

ROYAL SIGHTING !

CROWDS



PAPPARAZZI

THE ROYAL



3 occurrences



But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.

²⁵ Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

²⁶ Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

Context



Directed to the disciples and crowds gathered – receives far less attention than the sermon on the mount. Luke reports these blessings more plainly and straightforwardly than Mathew does. Poor rather than “ poor in spirit”, hunger rather than “ hunger and thirst for righteousness”. Luke also includes a list of counter vows which Mathew does not. The thrust of the passage, however, is the same. Jesus is explaining that God's blessing for those who follow Him will often mean suffering now, but glory and comfort in the Kingdom to come. Those who seek their comfort and pleasure in this life here and now may appear to be blessed, but in fact, they are to be pitied because in the age to come they will find nothing but weeping, suffering, and want. IT WAS INTENDED TO BE A SOCIAL SERMON AND A GUIDE TO “KINGDOM LIVING”

Sermon on the Mount
(Mathew 5 – 7)

- Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God
- Those who mourn, for they shall be comforted
- Those who hunger (and thirst after righteousness) for they shall be satisfied.
- Those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you men insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely because of me. Rejoice for great is your reward in heaven
- No woes

Sermon on the Plain
(Luke 6: 20-49)

- Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God
- Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh
- Blessed are you who hunger now for you shall be satisfied
- Blessed are you when men hate you
- 4 different woes – Rich, Well Fed, those who laugh, those spoken well of

WOES - But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.

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Reading this account of the well know beatitudes made me to wonder as to the almost obvious harshness to it all and why did God have to direct them to his disciples?

What is the **focus** on?

Blessedness

Suffering/ Hardship !

Eternity / "Kingdom Living"

You will find a Christian value system, an outline of how we are to live, a description of religious devotion and what's to be our relationship with money. While speaking on such themes as ambition, popularity, criticism and handling the thorniest of relationships Jesus does so in a way that is utterly at variance with the beliefs of our peer groups and the in-crowd. Christ is out of step with what the students and staff at the university, the gangs that go from pub to club in the nights and the media pundits whom we let into our living rooms all judge to be the life-fulfilling and life-enhancing way, or as he describes it, the 'blessed' life. Here we find the alternative society to the one that dominates the world today. Here is the Christian counter-culture, life lived in the kingdom of God. It is by living consistently in this way that his disciples will become the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

We are told by Luke that the crowds had begun to travel considerable distances, walking for a day or two to hear Christ speak. The previous night the Lord Jesus had spent in communion with God before he chose the twelve apostles. Then that morning he called the disciples to him and announced the names of the twelve. Then he led them some distance down the mountain until he came to a level place by which time the greatest crowd he'd ever addressed gathered to hear him. There must have been thousands there who had come not only from all over Judea and from Jerusalem but from the coastal area where the Gentiles lived, Tyre and Sidon. There

were many sick among them and he healed them all, and he delivered others from evil spirits. Confused and desperate people pressed through the crowd to get close to him to touch the hem of his garment. Then when all their expectations had been satisfied and some order having been obtained – the sick healed, the demon-possessed delivered – Jesus settled and silenced them all, turned to his own disciples and began to preach this message to them in particular, but in the hearing of the entire crowd. We are told that fact at the end of the sermon.

There were some in the gathering who considered a prophet preaching about the arrival of the kingdom of God to be irresistible. Some were hoping for a Messiah who would drive the hated Roman overlords into the Mediterranean and free them from servitude. Others thought that when the Messiah arrived he would reinstate the law of Moses, it would properly be observed once again, the stonings for adultery and idolatry, and all the land lying fallow every seven years, and then God's blessing would fall upon the nation; deliverance from their enemies would arise. What was Jesus going to say now? What definitive statement was he going to make about his mission and the kingdom of God? In fact he ignored the crowd, and focused all his words on the group of his disciples who'd been following him for months and who gathered there at the front. Soon they all discovered that his kingdom was like nothing else on earth, and it was certainly unlike anything the groups in the crowd were looking for.

