

## The Structure of Matthew

Matthew 4:23-25 is a summary of Jesus' earthly ministry. Matthew 4:23 says, "Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people." A parallel verse is in Matthew 9:35. It says, "Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness." These verses act as bookends that summarize the contents of Matthew 5-9. In other words, Jesus' ministry could be summarized by two characteristics: He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and demonstrated the purpose and power of the Kingdom by healing the sick.

Matthew 5-7 is Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom and is known as "The Sermon on the Mount" since it was given upon the hillside (Matt 5:2) perhaps over a period of days. Chapters 8 and 9 are a collection of stories mainly about His healing ministry. These form the two major divisions between Matthew 5 and 10.

### *The Sermon on the Mount – preliminary comments*

Matthew 5:3-11 forms the beginning of the Sermon and is known as the "Beatitudes." The word "beatitude" is a rough transliteration of the Latin word *beatus* meaning "blessed." Although some modern translations prefer the word "happy" over "blessed," it is a poor exchange. Although people who are blessed should be happy, blessedness cannot be reduced to happiness. Happiness is a feeling; blessedness is a state of being (Carson, 131).

The Bible says that men can bless God and that God blesses men. Blessing is not just happiness; it means "to be approved." When we "approve" of God we eulogize Him, praise Him. When God blesses us He approves of us. Since this is God's universe there is no higher honor than to be approved by Him. Thus, blessedness is a supernatural experience of contentedness based on the fact that one's life is right with God (MacArthur, 53).

We need to notice that two of the eight beatitudes promise the same reward. Both 5:3 and 5:10 promise the "Kingdom of Heaven." Just as Matthew 4:23-25 and 9:35 formed the bookends of a larger section, so do Matthew 5:3 and 5:10 (verse 11 simply expands upon verse 10). This is a writing style known as "inclusio" meaning that everything between these verses can be included under the one theme of the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, the beatitudes do not describe eight different kinds of people- some who are meek, others who are merciful, and others still who are called upon to endure persecution, etc.; rather they set forth a single, yet multicolored picture of the character of anyone who desires to enter the Kingdom.

### ***5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.***

What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Because the parallel passage in Luke simply says, "Blessed are the poor," (Lk. 6:20) some have concluded that Jesus is promising the poor that their present condition will not continue forever. Someday they will experience the outward riches of the Kingdom. Others see the poverty spoken of as that which came about by following Jesus. To follow Him meant to leave all, yet it also means to have a life of blessedness (Berkhower, *The Cost of Discipleship*). But it doesn't seem that Jesus is speaking of poverty as such, since poverty does not qualify a person for salvation (Marshall, 249; Broadus, 89) nor is it a state of blessedness in itself (Marshall, 249); it can just as easily be a curse (Morris, 139). Jesus is not promising a simple reversal of worldly position - that the poor will become rich- He is describing a mindset that can be called "poor in spirit."

**Poor in spirit.** The word 'poor' in 5:3 means 'to cower' or 'cringe'. It was used of a beggar who was totally destitute. As he held out his hand for alms he often hid his face with his other hand because he was ashamed. Lazarus was described as a poor person (Lk. 16:19-31). He was so poor he could offer nothing, nor did he even try. All he could do was cry for mercy.

To be poor in spirit is a concept that comes from the OT where physical poverty became associated with lowliness or humility (Carson, Sermon, 17). Poverty often came about through the oppression of God's people. Thus humility and poverty were often associated together. For example Proverbs 16:19 says "It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly (i.e. the poor), than to divide the spoil with the proud."

Thus to be poor in spirit has the same implications as anyone who is poor, yet on a spiritual level. Those who are poor in spirit recognize that they are spiritually destitute; they recognize that they are in a state of spiritual bankruptcy. They feel their need and turn to God for mercy (Broadus, 89).

The Kingdom of heaven is not given on the basis of race, earned merits, military zeal of the Zealots, or the wealth of Zaccheaus. It is given to the poor, the despised publican, the prostitutes, those who are so poor that they know they can offer nothing and don't even try. They cry for mercy and they alone are heard (Carson, 132 – see Luke 18:9-14). Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Again in Isaiah 66:2 God said, "But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word." (also see Ps. 34:18; 51:1-4, 17).

Thus at the very outset of the Sermon we learn that we do not have the spiritual resources to put the sermon's precepts into practice. We cannot fulfill God's standards ourselves. We must come to Him, acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy, empty ourselves of self-righteousness, and false conceptions of our great worth. Emptied of these things we will be ready for Him to fill us.

