

# THE BEATITUDES OF JESUS

Matthew 5: 1-12

## INTRODUCTION

“You are walking along a narrow road that climbs steadily upward. You are one of many who go that Way – old and young, strong and halting. Far ahead, obscured as if by mists and clouds, is your goal. From time to time some of you catch glimpses of it. It is a city of indescribable beauty, where all hungers are appeased and all sorrows end. It is your heart’s true home. You name it for one another in different ways: the Promised Land, the Kingdom of Heaven, the City of God, the New Jerusalem. In this you are all agreed: It promises a far better future than the present place you occupy.

To encourage one another you sing the praises of the city in familiar hymns: “Lift every voice and sing,” “Jerusalem the golden,” “Glorious things of Thee are spoken,”...

The journey to God’s Kingdom proves longer than you first thought. Nor is this high and narrow Way a detour around life’s difficulties. You encounter every kind of suffering known to humans: pandemic, racial injustice, extreme weather events, war, hunger, thirst, sickness, pain, sorrow, temptation, anxiety, depression. Sometimes you quarrel; often you weep; occasionally you despair.

From time to time you come upon side roads. Many of these are broad, inviting boulevards that lead down and away from the Way. There is talk among you of the bliss that might be found at the end of these roads, but the wise among you warn that they will prove to be dead end streets.

You are often tempted to turn back. There is no gate or barrier to prevent you. But when you turn around and look back, you see an empty cross. Its shadow falls across the way you have come. Everything you have experienced is covered by that shadow.

As people do who travel together on long journeys, you tell one another stories. You like to hear about other pilgrims who have gone this Way before. Above all you want to hear about the hero who blazed this trail. For you are his followers. You are comforted, exhorted, enlightened by signs that he has left for you along the Way. They bear such messages as these:

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

Blessed are the merciful,

for they will receive mercy.

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

This long quote is taken from John Purdy’s study of the Beatitudes, and it captures beautifully the sense of journey in them. Life is a journey. But what do we need spiritually to sustain, direct, inspire and transform us as we journey?

The beatitudes are the opening verses of three chapters of core teaching of Jesus known as the “Sermon on the Mount.” In Matthew’s gospel account, they are equivalent to the 10 commandments given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. Jesus speaks divine words as Moses received divine words.

But what do they mean? This is where there is much misunderstanding. In the next 6 sessions, beginning next week, we have the opportunity to reflect on the beatitudes more deeply, so that we may wrestle some deeper meaning out of them for our living today on our life journey.

To prepare for this series of meditations and bible study beginning next week, read Matthew 5: 1-12, and if you want to go further, read Matthew chapters 5-7, which is the full ‘sermon on the mount’. Some parts of this ‘sermon’ will be a challenge for you. It begins with the beatitudes and ends with the image of life as a house. Is your life built on a spiritual foundation of sand or one that is rock solid? Does it bend with the wind and grow stronger with every weather event of life or does it fall apart over and over again? Embracing the Way described in the sermon is intended to lead to building your life on a solid spiritual foundation that will help you bend with the storms of life and keep growing through them.

For Next Wednesday: Meditate on Matthew 5:3 in particular: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.