Blessed Are You?

the beatitudes

Introduction:

Paul Simon—
Blessed are the sat upon, spat upon, ratted on.

Matt 19:30
But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

Matt 5:7
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Sermon:

It is said: "A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew." If a preacher or a speaker does not know or understand what he or she is speaking on, then there is almost no hope for the audience. Speaking coaches PREACH on the need to have a point … a main point … one that is heard and understood by the hearers beyond anything else that is said. Sometimes a speaker will say the main point repeatedly, others will hide it strategically until the very end, and still others will begin their sermon with it.

I take a different approach… I want you to figure it out.

Jesus, in what is often called the "Sermon on the Mount" where we find our "Beatitudes," makes it quite clear what his main point is:

> Matt 4:17
> *From that time on Jesus began to preach: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*

Jesus is preaching on the present availability of the kingdom of God through a personal relationship to Jesus.

Here it is!! he says.
Pay attention!!
This is what you have been waiting for!!
The kingdom of heaven is at hand!!

And so he did what any great spiritual leader does: He preached.

Right before his sermon, Jesus had ministered directly to the needs of the people crowding around him…

He healed the sick.
He healed the demon-possessed.
He healed those who had seizures.
He healed the paralyzed.

Then Jesus was moved to teach.

And so begins what we call the Beatitudes:
Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted.

The Beatitudes, along with the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer, have became prescriptive for our lives as followers of Jesus the Christ. And yet… I feel like we have applied the "blesseds" inappropriately.

Before you abandon ship mentally… stay with me…

Typically, a speaker begins a sermon with an illustration to grab the attention of the audience. It also serves to focus the audience's thinking down a certain line of thought and application.

I think the Beatitudes are no different. To strive to be poor in spirit, meek, merciful, a peacemaker, or persecuted for righteousness is to drastically miss the use of the "blesseds."

The Beatitudes, in particular, are not teaching on how to be blessed. They are not instructions to do anything. They do not indicate conditions that are especially pleasing to God or good for human beings.

The "blesseds" are explanations and illustrations, which are drawn from the immediate setting of the present availability of the kingdom of God through a personal relationship to Jesus (remember Jesus' main point?). They are concrete examples from the "crowd" to the availability of the kingdom of God to everyone.

The list of "blesseds" is especially unique. They refer to those who are written off by society… lost causes… unworthy. Jesus is driving home a theme we touched on by the Scripture passages that were read:

God's hand lifting up those cast down and casting down those lifted up in the human scheme.

You may be thinking: Okay, Jeremy, interesting thoughts…
But how does this all apply to the Beatitudes?
And even more, how does that apply to us?!

The Beatitudes do this simply by taking those, who from the human point of view, are regarded as most hopeless, most beyond all possibility of God's blessing or even interest and exhibiting them as enjoying God's touch and abundant provision from the kingdom of heaven.

NO HUMAN CONDITION EXCLUDES BLESSEDNESS.
(Remember: these are illustrations and examples, not telling us to be those things.)

Blessed are the written off:
(follow with me on your sheet)

1) Blessed are the poor, or poor in spirit
    a. Those who are not rich, or the spiritually bankrupt
    b. The kingdom is available to you!

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

2) Blessed are those who mourn, or the weeping ones
    a. Those who have been through the death of a loved one, the loss of a mate and suffering from rejection, or the loss of a "secure" job or investment (so many things to break the heart!)
    b. As they see the kingdom in Jesus, enter it and learn to live in it, they find comfort and their tears turn to laughter

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted / for they will laugh.

3) Blessed are the meek
    a. The shy ones, the intimidated, the mild, the unassertive
    b. As the kingdom of heaven enfolds them, the whole earth is theirs

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

4) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness
    a. Those who burn with desire for things to be made right
        i. Either by the wrong you have done
        ii. Or you have been wronged
    b. The kingdom of heaven has a way of transforming and redeeming the past, thus restoring our soul and fill us with the goodness of rightness

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.

5) Blessed are the pure in heart
    a. The ones for whom nothing is good enough (not even themselves); the perfectionists; they are never satisfied
    b. And yet the kingdom is even open to them, and there at last they will find something that satisfies their pure heart – they will see God

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

6) Blessed are the peacemakers…
    a. They are always in the middles, neither side trusting you because they know you are looking at both sides and you cannot possibly be on their side – a policeman
    b. In the kingdom, bringing good to people who are in the wrong (as both sides usually are!), you show the divine family resemblance

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

7) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake
    a. Those who are attacked because of their stand for what is right, their lives ruined or killed – an often terrible, yet righteous position to be in
    b. The kingdom of the heavens embraces those and allows them to enjoy a blessed life, in their kingdom

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is proclaiming blessing to those who are written off, the lost causes, the unworthy. And in Luke, he proclaims woes to those who are regarded as well off.

Jesus is opening the kingdom of God to everyone.

How does this apply to us today?

[contextualized]

1) Blessed are the homosexuals and lesbians… for they shall be made whole.
2) Blessed are the gang members… for they shall be made a part of the family of God.
3) Blessed are the Ojibawe Native Americans… for they shall hold a great Pow-wow in the kingdom.
4) Blessed is the forgotten… for they shall be lifted up before all creation as a child of God.

Or how about these…

Blessed are the physically repulsive,
Blessed are those who smell bad,
The twisted, misshapen, deformed,
The too big, too little, too loud,
The bald, the fat, and the old—

For they are all riotously celebrated in the party of Jesus!

Or how about these…

The flunk-outs and drop-outs and burned-outs.
The broke and the broken.
The drug heads and the divorced.
The HIV-positive and the herpes-ridden.
The brain-damaged, the incurably ill.
The barren and the pregnant too-many-times or at the wrong time.
The over-employed, the under-employed, the unemployed.
The unemployable.
The swindled, the shoved aside, the replaced.
The lonely, the incompetent, the stupid.
The emotionally starved or emotionally dead.
And on and on and on…

Or how about these…

Murderers and child-molesters.
The brutal and the bigoted.
Drug lords and pornographers.
War criminals and sadists.
Terrorists.
The perverted and the filthy.

Sometimes, I feel I do not really want the kingdom to be open to such people…
But it is…
That is the heart of God.

1 Cor 6:10
9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

If I, as a recovering sinner myself, accept Jesus' good news (the kingdom that is available to everyone), I can go to the mass murderer and say,

> "You can be blessed in the kingdom of the heavens. There is forgiveness that knows no limits."

To the pederast and the perpetrator of incest.
To the worshiper of Satan.
To those who rob the aged and weak.
To the cheat and the liar,
The bloodsucker and the vengeful:

Blessed! Blessed! Blessed! As they flee into the arms of the kingdom of God!

> 2 Cor 5:16-17
> *16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

Jesus' proclamation clearly dumped them out of their privileged position and raised ordinary people with no human qualities into the divine fellowship by faith in Jesus.

What a scandal! The kingdom is available to all!

I have left one thing out.

> Matt 5:7
> *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*

Well, against all conventional wisdom and what they teach you in Bible College about teaching…

I'm going to let you figure that one out amongst yourselves.

Remember, the kingdom of God is available to everyone … especially to those we, as a society, write off.

Let's pray…