

THE BEATITUDES
Bible Studies on
Matthew 5.1-12

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THE BEATITUDES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Beatitudes lay the foundation stone for what is commonly known as the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. The Lord ascended up a mountain and set Himself in a position where He could be both seen and heard. There He taught His disciples in the hearing of other people gathered around.

'And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching' Matthew 7.28.

They heard a sermon from the greatest Preacher and Teacher the world has ever known, the One in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (*Colossians 2.3*). The sermon is a fully integrated statement and should be taught and treated as a whole. It is not like a plate of different cakes, from which a child will just take the one he likes the best. People treat the Sermon on the Mount like this, forgetting to start at the beginning and then leaving out bits that do not suit their taste. The Beatitudes form the foundation upon which Jesus then builds His message.

Remember the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Jesus the Son of God. He spoke as Christ the Anointed One, Lord, Saviour, and Judge – God. He spoke absolute truth; He presented matters of great significance; His message was perfectly balanced and ordered; He used illustrations; He spoke as a Lover of men, and with authority. Jesus did not govern His teaching by what people wanted to hear but what people needed to hear. He preached faithfully to be approved of His Father.

At the time Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount the Jewish leaders had turned the law of God into thousands of rules and regulations. For example, as regarding observing the Sabbath day; if a hen laid an egg on the Sabbath this constituted work, so the egg could not be eaten. However, if the hen was being reared to eat and laid an egg

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on the Sabbath, this egg could be eaten with a clear conscience as egg-laying was not considered to be this particular hen's main occupation!

This sermon breaks through the barrier of man's interpretation. It gets us back to the real teaching of God's law and God's way of life. This sermon gets us back to the heart of the law. It is the greatest sermon ever preached. It is orderly, it develops, it reaches a grand climax, and then it makes a powerful point!

*'Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them,
I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock'
Matthew 7.24.*

The Sermon on the Mount is not a set of rules and regulations that we obey to become Christians, but rather a guide as to how we should live as Christians following Jesus as Saviour and Lord. It speaks of life as citizens of God's Kingdom. When we walk as Jesus teaches us to walk, then we will find our personal evangelism more effective. The great challenge in this sermon is the divine calling to be the salt and the light. In order to be the salt and the light we have first to be living according to the teaching of the Beatitudes.

This sermon teaches the essentials of the Christian character and Christian lifestyle as citizens of the Kingdom of God. 'The Kingdom of God' refers to the reign of God in the life of the Christian believer centred in Christ. The Kingdom of God will be known in all its perfect fullness in the new Heavens and the new earth. In the context of the end of time it is also referred to as 'The Kingdom of Heaven.'

The Lord's sermon gives the perfect interpretation of how the law of God should be understood, and how it should be lived out by the Christian believer as a citizen of the Kingdom of God, not in a legalistic sense but willingly from the mind and heart. We can note again – we should never understand this Sermon on the Mount as meaning, 'Live this out and you will become a Christian,' but rather it should be understood as 'live like this because you are a Christian.'

Introduction

This is why our Lord teaches about the Christian character first, then follows with His teaching about the nature of conduct that should flow out of that Christian character. Luther stated:

‘Christ is saying nothing in this sermon about how to become a Christian, only about the works and fruit of being a Christian in a state of grace.’

The Athenian writer Aristides reported to the Emperor Hadrian about the Christians. He told of the distinctive lifestyle of the people known as Christians. He commented on their integrity, morality, quality of their family life, and the way they handled pressure. He concluded with a most telling observation: ‘Truly this is a new people, there is something divine in them.’

*‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new’
2 Corinthians 5.17.*

Men and women should see there is reality and life in Christian living in this world. Remember Jesus is not teaching about Kingdom life in an ideal world, but Kingdom life in a fallen world!

The first part of the Sermon on the Mount is most commonly known as the Beatitudes. The word ‘beatitude’ has the meaning of ‘being in a blessed state and condition.’ The Beatitudes describe certain aspects of the true Christian character. Christians, through God’s goodness, are meant to display all these characteristics. They are evidences of the new birth. The Beatitudes are Christ’s specification of Christianity. The Beatitudes are not like a revolving buffet bar from which you take or leave according to your taste and appetite. They are rather all essential parts of the perfect diet prescribed by Christ for healthy Christian living.

The Beatitudes are given to us by Christ the Son of God teaching absolute truth with authority as One Who really loves and cares. They

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describe what a Christian is meant to be. They are not natural tendencies or qualities; rather they describe the disposition produced by grace. Ultimately the objective is to be like Christ, the salt and the light in this world. But to be the salt and the light in this world we need to start with the Beatitudes.

Blessed

The word traditionally translated into English as 'blessed' has the meaning of possessing an inward contentment and joy that rises above life's circumstances. Therefore to be blessed in the truest sense of the word must mean to be divinely favoured by God. This is how those hearing the sermon would have understood this statement of Jesus.

While happiness is an emotion, blessedness is an endowment from God, a state and condition ordained by God. The state of those who have spiritual life and communion with God is blessed – they are divinely favoured and endowed of God. It is a word for Christians. They are blessed of the Lord, and therefore in a blessed state.

*'Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful'*
Psalm 1.1.

The Beatitudes are encouraging evidences that Christians are already blessed, enriched with heavenly blessings. Their sins are not imputed to them; they are in a covenant with God and have exchanged hell for Heaven. They have the firstfruits of the Kingdom, and know all things work together for good.

The blessed person is one in whom the Spirit of God is working, enabling him to show forth the evidences of Christian character as specified by Christ. So Jesus begins His teaching on the nature and character of the Christian.

2. BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Matthew 5.3

The poverty our Lord is speaking about here is not material poverty. A person can be poor and yet remain proud and arrogant and full of themselves. The poverty Jesus describes is in a man's spirit not in his pocket. Neither is this poverty an outward show of humility.

Dr D Martyn Lloyd-Jones was preaching once at a certain town. He was met at the station by the deacon who insisted on carrying his bag. The deacon told Lloyd-Jones, 'You know, I am a mere nobody, a very unimportant man really. I do not count. I am not a great man in the church. I am just one of those men who will carry the bag for the minister.' He was so anxious for Lloyd-Jones to know what a humble man he was that he achieved the opposite.

Neither does this mean to put on an outward show of poverty. I knew of a man who was so mean that he used to tie up his shoes with string and always wore old suits. When he died he left a huge estate.

Notice how carefully Christ chooses His words: '*Poor in spirit.*' To be poor in spirit means to recognise our utter unworthiness before God, to acknowledge we are sinners and that we are spiritually bankrupt, having no merit in and of ourselves to present before God. It means to willingly give up our self-reliance, self-confidence, self-importance, and self-righteousness. Lloyd-Jones said that the poor in spirit:

‘...know themselves to be entirely dependent human beings. They know themselves to be inexcusable sinners. They know that in their flesh dwells no good thing. They know they can have no hope but in the sovereign mercy of God. They know

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have no righteousness to glory in, but the obedience unto death of the Son of God. They know that whatever is right and holy in their character, thoughts, speech and actions is owing entirely to the influence of the Spirit of God. The effect of this realization makes themselves feel to be as dust and ashes.’¹

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

Augustus M Toplady, 1740-78

To be poor in spirit is an essential requirement to know the salvation of the Lord.

