

Epiphany IV: Matthew 5:1-12: The Beatitudes

1. Matthew does not give us strict chronology here. At this point Jesus was well into His Galilean ministry. The twelve disciples had already been chosen. At this point He was likely already at the height of His ministry. From 4:25 we know that on this occasion He had an audience from all parts of Palestine except Samaria! They were large crowds. Jesus had spent the night in prayer on the mountain (cf. Lk. 6). In the morning He came down, sat on the hillside and preached this great sermon to the disciples (at least the twelve, if not more), in the hearing of the multitudes. That's a good lesson in evangelism. Preach to the very best of your ability, not only for Christians but also for the non-Christians who might be present. And, if you study carefully, this will affect your work as a pastor through the whole week. Furthermore, by preaching well a pastor makes evangelists of his hearers. That's what Jesus did.
2. Vs. 1: εἰς τὸ ὄρος, LB and Phillips read "up the hillside". That is good. καθίσαντος, ancient teachers taught in a sitting position. προσήλθον, they were attracted to Him because they knew from experience what His teaching was like. οἱ μαθηταί, includes at least the twelve, if not more converts. "After He opened His mouth" is an idiom found again at Acts 8:35 and 10:34. Bengel remarks: "Used in commencing narrations of great and deliberate affairs." He adds: "Here the fountain began to pour forth water." ἐδίδασκεν plainly denotes ingressive and continued action. Thus NASB, AAT, TEV, NIV and NEB. λέγων simply means "as follows".
3. Here begin the beatitudes or macarisms, vss. 3-11. We make several observations which pertain to all of them:
 - a) The word μακάριος occurs nine times. There are three words for "blessed" in the NT: εὐλογητός (cf. Lk 1:68) used only of God and means "praise God", εὐλογημένος (cf. Lk. 1:42) used with reference to man of a specific blessing, and μακάριος, used primarily of man to denote the fact that he is in the state of grace, his relationship to God through Christ. (Note that it is used of Mary at Lk. 1:45. She was blessed through her son, the Son of God.) μακάριος is variously translated "blessed" "happy" "how blest" "how fortunate" in the translations. "Happy" is not very good because with us it denotes emotion and good feeling. It is exclamatory and therefore these notes suggest "how blest!" as the best translation (NEB). All translations are consistent in their translation of this word. But LB uses four translations: "Very fortunate", vs. 3; "fortunate", 4-5; "happy" 6-10; "wonderful", vs. 11.
 - b) μακάριοι, in each case, is a predicate adjective placed first for the sake of emphasis. In each case the subject (οὗ and an adjective or its equivalent, used as a noun) follows. The only exception is in vs. 11, where we have ἐστε, second person. In vss. 3-10 an elliptical "are" must be supplied.
 - c) Each beatitude is a paradox, a seeming contradiction, but not an actual one. The statements are paradoxical from the world's point of view, from what we usually experience among men, even among Christians insofar as they are still sinners.
 - d) These beatitudes are addressed, in the first instance, to believers and therefore presuppose faith. In that sense they are Gospel.
 - e) "The Kingdom of Heaven" is stated in vss. 3 and 10. It is a fascinating genitive case. It is adjectival, distinguishing this kingdom from all others. It can also be considered genitive of source, for it comes down from heaven. It is also genitive of goal, for it leads to heaven. It is the blessed Gospel, living in the hearts of believers.
 - f) For the first eight beatitudes, a causal clause follows the first line. (In vs. 11 it is a present general statement). In the first eight, in each instance, either αὐτῶν or αὐτοῦ, exclude all other people. αὐτῶν, 3 and 10, means "theirs and theirs alone". αὐτοῦ means "they and they alone".
 - g) In general, the first four beatitudes, vss. 3-6, denote Christians as they are in relationship to God,

apart from other people, but not absolutely. The next three, vss. 7-9, denote Christians in their relation to other people. The last two, vss. 10-11, denote the Christians as they are often treated by others.

h) Vs. 12 is the grand conclusion, truly a paradox.

