



An Nzema Mother-Tongue Commentary on the Matthean Beatitudes

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ABSTRACT

One of the major challenges facing contemporary Ghanaian Christianity is ineffective discipleship. Consequently, Christianity has little influence on the moral life of its adherents. No wonder Ghana has a high Christian population, yet corruption and wickedness abound in its societies. The priorities of many contemporary Christians have shifted from the pursuit of the kingdom of God and its righteousness to the accumulation of material wealth, the pursuit of upward social mobility and the fixation on earthly gratification, among others. To avert the situation, there is the need for the church to teach biblical principles that will raise disciples of resilient faith for this and generations to come. By drawing out some principles from the Matthean Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12) as a paradigm for contemporary Christian discipleship, the article sought to contribute to the church's efforts in dealing with discipleship challenges of current times and beyond. The main argument of this study was that the Christian disciple is called to be different from worldly people in both ethical behaviour and piety. This call to be set apart involves a call to recognise the reality of God's kingdom; a call to be alongside the poor and sinners; and a call to participate in God's kingdom community.

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INTRODUCTION

The translation of scriptures into the mother tongue helps to expose the affinities, histories and culture that the Bible lands have with African culture. However, the Translation helps readers to know and understand certain concepts that are used in the scripture in relation to the culture of the African People. However, with the translation of the Matthean Gospel into Nzema, readers are assisted with a deeper understanding of the concept of Blessedness in the **Matthean Beatitudes which explains that a person's actions of mercy, and a thirst for righteousness would certainly lead to blessedness.**

Even though the author is not named within the text, from the early second century the church has identified the Apostle Matthew as the author of this Gospel.¹ The Matthean Gospel was written between 70AD and 80AD. It is not known for sure the place of the composition of Matthew's Gospel. However, Syrian origin, precisely Antioch, has a wider scholarly acceptance.² Matthean tradition, according to the few verses prior to the Beatitudes (Matt 4:23-5:2), holds that the Beatitudes were pronounced on a mountain in Galilee. Jesus' original audience came from all over the surrounding regions which were under the control and oppression of

¹ Deji Ayegboyin, *The Synoptics: Introductory Notes on the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Ibadan: Global Estida Publishers, 2015), 78.

² RPV Kappelle, *Wisdom Revealed: The Message of Biblical Wisdom Literature-Then and Now* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 198.

the Roman government.³ Even though some of the audience may be from Jerusalem which at that time enjoyed religious aristocracy, many of Jesus' audience likely felt the effect of the oppression very strongly. It is for this reason that Jesus addresses the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who thirst for righteousness and those who are persecuted. The fact that the Matthean audience was under persecution for their allegiance to Jesus leads to the evangelist's purpose of including the Beatitudes in his Gospel account. As the community followed Jesus, their suffering was viewed as a paradoxical participation in the ministry of Jesus that was characterized by redemptive suffering. The Beatitudes were therefore written to encourage the new community to persevere and live for Christ despite the resistance against its presence.

Within the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes form an introductory statement. Jesus is portrayed as sitting down and speaking to the crowd. This context echoes the account of the Jewish leader Moses who spoke the commandments of God from Mt. Sinai.⁴ Two functions are attributed to the Beatitudes, namely, introducing the whole Sermon on the Mount and serving as the foundational ideology of the following teaching. The Beatitudes are followed by the metaphors of salt and light.

As the Church in Ghana expands numerically, there is the need to have a corresponding qualitative growth. One way to enhance effective discipleship is to have mother-tongue materials to speak to the heart of Christian converts. Unfortunately, there is a general lack of mother-tongue commentaries in Ghana and many other parts of Africa. Hence, using the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach, the present study explores the Nzema commentary of the Matthean Beatitudes and brings to bear the various lessons of the Beatitudes to the Christian discipleship journey.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach.⁵ Kwame Bediako identifies a theological meaning of the mother tongue in his observation that it is the language in which God speaks to mankind. According to him, God does not speak "in a sacred language, but in ordinary language," so that humans may hear God and realise the gospel is about mankind who have been invited to join a company drawn from every people, tribe, nation and language. Mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics is a step-by-step approach that analyses, adopts and adapts words and phrases in biblical texts to appropriate the word of God for indigenous Bible reading communities.⁶

In this research, three Nzema Bible translators were interviewed on the concept of blessedness in the Nzema language as well as two other Nzema scholars who helped to translate the English commentary into Nzema. Three questionnaires were also administered to Nzema Bible readers in Mpataba in the Jomoro Municipality who could speak and write both English and Nzema to get their views on the meaning of *Blessedness* in the Nzema Bible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background of the Nzema People

The "Nzema" (or Nzima) are Akan people numbering more than 100,000, and occupying the coastal strip between the Ankobra River in the Western Region of Ghana and the Assinie in the Ivory Coast. Many Nzema also live outside the territorial tribal limit in the Cote d'Ivoire, especially in Balsam close to the Ghanaian boundary where they represent a fairly large minority.⁷ In Ghana, the Nzema area is divided into three electoral districts: The Nzema East (or Evalue Gwira) municipal, the Ellembele district and the Nzema West (or Jomoro) municipal.