‘The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit Psalm 34.18.

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed’ Luke 4.18.

But then you may be saying, ‘This all sounds rather negative. What is the point and the blessing of being poor in spirit?’ It is those who are poor in spirit who receive grace. Christ is most precious to those who are poor in spirit. Those who are poor in spirit value the worth of Christ. They are the ones who really admire and appreciate Christ. They realise their dependence upon Him, and take Him by faith on His terms. They value the wonders of His free grace to poor and needy sinners.

¹ *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, IVP Eerdmans

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

But then we may be asking the question, ‘How may I be poor in spirit?’ We will never become poor in spirit by comparing ourselves with others. We will never become poor in spirit by taking heed to the philosophy of this world which tells you to believe in yourself. The way to become poor in spirit is to look at God. The way to look at God is to look at Christ as revealed to us in the Scriptures.

Isaiah: ‘*So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts”*’ (Isaiah 6.5).

Peter: ‘*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”*’ (Luke 5.8).

John: ‘*I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet...And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last”*’ (Revelation 1.10, 17).

‘If one feels anything in the presence of God apart from an utter poverty of spirit, it ultimately means that you have never really faced Him.’²

Do we sing this verse with meaning?

*Just and holy is Thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
Vile and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.’*

Charles Wesley, 1707-88

If I may say this reverently, it is really man face-to-face with God which matters, not man face-to-face with man. It is question of vertical thinking not horizontal thinking. So consider Christ. Consider His example of living, of suffering, of wisdom; consider His example

² *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, D Martyn Lloyd-Jones, IVP Eerdmans

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of love, grace, and compassion; consider His doctrine, His power, His authority, and His Word.

But then you may be thinking, 'Is it really that important to be poor in spirit?' To that question our Lord replies – your eternal future depends upon it!

For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven

God's spiritual Kingdom has come in Jesus Christ. But in its fullest sense it is yet to come! The kingdom of Heaven is that state of glory which the saints shall enjoy when they shall reign with God and the angels forever, sin, hell and death being subdued.

This is pictured and promised in *Revelation*:

- a crown of life and glory that does not fade away:

'Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life'
Revelation 2.10.

- white robes symbolising purity:

'After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes...' *Revelation 7.9a.*

- palms in their hands symbolising victory:

'...with palm branches in their hands' *Revelation 7.9b.*

- They have overcome Satan, the accuser of the brethren:

'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death' *Revelation 12.11.*

- a throne symbolising power:

'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne'
Revelation 3.21a.

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With Christ in Glory!

In the great day of the resurrection and of judgment when Christ comes again God will create a new Heavens and a new earth. God's Kingdom will be perfectly restored to all its former glory uniting the spiritual with the material in a perfect way. (See *2 Peter 3.8-13*.)

God takes the spiritually bankrupt sinners and in Christ freely gives them spiritual riches. Ultimately He gives them citizenship in eternal Glory.

3. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

Matthew 5.4

The Beatitudes are sometimes described as essential steps to blessing. Each step is a significant part of our Lord's plan for the Christian's spiritual growth preparation for Heaven.

Being poor in spirit is the first step on the journey in the Kingdom of God to receiving a glorious and eternal inheritance in Christ. God takes the spiritually empty, helpless sinners and, according to His wonderful grace in Christ Jesus, gives them freely spiritual riches and citizenship in His Kingdom now. He then gives them a home in Heaven when they die. To be children of the Kingdom of God and Heaven is the most blessed privilege for both time and eternity. Such people are indeed blessed, being divinely favoured of God.

Now we come to consider the second Beatitude, or the second aspect to the Christian character as specified by the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ. *'Blessed are those who mourn.'*

Now it may seem that the Beatitudes start in a very depressing manner. Certainly talking of being poor in spirit and mourning is not the positive, upbeat language of the world. It is certainly not their description of a happy or blessed person. In fact the teaching of Jesus here is opposite to much of what is taught even in contemporary Christianity. Conviction of sin and sorrow for sin are not the first steps in their teaching. Sin is no longer part of their Gospel vocabulary!

The devil hates looking at things in their actual size. He is in the business of reduction. He wants you to reduce the page size of your sin so that you cannot read the print in detail. It will then be an

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irrelevance. This misunderstands the work of the Holy Spirit, Whose first step in His work in a person's life is conviction, to lead to the comfort in Christ.

I would suggest to you that there is no real comfort in Christ without conviction and sorrow over sin. Of what value is a Saviour to us if we have no sense of our need of a Saviour? It is vital, therefore, that we submit to Christ's way to blessing. Christ's first steps are conviction of sin bringing sorrow and concern over our sin. Remember it in this way:

1st Beatitude – conviction;

2nd Beatitude – concern.

Now there are millions of people in the world who experience grief and sorrow. We see or hear on the news the anguish and the grief of those bereaved of loved ones. Understandably people mourn over their loss. This is vividly displayed when there is a terrible coach crash, or loss of life in a terrorist attack. But there is indeed something profoundly solemn about people mourning without hope. Distress without Christ leads to despair. I do not know of a sadder sight than witnessing unbelievers mourning and grieving without God in their lives. There is no comfort for them apart from that which the world offers. So our Lord is not saying here that everyone who mourns is blessed.

However, it is worth mentioning that there are times when God, in His sovereignty, uses terminal illness and bereavement to awaken the conscience to the significance of eternity and being right with God. Such a situation could be described as sanctified sorrow, meaning God has overruled the event for the spiritual blessing of a person, bringing him into conviction of his own sin, and leading him to Christ.

A mourning which arises out of conviction of sin follows from being poor in spirit. It is mourning or sorrow, being a sincere concern

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which arises out of a realisation of the awfulness of sin; of the consequences of sin, the pain of sin, and the stain of sin. It is a mourning which also comes from a deep understanding of what it cost the Saviour to deal with sin at Calvary. The Beatitudes teach us that those who are poor in spirit, being convicted over their sinful state before God, will also mourn, that is, have genuine sorrow and tears because of sin.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan, joined conviction with this contrition when he said, 'Sin must have tears.' To not address conviction of sin and also sorrow for sin, to be unconcerned about sin, is actually to take the name of the Lord in vain. Such a liberal position actually denies the cross of Christ. It also denies people the precious blessing of the comfort which comes from Christ.

Are we mourning, or have we ever mourned over our sin? The test of true conviction of sin and sorrow over sin is active repentance. True repentance means to turn from sin to Christ, confessing with sorrow in our heart we have sinned against God. But spiritual mourning never leaves us in a slough of despond. The poverty of spirit and mourning stated by the Lord never leaves us in a pit from which we are unable to get out. Spiritual mourning always leads to trust in the One Who can deliver us out of the pit, Christ Jesus the Lord from whom we obtain true comfort. Spiritual conviction and mourning always leads us to lean upon Christ and look to His reward of delivering faith. The point is that Christ has a blessed purpose in laying down these first two steps of conviction and sorrow. Remember He promises, in harmony with these steps of conviction, concern, and confession leading to Christ, both the Kingdom of Heaven and comfort. Therefore it is important to remember the significance of conviction and sorrow over sin because it is an essential part of our spiritual walk with God and entrance into Heaven!

