



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do
Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network Spiritual Guidelines

Teaching on the Kingdom The Sermon on the Mount (i)

'Blessed are you!'

(Matthew 5.3-12; Luke 6:20-23)

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The records in the Gospels of Jesus' teaching in both Matthew and Luke, start with what we have come to know as 'The Sermon on the Mount' although sometimes it is referred to in Luke's version as 'The Sermon on the Plain' possibly because it was a level place where many could gather (Luke 6.17). The Church of the Beatitudes in Galilee marks the traditional location for both these events. But because of the similarity in the teaching they are thought to be different records of the same event - although this teaching would no doubt have been given many times.

Early Ministry

Both Gospels record that Jesus was already well known as a teacher and a healer, that he had drawn together a number to be his disciples and also that he had quite a following as he had travelled *'throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and illness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralysed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him'* (Matthew 4.23-25).

Luke in particular records that following all this activity he went up the mountain to pray and spend time alone with God, his father (Luke 6.12). When he came back his newly appointed disciples were keen to hear him and eager to know what being a disciple meant and they were joined by many others from the crowds who had been following him and he began to teach them. His instructions later to his disciples were that they were to *'go and make disciples of all nations.....teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you'* (The Great Commission Matthew 26.19-20)

Preaching the Good News

His message was essentially a call to repentance with an emphasis upon the need to change their thinking to receive the full blessing. The fact that this was an outdoor event - on a mountainside meant that it was open to all - the message was not just to be heard in the synagogues and holy places, but could be heard anywhere.

It was also an exposition of the Hebraic law and had many similarities with Hebraic teaching which Matthew Henry's commentary confirms *'it was upon a mountain the law was given; and this was also a solemn promulgation of the Christian law'*. But

Matthew 5:3-12

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

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

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

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

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Luke 6:20-23

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

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

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

Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

Henry also observes the difference:

'when the law was given, the Lord came down upon the mountain; now the Lord went up: then, he spoke in thunder and lightning; now, in a still small voice: then the people were ordered to keep their distance; now they are invited to draw near: a blessed change!'

Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven?

Jesus was keen to introduce his listeners to a different Kingdom which he contrasted to their understanding of the worldly Kingdom in which they were living. Although there is a discussion on the meaning of terms, most theologians agree that the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven are synonymous terms: Matthew, as a Jew speaking to Jews who deemed God's name too holy to pronounce, used the term Kingdom of Heaven 32 times in his Gospel and it appears nowhere else, while Luke as a Gentile speaking to Gentiles was not so hesitant so he uses the term Kingdom of God - and this term appears 68 times - more than twice as many. This 'Sermon' contains many stories and examples which would have brought it alive and added understanding and meaning to his listeners.

Beatitudes

Both Matthew and Luke record that he started his public teaching with the Beatitudes or Blessings - a series of attributes to citizens of the Kingdom. The versions appearing in both Matthew and Luke are similar although Luke's version is rather abridged. Matthew lists 8 or possibly 10 Blessings and Luke picks 4 of these and follows it with 4 Woes - which show the misery which will come to those who did not accept them as Blessings.

The term beatitude comes from the Latin noun *beatitudo* which means "happiness". Each sounds like a cryptic, precise proverb which is full of meaning. Each starts with a condition which would have been familiar to Hebraic listeners as they all have an Old Testament context. Jesus then gives it a new interpretation that sets out the Christian ideals focusing on a spirit of love, humility and brotherly love which reflect the teachings of Jesus on mercy, spirituality, and compassion.

Each of the conditions would show people who in a worldly sense were to be pitied. But Jesus showed that if they accepted his teaching as good news and applied it to themselves, then in Kingdom terms they would be blessed and a happy people (suffering saints). Those described by Jesus in this passage have a different quality of character and lifestyle than those still "outside the kingdom." Their inner person would be transformed and they would have peace in the midst of the trials and tribulations on this earth - and they would also receive a future hope in the Kingdom of God. It really was turning the values of the world upside down!

*This paper comes to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in September 2016
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