

## The Jesus we never knew x 10 (PP1) VPBC 05 March 2017

### Matthew 5: 1 – 12 (READ in Revised English Version)

**The teachings of JESUS – from the mountain – for his Disciples.** (This is not for the crowds but those who are following him).

*Last week we looked at the Messiah's Manifesto (A [public declaration](#) of [principles](#), [policies](#), or [intentions](#), especially that of a [political party](#). A [creed](#) is a **manifesto** of religious or spiritual beliefs).*

From *Luke's Gospel (4: 16 – 18)*. Good news for the poor: poor in Luke refers to peoples' STATUS – i.e. the POWERLESS.

This week we looked at the further unpacking of the Messiah's Manifesto and Kingdom: those Jesus declares are "blessed". *Blessed are the poor in Spirit (Matt 5:3) for they will see the Kingdom of heaven. (PP2)*

This leads us into: Continuing our theme for this year and **we return to the way Jesus' declared what sort of Kingdom he is bringing in**. What is the character of this Kingdom that is being brought into the world by his presence – and his teaching? Nowhere is this spelt out more than in these chapters in Matthew's Gospel. (**chapters 5: 1 through to 7: 29**) **Jesus is about God's Kingdom on EARTH** (*as in heaven – Matthew calls it the Kingdom of Heaven*) – Now as well as Future. As we saw last week Jesus' claim is that all the OT prophesies about the Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom are fulfilled in his person: it has begun with his incarnation and is being outwork; it can be realised now in his people (\*) and is also yet to be realised.

**The Jesus we never really knew challenged tradition, customs, prejudices and still does if they are contrary to God's perception of justice.** He made it plain that he came not just for the Israel of the Jews but also the unclean and unholy Gentiles if they would receive him and believe in him. (\*)

In what we classically called "**the Sermon on the Mount**" and which was in fact probably many sermons Jesus begins to teach those who are following him and it is recognised that unlike the Scribes, the teachers of the Law he teaches with authority. But it is recognised that his teaching is to say the least challenging, so challenging that various schools of thought try to water it down or modify it. (None of these are entirely satisfactory and some just plain wrong).

- Thomas Aquinas: divided Jesus' teaching into 2 levels of commitment – precepts and councils or requirements and suggestions.
- Martin Luther said that Matthew 22: 21 we should give to Caesar what was Caesar what was his and to God what was his. Therefore, he also argued for requirements for behaviour in earthly Kingdoms and in Christ's Kingdoms.

- Anabaptist Movement took a more radical interpretation and argued that we should seek to follow Jesus' commands as literally as possible. (What we need to be able to do though is to interpret the true/ real meaning of what Jesus teaches. This is the core of his ethical and practical teaching and so it must be the core of the teaching of his people).
- The 19 Century American dispensationalists argued that we need not follow such teaching until Christ's Kingdom came into being after his death and resurrection.
- Albert Schweitzer thought these were unusual demands and since the world did not end when many Christians thought it would we must view these differently.

**Previous interpretations.** What is plain that Jesus is challenging the wisdom of 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine and the teachings that have gone before from many Scribes and rabbis. He is teaching something different to replace inaccurate teachings about God's rule. And so, we hear his constantly repeated challenge: ***you have heard it said but now I say unto you.*** But we also hear him declare that he has not come to destroy the teachings of the Law and the Prophets but to fulfil them.

**Unless we can understand the teachings of Jesus we cannot understand who Jesus is and what he wants of us.** This is how we can start to ask the question WWJD?

**Jesus is certainly challenging both how we value others around us in the world and also our favouring and loving of self over everything else. All of this raises what our valuing and love for God really is.** As we have said the values of Jesus are those of an "upside down Kingdom" (Kraybill). "How lucky are the unlucky" says Jesus in effect. (Philip Yancey. *The Jesus I never Knew*).

***Narcissus:*** a mythological character invented by Ovid. Narcissus becomes obsessed with his own reflection. Narcissism is the excessive love of self. Sexual desire for one's own body rather than that of goddess Echo and eventually wastes away. Many would say that Narcissism and obsession with individuality is growing. All too rarely do we speak of the importance of the democratic word "we" and keep talking of "I and me".

***Valorisation:*** this word is a Marxist term – creation of surplus value, self-expansion of capital. How do we value the poor: those of low status – the disabled, the elderly demented and many others. God loves us because he loves us Deuteronomy 7: 7 – not because of our capital value. What happens to a society where people only valued for their valorisation?

**The Gospel of the Kingdom challenges human narcissism and growing individualism.** (Ann Morrissey in *Borrowing from the Future*.) Those who truly follow Jesus will be dissenters from the march towards narcissism. "This is crucial not just for future generations, but it may be vital for the future of the species itself."

**(PP3) What does it mean to be poor in spirit? (5:3) Which word would you choose from this list? (Exercise: think for yourself)**

- Lonely
- Confused
- Remorseful
- Ashamed
- Depressed
- Needy
- Self-Sacrificing
- Beaten down
- Oppressed
- Another word ...or phrase

***“Blessed” – happy and to be envied – opposite of cursed.***

**DO YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE “BLESSED”?**

Any discussion group about “happiness” should take into account what Jesus said on the subject ... and I would suggest when we say what we want for ourselves and our children is that we should “be happy and healthy” we again if we follow Jesus consider what he meant by that.

