

The Narrative-Discourse Structure of Matthew's Gospel

Infancy Narrative: 1-2

Narrative: 3-4

Discourse: "Sermon on the Mount" 5-7

Narrative: 8-9

Discourse: "Missionary Instructions" 10

Narrative: 11-12

Discourse: "Collection of Parables" 13

Narrative: 14-17

Discourse: "Community Instructions" 18

Narrative: 19-22

Discourse: "End of the Age Sermon" 23-25

Passion and Resurrection Narrative: 26-28

Matthew 4:23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. **24** So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. **25** And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

Matthew 5:1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. **2** And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

Who is the intended audience? Jesus' ~~disciples~~ only, or also the crowds?

Given the nature of the content of the discourse (being persecuted for Jesus' sake, for example, 5:10-12) and the phrase in vs. 1 "his disciples came to him." the audience intended is the one who has embraced Jesus' message of repentance in light of the kingdom of heaven (4:17). This discourse is Jesus' teaching on discipleship; it is a guide for the disciple's life, one who is committed to the kingdom of heaven, and even they (and we) will find the ideal presented is beyond their grasp.

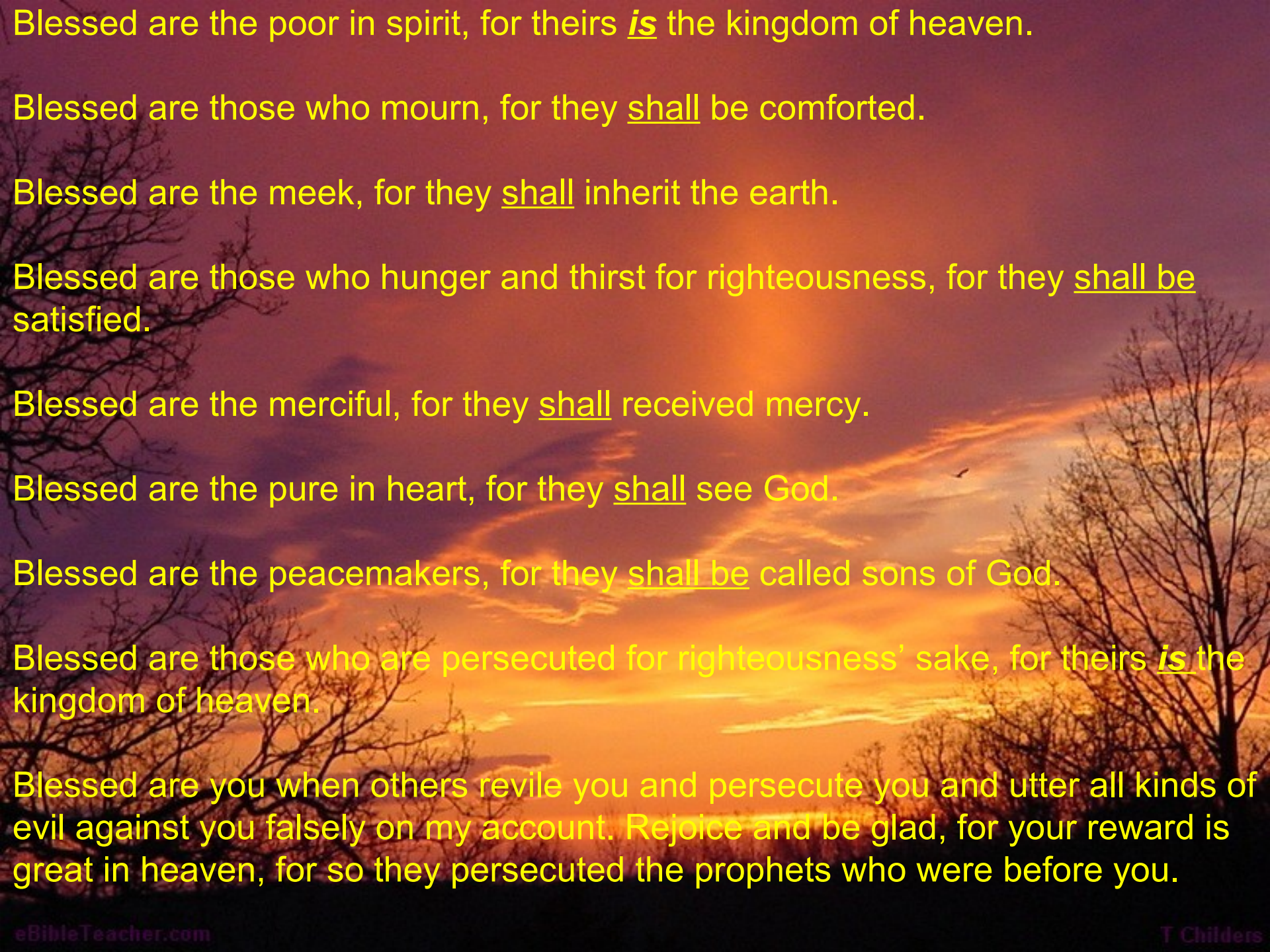
But what about the crowds? How are we to understand their role or function? They are mentioned as "following" Jesus in 4:25 and they are the reason Jesus ascends a mountain (5:1). At the end of the discourse, "the crowds were astonished at his teachings" indicating they had been listening as a kind of outer circle to the disciples. So we can say that the "crowds" represent at least potential disciples.