Now our Lord is teaching here what may be described as Gospel

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mourning: a mourning over sin which arises out of receiving and believing in Christ's message of the Gospel. Consider some of the significant aspects of this mourning over sin. Gospel mourning:

- realises our sin has offended the Almighty God;
- shows that we realise we have had a part in, and are personally responsible for, Christ having to go to Calvary to suffer and die as the perfect Sacrifice;

*The soldiers pierced His side, 'tis true,
But we have pierced Him through and through.*

Joseph Hart, 1712-68

- shows we do not take sin lightly;
- does not generalise sin but sorrows over sin particularly;
- brings with it hatred of sin realising that sin is enmity against God;
- realises that sin is rebellion against God;
- shows we understand that sin is unkindness to a kind God, that sinning against a God of love is serious;
- is a realisation that sin affects our relationship with God;
- has a purifying effect upon our spiritual lives keeping us loathing sin;
- is a constant daily exercise against sin, unbelief, lethargy, and lifelessness;
- sorrows over ineffectiveness and missed opportunities for witness;
- is realistic about our own selves and our own limitations;
- sorrows over the state of the world and the Church;

'Rivers of water run down from my eyes, because men do not keep Your law' Psalm 119.136.

- is concerned about the difficult days in which we live. This shows we are in harmony with Christ Who, while perfect Himself, still wept

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over the hardness of heart in the people of the city of Jerusalem;

- shows our hearts have been truly moved as we realise something of the burden of our personal sin which was borne by the Saviour at Calvary.

Together with repentance Gospel mourning always sends us to Christ the Saviour for forgiveness and healing. Therefore it is part of faith. This is seen in the testimony of Judas and Peter. Judas, who betrayed Christ, was sorry, he confessed and acknowledged Christ's innocence, yet his repentance was not of the essence of faith because it did not lead him to Christ as Saviour but instead to despair. However, in contrast, Peter denied Christ and was also sorry over his sin, but his repentance was of the essence of faith because it led him back to Christ. The test of true conviction and mourning is that it leads us to Christ in repentance.

Gospel mourning helps us to value Christ as our Saviour and Lord deeply. For example, the lady washing the feet of Jesus.

'Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat' Luke 7.36.

The host of the supper, Simon, treated Jesus casually just as any other person. The woman, in personal sorrow over her sin, treated Jesus with respect and honour. She valued His Person and believed in His ability to forgive her many sins. Simon had a shallow view of sin resulting in a shallow view of Christ and his need of a Saviour.

Gospel mourning makes us ready to receive and be filled with comfort.

Please remember a person who mourns over his sins is not a miserable person, not a cold person, a hardhearted, sullen person. Rather he is a person who mourns over his sins and, coming to Christ, experiences a blessing which gives him lasting peace and joy! A deep

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doctrine of sin will have the fruit of a deep doctrine of joy. Rejoice in the Lord!

Also if we have tears of repentance, in time leading us to Christ, we will have eternal joys in Heaven where there are no tears. But if we have no tears of repentance in time we will experience tears in eternity. Tears for time or tears for eternity? Remember, when the Word of God speaks of tears it is not so much those which fall from the eyes, but tears in the heart. God heals the brokenhearted.

‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound’ Isaiah 61.1.

A person who is fundamentally serious about the problem of their sin, depending wholly upon Christ, will also be fundamentally comforted. This is what Jesus is teaching here in this Beatitude. *‘For they shall be comforted.’*

The great work of the Holy Spirit is to lead to Christ. But how does this all come about? The Holy Spirit in this great work reveals Christ as Saviour and Lord through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is pleased to use the preaching of the Gospel to bring people to faith and comfort in Christ. Our lasting comfort is ultimately to be found in Christ, Who is revealed to us through the Word of God. In this great work the Holy Spirit is called the Comforter.

‘But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me’ John 15.26 (AV).

The word ‘comforted’ used here in the Beatitudes by Jesus has a very special meaning. The root of the word means to ‘call to one’s side.’ So God the Holy Spirit comes alongside the repenting sinner, leading

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them to true comfort in Christ. Now the comfort found in the Word of God, given to those who trust in Christ, is profound and lasting.

- The comfort of Christ's invitations: *'Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' Matthew 11.28.*
- The comfort of the cross of Christ: *'In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace' Ephesians 1.7.*
- The comfort of the resurrection of Christ: *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' 1 Peter 1.3.*
- The comfort of the ascension of Christ: *'You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive' Psalm 68.18.*
- The comfort of the intercession of Christ: *'Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need' Hebrews 4.14-16.*

Robert Louis Stevenson tells of a storm that caught a vessel off a rocky coast and threatened to drive it and its passengers to destruction. In the midst of the terror one daring man, contrary to orders, went onto the deck, made a dangerous passage to the pilot house and saw the steerman at his post holding the wheel unwaveringly, and inch by inch, turning the ship out, once more, to sea. The pilot saw the passenger and smiled. Then the passenger went below again and told them the good news: 'I have seen the face of the pilot, and he smiled. All is well.' Christ's face was sorrowful and marred because of our sin, but He is now joyful in Heaven interceding for His people.

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- The comfort of reconciliation with God: *'And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled'* Colossians 1.21.
- The comfort of acceptance in Christ: *'To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved'* Ephesians 1.6.
- The comfort of peace through Christ: *'Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'* 1 Corinthians 1.3.
- The comfort of the rule and reign of Christ: *'I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it'* Matthew 16.18.
- The comfort of the certainty of God's promises: *'For all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us'* 2 Corinthians 1.20.
- The comfort of God's sovereign purposes: *'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me'* Psalm 23.4.

'And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose' Romans 8.28.

- The comfort of being more than conquerors through Christ, secure in God's inseparable love: *'Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'* Romans 8.37-39.
- The comfort of God's perfect plan: *'For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always*

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be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words' 1 Thessalonians 4.16-18.

- *The comfort of the eternal perspective: 'Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal' 2 Corinthians 4.16-18.*

There is enough through the grace of God in the Scriptures to comfort any convicted sinner coming to Christ. Christ, Who never lies, comforts those who mourn with such precious promises of truth. He says they will be comforted. The comfort which comes from Christ is true and eternal.

Conclusion

The question for believers is, how deep are we going with God? The deeper our conviction the greater our comfort! Our comfort in Christ through His Word will always more than match our conviction. Are we being stretched spiritually? For continual deepening conviction there is an ever-deepening well of comfort in Christ from which to draw.

'Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work' 2 Thessalonians 2.15-17.

'Blessed are those who mourn: for they shall be comforted.'

4. BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH

Matthew 5.5

We are considering the Beatitudes, Christ's descriptions of those who are truly blessed. We are reminded that to be blessed means to be divinely favoured of God giving a person true peace and contentment in life. The Beatitudes are Christ's own description of Christian character, His description of the Christian's privileges, fruit, and work. They are His authoritative standards!

