

THE BEATITUDES

We know the verses of Matthew 5 as 'the sermon on the mount'. Mahatma Gandhi read from it twice a day for the last 40 years of his life – and he did not claim to be a Christian. One of his sayings pierces my soul, 'I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.'

The word BEATITUDE means 'supreme blessedness'. St Gregory of Nyassa, a mystic who lived in Cappadocia c. 380 AD described the Beatitudes – *Beatitude is a possession of all things held to be good... the opposite of beatitude is misery.*

'You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.

Only then you can be fully embraced by God.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. that's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're blessed when you've worked up a god appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full' you find yourselves cared for.

You're blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart – put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution will drive you deeper into God's Kingdom.' The Message

Each beatitude has a condition and a result. The condition is mostly from an Old Testament context, but Jesus teaches a new interpretation. These eight utterances really sum up Christianity. They reflect God's universal love, seeking justice for the poor, practicing forgiveness, living in hope and trusting in the God of peace. For some, these are the most radical, political, revolutionary words ever uttered. Our world is based on hate, punish, kill your enemies. Jesus reverses the entire system. He wants us to love the people of Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti, Russia and any that the USA has targeted.

The text uses the Greek word 'agape'. Agape calls for deliberate, unconditional, non-retaliatory, sacrificial, all-encompassing, all-inclusive, nonviolent universal love. Jesus calls us to practise the unconditional love of God. Jesus was not preaching hopeless idealism. He advocated a wise strategy for living in peace. Martin Luther King said, 'Jesus is not a practical idealist; he is a practical realist. Our responsibility as Christians, is to discover the meaning of this command and seek passionately to live it out'. Nelson Mandela put it this way, 'I have never yet met an enemy who I did not try to turn into a friend.'

God loves God's enemies! This is the nature of God. God is love. Jesus wants us to be sons and daughters of our God in heaven, for God makes the sun rise on the bad and on the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' could read blessed are those who have to rely on God for every breath that they take.

'Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted' the word for comfort means that God will be on your side or alongside you.

'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth' Such people are not those who lie down for a beating but rather those who will be assured of a place with God for eternity.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.' God wants to bless us not only as individuals, but as a society.

'Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.' The Latin word for mercy 'misericordia' means moving our hearts to the situation of another.

'Blessed are the pure of heart for they will see God.' A clean or pure heart is not just free from impure thoughts but a heart that has been cleaned, consecrated and made ready to receive God's holiness.

'Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall be called the children of God.'

We are peacemakers when we try to bring others to God – thus we show that we are his children.

'Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' This beatitude praises those who can identify with Christ through suffering for him because of their own holy living.

Today we have sat with Jesus and many others on the side of a hill and heard his words of blessing. Is it so strange that Jesus exalts those whom the world generally regards as weak? 'Blessed are you who seem to be losers, because you are the true winners: the kingdom of heaven is yours!' Spoken by he who is 'gentle and humble of heart, these words represent a challenge which demand a deep and abiding change of heart.

Jesus does not merely speak the Beatitudes; he lives them. You hear his voice on this hill and you believe. Like the first disciples at the Sea of Galilee, we must leave our boats and nets behind. That is never easy when we may face an uncertain future and be tempted to lose faith in our Christian heritage. Jesus does not leave us alone to face the challenges. We are to trust him when he says, 'My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'

Loving God,

We thank you for these blessings we have probed today.

Grant us strength to live them out

having taken them in.

For Jesus sake. AMEN

