

Discussion Time

Consider Matthew and Luke's versions of the Beatitudes:

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:3 – 6

“He said:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.”

Luke 6:20 - 21

“²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.”

- What differences can you spot? How might these reflect the different emphases and concerns of Matthew and Luke?

Number of beatitudes

Their/they compared to yours/you

Different audience Matthew Jews, Luke Gentile

- Which one of these beatitudes seems most relevant to your life right now? And why?

- How should these beatitudes shape our attitude on a daily basis?

Comparison of Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount

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<i>Matthew 5:3-12</i>		<i>Luke</i>	<i>6:20b-26</i>
³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, <i>for theirs <u>is</u> the kingdom of heaven.</i>	1	^{20b} Blessed are you who are poor, <i>for yours <u>is</u> the kingdom of God.</i>	²⁴ But woe to you who are rich , <i>for you <u>have received</u> your consolation.</i>
⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, <i>for they will be comforted.</i>	2		
⁵ Blessed are the meek, <i>for they will inherit the earth.</i>	3		
⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, <i>for they will be filled.</i>	4	²¹ Blessed are you who are hungry now , <i>for you will be filled.</i>	^{25a} Woe to you who are full now , <i>for you will be hungry.</i>
⁷ Blessed are the merciful, <i>for they will receive mercy.</i>	5		
	6	^b Blessed are you who weep now , <i>for you will laugh.</i>	^{25b} Woe to you who are laughing now , <i>for you will mourn and weep.</i>
⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, <i>for they will see God.</i>	7		
⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, <i>for they will be called children of God.</i>	8		

<p>¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, <i>for theirs <u>is</u> the kingdom of heaven.</i></p>	<p>9</p>		
<p>¹¹Blessed are you <i>when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.</i> ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, <i>for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</i></p>	<p>10</p>	<p>²²Blessed are you <i>when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man,</i> ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; <i>for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.</i></p>	<p>²⁶Woe to you <i>when all speak well of you,</i> <i>for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets</i></p>

Introduction

Throughout the history of the church, many individuals have engaged themselves in textual criticism of biblical texts. Irenaeus in 2nd century CE for example believed differences between texts to be on account of theological considerations of the Gospel authors. The Beatitudes as found in Matthew 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23 contain similarities and differences, some of which have caused many commentators to suggest outright contradiction in the Gospel text. Yet in reality, many of these differences can likely be accounted for in the theology of each author. The purpose of this essay is to examine these similarities and differences and to explore the underlying theology which has influenced the transmission of the Jesus' Beatitudes by Matthew and Luke.

Similarities and Differences

The beatitudes in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the Sermon of the Plains in Luke contain some similarities and differences, despite the expectation that these are a narration of the same sermon. There is an agreement between Matthew and Luke in the four common beatitudes which insists a literary relationship exists between the Gospels in either source material or direct access to the other author's writings. Robert Stein notes that the similarities between Matthew and Luke include the sermon's address to an audience of disciples, individuals who have already repented seek instruction on living in the kingdom with the crowd to the periphery. The texts include the same form of "Blessed are" in the Greek, a reference to the kingdom of "...", and the implication of God in the divine passive, that by God "you will be". According to Dieter Betz, a similarity between between the two sermons of Matthew and Luke is that these contain a guide for the conduct of the disciple on this earth.

Stein notes that there is a striking difference in the number of beatitudes in Luke, who writes four compared to Matthew's eight more developed beatitudes. The remaining beatitudes of Matthew are expected to be traced to Old Testament writings and traditions, if not found in shared source material both authors used. Of these shared beatitudes, Luke has written the equivalent of Matthew's first, fourth, second and ninth beatitudes, in that order.

There are a number of major differences between these four beatitudes, which firstly includes the point of view where Luke writes in second person plural "yours" and Matthew in third person plural "theirs".

Secondly, and by some considered to be a complete contradiction between biblical texts is the differences in the Greek. Matthew's inclusion of the the Greek ἐν πνεύματι, "in spirit," in the first beatitude and the words καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, "and thirst for righteousness" in the fourth has no comparative in Luke. Although likely to be Matthean redaction in line with his interests, Matthew has narrowed without falsifying the meaning of the beatitudes with his "in spirit" and "and thirst for righteousness". Commentators such as Blomberg suggest rightly that both authors have in mind those who have sustained economic or social stresses as having their confidence only in God in their writing. Luke would have been well aware of those who like David were "poor", having been humbled before God. It can be concluded therefore that the Lukan beatitudes broadly include both the economic poor and those humbled in spirit before the Lord.

