

SOME ACCOMPANYING NOTES

I think of commentaries as friends that I can chat with when studying a passage – I don't have to agree with them and sometimes I think they are wrong! but their insights are often much better and deeper than mine.

BEATITUDES – Matt 4:23 to 5:12

Tim Mackie

To understand the beatitudes the reader must understand that Jesus is speaking to the crowds referred to in Matt 4:23-25. They are the blessed.

Craig Keener

Jesus employs a standard Jewish literary form to express this point, a beatitude, which runs like this: "It will go well with the one who . . . for that one shall receive . . ." ("Fortunate" or "it will be well with" may convey the point better than blessed or "happy.") In this context Jesus' beatitudes mean that it will ultimately be well with those who seek first God's kingdom (Mt 6:33).

All the blessings listed are blessings of the kingdom time.

Craig Keener

The characteristics Jesus lists as belonging to the people of the kingdom are also those Jesus himself exemplifies as the leading servant of the kingdom and Son par excellence of the Father (Matthew 11:27; Matthew 20:28). Jesus is meek and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29); he mourns over the unrepentant (Matthew 11:20-24); he shows mercy (Matthew 9:13, Matthew 9:27; Matthew 12:7; Matthew 20:30); he is a peacemaker (Matthew 5:43-45; Matthew 26:52). If he is lowly, how much more must be his disciples, who are to imitate his ways (Matthew 10:24-25; Matthew 23:8-12)—in contrast to worldly paradigms for religious celebrities (Matthew 23:5-7).

Tony Stoltzfus

Jesus' invitation to life is, "Think this way: you are actually fortunate if you experience poverty or injustice now! The sooner you realise your desires can never be filled in this world, the more attached your heart will become to heaven."

LlewNote: Jesus lays out the two sides. One side is humiliation, tragedy, downtrodden immorality, unkindness human depravity, war and persecution. On the other side there is the kingdom of heaven, finding comfort, inheriting

the new earth, being deeply satisfied, receiving mercy, standing in the presence of God, adoption as sons and given the kingdom of heaven. Choose which side you want to live in and for. Which side motivates your life? And what does it say about the God who offers such a good deal!

Craig Keener

There are, of course, exceptions, but as a rule it is more common for the poor to be “poor in spirit”; Matthew’s poor in spirit does have something to do with Luke’s “poor.” Surveys in the United States, for example, show that religious commitment is generally somewhat higher among people with less income (Barna 1991:178-81; Gallup and Jones 1992), and Christians in less affluent countries like Nepal, Guatemala, Kenya or China often are prepared to pay a higher price for their faith than most Western Christians. In Bible studies among students from different kinds of colleges and backgrounds I have found that students from poor homes, struggling to pay their way through college, frequently understand this passage better than those students for whom the road is easier. Feeling impressed by the wealth and status of others, the less privileged students are amazed to learn how special they are to God and embrace this message as good news. Those of us who have attained more income or education would do well to imitate their meekness, lest the self-satisfaction and complacency that often accompany such attainments corrupt our faith in Christ (Matthew 13:22)

SALT AND LIGHT Matt 5:13-14

Tony Stoltzfus

"Jesus, what is my glory?"

"What's one way that I am created in your image that I haven't realized yet?"

"How am I salty? How do I spice up the world?"

"Jesus, what about my life brings glory to Father?"

Salt that has lost its taste

Matthew Henry

If a man can take up the profession of Christ, and yet remain graceless, no other doctrine, no other means, can make him profitable.

Craig Keener

The faith of nominal Christians may appeal to non-Christians who can use it to justify their own unbelief, but such “Christians” will have no part in God’s kingdom.

...Just as tasteless salt lacks value to the person who uses it, so does a professed disciple without genuine commitment prove valueless for the work of the kingdom.

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS Matt 5:17-20

David Stern p25

In Judaism the word Torah may mean:

- 1.Chumash - the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses
- 2.The above plus the Prophets and the Writings, i.e. the Tanakh [known by Christians as the OT
- 3.That plus the Oral Torah, which includes the Talmid and other legal materials
- 4.That plus all the religious instructions from the rabbis, including ethical and aggadic [homiletical] materials.

Here “Law” means 1, since “the Prophets” are mentioned separately. But Jesus’ phrase “and the Prophets” indicates that He is speaking of the whole OT – 1 & 2 above.

