

The Sermon on the Mount (1)

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5–7; Luke 6

Introduction

There is no limit to the volumes of writing and comments on this sermon, and especially the beatitudes. Yet despite this, there is still much that is not generally understood. What does it mean to be meek (or gentle), and how does that differ from merciful? What about “poor in spirit?” Shouldn’t we be *rich* in spirit? If someone is “filled with the Spirit,” how can he be *poor* in spirit? What does it mean to inherit the earth? What is the difference between *abolishing* the law and fulfilling it, and why does Jesus say He wouldn’t change the smallest stroke of the pen in the law, while at the same time seemingly contradict Himself saying, “You’ve heard it said...but I say...” (Matt. 5:17–19, 31–48)?

Matthew’s account of this event is the most detailed, so our study will revolve primarily around that, but Luke’s account will also be consulted, for its contrast in wording of the some of the same sayings.

This may not have been one sermon preached only one time, although the association of this particular lesson with Jesus’ separating the “twelve” from His other disciples does give this sermon a special significance. In placing this event at the beginning of Jesus’ teaching, Matthew gives us a clue to the structure of his gospel. The sermon itself serves as a template upon which all of Jesus’ teaching is based. Further, the so-called Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1–10) form a kind of *preamble* to the rest of the sermon. And though the teachings of every one of the beatitudes, in principle, can be found in the Old Testament texts, in verses 11–12, Jesus turns these principles of the past toward His current and future ministry. Can you see how he does this?

Using “Reverse Engineering” in learning the Scriptures

At the end of World War II, the technology of German rocketry had advanced far beyond any of the allied powers, so there was a competitive effort between the Anglo-Americans allies and the Russians to capture the German rocket bases and confiscate as much of their technology as possible. The Germans had engineered this technology, but even in a failure to capture the “engineers,” the capture of their *machines* would amount to a capture of their technology as well, because their rockets could be studied and copied. This is known as *reverse engineering*.

When we read the opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount, we can see that these beatitudes are extremely important to understand, yet they seem to be somewhat *elusive* as well. So instead of focusing so much of our time on them in detail, might we not “reverse engineer” them by studying the results they produce? For example, as we observe the behavior of the first converts in the book of

Acts, we notice that those who had properties sold them in order to give to those who had need, *because they considered that nothing they possessed belonged to themselves, but "all things were common property to them"* (Acts 4:32). Could this be what sets apart *poor in spirit* from the other Beatitudes? If so, it would be the only beatitude that speaks directly to the *attitude* of a person toward his earthly possessions. So the meaning would be, *blessed are they who, in their spirits, consider themselves to be poor* (Luke's account simply says, "...blessed are you who are poor..." (6:20). Yet these examples, and others like them, are scarcely mentioned in sermons and commentaries when considering of the meaning of *poor in spirit*.

It is true that many times, in practice, more than one of these principles apply. You can see this in the applications that Jesus makes in the rest of the sermon. For example, in His teaching about loving one's enemies (Matt. 5:43–47), meekness, mercy, peacemaking and a hunger and thirst for righteousness are three of these principles that might apply. But even though all of the beatitudes may share some things in common, we must also ask: is there is one thing that is unique to each of these beatitudes that separates each one from the others?

To help you answer this question, several passages are chosen that apply more particularly to one beatitude than to any of the others (even though you may find some overlapping). On the next page, there are two columns. In the left column, groups of examples are listed, and on the right, the beatitudes are listed (except for the one about persecutions, which we'll discuss later). Each group of examples applies more to one beatitude than to any of the others. See if you can match grouped examples to the one beatitude that *best fits* the examples given in each group.

Here are some things that may help as you work on the examples:

- We can learn what things are by comparing them to what they are not, so some of the examples are *negative* examples. For example, an example of what poor in spirit, meekness, mercy, etc. is not.
- Consider that some of the beatitudes may address an attitude, while others address an action.

When faced with the similarities between more than one of the beatitudes, ask yourself questions such as:

- Can one be meek without being merciful?
- Can one be merciful without being meek?
- Can one be meek without also being "lowly in heart?"
- Can one be merciful without being "lowly in heart?"
- Can one "hunger and thirst for righteousness," and still not be a peacemaker? Etc.

One final hint: One of the answers to which group fits which beatitude has already been answered in these comments!

NOTE: It is very important for this exercise that you use the *examples* to define the *beatitudes* and not vice-versa!

Link these sets of examples...

①

1 Sam. 25:1–39: Was David meek or merciful?

Dan. 3:13–30: was Nebuchadnezzar meek or merciful?

②

Luke 10:30–35 (the “good Samaritan”)

1 Kings 2:25–27 (Solomon and Abiathar)

Matt. 23:14 (widows’ houses)

③

Acts 2:44–45, 4:32–35, 5:1–6

Mk. 10:17–27 (Rich young ruler)

④

1 Cor. 5:1–2

Luke 18:10–14 (the Pharisee and the tax collector)

Ezek. 9:4

⑤

Matt. 5:21–26

Rom. 12:17–20

⑥

Acts 17:10–12

Heb. 5:11–14

1 Cor. 3:1–3

⑦

John 1:47

Matt 5:27–30

...To these beatitudes

Poor in spirit

Those who mourn

The meek (gentle)

<4239b> *praus* Matt. 5:5, 11:29, 21:5; 1 Pt. 3:5

<5011> *tapeinos* (lowly): Matt. 11:29, Rom. 12:16; Jas. 1:9, 4:6

Jesus—Matt. 11:29: “...I am (meek, gentle = *praus*) and (lowly, humble, = *tapeinos*) in heart...”