1. JESUS SPOKE ABOUT BLESSEDNESS.

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Lk. 6:20). Let me begin by emphasizing that Christ is not giving the world his prescription for happiness – "You all follow this teaching and you'll feel so good! Here are the 'Be-happy-attitudes!" No. In fact you find no instructions about how to live. These four Beatitudes simply describe the character and characteristics of all who are genuine disciples of Jesus, that is, those who believe that Christ is God the Son and have begun to follow him. They are blessed already and Jesus is explaining to them why. It's possible to translate the word 'blessed' [makarios] as 'happy', however 'blessed' is a better translation. Jesus isn't talking about the feel-good factor, about my own 'happiness', but about the new status of the people who are loved by God, believing men and women who live their entire lives from here to eternity under the blessing of God. They know God's grace and favour day after day. How such people should be envied and congratulated. What a privilege they have! That blessedness doesn't consist of their feelings, but what God has done for them here and now, and what he will yet do for them in the new heavens and earth. They're a blessed people – as we want you also to be blessed should you become a follower of Jesus Christ . . . and why not? And why not soon? Why not today? Then you too will be surprised by blessedness.

That is how the word 'blessed' is used in the Old Testament. It is the opening word in the book of Psalms; "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But

his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:1&2). Or again in Psalm 32, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (Psa. 32:172). We could trace such a theme throughout the Bible, beginning with Abraham who is promised the blessing of the Lord.

What is your own heart set on? What is vital for your life and character? What four blessings would you want to know this year? Where particularly do you want growth of character? Where do you want to be stronger and healthier in your soul? What do you want to see developing in your life? Does your desire include humility of spirit (“Yes, that is what I want and need”), a hunger to be like God (“Yes”), a sorrow for sin (“Yes”). Do you want a godliness distinguishing you from the sin-loving world around you which must result in men hating all you stand for, but you’ve made your mind up, this one thing you’ll do. You have counted the cost and you are willing to suffer for the Son of Man, saying “For to me to live is Christ.” Is that what you want? Isn’t that what you should want? Do you see that that is the only blessed life? No happiness in mere self. Blessed are the poor. It starts there. Jesus goes on to say that all other supposed blessings bring woe. He is talking about the people who think they’ve got everything, who are always joking and laughing, people whom everyone speaks well of – “Woe to you!” said Jesus (vv.24-26). Such people face a life of increasing disappointment. The only life that God blesses is the one marked by God’s values. Do we live in a nation of blessedness? Is that how you would describe our land today? People searched for blessedness in the wrong place doing the wrong thing. “Where can I find happiness?” they ask. “That’s what life is all about . . . that’s what really matters. I have a right to happiness.” Many seek it in a relationship while others seek it in divorce. Some think an increase in salary will bring it, others seek it in a virtual vow of poverty living far from everyone. Some head for life’s fast lane, others take a more relaxed country route. Some try to eat their way to happiness, others try to find it in dieting. O how elusive is this happiness. The late Bernard Levin was one of the most admired columnists in England, moving at the highest levels of media and entertainment and political people. He said, “Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, yet they lead lives of quiet (and sometimes noisy) desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside them that however much food and drink they pour into it, however many motor cars and television sets they stuff it with, however many well-balanced children and loyal friends they parade around the edges of it . . . it aches.” It is unattainable to man, he believes. Nothing really matters, sang Queen. There is no such thing as blessedness.

The Lord Jesus tells us where blessedness can be infallibly found. He guarantees it: “Blessed are you . . .” he says. He makes it so personal to his disciples. I know this blessedness; so have many of you, and we’ve come across thousands of others who’ve also known blessedness.

2. JESUS DESCRIBED THE BLESSED PERSON AS 'POOR.'

That is how this sermon begins, as does the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter five. "Looking at his disciples, he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'" (v.20). Realising your own poverty is the key to grasping what blessedness really is. Jesus is looking at his own disciples as he says these words. They have given up everything and are following him; "Blessed are you who are poor," he tells them. He is not addressing the materially poor. He is not saying to the slum dwellers with their corrugated iron shacks and open sewers and no running water and no electricity, "No! He is not telling those who have lost everything in the terrible cyclones that they are the blessed ones. There are those beggars who live their lives on the streets, thousands of street children, fighting off predators night and day. They are not blessed in possessing nothing. Jesus does not taunt such people by saying that their penury is a happy state. We have all talked to men who wanted money from us but who refused to listen to the good news of Jesus, saying, "We don't need God," but they do! All creatures need the blessed God. Again, when Jesus says, "poor" he doesn't mean a person lacking intelligence and plain sagacity. He is not referring to those who are suppressing their personalities.

Consider a man like the apostle Peter, a naturally assertive and confident man, a leader and spokesman for others not as gifted, a man who believed in himself, a typical popular man looked up to in our modern world. Yet see Peter when he's realised who and what the Lord is, Jehovah incarnate. "Depart for me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," he cries, falling before him. What a change has taken place in his life, but Peter never ceased to be a leader, and a bold man. He did not become a nervous and diffident fellow. No, he does not change in that way. The essential personality remains and yet Peter knows he is poor as he considers himself, "a sinful man" – that is how he sees himself.

