

Reading First: The Title: He who laughs last, laughs best

- For our Weekly background installment, an analysis of the SM, 4 types of beatitudes
- We will expound upon the 2nd beatitude
- We will explore the 2nd beatitude from a Kingdom Perspective

Proper interpretation tries to understand the historical context

- What it meant then, what it means today
- We examine ancient Greco-Roman and Jewish thought

Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount

- The sayings of the beatitudes of the SM are of a highly complex literary nature
- The sequence of beatitudes in the SM includes 4 different types
- Each containing 2 lines, except v. 12 which has 3 lines

The 1st and leading beatitude is that of 5:3

5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

It has a counterpart in 5:10

5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

If you recall from last week, the first lines are declarative, the 2nd lines are explanatory

- The first line constitutes the beatitude proper, formulated in the 3rd pers. pl.
- Special to this type is to whom the beatitude is addressed
- The 2nd line is the "hoti clause", hoti is Greek meaning "for, because, in order that" stating the reason for the first line.
- The hoti clause has its place in the last judgement, "*for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*", a verdict is anticipated

The 2nd type of beatitude is found in vss 4 thru 9

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

- The 1st lines contain the blessings proper, expressed in 3rd pers. pl. specifying the recipients of the blessings
- The 2nd lines contain a hoti clause giving the reason for the blessing
- In contrast to the first type, e.g: *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* These hoti clauses consist of eschatological promises or predictions, expressed in fut. pass. tense.
- These promises are based theologically on an eschatological application of the "*ius talionis*" meaning the "*right of retaliation*" described more fully in 5:38-42 and 7:12.
- The promises also constitute scenes describing the fate of the righteous in paradise

The 3rd type is found only one in vs. 11

5:11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

- This beatitude is stated 2nd pers. pl. with no specific addressee except pron. "you."
- The *hoti* clause describes 3 situations of harassment that the addressees must undergo

The 4th type is a 3 liner, represented by vs. 12

5:12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

- The 1st line contains a blessing, the 2nd a justification, the 3rd the reason
- This beatitude is also stated in the 2nd pers. pl. And begins with the double summons "rejoice and be glad."
- The *hoti* clause provides the justification, consisting of dogmatic judgment "*Great is your reward in heaven*"
- 3rd line gives the reason "*for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*"
- In other words, a historical assessment equates the persecution of the prophets of old with the present persecution of the addressees, in order to conclude on the basis of the concept of fairness that equal suffering deserves equal rewards.

The interpretation of the 2nd beatitude

5:4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

- The 2nd beatitude praises those who mourn, to clarify the meaning we need to understand the wider context of ancient thought.
- Does the beatitude refer to specific losses such as the death of loved ones?
- To grieve over the sin of Israel?
- To sorrow over one's personal sinfulness, loneliness, or despair?

Considering the background of the SM, we must consult the Judaism and its resources

- Jewish literature expresses a full spectrum of kinds of grief, ranging from personal loss to lament over Israel, to the state of the world, to one's own failure and sinfulness.
- Long before the NT, mourning had become a common metaphor to describe the faithful Jew's response to the terrible state of affairs in the life of Israel.
- This response was regarded as righteous in contrast to the frivolous & cynical who do not care: *Lk 6:25 Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep* cf. *Jas 4:9*
- According to the principle of eschatological reversal, the prophets had promised the end of all mourning to come in the future when God will redeem his people.
- Yet, our beatitude makes no mention of a specific cause for grief and sorrow, so there is no reason to limit its scope to any possible interpretation.

We will consult Greco-Roman ancient consolation literature for the wider context

- If poverty characterizes the human condition in general, 5:3a *Blessed are the poor in spirit*: then grief is the expected human response.
- Sources from the ancient world abound with material dealing with grief, refs: *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Alexiou, *The Greek Way of Death*, Garland

Consolation literature focuses on this aspect of human misery, the comforting of those stricken with grief in all its forms.

- Most people in antiquity saw mourning as the human response to death.
- Therefore mourning consisted mainly in rituals and prayers, especially burial processions and entombment, dress codes, gestures, withdrawal into solitude, etc.
- These rituals have been described in literary sources and depicted in monuments.

