The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes offer a vision of what it means to follow Jesus Christ

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In a few short sentences the Beatitudes are perhaps the most important, subversive and revolutionary text in the Bible.

> 'Brothers and sisters, listen carefully to these words from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In them he declares the blessings of God's kingdom. He gives us a vision of a world redeemed by love, and the qualities of discipleship which will bring about that transformation.'
>
> *Common Worship: Rites on the Way*

The Beatitudes sum up Jesus' teaching about what it means to live as a child of God's kingdom. They can be found right at the beginning of a long passage of teaching by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, known as the Sermon on the Mount. Just as Moses taught the people of Israel from the mountain after he had received the **Commandments**, so Jesus begins his ministry by going up a mountain and teaching his disciples.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,

for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.

Blessed are those who suffer persecution for righteousness' sake,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Read another version from Luke 6.20-23

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you,

and when they exclude you, revile you,

and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy,

for surely your reward is great in heaven;

for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

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Some of these sayings are difficult to understand, and some are uncomfortable for us today as they would have been to Jesus' first hearers.

Looking at how Jesus lives them out himself is the best way of understanding what they mean. So, for instance, if you are not sure what Jesus means by 'blessed are those who mourn', look at the examples in Jesus' own life and ministry where he cries out with sadness and anguish to God. This will help us see that mourning is not just about bereavement, but a whole attitude of lamentation and crying out to God when we see and experience the injustices and sorrows of the world.

Some of us may find that we are naturally people who thirst for justice, or who are merciful to others. But likewise we may also conclude that being pure in heart or meek do not come naturally to us. Whatever our natural tendencies, though, all of the beatitudes are for all of us, and they need to be understood as a whole.

The Beatitudes are complex. They are hard to live out. But they are also very beautiful. They describe what it means to live by a set of standards, callings and attitudes that go way beyond the observation of rules or the keeping of the law. This is what life looks like when you are truly Christ-like.

In order to follow Jesus and live the Christian life we need to enter into the challenging world of the Beatitudes.

Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)

Let nothing disturb you,

Let nothing frighten you.

All things pass away:

God never changes.

Patience obtains all things.

Jane Willis

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