Historical accounts indicate that the founding ancestors of the Nzima community originally lived somewhere along the N'Zi River which runs parallel to the Comoe River in Northeastern Cote d'Ivoire. As the people along the Comoe River became known as the "Kimbu people" (later Akwamu people), the N'Zi settlers were referred to as the N'Zi people, hence the Nzi-mba. This name later developed to become known as Nzima (or Nzema). History has it that, during this period, there were political struggles in the neighbouring regions of Kankyeabo and Bouna. These conflicts and invasions in the region by the Mande people made the Nzi-mba migrate in the southwestern direction and subsequently settle on the west coast at Beyin to avoid being caught

³ A. Picard and M. Habets, *Theology and the Experience of Disability: Interdisciplinary* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴ Andreij Kodjak, *A Structural Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986).

⁵ Jonathan E T Kuwornu-Adjaottor, "Doing African Biblical Studies with the Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics Approach," *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought* 1, no. 1 (2012).

⁶ Kwame Bediako, "Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 4, no.1(2001):2-11.

⁷ G. Nrenzah, "Indigenous Religious Belief and Practice in Ghanaian Pentecostalism: The Mame Wata Healing Churches of Half Assini," *Making Waves, Journal for Women's Studies at Florida International University* 7 (2009): 26-32.

in further clashes.⁸ Their leader at that time was Annor Asaman.⁹ The Nzema are divided into Evalue, Dwira, Ellembelle and Jomoro. Their clan names are *Twea*, *Ezohile*, *Alɔnwɔba*, *Nvavile*, *Adahonle*, *Azanwule* and *Mafole*.

During the 19th century, Nzema was one region until the deportation of the ruler Kaku Aka. The Nzema people are known as Ndenye or Apollonians in Ivory Coast. The name “Apollonia” was given to the Nzema people by the Portuguese who landed on the Nzema coast on the feast day of St. Apollonia. But in 1927, the indigenous readopted the name “Nzema” because the Portuguese name (“Apollonia”) had little impact on the people.

The language of the Nzema people is also known as Nzema in Ghana and Apollo in Ivory Coast. The term “Nzema”, therefore, refers to both the people and the language they speak. Nzema is part of the Niger-Congo (Kwa) language family.¹⁰ The Nzema language has an affinity with the Aowin dialect and with Gwira, Ajumoro and the Avalue (Axim). Despite certain dissimilarities and a wide range of variation in their ancestral backgrounds, these heterogenous groups still share a distinctive substratum of cultural and linguistic identity with the Guan-speaking people of Ghana after their going off from a common ancestry.

The Nzema are mostly farmers. During the last century, the agriculture of the Nzema has been the introduction of cash crops. Coconut from the early years of the century and palm oil in the latter part of the last century have gradually established themselves in the area as the principal and often the only crop. The cultivation of palms, the processing of the nut, and the production and marketing of copra oil are among the principal activities of the Nzema people. Another key economic activity among the Nzema people is fishing.

Traditional festivals are used as occasions to reach the ancestors and ask for their blessings for the ensuing year. For the Nzema community, the Kundum festival is the most popular and influential traditional festival. It is celebrated annually all over the Ahanta-Nzema area. The Kundum festival usually starts in the easternmost part of Ahanta and continues southwestward throughout the harvest period. Among other things, satirical *avudewene* songs are performed by young men during this festival. It is both a harvest and a religious festival which generally involves a lot of dancing, drumming and feasting. Samuel Edukubile Etikpah has identified three stages in the celebration: The first stage is the *Abisa siedu ehɔle* which serves as a preparation rite; the second stage is the *Abisa gua zo erale* which serves as the public performance of the festival, and the final stage is the *Abisa azule nu edole* which is the purification rite.¹¹ Each of these stages is marked with a libation rite known as *edeneyele*, or the pouring of wine accompanied by invocations known as *nza eguale*. It is important to note that like other Akan people (such as Akuapems, Asantes, Bonos, and Fantes), the Nzema system of kinship and marriage is matrilineal.¹²

The Concept of Blessedness in the Context of Nzema

The Nzema people have various ways of describing the concept of blessedness. They sometimes use stories and proverbs to explain the meaning of blessedness in their context. One of the proverbs of the Nzema people states “*akole mɔɔ betanle ɔ nli la a, lile aabe ezɔle a.*” This proverb is translated as “The chicken which is closest to the mother eats the thigh of the grasshopper.” The chicken stands for the one to be blessed while the mother is the source of the blessing. According to the Nzema people, a person who wants to be called a blessing is supposed to come closer to his or her source of blessing. The Nzema people believe that such a person becomes fortunate in life as he or she gets the privileges and the advantages needed in life.

