

<p>(Matthew 4) 12 Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; ... 17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ... 23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. 24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. 25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan. (Matthew 5) 1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: 2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,</p>	<p><i>eggizó to make near, refl. to come near</i></p>	<p><i>Jesus proclaims the availability of the kingdom</i></p> <p>Jesus starts preaching after John the Baptist is taken away from the scene. His basic message was that the kingdom of the heavens was “at hand” in the sense of being “available” or “on offer” (v17). It literally means “approached” or “drew near”. But how had it approached? As a result of being publicly proclaimed and offered by Jesus.</p> <p>Up to this point, John was the dominant religious figure of the day. John’s departure marked the end of an era “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John” (Matt 11v13).</p> <p>Jesus said that “among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt 11v11). In other words, what Jesus brought in was far greater than what John’s era (the law, prophets and John) could offer.</p> <p>And people were piling into the kingdom of heaven, so much so that Jesus describes it in these terms “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matt 11v12). See Matthew 4v23-25 for a description of this happening.</p> <p>These verses emphasise the availability of the kingdom to everyone. The word “all” is frequently mentioned, a range of diseases and problems are recorded. The scope of his ministry is also highlighted: not just locally in Galilee but throughout Syria and then great followings from Galilee, the ten cities, Jerusalem, Judea and even beyond Jordan.</p> <p><i>What is the kingdom of heaven?</i></p> <p>The basic idea behind the “kingdom of heaven” is that it is a place of God’s rule or, to put it another way, a place where his will is done.</p> <p>The phrase is more literally translated the kingdom of the heavens. The sense is that the kingdom is all around us, that God is “not far from every one of us” (Acts 17v27) and accessible. As Christians, we are born from it, “from above” (John 3v3). This sense of God’s nearness is throughout the Old Testament e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hagar, where God “heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven” (Genesis 21) • Abraham, “And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven” (Genesis 22) • Jacob, “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said” (Genesis 28) • Moses, “and the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.” (Exodus 20) <p>The Lord Jesus ascended up into heaven and the Holy Spirit came from the atmosphere around about.</p> <p>The kingdom (God’s rule) has always existed but just not on earth (Matthew 6v10).</p>
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What was the main subject of his message?

He teaches how to live everyday life, dealing with issues such as:

- anger towards other people
- contempt towards other people
- mending relationships with other people
- lust
- divorce
- manipulation
- retaliation
- giving
- praying
- fasting
- physical appearance and clothes
- anxiety
- attitudes to other people
- bringing about change in people

It is our life lived in God's will. As Jesus himself demonstrated: he lived an "ordinary" life himself for 30 years and not until he had done that did he start offering it (Mark 1v14 "when the time was fulfilled [i.e. when he had lived an ordinary life]". This enabled him to "prove" his offer.

People saw that he lived in the kingdom of heaven i.e. that God ruled through him, that his life was marked by God's will. He offered that same kind of life to others so that they too could enjoy a life marked by God's will or rule.

That is why he did not teach like the scribes but having his own authority - he was essentially saying look at me and my life and I'll tell you how to do it. The scribes taught by repeating others and without any moral authority.

Audience for the teaching

The "multitudes" who had received what he had to offer (Matthew 4v25).

Introductory comments to the sermon

In parts, Jesus explains what life under God's rule is like i.e. the teaching is descriptive rather than a new set of laws to follow. If someone grows into an expert at carrying out God's rule then they will *become* like God rather than simply robotically carrying out demands. This makes sense as God's gift of eternal life (God's life) grows. For example, see Matthew 6v48 where Christ talks about *being* like our Father.

