

The Teaching of Jesus: Beatitudes Pt 1

Nelson Cathedral

February 16, 2025

Jeremiah 17:5-10

1 Cor 15:12-20

Luke 6: 17-26

Introduction

One of my fond memories of primary school is the game we often played in winter. We would race out to a concrete court and play 6-aside football but with a tennis ball. This was a fast-paced game with very little structure.

School yard football is a familiar scene even now as kids muck about with a ball. But imagine if one day a teacher came out and selected 11 players, took them aside and began to teach them the rules and structure of the game.

It is pretty obvious to us what the teacher has done – they have selected a team and began preparing them to play a proper game.

By the time of our Gospel reading today, Jesus had a reputation as a famous teacher and healer – for Jesus his words and acts of compassion went hand-in-hand.

But just before this scene, Jesus had gone up a mountain and selected his team of 12 out of all those who were following him. His team of 12 Apostles who were the ones to carry on Jesus' mission, including recording his words for us, so that in time, we too are included in Jesus' team as the people of God.

And so today we find Jesus surrounded by a crowd of people, but not just any mob.

- There were his team of 12,
- a great crowd of other disciples of Jesus

- and a larger crowd of people.

All these were people who were responding to Jesus at different levels, and as Luke tells us, they had come to hear him teach and to be healed.

Jewish context

We need to remember that the Gospel writers used familiar imagery from Israel's history to unpack who Jesus is. Especially in the Gospel's written by Matthew and Luke, Jesus is portrayed as the prophetic figure based on Moses, who declares and brings about the arrival of God's new covenant. The Kingdom of God is now here, but not in the way people expected.

In Luke Chapter 6, we see Jesus repeating the very action that Moses is famous for – going up the mountain to receive the Law from God – the sign of God's covenant. But there is one noticeable difference, Jesus is not just reciting the law given by

God, He is teaching with total authority by re-telling the law on his own terms. Jesus is now saying “this is what I say”, giving the new covenant as God's own Son.

And in choosing his team of 12, Jesus is mirroring the 12 tribes of Israel and forming a new people of God.

So, in Luke's account we have Jesus, the new Moses, the one who is greater than Moses, the one who is God with us and who leads us as the newly expanded people of God.

In Jesus, the Kingdom of God had finally come, so that God's history now becomes our history, God's fulfilment our fulfilment, God's love our love.

But the question remains how does this affect our lives today?

Teaching of Jesus: Beatitudes.

Today we come to the ethical heart of Jesus' teaching, often called the "Beatitudes", a word meaning "blessedness", words of goodnews that are upside-down to the way of the world.

Or maybe we should say the right-way up in the eyes of Jesus, as he shows us what the kingdom of God is like and what the values of God are.

In Luke the Beatitudes Jesus proclaims in the "Sermon on the Plain" is a list of blessings and then corresponding woes in true prophetic fashion.

These parallel the Beatitudes recorded by Matthew, which are often referred to as the "Sermon on the Mount". But in Luke's Gospel, we have Jesus' teaching recorded for a gentile audience, so Luke has removed the Jewish legal references and condensed the ethical core to these universal principles for all of Jesus' followers – including us.

Jesus proclaims four statements of blessedness, which we could translate as "oh how fortunate", and at first reading we might respond..."Really"!

We should not read these four statements as refereeing to four separate groups because if you are poor, you are also hungry, and also sad with the strain of life. And in Jesus day, as for many in the world, all three can result from persecution because you follow Jesus.

Politically, these words show God's preferential concern for the poor which cannot be sanitised by simply referring to the spiritually poor alone. But remember the Gospels also give examples of rich people turning to Jesus

It is the attitude of our heart and mind that is being examined, just as Jeremiah described in his description of blessing and curses.

“Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord....I the Lord test the
mind and search the heart”, Jeremiah
reminds us.

What is central for the poor, the hungry, the sad and
the oppressed is that because life is beyond their
control, they **totally depend on God**.

And God’s promise is a scandalous reversal of our
economic expectations by providing care, by
satisfying their needs, and bringing joy and eternal
security to their lives, just as God promises to do for
all of us through faith in Jesus.

Then we come to the 4 corresponding woes which
often make those of us in affluent countries squirm.
But in singling out the rich it is worth noting that in
Jesus’ day, just as it is today, many get rich by taking
advantage of others less fortunate directly or
indirectly.

The key point here is that the situation of wealth,
satisfaction, wellbeing and popularity result in a
sense of independence from God and a indifference
towards others. People can pursue the joys of life
and not care about anything else, including no belief
in accountability towards God. This sounds very
familiar.

There is a car safety advert on TV where a family is
driving a regular car that it is unknowingly made of
cardboard. The little girl in the back starts peeling
back the cardboard lining, and as a truck goes by the
car shakes. This car is not fit for purpose

For many in our society, our security is built on
everything else but God. And Jesus’ warning, is that
this only gives a false sense of security.

US

In focusing on the values of the Kingdom of God, we should not be surprised that the Beatitudes are a reversal of the values of our world. As Paul has reminded us, the goodnews of the Gospel, flips our experience of life. The message of Jesus' resurrection is seen as foolishness by many.

But in the Beatitudes, Jesus is offering both an Invitation and a Warning.

1. The invitation is for us to lean into God's commitment to his disciples now and his promise of eternal blessing in the future.

In these words of Jesus, we can be confident that Jesus knows all who are his, and knows all that we go through – both good and bad. As John reminds us in his Gospel, the Good Shepherd knows every one of his sheep.

So, we are invited to place our hope in God alone and let that shape our lives, an ethic, as Jesus reminds us, that involves both sacrifice and patience.

2. The warning is of God's displeasure for those who ignore God, who oppress others and who persecute followers of Jesus. The beatitudes hold a mirror up to our current western values, and we should be asking ourselves individually and as a society, "do our values reflect God's values", or on a bigger scale, is "economic growth all that matters – even if that comes at a high cost for a few".

Jesus reminds us that every person is significant to God, and if God cares for such as these, we should too.

Jesus also reminds us, that to place all our hope in the things of his world and ignore God is folly. But that also means we who follow Jesus have a responsibility to let people know about the goodnews he alone offers, and which we have experienced.

Conclusion.

I want to finish with a story about John Wesley the great Christian leader in England in the 1700's. John Wesley was about 21 years of age when he went to Oxford University. Coming from a Christian home, and he was gifted with a keen mind and good looks but in his immaturity, he could be a bit snobbish and sarcastic.

One night, while speaking with a porter, he discovered that the poor fellow had only one coat and lived in such impoverished conditions that he didn't even have a bed. Yet he was an unusually happy person, filled with gratitude to God.

Wesley, thoughtlessly joked about the man's misfortunes by saying with a touch of sarcasm, "And what else do you thank God for?"

The porter smiled, and replied with joy, "I thank Him, that He has given me my life and being, a heart to love Him, and above all a constant desire to serve Him!"

Deeply moved, Wesley recognized that this man knew the meaning of being blessed by God and the meaning of true thankfulness, and this changed his life.

Luke captures for us the universal core of Jesus' teaching. For those of us who are on Jesus' team as his disciples, may we let this shape our lives as we place our hope in Jesus alone.

Amen.