Thirdly, Luke balances the four beatitudes of his text with four woes, a reversal of roles which living in the kingdom of God inevitably ushers in at the eschaton. Some scholars have drawn links between the woes and the Matthean sermon, which suggests that Matthew knew the woes and decided against using them. Alternatively, it is possible that Luke is wholly responsible for the woes and has been influenced by materials available to both writers. According to Dieter Betz however, readers should not conclude Matthew had no use for the woes. Included instead within the Matthean sermon are lengthy eschatological warnings towards the end of the sermon, which act as a counterbalance of the blessings in the same way as the Lukan woes.

It would appear that the similarities and differences between the Matthean and Lukan beatitudes are no cause for concern as some would suspect and the voice of Jesus feels as though it has been preserved adequately in the transmission of the text.

The Theology of the Gospel Authors

It is clear that there are similarities and differences between the narration of the two texts, but our explanation is undeniably linked to the differences in the theological interests of the author.

The Matthean beatitudes sees the world with a Jewish lens, where groups of people are identified as the righteous and the unrighteous. The Sermon on the Mount, including the beatitudes establishes an ethical standard of living, helping us to understand that the rewards given by God are directly related to our own responsibilities as His children and as members of the Kingdom. Osborne notes that "It is not a new messianic

Torah but rather a transformation of the Torah of the OT into the Torah of the Messiah.” Two primary themes run throughout the Matthean beatitudes. The first theme is the kingdom, where the blessed are promised the kingdom of heaven in the present tense. The second theme is the ethical requirements for righteousness within the community of Jesus, telling the Jewish church reading Matthew’s Gospel how to conduct themselves in the attitudes and relationships typical of the people of God.

The organisation of the Gospel, the ethical content and emphasis on discipleship have caused a variety of views to be considered by scholars. Some consider that Matthew has written to provide a manual for new believers, a scholastic manual for leaders in the church or that his Gospel is designed for reading in early church services. Gundry notes however that the Gospel gives an even stronger impression of having been used as a text to strengthen Jewish Christians in their faith in volatile times. Matthew narrows the meaning of Luke’s beatitudes in his text, focusing particularly on the attitudes of the believer, something often focused upon by Matthew in his Sermon on the Mount narration. Ultimately, Matthew is identifying Jesus as the new and greater Moses in his Gospel, portraying Jesus in this text as speaking His covenantal law from a mountain.

Whereas Matthew identifies with Jewish thought, the Lukan beatitudes identify humanity as the poor and the rich. Dieter Betz concludes that this division in Luke reflects the divisions typically made by Hellenistic moralists, Gentiles typically considered to be Luke’s audience. The law, righteousness and piety found in the Matthean text is all but absent from Luke and the Jewish background so distinctive of Matthew is less obvious. In fact, Luke neither links nor even mentions the Mosaic law within the text. The main theme running through the Gospel of Luke is the universality of Jesus. Although His mission is first to the Jews, Lukan theology includes Jesus’ concern for the Gentiles and social outcasts, such as immoral women, tax collectors, Samaritans and the poor. It is especially clear from the Gospel of Luke that the author has a special concern for the economic poor of his world and much of the content of the beatitudes and the Gospel at large reflects this.

The inclusion of the woes shows an emphasis on the countercultural nature of the kingdom, something which Matthew does not emphasise as greatly: “blessings await the poor, who hunger, weep and are hated; for God’s kingdom belongs to them and God will one day wipe away every tear.” Stein notes that for Luke’s readers, this should serve as an encouragement for them to continue living with the values of the kingdom in view despite their struggles in the world. In the context of Luke, the poor are not only those who are in need but also includes the humble believers who are loved by God. The author does not feel the need to spiritualise the poor in the text, which makes the text more broadly inclusive of the economic poor.

The Jewishness of Matthew and the Gentile nature of Luke can only be attributed to their differences in experiences and theologies, but we can remain certain that the texts both capture and narrate the beatitudes accurately.

Conclusion

Apollinaris once wrote that to hunger and thirst for righteousness produces an intensification of our desires. Although Matthew and Luke have narrated their beatitudes differently, with different emphasises and purposes, the essence of the beatitudes and the person and the character of Jesus remain.

As in Matthew, our intense longing and desire for righteousness should be to live up to the ethical standards of Christ and His attitudes for living out life in the kingdom, yet as disciples we must also be willing to set ourselves aside for the sake poor and the outcast, also part of Jesus' concern.

Above all, the beatitudes teach us that as disciples we have both privilege and responsibility ; we must have total confidence in the God who provides and have the responsibility to take actions of a standard befitting those called into the kingdom – living out humility, meekness, hunger and thirst, mercy, purity and peacemaking in a world which will reject and revile us for the name of Jesus Christ.