

“Beatitudes”

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"Beatitude" originates from the Latin *beatus*, derived from the Hebrew *ashre* and the Greek *makários*. In selecting the Greek adjective *makários* to render the Hebrew *ashre*, the LXX translators intended to suggest a happiness that flows from justice, or having a right relationship with God. In contrast to *eulogía*, which connotes a cultic blessing that is efficacious in its pronouncement, *makários* characterized the type of person who is truly fortunate in the standing of the community. *Eulogía* was a "top-down" form of recognition for right living; *makários* came to a person from "below," a communal recognition of valued/honorable behavior.

Before the Exile beatitudes were used infrequently (i.e., 1 Kgs. 10.8); in the postexilic period they became more abundant. Gradually, with Wisdom or sapiential literature, the beatitudes came to reflect the prevailing ethos motifs of the culture. These are articulated primarily in the psalms, then in the proverbs, and thirdly in Isaiah, with some in Ecclesiastes and Job.

Those (the third person is dominant) considered beatitudinal by the community trust (Ps. 40.4; Pr. 16.20), fear (Ps. 112.1; 128.1; Prov. 28.14), and obey the Lord (Ps. 1.1; 119.2; Prov. 8.32). They are the ones whom the Lord has chosen (Ps. 65.5) and who have received God's forgiveness (Ps. 32.1, 2).

God is never called "*makários*" in the New Testament, except for I Tm. 1.11; 6.15. Neither is the term applied to non-humans. Twenty-eight of the forty-four beatitudes found in the New Testament are in Matthew and Luke. Thirteen are found in their "beatitudes" from the Sermons on the Mount and the Plain. Outside the sermons, *makáριοι* are found at Matt. 11.6/Luke 7.23; Matt. 13.16/Luke 10.23; Matt. 16.17; Luke 1.:27-28; Matt 26.46/Luke 12.43, 37-38; as well as Luke 1.45; 14.14 and 15.

Most translated *makários* as a state of being "blessed," "happy" or "fortunate." However, such images seem overly individualistic and not cognizant of the strongly communitarian nature of the house churches that constituted the gospels' world. At the heart of household relations during the first century (as well as ours, if we probe deeply enough), was the notion of honor and shame. Given the honor/shame culture that defined household belonging in the first century world, it seems more appropriate to consider *makários* as a term of honor for those in the households of Matthew and Luke who exhibited certain situations or stances in the community. Thus "how honorable" are those/you who . . .

The first eight beatitudes found in Matthew's gospel constitute the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, the first of Jesus' basic teachings. Thus they can be considered a summary

the entire message of Jesus. The beatitudes honor “those” who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are non-violent, who hunger and thirst for righteousness/justice, who are merciful, pure of heart, makers of peace and persecuted for righteousness/justice. In his ninth beatitude Matthew’s Jesus honors “you” who are persecuted. This seems to begin a Matthean triad wherein the one who is blessed receives a name (salt of the earth and light of the world) and, finally, a commission: “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt 5.11-16).

The use of the second person defines the audience of Luke’s four beatitudes: “you” who are poor, hungry and who mourn (“now”) as well as those who are hated, excluded, reviled and defamed (Luke 6.20-23). This would follow the Lukan tendency to praise those who were unable to have access to resources as more closely following the poor and rejected Jesus. Immediately following these four beatitudes the Lukan Jesus offers their antithesis by uttering four “woes” (ouaî) to those (“you”) in his audience who now are rich, full, laugh and well spoken of (Luke 6.24-26).

Matthew does not have such juxtaposition in his version. However, where Luke contrasts beatitudes and woes, it seems that Matthew considers the opposite of the beatitudes that honor certain behaviors in his house churches those who put stumbling blocks (skandalízoi) on the path of others’ discipleship (Matt 11.6; 16.17, 23).

Whether the beatitudes are Matthew’s or Luke’s, they reveal an ethos or code of conduct which not only characterize the unique cultural dynamics of households which constituted their respective households, they also help define the relationships that determined whether or not one would be considered worthy of belonging to that community. This belonging outlines the honored way of living promoted by members of that community to be normative of discipleship. They offer a way of life that stands opposed to the cultural norms and universally accepted “beatitudes” of every generation.

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Sources: Hans Dieter Betz, *The Sermon on the Mount, Including the Sermon on the Plain* (Matthew 5:3-7:27 and Luke 6:20-49, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995). Michael H. Crosby, *Spirituality of the Beatitudes Revisited*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2005. Michael H. Crosby, O.F.M. Cap., “The Beatitudes: General Perspectives,” in Francis A. Eigo, O.S.A., ed., *New Perspectives on the Beatitudes*, Villanova, Pennsylvania: Villanova University Press, 1995. Dom Jacques Dupont, *Les Béatitudes*, Paris: Gabalda, 1969-73.