

# The Beatitudes

## *The Path To A New Life*



*Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee*

*“When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them...” (Matthew 5:1-2)*

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## *Dedication*

This book is dedicated to two of the finest elders I have ever met, **Norbert Maudlin** and **Gene McNabb**.

In 1981, when I was just 21 years old, these men gave me the chance to preach at the Northwest Church of Christ of Evansville, Indiana. Their diligence in the Lord's work and their love for the truth is worthy of imitation by all those who love the Lord. I will never be able to repay them for the kindness, encouragement and fatherly advice they provided during my time in Evansville.

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# Introduction To The Beatitudes

## Introduction

- I. In the second year of our Lord's earthly ministry He walked up a hill on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee and taught His disciples (Matt 5:1-2).
  - A. Moses went up into a mountain to receive the Law; Jesus ascended a mountain to explain the Law.
  - B. As was the custom of Jewish rabbis, Jesus sat down to teach (cf. Luke 4:20).
  - C. "The sanctuary for the greatest sermon ever preached was the mountain. As far as we know, this mountain—really a large hill—had no name until Jesus preached there. Until then it had been but one of many hills that slope up gently from the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. What had been simply a mountain among many other mountains now became the mountain, sanctified and set apart by the presence of the Lord. For many centuries the traditional site has been called the Mount of Beatitudes." (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 137)
  - D. The Mount of Beatitudes overlooks the four-mile long Plain of Gennesaret.
  - E. The mountain is topped by a Roman Catholic Franciscan chapel which was built in 1939 with the support of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.
  - F. A Byzantine church building was erected near the current site in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.
  - G. As you look over the Sea of Galilee from the Mount of Beatitudes you can see the Cove of the Sower, the place where Jesus told the parable about the man casting seeds into various types of soil (Matt 13:3-9).
  - H. You have to wonder what it would have been like to sit on these hills 2,000 years ago and listen to the Son of God explain the "kingdom of Heaven."
- II. One of the greatest problems in many local congregations today is superficiality.
  - A. The remedy for superficiality is found in the Beatitudes!
  - B. "The famous historian Will Durant said that in any given generation only a handful of people make an impression on the world that lasts more than a few years. The person who stands out above all others, he said, is Jesus Christ. Jesus undoubtedly has had the most powerful and permanent influence on the thought of mankind. But, the historian went on to say, His teachings have not had a corresponding effect on man's actions." (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 137)
  - C. The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known, but least understood and least followed, of all the teachings of Jesus.
  - D. The Beatitudes are a collection of eight characteristics (qualities of life) that separate children of God from the rest of the world (Matt 5:3-12).
  - E. These eight beatitudes describe the blessed state of those who humbly submit themselves to the will of God.
  - F. These are not eight different groups of people (poor, mourners, meek, etc.), but every Christian is meant to manifest every one of these characteristics.

## I. False Concepts About The Sermon On The Mount

- A. Dispensationalists, such as J. N. Darby, and many evangelicals, believe the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is for a future “kingdom age,” not for us.
  - 1. A note on Matthew 5 in the *Scofield Reference New Testament* reads: “For these reasons the Sermon on the Mount in its primary application gives neither the privilege nor the duty of the Church.”
  - 2. Jesus spoke in this sermon of the persecution His disciples would endure as they put the beatitudes into practice (Matt 5:10–12).
  - 3. However, dispensationalists claim the “kingdom age” will be a time of peace!
- B. Liberal theologians often look upon the Sermon on the Mount as a pattern for “the social gospel.”
- C. Seventh Day Adventists turn the sermon into an *extension* of the Ten Commandments that were given on Mt. Sinai.
- D. Many Christians today look at the Sermon on the Mount as a *contrast* to the Ten Commandments.
- E. Sadly, some Christians turn it into a *modern version* of the Ten Commandments.
  - 1. They have done to the Sermon on the Mount what the Jews did to the Law—they have drained the life right out of it.
  - 2. They have turned the teachings of Jesus into a series of “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not.”
  - 3. The Sermon on the Mount contains strong meat for mature Christians and it will challenge you as long as you live.

## II. Historical Context

- A. In the first century Judea was filled with many problems:
  - 1. The land was occupied by a tyrannical military government.
  - 2. It was a world of absolute rulers, the antithesis of democracy.
  - 3. It was a world of persecution—the people were chattel for the Romans.
  - 4. Taxes consumed a third of their income.
  - 5. Racial prejudice was prevalent to the point that men no longer knew who their neighbor was (Luke 10:25–37).
  - 6. Slavery was rampant—there were approximately three slaves to every free man.
- B. In response to this sad situation, many answers were given by sects of the Jews.
  - 1. The *Zealots*, the terrorists of their day, said, “Don’t worry about your spiritual life—our hope is military might.”
  - 2. The *Sadducees* said, “We can only survive by compromising with the world. Be cautious and negotiate the best bargain you can.”
  - 3. The *Pharisees* said, “Live a clean, ritually pure life (as defined by our Rabbis) and trust in God and He will do the rest.”
    - a) They followed human traditions and put a *hedge* around the Torah.
    - b) It has been said that the Sadducees bargained with Rome, but the Pharisees bargained with God.

- C. In this midst of this dispute, a lowly Galilean carpenter climbed the hills and walked through the valleys of Judea—He knew the people and had compassion on their miserable situation (Matt 9:36).
- D. This sermon was delivered in the second year of Christ’s ministry and near the height of His popularity (Matt 4:23–25).
1. He had already had two altercations with the Pharisees.
  2. Having rejected the doctrine of the Zealots, Sadducees, and Pharisees, Jesus taught about the need for genuine *repentance* (Matt 4:17).
  3. Consider how the lexicons define the word *repent* (Gr. μετανοέω, *metanoeo*).
    - a) “to change one’s mind and purpose” (Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek–English Lexicon*).
    - b) “have a change of heart, turn from one’s sins, change one’s ways” (Newman, *A Concise Greek–English Dictionary of the New Testament*).
    - c) “to change any or all of the elements composing one’s life: attitude, thoughts, and behaviors concerning the demands of God for right living” (Goodrick, Kohlenberger and Swanson, *Greek to English Dictionary and Index to the NIV New Testament*).
  4. Jesus was not just asking men to change a few of their behaviors, He was asking them to radically change their entire lives and worldview.
  5. No one has the right to ask another to change his manner of life, unless he can offer a better way.
    - a) Maybe this is the problem in what some brethren mistakenly call “personal evangelism” (cf. Rom 12:1–2).
    - b) When non-Christians visit at some congregations all they see is a group of people with long faces who are about as cheerful as a coroner’s inquest.
    - c) No one wants a religion that makes people miserable!
    - d) “However absolute the call to repentance, it was a message of joy, because the possibility of repentance exists. Because God has turned to man...man should, may and can turn to God. Hence conversion and repentance are accompanied by joy, for they mean the opening up of life for the one who has turned. The parables in Lk. 15 bear testimony to the joy of God over the sinner who repents and call on men to share it. God’s gift to men in their conversion is life. When the parable of the prodigal son pictures conversion as a return to the Father, it can be said of the man who has repented, ‘This my son was dead, and is alive again’ (Lk. 15:24; cf. 32).” (Brown and Colin, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*)

### III. General Observations About The Sermon On The Mount

- A. In this sermon Jesus challenges people to a standard of living that is radically different from anything the world had ever heard before.
1. This sermon does not say, “Live like this and you will be a Christian,” but rather, “Because you are a Christian, live like this.”
  2. This sermon shows how Christians are meant to live.

- B. Christ does not sound like Moses the lawgiver or Elijah the prophet.
1. This sermon has no threats or terrors, in fact, it sounds rather friendly.
  2. “It seems certain that no other speech ever delivered has so influenced man as has this sermon on the mount. Its contents, so superior to any production of man, proved the Deity of its author. Its teaching is out of harmony with any school of religion or philosophy of that day; hence, their brightest lights could not have produced it. It is not eclectic, that is, its contents are not a collection of the best thoughts of that and previous ages. Its teaching is distinct, revolutionary, challenging every school of religious thought of the times, both Jewish and heathen. It is not a product of the times, but of Deity.” (Whiteside, *Bible Studies*, 4:117)
- C. We do not study this sermon because it makes us “feel good.”
1. If the Sermon on the Mount makes you “feel good,” then you have either not read it or have not understood it.
  2. This sermon crushes us to the ground—it shows our utter helplessness before God, condemns us for falling short and drives us to the Cross.
  3. However, if you want power in your life as a Christian, if you want to be blessed, then go to the Sermon on the Mount—and start with the Beatitudes.
- D. There is a tendency to take a verse from this sermon and isolate it from the rest.
1. I don’t want to talk about “turning the other cheek” (Matt 5:39) with one who does not understand the Beatitudes.
  2. Some think if you own a clothing store and a man comes in and steals a coat, you have to stop him and make him take an overcoat as well (Matt 5:40).
  3. Some Christians will call other people every derogatory term in the world—except for *fool* (Matt 5:22).
  4. Some will go into a court of law and will *affirm* to tell the truth, but not *swear* to tell the truth, even though they mean the same thing (Matt 5:33–37).
  5. Pacifists have turned the command “not to resist an evil person” into a prescription for total political and social anarchy (Matt 5:39).
  6. Others misquote “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matt 7:1), and forget that Jesus tells us *how* to judge in the following verses.
- E. The Sermon on the Mount shows the way of blessing for a Christian.
1. We do not find happiness in the same way the world does, for our standards are not theirs (Eccl 12:13–14).
  2. The Sermon on the Mount tells us that it is the poor (not the haughty), the meek (not the proud), the merciful (not the cruel), the peacemakers (not the agitators) who are blessed by God.
- F. Our view of God determines our view of the world (cf. Eccl 3:1–12).