Since virtual all people in antiquity performed mourning rituals, 3 presuppositions underlie these forms of response:

- Death is viewed as an evil, the greatest of all evils
- Mourning is not only a response to death, but also an expression of fear of death
- Mourning raises the question about life after death

Philosophical & theological treatises concern many of the same issues and presuppositions

- Is mourning justifiable, and if so, to what extent? Is death really an evil?
- Should one fear death? Does belief in an afterlife make a difference?

While the Jewish religion regulates mourning and thus approves of it

- Greek and Roman consolation literature for the most part, regard mourning to be the practise of the uneducated masses.
- Educated individuals should limit all forms of grief, or should eliminate it altogether
- One way that Greeks overcome grief is to be initiated into the mystery cults.

The philosophical schools take different positions with regard to mourning and grief

- For the Stoics, the problem with grief is the heavy emotional uproar caused by it
- The major concern for therapy is to restore emotional balance

The most negative attitude towards grief is that of the Cynics and Epicureans

- For the Cynics, mourning is simply another example of human folly and hypocrisy
- One should face death as a natural event, not with fear but with courage

The Epicureans were extreme for a different reasons

- According to Epicurus's second *sententia* in the *Kyriai Doxai*, "death is nothing to us"
- The reason for this conclusion is that death, defined as the end of life, cannot reach us.
- As long as we live we are free of death, when death comes, we do not feel it or know it because we are dead, so there is no reason to fear death.
- With this in mind, be happy, enjoy life as much as possible, grief can only be an expression of erroneous ideas and superstition.

In contrast to all of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition, the 2nd beatitude is unconditionally affirming: Mourning is to be praised

- Again, the 2nd beatitude follows the 1st regarding poverty

Verse 4b gives the theological reason for the blessing of the mourners

for they shall be comforted

- Clearly the statement reflects the prophetic promise of Isaiah 61:2

Isaiah 61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

- **The immediate reason why the beatitude about mourning follows** the beatitude on poverty seems connected with the important passage from Isaiah 61:1-2, where vss. 2-3 elaborate on God's eschatological promise.

This is the reading Jesus took up in the synagogue in his home in Nazareth

Luke 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. 17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

- Nazareth was the hometown of Jesus, it was his custom to read in the synagogue.
- What follows is the citation from Isaiah 61:1-2

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. 20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

But there is more to it, the change from the factual present tense in vs. 3b, that is:

*5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: **for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

- from the factual present tense to an eschatological future in 4b *for they shall be comforted* reveals an intricate relationship between the present and future in view of the kingdom of heavens.

The 1st theological reason for the blessing of the mourners, is that the fulfillment of the predictions is a matter of divine justice for example the story of poor Lazarus from Luke 16.

- In this story Abraham from heaven informs the rich man sitting in hell: *"Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."*

The 2nd theological reason for the blessing of mourners is the willingness and ability to mourn is no longer to be taken as simply a part of life, but its affirmation is the result of special insight into the human condition before God.

- In this regard, the 2nd beatitude is based upon the 1st beatitude, that one is to consider mourning a virtue
- The construction of the promise *for they shall be comforted* in the future passive is characteristic of Jewish thinking. It is a device used to avoid using the name of God, hence it is God who will provide comfort as part of his eternal reign in justice.

The praise of mourners accepts as part of the human condition the fact that people suffer losses and engage in mourning and grieving.

- Mourning is the reaction to human deprivations and loss in all their forms of which faithful disciples are expected to identify conscientiously.
- It is the mark of discipleship does not deny but accepts the deplorable facts of life
- Yet the disciple believes the eschatological promises of a reversal of conditions.

Those who mourn do so because of the seeming slowness of God's justice

- But they are now to rejoice, even in their troubled circumstances. Because their salvation has found its beginning in the coming of Jesus as promised in Isa 61
- The time draws near when they shall be comforted:

Rev 7:17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

John 16:20 Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

Kingdom Perspective

But they are already happy knowing the kingdom has arrived, their salvation is at hand

Mark 1:15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Lk 11:20 But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

- There is an already, but not yet tension, kingdom is fulfilled, but not yet consummation,

Lk 10:17 And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. 18 And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

- Satan and the fallen angels who followed him had been defeated in a prehistoric heavenly battle with the cross of Christ in prospective
- Jesus sees the advancement of his Kingdom with eschatological eyes, outside of history
- Looking back to the battle in heaven & looking ahead to the cross in near application
- To far application seeing the final consummation of the kingdom when Satan and the fallen angels are cast into the lake of fire as described in the Book of Revelation.

