



LENT BIBLE STUDY SERIES:

The Relationship Between Personal Salvation & Social Justice

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Week #4: Thursday April 3, 7:00 pm-8:15 pm

Topic

“Living out the Beatitudes in Pursuit of God’s Justice”, Part II

Matthew 5:3-12

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

From the time of the composition of the Psalms, **“the poor”** had been understood as a characterization of the true people of God, who know that their lives are not in their own control and that they are dependent of God. **“Poor in Spirit”** makes this explicit. Persons who are pronounced blessed are those whose only identity and security is in God. This also includes those who disavow worldly riches for the sake of their callings to serve the Kingdom, and persons who invest or put at risk their earthly possessions and earthly station in the advancement of the well-being of the poor. What is at stake in the phrase is neither economics nor spirituality, but the identity of the people of God – a Matthean theme.

“Theirs is the Kingdom.” Thus far, Jesus has been presented as the king of the present and coming kingdom of God. He has reversed the idea of human kingship, and those to whom his kingdom belongs correspond to this eschatological reversal. **Just as the king is meek and poor in spirit (cf. on 5:5), so also are those to whom his kingdom belongs. Christology and discipleship are correlatives for Matthew.**

**4 *Blessed are those who mourn,
for shall be comforted.***

Matthew here taps into the deep biblical tradition that one of the characteristics of the true people of God is that they lament the present condition of God’s people and God’s program in the world. In Isaiah 61:1-11, on which the beatitudes are based, the community laments the desolation of the holy city. **This is the community that does not resign itself to the present condition of the world as final but laments the fact that God’s kingdom has not yet come, and that God’s will is not yet done (6:10).** The grammatical form of the verb *“shall be comforted”* is the future passive.

God will satisfy their yearnings by letting them see and participate in his eschatological celebration (cf, 6, 7, 9).

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

Here Jesus reformulates Psalm 37:9, 11 as a beatitude. Since “*meek*,” “*gentle*” (Heb., *praus*) is a key Matthean word that characterizes the reversal of this-worldly ideas of kingship (11:29, 12:18-21, 21:5). “*Meekness*” is here a synonym for “*poor in spirit*” (v.3). It is not a matter of a particular attitude one is urged to adopt but characterizes those who are aware of their identity as the oppressed people of God in the world: those who have renounced the violent methods of this-worldly power. “*Inherit the land*,” originally referring to the promised land of Palestine, has here become an eschatological metaphor for participation in the renewed earth (19:28).

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

Like those who mourn (5:4), those who “*hunger and thirst for righteousness*” are persons who long for the coming of God’s kingdom and the vindication of right, which will come with it, and who because of this hope actively do God’s will now. This longing is no empty hope, but “*shall be satisfied*”, another divine passive – i.e., God will satisfy.

**7 *Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.***

Here Matthew uses the word for “*mercy*” (Heb., *eleemon*), which refers to concrete acts of mercy rather than merely a merciful attitude. Metthew does not understand “*justice*” and “*mercy*” to be alternatives (1:19; 20:1-16 esp. v. 4). The key role mercy plays in Matthew’s theology is illustrated by his twice adding “*I desire mercy, not sacrifice*” (Hos 6:6) to verses 9:13 and 12:7 (cf. 23:23; and the parable in 18:21-35 esp. v. 33). Please note, in none of the beatitudes is advice being offered for getting along in this world, where mercy is more likely to be regarded as a sign of weakness than to be rewarded in kind. Again, eschatologically speaking, the passage indicates that the merciful will receive mercy from God at the last judgment.

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

Here Jesus reformulates Psalm 24:3-4 and presents it as a beatitude. “*Purity of heart*” is not merely the avoidance of “*impure thoughts*” (e.g., sexual or violent fantasy, or coveting), but refers to the single-minded devotion to God appropriate to a monotheistic faith. Having an “*undivided heart*” (Psalm 86:11) is the corollary of monotheism and requires that there be something big enough and good enough to merit one’s whole devotion, rather than the functional polytheism of parceling oneself out to a number of loyalties. Faith in the one God

requires that one be devoted to God with all one's heart (Deut 6:4-5; Matt 22:37). This corresponds to the "single eye" of 6:22, the one pearl of great price 13:45-46, and Luke's "one thing is needed" (Luke 10:42), and to Paul's "this one thing I do". The opposite of "purity of heart" is a "divided heart" (James 4:8), attempting to serve two masters (6:4), the "doubt" (gr., distazo: lit. "have two minds") of 14:33 and 28:17, and the conduct of the Pharisees (23:25).

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

Because of Jesus anti-militaristic preaching, Jewish Christians of Palestine refused to fight in the 66-70 war against Rome. The Roman emperors called themselves "peacemakers" and "Sons of God." **Jesus' use of "peacemakers" does not connote a passive attitude, but positive action for reconciliation.** Again, the eschatological divine passive points to God's claiming the peacemakers as "sons of God" in the last judgment, not to what people will say about those who work for peace in this world. To be declared "sons of God" is not a matter of individualistic identity but is among the nine "notae ecclesiae", the "marks of the Church" – the eschatological community living in the earth.

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

Verse 10 corresponds to 5:3. **The group who will receive the eschatological blessing is not composed of the oppressed in general, but those people unjustly persecuted because of their commitment to righteousness.** Note the parallelism between "for righteousness' sake" (v.10) and "for MY sake" (v.11).

**11 *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely
say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and
be glad because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same
way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

This transitional section shifts from third to second person, and includes the first imperative, "rejoice." **The joy to which the disciples are called is not in spite of persecution, but because of it.** Rejoicing because of persecution is not the expression of a martyr complex, but the joyful acceptance of the badge of belonging to the eschatological community of faith, the people of God who are out of step with the value system of this age. Such people are like the prophets of Israel, who were also persecuted (cf., Romans 5:3-5).

Homework

1. Do you believe that the church has manifested the notae ecclesiae throughout U.S history? (Explain)
2. Do you believe that the church is manifesting the notae ecclesiae in the U.S. today?
3. Do you believe that New Beginnings manifests the notae ecclesiae? (explain).