greek participle translated “persecuted” is a perfect tense passive (δεδιώγμενοι – dediōgmenoi). The sense of the perfect tense is an action completed in the past with ongoing present results
Matthew 5:10

- The meaning of the perfect could be that the persecuted ones continue to suffer the deprivation of property, health, or loved ones taken away from them in the past.
- The meaning of the perfect could be that persecution had begun in the past and was continuing in the present.
- This beatitude reflects the context of the Matthean church more than the context of Jesus’ first disciples.
Matthew 5:10

- It should be noted that the blessing is on those persecuted for righteousness’ sake
- 1 Peter similarly suggests that virtue only accrues to those who suffer justly rather than those whose suffering is deserved
- As in the case of the first beatitude, the blessing example (forming an *inclusio* with the first beatitude) is that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them
Matthew 5:10

- Again Jesus’ announcement is counter-intuitive and audacious
- Oh, the good fortune of those who are being persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Their good fortune lies in the fact that the kingdom of God has come and is present in Jesus and is available to them
Matthew 5:11

- Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
- Note the shift to 2nd person and compare with Luke 6:22: Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.
Matthew 5:12

- Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Compare with Luke 6:23: Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

- Though not framed as a beatitude, the imperatives, “rejoice and be glad” are as audacious as the beatitudes that preceded
Preaching the Beatitudes

- The homiletic possibilities are almost limitless
- One of the first homiletic decisions that must be made is whether to preach the beatitudes as law or as gospel
- The preacher ought to preach the beatitudes as the good news of the kingdom
- The preacher has a marvelous opportunity to announce the good fortune people who do not feel fortunate have because the kingdom has come (in Jesus)
Preaching the Beatitudes

- Preaching the Beatitudes as the effective words of Kingdom Grace offers an opportunity to preach and teach NT eschatology
- The beatitudes invite the listener (and preacher) to discover kingdom realities that seem quite contrary to what we daily describe as reality
- The beatitudes do not make sense using “common sense,” but they are marvelously instructive with “kingdom sense”
Preaching the Beatitudes

- Note that all verbs in Matthew 5:3-11 are in the indicative mood.
- The first imperative comes in verse 12 and many will follow in the Sermon on the Mount.
- However, the fact of the kingdom comes before the demands of the kingdom.
- Grace is first, always first!
- It is only by grace that we respond to God’s gracious initiative. (This is very Wesleyan)
Preaching the Beatitudes

- One could easily build an inductive sermon around the theme:
  - The Kingdom is not Law
    - It is not legalistic
    - It is not demanding
  - The Kingdom is Grace
    - It comes with effective words of blessing
    - It marks God’s invasion of grace from his future to our present
Preaching the Beatitudes

- One could preach a three point sermon on the whole passage:
  1. The Blessedness of those Suffering Loss (vv. 3-6)
  2. The Blessedness of those who are Virtuous (vv. 7-10)
  3. The Blessedness of Rejoicing in Persecution (vv. 11-12)

- One could preach three beatitudes per sermon (vv. 3-5; vv. 6-8; vv. 9-12)
Preaching the Beatitudes

- One could preach a sermon linking or intertwining the first four beatitudes (vv. 3-6) with Isaiah 61.
- One could easily preach a sermon series in which a full sermon was devoted to each beatitude (this has been done many times and resources of past sermons of others are available – be careful to not import assumptions you would not share).
Preaching the Beatitudes

- Be careful not to:
  - Let the beatitudes slide into kingdom requirements or expectations
  - Forget the eschatological dimensions of the beatitudes as kingdom blessings
  - Treat one beatitude in isolation from others and from the kingdom context
  - Forget the primacy of grace in the beatitudes