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## Christ's Perspective of the Holy Scriptures: How the Beatitudes were not Unique to Jesus

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## Introduction

In the book of Matthew, Jesus Christ began his ministry proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom of heaven by blessing those who possess character traits such as humbleness and a desire for righteousness. To the proud and arrogant, the Beatitudes sounded foolish. This dichotomy still exists today, either the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-10; Luke 6:20-22) resonate or they do not. Perhaps the composition of the audience on the hillside near Capernaum was not that different than an audience in our time. Those who are humble and lowly in heart will hear His voice and be blessed and those who oppose Him will not. The difference of Jesus' message compared to other rabbinical orators or anti-Roman zealots was that He asserted that the condition of the human heart was central to being blessed in the kingdom of heaven. But how could this be? Were they not all blessed because they were Abraham's offspring? Was Christ proclaiming a new message or had Israel simply lost their way? By focusing in on Matthew's list of Beatitudes, this research will show that Christ's perspective on the Holy Scriptures is evident within each of the Beatitudes and by examining and analyzing some of the proposed source(s) of each Beatitude, one will conclude these teachings are not unique to Jesus, but are solidly grounded in the Old Testament Scriptures.

## Background

The Beatitudes are located in two of the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew 5:3-10 and Luke 6:20-22. At a quick glance, "the ordinary reader, most familiar with Matthew's version, will notice first the differences, and will be apt to account for the discrepancy of the two reports as Augustine did, by assigning them to distinct occasions... in the Lord's ministry."<sup>1</sup> However, a "careful comparative study of the two passages raises serious questions regarding such a view."<sup>2</sup> The similarities and discrepancies will fall outside the scope of this study. The focus here will be primarily on Matthew's version, in an attempt to understand Jesus' perspective of the Old Testament as expressed in the Beatitudes.

### Concerning the Book of Matthew

Matthew contains many "quotations and subtle allusions to Old Testament texts."<sup>3</sup> While no direct audience is internally mentioned, clearly Matthew "crafted this Gospel for a group of Christians who were already familiar with the Old Testament."<sup>4</sup> With approximately 50 direct Old Testament citations,<sup>5</sup> it is apparent that Matthew wrote his Gospel for converts who were primarily Jewish. This is also suggested by Jesus' initial commission to go to "the lost sheep of

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<sup>1</sup> G. W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 443.

<sup>2</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 443.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Hindson and G. Yates, eds., *The Essence of the Old Testament: A Survey* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., *Gospels*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Colorado Springs: CO: David C Cook, 2018), 19.

the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6b; 15:24).<sup>6</sup> Further evidence that Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience is a discussion on the original language of the Gospel.

Most modern scholars have concluded that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Greek. Meanwhile, there are at least five individuals who declare “that Matthew wrote in Aramaic and that translations followed in Greek: Papias (A.D. 80-155), Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202), (Origen (A.D. 185-254), Eusebius (fourth century A.D.), and Jerome (sixth century A.D.).”<sup>7</sup> Many have speculated that what these authors are referring to was not Matthew’s original Gospel. However, Eusebius’ direct quote of Papias states that “Matthew composed his history in the Hebrew dialect, and everyone translated it as he was able.”<sup>8</sup> If Matthew wrote primarily to a Jewish-Christian audience, then he would have written in Aramaic or Hebrew. While this creates issues for scholars who insist on a two-source hypothesis, it explains perfectly why Nehemia Gordon, a Karaite Jew, was astonished at the teaching of Yeshua’s words in Shem Tov’s Hebrew version of Matthew. He argues that many of the textual controversies in the Greek are better explained when examining one of the 28 known copies of Matthew in Hebrew.<sup>9</sup> Even Guthrie admits that there is increasing evidence that Matthew may come from an Aramaic original.<sup>10</sup> Matthew’s audience is undoubtedly a people who were familiar with the Torah and his purpose was to make the case that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah.

### Concerning the Purpose of Matthew

Matthew proclaims that the Messiah has come. He first presents the ancestry that places Jesus in the lineage of King David (Matt. 1:1-17).<sup>11</sup> Next, he announces the arrival of Jesus as an infant (1:18-2:23). This is followed by the ministry of John the Baptist to “prepare the way of the Lord”, (Matt. 3:3b) fulfilling a quote from Isaiah 40:3. Matthew quotes Old Testament prophecies frequently, as he builds the case that Jesus is the promised Messiah. The account of Jesus receiving the anointment of the Spirit of God at his baptism and God’s proclamation from heaven, both show His proper coronation as king. In the narrative that follows, Matthew shows how Jesus was tested by the devil and was able to overcome him. Jesus began His ministry by first selecting His disciples. The message was direct: “Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). Matthew shows Jesus as having compassion, sitting down to teach the crowd as any Rabbi would (Matt. 5:1-2). What followed were the Beatitudes.

