

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

SYNOPTIC STUDIES.

I. THE BEATITUDES.

THE problem of problems in the synoptic question is the form and contents of the lost Aramaic source which Papias assigns to the Apostle Matthew. Does the First or the Third Gospel preserve it more faithfully? Did the Evangelists study it in Aramaic or in Greek; and if in Greek, had they generally identical translations before them? The studies which follow will have these questions continually in view, though the endeavour to trace the original form of the words of Jesus will only be subsidiary to the endeavour to grasp their essential meaning.

We start with some questions connected with the Sermon on the Mount. It may be as well to say at the outset that this discourse seems to me preserved most closely in Luke vi.: the elements in Matthew v.-vii. which Luke places in other contexts were not part of the Sermon as it stood in Q—we will adopt this convenient symbol for the non-Marcian source. I may add my own further conviction that where Matthew¹ and Luke differ in their report it is nearly always the former who has been introducing variation, for sundry motives, which will appear as we go on.

In examining the Beatitudes, we may begin with the literary form. It seems almost misleading to use the word "literary" in connexion with such fresh and spontaneous utterances as the words of Jesus. But the Hebrew mind

¹ I mean our First Gospel, which probably is "according to Matthew" because it is so largely "according to Q."

expressed itself in parallelism by a sort of necessity whenever thought was highly charged with feeling; and if the quintessence of "literature" is simply the best things said in the best way, we can use the term here with small likelihood of being contradicted. We see at once that in Luke vi. 20-26 there is parallelism continuously carried out: each blessing answers exactly to its woe. But a glance at Matthew v. 3-12 shows how much more elaborate is the form. There are eight Beatitudes, followed by a special application of the last; and the eighth lies very near the first. The Kingdom of Heaven is the subject of the Sermon as a whole, and the Beatitudes begin and leave off upon the same appropriate note. They form accordingly when taken together a composition of the same order as the eighth Psalm—an initial declaration followed by a development, returning upon itself with significant emphasis at the close. That this highly artistic arrangement is due to the Evangelist rather than to his source is made probable by comparing the concluding similitude of the Sermon as it appears in the two Gospels. We may, perhaps, see the same elaboration of parallelism in the Oxyrhynchus Logia. Compare with their canonical parallels the following sayings:—

I. no. 6. A prophet is not accepted in his own country;
nor doth a physician work cures on them that know him.

I. no. 7. A city built on the top of a high hill,
and established,
can neither fall
nor be hid.

II. no. 4. For there is nothing hid which will not become
manifest,
and buried which will not [be raised?].

The parallelism which distinguishes all these new Logia is not without importance as enhancing the probability of a genuine basis for them; but it must be acknowledged as

highly likely that they have passed through a medium which has intensified this.

We may now take the Beatitudes in Matthew's order one by one.

1. *Happy the poor in their spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.*

In Luke—

Happy ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Professor Burkitt points out that the presumed Aramaic original of this $\delta\tau\iota$ is ambiguous: it could be equally rendered "that they" . . . or "who will . . ." The fact that the two Evangelists translate alike by $\delta\tau\iota$ goes to swell the evidence in favour of a common Greek source. The first Beatitude brings us into the heart of our problem, and what we have to say here may be repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, for the two other sayings in which Luke and Matthew come into contrast. Did Matthew insert $\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\piνε\acute{\upsilon}\muατι$, which alters the whole content of the saying; or was it in the source, and did Luke cut it out? A considerable element in our answer is derived from the cumulative effect of studying other similar cases; and if I seem to start with a bias in favour of Luke's originality, it is only fair to note how the bias grew. Here, at any rate, there are arguments independent of other synoptic passages. The paradoxical form of the Lucan Beatitudes speaks strongly for them. The world "counts the proud happy" (Mal. iii. 15—LXX. *μακαρίζομεν*), and "dishonours the poor man" (Jas. ii. 6). In the kingdom of God this judgement is reversed. It is not, of course, that the poor are beatified as such—an allowance of common sense is assumed in the hearers of these pithy paradoxes. The history of the idea needs to be borne in mind. Time was when the flocks and herds of an Abraham or a Job were regarded as the outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual

grace. But the experience of the church-nation after the exile changed all this. "Forget not the congregation of Thy poor" was the recurrent cry of the pious, who had only too much reason to make the rich all but synonymous with the wicked (Isa. liii. 9). And so when "Thy poor" of the Psalmist is taken up in the Master's address to His disciples, we are in no danger of assuming that the blessing on "you poor" could be readdressed to the drunken casual of to-day. The Lucan form, alike in the absence of $\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\piνεύματι$ and in the presence of the corresponding Woe, is supported by James, whose saturation in the ideas of the Sermon on the Mount is the one sufficient argument for regarding his Epistle as the work of a Christian Jew. When James says (ii. 5) "Did not God choose out for Himself the poor as to this world as rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to them that love Him?" we cannot overlook the direct allusion to our Beatitude. And it must have been in the Lucan form: note the $\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\kappa\acute{o}\sigmaμῳ$ (dative of "person judging," or possibly not differing much from the $\epsilonἰς$ $\thetaεὸν$ $\piλout\acute{\omega}\nu$ of Luke xii. 21) as contrasted with the locative $\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\piνεύματι$ of Matthew. Nor is this the only allusion in the Epistle. The opening of chapter v. is entirely in the spirit of the Woe here. And in i. 9, 10 we have the element which justifies Matthew's interpretative insertion. "Let the humble brother glory in his exaltation, and the rich (brother) in his humiliation." The rich man who, by the grace of Omnipotence, has achieved what is harder than for the camel to pass through the needle's eye, may well glory in that sublime levelling process which enables the millionaire to share with the pauper the treasures of Heaven. A further note of Lucan originality may be seen in the characteristic $\acute{\alpha}\pi\acute{\epsilon}\chiετε$ of the Woe—"Alas for you rich, for you have received your consolation." It is the technical word in receipts—see Deissmann, *Bible Studies*, p. 229,

or any page of the second volume of Wilcken's *Ostraka*—and indicates that all that is due has been paid, there is no more to come. The coincidence with Matthew vi. 2, 5, 16 is conclusive. The blessing and the woe together recall many other passages in which the theodicy reverses the conditions of the world: so Isaiah lxxv. 13, 14; Luke i. 52, 53; John xvi. 20, and especially Luke xvi. 25.

The point made above from Luke's use of the second person—the originality of which is supported by its appearance in Matthew v. 11, 12—is not affected by its being found in the Woes as well. The “disciples” to whom our Lord was speaking included men of all kinds, and all degrees of attachment to His person. He may well have visualised the rich men really or ideally before Him, just as James visualises Sir Gorgius Goldring (ii. 2) stalking into the Christian “synagogue” amid the fawning servility of the worshippers.

“For yours is the kingdom of God.” Matthew's τῶν οὐρανῶν is the obvious substitution of a Jew, which it is unlikely enough that Jesus would countenance by His example,¹ even if He quotes its use by others (Luke xv. 18, 21). The ground of the blessing, as in the other Beatitudes, suits itself exactly to the condition which is pronounced happy. The poor are rich indeed, heirs of a realm of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where thief draws not nigh, nor moth destroyeth.” Happy such poor! poor indeed and miserable they who have already drawn all their treasure, and have no account when too late they would make a draft upon the bank of Heaven!

So to no. 2, with which John xvi. 20 has been already compared. *Happy they that mourn, for they will be comforted.*

¹ See Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, p. 218: his argument does not seem to me conclusive.

In Luke—

Happy you that weep now, for you will laugh.

Alas (for you), you that laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

This stands third in Luke's order, and third (but with a different no. 2) in the δ -text of Matthew. An arrangement supported by D and 33 (the "queen"), the Latins and the Curetonian, with Origen, Clement and Tertullian, must be treated with respect nowadays; but when the Lewis joins \aleph B and the rest to veto it we can hardly question the ordinary reading. Luke's order is another matter. He makes this Beatitude the second part of the blessing on the hungry. It seems possible that the δ -text reading in Matthew may be harmonistic in its origin, the Beatitudes which are linked in Luke being brought together in Matthew, though the change is not carried far enough to put verse 4 after verse 6. The juxtaposition of *poor* and *meek* would be an additional motive. It may at any rate be said that the Lucan order has nothing against its originality, though there is no decisive argument available.

It is difficult to determine between $\piενθούντες$ and $κλαίοντες$. On the one hand we have the former word in Isaiah lxi. 2, the great prophecy which formed the text of the Nazareth sermon, and may well be responsible for the blessing on the *poor* coming first here. On the other there is $\piενθήσετε$ in the Lucan Woe. It seems that conscious assimilation to Isaiah is the stronger motive, and we regard Luke again as closer to the Greek of Q. That $\piαρακληθήσονται$ is due to Isaiah can hardly be doubted, so that Luke's $\gammaελάσετε$ is sure. But Matthew's alteration of phraseology, while not affecting the sense, is peculiarly happy in its suggesting an Old Testament reminiscence so characteristic of the Master.