#### IV. Observations About The Beatitudes

- A. The biggest mistake most people make in studying the Beatitudes is overlooking the very first word in each verse!
1. Each of the Beatitudes begin with the word *blessed* (Gr. μακάριος, *makarios*).
    - a) The word *beatitude* is not found in the text of our English Bibles.
    - b) Our English word *beatitude* come from the Latin word *beatus* (blessed).

2. “Greek *makarios* corresponds to Hebrew *asher* and means ‘blessed,’ ‘happy,’ and ‘fortunate’ all at once, so that no one English word is adequate” (Stearn, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, comments on Matt 5:3).
  3. The Beatitudes do not tell you how to be *happy*, but how to be *blessed!*
  4. “Each beatitude tells how to be *blessed* by God. *Blessed* means more than happiness. It implies the fortunate or enviable state of those who are in God’s Kingdom. The Beatitudes don’t promise laughter, pleasure, or earthly prosperity. Being ‘blessed’ by God means the experience of hope and joy, independent of outward circumstances. To find hope and joy, the deepest form of happiness, follow Jesus no matter what the cost.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, comments on Matt 5:3)
  5. “The Greek term for ‘blessed, happy’ was not nearly as difficult to understand for Jesus’ audience and Matthew’s readers as it is for us. Matthew’s Jewish listeners and readers were familiar with the term. Our modern idea of ‘happiness’ is a diluted version of the joy implied by the term Jesus used. Our idea of happiness is a dependence on circumstances. Instead, God’s happiness or joy is dependent on the assurance of God’s blessing (sometimes present, often future), not on current circumstances, and it abides deep and undisturbable within the believer.” (Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary, 58)
  6. “*Makarios* then describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely independent of all the chances and changes of life. The English word *happiness* gives its own case away. It contains the root *hap* which means *chance*. Human happiness is something which is dependent on the chances and the changes of life, something which life may give and which life may also destroy.” (Barclay, *The Gospel Of Matthew*, 1:89)
  7. “What is this blessing? The second half of each beatitude elucidates it. They possess the kingdom of heaven and they inherit the earth. The mourners are comforted and the hungry are satisfied. They receive mercy, they see God, they are called the sons of God. Their heavenly reward is great. And all these blessings belong together. Just as the eight qualities describe every Christian (at least in the ideal), so the eight blessings are given to every Christian.” (Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 33–34)
- B. In the Old Testament, beatitudes commonly presented situations in which God’s blessings could be found (e.g., Ps 1:1–2; 32:1–2; 33:12; 41:1; 65:4; 106:3; 119:1, 2; Prov 8:32, 34; Eccl 10:17).
  - C. The Beatitudes found in the Sermon in the Mount are not the only beatitudes in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 11:6; Luke 12:37; Jas 1:12; Rev 1:3; 14:13).
  - D. The Beatitudes speak of a joy which comes in spite of sickness, pain, sorrow, loss of a loved one, or grief (cf. 2 Tim 4:6–8; Phil 4:4).
  - E. Jesus said, “No one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22).



*Conclusion*

- I. The beatitudes do not describe different types of Christians—all Christians are meant to manifest all of these characteristics.
- II. Christians are different in what we seek after and long for.
  - A. Everyone will “hunger and thirst” after something—what is it with you?
  - B. Wealth? Status? Political Power? Or, the righteousness of God?
- III. It is not enough to hear the words of Jesus, we must obey Him (Matt 7:24-27).

# The Blessedness Of Being Poor In Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3)

## Introduction

- I. According to Jesus, true happiness is related to some sort of poverty.
  - A. However, Jesus is not talking about *material* poverty.
    1. Catholic commentators are fond of this interpretation (e.g., Senior and Collins in *The Catholic Study Bible*).
    2. Material poverty does not guarantee heaven.
    3. “If Jesus was teaching the innate blessedness of material poverty, then the task of Christians would be to help make everyone, including themselves, penniless. Jesus did not teach that material poverty is the path to spiritual prosperity” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*).
    4. The only prayer in the book of Proverbs is that of Agur when he asked God to give him neither poverty nor riches (Prov 30:7-9).
    5. The Apostle Paul knew both poverty and riches (Phil 4:11-13).
  - B. Being poor in spirit does not mean *poor-spirited* either.
    1. Poor-spirited people lack drive and have no enthusiasm for life.
    2. Poor-spirited people have no real motivation to accomplish anything!
- II. Jesus was concerned with poverty of *spirit*—a frame of mind.
  - A. The Beatitudes were given in a very definite order, for they are a picture of a man turning to God.
  - B. This Beatitude begins with the emptying of one’s self; the rest speak of a filling.

## Discussion

### I. What Should Our Attitude Be Towards Ourselves?

- A. The world places a great emphasis on self-reliance, self-confidence.
  1. A humble politician is seldom elected because most people would say that he “lacks personality.”
  2. The Apostle Paul placed no confidence in himself; he made Christ the focus of his life and work (2 Cor 4:5).
  3. Paul would not be accepted by many congregations today (1 Cor 2:1-5).
- B. Being poor in spirit is not a suppression of your personality.
  1. You don’t have to be ashamed of your personal abilities, the money you have worked for, the car you drive, or the house you live in.
  2. While we are not to flaunt our wealth, there is nothing wrong in being rich!
- C. Great characters of the Old Testament were poor in spirit.
  1. Gideon (Judg 6:15).
  2. Moses (Exod 4:10).
  3. Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5-9).

- D. The Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14).
1. This poor, deluded Pharisee left the Temple, dreaming that he had earned his eternal salvation.
    - a) He had totally forgotten that the tithes he prided himself on giving were merely tithes on what God had blessed Him with.
    - b) He seems to think that God was lucky to have him on His side!
    - c) Here is a man who was proud in spirit and had no sense of his utter worthlessness before God.
  2. The tax collector was humble, contrite and heartbroken.
    - a) His only hope was to throw himself on the mercy of God.
    - b) The Pharisee thought he needed nothing and that is exactly what he got; the tax collector saw his need for mercy and received it!
- E. The Apostle Peter was an aggressive, assertive and confident man (Matt 26:33-35).
1. However, when he saw Jesus, he cried out, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man" (Luke 5:8).
  2. He never ceases to be bold and assertive; he is always aware of his nothingness before God (1 Pet 1:18-19).
- F. The Apostle Paul was a man of great power and education (Phil 3:3-6).
1. He could have taken pride in his pedigree, his education at the feet of Gamaliel, or his Roman citizenship.
  2. However, after seeing the Lord, all that he once valued become "loss for Christ" and counted as "rubbish" (Phil 3:7-8).
  3. He considered himself to be the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:15).

## II. What Is Meant By "Poor In Spirit?"

- A. Complete absence of pride and self reliance (Jer 10:23; 1 Cor 3:18).
1. It is consciousness of the fact that we are nothing before God (Ps 8:3-4).
  2. We will not rely on our ancestry, our financial reserves or education, for these things are meaningless before our God.
  3. "To be poor in spirit is not to lack courage but to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. It confesses one's unworthiness before God and utter dependence on him" (Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*).
  4. "To be poor in spirit is to have a humble opinion of ourselves; to be sensible that we are sinners, and have no righteousness of our own; to be willing to be saved only by the rich grace and mercy of God; to be willing to be where God places us, to bear what he lays on us, to go where he bids us, and to die when he commands; to be willing to be in his hands, and to feel that we deserve no favor from him. It is opposed to pride, and vanity, and ambition." (Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*)

5. “To be poor in spirit (Matt 5:3) is to be vacant of self and waiting for God. To have no confidence in the flesh; to be emptied of self-reliance; to be conscious of absolute insufficiency; to be thankfully dependent on the life energy of the living God—that is poverty of spirit; and it has been characteristic of some of the noblest, richest, most glorious natures that have ever trodden the shores of Time. Happy are they who are conscious of a poverty which only the Divine indwelling can change into wealth...” (Meyer, *Inherit The Kingdom*, 20)
- B. There must be an emptying of our lives before there can be a filling—we must become poor in spirit before we can become rich in God’s blessings.
  1. We must have a recognition of our unworthiness before God before we can accept His salvation.
  2. In the absence of human pride and self-assurance, we bow before our God and humbly submit to His will.

### III. Ours Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

- A. The kingdom of heaven is the consequence of being poor in spirit, not a reward for it, i.e., it is not something that we earn.
- B. “The poor in spirit are those who feel a deep sense of spiritual destitution and comprehend their nothingness before God. The kingdom of heaven is theirs, because they seek it, and therefore find and abide in it. To this virtue is opposed the pride of the Pharisee, which caused him to thank God that he was not as other men, and to despise and reject the kingdom of heaven. There must be emptiness before there can be fullness, and so poverty of spirit precedes riches and grace in the kingdom of God.” (McGarvey and Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel*)
- C. “*It is blessed to belong to that invisible kingdom* which is already in our world, including within its ever-expanding circle all gracious souls of every race and age, breathing the ozone of Heaven into the stale and exhausted atmosphere of the world; its King the Enthroned Lamb; its subjects, the childlike, the forgiving, the gentle, and the pure; its laws, love; its advances, soft, sweet, irresistible as the dawn; its duration, eternal. It is a blessed thing to know that one has the franchise and freedom of that kingdom, that one need never go out from its holy and strong embrace, and that men like John the Divine may greet us thus: ‘Your brother and partaker with you...in the...Kingdom...which [is] in Jesus’ (Rev 1:9, ASV).” (Meyer, *Inherit The Kingdom*, 15–16)

Conclusion

- I. Humility really is the first step toward entering the kingdom, for until we submit our will to the will of Christ we cannot enter in.
  - A. We come to Christ hopeless and helpless, naked and vile (cf. Eph 2:12).
  - B. “In our Lord’s own day it was not the Pharisees who entered the kingdom, who thought they were rich, so rich in merit that they thanked God for their attainments; nor the Zealots who dreamed of establishing the kingdom by blood and sword; but publicans and prostitutes, the rejects of human society, who knew they were so poor they could offer nothing and achieve nothing. All they could do was to cry to God for mercy; and he heard their cry.” (Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 40)
  - C. Like the wonderful hymn, *Rock Of Ages*, says, “In my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”
  - D. We can become humble when we take our eyes off of ourselves and fix them upon the cross of Christ (Gal 2:20).
  - E. Then we can truly say, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21).
- II. Becoming poor in spirit allows God to turn us into His own special people (1 Pet 2:9–10).
- III. We come to God empty and helpless, but with a contrite and humble spirit we are then allowed to dwell with Him (Isa 57:15; 66:2).
- IV. The kingdom of God can be yours when you realize your own utter helplessness without God and learn to trust and obey.

