

A Macroscopic View of the Beatitudes

I. Introduction

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is the introduction to God's Kingdom
 - 1. The Sermon on the Mount is considered to be the greatest discourse of ethical teaching known to man. While Jesus' teachings recorded in Matthew 5-7 certainly address the ethics of a person's character, they are so much more than just that.
 - 2. The sermon derives from and is inextricably attached to the coming of the kingdom of God. John and Jesus had come preaching "the kingdom of God is at hand." The Sermon on the Mount is the introduction to that kingdom, and the Beatitudes are the introduction to the sermon (Roberts).

- B. The Macroscopic Approach to the Beatitudes
 - 1. The Beatitudes have been called the "charter of the Christian life," "the magna carta of Christianity," "the central document of the Christian faith," "the living law of the new kingdom" (Tuten, p. 5). It behooves us to give much consideration to this discourse.
 - 2. Often a microscopic study is made of the Beatitudes, in which each phrase is dissected and analyzed. This approach is necessary and commended. We need to understand what Jesus meant when He called people to be "poor in spirit" and to mourn.
 - 3. However, this lesson considers the Beatitudes as a whole, for certainly they are to be taken that way.
 - 4. This lesson will consider...
 - a. The blessedness of those in the kingdom.
 - b. The qualities of those who make up the kingdom.
 - c. The audience who first heard this lesson.
 - d. The language and arrangement Jesus used in these sayings.
 - e. Finally, a brief consideration of each beatitude.

II. A Macroscopic View of the Sermon on the Mount

- A. The Blessedness of the Kingdom Citizen
 - 1. The word beatitude (Latin - BEATUS - happy) means perfect blessedness or happiness. These eight or nine sayings are given this name based upon the Greek word that introduces each of them, as well as, upon what the culmination of these character traits leads to - true happiness.
 - 2. MAKARIOS is the Greek word translated "Blessed." Lexicographers define it as to be supremely blessed; by extension, fortunate, well off. It refers to one who is thriving, prosperous, and in good condition. It is translated "blessed" or "happy."
 - 3. However the word extends beyond happiness. It carries the idea of congratulations.
 - a. We offer congratulations in times of great joy, and supreme life marking occasions that bring happiness ("Congratulations on

- your..." job promotion, getting married, having a baby, winning an award, etc.).
- b. It is something one might hear or be told because of a particular success.
4. What Jesus talks about receiving in this introductory discourse certainly marked success: the kingdom of heaven, inheritance of the earth, being satisfied or filled up, being comforted, obtaining mercy, being at peace, being adopted as a child of God, seeing God. What could be more successful? Consider the grandeur and the glory, the blessedness and the happiness contained therein. For the ones chosen, for those who are in the kingdom, this is yours! Congratulations!
 5. It is important to note that this sermon is directly attached to the announcement of the coming of the kingdom. John and Jesus said it was coming. So when Jesus presents the Sermon on the Mount, He tells these Jewish people, who had been waiting all their lives for it to come, that
 - a. the kingdom is here, and
 - b. this is what it is about, and
 - c. this is the description of kingdom citizens.
 6. There was no surprise in the announcement that there was true blessedness in the kingdom. The shock came in the kind of people who were destined to receive it.
 - a. This was not a description of the kind of people you associate with success: meek, humble, peaceful, pure, merciful, **persecuted**. Persecuted people are not successful people.
 - b. The description of the blessings of the kingdom were believable, but not those who would receive it. "These paradoxical statements must have fallen like thunderbolts upon the listener's ears" (Earnhart, p. 4).
 - c. Humble, merciful, mourning, meek, starving, peaceful people are not the sort of people who rise up and defeat the Roman empire!
 - d. A more unlikely formula of success could hardly have been imagined. Blessed are the losers.
 - e. Malcom Muggeridge writes, "We become forgetful that Jesus is the prophet of the losers', not the victors' camp, the one who proclaims that the first will be last, that the weak will be strong, and the fools are the wise" (Earnhart, p. 10).
 7. The earthly carnal mind measures happiness by the things possessed, or achieved, or the pleasures or experiences, but these concerns of men do not simply receive little attention, they receive none at all.
 8. The "Blessed" here conveys the highest form of spiritual and moral prosperity. It has nothing to do with outward prosperity, but rather is directly and solely attached and identified with one's character.