### The Beatitudes

When Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount, He proclaimed blessedness on those who were humble or downtrodden in some way. Jesus’ teaching was quite different from the zealots

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<sup>6</sup> Hindson and Yates, *The Essence of the Old Testament: A Survey*, 51.

<sup>7</sup> Barbieri, Jr., *Gospels*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius Pamphilus, *Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, translated by C. F. Cruse (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 106.

<sup>9</sup> Nehemia Gordon, *The Hebrew Yeshua vs. the Greek Jesus: New Light on the Seat of Moses from Shem-Tov's Hebrew Matthew* (Hilkiah Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1990), 56.

<sup>11</sup> Barbieri, Jr., *Gospels*, 19.

who were likely unrelenting in stirring up rebellion against Rome. The Beatitudes stand in stark contrast to worldly values. What Jesus expected from those who would follow Him was disparate to the religion of the pious and legalistic Pharisees and Sadducees. The Beatitudes were to “proclaim eschatological fact and eschatological promise. They present the challenge to actuate here and now what is ours as citizens of God’s kingdom through Christ.”<sup>12</sup> This was further amplified in their linguistic structure.

The Beatitudes are a series of independent clauses known as an asyndeton, constructed in an unbound manner without a leading conjunction. This type of stylistic feature often occurs for emphasis.<sup>13</sup> It is noticeable that Jesus used this style of speech to capture the audience’s attention in the Beatitudes, emphasizing them to help the hearer understand the proper state of heart they needed to be in if they were going to respond to Jesus. What does it mean to be called “blessed” by the king?

### Blessed

Simply understood, “to bless means to grant prosperity or well-being” to.<sup>14</sup> The Greek word for blessed (*μακάριοι*), pertains to being “especially favored, blessed, fortunate, happy, [and] privileged.”<sup>15</sup> The Greek philosophers believed that to be blessed was to know all, because “virtue depended on knowledge” and that happiness was “the prerogative of the few and the learned.”<sup>16</sup> In the Bible, instead of referring to happiness, blessed took on more of a spiritual meaning, which emphasizes “a sense of God’s approval founded in righteousness.”<sup>17</sup> D. A. Carson expresses that, “as for ‘happy’, it will not do for the Beatitudes, having been devalued for modern usage.”<sup>18</sup>

In the Beatitudes, “blessed” has a special significance in that “stylistically, these pronouncements reflect not only OT use (*asre*) but also some later Jewish features, such as the setting of Beatitudes in a series and their use in apocalyptic contexts.”<sup>19</sup> Though later Jewish literature followed this eschatological pattern, the Beatitudes are different in that the kingdom of heaven is promised to the poor, the powerless, and the mournful. “It is not the virtues that are important so much as the promise of salvation conveyed by the ‘blessed’ at the beginning as well as by the motive clause in the second half of each line.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 444.

<sup>13</sup> D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1996) 658.

<sup>14</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 523.

<sup>15</sup> W. Arndt and F. W. Danker, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition (Chicago, IL: Chicago Press, 2000), 661.

<sup>16</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Second ed., Vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>18</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with The New International Version: Matthew*, Vol. 8, F. E. Gaebelin, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 131.

<sup>19</sup> Moisés Silva, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Vol 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 208.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

Analyzing the Hebrew forms and derivatives, there are two verbs “meaning ‘to blessed’”. One is *barak* and the other is *ashar*.”<sup>21</sup> Some have suggested that “*barak* is used by God”, whereas “*ashar* is reserved for man”.<sup>22</sup> The following discussion explains:

There is no instance where *ashar* is ever on God’s lips. When one “blesses” God, the verb is *barak*, never *ashar*. One suggestion to explain this sharp distinction, i.e. that *ashar* is reserved for man, is that *ashar* is a word of envious desire, “to be envied with desire is the man who trusts in the Lord.” God is not man and therefore there are no grounds for aspiring to his state even in a wishful way. Similarly God does not envy man, never desires something man is or has, which he does not have, but would like to have. Therefore God never pronounces man “blessed” (*ashre*)... It should also be pointed out that when *barak* is used the initiative comes from God. God can bestow his blessing even when man doesn’t deserve it. On the other hand, to be blessed (*ashre*), man has to do something. Finally, *barak* is a benediction, *ashar* more of a congratulation. The former is rendered by *eulogetos* in the LXX and the latter by *makarios*.<sup>23</sup>