Those of us who are much moved by great music can never forget the magnificent use of this Beatitude in the *Requiem* of Johannes Brahms. The repetition of the same music for the solemn "Blessed are the dead" at the end is one of the masterstrokes which make the *Requiem* heart-searching beyond almost any music ever written.

In the Woe we notice again the echo in James iv. 9, in which every element of the Lucan verse is repeated.

3. *Happy the gentle, for they will inherit the earth.* This is simply Psalm xxxvii. 11, with the addition of *μακάριοι* and *ὄτι* to bring it into Beatitude form. Its absence from Luke is most easily explained by supposing it foreign to Q at this point, and adapted for its place here by Matthew, either direct from the Psalm, or more probably from a Logion of different form. That *πραῦτης* was beatified by our Lord we know already: see Matthew xi. 29 and 2 Corinthians x. 1—cf. also James iii. 13. We have no adequate equivalent for *πραῦς*. It is unfortunate that the word "meek" has fallen on evil days. As we use it now, "meekness" could not fairly be called a virtue in any sense. It does not imply the iron will that holds rebellious nature in check, but the flabby feebleness that could not resent a wrong if it tried. Imagine the word "meek" applied to the Speaker of Matthew xxiii. ! The *πραεῖς* are the strong souls who beat down within them the impulses of selfishness, who refrain from quenching the dimly burning wick, or breaking off the bruised reed, just *because* they are so bright and so strong themselves (see Isaiah xlii. 4, R.V. margin). For those who refuse to join in the selfish struggle the earth waits as their inheritance. The "pushful" are ousted by those who refuse to push for place and power.

4. *Happy they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.*

In Luke (cf. i. 53)—

Happy you who hunger now, for you will be filled.

Alas for you, you who are satiate now, for you will hunger.
 In this place the interpretation of Matthew has entirely changed the original meaning; and we can only plead that the resultant meaning is in complete harmony both with Old Testament figure (Isa. lv. 1; Ps. xlii. 1) and with the teaching of Christ elsewhere (John iv. 14, vi. 35, vii. 37). It is hard to believe that Luke's form is not the original. It fits the parallel Beatitudes perfectly, and it invited alteration by the very frequency with which hunger and thirst were used as metaphors for spiritual longing.

In Matthew's Beatitude we note how the verbs *πεινᾶν* and *διψᾶν* have become transitive, just as *νηστεύειν* in the Oxyrhynchus Logion which presumably recalls this—*ἐὰν μὴ νηστεύσητε τὸν κόσμον κ.τ.λ.* The emphatic *αὐτοί*, "they and no others," continues as in the other sayings.

5. *Happy the compassionate, for they will be compassionated.*
 This Beatitude, not in Luke, was probably due to the editor's adaptation. For as early as Clement of Rome—that is, not much later than the compilation of this Gospel—we find it in a series of sayings having the form of Matthew vii. 1. *Ἐλεᾶτε, ἵνα ἐλεθῆτε* is as plausible a form as that in which Matthew gives it. The inevitable echo in James (ii. 13) decides nothing as to form, and would answer as well to a corresponding Woe. The teaching is, of course, that which is enshrined in the Lord's Prayer and the comment upon it found in Matthew vi. 14, 15, also in Matthew xviii. 21–35, and Luke vi. 36. Shakspeare's exposition is too hackneyed to quote, and too telling to pass by.

6. *Happy the pure in their heart, for they will see God.*
 Here again we have the thought of a Psalm (xxiv. 4) put into the Beatitude form by Matthew, with support from a

Logion which is paraphrased in Hebrews xii. 14. The writer there is actually combining this and the following Beatitude, which probably stood together at some other place in Q, but the language is not exactly followed. (The iambic οὐ χωρὶς οὐδεὶς ὄψεται τὸν κύριον may be presumed accidental.) A suggestive contrast occurs in 1 John iii. 2. There the Beatific Vision produces the change into the same image; here the incipient God-likeness is rewarded by the Beatific Vision. The Beatitude links itself also with Matthew xviii. 10: the "angels," or heavenly counterparts, of the little ones are nearest the Throne because their earthly part has not yet been sullied in heart with sin. (Cf. Hastings, *B.D.* iv. 991*b.*)

7. *Happy the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.* For the first time the emphatic αὐτοί is possibly absent: its omission in \aleph CD and others is hardly balanced by its presence in B, etc., for the tendency to assimilate would be very strong. Once more the question arises whether the Beatitude originally stood in this form. Its absence from Luke is my main reason for doubting; but it may be noted that the echo in James iii. 18 would suit some other form equally well, and the saying may have owed to the editor its initial μακάριοι.

