

*Kingdom Calling -  
Blessed*

Matthew 5:1-12

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Well, Gilbert and Sullivan would certainly have something to say about what Jesus proclaimed from that mountain so many years ago.

In their opera, Ruddigore, we get some advice which, though intended to be comic, most of us take rather seriously:

If you wish in the world to advance  
Your merits you're bound to enhance,  
You must stir it and stump it,  
And blow your own trumpet,  
Or, trust me, you haven't a chance!

The ones who succeed are able to blow their own trumpet the loudest, longest, and get up the highest while doing so.

Free market, and all that.

Which leaves a lot of people in the ditch: poor, mourners, meek ones and the like.

So – how can it be that we hear the word “blessed” apply to precisely *these*?

It is so incredibly counter-intuitive, isn't it.

Backwards, it seems.

Or, as John Stott labeled it in his book “Christian Counter-Culture” - it seems upside-down.

How can you possibly be blessed when your spirit is poor?

How can struggling with all the depression and pain of mourning be a blessing?

What's Jesus saying?

What is a blessing?

When do these blessings come?

And where?

These words can be taken very easily into all sorts of directions when cut 'n pasted out of Matthew. Just – not necessarily the direction that the Son of God would have intended.

So – lets note the context of what has come to be known as the “Sermon on the Mount.”

Most immediately with the summary statement of Jesus' entire ministry.

Matthew 4:17 - *“From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.”*

A couple of weeks ago we looked at this verse in particular, noting two parts to it.

Part A deals our work.

Part B with God's work.

Part A is repenting, meaning a change in thinking and behaving.

Part B is the bringing of Heaven's Kingdom.

Part A happens because Part B is happening.

We change our thinking and behaving

**because**

God is bringing in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Kingdom of Heaven does **NOT** mean something unreal, unseen, far away, beyond death.

It means “the kingdom that belongs to, has the character of, heaven.”

Heaven – that's the zone of reality where God is present and visible, all in all.

The Kingdom of Heaven is the zone of reality where God has the final word.

It is about the authority of God.

It is about the property of God.

Where God acts.

In whom God acts.

Whenever God acts.

Right after saying that, in 4:17, Jesus calls some followers to be his special associates, his apprentices. They are his “disciples.” Their lives will be focused very specifically about learning what this Kingdom is like, and

how their behaviour should reflect it.

And then, verse 23, Jesus interacts with people from all over Palestine – north, south, east and west. People inside Israel, and foreigners. People struggling with all sorts of issues in their lives – damaged bodies, minds and souls.

And he healed them.

There isn't one single pain or broken corner or damaged piece of life that Jesus can't take control of, and restore.

He is more powerful than any of them!

In *that* context Jesus goes up the mountain.

He gathers his disciples around him, to teach them – that's what 5:2 tells us.

And he does that on the mountain.

Why a mountain?

If you do a survey of Matthew's gospel, you'll see mountains show up whenever there is a major revelation occurring. Mountains in that culture were places where God and humanity connected. The temple was on a mountain. Mountains signify major "God moments."

This sermon happens on a mountain.

Jesus is transfigured on a mountain.

He is crucified on a mountain.

He ascends to heaven from a mountain.

Jesus is providing major life-shaping news from the mountain.

This is God-news for the people; important **good**-news.

"Blessed are...."

Some people translate the original language term as "*happy*."

That really doesn't do it full justice. As one person noted, today we use that term rather loosely - "She had a few drinks and was getting kind of happy."

[from religion-online.org].

That kind of a positive mood is not the point here.

Rather, it is a word that is filled with excitement. It speaks about being very fortunate. It is meant to proclaim wonderful news, to congratulate someone who has come into a positive, life-enriching situation because of what God has done for them.

Blessed!

Jesus lays out a sampling of different life situations into which, he says, God is going to be at work in positive, life-enriching ways. And those who experience it are indeed fortunate. It will be wonderful news for them. Congratulations!!

It's a list of eight situations.

And, as is so often the case in the bible, we should not take this list as exhaustive.

It isn't like a recipe – where you combine these exact ingredients in this precise order, and only these in this way, in order to get the desired product.