This may be an important distinction. It is likely that Christ spoke this in His native tongue. Assuming that He used a word close to “*ashar*” and giving some consideration that the word is one of envious desire, it could be that said that “to be envied with desire” are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:3 My translation). While that may be overstated, the thought is intriguing. While both the “Heb. (*ašrê*) and Gk. (*makários*) occur primarily with the sense ‘happy, fortunate,’ illustrating the joy of life unmarred by care, labor, or death,” it is apparent that the Beatitudes “exhibits the traits of the faithful.”<sup>24</sup> “The state of being blessed, designated by a passive verb, may indicate receipt of both favor (Gen. 27:33; 2 Sam. 7:39) and adoration (Job. 1:21; Ps. 113.2).”<sup>25</sup> Clearly, a “blessed” man is a man who trusts in the Lord without equivocation.<sup>26</sup> When Jesus pronounces a man “blessed” with eschatological promise, truly the attributes of that man are to be desired, as he is like Christ. He is the type of man that God has chosen for His kingdom. This is what it means to be “blessed”.

### Those who are Poor in Spirit

In the first Beatitude, Jesus speaks to those who are humble. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). In Greek, the words “the poor in spirit” (*οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι*) pertain to those who feel they are lacking in spiritual worth in contrast to God.<sup>27</sup> There has been a dispute among scholars due to Luke’s account (Luke 6:20), as to

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<sup>21</sup> R. L. Harris, Jr. Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Pub, 2003), 80.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 524.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Harris, Jr. Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> Arndt and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 896.

“whether Christ meant the poor in reference to the things of this life, or to the humble.”<sup>28</sup> Barnes continues, “To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be sensible that we are sinners, and have no righteousness of our own... and to feel that we deserve no favor from Him.”<sup>29</sup> It is clear that the “the poor in Matthew are ...the pious and humble poor of the host of OT passages. By the times of later Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the postexilic Psalms, the term ‘poor’ could be the practical equivalent of ‘the truly devout Israelite.’”<sup>30</sup> These are the ones who have come to rely on God and “are the humble and lowly as opposed to the Pharisees with their self-esteem and religious accomplishments.”<sup>31</sup> Schweizer adds that “at the time of Jesus, the term ‘poor’... had also become a kind of title of honor for the righteous.”<sup>32</sup> This Beatitude is the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy in the Holy Scriptures (Isa. 11:4; 57:15), with the proclamation of Christ, lifting up the poor in spirit.

When considering Isaiah 11:44 and 57:15 for a connection to this Beatitude, the latter passage seems to be the strongest. Isaiah prophesied, “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15). The similarity between those of a contrite and humble spirit and Jesus’ proclamation of blessedness toward the poor in spirit is obvious. As Carson explains, the first Beatitude “joins with passages affirming God’s favor on the lowly and contrite in spirit”.<sup>33</sup> The high and holy God came down as the Messiah to dwell and live in those with a contrite and humble spirit. Here Watts notes “God’s paradox. The place of glory and power belongs not to the proud, ambitious and strong...but to the contrite, meek and lowly of spirit.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus understood that He alone was the anticipated one, spoken of by the prophet, sent to dwell with the poor in spirit, proclaiming them to be the kingdom of heaven. Thus, Jesus understood that His role was to fulfill these Messianic prophecies.

### Those who Mourn

The second Beatitude deals with those who mourn. “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matt. 5:4). The Greek word for mourn (*οἱ πενθοῦντες*) conceptually means to lament.<sup>35</sup> Grammatically it refers to the ones who are actively mourning, lamenting, or feeling guilt currently. The active nature of this parallels Luke 6:21 with the additional word “now” and there are even a few Greek and Latin Matthean manuscripts where now (*νῦν*) seems

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<sup>28</sup> A. Barnes, *Barnes Notes The Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1983), 43.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 444.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, translated by David E. Green (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1975), 86.

<sup>33</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 131.

<sup>34</sup> John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 34-66*, Vol. 25 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 262.

<sup>35</sup> Silva, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 706.

to be added.<sup>36</sup> The implication of Luke's account is that those who mourn now will not mourn forever. In fact, all tears will cease with the consummation of the kingdom of God (Rev. 7:17; 21:4).