# The Blessedness Of Mourning

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matt 5:4)

## Introduction

- I. As we examined the first Beatitude we saw that there has to be an *emptying* of our lives before there can be a *filling*—we must become *poor* in spirit before we can become *rich* in God’s blessings.
  - A. We must have a recognition of our unworthiness before God before we can accept His salvation.
  - B. As we empty our lives of human pride and self-assurance, we bow before our God and humbly submit to His will.
  - C. The second Beatitude starts the filling process and allows us to start filling our lives with the blessings of God.
- II. In one of the most passionate psalms of the Old Testament, David cried out, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest” (Ps 55:6–8).
  - A. David’s cry for comfort is as ancient as fallen man—he wanted to be able to fly away from his pain and anguish.
  - B. This same cry has often been uttered by those who yearn for comfort.
  - C. Fortunately, David found a source of comfort (Ps 55:16), and he recommended it to others (Ps 55:22).
  - D. In this psalm David sounded a lot like Isaiah as he wrote concerning the sad plight of the Jews in Babylonian exile (Isa 40:31).
  - E. The second Beatitude expresses the same lesson that both David and Isaiah learned, i.e., happy is the man whom the God of heaven blesses.

## Discussion

### I. What Does It Mean To Mourn?

- A. The word translated as *mourn* in Matthew 5:4 (Gr. πενθέω, *pentheo*) is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek New Testament.
- B. The basic meaning of the word is, “to bewail, lament, mourn for” (Liddell and Scott, *An Intermediate Greek–English Lexicon*).
- C. In Jewish literature the word often means, “to engage in mourning for one who is dead, ordinarily w. traditional rites, mourn over” (BDAG, *A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*).
- D. The word is used in the Septuagint (LXX) to describe Jacob’s grief when he thought Joseph was dead (Gen 37:34).

## II. Mourning For What?

- A. There are various interpretations of the cause for mourning in this verse:
  1. Some think this is mourning due to one's own bitter experiences in life.
  2. Others think this is mourning over the sad circumstances in the world (poverty, unemployment, war, disease, etc.).
  3. It is my understanding that this passage speaks of one who is mourning over their own sins and unworthiness before God.
- B. The message of Christ was a message of repentance (Matt 4:17).
  1. We can't truly repent without godly sorrow (2 Cor 7:10).
  2. I have witnessed people "come forward" at the end of worship services to "publicly repent" of some sin—but I can't understand how some people do this with a smile on their face!
  3. The smiling face suggests that they have not truly grasped what "godly sorrow" is all about.
- C. "*Blessed are they that mourn.* That is, those who, feeling their spiritual poverty, mourn after God, lamenting the iniquity that separated them from the fountain of blessedness. Every one flies from sorrow, and seeks after joy, and yet true joy must necessarily be the fruit of sorrow." (Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*)
- D. "The blessing is not upon all that mourn (2 Cor. 7:10); but upon those who mourn in reference to sin. They shall be comforted by the discovery and appropriation of God's pardon. But all mourning is traced directly or indirectly to sin. We may take it, therefore, that in its widest sense the beatitude covers all those who are led by mourning to a discerning of sin, and who so deplore its effects and consequences in the world as to yearn for and seek the deliverance which is in Christ." (McGarvey and Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel*)
- E. "This 'mourning' must not be taken loosely for that feeling which is wrung from men under pressure of the ills of life, nor yet strictly for sorrow on account of committed sins. Evidently it is that entire feeling which the sense of our spiritual poverty begets; and so the second beatitude is but the complement of the first. The one is the intellectual, the other the emotional aspect of the same thing. It is poverty of spirit that says, 'I am undone'; and it is the mourning which this causes that makes it break forth in the form of a lamentation—'Woe is me! for I am undone.'" (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*)

## III. Mourning Over Sin

- A. Jesus was filled with sorrow over sins—not His own, but of others (Isa 53:3-4).
  1. He wept *at the grave of* Lazarus, but not *for* Lazarus (John 11:35).
  2. He wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44; cf. Matt 23:37).
- B. Speaking of his former life, the Apostle Paul said, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:24).
  1. He is more specific in his epistles when he uses such words as *sober*, *reverent*, and *temperate* (Titus 2:2).
  2. Mourning over sin and its consequences is something that naturally follows one being "poor in spirit."

#### IV. Where Is The Comfort?

- A. Mourning ends in comfort only when it leads one to Christ!
- B. The gospel of Christ is the only source of true comfort for those who are afflicted by sin (Isa 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21).
- C. “Religion, according to the Bible, is neither a set of intellectual convictions nor a bundle of emotional feelings, but a compound of both, the former giving birth to the latter. Thus closely do the first two beatitudes cohere. The mourners shall be ‘comforted.’ Even now they get beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Sowing in tears, they reap even here in joy. Still, all present comfort, even the best, is partial, interrupted, short-lived. But the days of our mourning shall soon be ended, and then God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. Then, in the fullest sense, shall the mourners be ‘comforted.’” (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*)
- D. “Mourners are happy because they are the only ones who are forgiven. The rest of the world has to live with that endless guilt. Get it straight now—the happiness does not come from the mourning; it comes in God’s response to it. His response? Comfort. Keep sin in your life and bottle it up, and you’ll see how ruinous it becomes. Confess it and see the freedom and the joy that comes in forgiveness.” (MacArthur, *The Only Way to Happiness*, 79)

#### V. What Is The Application?

- A. Mourning for sin drives us to God, just as Paul’s infirmities made him realize how much he needed the Lord (2 Cor 12:9-10).
- B. David’s mourning over his sin with Bathsheba drove him to seek God with a “broken and a contrite heart” (Ps 51:1-19).

#### Conclusion

- I. “Parallel to this Beatitude is the invitation of Matthew 11:28, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ There is no difference between the ‘mourning’ of the Beatitude and the ‘heavy laden’ of the invitation; and there is no difference between the ‘comfort’ and the ‘rest.’ Both passages refer to remission of sins by the gospel of Christ. And that is the meaning of the second Beatitude which anticipated the good news of the gospel, as the means of comfort for the sin-laden world by removing the cause of mourning—‘the sin of the world.’ Nothing could alleviate that kind of mourning, or weaken the potency of sorrowing for sin, than the comfort of the gospel upon which rests the hope of all mankind.” (Wallace, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State*, 15)
- II. In Christ the weary soul can find peace (Matt 11:28-30; John 14:27; Rev 21:4).



# The Blessedness Of Meekness

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5)

## Introduction

- I. In the first Beatitude (“blessed are the poor in spirit”) we saw that there has to be an *emptying* of our lives before there can be a *filling*—we must become poor in spirit before we can become rich in God’s blessings.
- II. In the second Beatitude we learned that mourning over our sins drives us to God and there we find the comfort we truly need.
- III. In the third Beatitude we will see how the meek (i.e., those who humbly submit to the will of God) will enjoy the blessings of God here and now.
- IV. To the Jewish crowds who were waiting for a Messiah–King who would lead them to victory over the hated Romans, this Beatitude must have sounded ridiculous.
  - A. The Jewish Zealots of the first century sought happiness through a militaristic kingdom and a massive army.
    1. The thought of a meek and gentle Messiah seemed absurd to them.
    2. They understood the power of the sword, but had never considered the power of meekness.
    3. “Jesus’ teaching seemed new and unacceptable to most of His hearers simply because the Old Testament was so greatly neglected and misinterpreted. They did not recognize the humble and self-denying Jesus as the Messiah because they did not recognize God’s predicted Suffering Servant as the Messiah. That was not the kind of Messiah they wanted.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*)
  - B. Our world today associates happiness with possessions, beautiful houses, the praise of men, and the vain things of earth.
  - C. Christians need to understand that true happiness comes by meek and humble submission to the will of God.

## Discussion

### I. What Is Meekness?

- A. You won’t get very far in understanding the meaning of *meek* (Gr. *praus*) by using a modern English dictionary.
  1. The word *meek* has changed a lot in the last 350 years.
  2. The word does not mean weakness, cowardice or spiritlessness.
  3. “The term sometimes was used to describe a soothing medicine or a soft breeze. It was used of colts and other animals whose naturally wild spirits were broken by a trainer so that they could do useful work. As a human attitude it meant being gentle of spirit, meek, submissive, quiet, tenderhearted.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*)
- B. In the synoptic gospels the word *meek* is only found three times (all in Matthew).
  1. The first use of the word is in the Beatitudes (Matt 5:5).
  2. The second time is in the tender invitation of Jesus, where we find that He is “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matt 11:28–30).