Most of the time the lists found in the bible are samplers. They are examples of the sort of thing that is being talked about in the particular passage.

Jesus lays out a sampler of what life is like in the Kingdom that God is bringing down.

The blessings of God, and the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven – God's Kingdom – are found by people in life situations like the eight mentioned here.

Now, if you look at verse 3 and verse 10, the first and last blessing, do you see something that they have in common?

Blessed are.....

.... **for.... theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Life in God's Kingdom.

This is how it is – shape your life accordingly.

And this is how Jesus begins his teaching on earth.

By the way, did you know that his very last teaching sounds almost identical?

In that last teaching Jesus describes the final outcome of those who have listened to this first teaching, and built their lives accordingly.

You find it in Matthew 25:31-46.

Listen to the first part of that passage:

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

32 All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34 Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you?

39 When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

40 And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.'

It describes a life of mercy, of peace-making.

Same themes as found in the Sermon on the Mount.

Back to that sermon - Later in it, chapter 6, Jesus teaches the disciples to pray.

Remember the first words:

*Our Father in heaven,*

*Hallowed be your name.....*

***your kingdom come***

***your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.***

If you've ever prayed the Lord's Prayer, and said "Your kingdom come" this is what you are praying for – a life that looks like these words of blessing spoken by Jesus.

The life of heaven--the life of the realm where God is already king--is to become the life of the world, transforming the present 'earth' into a place of beauty and delight that God always intended. *And those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now.* That's the point of the Sermon on the Mount, and these 'beatitudes' in particular. They are a summons to live ***in the present*** in the way that will make sense in God's promised future; because that future ***has arrived in the present*** in Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem upside down, but we are called to believe, with great daring, that it is in fact the right way up."

[Wright, *Matthew For Everyone*]

God, through the appearance and work of His Son Jesus, is going to pour out lavish 'blessings' on all who now turn to him and accept the new thing that he is doing on earth in Christ. [N.T.Wright *Matthew For Everyone*]

Blessed are you.....

Fredrick Dale Bruner says, "To understand 'blessed' is to understand a divine 'I am with you'"

[Bruner, *Matthew*]

You can get excited about that.

You can rejoice in that.

You can hold your head up and feel positive about the future because of that.

***In spite of*** what today may look like.

So...

The beatitudes are not a spiritual “to-do” list.  
It is not an instant “shake 'n bake” formula for success in life.

Rather – it is putting down markers of how and where God is at work in this world, the sorts of places where we can look to see the first flashes of restoration from the curse of sin,  
and where – when Jesus returns – we’ll experience it in all its fullness.

In the meantime, then, we’re encouraged to live by it.

Because – well, think about it -

If this is what is real,  
if this is what is coming down from God,  
and will be breaking out all over the place,  
and completely taking over one day,

if this is true,  
if these are **really** the sorts of ways and places where we’ll get to encounter God at work, what person in their right mind **wouldn’t** want to be there?

*[paraphrasing Rob Bell in intro to his series on the Sermon on the Mount].*

God, through Jesus, is setting right what the original Fall into sin and the Curse on creation, and millenia of sinful human patterns and actions have so badly distorted in creation and culture.

So – if you find yourself trapped into situations like that  
poor, with no way out  
mourning at the loss of something dear, feeling empty  
powerless, perhaps overwhelmed by great powers around you  
longing deeply for things to be set right

Then look to the Son of God through whom one day all that will be turned around.

And when you see those who are overwhelmed:

- put aside free-market Gilbert & Sullivan jingo and extend a hand of mercy.

When filthy and perverse talk and entertainment drive you crazy:

- get out there, develop and promote pure and positive alternatives.

And when you see conflict, revenge, and a desire to get even:

- prayerfully explore restorative options instead, and reconciliation.

And if, while you are doing all this deliberately and without shame and with hope

– doing it in the name of Jesus -

if you do this and people get in your face, ticked off at you for it, trying to paste all sorts of labels on you because of it, and maybe even trying to trip you up or beat you down -

just be aware that you’re in some very holy and prestigious persecuted company.

And hang in there:

Because God's work will **not** be derailed.

His purposes **will** one day be fulfilled.

And those who have lined up with them **will** be fully blessed.