



Matthew: New King, New Kingdom

Cell Notes 2020

STUDY 2. Introducing the Upside-Down Kingdom

Aim. To consider what blessing looks like in God's new kingdom, who is concerned for and how we might grow in maturity as disciples by understanding that.

To Start With: What is your favourite way to cheer yourself up?

Introduction: To set the scene watch the first 4.35 minutes of the Bible project introduction to Matthew 1–13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Dv4-n6OYG>

Engaging the Text:

1. A. Who do you think is considered lucky or fortunate by 21st century Western standards?
B. Read Luke 18.10–13. Who appears to be considered blessed in 1st century Jewish society?

In the first century there was a general understanding that God blessed good people, so if bad things happened, it was a punishment for sin. God was believed to prefer the wealthy and successful, they were 'the blessed'. At one level this still outworks when people ask the question, '*Why do bad things happen to good people?*' However, **read Matthew 5.1–12** to hear what Jesus said.

2. How do you react to this teaching? How do you think his first hearers, and Matthew's readers might have responded? Why?
3. Blessings here is the word 'makarios' which also translates as 'happy', 'congratulations' or 'fortunate'. It is also significant that these phrases contain present *and* future tenses. How might considering these two literary factors help us make better sense of what Jesus is teaching? How would you sum it up?
4. A. When have you been in one of these categories?
B. How far did/do you find these promises of God's love and promise of eventual blessing helpful in those sorts of circumstances? Why/why not?
5. Obviously, there are ways to use these verses unhelpfully when people are in distress, but how might we wisely encourage people when they experience these sorts of challenges?
6. If you have time (10 minutes) in small groups you might like to re-write these for a 21st century context, trying to draw parallels that describe how God might feel about those who are struggling today.

Listen to some of them read and allow it to inform your time of prayer and ask God how he would have you act/respond in the light of this.