

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

with Christ? He has one name for the Messianic King—Jehovah-tsidkenu,¹ the Lord our righteousness—on which evangelical feeling has seized as indicating such a connexion; and there can be no objection to our using this title to express the fact that Christ has procured for us the pardon which is the root of love and obedience. But how far this combination of ideas may be ascribed to the prophet is more doubtful. All he knew may have been that the Messianic King was to bear a name denoting that in the new age God Himself was to be the source of the righteousness for lack of which the old covenant had been broken and in virtue of which the new covenant was to be everlasting. It was not given to the prophets to see the new era in its entirety; they set it forth, as they were able, in hints and fragments: it remained for the Messiah Himself, when He came, to draw together all the threads and form out of them the seamless and glorious robe in which He now shines and moves in the eyes of all the ages.

JAMES STALKER.

THE BEATITUDES.

SEEING that the beatitudes are prized as the very choicest gems in the treasury of our Lord's teaching, it is unfortunate that students of the New Testament have not been able to arrive at a common understanding as to the form in which they were originally spoken. We have two versions—one in the First Gospel (Matt. v. 3-12), and the other in the Third Gospel (Luke vi. 20-23), which differ considerably, as indeed do the two accounts of the whole discourse in which they occur. At the first blush of it, the simplest explanation would seem to be to follow Augustine in holding that we have here the narratives of separate discourses

¹ xxiii. 6; xxx. 16.

delivered by Jesus Christ on separate occasions. The more the facts are examined, however, the more difficult does this hypothesis become; the introductory circumstances, the concluding parables, many utterances, and the drift throughout are too similar in the two narratives to make it at all probable. Opinion continues to oscillate between preference for Matthew and preference for Luke. When the subject began to be freely discussed—about a century ago—St. Luke's version was regarded as the more primitive. This view was maintained by Schleiermacher, Credner, Schulz, Fritz, Olshausen, and others; and Tholuck tells us that when he advanced the opposite opinion he stood almost alone (*Com. on Serm. on Mount*, p. 4). But there came a turn in the tide. De Wette agreed with Tholuck's position, Meyer followed him on the same lines, and Hilgenfeld, from the Tübingen standpoint, maintained that the third evangelist had remodelled the language found in the first. In the present day opinion seems to be pretty equally divided. Holtzmann leans to Matthew's account as the more religious, and regards Luke's as a selection made from the evangelist's own sociological and ascetic standpoint (*Hand-Commentar, Die Synop.*, p. 100); Weiss admits that Luke has the sayings of Christ more correctly arranged in their historical setting, and yet maintains that Matthew's is undoubtedly the more original text (*Introd. to the New Test.*, vol. ii. p. 220; *Bib. Theol.*, vol. i. pp. 107, 127); and Beyschlag unhesitatingly accepts the first evangelist's wording of the beatitudes (*Neutest. Theol.*, vol. i. p. 47). On the other hand, Wendt, discussing the whole subject more fully, arrives at the conclusion that the balance of probability is in favour of Luke (*Die Lehre Jesu*, part i. p. 55); Resch also grants the priority to Luke (*Agrapha*, p. 247).

In attempting a fresh consideration of this question, we have to take account of the following leading distinctions:—

First, in Matthew there are 7 beatitudes, or, according to another reckoning, 8; in Luke there are but 4. Secondly, in Matthew the beatitudes are complete in themselves, and are followed by other topics; in Luke the 4 beatitudes are succeeded by a corresponding series of lamentations. In the third place, and here we come to the crux of the matter, in Matthew the beatitudes are of a spiritual character, describing for the most part persons of some specific excellence, for which the severally allotted blessings are the fitting rewards, or even the natural fruit; while in Luke attention is directed to the social conditions and sufferings of the several classes of people to whom the great blessings of the kingdom are promised.

That we have strong motives for accepting the version of the first evangelist is not to be denied. Compared with this, Luke's version cannot but strike us as thin and meagre. There is a richness in the beatitudes of Matthew that has commended them to every reader, so that they have passed into the popular understanding as simply *the* beatitudes, without any thought of their rivals. This common acceptance of them cannot but speak strongly for their true spiritual worth. But how dangerous it is to attempt to settle questions of verbal criticism by reference to considerations of this order, is clearly shown by the fact that many people who are able to appreciate the Bible spiritually in the highest degree entertain the quaintest notions in regard to its literary character. Questions that deal with the latter must be considered on their own merits.

Superior as the Matthew version may seem to be to that of Luke while the two are simply laid side by side, when we look at the comparison in all its relations it begins to assume different proportions. Several facts concur in pointing just the opposite way.

