



The following is a summary of the Bible Study that was given by Archbishop Rowan Williams at the Flames of Fire Conference on August 31st 2000.

"I want to put the familiar passage of the early part of Matthew Chapter 5 into a new context and relate it to what you have been thinking about, that is the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is visible, visible in Jesus, that is the starting point and for us, as the church, it is part of our responsibility to let the visibility of the Kingdom be proclaimed and realised. We are here because we know that the Kingdom is meant to be visible, it is not a private gift, to be hugged to ourselves in a corner.

But how is it made visible? There is a hint in Chapter 4 of Matthew verses 8-11:

Again, the devil took Him up on an very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'" Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

That is where the visibility of the Kingdom begins, on that high mountain where Jesus refuses the other Kingdom, where He says "No" to Satan. On that mountain top He tells us, that it is in the worship of the One True God that the Kingdom is made visible and it is in Him that this worship of the One True God as Father is fulfilled. Chapter 5 points to that mountain, the mountain, where Jesus is saying "No". The mountain in Chapter 5 spells out what happened in Chapter 4. If you want to find out how the Kingdom becomes visible then listen to Jesus on the Mountain of the Beatitudes. For here you will see what the visibility of the Kingdom means in your life."

[The Archbishop reads Matthew Chapter 5:1 – 16]

"It all moves towards that tremendous vision of the visibility of the Kingdom in the lives of believers. Light - the light shining before the world so that people will give glory to the Father.

But as we look at the Beatitudes the problem starts – Wouldn't it be wonderful if they looked at the Church and said, 'Aren't they doing well, aren't they awash with love, with signs and wonders, with reconciliation and forgiveness, with power and glory, isn't the Church just like that?'

But it is as we look at the Beatitudes that we understand, that for the Kingdom to become visible, is something just a bit different from you and I leading "successful" lives. Or rather the Gospel version of "successful" lives is just a bit different from the one we would all like to start with."

Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven

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“Poverty in the Bible is spiritual as well as material. In the Old Testament it is the willingness to depend absolutely on God. The "poor in spirit" don't look to defend themselves by any means other than depth of their faith. They are people whose faith is so deep, so rooted in Jesus Christ that they don't seek to prop it up. They don't want reassurance, they want depth. We sometimes run off looking for reassurance, we like to be affirmed, by each other and by the public we speak to – we look for affirmation we don't seek the depth. Poverty is saying “No” to all that, we must look for truth not reassurance.

Isaiah castigated the monarchy because they looked to Egypt. But then and now, God's promise is there. When you understand that depth comes before reassurance then perhaps you can say the Kingdom is visible. It is in the lives of people who know how to drop their anchor into the depths of Jesus Christ. We need to look to one source, Jesus Christ."

Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

"This can sound as if it is alright to be sorry now because there will be a happy ending. But it is much deeper than that, we have to mourn, we have to grieve because of how the world is, we have to be without illusion – we have to cry and lament.

The Church is reluctant to do the grieving we need to do. We are like the people in Revelation who think they are full of life, but are dying. We need to be truthful. Truth means mourning - it means lament.

'God help us,' we cry. We are in the middle of a Church that is divided and confused, we ourselves are divided and confused and frightened a lot of the time. And often we are just exhausted and baffled.

We would love to live in a Church where the visibility of Jesus means that we can relax, that is not the discipleship we are called to. So let's mourn, let's grieve, only grief will open up places where God can begin to work, - let God's truth in, God alone can comfort. Don't expect the statistics to get better but we can expect that if grief breaks our hearts open slightly there's room for God. Poverty and Mourning means Truth before Comfort; Truth before Peace"

Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

"Gentle is a better translation. Moses was described as the meekest man on the face of the earth and yet we wouldn't perhaps think of him as meek. But in the context in which he was described as meek we see that when he met opposition and criticism, meekness was his rock-like refusal to be provoked, to defend himself and hit back. It needs anchorage in the depths, in Jesus Christ. Meekness is the strength to say "no" to the need to explain one's actions, to justify oneself. It is the strength to say, "It is my anchorage that matters; if I have hurt you forgive me; if I have made a mistake pray for me." It is not the endless round of trying to justify myself. Once again the Beatitudes are simply calling us to anchorage in Him, his truth and his promise. So inherit the earth, stop defending self, plugging the gaps, being a lukewarm



Christian behind a wall trying to keep my safety. God is pushing at my resistance, my wall. Step back and let the walls crumble - my self-regard, my self-image - let it go and God comes in - then the earth is mine. If Christ is ours all is ours - we inherit the earth."

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be satisfied.

"What about being hungry and thirsty for justice? Connect that again with that willingness to be truthful and grieve. I must recognise that the world is as it is and then there is no way for me as a Christian, to be safe and happy. I must recognize that the suffering of any human being is a fact about me. Being hungry and thirsty for justice isn't an abstract matter, it means that I need nourishment that comes from seeing other people grow. If other people are imprisoned by sin, by guilt, by pain, by loss, so am I. I have to face that and not think it is possible to have a little sanitized Christian world where everything is alright while the world goes to hell in a hand-cart. The passion for spreading the gospel must come out of this, hungering and thirsting for God's Justice. It involves both social justice, and the justice of love and honesty between believers, which is the life-blood of real Christian community.

