

“Kingdom Come”

Sermon on the Mount Series

Class 1: Introduction and first beatitude

“BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.” MATTHEW 5:3

Introduction

- “...the sermon describes the ethics of the kingdom, thus explaining its idealism.” Hagner, Donald A. Matthew 1–13. WBC.
- “The Sermon on the Mount is nothing but a great elaboration of what our Lord called His ‘new commandment’..... If we are Christ’s, and our Lord has meant that word for us, that we should love one another even as he loved us, here we are shown how to do it.”
- The Sermon on the Mount “is the nearest thing to a manifesto that he ever uttered, for it is his own description of what he wanted his followers to be and do.”
- QUESTION: What are your best hopes for this series? Write it down.

Part 1 - Sermon on the Mount overview

1. Significance in the Gospel setting

- a. On a mountain
 - Deliberate imitation of Moses’ Sinai experience (**Exodus 19-20; 34**)
 - Greater than Moses - **Heb 3.3**.
 - Perhaps there are also deliberate contrasts:
 - Instead of the LORD coming down onto the mountain, the Lord here goes up onto the mountain; In the past he spoke in thunder and lightening, here he speaks in the voice of men; At Sinai the people were ordered to keep their distance, here they are called near.
 - Mountains are significant in Matthew - a good personal Bible study idea.
 - Temptation (**4:8**); Sermon here; Transfiguration (**17:1**); Farewell (**28:16**)
 - All peaks in Matthew’s emphasis.
 - Also **Matthew 14:23** (prayer); **Matthew 15:29** (sat and healed); **Matthew 24:3** (teaching).
- b. First and lengthiest of the five Matthean discourses.
 - a. “..when Jesus had come to the end of these sayings, ...” (**7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1**)

2. Significance related to the old covenant

- a. In continuity with Old Testament (**Matt 5.17-19**) and surpassing it (**Matt 5.21-48**).
- b. Especially relevant to Jewish Christians.
- c. Puts in positive form what Judaism expressed negatively.

3. Purpose?

- a. Options
 - i. Interim ethic: applicable only between then and Christ’s return (expected in very near future, but did not happen).
 - ii. Normal Christian discipleship between then and when Jesus ultimately returns.
 - iii. Applicable to individuals, or society?
 - iv. Meant to usher in a realistic utopianism?
 - v. Invitation to asceticism?
 - vi. Forces us to recognise our need for grace and drive us to the gospel?
 - vii. Salvation by works? Or framework of grace?
- b. The Sermon on the Mount describes the goal of the Christian life, but only *fully* lived in the next life.

- i. Are the teachings possible to practice? Not by the unregenerate, and not by the regenerate in perfection. We need grace.
- ii. It is not a matter of simply obeying them, but having a mind and heart transformed such that the actions grow out of what is inside.
- iii. "These 'blessings', the 'wonderful news' that he's announcing, are not saying 'try hard to live like this.' They are saying that people who already are like that are in good shape. They should be happy and celebrate." – Wright, N. T. Matthew for Everyone

4. Key Verse?

- a. **Matt 6:8** – “Do not be like them” – similar to what God tells Israel (**Lev 18:3**).
- b. This is a sermon of ‘compare and contrast’ – sometimes with the Gentile and pagan world and sometimes with the religious world.
- c. The SOM is an ethic with five characteristics
 - i. “It is a religious ethic...What we do springs from what we are.”
 - ii. “It is a disciple’s ethic ...It is how disciples should behave.”
 - iii. “It is a prophetic ethic, not a new law. It is revolution, not legislation.”
 - iv. “It is a comprehensive ethic...all aspects of life..”
 - v. “It is an unattainable ethic which we must nevertheless strive to attain.”

5. The kingdom

- a. This is “primarily dynamic rather than spatial” -in other words a reign.
- b. Although the kingdom can mean the entirety of God’s reign (the whole universe etc.) this is not what is meant in the Sermon on the Mount, since not all enter it.
- c. The kingdom referred to here is “a subset of the universal kingdom”. The kingdom is those who have life - life now and life to come.
- d. God has always been fashioning for Himself a people to be his own to love and display his love to the world. Jesus has come to inaugurate that Kingdom.
- e. Chapter 4 tells us that this is what he is here to do. This involves repentance.
- f. The SOM “portrays the repentance ... and the righteousness which belong to the kingdom.”
- g. Is it significant that the Lord’s prayer is at the approximate centre of the sermon?