Commentators disagree as to what this "mourning" is referring to. Some think it is for sin, while others do not. Schweizer feels that it is for "all kinds of misery, whether physical or psychic in origin".<sup>37</sup> Carson believes that "the godly remnant of Jesus' day weeps because of the humiliation of Israel, but they understand that it comes from personal and corporate sins."<sup>38</sup> This seems to be the best fit, especially considering the tears that are shed in Psalms 119:136 when the law is not obeyed. The mourners "are reminiscent of the many during prophetic times who mourned over the sins of the covenant people and whom the prophets promised comfort (cf. Isa. 57:18; 61:2f.; Joel 2:12-14)."<sup>39</sup> Mourning suggests "the present life of penitence for personal and national sin."<sup>40</sup>

The comfort that Jesus promises to those who mourn comes out of Isaiah's prophetic word about 700 years earlier. The anointed one was "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn" (Isa. 61:2). One of the purposes of Jesus' ministry was to fulfill this Beatitude by bestowing the gift of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, upon believers. However, one cannot help but notice that Isaiah's prophecy appears to be speaking about the final judgement or day of vengeance. These verses (Isa. 61:1-3) "present a picture of a man anointed by the Spirit of God, especially for the task of preaching."<sup>41</sup> Watts explains that "comfort has been a central word from chap. 40:1 on... 'To comfort all mourners' sums up and fulfills the commission that was sadly abandoned by those to whom it was originally given (49:1-4). Now an individual is commissioned anew to do the task".<sup>42</sup> This Beatitude's proclamation of comfort to all who mourn anticipates the union of the Spirit of God with the believers that would follow Jesus.

Isaiah further explains the Messiah's purpose, "to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified" (Isa. 61:3). The comfort that Jesus gives as the Messiah in the second Beatitude is "beauty for ashes", "oil of joy", and the "garment of praise". As Schweizer explains, Matthew 5:4, like Isaiah 12:1; 49:13; 51:3, 12; 52:9; etc., expects the comfort from God himself."<sup>43</sup> The second Beatitude proclaims the blessing of comfort to those who have mourned over possessions, sin, and national sin, according to the fulfilment of Isaiah 61:1-3, by God coming in the flesh, as Jesus Christ.

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara Aland and Eberhard Nestle, *Greek-English New Testament*, Eighth ed. (Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1998), 9.

<sup>37</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 88-89.

<sup>38</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 444.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> G. W. Grogan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with The New International Version: Isaiah*, Vol. 6, F. E. Gaebelien, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 333.

<sup>42</sup> Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 303.

<sup>43</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 89.

### Those who are Meek

In the third Beatitude, Jesus blesses those who have meekness and lowliness. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The word for meek (*οἱ πραεῖς*) has a primary meaning of mild and gentle. Meekness “is based on humility, which is not a natural quality but an outgrowth of a renewed nature”.<sup>44</sup> While the pagan form of the word tends toward outward conduct that is incapable of self-assertion or righteous indignation, the Christian word relates to an inward quality, of “a sense of the inferiority of the creature to the Creator, and especially of the sinful creature to the holy God.”<sup>45</sup> In this Beatitude, it is the meek, “not the strong, aggressive, harsh, tyrannical”, that “will inherit the earth.”<sup>46</sup> Carson presents that “the verb ‘inherit’ often relates to entrance into the Promise Land (e.g., Deut 4:1; 16:20; cf. Isa 57:13; 60:21)... There is no need to interpret the land metaphorically, as having no reference to geography or space; nor is there need to restrict the meaning to ‘land of Israel’”.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, entrance into the Promise Land points to entrance into the new heaven and the new earth (Isa 66:22, Rev. 21:1). While the third Beatitude has several Old Testament allusions, what Jesus proclaims seems to be direct quote from Psalm 37:11.

“But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Ps. 37:11). As one of the acrostic psalms, structured mostly with four lines per stanza, Psalms 37, “stands firmly within the tradition of Wisdom and should be interpreted as an instructional poem.”<sup>48</sup> The four lines of Psalm 37:10-11 follow a similar pattern as Isaiah 61:2, in that they both start with a prophetic statement of vengeance, “the wicked will be no more”, followed by “the meek shall inherit the land” (Ps. 37:10b-11a ESV). However, “it is not so much that they inherit by virtue of their meekness, but that their inheritance is won by God, not by their own strivings.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, as Keil and Delitzsch have correctly observed, “whatever God-opposed self-love may amass to itself and may seek to acquire, falls into the hands of the meek as their blessed possession.”<sup>50</sup> The third Beatitude stands in opposition to worldly tendency to muster up self-confidence and self-love, and as Jesus has proclaimed this blessedness, the future earth will belong to the meek.

### Those who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

The fourth Beatitude concerns justice and goodness. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). While most of the Beatitudes are stated conditions or positional, “hunger and thirst” expresses a desire. Commentators tend to disagree on what the word “righteousness” refers to. “Some argue that it is the imputed

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<sup>44</sup> Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 133.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 133-134.