But it's about me, the sin, the failure, the pain of another, my need to be nourished. If one suffers all suffer, if one rejoices then all rejoice. This being hungry and thirsty for justice is exactly that. The need and lack of another is mine – to know that truthfully is to know where the anchorage is in the depths.

The promise that my hunger and thirst to see all God's children healed, restored and glorified, is already met in Christ."

Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

"Even the most skeptical can't avoid mercy. Jesus returns to it again and again. It is no use talking about being forgiven unless your life shows that you know what forgiveness means. Recall the parable of the unmerciful servant, here there is a failure to communicate, forgiveness hasn't soaked in and become the very life-blood of one's being. If you have once encountered the absolute freedom of God - to renew your life, to take away your guilt, you know that at the heart of all things is God's freedom of mercy, of forgiveness. That freedom is the most important thing in the universe. One's own clinging on to grievances or hurt as self defence becomes an offence against the way the universe works."

Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

"Simplest but perhaps the hardest in some ways - to be single minded, to be focused to have Christ in view, the more you concentrate the harder it gets. Purity of heart can only be given not attained by effort. It is when Jesus so powerfully comes to us that there is nothing else we can think about. It is to be overwhelmed by the "thereness", the presence, the reality of Jesus. We are concentrated in prayer when Christ is before us, in truth and in reality. There is nothing else we can think about, we are anchored in the depths. Blessed those who see God, for they are the pure in heart, they are held, grasped, pure single minded. We can't make it up - we just



have to have enough of the habit of noticing God to let Him in when He comes and see Him when He is there.

Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

Who makes peace by the Blood of the cross? Christ made peace, He is the son of God and without Him none of us is a child of God. When we come into the work and the witness of His peace that makes real our sonship in Him. Jesus is the Peace between God and the world; when we seek to make peace that is the peace to which we ought to be witnessing."

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account.

"Here it must be blessed not happy, in tune, anchored in God. When persecuted, for reasons true or untrue, you are blessed - in God's gift. Your strength and your security comes from anchorage in the depths.

Each Beatitude tells same story. To be blessed means to be anchored in God, through Jesus Christ. For the Kingdom to be visible is for that anchorage to be visible - that steadiness and depth of faith. It is not for us to overcome, not to have all the instant answers for personal problems. For the Kingdom to be visible it is not even for the signs of God's working to be in great abundance, though we pray that that happens, and give thanks when it does."

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.

"The bottom line is the visibility of the Kingdom, - the visibility of Christ in our lives. The Kingdom is where Christ is visible, I suggest that the Church is visible where Christ is visible. In that case we can talk about salt and light because they give shape and sense and savour to human life. It gives a world where you can find your way. We are here as believers so that the world may rejoice, we are glad that we know where our anchorage is. The deepest gladness for us is knowing where that anchor is - where the depths are. Where we can show that this is the case then the salt is in the food and light in the landscape. "

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

"I want to lead us round again to Mountains, where we started. The City of God on a hill, there it is visible. The Kingdom and the Church are meant to be visible. Visibility of the Church - not a church with and organ in every village but the visibility of the Church is us. People who



know where the anchorage is, people who know we are nothing but Jesus Christ is everything. If we know that and live it out as the Beatitudes suggest that is the city on hill the real visibility.

When we start asking, "What do people in our society think of when they think of the visibility of the Church?" Often they do think of a church with an organ in every village or a church that only seems to emerge, blinking into the light, when a local newspaper rings up for a hostile comment. They think of the Church as a negative or an archaic reality.

But it has to be about the visibility of Jesus. We are challenged to make Jesus visible.- let Him be seen, that is what the Beatitudes are about, that is the hill on which we stand. Then there is the other hill that tells how freedom and visibility is won, the Son of Man lifted up on Hill of Calvary. The City of God is built on Calvary. Where His life poured out as blood on the earth. Jesus is visible in a terrible, humiliating way - there is the visibility of the Kingdom - with depths so deep in the Divinity itself that there is nothing to protect, nothing to screen, nothing to defend. Only the defencelessness of love – so weak, so poor, so empty that it can change everything.

Jesus stands on Mountain of Temptation, and says “No” to the Kingdom of Satan. Jesus takes us to the Mountain of the Beatitudes and tells us where our life and death is. Jesus calls us to the Mountain of Calvary to understand what the gift is that is given to you.

Let me feel the breezes blowing on Calvary’s hill. (reference to a Welsh Hymn)

From the hill of Calvary this Spirit blows carrying us along with it. Leaves on the wind and anchored in the rock. Contrasting images but that is where we have to find ourselves. In the wind on Calvary and anchored in the depths. Look not for reassurance, not for safety but for truth, knowing that truth is in Jesus and His gift, in his power, in his poverty.

Blessed are we if we hear and understand this.”