“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:”

The word “mountain” is probably not to be confused with some high mountain peak, but rather to the hill country lying west and north of the Sea of Galilee.

Possible typological meaning of “he went up on the mountain” is to Moses in Ex. 19:3 going up Mt. Sinai to receive God’s word for Israel and then coming down to declare that word. The contrast however is that while Moses received God’s word and gave it to Israel with a “thus saith the LORD”, Jesus simply declares “I say unto you...” Jesus was a greater than Moses.

“when he sat down..” Like a rabbi getting ready to teach, Jesus follows the custom of sitting before he taught. Sitting was the posture of authoritative teaching (compare 13:2; 24:3; 26:55 and especially in Luke 4:16-21. Teachers normally stood to read (Luke 4:16) and sat to teach (Luke 4:20).



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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Structure of the Beatitudes

There are basically 8 beatitudes; the 9th is distinctive in that it uses the 2nd person plural (“you”) and is much longer than the other 8.

Note that the 1st and the 8th are like frames surrounding the beatitudes with their common refrain, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. So what do we see here but a description of those who are part of God’s kingdom. This phrase is also a catch-word in the preaching of Jesus (see 4:17, 23). The context of this discourse (Matt.5-7) is the “gospel of the kingdom”. Though you cannot see it in the English, in the first 4 beatitudes the “designate” as blessed (poor, mourn, meek, hunger) all begin with the same Greek letter (p), indicating Matthew’s intention of easy memorization of Jesus teachings.

What is a “beatitude”? It is a kind of writing used in the OT and other Jewish literature as a way of teaching wisdom and it described the present happiness of those who lived according to wisdom. An example might be Psalm 1:1. There was a deed-reward relationship, “if you lived this way, this will happen to you.” They were usually expressed in the 3rd person (“he”).

Later this form of literary expression extended the deed-result connection to the eschaton, or end of this age. A beatitude would describe the future happiness of those presently in bad circumstances (Isaiah 30:18; 32:20; Daniel 12:12)

What Is A Beatitude?

A beatitude is not an expression of a blessing conferred, but a recognition of an existing state of happiness or blessing. It is an approving proclamation, signifying a future joy that is to come

In Matthew 5 these beatitudes describe those who are followers of Jesus Messiah. Jesus is not describing 8 kinds of disciples but 8 qualities of the same person that are evidences of the impact of the kingdom of heaven on him/her.

Comparison of OT Beatitude With Matthew 5

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.” Ps.1:1

In OT beatitudes something you do results in a blessing

In the OT beatitudes usually expressed that the person who lived his life a certain way was blessed. The idea was that certain behavior resulted in a good, or blessedness. No reference to the future of some promise or reward.