<sup>48</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary: Psalms 1-50*, Vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 296.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, Volume V, First Book (cont.), translated by Rev. Francis Bolton (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 13.



righteousness of God – eschatological salvation, or more narrowly, justification.”<sup>51</sup> While this is possible, “since the immediate context does arouse hopes for God’s eschatological action”, Carson argues that this righteousness is “personal righteousness... and justice in the broadest sense.”<sup>52</sup> The idea is that “these people hunger and thirst, not only that they may be righteous (i.e., that they may wholly do God’s will from the heart), but that justice may be done everywhere.”<sup>53</sup> However, “whether this righteousness is that which is the gift of salvation from God, or the righteousness that is the human activity of actualizing God’s ways in our lives, is a question for continued scholarly debate.”<sup>54</sup> In either case, this Beatitude has an ethical thrust for righteousness that is a gift, and those that desire it will be satisfied.

The Old Testament makes frequent use of “hungering and thirsting as metaphors for yearning after God’s word (Amos 8:11), mercy (Isa. 55:1-2, 7), and presence (Ps. 42:3). The poor and lowly are promised that their hunger will be satisfied (1 Sam. 2:5; Ps. 107:36-41; 146:7).”<sup>55</sup> Isaiah’s anticipation for future recompense is apparent when he states: “But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins” (Isa. 11:4-5). Again, this follows a similar pattern where judgement of the earth is intertwined with a longing for justice and righteousness. It is against this Old Testament background that the fourth Beatitude speaks, pronouncing blessedness for those who yearn “for the coming Kingdom and the righteousness of God.”<sup>56</sup>

#### Those who are Merciful

The fifth Beatitude relates to kindness and mercy. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt. 5:7). Those that are to “obtain mercy” are those who are inherently “merciful”. Barnes states that this Beatitude “is given as an evidence of piety, and it is said that they who show mercy to others shall obtain it.”<sup>57</sup> The Greek word for merciful (*οἱ ἐλεήμονες*) pertains “to being concerned about people in their need,”<sup>58</sup> in a way that is sympathetic or compassionate of God. There seems to be two aspects to mercy here. According to Carson, “mercy embraces both forgiveness for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and needy.”<sup>59</sup> While the Beatitude does not suggest one aspect over the other, it is apparent from the context that “it is the meek who are also the merciful. For to be meek is to acknowledge to others that

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<sup>51</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 134.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 134.

<sup>54</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 444.

<sup>55</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 91.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Barnes, *Barnes Notes The Gospels*, 45.

<sup>58</sup> Arndt and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 316.

<sup>59</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 134.

we are sinners; to be merciful is to have compassion on others, for they are sinners too.”<sup>60</sup> One can easily witness the sentiments of this Beatitude in the Old Testament.

For example, compassion for the suffering and needy can be found in Psalms 41:1 where it states, “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.” The wording of this Psalm follows the same pattern as the Beatitudes. Contextually, it is “characteristic of a statement of priestly blessing (or of the nature of a person who might expect to be blessed by God).”<sup>61</sup> The Israelites were to be concerned for the needs of the weak and the poor.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, they were to show mercy to receive deliverance.

The fact that God would be merciful to the merciful can be fully seen in 2 Sam. 22:26a and Psalm 18:25a. Both verses say the same thing: “With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful.” There is a connection between the merciful and kindness. The Hebrew word for merciful (*chasid*), refers to a man who is kind.<sup>63</sup> Kindness is an attribute of someone who has godly character or piety. It is apparent that Christ was relying on an Old Testament understanding of this attribute, in his pronouncement of this Beatitude. Kindness and mercy is to be a standard among those in the Kingdom of God. God’s desire for man to be merciful over ceremonial work is obvious when Jesus tells the Pharisees, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice’” (Matt. 9:13a ESV; also repeated in Matt. 12:7). This Beatitude stands in opposition to the outward performance of the Pharisees. God will show Himself merciful to those who are merciful, just as the Old Testament promised.

#### Those who are the Pure in Heart

The sixth Beatitude concerns the inner heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). The heart is “not only the seat of the emotions, but also a person’s innermost being, which shapes his entire life.”<sup>64</sup> The man whose heart (*καρδία*) is pure (*οἱ καθαροὶ*), is a man who has had his inner life, thinking, feelings, and volition set free from moral guilt and is free from adulterating pursuits.<sup>65</sup> Commentators have been divided in understanding what it means to be pure in heart. “Some take it to mean inner moral purity as opposed to merely external piety or ceremonial cleanness...others take it to mean singlemindedness, a heart free from the tyranny of a divided self.”<sup>66</sup> Carson disagrees with this division, stating “the dichotomy between these two options is a false one; it is impossible to have one without the other. The one who is singleminded in commitment to the kingdom and its righteousness (Matt. 6:33) will also be inwardly pure.”<sup>67</sup> Only those who are inwardly pure will see God.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 320.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 93.