The first step to receiving a glorious and eternal inheritance in Christ, the Kingdom of Heaven, is to be poor in spirit. In His second statement our Lord declares to be blessed those who mourn, promising that such shall be comforted. Our Lord now lays down meekness as His third aspect of Christian character.

In His wise pattern, Christ is showing us that the grace of meekness is an evidence of how we have received and understood the first two characteristics. To be a truly meek person, in the spiritual sense of the word, we must embrace the first two steps. Or, put another way, meekness is an essential fruit of the first two characteristics. They all are part of the whole. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones once assessed it like this:

'The meek man has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God declared him to be. But paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything! That is his motto.'

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The grace of meekness

The meekness Jesus is teaching here is not to do with a person's natural temperament. It is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Paul, in his *Letter to the Galatians*, gives to us a list of fruits which come from the Holy Spirit and are working in a converted person's life (*Galatians* 5.22-23). There, shining in its beauty among the other fruits, is meekness, an essential part in the engine of the Christian life.

The word 'meek' in our verse has the meaning of a mild, stable, gentle, and humble attitude, concerned first for the honour of the Lord and then for the wellbeing of others. When meekness is in action it provides something of the fragrance of Christ in a person's testimony. It is sometimes described as the ornament of the Christian life. It is a fruit which is required of all Christian believers. Meekness must first be exercised in our attitude towards God.

a. Meekness is a humble acceptance and trust in the ways of God

When this is in evidence it provides a most powerful testimony for good in the life of the believer.

*Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
'It is well, it is well with my soul.'*

Horatio Spafford, 1828-88

Ruth showed this fruit of meekness. We read in the *Book of Ruth* that she claved to her godly mother-in-law saying, '*Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God*' (*Ruth* 1.16). She had known bereavement, and she was now leaving her homeland of Moab. They were both in poverty but she was trusting in the living God.

David showed meekness when he said: '*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes*' *Psalms* 119.71.

The apostles were beaten for preaching the Gospel but took it meekly: '*So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*' *Acts* 5.41.

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They believed by faith that:

‘All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose’ Romans 8.28.

A meek-spirited person says, ‘Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven’, and means it.

b. Meekness means a humble acceptance and trust in the Word of God

When Jonah was told by God to go to Nineveh and call the people to repentance, he refused to adjust his thinking to God’s Word and call. He took a ship to Tarshish. Eventually, after God’s awesome intervention, he did go to Nineveh and call them to repentance. His ministry was wonderfully blessed of the Lord and the city repented. But then Jonah resented the grace and mercy of God. He would have much preferred to have seen the terrible justice of God on the city. He struggled to submit his thinking to the amazing extent of God’s grace to both Jew and Gentile. Meekness shows itself in a willingness to submit to the whole counsel of God for our lives.

James instructs us:

‘Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls’ James 1.21.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan, describes this meekness as ‘flexibility to the Word of God.’ Meekness in a person means they are willing to be moulded to God’s Word as clay in the hands of the heavenly Potter, that they may be a vessel unto honour, not dishonour. How flexible are we to the Word of God? How willing are we to change our thinking to God’s thinking? The meek person says, in effect, daily to the Lord:

*Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.*

Frances R Havergal, 1836-79

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Meekness is being consecrated to God's will and flexible to God's Word. A Christian is actually someone who is constantly changing. By that I mean they are constantly developing their thinking and understanding according to the pure truth which flows from God's Word. How meek is our attitude to the Word of God?

The postmodern mindset says our liberty, our freedom, our authority, and our right is to interpret the Bible in whatever way we want. In other words, the Bible must be flexibly interpreted to our views, tastes, and philosophies. The authority, it is said, is with the reader not the author. There is nothing in God's Word that should be accepted as absolute, unchanging truth. However the Christian believer who has the grace of meekness says, 'No. It is me who has got to be flexible to the unchanging Word of God. It is me who has to be constantly developing my understanding of God's unchanging truth.'

Meekness means to have the right attitude of mind towards God's will and His Word.

'The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way' Psalms 25.9 (AV).

c. Meekness finds its inspirational example perfectly displayed in Jesus Christ

'Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ' 2 Corinthians 10.1.

'For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously' 1 Peter 2.21-23.

'Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle

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and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls'
Matthew 11.29.

Look to Christ and pray that God will make you by His Spirit truly and consistently meek and lowly in heart.

d. Meekness is a sign of inner spiritual strength

As you are no doubt aware, meekness is sometimes confused with weakness. This is to misunderstand the actual strength of meekness. Meekness does not need to shout or use aggression to demonstrate its strength. The strength of meekness arises out of an inner confidence in God. It is manifested in a quiet, humble, and constant spirit.

e. Meekness means to be firm in God's honour, not our own

Moses was, by God's grace, a powerful example of meekness. He is described in *Numbers 12.3* as, '*very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*' (AV). This meekness was demonstrated so often as he led the Children of Israel. His patience with the Children of Israel was a testimony to his meekness. His meekness enabled him to be a bold and courageous leader working in a right spirit. He was, as Matthew Henry, says, 'Bold as a lion in the cause of God, but mild as a lamb in his own!' However on this issue of meekness, the Word of God records that on one occasion Moses snapped and lost his temper before the Children of Israel. They were crying out for water, while at the same time accusing God of not caring. Moses and Aaron sought the Lord in this matter and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. Moses was clearly told by God to –

*'Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water;
thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock' Numbers 20.8.*

But Moses, even after that remarkable appearance of the Lord, remained in a bad spirit about the whole matter. He had had enough. In his own spirit he mixed and matched his obedience. The old nature took over and Moses shouted to the Children of Israel,

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“Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly’ Numbers 20.10-11.

Moses’s anger replaced his meekness, the result being God’s name was taken in vain. God was displeased with Moses and refused him entry to the Land of Canaan as a sign of His displeasure. We learn from this event that our ministry for the Lord must always be done in a spirit of meekness. But we can also remember how that Moses, in a spirit of meekness, responded to God stopping his entering into the Land of Canaan. He did not argue with God in furious protest; he accepted God’s decision about Canaan. That is meekness! Meekness, for a child of God, means accepting uncomplainingly what comes, knowing that it comes from the hand of God Who orders all things. What He sends we accept in faith even if it hurts, knowing that it is for our and others’ good.

f. Meekness is a sign we have experienced the first two Beatitudes

Once we have realised the importance of the first two Beatitudes and imbibed them into our thinking as essential parts of the Christian character, our attitude towards others will be one of meekness. Remember meekness is a humble and gentle attitude to others determined by a true estimate of ourselves. This true estimate of ourselves is brought about by the first two Beatitudes. Meekness is described as a true view of oneself expressing itself in attitude and conduct towards others.

‘To speak evil of no one, to be peacable, gentle, showing all humility to all men’ Titus 3.2.

g. Meekness controls our behaviour in a positive manner consistently to all

- Meekness is not hasty in spirit;
- Meekness bears no malice;

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- Meekness never seeks revenge;
- Meekness avoids evil speaking;
- Meekness bears injuries;
- Meekness forgives really, fully, and often;
- Meekness is the master over our own selfish self-interest, exercising of self-control;
- Meekness is a daily exercise of mind and attitude.