1. In other cases it seems that we must give the prefer-

ence to the language of the Third Gospel, as more primitive than that of the first. Thus in Mark, one of the acknowledged common sources of the two, we read continually of "the Kingdom of God." This phrase passes over to Luke. But in Matthew it becomes "the Kingdom of Heaven," in harmony with the more Hebraistic tone of the latter work. Again, in the Third Gospel, Jesus says to the young ruler, "Why callest thou Me good? None is good save One, even God" (Luke xviii. 19)—word for word as the speech is found in Mark (x. 18, R.V.). In Matthew, however, according to the best authorities for the text (N B D, etc.), the language is softened into "Why askest thou Me concerning that which is good?" etc. If Matthew's version had been the original, it is inconceivable that any Christian writer would have ventured to alter it in order to put words into the lips of our Lord that have always occasioned a difficulty to His followers, assured as they are of His perfect goodness. In other cases, it is true, Matthew is nearer to Mark, and in most of these he is probably more correct. But the peculiar character of those cited shows a tendency in Matthew to smooth the harshness of the primitive tradition, and this is just analogous to the case of the beatitudes.

2. It is generally admitted that Luke is more careful in placing the sayings of Jesus Christ in their original historical framework, while Matthew's aim seems to be rather to group them according to their topics, a fact which of itself points to a probability of more change in Matthew. In dealing with the Sermon on the Mount this difference is to be observed. Luke makes it clear that the great discourse was given immediately after the appointment of the twelve apostles, and as a sort of ordination charge to them (Luke vi. 12-20). Matthew never mentions the original appointment of the apostles, and at the conclusion refers to the sermon having been heard by "the multitudes" (Matt.

vii. 28, 29) ; and yet he retains an allusion to the original intention of the discourse in his opening words, which seem to make a distinction between the great crowd and the "disciples" whom Jesus drew off to the mountain that He might speak to them without distraction (Matt. v. 1, 2). If, then, Luke is nearer to the original facts in these matters, is it not reasonable to suppose that he is also nearer to the language of our Lord on the same occasion ?

3. The literary history of the Bible has made it abundantly manifest that it was always the tendency of writers to expand rather than to abbreviate. The later writer feels called upon to enlarge upon the brief notes he has received, not indeed with any intention of deceiving, but with the very opposite purpose, in order to explain what seems to him to be obscure and to give the correct meaning to what appears to be in danger of misinterpretation. He attempts to develop and so make clear the ideas which he believes to be wrapped up in the pithy utterances that lie before him. The quality of such work as this varies immensely according to the capacity and character of the workman. In inferior hands poetry is converted into prose, and choice thought watered down to dullest commonplace. But when the writer is himself an inspired teacher the expansion of the more or less enigmatic utterance with which he has to do is a genuine explanation of its meaning. This gives the secondary writing a distinct value of its own. But it does not make it the less a secondary writing. The beatitudes seem to afford an admirable illustration of this process at its best. We cannot be too thankful for Matthew's version of these sayings of our Lord, it is so valuable an exposition of the hidden truth contained in the shorter utterances which appear in Luke ; and yet it must be confessed that it is according to all analogy that those shorter utterances should turn out to be the original ones.

4. Looking now more closely at the beatitudes themselves we have first the difference of form. Matthew's are in the third person, Luke's in the second. Now is it not more likely that when addressing a solemn charge to His own disciples Jesus Christ would adopt the more direct form of speech? He does so on other occasions, and this form appears in Matthew at the end of the beatitudes and throughout the remainder of the Sermon on the Mount. This then points to Luke's form of the beatitudes as the more primitive.

5. Next we have the difference in the number of the beatitudes, seven or eight in Matthew, and only four in Luke. It might seem more likely that some of the original utterances of our Lord would be forgotten than that new sentences should be added. This is not a case of mere expansion, as in the enlargement of individual beatitudes referred to above; it is one of clear addition. On the other hand, it must be remembered that in a distinctively Jewish writing the number seven would have a great attraction. This sacred number might be made up by the insertion of true teachings of Christ moulded so as to suit their new setting. It is admitted that Matthew does obtain lengthy discourses elsewhere by combining utterances of our Lord which were spoken on various occasions. Or look at it in another way. In Luke the four beatitudes are followed by four lamentations. Thus Luke has his eight aphorisms. If the lamentations were dropped, there would be an inducement to make up the number by selections from other teachings of Christ. Of course we may imagine the reverse process to have taken place, but there is a remarkable unity in the whole scheme as it appears in Luke that makes this hypothesis less likely. We know that our Lord was in the habit of uttering most terrible lamentations. The language here preserved by St. Luke is no stronger and no more stern than that of Matthew xxiii. The Sermon

on the Mount has other instances of the antithetic method, *e.g.*, the Narrow Way leading to Life and the Broad Way leading to Destruction, and the concluding parables of the House on the Rock and the House on the Sand. It is just according to the analogy of these utterances that Jesus should balance His beatitudes with the corresponding lamentations. Nor is it altogether wonderful that these lamentations should be omitted by Matthew. There is a graceful smoothness about the rendering of the great discourse in the First Gospel which the evangelist may have thought better left undisturbed by the insertion of the harsh lamentations immediately after the lovely beatitudes.

