

No.2 'Who is actually blessed?'

'The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter-culture ... and this Christian counter-culture is the life of the Kingdom of God, a fully human life indeed but lived out under divine rule.' John Stott

Read Matthew 5: 1-12 Jesus' opening shot of his counter-culture Kingdom – an earth-shattering bombshell which would have amazed his audience. It was not what they expected to hear about who will inherit the Kingdom of God. He did not say - the descendants of Abraham, or the Jews, or the moral people, what he said was - people who are 'broken' people, those who recognise their need of God. *I've used the term 'broken people' – is that a fair and realistic term?*

More shocks. Jesus was effectively saying, talking in the present tense, that 'these blessings, the wonderful news that he is announcing, are not saying "try hard to live like this". They are saying that people who already are like this are in good shape. They should be happy and celebrate.' (Tom Wright) *Why would the poor in spirit, those who mourn etc have reason to celebrate? What do these conditions have in common?*

Remember last week we saw Matthew pointing us to associate this teaching with Moses. Here's one reason why. Mathew, in his Gospel so far, has detailed Jesus coming out of Egypt (2:15), through the water and the wilderness (chap 3 & 4), and into the land of promise. Now here is His new covenant – the new 'Commandments'. But it would be wrong to think of the Beatitudes as a replacement for the Ten Commandments; they are not conditions for attaining salvation, more, they declare the blessings of God's Kingdom, a declaration of God's grace. 'The beatitudes are not a judgment against all who fail to measure up. Instead, they are a blessing for any who consent to join themselves to God's kingdom as it "comes near".' (Theology of Work Project) Jesus is far greater than Moses. *Re-read the Beatitudes. Can you find anything at all judgmental or condemning? What does this say to you about the up-side-down counter-culture of the 'new way' of Jesus?*

Read 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31 How often the use of humour and irony helps to make a serious point! In this passage Paul endorses Jesus' theme of God's Kingdom is up-side-down to what most believe to be normal. *Would you agree that the current culture of Western Europe promotes – you will be blessed when you achieve success, wealth, fame, long life, victory in battle? Have I left anything out?* And, unsaid but seriously implied, you cannot expect to be blessed should you fail to succeed.

To quote Tom Wright, 'It's all about the true God [Jesus and the cross] confronting the world of posturing, power and prestige, and overthrowing it in order to set up his own Kingdom, a kingdom in which the weak and the foolish find themselves just as welcome as the strong and the wise, if not more so.' *This is the Gospel, the good news. How might this focus on the Beatitude/the Sermon impact your prayer life?*

Prayer: We acknowledge our desperate need of you, Father God. Come Holy Spirit and fill us once again.