3. Finally, as Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, He is described as “*lowly*, and sitting on a donkey” (Matt 21:5).
- C. “Meekness is often mistaken for passivity, timid reticence and a sort of an inferiority complex. But the basic element of meekness, derived from its root meaning is equilibrium—the full and complete possession of all the faculties of one’s being, an inner mastery. It has been illustrated in some lexical definitions as the captain at the helm of his ship in the midst of the storm, who, in full control of the vessel, guides the ship steadily through the storm. It is said of Moses in Numbers 12:3, ‘Now the man Moses was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth,’ yet he was among all men the most courageous, and with Joshua his colleague and commander-in-chief, the greatest fighter in Israel.” (Wallace, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State*, 16)
- D. “Meekness is another word for self-effacement. We should not miss the point that in all three of the opening beatitudes the truth is brought out that the follower of Jesus does not aggressively insist on his own rights but displays genuine humility. Meekness is not to be confused with weakness: the meek are not simply submissive because they lack the resources to be anything else. Meekness is quite compatible with great strength and ability as humans measure strength, but whatever strength or weakness the meek person has is accompanied by humility and a genuine dependence on God. True meekness may be a quality of the strong, those who could assert themselves but choose not to do so. The strong who qualify for this blessing are the strong who decline to domineer.” (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 98)
- E. Who are the meek? The answer is found in Psalms 37:3–11.
1. The meek are those who trust in the Lord, who delight themselves in Him and commit their way to His will.
  2. “David calls us to take delight in the Lord and to commit everything we have and do to him. But how do we do this? To *delight* in someone means to experience great pleasure and joy in his or her presence. This happens only when we know that person well. Thus, to delight in the Lord, we must know him better. Knowledge of God’s great love for us will indeed give us delight. To *commit* ourselves to the Lord means entrusting everything—our lives, families, jobs, possessions—to his control and guidance. To commit ourselves to the Lord means to trust in him (37:5), believing that he can care for us better than we can ourselves. We should be willing to wait patiently (37:7) for him to work out what is best for us.” (*Life Application Study Bible*)
  3. Eliphaz, one of the friends of the patriarch Job, said that God “sets on high those who are lowly, and those who mourn are lifted to safety” (Job 5:11).
- F. The New Testament often reminds us of the importance of meekness.
1. James tells us to “receive with meekness the implanted word” (Jas 1:21).
  2. Peter tells us to always be ready to give a defense for our faith “with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15).
  3. Gentleness is a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23).
  4. We are commanded to put on meekness (Col 3:12).

## II. Example Of Moses (Num 12:1–10)

- A. In the book of Exodus we find that Moses had married Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, a priest of Midian (Exod 2:16–22).
- B. Apparently Zipporah had died and Moses married an “Ethiopian woman.”
  1. God had prohibited Israelites from marrying anyone from the surrounding seven nations (Deut 7:1–5), but He did not prohibit marriage to other foreigners (Deut 21:10).
  2. “Since Cush normally refers to ancient Ethiopia, most interpreters think that ‘the Cushite woman’ probably was Moses’ second wife, and that she came from Ethiopia. This leads some commentators to suggest that racial or ethnic prejudice may have been involved, the objection being to someone of African descent. In any case it becomes clear that Miriam and Aaron’s objection to ‘the Cushite woman’ was a pretense, and that the real issue was their challenge to Moses’ supreme authority.” (*The ESV Study Bible*)
- C. How did Moses conduct himself while Miriam and Aaron “spoke against him”?
  1. Did he fight back? No!
  2. He submitted to God and waited for Divine vindication.
  3. Very few people in history have been as rapidly, thoroughly and publicly vindicated as Moses!
  4. His meekness had caused him to shed his shoes at the burning bush, yet he humbly obeyed God by approaching the most powerful monarch in the world and demanding freedom for his people (Exod 5:1).

## III. Example Of Christ (1 Pet 2:21–23)

- A. Christ did not revile or threaten those who hated Him, but left His vindication in the hands of His Father (cf. Rom 1:3–4; 1 Tim 3:16).
- B. Look at Paul’s portrait of Christ and see His meekness and humility (Phil 2:1–11).

## IV. How Do We “Inherit The Earth”?

- A. Our Lord did not promise us that we would own oil wells, orchards and fancy cars.
- B. The phrase “inherit the earth” and “inherit the land” is found in many Old Testament passages (Deut 19:14; Ps 25:13, 37:9).
  1. The thought is traced to the Old Testament view of the land of Canaan as the earthly object of Divine blessings.
  2. “In the time of our Savior they were in the constant habit of using the Old Testament, where this promise perpetually occurs, and they used it *as a proverbial expression to denote any great blessing, perhaps as the sum of all blessings*, Ps. xxxvii. 20; Isa IX. 21. Our Savior used it in this sense, and meant to say, not that the meek would own *great property* or have many lands, but that they would possess peculiar blessings. The Jews also considered the land of Canaan as a type of heaven, and of the blessings under the Messiah. To *inherit the land* became, therefore, an expression denoting those blessings. When our Savior uses this language here, he means that the meek shall be received into his kingdom, and partake of its blessings here, and of the glories of the heavenly Canaan hereafter.” (Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*)

- C. There is a sense in which we own the land right now, for we belong to Christ and all things belong to Him (1 Cor 3:21–23).
1. The meek man is satisfied now—for Jesus not only promises us everlasting life, but the best life possible here on earth!
  2. The meek are content, even if they own nothing (2 Cor 6:10).
- D. “Even in the Psalm from which these words are taken the promise to the meek is not held forth as an arbitrary reward, but as having a kind of natural fulfillment. When they delight themselves in the Lord, He gives them the desires of their heart: when they commit their way to Him, He brings it to pass; bringing forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noonday: the little that they have, even when despoiled of their rights, is better than the riches of many wicked (Psalms 37:1–24). All things, in short, are theirs—in the possession of that favor which is life, and of those rights which belong to them as the children of God—whether the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are theirs (1 Corinthians 3:21, 22); and at length, overcoming, they ‘inherit all things’ (Revelation 21:7). Thus are the meek the only rightful occupants of a foot of ground or a crust of bread here, and heirs of all coming things.” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*)

#### Conclusion

- I. We are meek only to the extent we have surrendered our will to the will of God.
- II. “The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to His word and to His rod, who follow His directions, and comply with His designs, and are *gentle towards all men* (Tit. iii. 2); who can bear provocation without being inflamed by it; are either silent, or return a soft answer; and who can show their displeasure when there is occasion for it, without being transported into any indecencies; who can be cool when others are hot; and in their patience keep possession of their own souls, when they can scarcely keep possession of any thing else. *They* are the meek, who are rarely and hardly provoked, but quickly and easily pacified; and who would rather forgive twenty injuries than revenge one, having the rule of their own spirits.” (Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*)
- III. Our Savior’s tender invitation is still extended (Matt 11:28–30).

# The Blessedness Of Righteousness

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness,  
for they shall be filled” (Matt 5:6)

## Introduction

- I. As Christians, we realize that the problem with this world is not *sickness* but *sin*.
  - A. We do not live in a *sick* society, but a *sinful* society (Rom 3:23; 6:23).
  - B. Sin produces fear, guilt, worry, and depression.
  - C. The solution is not to offer the world entertainment and psycho-babble to ease their pain, but to show them how righteous living can improve their lives and remove the source of their problem, i.e., sin.
- II. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov 14:34).
  - A. In this lesson we want to shed some light on what *righteousness* really means.
  - B. This beatitude contains a statement to which all the others have led—that righteousness brings happiness.

## Discussion

### I. **Hungering And Thirsting**

- A. The words used in our New Testament do not occur in a vacuum; they exist against a background of human experience.
  1. Hunger and thirst were two things the people of the Ancient Near East knew all too well.
  2. “For those who live in a world in which they can turn on the tap whenever they want water and are always able to secure some sort of food to eat, the experience of hunger and thirst is foreign. Not so in the ancient world, where so many lived constantly on the edge of starvation and often traveled through desert regions without water.” (Mounce, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 40-41)
  3. Picture a man on a journey through the desert when he finds himself in the midst of a hot wind and the sand begins to blow.
    - a) There was nothing to do but to put a scarf around his neck, turn his back to the wind and wait for the wind to cease—all the while sand is filling his nostrils and throat.
    - b) There is no comparison to this in the Western world.
    - c) The man lost in the desert knew hunger and thirst in a way that most of us never will (if we are lucky).
- B. “Hunger and thirst, here, are expressive of strong desire. Nothing would better express the strong desire which we ought to feel to obtain righteousness, than hunger and thirst. No wants are so keen, none so imperiously demand supply as these. They occur daily; and when long continued, as in case of those shipwrecked, and doomed to wander months or years over burning sands, with scarcely any drink or food, nothing is more distressing.” (Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*)

- C. “*Hunger and thirst* are appetites that return frequently, and call for fresh satisfactions; so these holy desires rest not in any thing attained, but are carried out toward renewed pardons, and daily fresh supplies of grace. The quickened soul calls for constant meals of righteousness, grace to do the work of every day in its day, as duly as the living body calls for food. Those who hunger and thirst will labour for supplies; so we must not only desire spiritual blessings, but take pains for them in the use of the appointed means.” (Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*)
- D. “Jesus is speaking of an intense longing after righteousness that may be likened to both hunger and thirst. Everyone now and then does what is right, but Jesus is pointing his hearers not to occasional acts but to a passionate concern for the right.” (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 99)
- E. The road to heaven is a difficult and narrow way (Matt 7:13–14).
- F. On the Day of Judgement, only a few will be saved because only a few really made an effort—only a few will truly *strive* to get to heaven (Luke 13:22–30).
- G. In this world all men are hungering and thirsting after something.
1. The rich fool hungered for a life of ease (Luke 12:16–21).
  2. King Nebuchadnezzar hungered after the praise of men (Dan 4:29–30).
  3. Demas hungered after “this present world” (2 Tim 4:10).
- H. “The American Declaration of Independence asserts that citizens have the right to the pursuit of happiness. The founding fathers did not presume to guarantee that all who pursue it would find it, because that is beyond the power of any government to provide. Each person is free to seek whatever kind of happiness he wants in the way he wants within the law. Sadly, most US citizens, like most people throughout all of history, have chosen to pursue the wrong kind of happiness in ways that provide no kind of happiness.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*)
- I. What are you hungering and thirsting for?

