

FACT SHEET 1

That word “Blessed”

(excerpts from K. C. Hanson, “How Honorable! How Shameful”)

The word **translated as** “blessed” in the Beatitudes is “makarios.”

The **typical** word for blessed by God is “eulogos”

The relation between *makarios* and *eulogos*:

both are positive expressions

often extol similar virtues or attributes

The differences between *makarios* and *eulogos*

makarios is not a “word of power” --a word with divine action behind it

makarios is not only used by God or mediators of God (eg. Priests)

makarios **only** refers to human beings, never God

makarios is not a word used in ritual

When people pray for a “blessing” they do not use *makarios* or its cognates

...these affirmations are exclamations of honor and esteem... it is “bystanders” (better: one’s community of orientation) who pronounce makarisms, which demonstrates the basic issue with regard to honor: it is one’s self-respect in conjunction with the community’s affirmation of that evaluation.

A makarism is “a **value judgment** made by an individual, or the community at large, on either a real or an ideal person. **It is the social imputation of honor and esteem to an individual or group for manifesting desirable behavior and commitments.**”

A better translation of each beatitude would start with “O how honorable” or “Greatly honored,” not “Blessed”

FACT SHEET 2

A Re-Wording of the Beatitudes

Greatly honored are the destitute in spirit, for of them is the empire of heaven.

Greatly honored are those who are mourning, for they will be comforted

Greatly honored are those who are humbled, for they will inherit the earth (see Psalm 37)

Greatly honored are those who are famished and parched for justice, for they will be satisfied.

Greatly honored are those who are full of *chesed*, for they will received *chesed*.

Greatly honored are the pure of heart, for they will see God

Greatly honored are those who make shalom (not *pax*), for they will be called sons of God

Greatly honored are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, for of them is the empire of God

Greatly honored are y'all when people revile y'all and persecute y'all and say all kinds of evil against y'all falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before y'all

FACT SHEET 3

Taxation in Early Roman Palestine

(From K. C. Hanson and Douglas Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*)

To Rome and Herod, you paid

soil tax	25-50% of the produce of the land
head tax	1 days wage a year (denarius)
market taxes (cities)	
transit tolls	
port taxes (shipping)	
access rents, city-controlled resources	
Labor for state projects (roads, aqueducts, etc.)	

To Jerusalem, you paid

soil tax	10% of the land's produce
head tax	½ shekel a year (2 denarii)
sacrifice	animals, produce
vows	dedicated goods

Taxation in Roman Palestine was extractive, that is, designed to assert elite control over agrarian production. ...Their major impact was to remove most goods from the control and enjoyment of most people. ... the benefits in ancient economy flowed 'upward' to the advantage of the elites. – Hanson and Oakman, 116

The Economy, Health and Mortality

(excerpts from Warren Carter, "Jesus' Healing Stories: Imperial Critique and Eschatological Expectations in Matthew's Gospel" *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 2010)

The socioeconomic structure of Judea and Galilee during Jesus' day

Elites: – 2% of the population, consisting of Romans and allied provincials, who controlled political, religious, and legal institutions, the military and economic activity

consumed more than 50% of the agrarian production

Everyone else:--subsistence level existence that, for most, cycled above and below subsistence. Of these

4-8% are unable to provide food or shelter for themselves

20% are in permanent crisis

34% are artisans and traders who are always in danger of poverty

36% not yet in crisis [one bad illness away]

faced systemic malnutrition, particularly in times of famine, which led to lethal disease

average life expectancy

at birth: 21-22 years

at age 10: 45 years

50% of infants reached age 5

less than 50% of 10 year olds reached age 50

less than 20% of all live births reach age 60

FACT SHEET 4

Values of the Ancient World

Roman values

Stoic resistance of public mourning

Reason therefore requires that men of understanding should be neither indifferent in such calamities nor extravagantly affected; for the one course is unfeeling and brutal, the other lax and effeminate. Sensible is he who keeps within appropriate bounds and is able to bear judiciously both the agreeable and the grievous in his lot, and who has made up his mind beforehand to conform uncomplainingly and obediently to the dispensation of things...You will do well, therefore, to be persuaded by reason, and, as a favour to your dear departed son, to turn from your unprofitable distress and desolation, which affect both body and soul, and to go back to your accustomed and natural course of life. --Plutarch

The irrationality of mercy

Insofar as the wise man cannot assist his fellow...he must not yield to pity" because pity is "a mental fault" – Seneca

Pity is "an irrational feeling" – Epictetus

On peace

The *pax Romana* = peace to the Romans and "quiet" to the provinces – what happens when there is not quiet? (cf John 11:48)

Jewish and Christian

Mourning as resistance

Rachel weeping for her children – Matthew 2
the disciples mourning Stephen – Acts 8:2

The Psalmist's critique of the “wicked” vs. the “humbled” or “meek”

For the wicked shall be cut off,
 but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.
Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more;
 though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land,
 and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.
The wicked plot against the righteous,
 and gnash their teeth at them;
but the LORD laughs at the wicked,
 for he sees that their day is coming.
The wicked draw the sword and bend their bows
 to bring down the poor and needy, to kill those who walk
 uprightly;
their sword shall enter their own heart,
 and their bows shall be broken. (Psalm 37)

Mercy exemplified

In Hebrew, the word *eleos* translates most often to *chesed*, a word that means *both* pity *and* covenant loyalty.

Who was the neighbor to the one who fell among the thieves? The one who showed him mercy – The Good Samaritan

On peace

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?
(James 2:15-16 NRSV)

FACT SHEET 5

The Wider Literary Context

Immediately before the Beatitudes

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ...

Immediately after the Beatitudes

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16 NRSV)