

## Are we prepared? 13 Feb 2022.

The motto of the Scout Movement across the world is, and has been since 1908, 'Be Prepared'.

Other than that, there are all sorts of strange practices - some of which sound rather fun, like 'the Grand Howl' that gathers a Cub pack around Akela, their leader, and apparently helps them to focus. There are other things that are less obvious, like DYB DYB DYB, and DOB DOB DOB, which rather reminds me of a children's television programme that came out before electricity was invented called, 'Bill and Ben the Flowerpot Men, where they communicated (if you can call it that) by saying things to each other like, 'Flobadob'. If you

can translate that - or perhaps even continue the conversation, then you already have the gift of speaking in tongues or interpretation of tongues.

The DYB DYB DYB thing, though is spelt with D-Y-B, and stands for Do Your Best, and the response is, 'We'll DOB DOB DOB. The sharper amongst you will have worked out that DOB means 'We'll Do Our Best.' All good honourable stuff and memorable for the early scouts.

I was never a scout, so I cannot vouch for whether they continue with these acronymic mottos to this day, but I suspect they do. What may be missing from these useful mnemonics is WOFTSM - or Watch Out For

The Scout Master - because some of them had a highly dubious reputation, which got the whole Scout Movement a pretty shoddy reputation at times - rather like the Roman Catholic Church and its altar boys.

But away from these scurrilous reminiscences - we have work to do!

Tackling the Beatitudes is rather like running into the spiritual equivalent of Arnie Schwartzegger, Jonah Lomu, the Sedin Twins, and Jack Reacher all at the same time. Only one of those is fictional - the others will hurt you, seriously.

If you think that the Beatitudes are a touchy-feely kind of gospel - think again. If we are to take them seriously, even if we don't go as far as Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, 'The Cost of Discipleship', we are still left with concepts and demands that leave us emotionally and intellectually breathless.

The problem is a simple one - but as big as a mountain; we may confess to having faith or trust in Jesus, but are we truly prepared to follow him - no matter what it demands of us?

Bonhoeffer's view of this sermon was very much based on Matthew's version and not

Luke's, which we have just read. There are possibly two reasons for this; first, that Matthew elaborates each of the Beatitudes beyond the rather bald statements that Luke makes; and second - and this is contentious - Bonhoeffer's view is that this set of 'instructions' is aimed solely at the close-knit small circle of twelve disciples, and not to the whole crowd on the mountainside.

Luke sets this discourse on a 'Plain', and not a mountainside, and even though both Matthew and Luke borrowed extensively from Mark's gospel, this story does not appear in Mark anywhere.

My study bible has this to say about it: 'The Sermon on the Mount's call to moral and ethical living is so high that some have dismissed it as being completely unrealistic or have projected its fulfillment to the future kingdom. There is no doubt, however, that Jesus gave the sermon as a standard for all Christians, realizing that its demands cannot be met in our own power. It is also true that Jesus occasionally used hyperbole to make his point - for example, with reference to looking at a woman lustfully; 'if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away...' Jesus is not teaching self-mutilation, because even a blind man can lust. The point is that we

should deal as drastically with sin as necessary.'

In the fifth century, St Augustine said of this sermon, 'If anyone will piously and soberly consider the sermon which our Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the mount, as we read it in the Gospel according to Matthew, I think that he will find in it, so far as regards the highest morals, a perfect standard of the Christian life.'

So having taken a hefty body-check from the spiritual Arnie (plus possibly the Sedin twins) with the threat that, 'I'll be back!', we are now left to digest the words. With no apology I

will use the Matthean text as it gives us greater clarity as to what Jesus said and meant.

Before I do, however, I want to point out that if you only read the Lukan account, you will probably feel as though you are reading a completely different sermon from the Matthean account - and you are. Half the sentences are missing, and it matters. Hence my preference for Matthew.

First off, we have the 'poor in spirit'; the Greek word for 'spirit' here is πνεύματι, or 'rûach' in Hebrew - both have the same range of meaning and encompass not only our spirits, but also wind, breath, and the Holy Spirit. But

being poor in spirit does not mean being short of breath - but rather being aware that you are missing something. This is an encouragement to those who feel lacking in spiritual gifts, by saying that knowing what you lack is the first way of ensuring that you get more of it. If you know you are running out of butter or milk - it goes on the shopping list, and is the first thing you look for when you get to the store.

