

The Christian's Sorrels

(Matthew 5: 3-10)

Today we are beginning a detailed study of "The Sermon on the Mount." Last week Ruthy gave a very helpful overview of these three chapters.

This week and next we will be studying Matthew 5:1-10. The verses known as "The Beatitudes" They are the clearest depiction of Christian Character in the teaching of Jesus. Our character helps to determine our conduct. And you will notice that this is the pattern we have here.

Most of "The Sermon on the Mount" focuses on Christian conduct. But character needs to be considered before conduct and so that is why the sermon begins in the way it does.

This morning we want to consider three things.

- The meaning of the word "Blessed."
- The meaning of the phrase "The Kingdom of heaven"
- A consideration of the first two beatitudes.

1. The Meaning of the Word Blessed:

Blessed is a very special word. In Greek, the word is *makarios*. *Makarios* is the word which specially describes the gods. In Christianity there is a divine and godlike joy. The meaning of *makarios* can best be seen from one particular usage of it. The Greeks always called the Island of Cyprus *he makaria* which means "The Blessed Isle." They did so because they believed that Cyprus was so lovely, so rich, and so fertile an island that a person would never need to go beyond its coastline to find the perfectly blessed life. It had such a climate, such flowers and fruits and trees, such minerals, such natural resources that it contained within itself all the materials for perfect blessedness.

Makarios then describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely independent of all the chances and the changes of life.

The English word happiness gives its own case away. It contains the root “hap” which means chance. Human happiness is something which is dependent on the chances and the changes of life, something which life may give and which life may also destroy.

The Christian blessedness is completely untouchable and unassailable. "Your joy," said Jesus, "no one will take away from you." (John 16: 22). The beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain, that joy which sorrow and loss, and pain and grief, are powerless to touch, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away.

The world can win its joys, and the world can equally well lose its joys. A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition; even a change in the weather, can take away the fickle joy the world can give. But the Christian has the serene and untouchable joy which comes from walking forever in the company and in the presence of Jesus Christ. ¹

This therefore is the meaning of the word “Blessed”

ii) What about the Kingdom of heaven? ²

You will notice that Jesus refers to the Kingdom of heaven in the first and eighth Beatitude. This helps us to understand that Christian Character is shaped by our recognizing that we belong primarily to the Kingdom of heaven. It is **this** kingdom that is influencing our lives and **this** king, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we owe our allegiance.

As we consider this phrase “The Kingdom of heaven”, remember that Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience. He wanted to correct the Jewish conception of the kingdom of heaven.

¹ I am grateful to the commentary by William Barclay on Matthew for this insight.

² The clear teaching of Martyn Lloyd Jones in his book “The Sermon on the Mount” helped in formulating what I write here about “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

They had got into this materialistic way of looking at the kingdom; they were thinking of it politically and in a military sense, and our Lord's whole object here is to show that His kingdom is primarily a spiritual one.

In other words He says to them, 'You must not think of this kingdom primarily as anything earthly. It is a kingdom in the heavens, which is certainly going to affect the earth in many different ways, but it is essentially spiritual.

It belongs to the heavenly rather than to the earthly and human sphere.'

What is this kingdom, then?

It means, in its essence:

Christ's rule or the sphere and realm in which He is reigning.

It can be considered in three ways as follows.

i) Many times when Jesus was here in the days of His flesh, our Lord said that the kingdom of heaven was already present.

Wherever He was present and exercising authority, the kingdom of heaven was there. You remember how on one occasion, when they charged Him with casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, He showed them the utter folly of that, and then went on to say,

If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Mt. 12. 28).

Here is the Kingdom of God. His authority, His reign was actually in practice. Then there is His phrase when He said

'the kingdom of God is within you', or, 'the kingdom of God is among you'.

It was as though He were saying, 'It is being manifested in your midst. Don't say "look here" or "look there". Get rid of this materialistic view. I am here amongst you; I am doing things. It is here. Wherever the reign of Christ is being manifested, the kingdom

of God is there. And when He sent out His disciples to preach, He told them to tell the cities that would not receive him

'Be sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come close to you.'

When we read the Gospels, with this understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven in mind, the miracles, healings, exorcisms, and teachings make sense. With the three years of Jesus' ministry traveling the length and breadth of first century Israel the Kingdom of Heaven was present in a concentrated way.

ii) But not only does the kingdom need to be understood this way. The second way of understanding the kingdom is in relation to you and me. The Kingdom of Heaven is also present at this moment in all who are true believers.