Craig Keener

Matthew uses Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:17-20 as a thesis statement for the whole of Matthew 5:21-48 which follows. Jesus essentially says, “Look, if you thought the law was tough, wait till you see this. If you really want to be my disciples, give me your hearts without reservation” (see Matthew 5:17).

This passage seems to suggest that an uncommitted Christian is not a Christian at all (see Matthew 5:20).

ANGER Matt 5:21-26

Craig Keener

“You understand the Bible to mean only this, but I offer a fuller interpretation” (see Schechter 1900:427; Daube 1973:55-58). At the same time, Jesus does not speak with merely scribal authority (Matthew 7:28-29); there is no academic debate or citation of other teachers, but solemn pronouncements. Jesus upholds the law (Matthew 5:17-19) but is the decisive arbiter of its meaning, not one scholar among many (Daube 1973:58-60).

LUST Matt 5:27-30

CH Spurgeon

What a King is ours, who stretches his scepter over the realm of our inward lusts! How sovereignly he puts it: "But, I say unto you"! Who but a divine being has authority to speak in this fashion? His word is law. So it ought to be, seeing he touches vice at the fountain-head, and forbids uncleanness in the heart. If sin were not allowed in the mind, it would never be made manifest in the body this, therefore, is a very effectual way of dealing with the evil. But how searching? how condemning! Irregular looks, unchaste desires and strong passions are of the very essence of adultery; and who can claim a life-long freedom from them? Yet these are the things which defile a man. Lord, purge them out of my nature, and make me pure within!

Craig Keener

Jesus does, however, go beyond his contemporaries' customary views on lust. Jewish men expected married Jewish women to wear head coverings to prevent lust. Jewish writers often warned of women as dangerous because they could invite lust (as in Sirach 25:21; Ps. Sol. 16:7-8), but Jesus placed the responsibility for lust on the person doing the lusting (Mt 5:28; Witherington 1984:28). Lust and anger are sins of the heart, and rapists who protest in earthly courts, "She asked for it!" have no defense before God's court.

Craig Keener

Lust is antithetical to true love: it dehumanizes another person into an object of passion, leading us to act as if the other were a visual or emotional prostitute for our use. Fueled by selfish passion, adultery violates the sanctity of another person's being and relationships; love, by contrast, seeks what is best for a person, including strengthening their marriage. Adultery usually involves considerable rationalization, justifying one's behavior as necessary or loving; but lust is the mother of adultery, the demonic force that allows human beings to justify exploiting one another sexually, at the same time betraying the most intimate of commitments where trust ought to abide secure even if it can flourish nowhere else. Lust demands possession; love values, respects and seeks to serve other persons with what is genuinely good for them. Lust is always incompatible with acknowledging God as the supreme desire of our hearts, because it is contrary to his will.

Craig Keener

Jesus does not, of course, refer here to passing attraction. The Greek tense probably suggests "the deliberate harboring of desire for an illicit relationship"

(France 1985:121). In our culture, where young people generally have to arrange their marriages without their parents' help, we might be in trouble if Jesus meant mere attraction! Jesus refers not to noticing a person's beauty but to imbibing it, meditating on it, seeking to possess it.

DIVORCE Matt 5:31-32

Jesus is addressing the uncaring culture of the day which would issue a certificate of divorce for anything. He is defending the badly treated spouse.

Craig Keener

If I am to love my neighbor as myself, how much more should I love my wife as my own body, to sacrifice myself for her willingly as Christ offered himself for the church (Eph 5:25)! Provided that my love for my spouse expresses rather than competes with my love for God (Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26; 18:29; Eph 5:1-2, 18-21), any gift of love I offer this daughter of God is too small a gift for the treasure of her sharing her life with me.

OATHS Matt 5:33-37

Craig Keener

The Bible's point in prohibiting false oaths, however, was that one should tell the truth and keep one's promises. The Hebrew Bible approved of some oaths and vows (as in Num 5:19-22; 6:2), but Jesus again summons us beyond the law's letter to its intention. His own point is not so much that oaths are evil as that the motivation for engaging in them is; one should simply tell the truth (Mt 5:37).

Craig Keener

To protect the sanctity of the divine name against inadvertent oath-breaking, common Jewish practice introduced surrogate objects by which to swear (Vermes 1993:34-35).