‘Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering’ Colossians 3.12.

- Meekness means a person is willing to be corrected and admonished;
- Meekness means a person is willing to accept the advice of a helpful critic;
- Meekness means a person’s approach to teaching and correction will be in humility.

‘Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted’ Galatians 6.1.

- Meekness governs our attitude in witness.

‘But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear’ 1 Peter 3.15.

The inheritance of the meek: *‘For they shall inherit the earth’*

I would like to consider two ways in which Christian believers inherit the earth. In Christ they enjoy and appreciate its blessings now. I would suggest to you that the meek inherit the earth inasmuch as they take time to appreciate its blessings as coming from God. So they

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appreciate the wonders of Creation as a gift from God, as a wonderful opportunity to be reminded of the greatness and majesty of God! When a meek person takes a walk he views Creation as a gift from God, not a right. Creation is viewed as an opportunity for praise. When a meek person eats a meal he sees it as gift from God. The home of the meek person is seen as a provision from God. He proves the promise of God's Word that *'godliness with contentment is great gain'* (1 Timothy 6.6).

'But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace' Psalm 37.11.

'The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel' Isaiah 29.19 (AV).

In Christ they own the title deeds of the earth for all eternity. The word 'inherit' denotes the believer's title to the earth. At the Fall Adam lost his title. This title can only be regained in Christ. Only those in Christ have a personal interest in the future eternal state of this earth.

'...and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together' Romans 8.17.

'Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' 2 Peter 3.13.

5. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED

Matthew 5.6

The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has set out the pattern of the spiritual work of God clearly: conviction of sin (poor in spirit), sorrow over sin (mourning), and a humble attitude before God and with man (meekness). All this brings a person to a deep longing for and appreciation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ the Lord. Having been driven into ourselves by conviction, by the same Holy Spirit we need to be driven out of ourselves to plead the righteousness of Christ. The Holy Spirit never leaves us to constant introspection but His convicting work always leads us out of ourselves to Christ. The blessed fruit of true repentance is to be given a heart that reaches out to Christ.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.'

The hunger and thirst spoken of here by our Lord is a serious matter. It is a matter of life and death. It has an intense meaning. This verse sums up the reality, the evidence of our spirituality.

In the Land of Palestine in the days of Jesus the average family would only eat meat once a week. Food was scarce, and many people lived close to starvation. Water was an even more precious commodity. Food and water could not be wasted! Hunger and thirst are painful experiences. Hunger has an appetite for food. Thirst has a longing for water. These desires will only be satisfied with food and water.

Hunger is a sign of life. For example, a baby has an intense desire to be fed. So our Lord is teaching here about an intense spiritual hun-

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ger and thirst which will only be satisfied with Christ's righteousness. Nothing else will satisfy. None but Christ can satisfy! It is a sincere passion for righteousness, centred in Christ Jesus.

This verse is one of the key tests of our Christian faith. Where are our desires? What is our chief priority? What is our chief ambition? Is it Christ's righteousness? Lloyd-Jones says:

'I do not know of a better test that anyone can apply to himself or herself in this whole matter of the Christian profession than a verse like this. If this verse is to you one of the most blessed statements of the whole of Scripture you can be certain you are a Christian.'

There are undoubtedly times when we do not hunger and thirst after righteousness as we know we should. But the important point is to be concerned about this issue, to address it as a priority in our life, to recognise the wisdom and importance of Christ's teaching here. But there are those who do desire Christ's righteousness. They do have a hunger and a thirst, but fear to come to Him. I would ask such people to address this question in their mind: 'Who put the desire into your heart in the first place?' These desires may, in their estimation, be weak, but nevertheless they are spiritual and heartfelt desires. Such desires are an evidence that the Holy Spirit is working within them. They need to realise this reality and thank God for it, and come just as they are in humility to Christ. As C H Spurgeon put it, 'Our Lord keeps open house for coming sinners.'

Joseph Hart (1712-68) composed a hymn based on Paul's instruction to comfort the feeble minded.

*Ye lambs of Christ's fold, ye weaklings in faith,
Who long to lay hold on life by his death;
Who fain would believe him, and in your best room
Would gladly receive him, but fear to presume;*

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*Remember one thing, O may it sink deep;
Our Shepherd and King cares much for his sheep;
To trust him endeavour; the work is his own;
He makes the believer, and gives him his crown.
Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
'Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you still seek;
His Spirit will cherish the life he first gave;
You never shall perish if Jesus can save.*

Three references in the *Psalms* suffice to describe to us the nature of this hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

'One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple' Psalm 27.4.

'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. When shall I come and appear before God?' Psalm 42.1-2.

'Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city for a dwelling place' Psalm 107.5-7.

All these references – and there are many more – give us examples of directed desire.

Now I will mention some hindrances to hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

- **Temptation** – where Satan presents something as very attractive to our old nature. An alternative to Christ is presented before us as more conducive to our needs and ambitions.
- **The cares of this world** – these can overwhelm us, and we even use them as a reason or an excuse for spiritual coldness.

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- **Work and family pressures** may cause us to say in the secret place of our heart, ‘What does God expect of me considering all these cares I have? I have little time for personal devotion.’ Our circumstances become the reason for neglecting our Lord. As a consequence our desires after Him become cold.
- **Idolatry** – is when a person, or an interest, or an activity, takes first place in our affections. Idolatry can come into our life in subtle ways. For a Christian this will quench any desire after righteousness. When relaxing at home, it is good for us to spend more time with the Bible or a profitable book than with the newspaper or surfing the Net.
- **Ambition** – I am the youngest child of a very large family. All ten of us in my early years lived in a little three-bedroomed council house. I can remember what it was like to be hungry and despised in our village as being poor. In those days if you had free school meals the teacher would announce the fact to the class at the beginning of each week when the other children brought along their money to pay for their meals. As a teenager I rebelled against God and went the way of the world until a time when God in His mercy stopped me in my rebellion and brought me to Christ in repentance and faith. But soon after my conversion there was a period in my life when I became a driven man. God prospered me in my working life and I put all my energies into building a business. I was terrified of failure. I was determined that my children would have the best standard of life I could give them. But the problem was that while I was a driven man, ambitious, hungry, and thirsty for material success, my spiritual life became lifeless. My spiritual life at that time was what the Word of God describes as ‘*the years that the swarming locust has eaten*’ (Joel 2.25). In the end the Lord had to deal with me severely to bring me back to dependence upon Him. Please be careful of being a driven person! Satan drives a person on, but Christ leads a person. Beware of hindrances to spiritual desires!

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- **Misdirected or misplaced desires** – this is when we are hungering after a state of blessedness but bypassing the need for righteousness. This is far more subtle than being a driven person. In this condition Satan is more like an angel of light in his deception. This deception is evidenced in a person seeking experience above righteousness. Remember, Christ is calling us first to hunger and thirst after righteousness. The blessing, which is a vital part of the Christian life, is righteousness. We are not called to hunger and thirst first after experiences or emotional highs. We are called first to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Let me explain it this way. We live in a day and age when many people go to church for an emotional experience which makes no call for a righteous life. There is no encouragement to look to Christ for righteousness. They say you only need to look to Christ for a sense of wellbeing, prosperity, and Heaven. Such people are interested in experience, not holiness. This is a dangerous position to be in, to disregard the need of Christ's righteousness in our living. Remember, the prophet Baalam said something which sounded very good: *'Let me die the death of the righteous'* (Numbers 23.10). However, Baalam did not want to live the life of the righteous. Baalam wanted the crown of righteousness, not the way of righteousness. He was regarded as a false prophet. So this instruction of our Lord to righteousness is absolutely vital for our spiritual wellbeing.

