

The work of the church – the mission of the Kingdom of God

The sermon on the mount is widely regarded as being one of the most profound pieces of religious teaching in history. The beatitudes themselves lay bare the blueprint of the restoring work of God that took effect in the person of Jesus Christ. I believe though that many find them hard to understand and if they are misunderstood perhaps we miss a vital ingredient in the mission that we as Church inherited from Jesus following his Ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Matthew places this teaching at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry following his temptation in the desert and return to Galilee. A significant verse for understanding the beatitudes is Matt 4: 17 "From that time on Jesus began to preach, repent for the Kingdom of heaven is near". It is followed by a description of Jesus' ministry of preaching, healing and deliverance. The emphasis for Matthew is on the divine, transforming power of the Kingdom of heaven made real on earth in the person of Jesus.

So in his use of the beatitudes, Jesus is not saying that the poor in Spirit are blessed because they are poor in Spirit or even because they are humbly aware of their spiritual poverty. We cannot earn God's blessing by being anything and neither spiritual nor material poverty have any place in the kingdom of heaven anyway. The poor in spirit are blessed because in the coming of the kingdom of heaven they will be released from their poverty. The blessings of the kingdom of heaven are made accessible to people on earth in Jesus. The beatitudes alongside Jesus' quotation from Isaiah 61 (Luke 4) are his manifesto for his work on earth.

So to clarify; when exposed to Jesus the poor in spirit will be transformed to be people who are fully aware of the kingdom of heaven; those who mourn will be transformed into those who are comforted; those who are meek will regain self confidence; those who long for righteousness will know the reality of it and so on.

Finally where does this lead us as Christians today? Significantly, Jesus, in spelling out through the beatitudes his own manifesto of the transforming power of the kingdom, then invites his disciples to share in it. "You are the salt of the earth..... you are the light of the world." Salt and light are transforming. Your dinner tastes different with salt on it and salted meat does not go off like unsalted meat. Light in the darkness changes everything.

For us the challenge is this. Where you see the Church you should see the ministry of Jesus and the power of the kingdom of heaven realized in the presence of the Holy Spirit; the beatitudes in reality.

A very helpful and more detailed appraisal of the beatitudes can be found in 'The Divine Conspiracy' by Dallas Willard, pages 111-143



*Where you see
the Church you
should see the
ministry of Jesus
and the power of
the kingdom of
heaven realized
in the presence
of the Holy Spirit.*