<sup>65</sup> Arndt and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 489, 509.

<sup>66</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 134-135.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 135.

This is not to say that those who are full of deceit and filth will not see God. As Barnes points out, all men will stand before God and “they will behold him as judge, not as a friend”.<sup>68</sup> In the case of this Beatitude, the blessedness is referring to those who stand favorable with God. Barnes continues, explaining that “to see the face of one, or to be in the presence of anyone” such as a king, was “regarded as a high honor, [and] those that saw the face of the king...were his favorites and friends.”<sup>69</sup> In this light, it is apparent that those who will see God are the ones that will “dwell with him in his kingdom.”<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that seeing God is impossible in this life, but “is promised for the eschatological age, when unclouded communion will be established between God and man (Rev. 22:4; 1 Cor. 13:12); such is now granted only to the angels (Matt. 18:10).”<sup>71</sup>

The need for a pure heart comes from the Old Testament, as obedience from the heart is more important than ritual sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22). This is evident in Deuteronomy where Moses wrote, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut. 10:16). The heart was always the concern, even in the law. Jeremiah repeats the Deuteronomy passage (Jer. 4:4) and later prophesies judgement upon all the house of Israel who are “uncircumcised in the heart” (Jer. 9:25). The Beatitude to the pure in heart requires obedience to God from the inner heart, as opposed to external ritualistic religious practices. But how does one obtain a pure heart? The answer can be seen from David’s plea for forgiveness and cleansing after being caught in his sin with Bath-sheba, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). Christ’s proclamation of blessing to the pure in heart excoriates the hypocrisy of self-effort that keeps people from coming face to face with God.

When David asks, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? (Ps. 24:3)”, the answer relates directly to this sixth Beatitude. It is “he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Ps. 24:4-5). Only the pure in heart can ascend to the holy place. As Craigie confirms, “the worshiper must have ‘innocent hands and a pure heart’; that is, he must have maintained moral integrity with respect to both actions and thoughts.”<sup>72</sup> Christ’s proclamation to the pure in heart is reminiscent of David’s words in that the pure in heart will receive blessing and salvation.

### Those who are the Peacemakers

The seventh Beatitude implements peace and reconciliation. “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God (Matt. 5:9).” It is the peacemakers (*οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί*), who “endeavor to reconcile persons, making peace.”<sup>73</sup> According to Vincent, peacemakers should be held to a literal meaning, not only in terms of those who keep peace, but

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<sup>68</sup> Barnes, *Barnes Notes The Gospels*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 93.

<sup>72</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 213.

<sup>73</sup> Arndt and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 288.

those who “seek to bring men into harmony with each other”.<sup>74</sup> Within the context of Matthew, there is a sense associated with the Hebrew word (*shalom*). Peace is a very important concept to the Jews. Schweizer makes an interesting insight into the Judaism of the period when he states, “the call to make peace is as important as the law of love is in the New Testament.”<sup>75</sup> Even today, in Israel, “peace” is an everyday form of salutation (*shalom*), and whoever has peace is thought to be at peace with God. As Barbieri expresses, it is the peacemakers who “show others how to have inward peace with God and how to be instruments of peace in the world.”<sup>76</sup> As a result, Barnes states “all those who endeavor to promote peace are like him and are worthy to be called his children.”<sup>77</sup> This agrees with the writer of Hebrews, who states “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

The King James translates the phrase (*υιοι θεου*) as children of God. (*υιοι*) refers to a person associated, as if by sonship, in a “sense of one whose identity is in terms of a relationship with a person”.<sup>78</sup> As a result, many translations refer to peacemakers being “called the sons of God”. Furthermore, Paul and John “universally maintained that divine sonship is a gift that will only be granted at the Last Judgement, for eternal life (cf. Hos. 1:10, cited in Rom. 9:26-27).”<sup>79</sup> The peacemakers will eventually be exalted to what Christ is now, as God’s Sons (Rev. 21:7). Schlatter profoundly states, “to be called a son of God is the highest honor and the richest gift of grace. The words ‘shall be called’ indicate that it all depends on God’s verdict...A man cannot make himself a son of God; he has to be given the name by which he becomes a son”.<sup>80</sup> In Matthew 5:9, those that “will be called the sons of God” ultimately will be fulfilled at the Last Judgement at the consummation of all things.