Now I would like us to consider what is meant by the term 'righteousness'. What is it the spiritually-minded person is hungering and thirsting after? This righteousness is centred in Christ Jesus the Lord. We can consider it in three ways.

1. Imputed righteousness

This has to do with our justification before God in Christ Jesus. When a sinner comes in repentance and faith to Christ with the

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burden of their sin, they receive forgiveness and reconciliation with God the Father. They are presented perfect before the Father, clothed in Christ's righteousness – His perfection. His perfect obedience is put to their account, fully justifying them before the perfect justice of God. Christ's righteousness is imputed to them and for them. So a convicted sinner comes to Christ, knowing their own righteousness is as filthy rags (*Isaiah 64.6*). Only the righteousness of Christ will satisfy their need before God. This is the heart of the Gospel.

'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus' Romans 3.23-26.

2. Imparted righteousness

This is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, sanctifying our lives and conforming us to the image of Christ. A truly converted person is one in whom the Holy Spirit of God is dwelling. The fruits of the Spirit evidenced in their lives are characteristics of the perfect life of Christ.

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law' Galatians 5.22-23.

To grow in this way of righteousness is the continual desire of a Christian believer. The more they grow the more they want to grow.

'Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have

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apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus' Philippians 3.12-14.

The New Testament man longs to live as the new man in Christ, and longs to be like Christ. Christ is his example, his Leader, his Teacher, his Righteousness, his all and in all.

So we have these two aspects to righteousness: imputed and imparted. Someone has put it like this:

'In justification the believer is in Christ. In sanctification Christ is in the believer.'

These two aspects are like using both straps of a rucksack – we need both although sometimes we are tempted to just use one.

3. Perfected righteousness

This has to do with the believer's final state in Glory when he will be living in perfect righteousness, both fully justified and fully sanctified. He looks forward to a time when sin will be no more, when he will totally free from sin.

'Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' 2 Peter 3.13.

'For they shall be filled'

The filling taught by Jesus here follows the pattern of righteousness we have just considered.

1. The righteousness of Christ in justification

'And you are complete in Him' Colossians 2.10.

A Christian believer does not stand before God clothed partly in his own righteousness and partly in Christ's. Rather he stands before God completely in Christ's righteousness and His alone.

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2. The righteousness of Christ in sanctification

When a person is converted the Spirit takes up residence in the body of the believer. Paul says,

'Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?' 1 Corinthians 6.19.

As a believer grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Spirit within constantly fills his developing spiritual nature.

'And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.'
John 1.16.

Now we are not passive in this filling blessing. The Spirit works in us as we exercise ourselves unto godliness in Christ. Paul puts it perfectly when he says:

'Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure' Philipians 2.12-13.

This is a passionate desire to grow in Christ through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. As Eliza Edmunds Hewitt (1851-1920) wrote:

*More about Jesus would I know,
More of His grace to others show,
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love who died for me.*

*More about Jesus let me learn,
More of His holy will discern,
Spirit of God my Teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me.*

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*More about Jesus in His Word,
Holding communion with my Lord,
Hearing His voice in every line,
Making each faithful saying mine.*

*More about Jesus on His throne,
Riches in glory all His own,
More of His kingdom's sure increase.
More of His coming, Prince of Peace.*

The Christian looks to Christ as his inspiration and hope, his Word of truth. *'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly'* (Colossians 3.16) – may His wisdom guide you. Jesus said:

'These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full' John 15.11.

When writing to the church at Ephesus Paul's desire is that they will experience an ever-increasing knowledge of the love of Christ, that they also will know in Christ God's fullness.

'...to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' Ephesians 3.19.

This hungering and thirsting, in terms of our sanctification, is not a 'once in a lifetime' experience. The meaning here in the original language is that those who are filled will come again and again for more. Naturally speaking it is the sign of good food if there is a desire to experience it again. In the believer's experience of righteousness there is continual appetite for more, a desire for continued development to be conformed into the image of Christ. There is an increasing awareness of the power of the Holy Spirit, first given to us at conversion, working within us.

'Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in

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believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit' Romans 15.13.

3. The righteousness of Christ in Glory

'As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness' Psalm 17.15.

6. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL, FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

Matthew 5.7

The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ sets out the pattern and promise of spiritual work in the Christian.

- Pattern – conviction of sin (poor in spirit)
Promise – theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven;
- Pattern – sorrow over sin (mourning)
Promise – they shall be comforted;
- Pattern – humble attitude before God and with man (meekness)
Promise – they shall inherit the earth.

These truths in exercise bring a person to a deep appreciation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Having been led into ourselves by conviction by the same Holy Spirit, we need to be led out of ourselves to trust and plead the righteousness of Christ. The Holy Spirit never leaves us to constant introspection but His convicting work always leads us to Christ. The blessed fruit of true repentance is to be given a heart that reaches out to Christ and His righteousness both for justification and sanctification.

Such a God-given desire for righteousness in position and practice will be fulfilled. In justification a person is presented permanently before God the Father fully clothed in the righteousness of Christ. In sanctification the Holy Spirit is continually conforming us to the image of Christ and His righteousness. In the believer's experience of sanctification there is continual appetite for more righteousness, a desire for continued development and constant filling to be conformed into the image of Christ. Ultimately this hunger and thirst after

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righteousness will find its fulfillment in Glory: *'Christ in you, the hope of glory'* (Colossians 1.27).

'As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness' Psalm 17.15.

Now we move on to the outworking of these first four Beatitudes in the testimony of the Christian lifestyle.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'

At the outset it is important for us to notice again the wisdom of our Lord in His teaching. He places the character before the lifestyle. He places our 'being' before our 'doing'. Christ is teaching that our attitude affects our actions. We do not adopt the Christian lifestyle to obtain Christian character. Rather God gives us Christian character by His grace, and as a result we live the Christian lifestyle. So our Lord has started with the character of a Christian, and now He moves to the lifestyle of a Christian. We are *'created in Christ Jesus for good works'* (Ephesians 2.10).

So we view this Beatitude as a Christian lifestyle Beatitude, not a way of salvation by works of mercy. It has to do with the outworking of grace and an ongoing blessed relationship with God. What Christ is teaching us here is extremely serious for our spiritual wellbeing. Justification and sanctification go hand-in-hand together and cannot be separated. Character and lifestyle also go hand-in-hand together. Therefore we cannot consider ourselves to be a true Christian if we fail to be merciful in our lives. Mercy is one of the fruits of Christian character. If mercy is missing from our life then we must go back to the foundations and examine our Christian character.