In the Old Testament the word 'poor' is almost a technical term for a particular group of people. Psalm 34 and verse six speaks about "this poor man" who called on the Lord and he was heard and was saved. "I am poor and needy," says the writer of Psalm 40 in verse seventeen. He asked the Lord to remember him and deliver him – and he was lifted up. Such people are weak and helpless, dispossessed of anything to commend themselves to Jehovah, with no resources to defend and save themselves. They are people who cast themselves on God as their only refuge and strength and salvation. They are bankrupt in their own eyes and in the judgment of the world. They put all their trust in the Lord as the one who is certain to protect and deliver them. Childless Hannah, the hunted fugitive David, the wrongfully arrested Joseph, the prophet Jeremiah put into the muddy depths of a cistern, Daniel being thrown to the lions, Jonah swallowed by a great fish, Stephen being stoned to death, Paul being abandoned by all the Asian churches – they were men and women who all

acknowledged that they were in a poor and needy state. They all had come to cast themselves on God who became their refuge and strength. These are the poor.

Again, think of the people of God in exile in Babylon. They have lost their land and their homes, their city and their temple. They have been driven like sheep for five hundred miles east to Babylon as prisoners of war and a plentiful supply of slaves, and there they fear they are going to end their days. They hang their harps on the willows and they weep. Their only hope is in the Lord. Oh that he would deliver them! Oh that he would save them and re-establish them in his kingdom. They continue to look to him; they bring their poverty to him. They are utterly dependent on him for a return to the land of promise. They are the poor ones.

Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood” (Ez. 16:4). What poor people! They owed absolutely everything to the Lord who said to them, “Live!” To him alone their life was due. Do you remember how the Lord Jesus impresses this on the people when he places a helpless child in their midst and tells them that unless they became like a child they could not enter the kingdom of God? What is the one undeniable fact about a child? Its vulnerability. There is no way it can survive without a protective figure showing mercy and love and saying, “Live!” and ensuring that it does. So it is with us. Without God’s grace we are the poorest people.

In the Matthew version of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus expands this word ‘poor’ with the additional words, “in spirit.” In other words our Lord is affirming that he is referring to **an inward state of mind, a heart attitude**. This poverty **has no reference to our overdraft**. It is not talking about the people who go to the Citizen’s Advice Bureau about their debt. Here are people who have come to see **themselves in need of life deliverance**, and they are **looking to the Lord Jesus Christ for his help**. They are prepared to give up everything that’s necessary in order to have him. For example, they are aware of their great ignorance in answering the big questions of life, “Why am I here? What is the meaning of life? What is the good life? How can I know God? What is death? What lies beyond it? Can I be sure that I’m going to be annihilated when I breathe my last? Is there a heaven? What must I do to be saved?” They’ve gone in and into their hearts, but they can’t find any answers to those question within themselves, but here is the extraordinary One who preached the Sermon on the Mount and they ask him those question and they look for answers in what he says in the New Testament. We have a comprehensive record of his words. So here are people who know that they themselves are poor, but he is rich in knowledge and wisdom. **They are people who are conscious that they are facing the future alone, without a good shepherd to guide and protect them. There is that hole inside them which aches.**

More than that, they feel themselves to be poor in virtue. There are those others whom they’ve hurt; there are words and actions they’re deeply ashamed of, and they

know what they've done is inexcusable. They cannot eradicate them, and the more they try the more they remember! But Jesus' life is peerless. There is a fragrance and beauty about everything Jesus is, and they are drawn to him in their moral poverty. They feel in themselves they are condemned and their only hope is in the pity of God.

Isn't it crucial to have a true view of ourselves?

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die." (A.M. Toplady).