The concept of blessedness in the context of Nzema could further be explained with another story in Nzema.

Nyilale mɔɔ di munli la anwo adawu. Nrenya bie denlanle namule bie azo, namule ne duma a le Boame. enee ɔ nee kakule kpavole anwosesebe ko a wɔ namule ne azo a. Nrenya ne kile a, debie biala mɔɔ daye Nrenya ne, ɔkse ke ɔye la, ɔnvɛle kpavole ne bɔbɔ enee yeralie ɔkye yeamaa Egya Ewule, mekile nrenya ne. Wɔ nrenya ne adwenle nu nee kemɔ ye duma ne abo kile la, enee kuye, kuye ti a ɔlua mɔɔ enee ɔwɔ ke, ɔku kpavole anwosesebe ne a, noko, kakula nrenya ne kpale ti, Egya Ewule hakyile ye adwenle na ɔyila kpavole ne molozo.

⁸ Veronica P. Onuman, “The People of Nzema (Ghana) – How They Emerged,” <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/people-nzema-ghana-how-emerged-veronica-penelope-onuman>, 2016.

⁹ Onuman, “The People of Nzema (Ghana) – How They Emerged.”

¹⁰ Mohammed Yakub, “A Linguistic Analysis of ‘Pet Names’ in Nzema: A Morphosyntactic Description,” *Indian Journal of Language and Linguistics*, September 26, 2020, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.34256/ijll2011>.

¹¹ Samuel Edukubile Etikpah, “The Kundum Festival in Ghana: Ritual Interaction with the Nonhuman among the Akan,” *Journal of Africana Religions* 3, no. 4 (2015): 343–96.

¹² Pierluigi Valsecchi, “The ‘True Nzema’: A Layered Identity,” *Africa* 71, no. 3 (2001): 391–425.

In this story, there lived a certain young energetic man in his own village called “Help me.” This young man was very honest, hospitable and kind to everyone. One day, an old man with the name “Death” whose intention is to kill anyone he meets, came to live with the young man. The young man without shame showed mercy, hospitality and kindness to the old man named “Death”. The young man continued to offer a helping hand to the old man in anything he did while he lived with the young man in his village. One day, “Death” decided to kill the young energetic man to fulfil his intention of killing people he met in life. However, Mr. Death changed his mind and refused to kill the young man due to his kindness and hospitality and the mercy he had to help him find a place to stay. Mr. Death, instead, blessed this young man to the fullest.

The story is in parallel to the Matthean Beatitudes which explains that a person’s actions of mercy, and a thirst for righteousness would certainly lead to blessedness.