CH Spurgeon

A man who cannot be believed upon his word certainly cannot be believed upon his oath; and, usually, when a man tells a lie, the next thing he does is to swear to it. When Peter denied his Master, the next thing he did was to curse and to swear, because he thought it likely that they would not imagine that he was a follower of Christ if he did curse and swear; so he gave that as a pretty

clear proof that he had not been with Christ, and was not one of his disciples. Alas, that we should need anything beside “Yea, yea,” and “Nay, nay!”

RETALIATION Matt 5[38-42

It is only possible to slap a right cheek if the person hitting us using their right backhand. such a slap is not intended to injure so much as to put a person in place - to humiliate.

Jesus instructs that we do not resist [ἀντιστῆναι] or make a stand against such a person but to turn the other cheek. when one turns the left cheek to the hitter, the hitter cannot hit the right cheek. In doing this the person being hit is saying that i am not your inferior but i will not hit back. You may hit me but i will not be humiliated.

It is not the often peeled view that Christians are to be doormats, that battered and abused spouses or children must simply comply. Do not cowardly submit or violently respond - there is a third way - love’s way.

The context is a law court.

Here the poor, who have been impoverished to the point of only having the clothes on their backs, is being humiliated by having his coat taken away [Deut 24] Jesus is teaching that they should resist by giving the cloak as well and showing the creditor up for who they are - people who are prepared to strip others of all dignity for their purposes. What if the person strips naked in the court and leaves the creditor revealed for what the system and the creditors greed does.

These break the cycle of inhumanity by taking the law to its extreme pushing the enemy to turn to justice.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES Matt 5:43-47

Compare

Psalm 139:21-22

Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

I hate them with complete hatred;

I count them my enemies.

CH Spurgeon

Ours it is to persist in loving, even if men persist in enmity. We are to render blessing for cursing, prayers for persecutions. Even in the cases of cruel enemies, we are to “do good to them, and pray for them.” We are no longer enemies to any, but friends to all. We do not merely cease to hate, and then abide in a cold neutrality, but we love where hatred seemed inevitable. We bless where our old nature bids us curse, and we are active in doing good to those who deserve to receive evil from us. Where this is practically carried out, men wonder, respect, and admire the followers of Jesus. The theory may be ridiculed, but the practice is revered, and is counted so surprising that men attribute it to some Godlike quality in Christians, and own that they are the children of the Father who is in heaven. Indeed, he is a child of God who can bless the unthankful and the evil; for in daily providence the Lord is doing this on a great scale, and none but his children will imitate him. To do good for the sake of the good done, and not because of the character of the person benefited, is a noble imitation of God. If the Lord only sent the fertilizing shower upon the land of the saintly, drought would deprive whole leagues of land of all hope of a harvest. We also must do good to the evil, or we shall have a narrow sphere, our hearts will grow contracted, and our sonship towards the good God will be rendered doubtful.

Craig Keener

He also makes a demand that can require more than merely human resources for forgiveness. Corrie ten Boom, who had lost most of her family in a Nazi concentration camp, often lectured on grace. But one day a man who came to shake her hand after such a talk turned out to be a former prison guard. Only by asking God to love through her did she find the grace to take his hand and offer him Christian forgiveness.

CH Spurgeon

“Love for love is manlike,” but “love for hate” is Christlike.

Craig Keener

But after adducing the ultimate moral example, Jesus adduces an example from the opposite end of his hearers’ moral spectrum (vv. 46-47): he provokes his hearers to shame by comparing their ability to obey the love commandment with that of tax-gatherers and Gentile idolaters, the epitome of moral reprobates (Mt 6:7; 20:25; 18:17; compare, for example, Sipre Deut. 43.16.1). One whose righteousness would surpass that of scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20) must exemplify a higher standard of righteousness than loving those friendly to their interests.

BE PERFECT

Craig Keener

To be faithful to the text, we must let Jesus' radical demands confront us with all the unnerving force with which they would have struck their first hearers.

That God becomes the standard of comparison suggests that Jesus' instruction here is exhortation, setting a goal, not assuming a state to which the hearers have already come. (The issue of whether any Christian is perfect is irrelevant here. All of us can learn to better reflect God's character; at the same time, God promises us power to overcome any given temptation; and if we can overcome any temptation, we should choose to say no to every temptation.) And as long as God represents the moral standard, none of us has room to boast; all of us must unite as brothers and sisters in need and seek God's kingdom and righteousness with all our hearts.