B. The Qualities of the Kingdom Citizen

1. The words "beatitude" and "attitude" (Latin - APTUS - meaning apt, appropriate, fitting) have no etymological relationship, but they do have a

conceptual one. The beatitudes of Jesus tell us what the attitudes of the kingdom citizen must be - the appropriate or fitting attitudes or character traits . They are the attitudes that one must be to fit into the kingdom of heaven.

2. First, the qualities that Jesus delineates to describe the citizen of the kingdom are not ones that men would come by naturally. They are not ones the world will teach you. Actually they are contrary to the pride and lust that so often prevail in the hearts of all humanity (Earnhart, p. 4). Rather they are dispositions that are produced by effort. They must be taught and accepted and worked on.
3. Second, perhaps one of the most important truths to be recognized about the beatitudes is that a kingdom citizen possesses all of them. These are not eight proverbs describing eight different groups of people, with eight blessings to go with each assigned characteristic. They are not independent of one another, but to the contrary they are woven together into one single piece of fabric and to remove one unweaves the whole piece of cloth. If you lack one, you lack them all.
4. Third, Jesus gives a description of what each citizen is supposed to be, not just the super Christian. These are the character traits that all citizens are to display at all times (Earnhart). When that happens a clear distinction will be made between a disciple and a non-disciple. Kingdom citizens are different in what they admire, seek, and do.

C. The First Audience of the Sermon on the Mount

1. I believe we will have a better understanding and greater appreciation for the beatitudes when we understand the minds of the audience who first heard these remarkable sayings. Remember that this is a Jewish audience, subjected to Roman occupation and rule.
2. They considered themselves to be a people who were still in exile or captivity, even though they had returned to their homeland. **Read Nehemiah 9:36,37.** While they were allowed to live in Palestine, they had not experienced true freedom for over 400 years. They longed for and were looking toward the return of a kingdom like that of David and Solomon. It was a kingdom that ruled over the earth, not one subjected to another government.
 - a. So when Jesus speaks about the blessedness of the kingdom of God, He has his listeners' attention.
 - b. We are not too removed from the same mindset. Even the most shallow thinker would desire the blessedness of the kingdom Jesus speaks of (even a perverse understanding of it) over the American kingdom.
3. This audience longed to be comforted. They mourned over their oppression. They longed for freedom from their oppressors, and they looked for a Messiah to deliver them (see **Is. 40:1; 61:1-3**).

4. When Jesus speaks of "inheriting the earth (land)" these people related to that and looked to a time in which they actually would - **Ps. 37:11; Is. 60:18-21**. These people had read the old prophecies, and while they misunderstood them, they banked on their promises. They believed that God would one day release them from their punishment and give them their land back. They mourned over the sins of the past as a people, thinking that if they mourned enough and were righteous enough God would comfort them and return them to the state of freedom they once enjoyed.
5. Jesus said that those in the kingdom would be satisfied or filled. Remember how that Moses described the promised land to them, and the state of living these people would enjoy - read Deut. 8:7-10 (a land flowing with milk and honey; "you shall not lack anything"). Christ's listeners longed to be in that state again.
6. More time could be spent on considering each of the blessings Jesus spoke of and how they appealed to this first century, Jewish audience. They longed for mercy from the Roman rule. They could relate to seeing God and His power once again, for they had read of how their ancestors had seen Him in His power (Red Sea, Sinai, Jericho, etc.). They longed to hear God call them His children (sons) again.
7. I am not suggesting that Jesus was speaking of earthly blessings or an earthly kingdom. He was relating to His hearers in terms they could relate, but they were expected to see these blessings on a higher plain. The comfort and mercy they would receive would not be from the freedom of Roman rule, but the freedom from their sins and the consequence of physical and spiritual death. The earth or land they would inherit would not be the ownership of a piece of dirt, but an eternal glory. They would not be filled with rich foods from a land flowing with milk and honey, but with the righteousness of God and an everlasting satisfaction (Jn. 4:13,14). They would receive the true grace and mercy of God. They would be called children of God in a sense that Israel had never experienced. They would see God in a way they had never seen Him. This was the kingdom for which they were to be looking.