6. Structure

- i. A Christian’s character, 5:3-12
- ii. A Christian’s influence, 5:13-16
- iii. A Christian’s righteousness, 5:17-48
- iv. A Christian’s piety, 6:1-18
- v. A Christian’s ambition, 6:19-34
- vi. A Christian’s relationships, 7:1-20
- vii. A Christian’s commitment, 7:21-27

(John Stott)

- I. Introduction (5:3–16)
 - A. The Foundation of Righteous Living: The Beatitudes (5:3–12)
 - B. The Essence of Discipleship: Salt and Light (5:13–16)
- II. The Main Body of the Sermon (5:17–7:12)
 - A. The Relation between the Old and the New Righteousness (5:17–48)
 - 1. Continuity with the Old (5:17–20)
 - 2. The Surpassing of the Old: The Six Antitheses (5:21–48)
 - B. Outward vs. Inward Righteousness (6:1–18)
 - 1. Almsgiving (6:1–4)
 - 2. Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer (6:5–15)
 - 3. Fasting (6:16–18)
 - C. Dependence upon God (6:19–34)
 - 1. Serving God Rather Than Wealth (6:19–24)
 - 2. The Disciple and Anxiety (6:25–34)
 - D. Various Teachings and the Golden Rule (7:1–12)
- III. Conclusion (7:13–27)
 - A. The Two Ways (7:13–14)
 - B. The False and the Genuine (7:15–23)

1. Warning concerning False Prophets (7:15–20)
 2. The Insufficiency of the Charismata (7:21–23)
- C. The Parable of the Two Builders (7:24–27)" (Hagner)

7. Other matters

- a. Luke's version
 - i. Is it a compilation? Luke's material is, here and there, a little different and more spread throughout his Gospel.
 - ii. May be down to the fact that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and so both Matthew and Luke are translating what he said into Greek.
 - ii. Composition
 - i. Simply reading Matt 5-7 takes only a few minutes, so there must have been much more material that Matthew does not record.
 - ii. What we have, both here and in Luke, are condensed versions of the teaching.
- QUESTION: What are your impressions of the SOM?

Part 2 - Beatitude 1, Matthew 5.3

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." **Matthew 5:3**

- "These beatitudes crush me to the ground." They are a picture of Everest that we cannot climb.
- "So the beatitudes set forth the blessings which God bestows (not as a reward for merit but as a gift of grace) upon those in whom he is working such a character."
- Chrysostom called the beatitudes, 'a sort of golden chain.'

• Overview of the beatitudes

- Structure of the beatitudes
 - 4 attitudes followed by 4 aptitudes. Carson calls **vv 3-10** the 'norms' of the kingdom.
 - The kingdom bookends the beatitudes (**vv3, 10**).

• "Blessed"

- To approve of and find approval. 'Happy' is not a good translation because it is subjective.
- "Neither blessed nor 'happy' adequately translates makarios, which is rather a term of congratulation and recommendation. These qualities are to be envied and emulated; they make up 'the good life'. Each is followed by a reason, pointing out that no-one will be the loser by following this way of life, however unpromising it may appear in the short term." New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. Edited by Carson, D. A, R. T France, J. A. Motyer, and Gordon J. Wenham. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- "Rather than happiness in its mundane sense, it refers to the deep inner joy of those who have long awaited the salvation promised by God and who now begin to experience its fulfilment. The makarioi are the deeply or supremely happy." Hagner, Donald A. Matt 1–13. WBC 33A.
- "If God's blessing means more to us than the approval of loved ones no matter how cherished, or of colleagues no matter how influential, then the beatitudes will speak to us very personally and deeply."
- "Blessed" is found frequently in the Septuagint (LXX), eg, **Pss 1:1; 2:12; 106:3; 119:1; Isa 30:18**.
- Outside the Sermon on the Mount (and Luke's Sermon on the Plain), see **Matt 11:6; 13:16; 16:17; 24:46; Luke 1:45; 11:27–28; 12:37–38; 14:14–15; 23:29; John 13:17; 20:29**. See, too, **Rom 14:22; Jas 1:12; Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14**.