The Anglican Church tends to identify this kingdom with the Church, but that is not right, because the Church contains a mixed multitude. The kingdom of God is only present in the Church in the hearts of true believers, in the hearts of those who have submitted to Christ and in whom and among whom He reigns. The apostle Paul puts it this way in Colossians 1.13. In writing to the Colossians he gives thanks to the Father

'who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son'.

The 'kingdom of his dear Son' is 'the kingdom of God', it is 'the kingdom of heaven', it is this new kingdom into which we have entered. Or, again, in his letter to the Philippians he says,

'Our conversation is in heaven

or

'Our citizenship is in heaven.'

We are here on earth, we obey the powers that be, we live our lives in this way. Yes; but 'our citizenship is in heaven; And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, (Phil.3.20,).

We who recognize Christ as our Lord, and in whose lives He is reigning and ruling at this moment, are in the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of heaven is in us. We have been translated into the 'kingdom of his dear Son; we have become a 'kingdom of priests'. Because of this our conversation gives us a way. Just as you can tell if someone is from England by their accent or they can tell we are Canadians by our accent so too with kingdom people. Our accent or “conversation” is to give us away. The way we talk with people is to have a quality about it that will help others to know that while we are Canadians, even more importantly we our citizens of heaven. It is the language of that realm that is shaping how we speak in this realm.

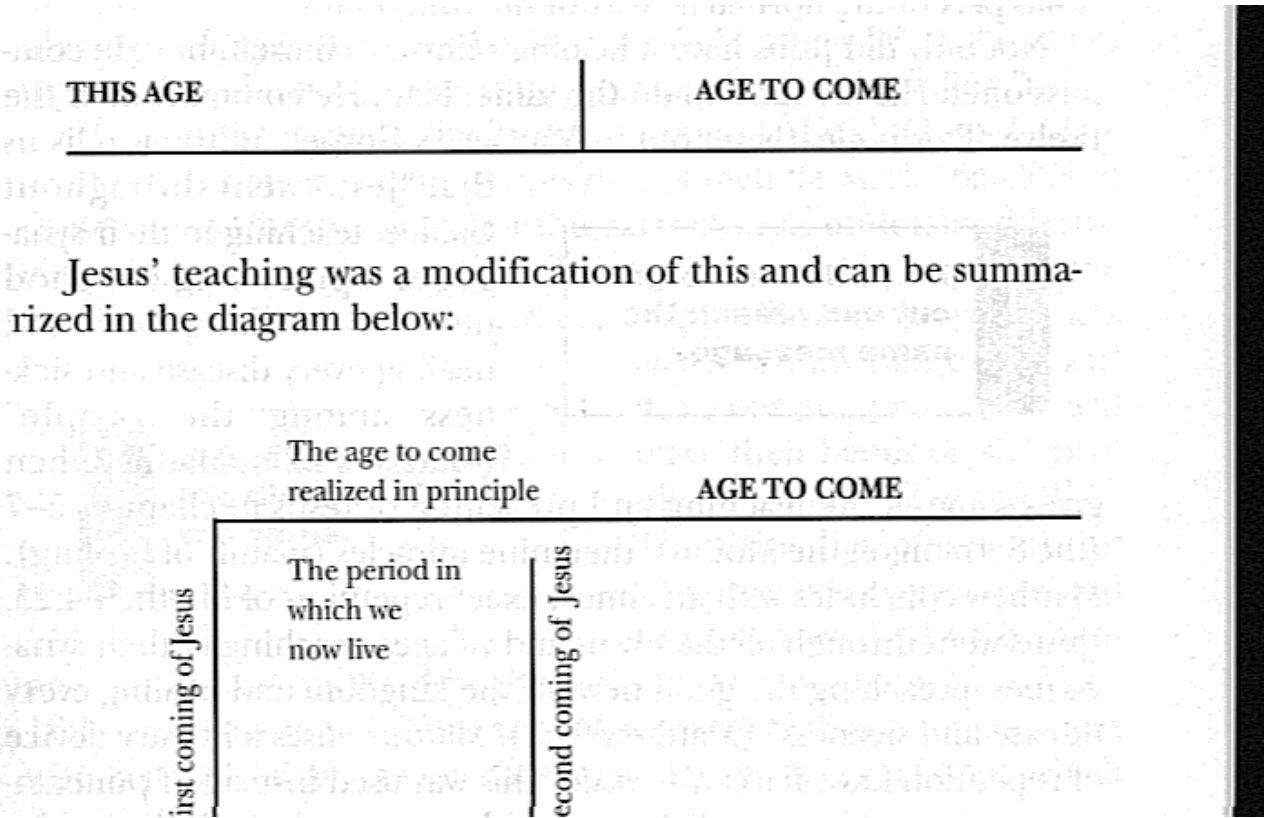
iii) The third, and last way, of looking at the kingdom is this. There is a sense in which it is yet to come. It has come; it is coming; it is to come. It was here when Jesus was exercising authority; it is here in us now; and yet it is to come. It will come when this rule and reign of Christ will be established over the whole world even in a physical and material sense.