Nzema-English Commentary on the beatitudes

Nzema text	English Translation
<p>Nyilalɛ mɔɔ di munli Matiyu 5:3-5 ³ “Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ bɛzɛ kɛ bɛdi Nyamenle Sunsum ne anwo ehyia la, ɔluakɛ bebanwu Anwuma Belemgbunlilile neɛ ⁴ “Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ nyane ɛha bɛ la; Nyamenle bakyeke bɛ rɛleɛ ⁵ “Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ beɛ beɛvo la; Azɛle ye bayɛ bɛ ɛdeɛɛ</p>	<p>Blessings that are complete Mathew 5:3-5 ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.</p>
<p>Ngilehilenu Gyisɛɛ hanle boka ne azo nyilalɛ edwɛkɛ ne nidizo nu. Mɔɔ limua la, ka anwoblaze now edwɛkɛ. Sunsum nu bɛtɛɛ ɛyɛɛ (Mateyu 5:3), mɔɔ ɛnee ɔɛkile sunsum nu ngoane, anyebololɛ mɔɔ yɛfa yɛkɔ Nyamenle Belemgbunlilile ne an una emomu yɛnua sonla anwosesebɛ a yɛkɔ a, na emomu, Nyamenle anwunvɔnezele ɔ. Sunsum nu ehyia mɔ saa yɛfa ystott yɛdays mumua ne yɛanwonyia now a, ɔnee ye ɛngɔ la, yɛ now mɔɔ yɛdie yɛdi nee yɛ now zo ɛmɛmanlɛ mɔɔ ewiade kulo na yemɔ a ɔye ye ayɛɛ la. Ehye, le ye angɔbenzi, fanwodi nee anwomema zo subane, mɔɔ ɔmmambɔ yɛ ti aze yɛmmq Nyamenle la, ɛhye mɔ maa akɛnrazile zo keda, na ɛhye a Falo hanle kɛ, “Nwane a le Nyamenle a, maa meadie ɔ ne? (Adendule 5:2). Kɛ ɛdi sunsum nu ehyia kile kɛ yɛnnlɛ ɛhwee yɛɛ ɛnlɛ hwee yɛ ɛngola ɛnyɛ hwee ɔti ɛhyia debie biala. Sunsum nu ɛhyialilɛ da ali wɔ sonla nu wɔ mekɛ mɔɔ ɔkɛdwazo na ɔkɛnwu mboalɛ ne kɛ ɔvi Nyamenle la. Mɔɔ tɔzo nwiɔ la, gyi alɔbɔɛlilɛ zo, (ngbakyele 4) ɛke ɛdeɛ ye, noko gyi alimua ɛdeɛ ne azo, sunsum nu ɛhyialilɛ. Mɔɔ le sunsum nu ehyiavolɛ la nwu ye kɛ, ɔnlɛ hwee yɛɛ ɔnee hwee wɔ Nyamenle anyunlu na ɔsu. ɛzunlɛ a</p>	<p>Commentary Jesus presented the Beatitudes in a definite progressive and logical order. The first one carries the ideas of contrition and humility. The poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3) refers to “the <i>utter spiritual destitution</i>, the consciousness of which precedes the entrance into the kingdom of God, and which cannot be relieved by one’s own efforts, but only by the free mercy of God.”¹³ Poverty of spirit stands in contrast to self-sufficiency, self-assertive and self-promotion that the world so much admires and praises. It is the very reverse of that independent and defiant attitude that refuses to bow to God, that determines to brave things out,¹⁴ and that says with Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice?” (Ex. 5:2). To be <i>poor in spirit</i> is to understand that you have nothing, you are nothing, and you can do nothing and therefore have need of all things. The poverty of spirit is manifest in a person when he/she is awakened to recognize his/her absolute helplessness before God. The second condition, mournfulness (v.4), is a direct progression from the first, poverty in spirit. It goes side by side with conscious poverty of spirit. The poor in spirit recognizes his or her nothingness and emptiness before God and then begins to mourn for</p>

¹³ Marvin R Vincent, “Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament. Vol. 3,” *Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc*, 2009.

¹⁴ A. W. Pink, *The Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer* (Bellingham, WA.: Logos Research System, Inc., 2005).

yɛfa yɛkila yɛ stane mɔ yɛdi la a. Kɛ yɛnwu ye kɛ, yɛnlɛ shwee la, ɔdikɛ yɛzu yɛfa yɛkila yɛ stane ne mɔ mɔ yɛyɛ la. Yɛzu yɛkila yɛ shya mɔ yɛdi yɛbwɔ sunsum now la nee stane ngyikyɛ mɔ ɛde yɛ nee Nyamenle avinli la. shye anwo ndonwo a le ɛrɛlɛ ne mɔ fane Falasiinli ne nee adwule die volɛ ne, mɔ wɔ (Luuku 18:9-14). Falasiinli ne dule ɔ now wɔ ye asɔne ɛyɛlɛ nu na bɛboale ye fɔlɛ kolaa na yeahɔ sua nu. Adwule dievolɛ ne gyinlanle moamoa na ɔnwunle ɔ now kɛ, ɔle stanevolɛ (Edwɛndolɛ 40:12) yeangulo bɔbɔ kɛ, ɔkɛmaa ɔ nye zo ɔkɛnlea anwuma bɔbɔ, ye stane dɔnwɔ ne ati, ɔzunle, Nyamenle nwu nu, ɔboalekɛ ɛnee ɔle sunsum nu shyanli na ɔlile nwolɛ nyane. Nyanelilɛ a wɔ ɛkɛ maa kilisianli kpɛlɛ biala a.

