

Matthew 5:1-10

Beatitudes

Part of Jesus's sermon on the mount.

The gospel writer draws various parallels between Jesus and Moses. Jesus the fulfilment of the law and prophets. Moses and Elijah are seen as the prime among the law givers and prophets. During their lifetime they received the law and God's messages on mountains and gave it to the people. Now Jesus who is the fulfilment of the Law and Prophets does the same. Later we see transfiguration of Jesus also happens on the mountain accompanied by Moses and Elijah.

The beatitudes are 8 statements made by Jesus that proclaim who are the blessed. They show the character traits of people who are blessed by God. When Jesus says "blessed are they," He is not only describing them as being filled with an inner sense of joy and peace because they are right with God, but He is praising them for their character and pledging divine rewards for it. Although they are addressed to the people assembled on the mountain, like the Torah, they are addressed to people of all times.

The socio-cultural injustice of the time. Under Roman dominion. The empire didn't care for the people but exploited them and their resources. The Roman soldiers were known to be brutes hardened by war. Heavy tax through a system of tax collectors. Withing the

Jewish society the rich exploited the poor. The religious class sided with the rich and corrupted religion for profit.

That is why in society there were people who were oppressed, impoverished, intimidated, cheated and persecuted. People were hungering and thirsting not only for food and water but also righteousness and justice.

The Beatitude statements are counter cultural, in the sense that, we would consider people with such characters as unfortunate; but Jesus calls them blessed. Because such people are precious to God and God is with them. They are not conditions of salvation or a set of rules to earn entry to God's kingdom. Rather these are traits of those who experience the grace of God. Consider the second beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4). People do not normally think of mourning as a blessing. It is a sorrow. But with the coming of the kingdom of heaven, mourning becomes a blessing because the mourners "will be comforted." The implication is that God himself will do the comforting. The affliction of mourning becomes the blessing of profound relationship with God. That is a blessing indeed!

1. Poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

These are the people who acknowledge their spiritual and moral inadequacy before God. And realize they are inadequate in themselves without God. Infact they need God's grace for all spheres of daily living. That arouses in them the character of being humble. That humility makes

them respectful towards God and humans and also keeps them learning and growing.

Luke 18:9-14 parable of tax collector and pharisee.

Being poor in spirit makes us rich in God's grace.

2. Those who mourn for they will be comforted.

Those who mourn are those who are thrown into sorrow due to the brokenness of the world. They lament their own sins as well as the sins of the world. They could be sorrowful due to their own afflictions and also due to the afflictions faced by others. During this pandemic time, we are made conscious of various sorrows. People who lose their job and face an uncertain future. People who need urgent medical care and are unable to do so. People who cannot attend the funerals of their loved ones. Those who are stuck in foreign countries without a job or income. The poor and homeless for whom social distancing is not a choice and are most vulnerable. The cry of the earth that is slowly limping back to normalcy. The cry of the earth.

Illus – Ashraf Thamarassery,

A respected man in the eyes of the Indian community in UAE, a personal appreciation from Modi, access to all embassies in UAE, a Padmashri nomination by India. There are 4 books written on his life, a documentary and a movie in the making. Numerous awards from the Government of Dubai, the police and a honorary doctorate. What has he done for him to earn all this. A man in dubai in his 50s who is known for a very different service he

renders. He is a volunteer who helps in repatriation of dead bodies of migrant workers from UAE. Some are too poor to afford embalming and transport to their home country. Some don't know the procedures. Some don't have anybody to help them. Sometimes there is nobody to claim the body.

Ashraf came to Dubai in 1998 and soon established himself as a garage owner. In the year 2000, Ashraf was visiting a friend in hospital when he found 2 malayalis in their 30s crying because their father had died and they were without any means to carry his body to Kollam in Kerala. Ashraf had pity and helped them through various procedures. Soon various people in need began contacting him and he took it up as a full-time voluntary work without any compensation. The cry of the migrant in a foreign country who works and dies trying to feed his family is what moves Ashraf to give up his garage and devote himself fully to this task. Ashraf has repatriated more than 5000 bodies to 38 countries. His selfless work might not have earned him any money. a man whose posts were recently in the news after the Indian Government denied permission to receive bodies of expatriates to India during the pandemic. He lobbied against it in the Supreme Court and finally the Indian Government agreed to it. Earlier he lobbied against the practice of a hefty sum charged by aircraft carriers based on the weight of the dead body and filed a petition in the Supreme Court and he finally won relief for family members of the dead. He empathized with the pain of their loved ones.

Blessed are those who mourn, they will be comforted.

3. The meek for they shall inherit the earth

Many assume the term means weak, tame, or deficient in courage. But the biblical understanding of meekness is power under control. In the Old Testament, Moses was described as the meekest man on earth (Numbers 12:3, KJV). Jesus described himself as “meek and lowly” (Matt. 11:28-29, KJV), which was consistent with his vigorous action in cleansing the temple (Matt. 21:12-13).

Power under God’s control means two things: (1) refusal to inflate our own self-estimation; and (2) reticence to assert ourselves for ourselves. Paul captures the first aspect perfectly in Romans 12:3. “For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” Meek people see themselves as servants of God, not thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. To be meek is to accept our strengths and limitations for what they truly are, instead of constantly trying to portray ourselves in the best possible light. But it does not mean that we should deny our strengths and abilities. When asked if he was the Messiah, Jesus replied, “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me” (Matt. 11:4-6). He had neither an inflated self-image nor an inferiority complex, but a

servant’s heart based on what Paul would later call “sober judgment” (Romans 12:3).

4. Hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled

Jewish understanding of righteousness – obedience to the Law. The religious elites manipulated these laws for their advantage. Jesus demanded something more than the religious elites. Not defined by these rules but by being set right in relationship with God. That righteousness will make us repair our relationship with fellow humans too.

I have often cited the example of Joseph choosing to marry Mary and Jesus choosing to forgive the sinful woman as an example of righteousness above the law. Beyond legalistic terms that would destroy humanity, this righteousness would restore humanity.