

Changing the Culture of the Spheres of Influence through The Beatitudes

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Introduction

How can we use Jesus' Command to *"love one another"* (John 13:33-34) to change the 21st century culture which is affected by sin: every sphere of influence in our society has been corrupted and affected by the ungodly activities which are operating to destroy humanity. Modern life has become multi-faceted and hectic with the following spheres/domains dominating and competing for ours and our families' time, money, affections and ambitions. These spheres or domains are:

- Business (Trade and Finance)
- Government and the Military
- Law and Justice
- Religion and Philosophy
- Creative Arts
- Education
- Charity and Not for Profit Welfare
- Health and Science
- Media and Entertainment
- Sport and Recreation

In the Old Testament God promised to mend that which had been lost in the Fall by reinstating peace on earth. Through Ezekiel, the Lord looked forward to such restoration for his people:

"And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give them their land and increase their numbers, and I will put my Temple among them forever. I will make my home among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

(Ezekiel 37:26-27 NLT)

Peace will come by God's effort. The result will be material blessing and, most importantly, a mended relationship between people and God. The prophet Isaiah brought a message similar to that of Ezekiel: how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, *"Your God reigns"* (Isaiah 52:7). God's peace is integrally related to His salvation, to the

restoration of His reign on earth. When God saves, He will restore His kingdom so that those who live under His rightful rule will experience the fullness of His peace.

Jesus entered the world as the one who would fulfil the mission of the *Suffering Servant* (Isaiah 53), thus bringing divine peace. Even before Jesus was born, one of His relatives proclaimed what God was about to do:

*“By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

(Luke 1:78-79 NRSV)

How The Beatitudes Will Bring Change to the Spheres of Influence in Our Society

“The beatitudes reveal to us eight qualities that bring God's blessing: meekness and mercy, poorness in spirit and purity of heart, mourning and hunger, peacemaking and persecution. Jesus highlighted these to offer both encouragement and instruction on living distinctly as his followers in a world with values much different from God's. As we study these qualities and integrate them into our lives, we will receive the blessing Jesus promised to his followers then and now”.

(The Beatitudes: Developing Spiritual Character by John R.W. Stott)

Looking at *The Beatitudes* as a kind of ladder, an ascent, we can discover some amazing things about spirituality and its fundamental relationship to the world. The Beatitudes have intense significance in a world where many Christians want to change others and the world from the top down, through forced conformity rather than genuine conversion. The Beatitudes are the essence, the lifeblood and beating heart of authentic, ancient and living Christianity. They are (from Matthew 5:3-10):

- **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**
- **Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**
- **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**
- **Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**
- **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**
- **Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.**
- **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.**
- **Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

The Beatitudes express the idea that peace comes from peacemakers who are characterised by their poverty of spirit, their ability to mourn for the world, their lack of attachments or clinging to personal rights, their hunger for the healing of the world, their extreme mercy extended even towards their worst enemies, and their purity of heart. Peacemakers, according to Christ, are the instruments who bring peace to the world because they exemplify these characteristics. Change comes from the inside and moves towards the

external. Peacemakers are persecuted because they present a challenge to human authority which compels from the outside but cannot penetrate the interior.

Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount* begins by talking about the kingdom of Heaven. A kingdom has a king, subjects, a place, and the ways of the king and his kingdom. It is where this particular king is reigning. So when Jesus teaches, He is not just advocating rules or giving advice. He is talking about a place or, more accurately, a realm where the ruler is God. And what is God's kingdom like? What is God like as a king? Who are His subjects? And what are the ways of God? You can see that Jesus speaks about all these things in the Beatitudes. We learn about who the subjects of this kingdom are: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, etc. The true King of this universe is the One who gives the kingdom, who comforts, gives the earth to His children, and so on. Jesus is telling them about the wonder and goodness of living under the reign of God. The creator of this universe is the king of every sphere of influence, Jesus is the author of these spheres and we are the witnesses to bring real changes into them by proclaiming God's kingdom on each one of them.

How the Kingdom will Manifest its Power in the Spheres

First of all Jesus is speaking about the kingdom as a present and future reality. We can truly possess the kingdom of Heaven here and now on the earth. We can enjoy the truth of this at least to some extent. The people of the kingdom are blessed. The word "blessed" always implies that the one doing the blessing is God. To be blessed is to be favoured or honoured by God. "Blessed" is a passive term. The one who is blessed is receiving from God His notice and favour. We can bring blessing to others that we meet within our sphere of influence.

So who are those who are blessed in the kingdom of heaven? And why are they blessed? In looking over The Beatitudes, we are immediately struck that Jesus is saying the unexpected, to say the least! The qualities of the blessed on Jesus' teaching are not at all what we think of when we consider those we believe to be blessed.

To be blessed is to have value as human beings from our (Government), to have good health (Health and Science), to be secure and protected (Law and Justice), have great success in one's endeavours (Business), creative and artistic (Arts), athletic (Sport and Recreation), freedom of speech and ideas (Religion and Philosophy), rich in knowledge (Education), helping others in need to live (Charity and Not For Profit Welfare), spreading Christian values through technology (Media and Entertainment). These are the qualities we tend to associate with being blessed.

Jesus brings a new dimension to human life through the Sermon on the Mount. In The Beatitudes He teaches us the quality of life that we are hungry for. Every sphere of influence needs these kingdom qualities to be proclaimed in them. The qualities He includes are actually what we would normally consider indications of someone not being blessed! The person who we naturally think is blessed is favoured to have the kingdom of Heaven now and a future fullness in comfort, inheritance, satisfaction, mercy, etc. The blessing then that these people receive is not to be poor in spirit, mourning, or meek. Rather, the presence of these qualities is thought to be a sign that the person is not cursed, but actually blessed. Paradoxically in Jesus teaching one can be called blessed when they are poor in spirit because being poor in spirit is a sign that she/he is looking for the very thing God the King is giving: His kingdom. You can see that there is a connection in the message of Jesus between the person who is blessed and why they are blessed, where every person who is a witness to Christ in the Marketplace can bring a blessing to these domains or spheres.

God our King desires indeed to bless us, to bless our families, our church, our work. Through our mission we can transform our society by applying the teaching of The Beatitudes through each one of us. We can be a part of bringing the reality of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:10). To understand that to be blessed here and now is to find we are being made ready to receive all these things forever.

Jesus is telling us about His kingdom. We see that God greatly desires to bless His people in a full and complete way. God is not going to give sparingly – just some comfort, or a small inheritance. And what God is doing in His people now, when He is blessing them, is that He is making them able more and more to hope in, receive, long for, the very riches He is giving. If we are in Christ we are a new creation:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”
(2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV)

So as blessed people:

- Let us be rich in God’s Kingdom who is the provider of all richness in this world. Colossians 3:16
- Let us be comforted to be free, Jesus gave us freedom the moment he gave His life on the cross. Galatians 3:1-14
- Let us inherit the earth because we are sons and daughter of God’s Kingdom. Psalm 2:7
- Let us be righteous and let God’s light shine through us. Matthew 5:14
- Let us receive mercy and grace, and be merciful to others. Matthew 8:14-17
- Let us have Jesus’ heart and receive His unconditional love to love others as He loved us. John 3:16
- Let us be peacemakers and bring unity across the body. John 13:35
- Let us handle persecution with perseverance; then we may understand the fullness of God’s mercy and grace. John 25:20

Amen.