## II. What Is Righteousness?

- A. In the days of our Lord, *righteousness* among the Jews was measured by outward expressions and displays, not upon inner holiness.
1. They loved to put their righteousness on display (Matt 23:5; cf. Deut 22:12).
  2. “We can understand the Beatitudes better if we recall the prevailing standards of righteousness of Jesus’ day. The religious life of the people had become pretty much centered within the temple and the synagogue. It was measured in terms of attendance, contributions, and obedience to the myriad of rules, precepts, traditions, and laws handed down and added to by generations of priests. It was quite professional, and cold, and dignified. Nobody enjoyed it. Like wearing a necktie and coat to church on a hot summer day, it was considered an uncomfortable but necessary thing if you wanted to get along with respectable people...People kept the rules because they knew they were expected to, not because they really believed in them. Their righteousness was something like perfume—it wasn’t a part of you but if you had it on, it made you smell real sweet. Of course, everybody recognized the odor, but that didn’t matter, because they used it, too.” (Jordan, *Sermon on the Mount*, 28)

- B. The word translated as *righteousness* in Matthew 5:6 (Gr. *dikaiosyne*) is defined as “righteousness, what is right, justice, the act of doing what is in agreement with God’s standards, the state of being in proper relationship with God” (Goodrick, et al., *Greek to English Dictionary and Index to the NIV New Testament*).
- C. The righteousness of which Jesus spoke is a positive virtue—it is an attribute motivated by love for God and a fervent desire to please Him.
- D. “Righteousness is the state of justification due to forgiveness of sin. Paul declared in Romans 1:16–17 that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation because it reveals the righteousness of God. This righteousness does not refer to the character of God and is not an attribute of God. In chapter 10:3 the apostle said that the Jews were ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, had not submitted to the righteousness of God. But the Jews were not ignorant of God’s character, they knew that God is a righteous being; therefore the righteousness of God did not refer to an attribute of God but rather to the righteousness imparted to man by the forgiveness of God necessary to justification of sinners. The Jews had set up their system of justification, and were ignorant of the gospel plan or how God forgives sinners. So Romans 1:16–17 simply states that the gospel reveals how God forgives sinners and thus makes sinners righteous.” (Wallace, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State*, 17)
- E. God does not urge men to spirituality because it is their duty, but tells them real happiness is obtained by hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

### III. They Shall Be Filled

- A. What will those who have been hungering and thirsting after righteousness be filled with?
  - 1. They will be filled with righteousness!
  - 2. They will receive what they have been striving for.
- B. “**Shall be filled** (χορτασθήσονται). A very strong and graphic word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals in a stall. In Revelation 19:21, it is used of the filling of the birds with the flesh of God’s enemies. Also of the multitudes fed with the loaves and fishes (Matthew 14:20; Mark 8:8; Luke 9:17). It is manifestly appropriate here as expressing the *complete satisfaction* of spiritual hunger and thirst.” (Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*)
- C. A good appetite is usually a mark of good health (Heb 5:12–14; 1 Pet 2:2).
- D. “As a proof of this, consider the vast number of people who frankly have no taste for the spiritual. The most inspiring service ever held would scarcely awaken their interest. The best sermon ever preached would bore them. The very thought of worship is repellent. The Bible, throbbing with ‘thoughts that breathe and words that burn,’ is to them the deadest of dead books. The great hymns of the Church, that for centuries have thrilled the hungry hearts of devout men and women and have served as stairways by which they have climbed into the presence of God, leave them dull and listless and uninterested. The man who has lost all appetite for his daily bread is to be pitied, but how infinitely greater is the tragedy when we lose all desire for the Bread of Life! It is by no means difficult to find those who have so long and so persistently fed upon the leeks and garlic of Egypt that they

seem to have lost all taste for the heavenly manna.” (Chappell, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 54–55)

- E. “There is perhaps no greater secret of progress in Christian living than a healthy, hearty spiritual appetite. Again and again Scripture addresses its promises to the hungry. God ‘satisfies him who is thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things.’ If we are conscious of slow growth, is the reason that we have a jaded appetite? It is not enough to mourn over past sin; we must also hunger for future righteousness.” (Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 45–46)
- F. The one who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness knows that sin has separated them from God and they long to restore fellowship with their Father in heaven (Isa 59:1–2).
- G. Show me a man who is “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” and I will show you a man who doesn’t need to be begged to worship God (Ps 122:1).
  - 1. He knows that Christ is in our midst on the Lord’s Day (Matt 18:20).
  - 2. You will not need to nag this person to study, teach or give as they have been prospered.
  - 3. There is a real difference between casually seeking heaven and making it your life’s work.

#### Conclusion

- I. “The fourth Beatitude therefore refers to the desire for the justification that the gospel of Christ offers to unpardoned sinners. In order to receive it one must possess the inward qualification of desiring it—hungering and thirsting for it. It means that the gospel is persuasive, not coercive, in character. We cannot shoot the gospel into a man nor machine-gun Christianity into him—he must know what the gospel offers, and realize his own condition without it, and desiring what the gospel will do for him, he will obey its conditions and come into the full measure of its forgiveness and pardon. It simply defines who will enter the kingdom—the one who so deeply desires justification that he will meet the conditions necessary to obtain it. This blessing is attached to conditions that we have the power to fulfill, submission to which on the knowledge of what the gospel reveals and obedience to its commands.” (Wallace, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State*, 18–19)
- II. “This beatitude speaks of strong desire, of driving pursuit, of a passionate force inside the soul. It has to do with ambition—ambition of the right sort—whose object is to honor, obey, and glorify God by partaking of His righteousness. This holy ambition is in great contrast to the common ambitions of men to gratify their own lusts, accomplish their own goals, and satisfy their own egos.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*)
- III. The sons of Korah cried out, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps 42:1–2).



# The Blessedness Of Mercy

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7)

## Introduction

- I. Our Lord did not speak haphazardly as He gave us the Beatitudes—they are presented in a definite progression and logical order.
- II. The first four Beatitudes discuss the *attitude* of those in the kingdom of God, this Beatitude talks about our *actions*.
- III. “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. Those who in poverty of spirit recognize their need of mercy are led to show mercy to others (v. 7). Those who mourn over their sin are led to purity of heart (v. 8). Those who are meek always seek to make peace (v. 9). And those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are never unwilling to pay the price of being persecuted for righteousness’ sake (v. 10).” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 187)

## Discussion

### I. What Is Mercy?

- A. *Mercy* (Gr. *eleos*) is not the same as *grace* (Gr. *charis*), though they are often found together in the epistles.
  1. Grace is “kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved” (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).
  2. Mercy is “the moral quality of feeling compassion and especially of showing kindness toward someone in need. This can refer to a human kindness and to God’s kindness to humankind” (Goodrick, Kohlenberger and Swanson, *Greek to English Dictionary and Index to the NIV New Testament*).
  3. Mercy is not an emotion, but our response to human need.
- B. “The best definition of the two that I have ever encountered is this: ‘Grace is especially associated with men in their sins; mercy is especially associated with men in their misery.’ In other words, while grace looks down upon sin as a whole, mercy looks especially upon the miserable consequences of sin. So that mercy really means a sense of pity plus a desire to relieve the suffering.” (Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:99)
- C. “What makes mercy different from grace? Primarily it is the quality of helplessness or misery on the part of those who receive mercy. Grace is love when love is undeserved. Mercy is grace in action. Mercy is love reaching out to help those who are helpless and who need salvation. Mercy identifies with the miserable in their misery.” (Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 51)
- D. “Mercy is love for those in misery and a forgiving spirit toward the sinner. It embraces both the kindly feeling and the kindly act. We see it exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), and especially in Christ, the merciful High priest (Heb. 2:17).” (Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 275)

- E. “As meekness is rather a passive virtue, so mercy is an active one. The meek bear, and the merciful forbear, and for so doing they shall obtain mercy both from God and man” (McGarvey and Pendleton, *The Fourfold Gospel*).

## II. The Application Of Mercy

- A. In the third Beatitude (Matt 5:5) we saw that the meek acknowledge their sins before God; now we see that those who know they are sinners are merciful and have compassion on others, for they are sinners too.
- B. Our Lord is not teaching forgiveness under pressure.
1. We forgive others because we see people who have been blinded by Satan, “the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4).
  2. Our attitude towards other people has changed, for now we have genuine sorrow for own sins and extend mercy towards those who sin against us.
  3. We forgive because we have been forgiven (Matt 6:14-15; 18:21-35).
  4. The scribes and Pharisees were hard hearted individuals who were totally devoid of mercy and compassion (John 8:2-11).
- C. We must have genuine compassion toward all men.
1. The Bible never tells us to “give until it hurts,” but it does teach that we should give until it feels good (Acts 2:44-45; 2 Cor 8:1-5).
  2. The good Samaritan extended mercy to the helpless man (Luke 10:25-37).
    - a) The priest and the Levite might have had *pity* for the wounded man, but they did not show *mercy* to him.
    - b) The merciful man made provision for wounded.