Like the fifth and sixth, this Beatitude is based on God-likeness; and the use for the first time of the term "sons of God," i.e. (in this case) men who reflect what "is an attribute of God Himself," shows that this attribute is the most important of the three. It is hardly necessary to copy from the concordance the passages which show how the old savage conception of the God of Battles—in which most Christian nations linger yet to their shame—has been uplifted by the coming of Him whose birth the angels heralded as bringing "peace among men of God's good pleasure." When "the Wisdom from above" became

incarnate below, the spirit of strife was understood at last to be only the activity of the animal in man, "the lusts that campaign in our members." Yet even in Old Testament days the Yahweh Sebâ'ôth, God of the armies of Israel, had been slowly transformed in the people's minds into the Lord of the hosts of heaven, and the Prince of Peace. And when New Testament writers bid us "*pursue* Peace"—not sham glory, bastard patriotism, dishonourable honour—they are quoting a Psalm.

Observe the difference between *εἰρηνοποιοί* and *εἰρηνικοί*. The latter may be merely passive. But *οἱ ποιοῦντες εἰρήνην* (James *l.c.*) are not content to be negative. There is great suggestiveness in the New Testament use of *ποιεῖν*, as contrasted with the *πράσσειν* of mere activity which sometimes in the same context describes the doing of evil. The *good* "that men do lives after them": good is a permanent product and evil a passing phase. "He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever"; and "His will is our peace."

Once more, "they shall be *called* sons of God." *Called*, in Heaven mostly, where perfect intelligences know how to call things by their right names. But even on earth the recognition is not wholly wanting. Witness the peculiar consideration shown to the Society of Friends, whose abandonment of the outward form of Sacraments must make their leading tenets the rankest heresy to those who lay stress upon that outward form. It is not strange that those who most conspicuously "*pursue* peace with all men" should so conspicuously succeed in showing in their members "the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord."

The saying of the Lord's Brother which we have been using to illustrate words of a higher authority still, reproduces with singular suggestiveness one of the most beautiful sayings of Hebrew wisdom (Prov. xi. 30):—

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life ;
And he that is wise winneth souls.

To *win* men, not to force them—to plant once more the “fruit of righteousness” which is to turn earth’s desert into a “Garden of the Lord”—well may that be accounted the task of those who are most like God.

8. *Happy they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.* This Beatitude seems to be a generalising of the original in the second person which Luke preserves in its place and Matthew adds as an application. In the Old Testament the *poor* and the *persecuted* are epithets of almost identical meaning applied to the struggling church-nation, fitly consoled with the promise of a kingdom not of this world. The perfect participle recalls the thought of Revelation ii. 10 : it is those who have gone through the fiery trial and proved “faithful unto death”—“obedient unto (μέχρι) death,” like their Master—who have the reward of final perseverance.

What may be said of this belongs best to the Appendix, as Matthew makes it :—

Happy are you when they have reproached you and persecuted you and said every evil thing against you [falsely] for my sake : rejoice and exult, for your reward is great in the heavens ; for so they persecuted the prophets that were before you.

Ψευδόμενοι is omitted by the Lewis, by D and some Old Latin (including the Bobiensis), and by Origen, Lucifer and Hilary. It seems strange that it was not included among Hort’s “Western non-interpolations.” It appears to me a gloss of the same kind as εἰκῆ in verse 22, softening a phrase which was not understood. The libels were bound to be “false” if they were uttered for Christ’s sake.

Instead of “for my sake” the Old Syriac had “for my name’s sake.” D and the Old Latin repeated the “for

righteousness' sake" from verse 10. There are other traces of assimilation in the Lewis here, which reads "hate and persecute"; while D and some other Westerns (including *k*) alter the order of *διώξωσι*—has the verb come in from verse 10? On the other hand the Lewis omits *ὀνειδίσωσι*.

In Peter:—

Were you even to suffer because of righteousness, happy you! (iii. 14).