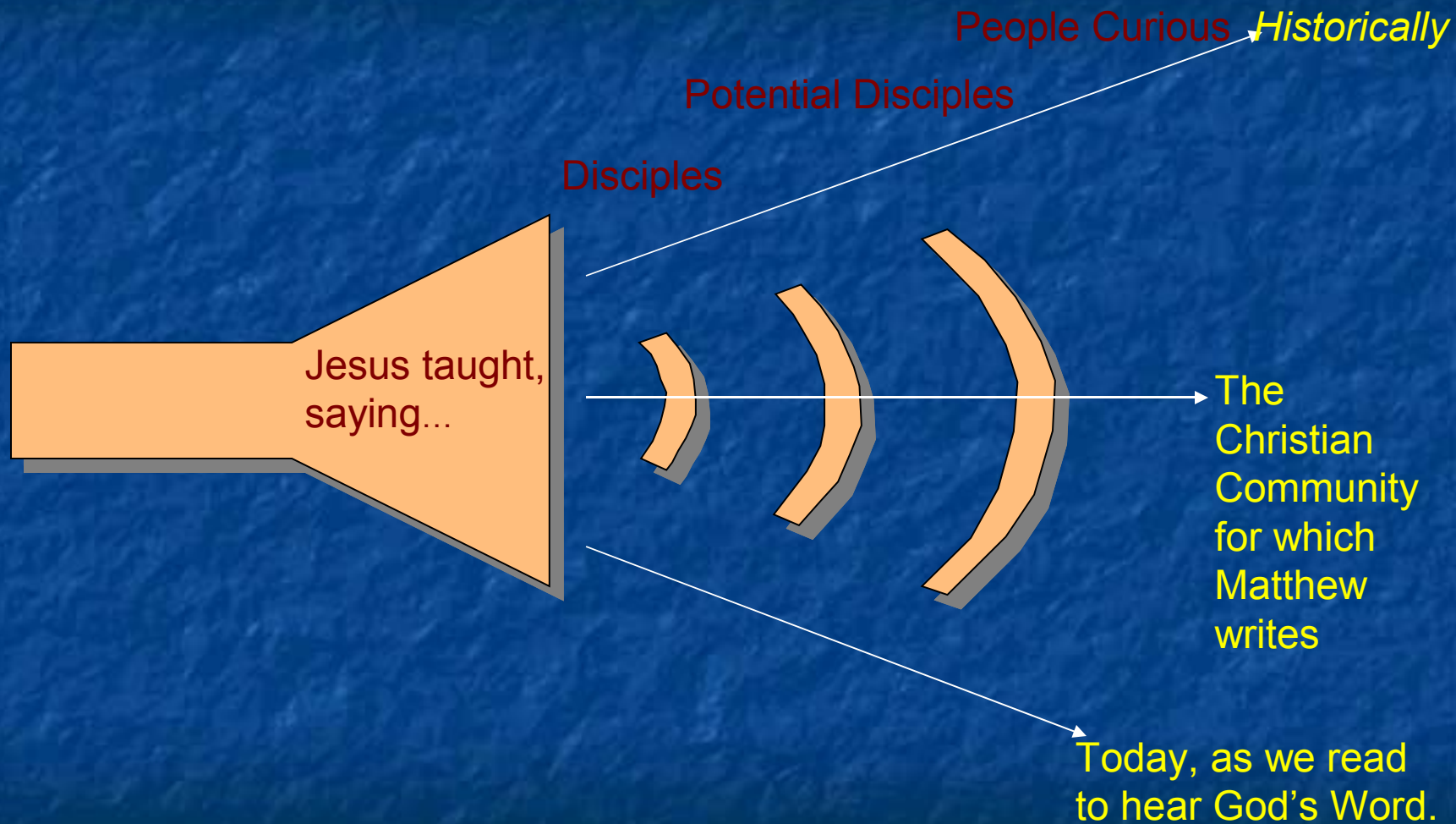
“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

People who are in what appears to be a bad state of affairs, maybe even hopeless, are pronounced “blessed”; they have not done anything to merit such a pronouncement. In Jesus’ beatitudes the promise will be realized in the age to come, and these blessings are a result of the coming of the kingdom into history in Jesus

Structure of The Beatitudes

- Matthew's Beatitudes can be divided into:
 - Two stanzas of four beatitudes (5:3-6 and 5:7-10), framed by the promise "theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3 and 5:10).
 - A final, longer ninth beatitude marking a transition (5:11-12).
 - The word "beatitude" comes from the Latin for blessing, "beatus"

The Audience and Context of the Sermon on the Mount



“Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying.” Matt.5:1-2

The Meaning of “Blessed”

What is the meaning of “blessed”? Some translate the Greek word with “happy” but the problem is that “happy!” is too associated with shallow feelings (“happy are they that mourn” can be confusing), others, with “how fortunate!” (though not in the sense of luck) or “to be congratulated!”. It is a word used to describe the nearly incomprehensible happiness of those who participate in the kingdom being preached by Jesus. The word could be translated “happy” but only in the sense of a deep inner joy. The “blessed” are those who are the deeply or supremely happy. I find that the word “blessed” is best as it seems to capture the concept of all the above concepts.