6. We now come to the chief distinction between the two versions of the beatitudes. In Matthew they treat of spiritual characters and their fitting rewards and natural fruits; in Luke they are connected with the external condition of people, their social state, and the sufferings to which they are subjected, apparently without any reference to their personal characters. Now it has been justly pointed out by Wendt that the beatitudes in Luke cannot be promised as rewards for the states there described, since those states are not of a moral or spiritual nature, as are the states described in Matthew. This fact, however, does not rob them of their value. It rather puts them in line with the doctrine of grace, the free offer of the gospel, and the exceeding gladness of the news that Jesus came to preach. This difference might seem to militate against the Lucan version, were it not that traces of the form preserved in that version are to be found in Matthew's. Thus the second beatitude in Matthew is of the same nature as the beatitudes in Luke. This does not refer to any moral character. It simply promises consolation to mourners, as the beatitudes in Luke promise blessings to the poor and hungry and suffering.

It cannot be denied that the drift of the beatitudes as

they appear in Luke is entirely in accordance with the spirit and teaching of Christ. In the great annunciation of His programme at Nazareth He struck the keynote of His teaching by starting with a reading of an ancient prophecy which He declared gave the reason for His divinely ordered mission in the words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor" (Luke iv. 18). And in the parable of the great supper the servant is commanded to "go quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and maimed and blind and lame" (Luke xiv. 21). If it be objected that, inasmuch as these passages and others of kindred nature, such as the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, are only found in the Third Gospel, they bear witness to the Ebionite tendency of the writer, it may be replied that they are to be matched with close parallels in the other Synoptics. Thus we have the answer sent to John's enquiry from prison concluding with the words, "The poor have good tidings preached to them" (Matt. xi. 5); and the difficulty of a rich man entering the kingdom of God, a difficulty that amounts to an absolute impossibility without special Divine aid (Matt. xix. 23, 24; Mark x. 23-27). The great truth that the very best things are offered to the poor and suffering and helpless lies at the heart of the gospel. It exactly meets a need that is left by the opposite method pursued in the course of nature. The law of the survival of the fittest may be good news to the strong; it is a doctrine of doom for the weak. In the fierce competition of nature, as in the fierce competition of human life, the weak must go to the wall. Here is a crying need, and Christ comes directly to meet it. The most marked characteristic of Christianity is compassion, the compassion of the Saviour, the compassion of God revealed and made effective in His Son. St. Luke's version of the beatitudes brings this out with double emphasis by being set against the

dark back-ground of the miserable disappointment that is in store for the self-sufficient. If this is Ebionite, Christianity is Ebionite; but it is nothing of the kind, for it does not imply the meritoriousness of poverty and abstinence, it simply promises compassion and help from God for people in these conditions.

7. After the Gospels there is no book of the New Testament so full of allusions to the teachings of Jesus Christ as the Epistle of St. James. If we may accept Mr. Mayor's strong arguments in favour of the early date of this writing, and "perhaps name the year 40 A.D. as the earliest, and 50 A.D. as the latest, at which the Epistle could have been written" (*The Epistle of St. James*, p. cxxiv.), we have here a document considerably prior to all the Gospels, and therefore not borrowing from any of them. Now St. James reminds us of the beatitudes and lamentations that were recorded by St. Luke, though not till after the appearance of the Epistle. Thus, he says, "Did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith" (Jas. ii. 5), and he goes on to mention the oppression practised by the rich, making a charge against the wealthy of his day which may account for the apparently harsh words used about them by Jesus in His lamentations. In another place St. James utters a lamentation over the rich that reads like an expansion of our Lord's words on the subject, with allusions to kindred sayings of Jesus, as that about the moth and rust that destroy earthly treasures (Jas. v. 1-6). This too gives such a picture of the rich men of the time as fully justifies the anticipation of a terrible destiny for them such as is indicated in the language of Christ.

