

JESUS AND KARMA (Lindfield 17 Feb. 2019)

LUKE 6:17-26

Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are those who weep. Blessed are those who are hated. Sound familiar but a bit different? That's because we are more familiar with Matthew's version: Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness sake. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

In terms of sermons Matthew's one on the Mount has become more commonly known but the differences between Matthew and Luke are not just cosmetic but very significant. Here we see the clearest example of the literary genre we call "Gospel". The Gospels are not histories or diary recollections otherwise they'd be more similar. A Gospel is an account of events understood and interpreted by the writer to a particular audience for a particular purpose. Details will be shaped to suit the situation. In the 4 Christian Gospels there is a vast amount of commonality. For instance 70% of Mark can be found in Matthew – both the same so we conclude that Matthew was written after Mark and that he had a copy of his work. Mark makes his purpose very clear right from the beginning: Mark 1:1 *This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God*. Luke writes to a Roman official Theophilus, *I have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I, too, decided to write an orderly account so that you may know the certainty of the things that you have been taught. (1:3-4)*

In Matthew Jesus is seated, the tradition of the teaching Rabbi. The sermon comes from the top of a mountain – the traditional location for encountering the divine (eg Moses and the 10 Commandments). Jesus speaks to his disciples. Jesus pronounces 8 blessings all oriented to spiritual realities: poor in spirit, pure in heart etc.

In Luke, Jesus is standing, the position for a Greek orator and he is on a level place, at the foot of the mountain, surrounded by all the people looking for help.

In Luke there are 4 blessings or beatitudes and all very tangible, material and earthed: the poor, the hungry, those who grieve. Then, only in Luke are they followed by 4 matching curses, 4 woes for those who ignore the sufferers and think they have their blessings now. Their attitudes will come back in a terrible way – we call it Karma. This structure was totally prophetic. Many of Israel's prophets spoke that way. In Chapter 7 after Jesus teaches them it is said of him, *a great Prophet has risen among us*".

Matthew is painting Jesus as the Rabbi, teaching Israel and interpreting their Law. Speaking for God, a second Moses or Elijah as he's called. Luke is portraying Jesus as a Prophet speaking to Romans and Greeks in terms that are practical rather than spiritual. We see Jesus as both.

Luke's crowd is made up of outsiders already keen to see Jesus. People of different languages, locations and religions. Matthew has Jesus speaking *to the lost sheep of Israel*.

Luke's diverse crowd all take part in the teaching, the healing and the exorcisms. All drawn from around the region including Israel's religious enemies, the Samaritans and their cultural enemies, the Gentiles.

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This is where Gospel is apparent. Matthew is speaking mainly to a Jewish audience and so Jesus is portrayed as being the Rabbi, the one interpreting God's law. That's why we have the stories of the angels visiting Mary and Mary visiting Elizabeth, to root Jesus' heritage. Matthew records his circumcision and Baptism and parables of the Kingdom of God. Even the form of the Sermon on the Mount for after the Beatitudes Jesus says, *You have heard that it was said.... But I say unto you...* He interprets the Law, much to their displeasure.

Luke is more concerned with showing how Jesus relates to the realities of life. Romans and Greeks aren't so concerned with Jesus' relationship to the Jewish Law, but what he thinks about everyday life. His audience comes from all over. The word he offers will need to speak to the noisy, needy mass of humanity in front of him. They have come to hear what he has to say and to see if he can help them live their lives.

Which aspects of Jesus' life and ministry speak to you most clearly? Is it the way he fulfils the Old Testament prophecies and how he is the culmination of God's plan of Salvation? Or is the earthiness of what he says. The fact he's not afraid to deal with the real issues of his day even though it will upset the status quo and ultimately get him killed?

The 4 Gospel writers present their "good news" in different ways, catering to different readers with different backgrounds and different needs. Even when all these differences are taken into account we still have one basic message. Mark puts it clearly, *the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God*. Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God who comes to show us God and how to know and love God just as we are loved and known. This is truly the "GOOD NEWS".

AMEN.