## III. Obtaining Mercy

- A. The reward for the merciful is not mercy shown by others but by God (Matt 5:7).
- B. The principle of reciprocity is seen in other passages (Matt 6:12; Jas 2:13).
- C. “This *quid pro quo* ethic should be taken seriously but not legalistically. Those who are genuinely forgiven cannot help but forgive.” (Mounce, *New International Biblical Commentary* 1, 40)
- D. “Showing mercy toward others does not earn a person entrance to the kingdom; rather, it is a heart attitude that opens a person to receive the offer of mercy that Jesus has proclaimed in his gospel of the kingdom.” (Wilkins, *Matthew*, 208)

- E. “*Happy are the merciful*. This paradox, too, contradicts the judgment of men. The world reckons those men to be *happy* who give themselves no concern about the distresses of others, but consult their own ease. Christ says that those are *happy* who are not only prepared to endure their own afflictions, but to take a share in the afflictions of others, who assist the wretched, who willingly take part with those who are in distress, who clothe themselves, as it were, with the same affections, that they may be more readily disposed to render them assistance. He adds, *for they shall obtain mercy*—not only with God, but also among men, whose minds God will dispose to the exercise of humanity. Though the whole world may sometimes be ungrateful, and may return the very worst reward to those who have done acts of kindness to them, it ought to be reckoned enough, that grace is laid up with God for the merciful and humane, so that they, in their turn, will find him to be *gracious and merciful* (Psalm 103:8; 145:8).” (Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*)

#### Conclusion

- I. “Nowhere do we imitate God more than in showing mercy. In nothing does God more delight than in the exercise of mercy... To us, guilty sinners; to us, wretched, dying, and exposed to eternal woe, he has shown his mercy by giving his Son to die for us; by expressing his willingness to pardon and save us; and by sending his Spirit to renew and sanctify the heart. Each day of our life, each hour, and each moment, we partake of his undeserved mercy. All the blessings we enjoy are proofs of his mercy. If we also show mercy to the poor, the wretched, the guilty, it shows that we are like God; we have his spirit, and shall not lose our reward. And we have abundant opportunity to do it. Our world is full of guilt and woe, which we may help to relieve; and every day of our lives we have opportunity by helping the poor and wretched, and by forgiving those who injure us, to show that we are like God.” (Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament*)
- II. This Beatitude echoes the words of the prophet Micah (Mic 6:8).
- III. The result of mercy is that a new creature is formed within us (2 Cor 5:17).
- A. A tree is known by its fruit (Matt 7:17–20).
- B. Paul prayed that Onesiphorus would be granted mercy (2 Tim 1:15–18).
- IV. If I am not merciful to my fellow man, there can be but one explanation: I don't understand the mercy of God!

# The Blessedness Of Purity

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8)

## Introduction

- I. Here we note again that the Beatitudes are given in a very logical order.
  - A. The first three Beatitudes concerned our spiritual needs and our attitude towards the kingdom of God.
  - B. Then we hunger and thirst after righteousness.
  - C. Then we become merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers.
- II. As one writer suggested, three Beatitudes lead us up a mountain; the fourth Beatitude reaches the summit; the last three Beatitudes lead us down.
- III. This Beatitude holds out the great promise of allowing us to “see God.”

## Discussion

### I. What Is The Heart?

- A. This Beatitude does not refer to freedom from impurity in our lives, but to a heart that has been enlightened by the gospel of Christ (cf. Eph 1:18).
- B. “**Heart** translates *kardia*, from which we get cardiac and similar terms. Throughout Scripture, as well as in many languages and cultures throughout the world, the heart is used metaphorically to represent the inner person, the seat of motives and attitudes, the center of personality. But in Scripture it represents much more than emotion, feelings. It also includes the thinking process and particularly the will... The heart is the control center of mind and will as well as emotion.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 202)
- C. The gospel emphasizes the importance of a good heart in order for us to be acceptable before God (Rom 1:21; 2:5).
- D. We speak “out of the abundance of the heart” (Matt 12:34).
- E. The Pharisees were clean on the outside, but inwardly were “full of hypocrisy and lawlessness” (Matt 23:23-28).
- F. Christianity starts with a condition of the heart.
  1. Some people have a mechanical interest in the Bible—they are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7).
  2. Christ starts at the heart, and when He gets that he gets the rest of you too.

### II. What Is Purity?

- A. Our Lord is speaking about our heart, the seat of our emotions and our entire inner being—then He tells us that this heart must be pure.
- B. “**Pure** translates *katharos*, a form of the word from which we get catharsis. The basic meaning is to make pure by cleansing from dirt, filth, and contamination. Catharsis is a term used in psychology and counseling for a cleansing of the mind or emotions.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 204)

- C. “Pure in heart should not be restricted to moral, still less sexual, purity; it denotes one who loves God with all his heart (Deut. 6:5), with an undivided loyalty, and whose inward nature corresponds with his outward profession (cf. Isa. 29:13). ‘Such is the generation of those who seek him’ (Ps. 24:6), and they receive the promise that they shall see God.” (France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 116)
- D. “The term Matthew used here means **pure** or ‘clean.’ It can be used literally of physical cleanness, but Scripture often uses it for moral cleanness and purity. A simple but helpful way of looking at the word is to realize that it implies the absence of impurity or filth. It implies a singleness of purpose, without distraction (akin to the concept of ‘holiness,’ being set apart for a special purpose; see Jas. 4:8). Any distracting or corrupting influence a kingdom servant allows into his or her heart makes that person less effective as a servant. The kingdom servant has a heart that is undivided and unalloyed.” (Weber, *Matthew*, HNTC, 60)
- E. “The rabbis were developing a complex system of laws for maintaining ceremonial purification, which later comprised *Toboroth* (‘Cleannesses’), one of the divisions of the Mishnah. But all of those laws *could* bypass the most important purity of all, purity of the heart. A pure heart produces external purity, not vice versa (e.g., 15:1–19). A pure heart describes a person whose single-minded loyalty to God has affected every area of life.” (Wilkins, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*)
- F. God has always demanded holiness from His people (Deut 14:2).
  - 1. A pure heart allows us to “ascend into the hill of the Lord” (Ps 24:3–4).
  - 2. We cannot see the Lord without it (Heb 12:14).
  - 3. The purpose of our preaching is to instill “love from a pure heart” (1 Tim 1:5).

### III. When Will We See God?

- A. In one sense, we see God right now, so the promise is partially fulfilled.
  - 1. We see God in nature.
    - a) David saw the evidence of God in nature (Ps 19:1–3).
    - b) The universe around us continues to give evidence of God’s handiwork and proclaim His power (Rom 1:20).
    - c) Maltbie D. Babcock’s beautiful hymn, *This Is My Father’s World*, reminds us, “The morning light, the lily white, declare their Maker’s praise.”
  - 2. We see God in history:
    - a) Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:37–38).
    - b) Belshazzar (Dan 5:1–5, 17–30).
    - c) Darius the Mede (Dan 6:1–2, 25–28).
    - d) Alexander the Great (Dan 8:1–8, 18–22).
    - e) The Roman Empire (Dan 2:44; Mark 1:15).
    - f) The destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:1–35).
  - 3. We see God through the eye of faith—like Moses who “endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27; cf. 3 John 11).
  - 4. The child of God sees God’s presence everywhere and experiences the joy of God’s watchful eye over them (Ps 139:7–12).

- B. In the final sense, we will see God in heaven (Ps 17:15; Rev 22:3-4; 1 John 3:2).
- C. "If the ordinary person goes out on a night of stars, he sees only a host of pinpoints of light in the sky; he sees what he is fit to see. But in that same sky the astronomer will call the stars and the planets by their names, and will move amongst them as his friends; and from that same sky the navigator could find the means to bring his ship across the trackless seas to the desired haven. The ordinary person can walk along a country road, and see by the hedgerows nothing but a tangle of weeds and wild flowers and grasses. The trained botanist would see this and that, and call it by name and know its use; and he might even see something of infinite value and rarity because he had eyes to see. Put two men into a room filled with ancient pictures. A man with no knowledge and no skill could not tell an old master from a worthless daub, whereas a trained art critic might well discern a picture worth thousands of pounds in a collection which someone else might dismiss as junk....In every sphere of life we see what we are able to see. So, says Jesus, it is only the pure in heart who shall see God." (Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:107)

#### Conclusion

- I. Use this passage as an injunction to live right (Jas 4:7-10).
  - A. To maintain purity, let your heart dwell on the things of God (Phil 4:8).
  - B. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14).
- II. "The happiness of seeing God is promised to those, and those only, who are *pure in heart*. None but the *pure* are capable of *seeing* God, nor would it be a felicity to the impure. What pleasure could an unsanctified soul take in the vision of a holy God? As *he* cannot endure to look upon their iniquity, so *they* cannot endure to look upon his purity; nor shall any unclean thing enter into the new Jerusalem; but all that are *pure in heart*, all that are truly sanctified, have desires wrought in them, which nothing but the sight of God will sanctify; and divine grace will not leave those desires unsatisfied." (Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*)
- III. Do you want to see God?