8. A very striking confirmation of St. Luke's version is contained in the Epistle of Polycarp, where the writer gives as "words which the Lord spake" the sentence, "Blessed are the poor and they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of God" (*Epist. to Philippians*, 2).

The form of this beatitude—its being in the third person—recalls Matthew's version; but it is significant that Polycarp has simply "the poor" as in Luke, not Matthew's "poor in spirit." Credner, who first drew attention to this fact in its bearing on the question now before us, also cited the testimony of the Clementines, in which we read, "But our teacher pronounced the faithful poor blessed" (*Clem. Hom.*, 10); but these are writings of Ebionite tendency. In the *Apostolical Constitutions*, however, we meet with the hortatory form of St. Luke, and that is independent of doctrinal tendencies. We seem to have a reference to one of the beatitudes in the sentence, "Do ye also rejoice when ye suffer such things, for ye shall be blessed in that day" (*Apos. Con.*, v. 3). On the other hand the *Didache* has Matthew's phrase, "The meek shall inherit the earth" (*Didache*, 3). This may be taken from our Gospel, or from the *Logia*; if from the latter, we must infer that Matthew here follows closest to that primitive authority, as he is generally supposed to do.

The conclusion of the last paragraph brings up another question. If, as the arguments adduced seem to show, Luke's version of the beatitudes is the original, whence came Matthew's? Can we set this down entirely to subsequent reflection and exposition? To do so is to credit the evangelist with more than can be allowed him. The wonderful utterance, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," is found only in Matthew. We cannot possibly regard this as an expansion of any of Luke's beatitudes; it must be a genuine *Logion* of the Master. Moreover, the rich, deep teaching with which Matthew's beatitudes are inspired points throughout to the thought and soul of the Great Teacher. Thus we seem to be urged to a contradiction of the position towards which earlier considerations were leading us. The paradox, however, is not insoluble. We have seen that it was the custom of the first

evangelist to collect sayings of a common character and group them together, and also that it was his habit to round off his materials and shape them into his smooth style. It is in accordance with the analogy of the situation, therefore, to conclude that in the case before us the evangelist has preserved the true thoughts and teachings of Christ and arranged some of the most suitable of these in association with the primary beatitudes. That our Lord was accustomed to speak in the form of the beatitudes, is apparent from various instances. Thus we have the saying preserved by St. Paul, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35), and probably a genuine tradition of a saying of Christ addressed to the man whom He found working on the sabbath, inserted in the *Codex Bezae*. "If thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art under a curse and a transgressor of the law" (Luke vi. 4, D). The beatitude form of speech was in favour among the early Christians. In the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* we have a number of fresh beatitudes associated with genuine teachings of Christ. St. Paul is here represented as saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are they that keep themselves chaste, because they shall be called the temple of God. Blessed are they that mortify their bodies and souls, because unto them speaketh God. Blessed are they who despise the world, for they shall be pleasing to God. Blessing unto them who shall have wives as if they had them not, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed they who shall have the fear of God in their hearts, because they shall be called angels. Blessed they who tremble at the words of God, which they fear, for the Lord shall call them. Blessed be they who have received the wisdom of Jesus Christ, because they shall be called sons of God. Blessed be they who keep the baptism, for they shall rest in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Blessed they who shall

receive the law of Christ, because they shall be for a great light. Blessed those who for the love of Christ shall leave the flesh, for they shall inherit immortal life, and shall stand eternally on the right hand of the Son of God. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy from the Father and in the day of judgment they shall receive the kingdom. Blessing to the souls and bodies of virgins, for they shall be pleasing to God, and shall not lose the reward of their chastity; for the working of the Father's words shall be found in them, and they shall inherit life in the day of the Son of God, and rest eternal shall be theirs" (Conybeare, *Monuments of Early Christianity*, pp. 64, 65).

The writer here follows Matthew in his quotations from our Lord's beatitudes, and imitates them in adding his own, which are for the most part of a strongly ascetic tone. In these novel beatitudes we meet with evident allusions to New Testament passages. Thus the second sentence is evidently moulded on a phrase of St. Paul's, the temple of God preserved in chastity being a manifest allusion to 1 Corinthians vi. 19. This curious instance of the adaptation of earlier teaching to the form of beatitudes, with which it is wished to bring it into line, may throw some light on the arrangement of the beatitudes in Matthew.

While, then, we are led by a variety of arguments to the conclusion that the original utterance of the beatitudes by Christ corresponds to the group in Luke, we may account for the version in Matthew by supposing that the evangelist collected teachings of Christ from other occasions, and arranged these so as to enrich the primitive beatitudes.

W. F. ADENEY.