

Weighed in the Scales (Part Two)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”

Reflection 4 in the series “A New World in the Morning”

So many people today weigh churches against the teachings of Jesus and their own experiences and find them wanting. Consider, for instance, just the Beatitudes of Jesus. And this becomes the question in the air all around us, certainly my question, always my question: How does Christian faith as it's often practiced measure up against something as basic as the Beatitudes of Jesus in Matthew 5:1-12?

What happens if a church meant to be poor in spirit comes across acting as if it alone has the truth, all the truth and nothing but the truth though across the centuries it often demonstratively turns out to be wrong? What if a church meant to hunger and thirst for what is right regularly passes by the poor and the marginalized? What if a church meant to be merciful is exposed for its intolerance? What happens when a church meant to be pure in heart is wracked by scandal – or when a church meant to be single-heartedly focused on God focuses instead on itself and its own institutional survival? What if a church meant to be engaged in peacemaking by its silence over and over tacitly endorses war? Should anyone really be surprised when a generation arises that sees all this, if many of them quit going to church?

And so we come to the great turning point that faces us in our time. And again maybe to some this sounds all bad. But again it turns out to be all good! Just suppose that a handful of people, maybe as few as twelve, understand what Jesus was really saying! Then suppose, ah, maybe 120 did, or three thousand, then maybe hundreds of thousands, then perhaps a great multitude that no one could count.

Let's consider again what Jesus was saying – what he's still saying: that his movement (what he calls the kingdom of heaven) belongs to the poor in spirit. It belongs to those who genuinely grieve. It belongs to those who master their impulses through meekness. It belongs to those who find justice not in vengeance but in doing what is right. It belongs to the merciful. It belongs to those who seek God with all their heart. It belongs to those who renounce violence and work for peace, and who will do so even in the face of violent resistance.

But that's only part of what he's saying because he says that it's such people who are blessed. Specifically Jesus is saying: How joyful, how radiantly joyful, how radiantly, unshakably joyful such people are. No one will be able to take away their joy (John 16:22). How blissful such people are! In their very poverty of spirit, in their grieving, in their unanticipated meekness, in their passion for just doing what is right regardless of the consequences to themselves, in their mercy, in their single-mindedness pursuit of God, in their renouncing violence and making peace, in all circumstances, even persecution, it is they who have found unshakable peace.

It is they who sense eternity all around them. It is they who live enchanted lives; in the words of the hymn, all nature sings and round them rings the music of the spheres. Not needing to possess or control anything, all things are theirs. They are open to all that life offers them, trusting that no matter what happens in their lives, it may just be for their highest good. Deep in their souls it is they who are born again. It is they who are free. God's love pours into them; joy and vitality

pour out of them. It is they who feel one with God, who sense the divine flow all around them and in them. They are surrounded by grace. For them time becomes eternity. They are filled with previously unimaginable power. They feel they can touch the heavens; that kingdom is theirs. They have found a joy that is nothing short of euphoria. And even when they slip – and they will sometimes slip – they now know life in the Spirit and the way back to it.

This is what people worldwide are hungering to hear. And many will not listen again until this is what they hear. But when they hear it! Ah! When they hear it! So things are falling apart – and have to so that space is made for what is new and better, so that space is made for the original teachings of Jesus, so that faith can catch fire again and dynamically spread. This time truly globally. A new world in the morning.

So what we call the world to today is what we too are called to: a state called beatitude, to supreme blessedness, to bliss, to euphoria. It's there for the taking. For anyone. Anytime. This is, it turns out, the foundational wisdom of the world God created. This is the oldest-time religion – what people already know in their hearts to be true. It can be yours starting now. Yeah, you'll fall off it. Old habits die hard. But you'll get back on. Now you'll know the way, and the way back. It's this poverty of spirit. It's this purity of heart – this single-minded quest for God. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. Every morning it will be as if you arose in heaven. You will be comforted. You will inherit the earth. You will be filled. You will be shown mercy. And you will see God. And if this is our faith and if we live it and teach it, there will be a new world in the morning.

– Dale Pauls