# The Blessedness Of The Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God” (Matt 5:9)

## Introduction

- I. In an age of turmoil, *peace* is one of the greatest words in the world!
  - A. The kingdom of promise was to be characterized by peace (Isa 9:6-7; 66:12-13).
  - B. Christians are to “pursue the things which make for peace” (Rom 14:19).
  - C. Children of the kingdom must follow after peace (1 Thess 5:13).
  - D. “There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked” (Isa 48:22).
- II. Peace not found in treaties, but in hearts of men.
  - A. Peace among the nations begins with peace within the individual.
  - B. Peace comes when we replace greed, distrust, and hatred with love, mercy, faith and brotherly kindness.
  - C. It is not the absence of war that makes peace, but the presence of God.
- III. The setting of this Beatitude shows that the peacemaker does not refer to an arbitrator.
  - A. The peacemaker is the peace preacher (Rom 10:15; Col 1:20).
  - B. It is the peace that Christ came to preach (Eph 2:14-17; Acts 10:36; Rom 5:1).
  - C. “The immediate question is, what is this peace, and who is the peacemaker? A look at the Beatitude in the light of its setting reveals at once that it does not refer to the role of an arbiter, nor to arbitration, nor to composing differences between people. The peacemaker here is not the compromiser of disagreements and the settlers of disputes. It is a passage on reconciliation to God and involves the doctrine of peace with God, and the peacemaker is the peace preacher, the disciple who would show the people of the world how to find peace with God. It is the peace of Romans 10:15, ‘how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.’ It is the peace that Christ came to preach, as expressed by Paul in Ephesians 2:14-17, ‘for he is our peace...and came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to them that were nigh.’ It is the peace that Peter preached to the children of Israel and to Cornelius, as recorded in Acts 10:36, ‘the word that God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: he is Lord of all.’ It is the peace that comes through justification by faith, as stated in Romans 5:1, ‘Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ It is the peace of reconciliation by the blood of the cross, as declared in Colossians 1:20, ‘And having made peace through the blood of the cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself.’ It is the peace of reconciliation to God.” (Wallace, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State*, 21)

- D. “Jesus does not limit the peacemaking to only one kind, and neither will his disciples. In the light of the gospel, Jesus himself is the supreme peacemaker, making peace between God and man, and man and man. Our peacemaking will include the promulgation of that gospel. It must also extend to seeking all kinds of reconciliation. Instead of delighting in division, bitterness, strife, or some petty ‘divide-and-conquer’ mentality, disciples of Jesus delight to make peace wherever possible. Making peace is not appeasement: the true model is God’s costly peacemaking (Eph 2:15-17; Col 1:20).” (Carson, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*)
- E. “The peace of which Christ speaks in this beatitude, and about which the rest of Scripture speaks, is unlike that which the world knows and strives for. God’s peace has nothing to do with politics, armies and navies, forums of nations, or even councils of churches. It has nothing to do with statesmanship, no matter how great, or with arbitration, compromise, negotiated truces, or treaties. God’s peace, the peace of which the Bible speaks, never evades issues; it knows nothing of peace at any price. It does not gloss or hide, rationalize or excuse. It confronts problems and seeks to solve them, and after the problems are solved it builds a bridge between those who were separated by the problems. It often brings its own struggle, pain, hardship, and anguish, because such are often the price of healing. It is not a peace that will be brought by kings, presidents, prime ministers, diplomats, or international humanitarians. It is the inner personal peace that only He can give to the soul of man and that only His children can exemplify.” (John MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*)
- F. “The pure in heart are naturally *the peacemakers* (Matt. 5:9), because they cannot rest satisfied that the world of people should remain alienated from the life and holiness of God. They become, therefore, messengers of peace and benediction, seeking to reconcile between God and people, or between different people, which is a most needful work if ever the wrongs of time are to be righted, and earth become the home of love.” (Meyer, *Inherit The Kingdom*, 27)

### Discussion

#### I. The Peace Of God

- A. Peace with God can only be found in Christ (John 16:31-33; Rom 5:1).
- B. Peace comes through a knowledge of Christ (2 Pet 1:2-4).
- C. For the Christian, the peace with God will guard our lives (Phil 4:6-9).

#### II. Things That Destroy Peace

- A. Contentiousness (Prov 26:21).
- B. Gossip and slander (Prov 16:28; 26:20).
  1. Before you repeat something, ask yourself these questions:
    - a) Is it true?
    - b) Is it needed?
    - c) Is it complete?
    - d) Is it needed?
  2. Our words reflect our character (Jas 3:1-13).



3. As one well-known hymn suggests, “Angry words! O let them never from the tongue unbridle slip; May the heart’s best impulse ever check them ere they soil the lip.”
- C. Seeking personal vengeance (Rom 12:19).
1. Vengeance will destroy your life.
  2. “The moment I start hating a man, I become his slave. I can’t enjoy my work any more because he even controls my thoughts. My resentments produce too many stress hormones in my body and I become fatigued after only a few hours of work. The work I formerly enjoyed is now a drudgery. Even vacations cease to give me pleasure... The man I hate hounds me wherever I go. I can’t escape his tyrannical grasp on my mind... The man I hate may be many miles from my bedroom; but more cruel than any slave driver, he whips my thoughts into such a frenzy that my innerspring mattress becomes a rack of torture. The lowliest of serfs can sleep, but not I. I really must acknowledge the fact that I am a slave to every man on whom I pour the vials of my wrath.” (McMillen, *None of These Diseases*, 73–74)

### III. Do You Contribute To Peace?

- A. Peace must be pursued (1 Pet 3:10–12; Ps 34:12–16).
- B. “But the peacemaker of whom Jesus speaks does a positive work. He puts an end to strife by the bringing in of its opposite. He does not pull up the noxious weeds of discord and enmity and hate one by one and leave the garden bare. He rather sows and cultivates such a luxuriant crop of the flowers of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, long-suffering—that the disturbing weeds are all crowded out. He drives out suspicion by confidence, enmity and misunderstanding by understanding and good will. He puts brotherliness in the place of unbrotherliness. He puts love in the place of hate. Through his ministry men not only cease to fear each other and to fight each other, but they come to love and to trust each other. He does more than take the sword and break it into fragments. He does more than blunt the spear and burn its shaft. He beats the sword into a plowshare, and the spear into a pruning hook. He converts the implements of war and waste into implements of peace and prosperity. He overcomes evil with good.” (Chappell, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 89)
- C. The “golden rule” is a great place to start (Matt 7:12).
- D. Being a peacemaker also involves how I treat my personal enemies and those who might oppose me (Rom 12:20–21; cf. Prov 25:21–22).
- E. Reconciliation takes precedence over worship (Matt 5:22–25; 18:15–20).
- F. There are divine limitations to peace (Luke 12:51–53; Acts 5:29).

### IV. The Promised Blessing

- A. What is the blessing promised in this Beatitude?
  1. We shall be called the sons of God!
    - a) Who shall call us that?
    - b) Certainly not men of the world!
    - c) God Himself acknowledges us as belonging to Him.
  2. We are the “sons of God” because we reflect the character of our Father.

- B. “God’s calling is a recognition of men for what they are. God owns the man that lives in the fashion that we have been trying to outline—God owns him for His child; manifestly a son, because he has the Father’s likeness. ‘Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love.’ God in Christ is the first Peacemaker, and they who go about the world proclaiming His peace and making peace, bear the image of the heavenly, and are owned by God as His sons.” (Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*)
- C. “Those who by word and example are promoters of this peace are called blessed. Their title is ‘sons of God,’ a designation of high honor and dignity, showing that by their promotion of peace they have entered into the very sphere of their Father’s own activity. They are his co-workers. By their trustful attitude and many good works, performed out of gratitude and to the glory of God, they have become their Lord’s agents who are everywhere engaged in the business of crowding the evil out of human hearts by filling them with all that is good and noble (Rom. 12:21; Phil. 4:8, 9). They are, as it were, God’s own ‘peace corps.’ *Already* they are the sons of God (1 John 3:1). In the day of judgment their glorious adoption as sons will be publicly revealed (Rom. 8:23; 1 John 3:2).” (Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 279)
- D. “Most of us are thankful for our heritage, our ancestors, our parents, and our family name. It is especially gratifying to have been influenced by godly grandparents and to have been raised by godly parents. But the greatest human heritage cannot match the believer’s heritage in Jesus Christ, because we are ‘heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ’ (Rom. 8:17). Nothing compares to being a child of God.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*)
- E. The phrase “sons of God” includes both men and women, because with sonship comes the rights of inheritance (cf. Gal 3:26).

#### Conclusion

- I. The happiness of the peacemakers is its own reward.
- II. “*The peace makers*—They that out of love to God and man do all possible good to all men. Peace in the Scripture sense implies all blessings temporal and eternal. *They shall be called the children of God*—Shall be acknowledged such by God and man. One would imagine a person of this amiable temper and behavior would be the darling of mankind. But our Lord well knew it would not be so, as long as Satan was the prince of this world. He therefore warns them before of the treatment all were to expect, who were determined thus to tread in his steps, by immediately subjoining, Happy are they who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. Through this whole discourse we cannot but observe the most exact method which can possibly be conceived. Every paragraph, every sentence, is closely connected both with that which precedes, and that which follows it.” (Wesley, *Wesley’s Notes on the Bible*)
- III. Are you a peacemaker or a peace breaker?