One of the purposes of Matthew in his structure of Jesus' Discourse is to demonstrate that God was at work in Jesus and that Jesus is the fulfillment of OT promises. He does this with the beatitudes by structuring them to show how they fulfill Isaiah 61. Jesus is the one bringing this passage to fulfillment. Look at Luke 4:16-21

“ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." 20 And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The beatitudes are Jesus' pronouncement of congratulations to those whose dispositions/attitudes reflect their response to his preaching of the kingdom. The beatitudes addresses those who already are what they are identified as being. As they come into an encounter with God in Jesus and realize their desperate state of poverty of spirit, mourning, and meekness, and then hunger for righteousness, etc. they are given an assurance of promises when there will be a great reversal of their current situation and that which is to come.

ESV Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion- to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified. 4 They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. 5 Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; 6 but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. 7 Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matt.5:3

"Congratulations to the poor in spirit!"

Remember who is being addressed: disciples and would be disciples in the crowd surrounding the disciples as they listen to Jesus teach.

With Jesus the beatitudes are paradoxically formulated with the persons pronounced blessed are precisely those from whom one would not expect it!

What brings the pronouncement of "blessed" is an inner attitude ("poor in spirit"), not a condition; an attitude that could be described as lowly in spirit or humble. And though it often characterized the economically poor and oppressed, it is an attitude that could reside in anyone who sees him/herself standing before God as beggars with a feeling of utter inability to help themselves. One scholar states, "For Matthew, the poor in spirit are those who find themselves waiting, empty handed, upon God alone for their hope and deliverance while beset with abuse and rejection by their own social and religious context." It describes those who know their dependence upon and need of God.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

Again, we are reminded of Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,....to comfort all who mourn...." vs.2

Those who mourn in Isaiah 61 were mourning because of the intense sense of loss and helplessness in the context of the Exile; grief from recognition of Israel's sin and failure before God.

Here, like the poor in spirit the mourner stands before God stripped of any recourse within him or herself, just totally dependent upon God.

Even in everyday life, nothing reflects our vulnerability or sense of helplessness than mourning. Our hope lies beyond our own resources. True and final comfort can only come from The Comforter. This beatitude announces a blessedness/joy/happiness to those who are in despair but open before God.

We see our life now in a different context. See, for example, I Thessalonians 4:13-18, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you do not grieve as others who do have no hope."

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5

This beatitude has its parallel in Psalm 37:11, "But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace."

The subject of the beatitude, "the meek" is essentially the same as the "poor in spirit" in vs.3. The word translated "meek" in Ps.37 and the word translated "poor" in Is.61 is the same Hebrew word.

The 1st beatitude has a definite reference to Is.61, while this one recalls Ps.37. There, is, however in Is.61:7 a reference to future Israel "in their land they shall possess a double portion..." Again, we see the importance of Is.61 in the meaning of Jesus' ministry.

This beatitude refers to an attitude of total dependence upon God, an attitude arising out of one's recognized helpless condition.

The future blessing of "they shall inherit the earth" is later identified with the kingdom. See Matthew 21:33-44, especially vs.43. No Jew hearing this parable would fail to identify the vineyard with Israel (see Is.5:1-7) and Jesus identifies the vineyard with the kingdom of God, so land of Israel=vineyard=kingdom of God.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Matthew 5:6

"hunger and thirst" certainly express an intense desire, and here, that intense desire is for "righteousness". What is the meaning of this "righteousness" in this beatitude?

The word "righteousness" can be in reference to one's conduct, living in accord to God's will, living a righteous life. This is the probable meaning in 5:10, 20; 6:1.

In this beatitude, however, notice the fulfillment is expressed with the "divine passive". Like the previous beatitudes it refers ultimately to one's standing before God. It is in reference to the gift of a new standing before God in the light of our spiritual poverty, and sense of helpless condition. Being aware of our inadequacies and personal need of God's work in our lives, we turn to him for his acceptance and help. In 6:33 we have the same meaning for "righteousness" where this gift of a new relationship with God is brought about by the presence of the kingdom of heaven being preached by Jesus.

With this longing, however, there is naturally the desire of living life as God intended, and to see life lived as God intended. We look forward to the day when God will make right the wrongs in the world.