

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1: 26–31

Last week, Paul was speaking to the Corinthian Church about their disagreements and divisions. He appealed to them to be reconciled; to be united in *'the same mind and the same judgement'*. He was speaking of his mission to preach the Good News brought about by the crucifixion of Christ.

This week Paul entreats the Christians of Corinth to look at themselves. Who are those making up their Church? The answer is the lowly and poor; slaves; Gentiles; those whom most people would call foolish and weak. Being a Christian is a new way of being human; it is not a reward for a privileged life, nor a compensation for a deprived one. It may seem paradoxical. Our social status in the world is meaningless compared to our standing before God.

In Christ we are set apart. We have *wisdom*: we are not controlled by evil. We have *righteousness*: we are at one with God. We have *sanctification and redemption*. All these achievements do not come from any particular effort we have made; they are God-given graces. Paul is well aware that these were the very accomplishments which both Greek and Jews yearned for. It is his way of answering the self-important cliques which caused disunity in Corinth. No one needs to boast; all they have comes from God through Christ.

Paul concludes this section by a free quotation from the prophet Jeremiah (9: 23-4):

*Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,
let not the mighty man boast in his might,
let not the rich man boast in his riches,
but let him who boasts boast in this,
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the Lord who practises
steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth .*

Gospel Matthew 5: 1–12 The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is the first of the five discourses which are a central part of Matthew's Gospel. The beginning of the Sermon, which we now know as 'The Beatitudes', summarises the values of the Kingdom of God.

Matthew has nine Beatitudes, in contrast to the four from Luke's 'Sermon on the Plain' (Luke 6: 20-22), though Luke has a rather different emphasis. Matthew here focuses on the spiritual qualities of all who enter the Kingdom, and the rewards of true discipleship, suggested in the second part of each verse.



James Tissot (c.1886-94), *The Master teaches his disciples*. (Wikimedia Commons)

Jesus sits down to teach

This is a significant detail: when a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially, he sat down. When Matthew uses the word 'taught' he uses a particular past tense, which in Greek means that Jesus's teaching was repeated and habitual.

The Sermon on the Mount was not one sermon, but rather the essence of all that Jesus taught throughout his ministry.

The Beatitudes

The word 'beatitude' comes from the Latin *beatus*, meaning blessed or happy. This comes from the Greek *makarios*, which specially describes the gods. Thus there is a godlike joy in the people Matthew is describing. It is something they already have, rather than something they hope to achieve in the future. In effect, Jesus is saying that there is great joy in living out the values of the Kingdom, values the world finds difficult to accept and understand.

Matthew was writing for a Jewish-Christian audience where those in his community lived by edicts and rules of the Jewish Law. The Beatitudes point to awareness of spiritual need, humility, peaceful living, moral living, and compassion as the keys to happiness.

Most of all, Matthew's Beatitudes see Christian witness as the core of a happy life.