4. Vs. 3: πτωχός: M-M says: "'crouching' 'cringing' hence 'a beggar' was always used in a bad sense until it was ennobled by the Gospels." It is τῷ πνεύματι "with reference to the spirit" which tells us immediately that it is of a peculiar, different sort. It is the poverty of contrition. *Apology*, XXVII, Tappert 277: "The poverty of the Gospel (Mt. 5:3) does not consist in the abandonment of property, but in the absence of greed and of trust in riches. Thus David was poor in a very rich kingdom." It is described at Is. 66:2. Lenski says: "The poverty here referred to is not one against which the will rebels but one under which the will bows in deep submission." He continues: "It is also an attitude of the soul over against God, the profound realization of utter helplessness and beggary as far as any ability or possession of self are concerned." Like Paul, at Philippians 3:4-11, who considered his former prerogatives and legal righteousness as dung, manure, repulsive to God. Like David in Ps. 51. Like Daniel 9:4-19. Like the publican at Lk. 18:13. Above all else, this poverty is no meritorious deed or attitude. It's an attitude which precedes absolution. They are indeed blessed BECAUSE the Gospel, forgiveness, heaven, IS theirs, and none others.
5. Vs. 4: οἱ πενθοῦντες, a substantival present participle. All our translations, except NEB, translate "mourn". Why do they mourn? Because of sin and its consequences, just consequences, both their own and that of others. Not the mourning of despair and rebellion but the honest recognition of things as they are. Read Is. 61:2.3. Ylvisaker quotes Luther: "Sorrow is no rare growth among the believers, even if it is not outwardly visible. When they contemplate the world, they see and experience so much that is evil in their daily life, so much wantonness, so much contempt for God and His Word, and so much misery and misfortune wrought by the devil in spiritual as well as in earthly affairs that there is little room for happy thoughts, and their spiritual joy is very weak. But they who thus repent and mourn for that which is of God shall be comforted." Again the causal ὅτι and αὐτοὶ "they and they alone". παρακληθήσονται is future passive with God as agent. It contains the noun παράκλητος which reminds us of Jn. 15:26. The verb is future not only because comfort always follows immediately after mourning in this life. Jn. 16:20.33. Bengel remarks: "The future tense indicates promises made in the OT and now to be performed." Lenski remarks: "The greatest of all comfort is the absolution pronounced upon every contrite mourning sinner."
6. Vs. 5: All the commentaries suggest that Ps. 37 be read at this point. This is not the meekness of the worldling, cringing and cowardly. It is like that of Jesus at Mt. 11:29. It is a courageous meekness, described by Ylvisaker: "The meek remain calm and unruffled when others are easily aroused, they do not seek revenge, but forgive from a loving heart. They have learned of Jesus who was not merely humble but also meek, and who in his submissiveness did not revile when He was reviled (I Pet. 2:23; also Tit. 3:2; II Tim. 2:25)." They will inherit the earth. Definitely a promise for this life. Bengel: "All the produce of the earth is ordered for the comfort of the meek. In all these sentences, blessedness in heaven and blessedness on earth mutually imply each other. See Ps. 37:3.9.22.29.34." But this does not exclude the possibility that God sometimes withholds earthly goods from Christians lest they become proud. See Ps. 37:16. The *Apology*, Art. IV, Tappert 277 says: "God exercises his saints in different ways and often puts off the rewards for the righteousness of works. Thus they learn not to trust in their own righteousness, but to seek the will of God rather than the rewards, as is evident in Job, in Christ, and in other saints."
7. Vs. 6: The word δικαιοσύνη must be treated with care. The whole Sermon on the Mt., in the final

analysis, is about this word. Its meaning is known only to the believer. We reject five translations: "to be just and good" LB; "to do what God requires" TEV; "for true goodness" Phillips; "for what is right" JB; "to see right prevail" NEB. The unbelievers do this too. AAT is recommended: "to be righteous", which is in the Biblical sense. The Christian, when he looks at the Law, sees that he is not righteous as God requires. Cf. Phil. 2:9. What does he do? He looks to Christ who is his righteousness. Again cf. Phil. 2:9. God promises χορτασθήσονται which is a word used for the satisfying of the voracious appetite, especially of animals. Ylvisaker: "It is a source of distress to the child of God that his measure of service is so imperfect. Everyone who now really hungers and thirsts after this righteousness of faith and of life 'shall be filled', here on earth through the putting on of Christ and through the power of God which shall be perfected in our weakness." It covers both the righteousness of faith (imputed) and the righteousness of life. Cf. Gal. 2:20.