# The Blessedness Of Persecution

“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, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matt 5:10–12)

## Introduction

- I. Here is the acid test for one who claims citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.
- II. “This last Beatitude reverts to the first. The first Beatitude states the condition of becoming a citizen of the kingdom, and the last describes the character of one who has become a citizen, and being in it is exposed to all of the opposition, persecution and scorn for the cause of righteousness. It has its place also in the sequence of the Beatitudes pointing to Pentecost, for the disciples were not persecuted before Pentecost. It is therefore a forecast of the church after its establishment on Pentecost. The apostle, in Hebrews 10:32–33, said: ‘But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.’ The last Beatitude sees the disciple of Christ at his highest, triumphing by the sheer spiritual power of the new kingdom over forces of opposition. He is not necessarily the martyr in the arena under the gaze of the spectators, but the disciple of Christ anywhere who overcomes the buffeting storms of hostility, who finds himself the subject of malignity, due to his loyalty to Christ and the principles of his kingdom. Here is the test of truly possessing the kingdom—the one who can bear it, and maintain his integrity and fidelity as the disciple of Christ, surely has his inheritance in the kingdom.” (Wallace, *The Sermon on the Mount and the Civil State*, 22)
- III. As we endure persecution we are related in spirit to the prophets who were persecuted before us (2 Chr 36:15–16; Matt 23:29–36; Acts 7:51–53; Jas 5:10).
- IV. This Beatitude is the first in a series of warnings given by Christ (Matt 10:24–25).
  - A. Our Lord’s earthly ministry was filled with hardships (John 15:18–21).
  - B. Those who enjoy the favor of all men are not living right (2Tim 3:12).
  - C. “The Lord’s opening thrust in the Sermon on the Mount climaxes with this great and sobering truth: those who faithfully live according to the first seven beatitudes are guaranteed at some point to experience the eighth. Those who live righteously will inevitably be persecuted for it. Godliness generates hostility and antagonism from the world. The crowning feature of the happy person is persecution! Kingdom people are rejected people. Holy people are singularly blessed, but they pay a price for it.” (MacArthur, *Matthew 1–7*, 220)

- D. “All the world knows of the Christians who were flung to the lions or burned at the stake; but these were kindly deaths. Nero wrapped the Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies; eyes were torn out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ.” (Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1:112)

#### Discussion

### I. What Is The Cause Of This Persecution?

- A. We are persecuted “for righteousness’ sake” (Matt 5:10).
1. “*For righteousness’ sake*. Because they are righteous, or are the friends of God. We are not to seek persecution. We are not to provoke it by strange sentiments or conduct; by violating the laws of civil society, or by modes of speech that are unnecessarily offensive to others. But if, in the honest effort to be Christians, and to live the life of Christians, others persecute and revile us, we are to consider this as a blessing. It is an evidence that we are the children of God, and that he will defend us.” (Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament*)
  2. “He does not speak of persecution as such, but of persecution *for the sake of righteousness*. People may suffer for doing evil, but such suffering is punishment, not persecution, and in any case believers are not to suffer that way (cf. 1 Pet. 4:15). Jesus is speaking of those committed to God’s cause, and *righteousness* is the kind of conduct appropriate for those who have been given right standing before God.” (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 101)
  3. “All the virtues of the Beatitudes character are intolerable to an evil world. The world cannot handle somebody who is poor in spirit, because the world lives in pride, in a state of self-promotion and ego substantiation. The world cannot tolerate mourning over sinfulness. It wants to bypass sin altogether and convince itself that it’s all right. The world cannot tolerate meekness; it honors pride. The world cannot tolerate someone who knows he is nothing and seeks something that cannot be earned. The world knows little about mercy, about purity, about making peace. These characteristics flagrantly counter the system.” (MacArthur, *The Only Way to Happiness*, 185)
- B. This persecution is because of righteous living, not because of our sins or some character defect (1 Pet 3:14; 4:14-16).

- C. The same thing that influences some sinners to obey the gospel arouses animosity in the hearts of others (2 Cor 2:14–16).
1. The picture Paul painted in this passage is of a Roman Triumph.
  2. “In his mind is the picture of a Roman *Triumph* and of Christ as a universal conqueror. The highest honor which could be given to a victorious Roman general was a Triumph. To attain it he must satisfy certain conditions. He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field. The campaign must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home. Five thousand of the enemy at least must have fallen in one engagement. A positive extension of territory must have been gained, and not merely a disaster retrieved or an attack repelled. And the victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war.

“In a Triumph the procession of the victorious general marched through the streets of Rome to the Capitol in the following order. First came the state officials and the senate. Then came the trumpeters. Then were carried the spoils taken from the conquered land.... Then came pictures of the conquered land and models of conquered citadels and ships. There followed the white bull for the sacrifice which would be made. Then there walked the captive princes, leaders and generals in chains, shortly to be flung into prison and in all probability almost immediately to be executed. Then came the lictors bearing their rods, followed by the musicians with their lyres; then the priests swinging their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. After that came the general himself. He stood in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was clad in a purple tunic embroidered with golden palm leaves, and over it a purple toga marked out with golden stars. In his hand he held an ivory scepter with the Roman eagle at its top, and over his head a slave held the crown of Jupiter. After him rode his family; and finally came the army wearing all their decorations and shouting *Io triumphe!* their cry of triumph. As the procession moved through the streets, all decorated and garlanded, amid the cheering crowds, it made a tremendous day which might happen only once in a lifetime.

“That is the picture that is in Paul’s mind. He sees Christ marching in triumph throughout the world, and himself in that conquering train. It is a triumph which, Paul is certain, nothing can stop.

“We have seen how in that procession there were the priests swinging the incense-filled censers. To the victors the perfume from the censers would be the perfume of joy and triumph and life; but to the wretched captives who walked so short a distance ahead it was the perfume of death, standing for the past defeat and their coming execution. So Paul thinks of himself and his fellow apostles preaching the gospel of the triumphant Christ. To those who will accept it, it is the perfume of life, as it was to the victors; to those who refuse it, it is the perfume of death, as it was to the vanquished.

Of one thing Paul was certain—not all the world could defeat Christ. He lived not in pessimistic fear, but in the glorious optimism which knew the unconquerable majesty of Christ.” (Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, 183–184)

- D. We need to be aware of some men love the darkness of sin more than light of Christ (John 3:19-20).
- E. Christians are God's "own special people" (1 Pet 2:9-10).
  - 1. Righteous people do not love the world (1 John 2:15-17; Jas 4:4).
  - 2. The life of the righteous individual is a constant rebuke of sin.
    - a) Noah "condemned the world" by his life (Heb 11:7).
    - b) Lot was hated because he kept "acting as a judge" (Gen 19:9; 2 Pet 2:8).
  - 3. A godly life interferes with the progress of sin (Eph 6:10-20; John 2:13-16).
- F. "Since all the beatitudes describe what every Christian disciple is intended to be, we conclude that the condition of being despised and rejected, slandered and persecuted, is as much a normal mark of Christian discipleship as being pure in heart or merciful. Every Christian is to be a peacemaker, and every Christian is to expect opposition. Those who hunger for righteousness will suffer for the righteousness they crave. Jesus said so both here and elsewhere. So did his apostles Peter and Paul. It has been so in every age. We should not be surprised if anti-Christian hostility increases, but rather be surprised if it does not." (Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 53)

## II. What Should Our Reaction Be To This Persecution?

- A. "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad."
  - 1. "The believer's response to persecution and affliction should not be to retreat and hide. To escape from the world is to escape responsibility. Because we belong to Christ, we are no longer *of* this world, but He has sent us *into* this world to serve just as He Himself came into this world to serve (John 17:14-18)." (MacArthur, *Matthew 1-7*, 231)
  - 2. Persecution should fill us with joy (Acts 5:41).
  - 3. Persecution puts us in the glorious company of the Old Testament worthies who have gone on before (Heb 11:32-40).
  - 4. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas 1:12).
- B. We can exhibit bad reactions to persecution, such as...
  - 1. Grumbling and complaining (Rom 11:1-4).
  - 2. Seeking personal vengeance (Rom 12:17-19).
  - 3. Becoming discouraged and giving up (Gal 6:9).
  - 4. Failure to pray for our persecutors (Matt 5:43-45).
  - 5. Failure to realize that persecution is a crucible (1 Pet 1:6-9).

Conclusion

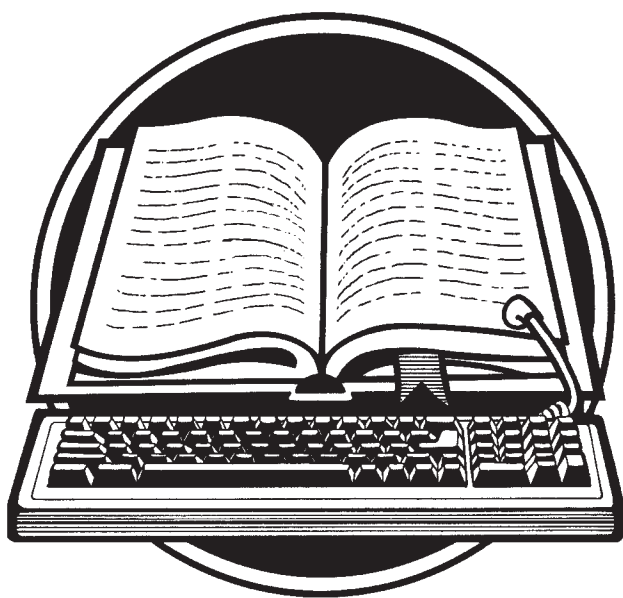
- I. “Jesus said to be happy when we’re persecuted for our faith. Persecution can be good because (1) it takes our eyes off earthly rewards, (2) it strips away superficial belief, (3) it strengthens the faith of those who endure, and (4) our attitude through it serves as an example to others who follow. We can be comforted knowing that God’s greatest prophets were persecuted (Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel). The fact that we are being persecuted proves that we have been faithful; faithless people would be unnoticed. In the future God will reward the faithful by receiving them into his eternal Kingdom, where there is no more persecution.” (*Life Application Study Bible*)
- II. “This, then, is the appeal of Jesus. He calls upon us to share His nature, to be like Himself. He does not base his appeal on promises of exemption from battle. He is finely frank with us. He will allow no man to follow him without giving that man to understand something of the difficulties involved. He tells us openly that to be a Christian is to meet opposition. But if we dare face the opposition our reward will be great. It will be great in this present world. It will bring us deeper spiritual life and richer usefulness. It will enable us to rejoice with those of old because, for His sake, we, too, are counted worthy to suffer shame. By and by it will enable us to feel at home among those ‘who have come up out of great tribulation, and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’” (Chappell, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 113)
- III. It is worth it to be a Christian (2 Cor 4:17; Rom 8:18).

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