

# The Sermon on the Mount (Part 1)

## The Good Life – A Fresh look at the Beatitudes

### Study 1- Behind the Beatitudes

#### Introduction

The Beatitudes are among the best known words of Jesus. Pithy and compelling, they catch our attention and draw us in to think about what Jesus has to say. In particular they present us with two very important questions. First, what is the Kingdom of God? Second, to whom does the kingdom of God belong?

Despite their familiarity, the truth is that the Beatitudes like the Sermon on the Mount of which they are a part, are not always understood by those who read them. What does it actually mean to be *poor in spirit*? Who are the *meek* and why should they in particular be the ones who *inherit the earth*? Come to think of it what does it mean to *inherit the earth*? Is this a reference to a piece of land somewhere and if so do we get to choose our patch? A cottage near the beach, perhaps? Or a house on a golf estate? Does each of the Beatitudes describe a different believer? Or all they all true of all believers? And so we could go on...

The simple fact is that when it comes to the Beatitudes, we face the same challenge that we face in interpreting any part of the Bible. The challenge of understanding what they meant when they were first spoken and written down and the challenge of how to apply these ancient words to ourselves today. And as with all Bible study the answer lies in the simple but important rule of reading texts in their **context**. In particular, we need to ask and answer THREE important questions:

Question 1: What kind of literature is this? (The *literary context* of the text)

Question 2: In what historical setting were the words spoken or written? (The *historical context* of the text)

Question 3: How does what the text says fit in with the message of the Bible as a whole? (The *theological context* of the text)

Although background information is helpful, for our purposes we want to try as far as possible to answer these questions from the text itself. And with that in mind, we have set a few questions to help us along the way:

## Investigate – Literary Context

Read Matthew 5:1-12

- What do you notice about the structure of the beatitudes?

(Look for repeated words and phrases, how it begins and ends, where there is a rhythm, and when that rhythm is broken.)

- Are vv1-12 a description, a statement or a promise?

What might be the significance of Jesus speaking in these terms?

## Investigate – Historical Context

- Read Matthew 4:12 -5:2.

- What was the focus of Jesus preaching prior to this sermon? (v17, 23)
- When did Jesus start preaching like this? (v12,19,24)
- Where was Jesus when he preached the sermon? (v13-15 and v23) What is the significance of this?
- Who Jesus was speaking to in the Sermon on the Mount?

- How can these observations help us to understand the purpose of the Beatitudes?

## Investigate – Theological Context

From Matthew 4:12-17 we discover that Isaiah's message was the key theological background to Jesus' ministry. In Isaiah Ch 1-39 the prophet announces the coming exile of Israel. Read Isaiah 9:1-7 and skim read Ch 5:8-25.

- What language does Isaiah use to describe the spiritual condition of the people of his day?
- What word does Isaiah use repeatedly to warn Judah of the LORD's wrath against sin and unrighteousness?
- What word does Jesus use repeatedly in the beatitudes?
- Now read Matthew Ch 1:17. What difference does the coming of Jesus make to the exile of God's people?



## **Understand**

Think through what we have discovered about the Beatitudes thus far.

1. What announcement do you think Jesus is making in the Beatitudes?
2. Who are the people that the Beatitudes describe? What is true of these people?
3. What promises does Jesus make in the Beatitudes?



## **Apply**

1. If you were on the mountain side listening to Jesus that day, what part of the Beatitudes would have captured your attention the most? Why?
2. How do you think the Beatitudes speak to our world today?