

# Beatitudes 1 Mike Smith

## 03/06/18 08:00 & 18:30 St Peter's, 11:15 Mapledurham

Today we are starting a new sermon series. For the next 9 Sundays, until the end of July, we will be thinking together about a few verses at the beginning of Matthew chapter 5. Commonly known as the Beatitudes, these are sayings of Jesus to his disciples at the start of his ministry with them. They shape Jesus, and will shape how the disciples see the world. And I hope we will discover together, how they should shape us.

Jesus words come at the start of his ministry. Whilst we are in Chapter 5 of Matthew's Gospel, we haven't go very far into Jesus' ministry. We have had the list of Jesus' ancestors (chp 1), the story of Jesus birth (chp 2), John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus birth (chp 3), Jesus battles with the forces of this world and calling of the disciples (chp 4).

Now in Chapter 5, a crowd has gathered because Jesus is becoming famous. In their midst, Jesus goes up a mountain, sits down, gathers his disciples, and speaks. These scene setting words are easily glossed over, but they provide vital context for what we will discover is the 'Blessed sayings' in coming weeks.

Surrounded by a crowd, Jesus withdraws up a mountain. Maybe the mountain was close by, or maybe it is symbolic. Matthew is always symbolic - after all, he is the Gospel writer always at pains to tell us what prophecy Jesus was fulfilling at various stages of his ministry. But where else have we had a mountain? Mountains are very important places to the Jews - most of all, it was on the mountain that Moses met God. So perhaps in hearing that Jesus retreated up a mountain, we are invited to understand that he is going to the place of God - in fact what will happen next is of God. For what Jesus' will speak directly relates to the first of our readings today from Isaiah 61. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me...liberty to captives .... release to captives....". Matthew is always at pains to show the Jewish links to Jesus, and how Jesus fulfils the scriptures. So these beauty sayings are the fulfilling of Isaiah prophetic words, describing what heaven is like.

But we also notice that, in the midst of crowds, Jesus speaks only to his disciples. These next words are not for everyone, but for those who have made decisions to follow him. What follows is teaching for those who have already glimpsed who Jesus is. If you like, in our context, the Beatitudes are for the Church.

And we notice that to speak, Jesus sits down. This is no grand oratory - projected to a large audience. But this is quiet, intimate teaching to a small gathering. You can almost detect Jesus saying, "Come up close, I have something to teach you".

And then we get to the sayings - the words perhaps we have grown up with. In a street survey of people, over 70% who were read these words without attribution guessed correctly that they were words of Jesus. These are Jesus words that have entered our being, and the being of society. But what do they mean? That is largely for the coming weeks.

But I want to finish by concentrating on one word - the one we translate "Blessed". The Greek word is Makarioi, which is translated in many different ways by Bible translators. In our translation we get 'Blessed', in others in might says 'Happy', or 'God blesses' or 'You are blessed when'. Whatever term, the Greek word implies joy, even filled with joy. 'Filled with joy are' would be a good translation. And this joy is not to be equated with simplistic happiness, but a deep filled with God's joy. For in these texts Jesus is primarily talking about what God is like, and only secondarily talking about the character of Christians. So we are talking about 'God fills with joy' the peacemakers, those who mourn, etc. And that is why Jesus is at pains to help the disciples

understand what heaven is like. Again, remembering Isaiah 61, in God's realm "everlasting joy shall be theirs". Filled with God's joy shall be the poor in spirit - theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The task for us disciples is to believe what heaven is like. Heaven being the realm of God, not a future or distant place - but the reality of God now, if only we can see it.

So this sermon series invites us to open our eyes and our hearts to glimpse heaven in our midst. To ask ourselves how we might be different as Christians, if we see God at work in the life of those he prioritises. The saints of God, filled with joy, are in our midst. Ours is to recognise them, and in doing so recognise God in our midst. We are to become a Church of the beatitudes. I pray that we open ourselves to explore what that means in these coming weeks.