Bɛmɛ a bɛbakyekye bɛ rɛle a. Wɔ shye anwo, ɛnee kelaese ɛlɛka stane fakye mɔ gyegeye stanevolɛ mɔ hyia dievolɛ now la. ɛhye di munli wɔ sunsum nu alilalɛ wɔ Nyamenle edwɛkɛ ne ɛlolɛ zo. ɛhye awieles ne, a le adwenle mɔ nuhua la ɛkɛ nee fakye mɔ ɔlua Gyisɛse Kelaese mogya ne azo yɛnyianle ye la. Arslekyekyelɛ totohyia shye a le Nyamnle azondwɔle ne mɔ bo ndelebɛbo muala azo la (Felepima 4:7). ɛhye yi sonla ne mɔ bɛbɔ ye ɛwɔkɛ la ahonle kɛ, bɛlie ye bɛdo nu wɔ Kulovolɛ ne wɔ avinli. (ɛfesɛse 1:6). Ye sikalɛ ale kɛ, bɔbɔ ɔdi nyane wɔ ye sinli ɛdɔlɛ now na ɔka ɔkile Nyamenle, bɛkyekye ɔrɛle wɔ ngyinla zo now kɛ, Gyisɛse mogya ne kyikyɛ ye stane muala (1 Dwɔne 1:7).

Nyanelilɛ gyinlabelɛ shye nyi yɛ ahobelase (v5) wɔ ye boka ne azo edwɛkɛ ne mɔ mɔ tɔ zo nsa la anwo.

Lloyd Jones (1970:68) se, ahobelase a kile nɔhale nu kɛsi awie de a, kɛ ɔsi ɔtɛndɛ ɔkile, ye nyɛlɛ nee ye subane mɔ ɔda ye ali ɔkile menli gyɛne la. Ahobelase bo debie biala azo wɔ sonla ɛbela ɛbɔlɛ nu wɔ Nyamenle anyunlu (Kelvene 1509-1564:232). Ka kɛ, bɛle menli mɔ da nyɛlɛ nee subane kpɛlɛ ali a, mekile kɛsi bɛde la, mɔ bɛnua ɛya mgbane mgbane nae za bɛnyɛ bie bɛntia awie mɔ na emomo, dahuu bɛkɛli ye bɛ kunlu. Ahobelase ne mɔ yɛyɛ yɛsamaa Nyamenle la a yɛdie yɛto nu a. ɔnee yɛ di ye bɔɛ, ɔnyeye nu yɛɛ ɔnga kɛ ɔnrɛyɛ

his or her helpless state. Mourning is our attitude over our sin. Once we become aware of our lack of sufficiency we must then mourn over our sinfulness. It is mourning over the felt destitution of our spiritual state, and over the iniquities that have separated us and God. A striking illustration is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. The Pharisee boasted in his prayer and went down to his house in a state of condemnation. The Tax Collector standing afar off, was so troubled by his iniquities (Ps. 40:12). He dared not so much as lift his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast. Conscious of the fountain of corruption within, he cried, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” That man went down to his house justified because he was poor in spirit and mourned for sin. Mourning is ever a characteristic of the normal Christian state.

“They shall be comforted.” By these words, Christ refers primarily to the removal of the guilt that burdens the conscience of the sinner who is in dire need of a Saviour. It is accomplished by the Spirit’s application of the Gospel of God’s grace. The result is a sense of free and full forgiveness through the merits of the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. This Divine comfort is “the peace of God, which passes all understanding” (Phil. 4:7), filling the heart of the one who is now assured that he is “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). Simply, though he or she mourns his or her failures and confesses them to God, yet he is comforted by the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ, cleanses him/her from all sin (1 John 1:7).

This condition of mournfulness naturally progresses into that of meekness (v.5) in the third beatitude.

For Lloyd-Jones (1970:68), “Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others.”¹⁵ Meekness is an abandonment of all pretences to personal merit and taking of one’s place in the dust before God. John Calvin states that they are persons of mild and gentle dispositions, who are not easily provoked by injuries, who are not ready to take offense, but are prepared to endure anything rather than do the actions of the likes of wicked men.¹⁶ Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. A meek

¹⁵ Lloyd-Jones D. M., *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 68.
¹⁶ Calvin John, *Commentary on Mathew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.).