This text teaches us that a blessed ongoing relationship with God is affected by our Christian lifestyle. Christ in His wisdom teaches us that mercy is one of the key fruits of sanctification, an essential element in Christian lifestyle. Being merciful demonstrates that we have

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understood something of the mercy shown to us by God. This is what Jesus taught in the parable about the unforgiving servant in *Matthew 18.23-35*.

Mercy is essential for us to enjoy God's continued merciful presence in our lives. Take mercy out of our attitude and behaviour, and then we cannot expect to enjoy God's merciful presence.

'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal'
1 Corinthians 13.1.

'Blessed are the merciful'

God's mercy is defined as 'divine compassion with action'. We are called to imitate God's mercy in our lives to others. He is the *'Father of mercies and God of all comfort'* (*2 Corinthians 1.3*). Therefore the principle of mercy is for us to show compassion with action for God's glory. Nowhere do we imitate God more than in showing such mercy.

This mercy is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan. He showed the real meaning of compassion with action. He saw the need, and he took responsibility for the need.

This word 'mercy' here is based upon the Hebrew word 'hesed', meaning steadfast lovingkindness, intentional kindness to others. Mercy is an active fruit which is steadfast in its application. The Puritan Thomas Watson describes it in this way:

'Mercy is a melting disposition whereby we lay to heart the distress of others and are ready on all occasions to be instrumental for their good.'

He goes on to say, 'You must be a new man before you can be a merciful man.' But we might argue, 'Surely there are millions of people who have been merciful today who are not born again.' It is true – millions of unbelievers today have shown practical mercy to others. However, the mercy which Christ is speaking about here concerns the

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whole being of a person. It is a mercy which reaches out, concerned for a both a person's physical and spiritual wellbeing. An unbeliever shows mercy in a practical way and is to be commended for this. However their actions lack one vital element of mercy. Their mercy is incomplete inasmuch as it lacks a concern for the spiritual wellbeing of a person. The Gospel moulds our mercy.

The good-natured person, the generous man of the world pities and relieves the temporal wants of his fellow creatures, but he does not think of their spiritual state, or their everlasting prospects. He feels tender compassion for the needy in their distress but feels no pity for needy souls perishing in ignorance of God and in rebellion against Him, being under the condemning sentence of God's holy law! This cannot be expected of him, for why should he feel for others what he has never known or felt for himself? This is why, in terms of wholesome mercy, we must always start at the beginning of the Beatitudes.

So a Christian believer shows mercy practically and spiritually as an evidence, a fruit of conversion. In that mercy, as opportunity allows, they are called to witness to, exhort, warn, and pray for unbelievers. This mercy shown to the lost is not to be seen as some type of easy-going compromised emotion which confirms a person in his ungodly lifestyle. Remember, in Christ mercy is not separate from truth. The Word describes Him as the One in Whom *'mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed'* (Psalm 85.10). The exercise of mercy for a believer carries that added dimension which is concerned for God's honour in that care.

'Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart' Proverbs 3.3.

The love of Christ constrains us to show mercy which does not compromise truth. Mercy is described as the touchstone of true and living faith. Mercy is described as being one of the most effective ways of honouring true Christian faith. The way we show mercy is important.

Blessed are the Merciful

This is seen in the example of Stephen who, even when being stoned, was concerned for God's mercy to be shown to his persecutors.

'Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep' Acts 7.60.

'Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do"' Luke 23.34.

Mercy is a fruit which pervades every aspect of the Christian lifestyle in every circumstance. It affects the way in which we act, communicate, and listen.

Being merciful is one of God's deterrents against sin. It is said that mercy refuses to listen or receive communication when rumours are flying about. Gossip is known as one of mercy's greatest enemies. The two have no fellowship with each other. Mercy is concerned for a person's wellbeing, not a person's undoing.

Mercy prefers to deal with the needy in terms of what is needed rather than what is deserved. It means giving help regardless of the attitude of the person in need.

Mercy seeks to understand situations that at times seem beyond understanding. This point is particularly pertinent to showing mercy to those suffering from depression.

Mercy is something which has to be exercised – it does not just happen.

'Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering' Colossians 3.12.

'For they shall receive mercy'

Christian believers have received mercy, are receiving mercy, and will continue to receive mercy for all eternity. Heaven is the home of God's everlasting mercy.

The Beatitudes

'But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him' Psalm 103.17.

Jude puts it perfectly when he writes, making reference to our Christian lifestyle:

'Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life' Jude 1.21.

Anticipating God's mercy we will receive in Christ for all eternity makes us merciful and praising people, reflecting the love of God.

*Come, Thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.*

Robert Robinson, 1735-90

But we are also considering this verse particularly in terms of our ongoing relationship with God: being merciful, receiving mercy – the blessed Christian lifestyle. So there are a number of ways the merciful receive mercy as they walk with the Lord.

- They receive therapeutic blessing for their souls.

'The merciful man does good for his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh' Proverbs 11.17.

'He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness, and honour' Proverbs 21.21.

One supermarket brand advises, 'Be good to yourself', encouraging us to eat healthy food. Christ has a far better and wiser statement which covers all walks of life: 'Be merciful.' If we apply this principle to our lifestyle we will be good to ourself in what we eat, but we will not only mercifully take care of our body; our merciful actions to others will also prove a blessing for our soul. Being good to yourself

Blessed are the Merciful

in Christ's way will affect body and soul. Be merciful and it will prove a blessing to you.

- They have the answer of a good conscience.

'He who despises his neighbor sins; but he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he' Proverbs 14.21.

- They are following the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ and will be blessed. Paul's final words to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, to whom he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20.27), were:

'I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive"' Acts 20.35.

- They can pray with assurance to the Father for forgiveness.

'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you' Matthew 6.14.

Conclusion

Why is mercy so vitally important?

- Because by it we reflect the character of God and bring praise to His name. Jesus said,

'Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful' Luke 6.36.

- Because mercy is commanded. What is expected of me?

'He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?' Micah 6.8.

- Because mercy affects our relationship with God. This is the heart of the issue. David's testimony towards the end of his life was:

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'With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; with a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless' 2 Samuel 22.26.

- Because we will be answerable to Christ on the Day of Judgment. (See *Matthew 26.31-40*).

This is a serious Christian lifestyle directive from Christ, being a fruit of Christian character.

7. BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD

Matthew 5.8

Christ is teaching that our attitude affects our actions. We do not adopt the Christian lifestyle to obtain Christian character. Rather God, by His grace, gives us Christian character and as a result we live the Christian lifestyle. Now we come to consider another fruit shown in Christian lifestyle – this being pure in heart – with the amazing promised attached, *‘for they shall see God.’*

I would like us to consider this Beatitude by asking of it three simple questions:

1. What does our Lord mean when He speaks here of the ‘heart’?
2. What does it mean to be ‘pure in heart’?
3. What does it mean to ‘see God’?

1. The heart

When Jesus refers to the heart here it means much more than our emotions. The word ‘heart’ being used is taken from the Greek word ‘kardia’, from which we get the medical word cardiac. Physically the heart is considered to be the chief organ upon which life depends. So spiritually considered the word ‘heart’ refers to the chief organ, the centre of our spiritual life.