• "Poor"

- "Happy are the oppressed, because to them belongs the kingdom of heaven."
- The beatitudes start with an 'emptying' while those that follow are a "manifestation of a fullness. We cannot be filled until we are first empty." Conviction comes before conversion. "Poverty of spirit is a consciousness of my emptiness..."
- In the Old Testament the poor are the destitute, oppressed, lowly, humble.
- **Psalms 34:6, Psalms 40:17, Psalms 69:33, Psalms 72:13, Psalms 107:41, Psalms 132:15, Proverbs 16:19, Isaiah 57:15, Isaiah 66:2**.

- Jesus came to bring good news to the poor: **Matthew 11:5; Isaiah 61:1**. He is fulfilling promises in an eschatological manner.
- “For ‘the poor’ were not so much the poverty stricken as the pious who-partly because they were needy, downtrodden, oppressed or in other ways afflicted - had put their faith and hope in God.”
- The version in **Luke 6:20** does not mention “in spirit”, but only the poor. Does this mean that the poor are more blessed than any other socio-economic group? This is not in the mind of Christ, since his hearers would not have made this interpretation – except in the sense we’ve dealt with above. The Bible does not teach that the state of poverty is blessed more than any other, but does teach that reliance on riches is a curse. This reliance on material things can be characteristic of the poor or the rich. There is no commendation here from Jesus for those who voluntarily make themselves poor.
- We’re dealing with spiritual bankruptcy (publican/Pharisee contrast in **Luke 18**) and deep repentance. Gideon, Isaiah, David, Peter (**Luke 5**), Paul are examples of this – and yet are not weird in their lack of confidence in self. Paul saw his worldly attributes as ‘dung’. Self-hatred is not encouraged by this attitude. It requires a conscious self-emptying before approaching God. The church in Laodicea had presumably started with the right spirit, but it stands as a warning of what can happen to us. They were rich in their own eyes, yet poor in God’s eyes. Self-examination, self-reflection, self-emptying are needed in our devotional times so that we approach God with humility and then we find grace in our time of need (**Hebrews 4**).
- “To be ‘poor in spirit’ does not mean that we should be diffident or nervous, retiring, weak or lacking in courage.”
- Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” (**Luke 4:18, Is 61.1-2**). He was completely emptied of self (**Phil 2**) and obedient to the Father (**John 14:10**) and dependant on Him in prayer. Jesus himself started life in a ‘poor’ way by being born in a stable. He is gentle – **Matthew 11:29**.
- “..we are looking at men face to face with God. And if one feels anything in the presence of God save an utter poverty of spirit, it ultimately means that you have never faced him.”
- How do we cultivate this beatitude? How do we ‘practice’ it? “The way to become poor in spirit is to look at God.”
- There is a world of difference between dependence on personality and celebration of God-given personality. Similarly between godly confidence and self-confidence. It seems to me that the more the world holds up an ideal of self-confidence, assertiveness, self-expression and self-assurance, the more we become neurotic, anxious and afraid. The cure must not be more striving after this ‘ideal’, but a radical reorientation of our hearts to poverty of spirit.
- QUESTION: “In what ways are we blessed if we are poor in spirit?”
- QUESTION: “How do we cultivate being poor in spirit?”
- “**Theirs is**”: Present fulfilment because Jesus is present.
- **Kingdom of heaven**
 - See **verse 10** – same reward. An inclusio. Emphasises the rewards are spiritual, not material.
- **Comment**
 - The first beatitude combines reality with hope. Being poor is not fun, but it is temporary once you have Jesus. We have the kingdom now, and experience some of its blessings now, but, given life continues to be difficult, we hold on to the promise of its future complete fulfilment.
 - QUESTION: “How can you apply this beatitude tomorrow?”

Resources

- “The Blessedness of Possessing Nothing”: A.W. Tozer - <https://renovare.org/articles/blessedness-possessing-nothing>
- Doug Jacoby’s “Jesus is the second Moses” on YouTube.
- Doug’s podcast series on the Sermon on the Mount: <https://www.douglasjacoby.com/the-sermon-on-the-mountain-00-introduction/>