<p>noko. Ahobelase sonla ka kɛ, Nyamenle ɛhulolɛdie ɛrɛla nu ɛmaa me.</p>	<p>person can say “May the will of God be done in my life.”</p>
<p>Matiyu 5:6-10 ⁶ Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ bɛ kunlu anu a anrɛɛ bɛkola bɛyɛ mɔɔ Nyamenle kpondɛ la; Nyamenle bamaa bɛ kunlu adwo bɛ nwo ⁷ Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ bɛsɛ anwunvɔne la; Nyamenle baze bɛdabɛ noko anwunvɔne ⁸ Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ bɛ ahonle nu te la; Bɛbanwu Nyamenle ⁹ Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ bɛpɛle bɛkpondɛ anzonudwoɛ la; Nyamenle baveɛ bɛ ɔ mra ¹⁰ Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛdabɛ mɔɔ bɛyɛ bɛ kpɔdekpɔde kɛ bɛbɔ mɔdenle bɛyɛ mɔɔ Nyamenle kpondɛ la; Anwuma Belemgbunlililɛ ne le bɛ ɛdee</p>	<p>Mathew 5:6-10 ⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p>
<p>Ngilehilenu Wɔ foa ne mɔɔ tɔ zo nwiɔ la anu wɔ nolobɔɛ ne mɔ Kɛlaese bɔle ye wɔ boka ne azo la, subane mɔɔ yɛda ye ali yɛkile Nyamenle la nee mɔɔ yɛda ye ali yɛkile yɛ gɔɔnwo mɔ le ngakyile. MacArthur (1985:187) hanle kɛ “Kelease nolobɔɛ ne wɔ boka ne azo anlumua ɔdes nna ne da yɛsu mɔɔ wɔ yɛ nu la ali. Su mɔɔ wɔ yɛ adwenle nee yɛsɛ ahonle nu la. Bekile kɛ, yɛsi yɛ nwo yɛ now wɔ Nyamenle anyunlua. Awieleɛ ɛdes nna ne kile kɛ yɛsi fɛ yɛda su ne mɔ mɔɔ wɔ yɛ nu la ali la.” Saa Nyamenle kpaleɣɛla ne tɛnla sonla mu a (v.6) ɔnwɔ ye ɛtane nee ngyianlɛ na ɔsɛ anwunvɔne. Awie mɔɔ sɛ anwunvɔne la (v.7) ale sonla ne mɔɔ dwenle awie mɔ ngyialɛ now la. Anwuvɔnezɛlɛ mee gyimayalɛ a wa a. saa Nyamenle nwo sone Anwuvone a mɔaa ɔnyia ɛhulolɛ kpale ɔmaa ɔgɔnwo mɔ, ɛnye maa ɔtwe ngeladɔnwo ɔmaa Kelease. ɔnɛ ɛkpɔɛ ɔmaa awie biala. Nolobɔɛ ɛhye gyi su ɛhye mɔ azo na ɔmaa sonla dahuu pele azonuduolɛ.</p>	<p>Commentary In the second half of the Beatitudes (the last four), we seem to turn from our attitude toward God to our attitude toward our fellow human beings. MacArthur (1985:187) states, “The first four beatitudes deal entirely with inner principles, principles of the heart and mind. They are concerned with the way we see ourselves before God. The last four are outward manifestations of those attitudes.” As a person is filled with God’s righteousness (v. 6), he or she identifies with a sinful man in his need and extends mercy. The merciful (v. 7) shows compassion for people’s needs. Being merciful equals pity plus action. Having received mercy from the Lord, the saved sinner now possesses a pure heart towards others, which makes him eager to win other souls for Christ and to be friends of all and enemies of none. It is from this purity that this beatitude functions and the person becomes a genuine peacemaker.</p>
<p>Matiyu 5:11-12 ¹¹ Nyilalɛ ɛha bɛ kɛ bɛle me ɛdoavolɛma la ati bɛbɔ bɛ aholoba, bɛyɛ bɛ kpɔdekpɔde na bɛsoa ɛzonle ngakyile muala bɛgua bɛ nwo zo la. ¹² Bɛmaa bɛ nye ɛlie na beli fɛleko, ɔluakɛ bɛlɛ nwolɛ ahatuale kpole wɔ anwuma. Zɔhane ala yɛɛ bɛyɛle Nyamenle kpɔmanvolɛma ne mɔ mɔɔ lumua la a.</p>	<p>Mathew 5:11-12 ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p>
<p>Ngilehilenu Adwulalɛ ne, Mateyu sile bɛ adua kɛ b’ɛmaa bɛ nye ɛlie” wɔ amanɛmonlɛ” mɔɔ bɛlɛmou ye kɛ bɛgyi Kɛlaese Gyisɛsɛ agyakɛ anu la.</p>	<p>Commentary Finally, Matthew encouraged the new community and its leaders to “rejoice” for the “insults” in response to their representation of Jesus. The</p>

<p>Keliseouli baho ngyelele dɔnwɔ anu noko. ɔwɔkɛ ɔgyinla kpundii wɔ Awulae anu kɔkpula kɛ Awulae anyunlunya kɛra la. Ezukoolɛdea boni efa ye wɔ ɛdwɛkpa ɛhye anu a. yɛda ye ezukoalɛdeɛ ne azo.</p>	<p>Christian will be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. The persecuted Christian is encouraged to stand firm in the Lord till deliverance comes. What lessons can be learnt from the message of the Beatitudes? The next section takes care of this question.</p>
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Lessons from the Beatitudes for Discipleship

The Matthean Beatitudes have several lessons for Christian discipleship, a few of which are outlined below.

