

No, The Greek Doesn't Reveal Secret Bible Meaning, But It Helps

"Well, I Use the Greek"

One of my favorite things I've heard Dr. Robert Picirilli say is that when talking about Bible interpretation in small groups or informal conversation, people always want to know, "Well, what does the Greek say?" It's a fair question if you understand how God gave us the Bible, and specifically the New Testament.

I didn't take Greek as an undergrad at Welch College because I was a youth ministry major and it wasn't required. And when I started grad school several years ago at Moody Theological Seminary, it still wasn't required for my degree. Yet being older and wiser, I delayed graduation to take all of the classes they had on the subject.

The first two courses were great, and it was a lot of vocabulary and translation. The third, with perhaps my favorite professor ever, Dr. Julius Wong Loi Sing, was the most beneficial for several reasons.

First, and most importantly, he taught us that if you learn to read the New Testament in Greek and it makes you proud instead of humble, then you are reading but not understanding. Which is utterly useless to the Kingdom of God. I'll never forget this quote: "You are not supposed to dominate the Bible; it is supposed to dominate you."

Second, he told us that Greek should be like your underwear; you should use it but people should not be aware of it. In other words, do not constantly and haughtily make everything about, "Well the original Greek says..." and "Now if you

understand the Greek syntax Paul uses here..." And lastly, and the point of this article, he taught us that Greek does not contain some kind of hidden, secret meaning to Bible texts. But it does help.

Last year for Rambling Ever On, I wrote an article called *#Blessed: The Beatitudes As Modern Day Facebook Statuses*, which if you would like you can read [here](#). In that article I tried to practice Dr. Wong Loi Sing's advice about the underwear. Yet I think it could be interesting for the readers of REO to see how things go behind the scenes of an article like that, because it says something about the way God communicated the Bible to us.

First, I want to look at Matthew 5:3-16 in English. You don't have to read this to get what I am wanting you to see. Just survey it quickly:

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 gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

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 have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 *"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you,*

and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.
12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

First, note a couple of things. One, the translation I used (the NASB) separates vs. 13-16 from vs. 3-12. Two, there is little about vs. 3-12 that gives any sense of separation within these verses.

Now, I want to show you these verses in Greek. I just want you to look at them. You do not have to understand one iota of Greek to get what I am trying to communicate here. In fact, to save time and space I'm going to go ahead and highlight some things that stand out to me:

3 Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

4 μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

5 μακάριοι οἱ πραεῖς, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν.

6 μακάριοι οἱ πεινῶντες καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

7 μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται.

8 μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται.

9 μακάριοι οἱ εἰρηνοποιοί, ὅτι αὐτοὶ υἱοὶ θεοῦ κληθήσονται.

10 μακάριοι οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

11 μακάριοί ἐστε ὅταν ὄνειδίσωσιν ὑμᾶς καὶ διώξωσιν καὶ εἰπῶσιν πᾶν πονηρὸν καθ' ὑμῶν ψευδόμενοι ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ. **12** χαίρετε καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε, ὅτι ὁ μισθὸς ὑμῶν πολὺς ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς· οὕτως γὰρ ἐδίωξαν τοὺς προφήτας τοὺς πρὸ ὑμῶν.

13 Ὑμεῖς **ἐστε** τὸ ἅλας τῆς γῆς· ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῇ, ἐν τίνι ἀλισθήσεται; εἰς οὐδὲν ἰσχύει ἔτι εἰ μὴ βληθὲν ἔξω καταπατεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

14 Ὑμεῖς **ἐστε** τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. οὐ δύναται πόλις κρυβῆναι ἐπάνω ὄρους κειμένη· **15** οὐδὲ καίουσιν λύχνον καὶ τιθέασιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τὸν μόδιον ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τὴν λυχνίαν, καὶ λάμπει πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ. **16** οὕτως λαμψάτω τὸ φῶς ὑμῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὅπως ἴδωσιν ὑμῶν τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δοξάσωσιν τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν τὸν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

A couple of things to notice, which are made easy by my highlights. First, there is a contrast in verses 10 and 11. You can see it in English as it changes from “Blessed are the/those” to “Blessed are you”. But for some reason I never saw it until the first time I read it in Greek. Perhaps because the English obscures the consistency of verses 3-10 by switching between “the” and “those”. In Greek the form is exactly the same every time.

I think the change from vs. 10 to 11 is significant. If I wear

khaki pants and a blue shirt eight days in a row and then on the ninth day I wear blue jeans and a blue shirt you will wonder why I changed. The same is true for understanding biblical authors in how they write.

I personally think the change is there because Jesus gives eight beatitudes (vs. 3-10) and vs. 11 begins a commentary on the last one about being persecuted. This sharp change in the passage can also be seen without any hindrance in English by the use of "for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven" in verses 3 and 10. This creates a bun type affect of the passage.

The commentary on persecution, in my opinion, continues through vs. 16 and this can also be seen in my highlights by use of "You are" and other forms of "you" from vs. 11 to vs. 16. In fact, if I play around with the English a little, you can see it even more clearly in English than Greek:

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 gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

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 have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 *"Blessed you are when people insult you and persecute you,*

and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.
12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

13 “**You are** the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

14 “**You are** the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; **15** nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. **16** Let **your** light shine before men in such a way that they may see **your** good works, and glorify **your** Father who is in heaven.

Now you may ask, “What difference does it make?” Well maybe not much. But as a preacher I have to confess, knowing that verses 13-16 should not be separated from vs. 11-12 (or from vs. 1-10) then it affects my interpretation of verses 13-16. How often do you see a new subheading in Bibles over vs. 13? What if I told you that shining your light before men, in context, was directly linked to being persecuted? Does it change your understanding of the verse? Or its application?

One more thing I want you see this, this time only in verses 3-6:

3 Μακάριοι οἱ **πτωχοὶ** τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

4 μακάριοι οἱ **πενθοῦντες**, ὅτι αὐτοὶ παρακληθήσονται.

5 μακάριοι οἱ **πραεῖς**, ὅτι αὐτοὶ κληρονομήσουσι τὴν γῆν.

6 μακάριοι οἱ **ΠΕΙΝῶΝΤΕΣ** καὶ διψῶντες τὴν δικαιοσύνην, ὅτι αὐτοὶ χορτασθήσονται.

Notice that the four words are alliterated, beginning with the same Greek letter you may recognize from math class as Pi (though I was taught to pronounce it with a long 'e' instead of a long 'i'). I know some people find outline alliteration annoying in modern preaching but it's used here. What does that mean? Perhaps nothing. After all, vs. 7-10 are not alliterated. Yet, I think it probably means that vs. 3-6 are one subgroup of the Beatitudes and vs. 7-10 are a second group. Even further, I think if you study them you will see that it could be that vs. 3-6 deal with man's relationship to God and vs. 7-10 deal with man's relationship to other men. This follows the pattern of both the Ten Commandments and The Great Commandment given by Jesus.

And this absolutely changes how I interpret the Beatitudes, especially vs. 8 which I interpret differently than you probably have ever heard. If you want to read more about that interpretation you can read the article the I linked at the beginning of this article or you can go [here](#). Note that I don't think that my interpretation is undoubtedly correct or beyond reproach, but that I got there by study and not some crazy, baseless theory.

Again, it has been my aim to be informative without being pedantic and helpful without being condescending. I am no Greek expert and never will be. But I have benefited from it and I hope that I can help others see its benefit. God did, after all, reduce himself to human language to give us the main source of truth we have.

Questions? Comments? Let us know below!