

The Beatitudes – An introduction to our studies:- Read Matthew chapter 5, verses 1 – 16:

Note that the “Beatitudes as such extend from verse 3 to verse 11. In order to put this teaching in context we need to look at the preceding and following verses.

This block of teaching in the Gospel of Matthew extends from chapter 5, verse 1 through to chapter 7 verse 28. It may be good to ask ‘Was this teaching given in one block or did it take place over several days?’

The Place – Notice that the text implies that the Lord Jesus went up the mountain to escape from the crowds! When he comes down from the mountain he is again surrounded by ‘*great crowds*’ chapter 8, verse 1.

His Audience – It is important to notice that those who came to him to listen to his teaching were already his disciples. “*his disciples came to him and he opened his mouth and taught them*” (chapter 5 verse 2). The parallel text in Luke chapter 6, verse 20 specifically says “*he (Jesus) lifted up his eyes on his disciples*”. It follows that the teaching in these verses is primarily for those already committed to following the Lord Jesus Christ. I can imagine the disciples gathered round the Lord Jesus as he taught and a larger crowd ‘listening in’. Certainly some verses must apply to his followers while others may be in a wider context. Those that can be applied to his committed disciples can be seen at chapter 5, verses 3 – 16; chapter 5 verse 48, and chapter 6, verses 24 – 34.

Teaching not Preaching! - This is important. The context and audience means that it is not a case of ‘Do this and you will get to heaven.’. The Beatitudes themselves are a description of what life in the Spirit can be. The rest of the teaching – for example chapter 5, verses 13 – 16 - are a result of making a commitment. ‘Because you have made a commitment to follow me, this is how you should live!’ The same argument is clear in the epistle of Paul to the Romans, chapter 12, verse 1. The appeal for sacrificial living is because God has done all that is described in Romans chapters 1 – 11. “*Therefore present your bodies as a living sacrifice*”.

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” – Matthew chapter 5, verse 16. This verse may bring to a close the teaching aimed at the committed followers of the Lord Jesus. After which he widens the teaching to include those on the fringes.

There are a number of questions worth asking.

- 1) Was this block of teaching as recorded by Matthew given over several days or on a number of different occasions? Note that there are no indications in the narrative as to when the breaks come.
- 2) If some of the teaching (including the Beatitudes) is aimed at committed believers how can this text be used effectively, if at all, when speaking (or preaching) to ‘non-believers’?
- 3) Can you find encouragement and hope as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ as we reflect on the statements given in the ‘Beatitudes’?