The Disciple as a Kingdom Citizen

Matthew uses the “kingdom of heaven” both at the beginning and end of the Beatitudes to form what is known as *inclusio*, which is meant to draw believers’ attention to the priority of their citizenship in heaven. This leads to the central message of the Beatitudes which is the Christian and the non-Christian belong to two entirely different worlds. As a citizen of heaven (as opposed to the world), the Christian is expected to exhibit a lifestyle of a distinctive value system, ethical standard, religious devotion, attitude to money and ambition that clashes with the world and nominal religion. True disciples should be heavenly-minded rather than earthly-minded. The study reminds disciples that the world is just a route to their home, heaven. This calls for the attitude of forgiveness, meekness, being hungry for righteousness, and not corrupting oneself with the things of the world, among others.

The Disciple’s Attitude Towards Wealth

The attitude of Christian disciples towards wealth is of very high importance in current times where money seems to be the priority of many people. It is first of all important to state that there is nothing wrong with a Christian becoming wealthy per se. It is not money which is the root of all evil but the love for it (1 Timothy 6:10). In the scriptures, God made many people rich with Abraham, Solomon, Job and David being examples of such people and the Bible does not say anything wrong with their wealth. The concern of this study, therefore, is not that Christians are seeking to be wealthy but rather the mode of acquiring it. Today, many people spend the whole of their lives seeking happiness and blessedness which they can never find and, as a result, become frustrated. The current situation of most contemporary Christians tirelessly seeking wealth with the belief that it is the source of happiness contradicts biblical teachings. True joy must be rooted in one’s relationship with God not one’s relationship with wealth. Acquiring wealth at the expense of other people’s welfare is unchristian.

Today, most Christians are ready to do anything to acquire wealth regardless of the means. Quite recently, some financial institutions (such as DKM, God is Love, Jastar Motors, Perfect Edge, Little Drops, and Menzgold Ghana Limited) sprang up in Ghana and offered their customers very high interest rates (as high as 100%). Some Churches and organizations patronized these financial institutions, and in the end, had their monies locked up. The authors believe the ethics, sustainability and credibility of these institutions should have been considered before patronizing. The principles behind these so-called financial institutions, soccer betting, and others, fuel greed and materialism which the Bible clearly speaks against (Deuteronomy 15:1-11; Mathew 6:19-34; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; 17-19). The involvement of individual Christians, Christian organizations and churches in the operations of these financial companies points to the fact that contemporary disciples are seeking wealth without considering its source. Unfortunately, many Christian leaders encouraged their members to join these companies because they subjectively felt nothing wrong with it. The researchers contend that any principle established to make everyone (including the lazy) abundantly rich is unchristian and must be rejected by Christians.

As demonstrated in the Beatitudes, the Christian is not meant to hunger and thirst for blessedness (in the form of material prosperity or any other form) but for righteousness. They alone are truly happy and are seeking to be righteous. Put wealth in place of righteousness and one will never find it. Put righteousness ahead of wealth and it will be found. The reason is simple. The heavenly kingdom is the source of all blessings. Notwithstanding the above discussion, it is wrong to use the first Beatitude either to condone the poverty of the masses or to commend the voluntary poverty of monks and others who have taken a vow to renounce possessions. Such a position contradicts Jesus’ ministry of helping the needy, healing the sick and feeding the hungry (Luke 4:18-20). Yet, it must also be noted that the blessing of Jesus’ kingdom was not primarily one of economic advantage. Christians must appreciate the fact that God can (in some circumstances) use poverty as a

means to spiritual blessing, just as wealth can be a hindrance to it. The affluent, who have gained their great wealth through the exploitation of the destitute, are not to be honoured for they are shameful in God's dominion.

The authors, therefore, call on contemporary disciples of Christ to distance themselves from the worldly means of seeking meaning, happiness, wealth, and fulfilment among others. Though Jesus had compassion for the needy and fed the hungry, the blessing of his kingdom was not primarily one of economic advantage. While it is wrong to use the first beatitude either to condone the poverty of the masses or to commend the voluntary poverty of monks and others who have taken a vow to renounce possessions, the blessing of his kingdom was not primarily one of economic advantage. In some circumstances, God can use poverty as a means to spiritual blessing, just as wealth can be a hindrance to it. But (as stated earlier) this does not make poverty in itself a desirable condition that Jesus blesses.