D. Consider the Language and Arrangement of These Beatitudes

1. The first and last beatitudes (v. 3 and 10) end with "theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
 - a. This is what we call "bookends." They marked the beginning and ending of the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount.
 - b. They are in the present tense (unlike the other beatitudes), meaning that they had opportunity to enter the kingdom and be a part of it within their lifetime. They would possess the kingdom.

2. The other beatitudes use a future tense: "they shall be..." This is what God is going to do. "They shall be comforted" indicated that God was going to comfort them. The Jewish audience understood this, and could appreciate it for they desired to be comforted by no one other than God, and so should we.

D. The Characteristics of Those in the Kingdom

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit.
 - a. Poor indicates utter destitution. It is one who recognizes that they are in need and dependent upon a Savior to save them from starvation and death. Of course Jesus is speaking of spiritual poverty, bankruptcy. Jesus is describing one who has looked inside himself and has found that his only value comes from God and without Him and His provision of salvation from sin, he is doomed. The kingdom citizen is one who has emptied himself of pride and self-reliance, and seeks to be filled up with the righteousness of God.
2. Blessed are those who mourn.
 - a. Only those who realize their spiritual poverty before God will be those who mourn over their undone condition, their consequences of their sins upon themselves, upon others, and their rebellion toward a loving creator. The kingdom citizen is one who is crushed over his spiritual circumstances and is sorrowful that God must see Him this way.
 - b. We have trouble mourning. Some have stony hearts and are indifferent toward sin. Others love sin. Some are too enthralled with life's pleasures to take the time to evaluate their miserable spiritual situation. We would much rather go to the house of feasting than the house of mourning. But mourning must happen before God can heal us. True healing happens after we grieve over what we have done to the image of God in ourselves.
 - c. 2 Cor. 7:9-11
3. Blessed are the meek.
 - a. More than just strength under control, or just not exerting our rights.
 - b. Ps. 37:11 speaks of one who is lowly and contrite. Those who recognize that because of the grace of God they have no self-given right to exert their rights.
 - c. Meekness meets up with words like lowliness, kindness, forbearance, longsuffering. We suffer long with others because God has suffered long with us.

- d. A meek person is not one who seeks to avenge, or is proud of his right to retaliate. Consider where we would be if Jesus chose to be vengeful, and He certainly has the right to be.
 - e. A meek person is who seeks to bless; who desires to carry the yoke of Christ and the burdens of His brethren.
4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
 - a. They desire the righteousness of God. Not self-righteousness, or self-justification; not the righteousness of men, but of God.
 - b. We first realize that this righteousness can only be found in the blood of Christ.
 - c. We then realize that this righteousness is found in the standard God has given. We hunger and thirst for the word of God the way a babe desires milk.
 5. Blessed are the pure in heart.
 - a. Ps. 24:3-5
 - b. The kingdom citizen is the one who guards his heart with all diligence, knowing that out of it springs forth the issues of life.
 - c. This is one who is sincere in his thinking, living, and speaking. He abhors duplicity.
 6. Blessed are the merciful. Kingdom citizens are those that recognize they are saved by God's mercy and seek to bring it to others. They see the ugliness of sin and the sinner, and instead of being repulsed, show mercy by extending the gospel of Christ. We love because He first loved us.
 7. Blessed are the peacemakers. The kingdom citizen finds peace in God, in the gospel of Christ, and chooses to take it to others.

III. Conclusion

- A. The Beatitudes describe what the kingdom is, and who is in it.
- B. Are you in the kingdom?

Bibliography

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