If you are being reproached in the name of Christ, happy you! (iv. 14).

In Luke:—

Happy are you when men have hated you, and when they have boycotted you and reproached (you) and cast out your name as an evil thing for the sake of the Son of man: rejoice in that day and leap, for lo your reward is great in heaven; for in the same manner their fathers used to do to the prophets.

Alas when all men have spoken well of you, for in the same manner their fathers used to do to the false prophets. One curious difference between Matthew and Luke here is explained by Wellhausen as starting from the Aramaic "bring a bad name on you," which was translated *ἐκβαλεῖν ὑμῖν ὄνομα πονηρόν*. This is actually found for Luke in the Lewis, "put forth concerning you a name that is evil." It is tempting to regard this as the original reading in Luke and in Q, from which Matthew paraphrased. The form of the Greek text would come easily from a misreading of *ὑμῖν* as *ὑμῶν*, and a subsequent change of order.

By this time I hope we are ready to agree with Wellhausen's dictum that "the variants in Luke deserve throughout the preference," even though we admit with Dr. Moffatt that "Luke's rendering is truer to the letter, Matthew's to the spirit, of the original." In the case of this last Beatitude, indeed, the two versions represent two applications of the

same principle, Matthew's including times of actual persecution, while Luke's is restricted to conditions such as prevailed during the age of comparative tranquillity before the fires of persecution were kindled, when the "sect" was "everywhere spoken against," and Christians had to endure that social ostracism which is often so much harder to bear than persecution itself. The significant *εἰ καὶ πάσχοιτε* of the Petrine form shows the transition to the new conditions. The application to actual persecution was obvious and wholly justifiable, but the words as originally spoken were more inclusive. Jesus warned His disciples of persecution at other times : here He contemplates conditions which would last longer, as long as faithfulness to His principles provoked antagonism, as long as religion should remain unfashionable and loyalty vulgar in the eyes of a world which became no whit more Christian when it learnt to pay lip-service to Christian forms.

The *χαρῆτε ἀγαλλιάμενοι* of 1 Peter iv. 13, just before the Beatitude, is one of the few external supports we have for the Matthaean against the Lucan phraseology. The vivid *σκιρτήσατε* (cf. Luke i. 44) can hardly have been invented, however. Notice the aorist imperative in Luke, going with the "in that day," the absence of which in Matthew fits the generalised form of the command.

Matthew's concluding *τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν*, omitted by the Lewis here, as in all the authorities for Luke, may be the editor's gloss, or, as Wellhausen suggests, a translation doublet from Aramaic. The prophets of the Old Dispensation and of the New alike bore "the reproach of the Christ."

It would be very easy to enlarge at any length on this new Law of the Kingdom, but we must forbear. We have tried to bring out the probability that our First Evangelist is responsible for its codification as we have it. A skilled lawyer will collect from scattered sources judicial decisions in equity which together make the authoritative law on some particu-

lar subject. His book will be recognised according to the fullness and accuracy with which he has made his selection, and this will depend on his own understanding of legal principles as well as on his industry in searching sources. In something like this manner our Evangelist selected dicta from the one Lawgiver to whom Christians listen. We recognise inspiration in the power that has enabled him to bring together just those elements which form the ethical code of Christianity, superseding the mainly external and negative Decalogue of the olden time. I say "superseding," but do not mean to suggest that the Ten Words deserve the shallow depreciation which was paraded with all the airs of a discoverer by a writer in the *Hibbert Journal* not long ago. Recognition of their permanent value is consistent with the realisation that they can no longer stand in the forefront of the Christian system as an adequate summary of duty. Every one of them needs the "But I say to you," transforming its whole character by taking it from outward action into the springs of action. And for this purpose the Matthaean Beatitudes serve better than any other ethical code. It takes us only a little way, for example, to say "Thou shalt not kill." The world accepts this easily (except in war time) but has its gloss ready—

Thou shalt not kill, but needst not strive
Officiously to keep alive.

The New Law beatifies the merciful and the peace-makers, and bids every man do as he would be done by. And so on with the other Commandments. Jesus concentrated the whole Law into one little word. His interpreter Paul showed Love at work, in that incomparable thirteenth chapter of the first letter to Corinth. It was reserved for the first Evangelist, who worked up Matthew's collection of sayings of Jesus, to give us a gem more sharply cut still, each facet flashing with its special brilliance, but with a light that is always one.

JAMES HOPE MOULTON.