There are several Old Testament Scriptures which can be indirectly connected to Jesus’ use of peacemakers in this Beatitude. In Isaiah 57:18-19, God acknowledges the waywardness of man and states He will heal and comfort him, creating fruit on his lips saying “Peace, peace”. As Grogan sees it, this can be seen “as a welcome home for the wayward.”<sup>81</sup> Isaiah 60 is in a little different light, where the nations of the world will bow down (Isa. 60:14) and no longer trample on the people of God, but will care for them. Isaiah prophesies that God “will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness” (Isa. 60:17 ESV). The commonality between the peacemakers and the overseers is evident in that they both make peace. The proclamation of Jesus’ blessing to the peacemakers strongly alludes to the fulfillment of these Old Testament passages.

### Those who are Persecuted for Righteousness Sake

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<sup>74</sup> Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 38.

<sup>75</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 94.

<sup>76</sup> Barbieri, Jr., *Gospels*, 31.

<sup>77</sup> Barnes, *Barnes Notes The Gospels*, 45.

<sup>78</sup> Arndt and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1025.

<sup>79</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 94.

<sup>80</sup> Silva, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 530.

<sup>81</sup> Grogan, *Isaiah*, 320.

In the eighth Beatitude, Jesus concludes with the result of one's faithfulness. "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10). Being persecuted (*δεδιωγμένοι*) "means to vex, or oppress one, on the account of his religion."<sup>82</sup> The reason for persecution is for "righteousness' sake". This Beatitude is similar to the first Beatitude, in that they both end with the same promise, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3, 10). Allen suggests, "that this phrase contains in itself all the blessings promised in the six intermediate clauses."<sup>83</sup> As the kingdom comes, those who live humbly before God, the poor in spirit, the mournful, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, pure in heart, and the peacemakers will experience persecution. Carson comments on this Beatitude with the following:

It is no accident that Jesus should pass from peacemaking to persecution, for the world enjoys its cherished hates and prejudices so much that the peacemaker is not always welcome. Opposition is a normal mark of being a disciple of Jesus, as normal as hungering for righteousness or being merciful.<sup>84</sup>

Paul affirms this sentiment in his writing, that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Those who follow Jesus should expect persecution for belonging to the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus did not quote the Old Testament directly in this Beatitude. Yet, He was familiar with the testimony and examples of the prophets (Matt. 23:40, Luke 11:47). There are many examples of faithful prophets (e.g. Elijah, Jeremiah, and Daniel) who were persecuted for righteousness sake. Furthermore, Jesus knew that the Messiah was to be "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isa. 53:3). The followers of the Messiah should expect the same as they become more like Him. Therefore, those who have been blessed, because of the character traits like those defined in the Beatitudes, will undoubtedly be persecuted for their faithfulness just like the prophets and Jesus were.

### **Christ's Perspective on Scripture**

When considering Christ's perspective on Scripture, it is apparent that all eight Beatitudes are directly or indirectly taken out of the Old Testament. Christ asserted and relied upon Old Testament Scripture in the proclamation of each of the Beatitudes. He knew the Scriptures by heart and viewed them as authoritative. As John testified, "The Jews therefore marveled, saying, 'How is it that this man has learning, when He has never studied?'" (John 7:15 ESV). Jesus responded that His teaching was not His, but from the one that sent Him (John 7:16). He knew beforehand that He was the one chosen to fulfill the Messianic prophecies.

The Beatitudes themselves are not a new law given by Christ. H. L. Ellison argues against those who have the tendency to attempt making the Beatitudes a part of a new law:

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<sup>82</sup> Barnes, *Barnes Notes The Gospels*, 46.

<sup>83</sup> Willoughby C. Allen, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1985), 41-42.

<sup>84</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 135.

The contrast between the Sermon and the Law-giving at Sinai is at its greatest here. The latter begins with the Ten Commandments, which give the fundamental laws governing the behavior of those that would be in covenant relationship with God. The Beatitudes are addressed to those who show by their lives that they have achieved what the Decalogue demands. So far from being a new law, as some ‘dispensationalists’ believe, the Sermon describes the life of those who by grace have passed beyond law.<sup>85</sup>

Judaism in Jesus’ day relied heavily on oral law and traditions of the Pharisees, not the imperatives of the Ten Commandments. Jesus affirmed this error when He said, “they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt. 23:4). There are many times in the Gospels where Christ stood in opposition to the oral law of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the Beatitudes, Schweizer states that “there is striking absence of any injunction to observe the Law, after the manner of the Pharisees, or to observe the cult, after the manner of the Sadducees.”<sup>86</sup> This comment needs to be held in the context “after the manner of the Pharisees”, as one of the underlying themes Matthew embedded into his Gospel is to reject any claims that Jesus did not follow the Mosaic law. He even goes so far as to say, “The Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matt. 23:2b-3).