<p>3 Blessed <i>are</i> the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>4 Blessed <i>are</i> they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.</p> <p>5 Blessed <i>are</i> the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.</p> <p>6 Blessed <i>are</i> they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.</p> <p>7 Blessed <i>are</i> the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.</p> <p>8 Blessed <i>are</i> the pure in heart: for they shall see God.</p>	<p><i>ptóchos</i>: (of one who crouches and cowers, hence) beggarly, poor</p> <p><i>pentheó</i> to mourn, lament</p> <p><i>parakaleó</i>: to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage</p>	<p>I think that Jesus is teaching that, despite who we are, we can be blessed. I don't see these verses as Jesus teaching <i>if</i> you are X then you will get Y. In other words, he is encouraging the multitudes (those who had been rejected by the religious society of the day) that they can experience the life he offers <i>despite</i> who they are.</p> <p>I should mention that the conventional approach is to see Jesus as saying that <i>if</i> you are a certain way then you will be blessed. But it seems difficult to be consistent in holding that view.</p> <p>It is easy to see most of the states as positive and aspirational e.g. the meek, those who hunger and thirsting after righteousness, the peacemakers but it is very difficult to see "poor in spirit" and "mourn" in that way.</p> <p>It seems pretty clear that "poor in spirit" does not mean humble but someone who is spiritually destitute or bankrupt. We could say it means blessed are those who admit they are spiritually poor but that is not what it says. So it seems that we have to say it means <i>despite</i> being spiritually poor we can be blessed.</p> <p>The idea behind "mourning" is to bewail or lament the loss of something or someone. Again, we could say it means to lament our spiritual condition but that risks reading extra words into the text.</p> <p>If we say that Jesus was teaching us to aspire to be meek, peacemakers and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness then a consistent reading results in him saying that we should aspire to be spiritually destitute and mournful.</p> <p>I think it is fairer to the text to see Jesus as commencing his teaching to the multitudes by saying that despite who you are you can be blessed. He was speaking to a mass of people with their various problems and issues and he reassures them that whatever personality they have they can be blessed in their everyday life under God's will.</p> <p>They seem to split into four sets of extremes:</p> <p><i>Group 1: earth's winners right through to earth's losers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> poor in spirit ("earth's winners"): the spiritually and morally bankrupt (who are often earth's "winners") e.g. Zacchaeus. Despite that they can have God's rule in their lives. they that mourn ("earth's losers"): those who are rejected, lost something/someone. Despite that they can get comfort (literally someone alongside) and perspective on their loss through God's rule in their lives. <p><i>Group 2: those who lie down right through to those who always stand up</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the meek ("those who lie down") the walkovers, shy, unassertive. Despite being pushovers they can end up inheriting the earth at a later date. hunger and thirst after righteousness ("those who always stand up") the wronged, those with a burning sense of injustice, who can't help themselves standing up for what's right. Despite that they will be satisfied as a result of God's will in their lives. <p><i>Group 3: those who are too soft right through to those who are too hard</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the merciful ("too soft") those who are naive or naturally soft. They are often taken advantage of but in the kingdom they will find the safety and gentleness that they dispense. pure in heart ("too hard") those who are too hard on themselves, who are never satisfied. With God's rule they will see God (who is perfect)
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<p>9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.</p> <p>10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>11 Blessed are ye, when <i>men</i> shall revile you, and persecute <i>you</i>, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great <i>is</i> your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.</p>	<p><i>misthos</i> wages, hire</p>	<p><i>Group 4: the compromisers right through to the fundamentalists</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peacemakers (“the compromisers”) <p>A peacemaker is often attacked from both warring parties as they stand in the middle trying to make peace but sometimes pleasing nobody. With God’s rule they can share the same characteristics as God</p> • persecuted for righteousness’ sake (“the fundamentalists”) <p>Sometimes people are also vulnerable being persecuted because of their stand for what is right or whistleblowing. Despite that such people can enjoy security from God’s rule in their lives.</p> <p>Verses 11 and 12 are different in that Jesus is talking directly to the multitude (i.e. those in the kingdom). Up to this point he has been talking about different types of people and no doubt some in the crowd would have recognised themselves as those who mourn, others those who are spiritually bankrupt, others those who are perfectionists etc etc. But now he talks to them all (“blessed are <u>ye</u>” - not “blessed are those who...”) and says that in living in the kingdom you will be blessed if you are reviled, persecuted and/or falsely accused - all for his sake.</p> <p>This, of course, seems strange especially when he goes on to say they should “rejoice and be exceeding glad”. He explains this by saying that there is a reward in heaven. So if living counter culturally (i.e. in the kingdom or under God’s rule) in our everyday life brings suffering we should be happy and know we are blessed because it provides future payment.</p>
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