Moses: Num. 12:3, was *praus* (in the Septuagint translation)

Merciful

Hunger and thirst for righteousness

Pure in heart

Peacemakers

Questions

1. Below are several common sins. *First, which of the beatitudes **must be** violated in one who engages in them? Which of the beatitudes **might also be** violated?*
 - a. Lying
 - b. Gossip
 - c. Stealing
 - d. Adultery / fornication
 - e. Outbursts of anger
 - f. greed
 - g. Laziness
2. *How does Jesus use the beatitude, "Blessed are they who are persecuted..." to begin to apply these things to Himself and His ministry?*
3. *How do verses 11–12 also give evidence to Jesus' deity?*

Salt of the earth; light of the world

4. *In what new way does Jesus bring people into His personal ministry in vv. 13–16?*
5. *How are verses 13–16 related to Gen. 15:16, Lev. 18:24–30, Deut. 9:4–6 and Rev. 11:18? (The understanding of this will also help answer what Jesus meant by "inherit the earth" in v.5)*
6. *How might "salt of the earth" also relate to such passages as Gen. 6:5–8, 18:20–32 and 2 Pet. 3:3–10?*

Let your light so shine before men...” (KJV, NKJV)

The Greek word for “so” is *houtos* <3778> and means, “thus; in this manner; in such a way,” etc. We studied this in Lesson 15 (“God So Loved the World”), but to refresh your mind, see if you can find where the Greek word, *houtos* fits in these passages:

Matt. 1:18

Matt. 5:16

Matt. 2:5

Matt. 7:12

Matt. 3:15

Matt. 9:33f

How does knowing this help us sharpen our understanding of Matt. 5:16?

Transition

After turning the sermon toward Himself, Jesus brings into the mix anyone who desires to be persecuted for His sake. These are those who are the “salt” and the “light.” But what He is saying about Himself is new to them; He must reassure them of His authority and His intent.

7. *What is the difference between fulfilling the law and abolishing it?*

8. *Some say that Jesus circumvented parts of the law in order to fulfill a “higher purpose,” such as allowing His disciples to break the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–4). What verses show that Jesus would not and could not circumvent the least part of the Law?*

9. *What is meant by “Least in the kingdom” and “great in the kingdom”? That is, what difference does it make as long as one is IN the kingdom? (A hint: Matt. 5:20, 13:41–43)*

Under the Iceberg: Inherit the earth

Earth <1093> *ge*, earth, land. Often translated *land* (Matt. 2:6, 20, 21, etc.) but usually *earth* when that is what is meant: “heaven and earth,” rather than “heaven and land.” Matt. 5:18, 35, 6:10, 19, etc.

Israel’s physical inheritance

Gen. 15:13–21: God promises to give the land to Abraham’s descendants.

Ex. 32:13 (as Moses pleads with God to spare Israel)

Num. 33:54: Land apportioned according to tribes and families.

Josh. 1:1–6: Boundaries of Israel’s inheritance

Josh. 21:44–45: All God’s promises to Israel were fulfilled during Joshua’s time.

Another kind of inheritance

God had warned Israel that, though He had given them the land as their possession, if they defiled it, the land would spew them out the same as the nations that had inhabited it previously (Lev. 18:24–28, 20:22–24). Even the Babylonians, when they had destroyed Jerusalem and were taking the rest of Israel into captivity, understood that Jehovah was expelling them from their land because of their disobedience to Him (comp. Deut. 29:24–25 with Jer. 40:1–3).

The passages below speak of a different kind of inheritance in the future. Probably the Jews of Jesus’ day interpreted these passages—as do the Premillennialists of today—to mean that God would return the land once again to physical Israel.

Ps 37:9, 34: Those who wait on the LORD shall inherit...

11: The humble (in the Greek Septuagint, the word is *praus*, the same as in Matt. 5:5) shall inherit...

23: Those who are blessed by God shall inherit...

29: The righteous shall inherit...

Isaiah 57:13: Those who take refuge in God shall inherit...

Closing remarks from Rev. 5:10

From the perspective of the gospel, God views those in Christ to be a kingdom of priests, reigning on earth. Notice that this is not some future reign, but one which transpires when (1) His people are priests on earth and (2) while He is still in heaven. Follow this thread:

Ps. 24:1; 1 Cor. 10:26—The earth is the Jehovah’s and all they that dwell therein.

John 17:10—All things that belong to the Father belong to Christ and vice versa.

Matt. 28:18—All authority in heaven and on earth was given to Christ after His resurrection. This is also reflected in the statement made in Rev. 11:15.

Rev. 11:15—This was fulfilled when Christ was coronated and glorified (Acts 2).

Heb. 5:6, 7:1–28, 8:1–2, 9:11–12, —Christ was designated as High Priest (according to the order of Melchizedek)

Heb. 10:21—Christ is High Priest over the house of God.

Rev. 5:10—Those who are of the house of God are priests on earth under the administration of Christ, the High Priest, reigning from heaven, while His people reign on the earth.

These things may also be included in the phrase, “inherit the earth.”