8. Vs. 7: Vss. 7-9 describe the Christian primarily in his attitudes and dealings with other people. ἐλεήμονες: TEV reads "who are merciful to others" and NEB "who show mercy". Cf. Lk. 6:36. They are merciful towards others as God has been merciful to them. Ylvisaker: "Mercy is an act of sympathetic love toward those who are in need of assistance in a temporal or spiritual way. Mercy is the natural outgrowth of clemency received from God. Only he that can say with Paul 'I obtained mercy' (I Tim. 1:16), may truly dispense mercy to others." Lenski: "God first makes us merciful and then even blesses us for being merciful."
9. Vs. 8: "The pure in heart." Lenski: "Purity in heart must denote a single virtue. A glance into the OT shows us the exact counterpart to this in Ps. 24:4; 73:1; Gen. 20:5.6; and then I Tim. 1:5; II Tim. 2:22; I Pet. 1:22, and Zahn's conclusion is evident. 'Pure in heart' is sinceritas, singleness of heart, the honesty which has no hidden motive, no selfish interest, and is true and open in all things." Ylvisaker says: "Jesus has in mind the contrast to hypocrisy, lies, and deceit. . . . In the OT there is frequent reference to pure hearts, with the emphasis on pure (Ps. 73:1; 32:2; 51:12; 24:3.4)." They shall see God. Even in this life the believers, by faith, experiences God, enjoys Him and perceives that He is truly good. But, in eternity he shall behold Him face to face. I Cor. 13:12; II Cor. 3:18; I Jn. 3:2; Rev. 22:4.
10. Vs. 9: Most translations have "peacemakers". LB has "who strive for peace", TEV "work for peace among men", and AAT "who make peace". God has established peace with man in Christ Jesus, Lk. 2:14; Jn. 14:27. As a result of this, Christians live peaceably with all men, as lieth in them, Rom. 12:18, without giving up principle. Lenski: "The followers of Christ work for peace in the spirit of their Master." This is difficult to do even among Christians. On the night when He was betrayed (Lk. 22:24), when His disciples were arguing among themselves, He brought peace among them without giving up principle, vss. 25-30. κληθήσονται, future passive with God as agent. God will bring it about that they appear and will be recognized by men as God's children. That is a promise for this life, a wonderful promise.
11. Vs. 10: Vss. 10 and 11 form a unit. How to handle the perfect tense οἱ δεδιωγμένοι? Phillips, NEB and NASB preserve the perfect tense in translation. Bengel treats it as a middle participle: "Those who have offered themselves to undergo persecution." Lenski concurs in this and adds: "They held out under persecution and are now people of this kind, martyrs who have stood firm in trials." "For the sake of righteousness" is synonymous with "for My sake" in vs. 11. Lenski: "They suffered for the divine approval that rested upon them. God adjudged them righteous, the world, in flagrant opposition to God, adjudged them abominable." Ylvisaker says: "The Esau-nature of the world will break out (Gal. 4:29)." Fahling: "Because they confess Christ the world hates them as it did their Savior and persecutes or at least ridicules their faith." Look at Jn. 15:18.19. The comfort in this vs.

is the very same as in vs. 3. The cure and comfort for contrition over sin and persecution for Jesus' sake is that heaven is ours now. In Christ, God is mine and I am His.

12. Vs. 11: ὅταν means "whenever" meaning that it may happen again and again. On this vs. cf. what happened to Jesus on the cross: Mt. 27:39-44; Mk. 15:27-32; Lk. 23:35-39. The vocabulary is similar. No wonder He says: "For My sake." What happened to Him can happen to me, but it's done ψευδόμενοι "in a lying fashion" translated "falsely". Is this limited to the twelve disciples? No. It has happened many times since, and, sadly enough, even at the hand of fellow Christians.

13. Vs. 12: Truly a paradox! Present imperatives which denote continued action: "Be rejoicing and exulting!" A remarkable statement mid such adverse circumstances. Bengel remarks: "Joy is not only a feeling, but also a duty of the Christians. See Phil. 4:4; and in adversity, the highest grade and very nerve of patience. 'Be exceeding glad' so that others also may perceive your joy." See how the songs of Paul and Silas in prison impressed the jailor, Acts 16:25-32, as well as the other prisoners. The "great reward in heaven" is not simply the promise of everlasting life. That the Christian has already by faith. Bengel: "The word 'reward' implies something further beyond the beatitudes, which spring from the very disposition of the righteous." Read the *Apology*, Art. IV, 134, Tappert 198 on this verse. God graciously rewards obedience just as parents reward obedience in their children. The child's obedience does not make the child a child of the parents. Just what this "great reward" is we know not now. But we shall know when we arrive there. The final sentence is introduced by and explanatory γάρ. It contains an argument from the greater to the lesser. If they persecuted the prophets like this, can I expect anything less? It also contains a comforting thought: if God preserved them in the faith, He can and will preserve me too. See Phil. 1:6.