Mark 4:11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: 12 That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.

- The kingdom has come to those that are able to perceive it by faith
- Jesus promise to comfort those who mourn is not an empty promise for the future
- Jesus comforts now in the midst of suffering, those with eyes to see and ears to hear.
- These will be converted, sins will be forgiven, and their hearts transformed sharing in Jesus' resurrection life as part of a new creation.

Jesus, as the Incarnate Son reveals to us a glimpse into the mind of God, contrasting the values of the world with the values of God

- To see their fellow man as God sees them, seek God's justice rather than man's justice
- When man begins to live and see from God's perspective, the promises are not merely postponed to the future, but hearts are changed to serve our fellow man

Jesus' beatitudes differ from apocalyptic future hopes through his message of the Kingdom of Heaven: the promised glorious future is already dawning in his activity.

- A part of the salvation promised to the poor, the hungry, and those who mourn is already a reality of Jesus' acceptance of the dispossessed, in his common meals with them, and in the joy over God's love experienced in the present.
- Jesus' beatitudes are not empty promises of something that will happen in the future but accompany the glorious fact that the **Kingdom of Heaven is at hand**

The kingdom has come, it is fulfilled, but not yet consummated.

- There is an Already, but not yet tension.
- Those who mourn enjoy a foretaste of heaven, an earnest of the spirit as a down payment for what awaits them, while Jesus brings joy now in the midst of affliction

The Beatitudes should not be spiritualized to justify ignoring our fellow man

- Yet at the same time, should not be politicized
- Xtianity is a grassroots movement, convert one heart at a time
- Xtians should learn the lessons from the past that conversion by the sword leads to the perversion of Xtianity into a religion of empire regardless of which party gains power

Political attempts to enforce the beatitudes violates the very principles of the beatitudes

- An attempt to enforce these qualities as the product of human effort or politics overestimates man's ability and an underestimation of his depravity
- The gospel is ***the power of God*** unto salvation, not the power of man

The folly of politicizing the Beatitudes or similar is shown by its fruit

- In contrast to those who mourn, politics returns evil with evil, returns injustice with injustice, uses the power of the state to impose conversion by the economic sanctions
- Politics is not patient to wait for the Day of the Lord, but instead take things into their own hands, putting their trust in man, not the kingdom.

The Beatitudes do not show man how to be saved, but rather describe the characteristics

Of one who has been saved, Those that mourn are at the same time those who remain faithful to God and expect their salvation from his kingdom alone.

- Those who mourn for the human anguish of the lost shall be comforted by the compassion of God
- In the midst of the ungodliness and worldmindedness of others, they form the true people of God, comforted by the promise of the coming salvation of the Lord.

The Beatitudes describe those who wait on the Lord

- Who put their trust in his kingdom alone and let the systems of this world
- They do not answer evil with evil, nor oppose injustice with injustice

The Beatitudes describe those who live in the spirit and not the letter of the law

- The law decrees against murder, the spirit is without anger
- The law decrees against adultery, the spirit is without lust
- The law decrees against divorce, the spirit is committed
- The law decrees against oath-taking, the spirit speaks the truth
- The law decrees against retaliation, the spirit forgives
- A law tradition allowed for hatred of enemies, the spirit loves one's enemies

When Xtians put their faith in politics or politicians

- As if their candidate will administer God's justice upon their opponents
- They compete with God for honor and glory,
- forgetting his promises, no longer depending solely on him
- It is nothing short than idolatry

The Beatitudes should be a reminder to Xtians to get back to the basics

- To repent of all the political strife of our day, the practice of anathematizing and dehumanizing political and religious opponents, To return to the first works:
- Love God, honor his law, love their fellow man, love their enemies
- Do good to those who hate you, be kind to them in word and deed, promote their well being, recognize their dignity as being one created in the image of God.