The day is coming when the kingdoms of this world will have become 'the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ,'” when Jesus shall reign where'er the sun Doth his successive journeys run; His kingdom stretch from shore to shore, Till moons shall wax and wane no more.”³

It will then have come, completely and entirely, and everything will be under His dominion and sway. Evil and Satan will be entirely removed; there will be 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' (2 Pet. 3. 13), and then the kingdom of heaven will have come in that material way. The spiritual and the material will become one and all things will be subject to His sway, that 'at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2. 10).

³ Hymn : “Jesus shall reign”

This can be summarized with the following diagram. The Jewish understanding



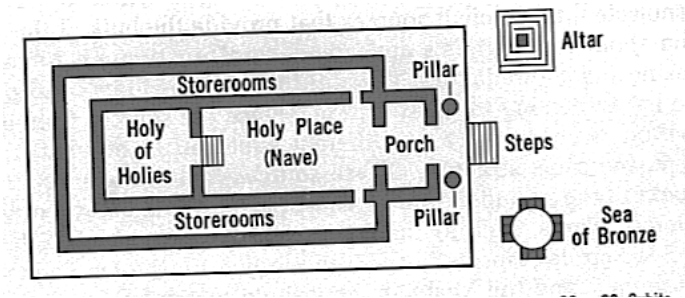
current at the time of Jesus' earthly life was that when the Messiah came, the Kingdom of Heaven would be fully inaugurated. However, as we have just considered, Jesus teaching was a modification of this understanding.⁴

Having thought about the word Blessed and the Kingdom of Heaven let's go on to look at the first two Beatitudes. We need to begin by noticing that there is a pattern to these eight sayings. We will understand this in more detail next week. But just keep this in mind. To understand the beatitudes aright we need to see the pattern, and sequence. This becomes very clear as we turn to verses 3 and 4:

3"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

4 Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁴ This diagram is taken from "Questions of Life by Nicky Gumbel. Page 203.



What does Poor in Spirit Mean?

Well in order to answer this question we need to know what Jesus means by the word “spirit” To help you understand this, please refer to the diagram above.⁵

This is a model of the floor plan of the Solomonic Temple. You will notice that it is made up of three parts. The Holy of Holies, the most holy place and the outer walls.

I would like to suggest to you that the temple corresponds to us. As we look at this floor plan and apply it to ourselves it helps us understand how God has made us. Just as the temple is tripartite, so are we.

- The Holy of Holies corresponds to our spirit
- The Holy Place corresponds to our soul (thought life, emotional life, personality)
- The Outer walls corresponds to our physical body

“The Sermon on the Mount” deals with all three. Jesus begins at the level of the Spirit or the Holy of Holies; from there the progression is outward as chapters 5-7 will illustrate in the weeks to come.

So what is our spirit, the holy of holies? It is the place of closest intimacy with God. It is so to speak the altar of our being. It is that part of us that is intended for communion with God. Our spirit is what defines us as being made in God’s image and sets us apart from the rest of creation.

⁵ This is taken from Harper’s Bible Dictionary, page 1022.

However, because the spirit is the essence of who we are it is also susceptible to being desecrated. I would like to suggest a way in which this happens.

Curses spoken into our spirits.

One of the primary responsibilities given to parents is to help nurture a child's spirit. This is to be done as the mother and father speak blessing into a child's life. As a child grows up in an environment where they are being nurtured and loved, the altar of the spirit is being created in ways that can allow a child to know they are of infinite worth because they know their parents love them and the children have a deep sense of belonging.

We see this illustrated clearly in the life of Jesus. The Father placed him in a family where he was nurtured and had his spirit shaped by the loving care given to him by Mary of Joseph. Because he knew their blessing, I would suggest he was able to fully receive the Holy Spirit's blessing at his Baptism. In Matthew 3 we read that the Spirit affirmed him with these words: "You are my Son, beloved, and with you I am well pleased." Immediately after receiving this blessing he is lead out into the wilderness where the Devil tempts him. What the devil is attempting to do is to get Jesus doubt the blessing he had received growing up and the focused blessing received at his baptism. But because Jesus knows who he is in relation to the Father and his earthly parents he is able to reject the devils' lies and so Jesus' spirit remains whole.