In the same way, knowing what you lack spiritually allows us to search and ask for what we need. And Jesus tells us that we will get it; 'For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

Before the end of this discourse in Matthew 7, Jesus says, 'Ask and it will be given to you,,

seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you.

The 'blessings' that we read of in the Beatitudes are all dependent on our 'awareness' of what we lack or what we are experiencing - and explaining it to us.

When I was a surgical resident in hospital, I had a friend whose boss said to him one day, 'The man who knows what he doesn't know, is a man of power.' In other words, you have to know where you're ignorant before you can redress it. Similarly, when I was training in Aikido, my sensei said to me, 'There are three stages of learning; one - you don't know that

you don't know; two - you know that you don't know; three - you know that you know.'

What Jesus is doing in his sermon is making sure that all who hear him - whether just his small band of 12, or the whole crowd who were gathered - is to make them aware that what is happening in their lives and what may happen in the future (because of following him) has consequences and implications. In other words, step two of my sensei's instruction.

In my opinion, Jesus is describing the state of mind of some of his disciples - confusion, frustration, a changing centre to their lives, criticism, insults, and even early persecution.

If you take just the Lukan account, you might think that you just don't fit in - nor will you ever. 'I'm not poor or hungry, I'm not even sad, and just at the moment, I'm not aware of anyone hating me - what's this all about?'

Turn again to Matthew, and you get a different picture. 'Blessed are those who mourn...'. Some of the disciples had to give up everything; home, wife, kids, job - that makes a big hole in your life - and filled by what? An itinerant life following this strange but compelling man?

How important was this encouragement! How vital - not just to the spirits of his followers, but to the retention of them. If he did not

have a hard core of truly cohesive disciples, his work had no chance of success.

So those who left all and mourned for their homes and families - he tells them that it will be all right, they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek', the Greek is 'πραεῖς'.

The adjective was often used of taming a wild animal or the calming of people who were excited or irritable. By association it was therefore applied to the outcome of such taming, to the gentle, quiet and friendly who, like a well trained animal, do not succumb to bitterness or anger, whatever the provocation. As with the trained workhorse, this is not

simply a matter of passive submission to a stronger force, but involves an active choice to accept instruction. It is not weakness, but exercising God's strength under his control.

The 'righteousness' that is being hungered for is not the sickening moral high ground that that is sometimes implied by this word, but justice, fairness, integrity and decency. Jesus says this will come.

The verse on mercy should need no further elucidation.

The 'pure in heart' is an encouragement to get rid of what lures you away from God's work.

What nags away at your mind like some secret

obsession. The word 'pure' is the same as 'clean', so the implication is fairly clear.

The last three Beatitudes are probably directed to those who want to take up arms against the Roman occupation - like Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were an underground resistance movement, who were hell-bent on causing as much disruption and mayhem for the Romans as they could.

We know that Peter, James and John were all hotheads, and would jump into a fight as soon as the opportunity arose; but Jesus says that is not the way.

And don't be surprised if you get arrested by the authorities for being associated with me,

he says, because you will. But stick to being honest and decent, and you will know a peace and comfort - even when times are bad. And they will get bad.

The woes mentioned in Luke's reading are very simple and all relate to physical comfort and emotional well-being. They need no further discussion here. More detailed woes are to be found in Matthew 23.

So look deeper than just the Lukan account of the Beatitudes; there is much more to discover.

This is a template, if you like, of what to expect, but if Jesus had prefaced each of his



sentences with the word, 'Beware...' then it is highly unlikely that many would have stayed to hear the rest of what he had to say. By turning it around and telling them that their confusion would be resolved, their frustrations overcome, and their fears abolished he succeeds in telling his followers that it IS going to be tough to follow me - but it will all come out OK in the end. They are 'blessed'.

And as the young hotel manager said in 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel', '...and if it's not OK, then it's not the end.'