The Disciple's Attitude to the Poor

What should be the attitude of the disciple of Christ towards the poor in society? Poverty may be categorized into material poverty of the destitute and powerless and the spiritual poverty of the humble and meek. God shows concern for both kinds of poverty by raising the poor from the dust (1 Samuel 2:8), though through different means. While God shows approval for spiritual poverty, he opposes material poverty. However, in the kingdom community, the combination of these two kinds of poverty is identified. In the Old Testament (OT), God promised a kingdom that would judge the poor with justice and give the blessing of his rule to the humble and lowly. Jesus declared that he was sent to preach the good news to the poor (Luke 4:18) and the kingdom of heaven was meant for the poor (Matt 5:3, Luke 6:20). Stott contends that the "poor" in this context cannot be either just the materially poor (else Christ's salvation will be limited to the proletariat) or just the spiritually poor (else Christ's ministry to the needy will have no relevance).¹⁷ Against this backdrop, Stott contends that the "poor" must refer to both the materially poor and the spiritually poor. He concludes "[t]he 'poor' then are those to whom the kingdom comes as great news, partly because of its free and unmerited gift of salvation to sinners, and partly because it promises a new society characterized by freedom and justice."¹⁸ These two truths must be exemplified by the church. The church, on one hand, must consist of the spiritually poor, those who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy before the holy God. On the other hand, the church must preach "the good news of the kingdom to the materially poor, welcome them into fellowship and share in their struggle"¹⁹ Jesus calls believers to honour the destitute, while he calls the wealthy to account. The (spiritually) destitute are to be honoured because the kingdom of God belongs to them. The affluent, who have gained their great wealth through the exploitation of the destitute, are not to be honoured for they are shameful in God's dominion.

The Disciple and the Challenge of Persecution and Suffering

Persecution and suffering are among the most prominent challenges facing the 21st-century disciple. For the sake of Christ, people become victims of torture, rape, kidnappings, mass killings, forced starvation, imprisonment and even crucifixions. The message of the Beatitudes is very relevant in encouraging Disciples of Christ to persevere and endure whatever hardship comes their way. The Beatitudes teach that a disciple will suffer for the sake of Christ, but in all these, they must rejoice for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In the face of verbal persecution, social persecution and martyrdom, the disciple is encouraged to be resilient and to rejoice because of his/her portion in God's estate.

The Disciple and Disciple-Making

God has given the Church the mandate to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20). Disciple-making has a multiplying effect such that one disciple is to make other disciples and those he or she makes are in turn expected to make disciples such that there is an endless chain of disciple-making. Jesus taught his disciples how to fish for people after he had made them his converts. In this regard, the church must make frantic efforts at equipping disciples to make disciples. Training believers to be disciple-makers should be the church's response to the eschatological hope embedded in the Beatitudes. Like an apprentice, the disciple learns by participation not only by merely listening but also by actively telling others about Christ. Given this, the authors call for systematic discipleship programmes to prepare every believer, not just a small group of members of the church.

Discussion Summary

¹⁷ John R. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 307.

¹⁸ Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 307.

¹⁹ Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 307.

The following deductions can be made from the above discussions. Firstly, the Beatitudes give us a description of what every disciple of Christ ought to be like. That is, the Beatitudes set forth the balanced and variegated character of all Christians, not of some exceptional Christians. As such, all disciples of Christ are required to manifest all these characteristics. Secondly, no disciple of Christ can exhibit the descriptions in the Beatitudes without the grace of God and the empowerment by the Holy Spirit—rather than natural tendencies. There is therefore the need to have constant fellowship with God. Thirdly, the descriptions in the Beatitudes are meant to show clearly the essential utterance between Christians and non-Christians. In this respect, Christian discipleship is a call to be different²⁰ from worldly people in both ethical behaviour and piety. This call to be set apart involves a call to recognise the reality of God's kingdom; a call to be alongside the poor and sinners; and a call to participate in God's kingdom community.

CONCLUSION

By drawing out some principles from the Matthean Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12) as a paradigm for contemporary Christian discipleship, this article sought to contribute to the church's efforts in dealing with discipleship challenges of current times and beyond. The discussion has established that the Beatitudes give a description of what every disciple of Christ ought to be like. It has also been established that no disciple of Christ can exhibit the descriptions in the Beatitudes without the grace of God and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the descriptions in the Beatitudes are meant to show clearly the essential utterance between Christians and non-Christians. It is the author's conviction that these principles of discipleship when properly expounded in the church, will enhance church growth both qualitatively and quantitatively.

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²⁰ John R. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon of the Mount* (Illinois: IVP, 1978), 48.

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