Again, later in this gospel in chapter eighteen Jesus told of an incident he had observed in the temple, and it perfectly casts light on this first beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. Men had entered the temple to pray and Jesus spotted two in particular. One was a Pharisee, a man who strove for religion and moral living and this man prided himself that he'd got there. The other was one of many tax collectors of that time, despised because they collected hated taxes from their fellow countrymen on behalf of the Romans. They were covetous hirelings who'd got a well earned reputation for extortion. The Pharisee stood in a place that everyone could see him, and in a loud prayer he paraded his virtues before all who could hear him: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (Luke 18:11,12). Not much poverty of spirit there! Then the tax collector prayed, and he behaved very differently. He was a chastened and humbled man. Here was someone whose conscience refused to be stifled. He stood apart from other people. He couldn't even lift his head and look up to God. He hit his chest savagely in self hatred for the miserable life he'd led. He said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). Better, "God, have mercy on me . . . sinner!" that is, the sinner. He wasn't thinking of himself as one sinner among many . . . "Well, we're all sinners." No it wasn't like that. There is no comfort to our conscience in acknowledging that others are in the same mess we're in. He was aware that he was the one who had to answer to God for his life; he was the one under the divine spotlight, who had to deal with God. He was so overwhelmed with the sense of his sin, his moral bankruptcy and his spiritual destitution that, as far as he was concerned, anyone else's sin paled into insignificance in comparison. What did they matter to him? He felt his own great guilt and shame. In other words, here is the kind of man whom Jesus is describing at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, a man who knows that he's 'poor in spirit', and so he is taking these first steps into the blessed life. A revolution has taken place in his life; he has been converted. There is no other way to blessedness except through the door marked, "Poor in Spirit." The Lord concludes his recollection of that

incident by telling us that the tax-collector 'went home justified before God' (Luke 18:14). He did! He alone did. Not the religious Pharisee.

God answers the tax-collector's plea for mercy through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the only way. There is a marvelous summary of Jesus' whole journey from heaven to earth in these unforgettable words of Paul, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). What a journey he made to help us, from the eternal glory, down and down he came, to incarnation in the virgin's womb, to the humiliation of silent years in the insignificant hillside cluster of little houses in Nazareth, then his baptism and ministry preaching all over Galilee and Jerusalem, to the lash and the nails and the spear thrust that ended in life on the cross, and finally to burial in the tomb. What a journey he made. He'd been so rich, and yet what depths of poverty he experienced hanging naked suspended by nails driven through his hands and feet on a cross. He couldn't even call the nails his own – what poverty he took, and he did that for our sake. That is what Paul says. He had deliberately laid aside the blessings of the heaven we long for that they might become ours as a gift, something he purchased for us by his humiliation. That is how the poor become rich. Have you seen it? If you have then you are blessed.

So am I like that? "How do I really feel about my life as I think of myself in terms of God, and in the presence of God, and as I live my life? What are the things that I am saying, what are the things that I am praying about? What are the things I like to think of with regard to myself? What a poor thing it is, this boasting of the things that are accidental and for which I am not responsible, this boasting of things that are artificial and that will count as nothing at the great day when we stand in the presence of God. This poor self!

That hymn of Lavater's puts it perfectly: 'Make this poor self grow less and less,' and 'O Jesus Christ, grow thou in me'

3. JESUS DECLARED THAT THE POOR WOULD GAIN THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

"For yours is the kingdom of God" (v.20). Our God actually reigns. His is not a symbolic monarchy but an actual monarchy. He has power, illimitable power, and he exercises it everywhere, in heaven, but on earth too. Over men, over the angels and over the powers of darkness. At his decree angels fly and do his bidding. At his will the sparrow falls to the ground. In the beginning he said, "Let there be light" and there was light. His power is undiminished today. He is the good Shepherd of his flock. He ensures that not one of them will perish. He has laid down his life for the sheep and now he lives to keep each one of them. His kingdom is one of grace. It is surrounded by great walls and ditches. All who are in the kingdom are kept by the power of God through faith for their ultimate and perfect salvation.

Are you in that kingdom? There is one mark that you indeed have entered it, and that is that you confess to God your own poverty of spirit. You protest, "But I don't know if I am poor and needy enough." None of us is poor enough, but that is not what kingdom life is all about. It is about going to God and saying, "I can only bring you my sin, nothing else at all with which to buy or earn my entry into your kingdom. My hope is this, that Jesus Christ has done everything to obtain my entrance. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let me in. He has done that, so please let me come in, for Jesus' sake."

Our Saviour had to tell a religious man called Nicodemus that there was one thing preventing him entering the kingdom of God. It was a divine birth. Unless he was born again he could not enter the kingdom of God. That birth makes us poor enough in spirit and longing enough for God to reign over us and keep us for the rest of our lives.



The
COUNTER
CULTURE
Christian

How do we **COUNTER** our **CULTURE**?

How can we go from being "**CITIZENS**" of a nation to "**Ambassadors**" for the **GREAT KINGDOM**?

How can we live the "**KINGDOM LIFE**" – Marked by Gods values?