However, in many peoples' lives their experience is much different. Rather than home being a place of nurture where a child's spirit is being carefully attended to, children can experience the opposite. As they are growing up the spirit is desecrated as curses rather than blessings are spoken into their lives. These take many forms. Some of the most common would be

"Why are you so stupid"

"You can never do anything right"

"You will never amount to much"

"Why can't you be like you brother, sister cousin etc"

“I hate you and wish you had never been born”

“It’s your fault mommy and daddy are getting a divorce”

Sexual and physical abuse also deeply damage the spirit. As can a home in which there is constant fighting between the parents and is witnessed by the child.

It could also be that a child never had such harsh words spoken to them, but they never received positive affirmation and tangible expressions of love. This too effects this most intimate place, the spirit, and leaves us longing for it to be healed and fulfilled.

When these curses are then compounded by people making choices that the Bible refers to as sinful, we are drawn farther away from the love of God and the spirit becomes colder and more self centred than Christ centred.

When we come to faith in Jesus Christ and then as we come to understand more deeply what this Christ centred life is all about, we are made aware of our Spirit. Jesus says that when this happens we are brought to a place where we experience poverty of Spirit.

This poverty of Spirit is something we see clearly played out in the life of Peter. You will remember that when Jesus first met Peter he invited him to take his boat and into the deep. All that night Peter had been fishing but had caught nothing. Jesus instructs Peter to cast his net over the boat again and to the fisherman’s amazement he takes in a great haul of fish. As Peter then looks at Jesus he says to him “Get away from me, Lord for I am a sinful man”. Do you see that Peter is here acknowledging, poverty of Spirit. What he couldn’t do on his own that night, catch fish, Jesus was able to help him do. This then resulted Peter is seeing I Jesus more than just a good man. There was something about Jesus that so touched Peter that it brings to his awareness his own sinfulness. His night of fruitless labour on the Sea of Galilee resulted in him seeing that he was not living his life fully and fruitfully and so he cries out “Lord get away from me. I am sinful, My Spirit is poor.

However as you go onto to read the Gospel accounts, you will notice that Peter, has this tendency to trust in himself instead of in the Lord. He says things like, “Even

thought they may all forsake you Lord, I never will. I am even ready to die for you and with you.”

When then fast forward to the Thursday evening before the Crucifixion. Peter’ bravado gives way to fear as he denies having know Jesus. At dawn the rooster crows, Jesus looks out and catches Peter’s face and looks at him intently. We are told that Peter then breaks down and weeps. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Here we see Peter come to the end of himself. He now is in the place to truly acknowledge his poverty of Spirit.

Like Peter when we come to this place we can end up feeling of worthless.

The Bible makes it clear that we are not worthless. We are of infinite worth but in need of forgiveness, healing and restoration.

As we read through the Sermon on the Mount we recognize that the conduct asked of us here is impossible if left to our own devises. This is because it is only possible to live out the Sermon if the Holy of Holies is being restored by the Holy Spirit. You see the Christian life needs to be shaped by Christian Character.

As we allow ourselves to admit our poverty of spirit then like Peter we can be filled with the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life. Peter had been a Christian for three years, but he was trying to follow Jesus in the power of his own flesh, his won effort. To do this is like choosing to wear sandals in the middle of winter, when what are needs is a pair of sorrels. The right foot ware will allow you to negotiate the snow in winter. Conversely in summer you wouldn’t put on the winter boots but would be wearing your sandals.

When we are able to admit our poverty of spirit it is as if we are recognizing that we had on the wrong footwear. We have been trying to live the Christian life in the flesh and not in the Spirit.

As we understand and accept our poverty of Spirit the Holy Spirit can fill us with his presence. This in turn will influence our awareness of being Kingdom people which in turn will help us to know the blessedness with which each of these beatitudes in introduced.

The greatness of the beatitudes is that they are not wistful glimpses of some future beauty; they are not even golden promises of some distant glory; they are triumphant shouts of bliss for a permanent joy that nothing in the world can ever take away.

But before we can know the blessed life, we need to know that we are poor in Spirit. For it is then that Jesus by His Spirit can shape within us His character.

More about this next week.