## **THE HISTORY OF THE WORD "MAKARIOS" ("BLESSED") PP4**

Do you remember the illustration I used last week of Jesus being the door through which everyone must enter: the proud and powerful will have to stoop and those powerless and crawling will be lifted up. (Magnificat evidence of this).

**Who wants to be a lowly person? Who wants to be stooped down?** Most of us spend a good part of our lives trying to pull ourselves up. We want to walk tall in society. According to Jesus in the Beatitudes, it is the lowly – those stooped low – who are blessed by God. **This runs counter to the normal uses of that word for blessed, *makarios*.**

What does it mean to be blessed? The Greek word for "blessed" used in the Beatitudes is *makarios* (plural: *makarioi*). The following is a study of how this word has been used (mostly taken from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*).

- **In ancient Greek times, *makarios* referred to the gods. The blessed ones were the gods.** They had achieved a state of happiness and contentment in life that was beyond all cares, labors, and even death. The blessed ones were beings who lived in some other

world away from the cares and problems and worries of ordinary people. To be blessed, you had to be a god.

- **Makarios took on a second meaning. It referred to the "dead".** The blessed ones were humans, who, through death, had reached the other world of the gods. They were now beyond the cares and problems and worries of earthly life. To be blessed, you had to be dead. That is the origin of the different saints days -- they are remembered on the dates of their deaths. All Saints Day was for all the people who had died in the faith whose names we didn't know.
- **Finally, in Greek usage, makarios came to refer to the elite, the upper crust of society, the wealthy people.** It referred to people whose riches and power put them above the normal cares and problems and worries of the lesser folk -- the peons, who constantly struggle and worry and labor in life. To be blessed, you had to be very rich and powerful. (Some would still take this view).

**When this word, makarios was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), it took on another meaning. It referred to the results of right living or righteousness.** If you lived right, you were blessed. Being blessed meant you received earthly, material things: a good wife, many children, abundant crops, riches, honor, wisdom, beauty, good health, etc. A blessed person had more things and better things than an ordinary person. To be blessed, you had to have big and beautiful things. (Corollary: if suffered or were poor must have sinned. This confused the people of Jesus' day)

In all of these meanings, the "blessed" ones lived in a higher plane than the rest of us. They were gods. They were humans who had gone to the world of the gods. They were the wealthy, upper crust. They were those with many possessions. The blessed were those people and beings who lived above the normal cares, problems, and worries of normal people.

*Matthew (reflecting Jesus' thoughts) uses this word in a totally different way. It is not the elite who are blessed. It is not the rich and powerful who are blessed. It is not the high and mighty who are blessed. It is not the people living in huge mansions or expensive penthouses who are blessed. Rather, Jesus pronounces God's blessings on the lowly: the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the meek, the mourning. Throughout the history of this word, it had always been the other people who were considered blessed: the rich, the filled up, the powerful. Jesus turns it all upside-down. The elite in God's kingdom, the blessed ones in God's kingdom, are those who are the poor in spirit, those who live in dependence on God.*

*\* (PP5) Matthew's beatitudes are not practical advice for successful living, but **prophetic declarations made on the conviction of the coming-and-already-present kingdom of God.***

*\* The beatitudes declare an objective reality as the result of a divine act, not subjective feelings, and thus should be translated with the objective "blessed" instead of the subjective "happy." The opposite of "blessed" is not "unhappy," but "cursed" (cf. Matt 25:31-46; Luke 6:24-26).*

*\* There is, however, an ethical dimension to the beatitudes. The community that hears itself pronounced blessed by its Lord does not remain passive, but acts in accord with the coming kingdom. ...*

*\* The beatitudes do not merely describe something that already is, but bring into being the reality they declare. ... As eschatological blessings, the beatitudes are not "entrance requirements" for outsiders, but a declaration about insiders. ...*

\* Understood as a prophetic pronouncement, the truth claim of the beatitude is not independently true, but dependent on the speaker. They are true on the basis of the authority of the one who speaks. ... JESUS' christological claim that calls for taking a stand with regard to the speaker, not merely the content of his speech.

- The nine pronouncements are thus not statements about general human virtues -- most appear exactly the opposite to common wisdom. Rather, they pronounce blessing on authentic disciples in the Christian community. All the beatitudes apply to one group of people, the real Christians of Matthew's community. They do not describe nine different kinds of good people who get to go to heaven, but are nine declarations about the blessedness, contrary to all appearances, of the eschatological community living in anticipation of God's reign. Like all else in Matthew, they are oriented to life together in the community of discipleship, not to individualistic ethics. ...

Thank you to notes of Brian Stoffregen [pp. 176-178] which I have adapted...  
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**YES, another word – poor in Spirit** means knowing we need God and also one another. Humbleness – a correct perception of our own strengths and weaknesses. An awareness of gifts of others but also that each of us is flawed.

It is belonging to the community of the poor in Spirit who begin to see the Kingdom of Heaven coming into being on the Earth. **In our dependence on God** we see the Kingdom of heaven NOW and also coming into being in the future. Those who mourn are comforted. The meek begin to inherit the earth as goods are shared and so on.