

Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-12

When 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.

So what are the Beatitudes. Perhaps it would be useful to state what they are not.

They are **not** a list of people whom God blesses

They are **not** a list of pious aims

They are **not** vague promises for the future

They are **not** outlining a moral code

They are **not** good advice.

Billy Graham called them the ‘beautiful attitudes. It’s certainly a way of remembering them. But what’s so beautiful about them? Is it really **beautiful** to be poor, to be mourning, to be persecuted?

All situations where if we were honest - we wouldn’t feel very blessed! **Are** these so-called ‘beautiful attitudes’ the ones we should be aiming for as Christians? Trying to become as sad, as poor, as persecuted as possible?

Another way of looking at them is like this -

Wonderful news for the poor in spirit! The kingdom of heaven is yours
Wonderful news for the mourners. You’re going to be comforted.

Wonderful news for the meek! You're going to inherit the earth.

There's a noticeable difference, between saying '**blessed are**' the poor and '**wonderful news for**' the poor. And it's all to do with the translation from Greek. Because there isn't a direct comparison in the English, it has been translated as 'blessed' as we read it.

But some scholars want to say it's more than that. It's someone who is to be congratulated. What if rather than saying 'try hard to live like this' Jesus is saying 'the people who are living like this are in good shape, and so they should be congratulated.

When Jesus uses the beatitudes to teach the disciples at the beginning of the sermon on the mount, he is signalling as clearly as he can that, like at sea, a freak wave has come, that the ship of Judaism has turned upside down. With his coming into the world everything has changed. All the values that were held as important have been turned on their head. These beatitudes reflect this upside-down nature. This is 'upside down' living. Or is it - living the right way up (God's way up) in an upside-down world.

There's no doubt It takes time to adapt, time to learn to live upside down. It involved retraining your brain.

So, I'm sure the disciples wouldn't have got the hang of it straight away. In fact, there's plenty of times in the gospels when it's made clear that the disciples haven't got the point at all, however seeing something demonstrated is a very effective way of learning, over time his ways would have rubbed off on the disciples.

If we're going to adopt Jesus' ethos, if we want to learn how to live God's way up in this upside-down world, then we need to hang around Jesus too!!

Reading, thinking, praying, setting time aside to listen, allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us, then we will see the values of this world as upside down, and God's as the right way up.

The problem is that the majority of people in our society still think that the 'wonderful news' is success, wealth, long life. Completely at odds with what Jesus is saying.

And if we're honest most of us probably still think (at least some of the time) that the wonderful news is success, wealth, long life.

Living upside down, or rather 'the right way up in a world that is still upside down' is going to cause us problems and conflicts. It's going to cause us to look very odd at times.

Living this upside-down way of life is going to make us look unworldly, foolish even, when we decline a promotion at work because we'd rather have some spare time to do voluntary work than earn more money.

Acknowledging that we have got something badly wrong, apologising for it and doing our best to put it right is going to look weak in a society that likes to pass the buck and push the blame on to others wherever possible.

It is the world we're in that's upside down. God's world is the right way up. We need to have the courage to keep heading that way.

We may find it especially hard at this time with the corona virus and all the restrictions that go with it. The world definitely seems upside down right now, but all the more reason to be the one that stands out – to be the one who reaches out to help. We may look strange to others – but strange can be good – strange can be strong – strange can make people stop and think.

Jesus and his disciples must have looked strange – so we have a good role model to follow.

Be safe and be happy.

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