Jesus did follow Moses’ law, which is a must if Matthew’s claim that Jesus was the Messiah is to be believed. Jesus clearly articulates this purpose in His Sermon on the Mount:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:17-20)

Christ viewed the Old Testament Scriptures as authoritative and inerrant. One must not oversimplify the concept of law, by ignoring the difference between the Law given at Sinai and the law of the Pharisees. The Beatitudes do not stand in opposition, but in fulfillment of prophecies from the context of the Law. What is new about the Beatitudes is that Jesus promises salvation not just for a future eschatological time, but also in the present.<sup>87</sup> This is clear from the message Jesus began to preach. He taught, “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). The Kingdom was at hand because the anointed one had come. Therefore, when Christ pronounced blessedness on the poor in spirit, the mournful, the meek, those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers, He was putting

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<sup>85</sup> H. L. Ellison, *The International Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, F. F. Bruce, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publish House, 1986), 1124.

<sup>86</sup> Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, 97.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

full trust on the words of the Old Testament writings. Thus, Christ's perspective on Scripture is authoritative and inerrant.

### **Application**

Every Christian under the authority of God should earnestly desire the same inerrancy of Scripture that Jesus had. Jesus' reliance on the Law and the Prophets for each of the Beatitudes shows the priority and supremacy He gave to the Holy Scriptures. His interpretation of them is more from a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, which is opposite to what is happening in our day, with scholars resorting to historical-critical methods. The reliance on these latter methods are slowing breaking down and destroying the authority of Scripture, leading to a slow, systematic destruction of Christian tradition and orthodoxy.

Today, the message of Jesus is being twisted into a doctrine focused more on how it makes someone feel versus cultivating the character traits that Jesus calls blessed in the Beatitudes. "The truth is that following Christ is not merely about endorsing grace and love, but is also about obeying a set of commandments established by our Creator."<sup>88</sup> Both critics and new age spiritual movements alike have the same result. They both reduce the inerrancy and authority of Scripture by transforming the message to fit one's lifestyle, instead of letting the truth of God's word transform one's lifestyle.

Each of the Beatitudes testify to Christ's view of the Old Testament Scripture. If one seeks to be more like Christ, then they will possess a similar view. While the worldly aspiration is to have pride, be independent, and exert self-confidence, Jesus blesses those who consciously seek dependence on God, recognize their need for a Savior, and are truly humble and gentle (Matt. 5:3-5).<sup>89</sup> While the religious man is more concerned with legalism, condemnation, and being ceremonially pure, Jesus blesses those who earnestly desire personal righteousness, extend mercy to others, and have been given a clean heart, healed by the blood of the Lamb (Matt. 5:6-8).<sup>90</sup> While the politician creates rifts instead of peace, Jesus blesses those who make it their life's work to show others how to obtain the peace that surpasses all understanding, even if it means they are ostracized or killed (Matt. 5:9-10).<sup>91</sup> The Beatitudes stand directly in opposition to worldly values, promising a reward to all those who are willing to enter, in this life and the life to come, the kingdom of heaven.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Beatitudes reflect Christ's perspective on the Holy Scriptures. The Sermon on the Mount is foundational to the expectations of the character, attitude, and hope that is to be expected for those chosen to be in the kingdom of heaven. The Beatitudes also "reflect the two poles of the 'already but not yet' nature of God's kingdom through Christ."<sup>92</sup> As a

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<sup>88</sup> Chelsen Vicari, *Distortion: How the New Christian Left is Twisting the Gospel & Damaging the Faith* (Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine, 2014), 6.

<sup>89</sup> Barbieri, Jr., *Gospels*, 31.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 444.

result, there is a tension between the desire to live for the flesh and to live in righteousness. Each of the Beatitudes identifies specific traits of the human heart, setting a standard that can only be met by those who God has transformed from the inside out. The Old Testament writers anticipated the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus spoke the Beatitudes in the authority given to Him by the anointment of the Holy Spirit at His baptism. The writer of Hebrews later confirms Jesus' authority when he states, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son." (Heb. 1:1-2b ESV) It is in that light that the power and beauty of the Beatitudes stand, as they are the first public pronouncement of God's grace on the sinner. "Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:12)



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