

Matthew 5:1-12

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you

Matthew 5:1-12, 2017

What you have heard in this gospel lesson is the opening of what is called the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus by now, had huge crowds of people following him.

The closing verses of Chapter four say they came from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

He had come to a place along the Sea of Galilee where the coast rises gradually from the blue water

to an area that is still open and sparsely inhabited.

I found a picture of the location where Jesus is reported to have preached this sermon.

It looks like there is some agricultural production there.

The hillside is stepped to create leveled areas for prepared green fields and rows of date or olive trees.

In the middle of this picture, on the Mount of the Beatitudes that rises from the sea,

is sacred Church of the Beatitudes overlooking the water.

Some of you have been there and know exactly what it is like to stand there in that place,

and maybe imagine being there 2,000 years ago
hearing Jesus' voice speaking to the crowd,
speaking to your heart.

This passage is one of the most read, remembered and
meaningful of all the passages in the bible.

It has brought comfort to many who have heard the
promise of being blessed.

You are struck by the poetic beauty and yet can be taken
aback by the impracticality of these Beatitudes in this
world we live in.

You may admire the instruction, but are fearful of the
implications for your life.

Somehow they are all inconsistent with the life you live.

Blessed?

Frankly I have trouble figuring out what that means myself.

These sayings speak of the blessedness you are
supposed to see and experience in your lives today,

and also point to a future time when that
blessedness will be fully realized;

the time when Jesus comes again to take you to
his Father's house where there is a place prepared
for you,

or when he comes to reconcile all of creation
with the creator

I think this passage touches people spiritually to give them strength of faith, assurance of God's presence, comfort in difficult times,

Because Jesus says,

“blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

This is one of the two verses in which the verbs in both phrases are in the present tense;

“Blessed **are** the poor in spirit...theirs **is** the kingdom...”

In our limited capacity it is hard to reconcile these two realities because they seem so opposed to one another.

How can you be poor in spirit and at the same time possess the Kingdom of Heaven?

But you know, sometimes ones spiritual condition can descend below being just poor.

Sometimes a person's spirit can be broken.

I have been reminded of a lesson I learned about this along with a seminary classmate who became a close friend.

We all had to do a unit of Contextual Pastoral Education (CPE) during one summer break which is essentially chaplaincy training.

I was doing mine at the prison there in Columbia, S.C., and my classmate was at a mental health hospital.

I took the opportunity to go to the hospital to visit him to find out what his setting and experience was like.

He had spent much of his time, and was most affected by his work with the teenagers there.

During my visit we got to talking about an issue that had come up for us at the prison,

and that was the spirituality or lack of spirituality or spiritual connection of some we were working with.

Lyle's observation was the teenagers at the hospital suffered from broken spirits,

Spirits that had been completely shattered by the abuses and neglect they had suffered in their lives at such young ages.

His assessment was that until their spirit was healed there could be no other permanent healing of any other kind.

That spirit is the part that Jesus talks about here,

The part of them that is connected to God's spirit, the place where God's spirit plugs into theirs

and becomes a part of their life and who they are like a life-line sending the power of God into their very soul.

But how do you reach that shattered spirit.

If you have ever been poor in spirit you might be able to imagine how difficult that is.

Think about that moment when your spirit was poor. What happens?

You have a tendency to turn in on yourself don't you?

Yesterday while working on my Trumpet article I found an article that relates to this very subject that said:

“Luther described the burden of sin as being *incurvatus in se* (curved in on the self). That inward curve can be marked by pride and selfishness, but Luther found that sin is also manifested in the ways we focus on ourselves with anxiety or shame.”

Now, your poor spirit may not have anything to do with how you may perceive your sin, or the things you have done that go against God,

but this anxiety and shame that you may allow to define you, whatever the source, can drain the power from your spirit,

diminish the power of God to work in your life.

That is why these Beatitudes are so important.

They are not imperatives calling you to some action.

They are promises God has made with you.

You may be poor in spirit but the kingdom of heaven **is** still yours.

You may be one who mourns, meek, or hungry and thirsty for righteousness,

but you will be comforted, you will inherit the earth, and you will be filled.

You may be merciful, pure in heart, or a peacemaker,

And you will receive mercy, you will see God and you will be called child of God

You may be persecuted for righteousness sake, but again the kingdom of heaven **is** yours.

To understand these Beatitudes it is important for us to do so in the 1st century context when to mourn is not just about the death of a loved one,

But recognizing the present condition of the world is far from God's purpose.

Understanding these Beatitudes beyond the context of today, and in the context of the end times and the life to come

opens them up to all God's promises to bring transition from the old to the new,

this life to the next, from doubt about yourself and God to faith and trust in God's promises

that free your spirit from the anxiety and shame that binds you and turns you in on yourself.

Blessed are you in God's promises.