Much of the rest of the Sermon is designed to remove our self-delusions from us, and foster genuine poverty of spirit. The genuineness and depth of repentance is a prime requirement for entering into life (Carson, Sermon, 18).

**The Kingdom of Heaven.** The Kingdom of heaven is Matthew's customary expression for what other writers prefer to call the Kingdom of God. Matthew, like other Jews in his day, avoided using the word "God" for he felt that it was too holy and too exalted a name to be uttered. In place of it they used other expressions like "heaven." In meaning, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven are identical (Carson, Sermon, 11).

When Jesus or John the Baptist proclaimed the Kingdom, they offered no explanation as to what they meant since they felt that what they said would be understood by any Jew who heard them. It is inconceivable that if they were preaching about a different Kingdom, one that was not found in the OT, that they would do nothing to correct the thinking of those who heard.

"Throughout the OT there was a rising expectation of divine visitation that would establish justice, crush opposition, and renew the very universe." (Carson, 99-100). The Kingdom prophesied in the OT was not simply the spiritual "reign of God in people's hearts" or somewhere "up there" as many today want to see it, but it is a physical Kingdom established upon the earth that exists among human Kingdoms (Dan. 2:36-44; 7:13-14). Thus the Kingdom of heaven is not "heaven" as many conceive of it; It is the physical rule of Messiah over His people upon the earth (Rev. 21-22).

**A future Kingdom.** There is no doubt that the Scriptures teach that the Kingdom of God is still future. In Luke 11:2 and Matthew 6:10 Jesus told His disciples to pray that the Kingdom *would come*. In the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24-30) the wicked aren't expelled until the Kingdom comes. Only after the interval described by the parable would the righteous shine like the sun (Matt. 13:43).

Although Jesus and John the Baptist said the Kingdom is near (Matt. 3:2; 4:17), Jesus also told His disciples that it will be entered at the time of judgment (Matt. 7:21-22; 24:34). In the parable of the nobleman, the Kingdom is future (Lk. 19:11-26). This parable was told late in Jesus' ministry, right before His triumphal entry, and was told because people thought the Kingdom was going to appear immediately (v.11). So the parable explains that the nobleman goes on a long journey before returning. In Acts 1:6 (after the resurrection) the disciples asked when the Kingdom would come. Jesus replied in Acts 1:7: "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Neither Jesus nor the disciples believed that the Kingdom was present as they spoke; its coming was still anticipated. In Acts 14:22 Paul said we need to go through many hardships to enter the Kingdom, implying that we haven't entered it yet.

**A present Kingdom.** Nevertheless, Jesus also taught that the Kingdom was present when He came. Jesus quoted Isa. 61:1-2 and said *it was fulfilled* (Lk. 4:21). His miraculous power was evidence that the Kingdom was *present* (Matt. 11:5). In Matthew 12:28, when driving out demons, Jesus declared that the Kingdom "*has come upon you.*" Furthermore, the Kingdom *could be entered* (Matt. 23:13). These teachings make it clear that the Kingdom was not just future but present as well.

**A Present yet Future Kingdom.** How can the Kingdom be both present and future? Because the Kingdom is both a spiritual and a national Kingdom.

Notice in the Sermon on the Mount that most of the promises are for the future. "They shall be comforted . . . They shall inherit the earth . . . They shall be satisfied . . ." And so on. But the promise of the first and last beatitude in verses 3 and 10 seems to relate to the present: the disciples are assured that "theirs *is* the Kingdom of heaven." In some sense, the Kingdom of heaven is present with the disciples, but the full blessings of the Kingdom will have to wait for the age to come ("They shall inherit the earth"). Another way to put it is that Jesus has brought the Kingdom of heaven to earth in his own kingly power and fellowship, and we can enjoy foretastes of it here and now; but the full experience of the life of the Kingdom will have to wait for a future date.

The believer possesses present Kingdom blessings due to his relationship to the King. We ARE delivered from the kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13), but that deliverance is not all encompassing – it is deliverance from our personal evil, not from evil from without.

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Much of the rest of the Sermon is designed to remove our self-delusions from us, and foster genuine poverty of spirit. All who look forward to the coming Kingdom will embrace His message with whole hearted allegiance. In fact, the message itself will drive one to Christ, for only in Him is there any hope of living up to the rigid standards presented here.