

6th Sunday after Epiphany

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Luke 6:17-25 NKJ ¹⁷ And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, ¹⁸ as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. ¹⁹ And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed *them* all. ²⁰ Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed *are you poor*, For yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed *are you who hunger now*, For you shall be filled. Blessed *are you who weep now*, For you shall laugh. ²² Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile *you*, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation. ²⁵ Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep.

The Beatitudes are His Blessing to those Who Do not Deserve It

What are the beatitudes? Are they law or are they gospel? Are they words that all people should learn to live by? Do they show us how we can be nice and loving to our neighbor? Are they a division, dividing the good people from the bad?

The truth is they are nothing less than the undeserved grace of God showered upon worthless and sinful men. They are His gracious gift to a people who do not deserve it.

They are so often misunderstood for one simple reason: we are unwilling to see ourselves the way God sees us. Imagine that a very wealthy man promises to give millions to all those who are poor. But many in their pride refuse to even apply because they insist they are not poor, even though they live in filth.

In order to help you understand these beatitudes properly we are going to discuss four statements about the beatitudes. Four truths that Jesus himself teaches in these very beatitudes. Four truths which when they are understood and acceptable will make it clear that these beatitudes are not law. They are not a standard we have to live up to, but they are a gracious promise from Christ. Four truths which will make certain that you never again misunderstand the beatitudes.

1. All the conditions and blessings of the beatitudes are spiritual

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. - The poor are those who have nothing to give the Lord for their salvation. It is as though all men are lined up before God and the "wealthy"

come and say to the Lord here are my great works by which I have earned heaven. Then come the poor and say to the Lord I have nothing and can give you nothing by which to earn my salvation. And the Lord gives the riches of the kingdom to those who claim poverty.

Thus the first of the four truths is this that all the conditions and blessings are spiritual. Each beatitude consists of a condition, eg “the poor,” and a blessing, eg “the kingdom of God.” Both of these parts are always spiritual.

Luke says “blessed are you poor,” but Matthew makes the point clearer: “Blessed are the poor **in spirit.**” Luke says “blessed are you who hunger” but again Matthew makes it clearer: “Blessed are you who hunger and thirst **for righteousness.**” Matthew and Luke both say, “blessed are you when people hate you . . . on account of the son of man.”

Again and again the condition you are supposed to be is a spiritual condition. It is a spiritual problem and the thing that is received is a spiritual blessing.

This is the first mistake that many make. They assume that they need to win their way to heaven. They assume that if they can achieve what Jesus says here then they will receive the blessing. They proceed to take a vow of poverty, or they fast exceedingly, or they give up all joy in this world, and they think they have thereby fulfilled the condition part of the beatitude and therefore the blessing is theirs.

But they have completely missed the point. For it is not a lack of earthly wealth that Jesus speaks about but a poverty of the spirit. The poor is the spirit that claims nothing before God but acknowledges that I am filth in his presences. Christ gives the riches of the kingdom to these poor, so then the difference is Christ not us

2. The condition that Jesus describes in each of the beatitudes is what we already are

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. To hunger here means to lack, to lack righteousness, to lack peace, to lack contentment. We lost the image of God and that loss is a deep ache within us. We hate ourselves because we know that we are not what we are supposed to be. We hunger for righteousness.

The second truth is that the condition that Jesus describes in each of the beatitudes is what we already are.

When the first truth is understood, it is a spiritual poverty, then the second truth follows naturally. I already am poor, and hungry. These are not things that we need to work at to achieve, for there is no lack of spiritual poverty and hunger in our hearts.

When Jesus says, “Blessed are you poor,” he is not dividing the crowd but describing it.

Hunger is never anything you strive for. You don't go out and work at being hungry. Hunger is something that happens to you because you do not have the food you need. Likewise spiritual hunger comes about because you lack the righteousness which you should have done.

In fact all the beatitudes describe a lack, not an act. Not a single one of them describes something we should go and do but instead they all describe something that is missing from our life.

Blessed are the poor – ie the ones who lack a rich spiritual life

Blessed are the hungry – ie the ones who lack the righteousness that would give you a satisfying life

Blessed are those who mourn – ie the ones who lack any true joy in this world

Into this lack Christ comes and by His grace gives what we are missing. You are poor and I give you the riches of the kingdom of God. You are hunger and I will satisfy you with my righteousness. You are sad I will give you joy in life everlasting

3. The condition does not make you worthy of the blessings

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. - The weeping Christ describes here is not the outward stern face, or a life lived avoiding all human joy. This is a mourning of the soul. This is the sorrow that never fully leaves our soul because we live in a world of sin. This is the same sorrow that even caused Christ to weep at the death of Lazarus.

This condition does not make us worthy of the blessing.

Again, many mistake the beatitudes as though God is saying if you suffer this now then you will receive this later, as though the condition makes us worthy of the blessing. But this is pure nonsense. If I go without food now does that make me worthy of food later? If I eat now does this make me unworthy of eating later?

Let me ask you mothers, what would you say to your children if they said to you, I'm going to skip supper so then I deserve ice cream later. Or if one son said, "My brother ate his broccoli so he doesn't deserve ice cream."

Consider the evilness of Jesus woes if you view the condition as making you worthy of the blessing. Do we really worship a God who punished people just for being happy? No of course not. We all deserve to suffer because of our sin, not based on our earthly wealth or happiness.

The truth that Jesus lays at our feet here is that we all poor and hungry and mourning and he in his grace has come to give us riches and fill us with good things and make us to rejoice.

The distinction is not that the hungry deserve to be filled, the difference is Christ. He fills us who are hungry.

4. But now Christ is risen from the dead

The fourth statement comes not from our gospel reading but from our epistle reading

1 Cor 15:14 – 20 If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up--if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! . . . If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Our only hope is in Christ who rose from the dead. As Paul and Jeremiah reminds us if our hope is anything else, we are the most worthless of all men.

If we have to somehow find a way to make ourselves poor in spirit we will not attain the blessing. If we have to find a way to make sure we are always sad and mourning, then there is no hope for us. And if it is such that the kingdom of heaven belongs then why did Christ die?

But the truth is that Christ is risen from the dead. What does this mean accept that first He died for our sins. If he died for sinners, than it is to sinners that his righteousness is given not to those who prove themselves worthy. And that then second, he rose. And if He rose our sins have been left behind and we have received all these blessings which he in his grace came to bring to us who are poor, and hungry, and naked and sorrowful.

We are empty and he fills us with His gifts by His grace.

Amen.

Children's Sermon

I'm going to give candy to all the girls – does that make the girls better than the boys?

I'm going to give candy to all the boys – does that mean the boys are better than girls?

I'm going to give candy to all the children and none of the parents – is that because children are always good? No

It is merely because I want to give a gift to the children. It has nothing to do with your goodness it only has to do with my goodness.

In the same way when Christ gives his gifts it doesn't mean that there is anything good in those to whom he gives it.

Christ gives to those who are sinners

Christ says he gives to those who have been baptized – that doesn't make the baptized ones better than the unbaptized ones, it means that Christ is gracious

Christ says he gives forgiveness through faith – that doesn't mean those who have faith are better it means that Christ is good

Christ's blessings are always a reminder of his goodness not ours. He is good to us