

Matthew 5:1-12 The KJV and the Beatitudes
January 29, 2023

The very first bible I was given, came to me when I was in the third grade, on September 21st, 1971, at the Edmundson Road Baptist Church, not far away from Lambert Field, which is the international airport in St. Louis Missouri. On the front it says, "Holy Bible," which means, "sacred book," and there is an epitaph inscribed inside a shield which reads, ". . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." It is presently the only King James Version of the bible that I own.

Down the years shortly before then and since, has come a flood of modern translations, including among many others:

The Revised Standard Version
The Phillips New Testament and Modern English Bible
The Revised English Bible
The New International Version (which I mostly use)
The New American Standard

The second bible given to me was from my parents a few years later in the middle of the 1970s. It is called "The Living Bible," and it turns out it isn't even a translation; but a paraphrase; it was the farthest reach in the attempt to capture the imagination of those who were not relating well to the traditional language. I remember several other friends who were also given Living Bibles around the same time.

There was a definite trend towards contemporary language. I believe that in addition to an adaptation to trends in the American version of the English language, there was also a concern that the young people of that time were not reading the bible because of its archaic language (all those thees and thous). Truth be known, it was driven by the fear of losing them.

It all came, of course, with a backlash on the part of some who maintained that the only legitimate English translation was the King James. Across the street and down a little way from the first post-seminary church that I served in Spartanburg, SC, in a storefront, was a little church that called itself, "Bible Baptist Church; Independent, fundamental, KJV 1611 only. Which refers not only the King James Version, but to only the first edition. They said they did not believe the KJV was a translation at all, that there were never Hebrew or Greek bibles.

What an interesting journey the development of language has taken us? From the original languages, to Latin, and into the modern vernacular, bibles translated into hundreds of languages, and at least in the case of English, dozens of different translations.

Generally I have gone along with the contemporary trend and believe that it is a good thing. Shakespearean Elizabethan English does have a poetic quality to it that is at times powerful, but can be hard to decipher if one is not used to it. Though there are some texts that have such high places in Christian

thought and expression, that, what one interpreter called the “stately cadences” of 17th century English are still needed to do them justice; In the main the modern church has moved on from the KJV.

One of the benefits of having all these translations is that we can read from several of them, and by comparison entertain different perspectives, different understandings. By the way, the Call to Worship this morning came from the Revised Standard Version, which raises the question of the Beatitudes, which are the New Testament reading for the day.

Because the Beatitudes are from a sermon themselves, and stand alone homiletically, I always hesitate before I say too much about them. So I thought this morning, I would offer only a few words, and let them speak for themselves by reading from one of the more recent versions; The Message. and then to conclude, a unison reading. Please hear these sacred words not from my voice, but from the Lord, holy and true, and with redemption, reconciliation, and healing in their wings.

The Message by Eugene Peterson

5 1-2 When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

3 “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

4 “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

5 “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

6 “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

7 “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

8 “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

9 “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

10 “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

11-12 “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Last week we spoke about the wisdom and power of the cross; today we heard the remainder of the text in 1 Corinthians 1 which elaborated the point. The Beatitudes almost serve as the base text and 1 Corinthians 1 a homily upon it. The ideas are both high and lifted up, and also down in the nitty-gritty of life covered with mud, and sweat, and sometimes blood.

They are hard to follow, the way of the cross and the beatitude, even as much as we admire them. Let us aspire towards them, pray to be empowered to put them into practice, each of us in unique ways. They speak to us of life's meaning. We can clearly see the distinction between the way of humility and righteousness, compassion and peace, and the way of arrogance and conceit; the way that sacrifices the good and the right in exchange for the world's security and ease.

Our faith compels us to admit that at our best we are caught up in both ways . . . to the extent that we follow the "wisdom of the world," we are diminished. Here we learn that in that case, we are actually losing, not winning.

Let us honor this message today by hearing it once again, as if even three times could be enough, and this it will be in the lofty language of the King James Version; and the second is that we will stand, if able, and recite it with me, words are found in a bulletin. Let us do so at this time as a closing prayer. KJV

L - And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

P - Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

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

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

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

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

L - Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Amen.

[Back](#)

[Home](#)