The heart is an all-inclusive word, used here for our whole being, representing the mind, emotions, and will. It refers to who we are, our personality, our inner being. The biblical phrase used in *1 Peter 3.4* is *‘the hidden person of the heart.’* The heart is like the managing director or chairman of our life, governing our behaviour and our attitude.

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2. The pure in heart

Jesus describes man's heart by nature as the seat of all our troubles.

'For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' Matthew 15.19.

The impure heart –

- has no serious view of sin;
- does not regard the truth of God nor the warnings of God;
- does not make reference to the Word of God for instruction or direction;
- does not respect or admire the example of Christ and sees no need for Him;
- is regularly hypocritical and yet does not either seek or regard God;
- hates purity above all else.

Now while people sin to different depths, every person's whole being is affected by the Fall. Upright-living people and loose-living people are all affected. That is our state by nature. To illustrate this, some people have weak tea and some strong tea. Nevertheless all the water is affected by the tea.

This brings us to the all-important point Jesus is teaching here, which is the absolute requirement of a pure heart as an evidence of conversion and regeneration. This is what those who mourn over their sin realise. The heart has negatively affected their whole attitude to life.

I would like to deal at this point with a fallacy in our society and in humanistic leadership principles. The reason for evil, the reason for man's troubles, they say, is all to do with the environment in which a person lives. The great answer, the humanistic mind says, is to change the environment and that will change the heart. Change the conditions, provide more benefits, facilities, activities and education,

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

and people's behaviour will improve. The problem within, they say, can be improved and made better by a change from without.

The Fall of man demonstrates that such a policy fails to deal with, or understand, the root of the problem. Remember, Adam and Eve were living in Paradise when they fell. They had no problem with living conditions; they endured no suffering, no hardship, no poverty, no hunger, no wars. In fact everything was perfect. But such living conditions did not stop Adam and Eve falling and disobeying God. The problem for Adam and Eve was a problem of the heart. They listened to Satan and received his evil lies into their mind and then into their very being.

So a change in lifestyle requires a change in the heart. It requires a realisation of where the problem really is. The problem is not without – the problem is within.

When Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost the Spirit worked in conviction, and this work is described as people being '*cut to the heart*' (Acts 2.37) – a realisation about the state of their hearts, their conscience being deeply moved. The *Letter to the Hebrews* shows the Spirit working with the Word of God in more detail.

'Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account' Hebrews 4.11-13.

So above all we need a pure heart. Just like being merciful is a fruit of God's work within us, having a pure heart is an evidence of God's work within us.

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A pure heart is a gift from God through the power of His Holy Spirit. The pure in heart are those who have been given a new nature by God, and a new heart towards God. Instead of their lives being ruled by the old nature a take-over has taken place, under the power of God. They have a desire to live a holy life, a life of integrity, to be of one mind, having a loyal mind towards God. For a saved, converted person a new heart given by God has now taken over as the leader of his life. We cannot possibly truly live the Christian life without a renewed heart.

I would like to share with you some of the evidences of a pure heart.

- Interestingly, the new heart makes us constantly conscious of the reality of remaining indwelling sin. The battle against the old nature will continue until the end of life. But the very fact there is a battle, and you are concerned about indwelling sin, is in itself a sign of life. It is a sign of the new heart, the new nature asserting its authority and discipline in your life. This is an evidence for our personal assurance. A W Pink says: ‘One of the evidences of a pure heart is a consciousness of the remaining impurity that continues to trouble us.’

For example, if we are able to keep our home clean and tidy, then anything that is dirty will show up more. But if the whole house is rather dirty and untidy, more grime is not so noticeable. So it is with our car. If it is constantly dirty, then additional dirt is less noticeable. But if we have cleaned it, then new dirt shows up more. So a pure heart will be sensitive to the impurities in the way we live our Christian life.

- A pure heart is evidenced by its singleness. It will have a single-minded desire to honour God. Purity of heart has been described as, ‘To will one thing’, that is God’s will.
- A pure heart loves Jesus Christ with sincerity.

Blessed are the Pure in Heart

‘For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you’ 2 Corinthians 1.12.

- A pure heart is known by its openness. Hypocrisy is shunned and resisted; there is no mask required. A pure heart seeks after openness in the Christian lifestyle at home, at work, at church and at leisure.

‘Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!”’ John 1.47.

- A pure heart is known by its motives, constantly asking the question, ‘What am I doing this for? Is it to bring praise to God?’ This is probably one of the most challenging evidences. Looking back over one’s life, this is probably one of the most searching tests of all!

‘So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him!” But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart”’ 1 Samuel 16.6-7.

- A pure heart is known by its willingness to be searched.

‘Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting’ Psalm 139.23-24.

- A pure heart does not act against conscience but in harmony with the conscience. Unity is in the camp of the person’s being. This is God’s ideal for life.

‘Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith’ 1 Timothy 1.5.

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- A pure heart continually goes to the Word of God.

'You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you' John 15.3.

'How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You' Psalm 119.9-11.

- A pure heart daily and continually goes to the Fountain of Christ for cleansing because it hates sin.

'In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness' Zechariah 13.1.

- A pure heart longs for the Spirit to work. Why is this? The pure heart is for purity! God by His Spirit dwells in the heart. We want it to be a suitable dwelling place. The Spirit is likened to a fire which purifies, a wind which refreshes, and to water which cleanses.

'Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart' 1 Peter 1.22.

- A pure heart longs for a pure life!

'... that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot

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please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness'
Romans 8.4-10.

3. 'They shall see God'

This is a profound statement. How is it that we shall see God? We see God partially in time by faith, and then fully in eternity. In what ways do we see God in time?

- in Creation – in His glorious handiwork;
- in His attributes – as revealed in His Word;
- in history – in the persecution of the early Church and the spreading of the Gospel;
- in providence – our everyday experience of God's dealings with us;
- through conversions – one of the wonderful ways we see lives transformed by God;
- in His Word – the objective of our study;
- through worship – our whole being moved by God's truth;
- in answered prayer – one of the most common testimonies of God's people;
- in serving the Lord and our labours are fruitful.

In what ways shall we see God in Heaven? When we get to Glory our vision of God will be given through Christ our Mediator.

'Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like

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Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure' 1 John 3.1-3.

'They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads' Revelation 22.4.

As the hymnwriter put it:

*There shall I see His face
And never, never sin,
There, from the rivers of His grace,
Drink endless pleasures in.*

Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

It will be a satisfying sight, an unwearied sight, a beneficial sight, a constant sight!

Conclusion

The ideal is given to us by our Lord of the blessed person who is pure in heart. We cannot fulfil this in our own strength, but we can with the help of Christ. If we seek these standards given by Christ in our own strength we will more burdened than before we started; but if we come as we are, with a desire after these standards of purity, seeking the grace of Christ to work in us for His glory, we will actually find them, with God's help, to be liberating.

*'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me'
Philippians 4.13.*

There is nothing like the answer of a good conscience for a peaceful mind, so we can come with the failures of the past seeking the Lord's forgiveness, and look to the future with a desire to live our lives consecrated to Him. This is Christ's way ahead. This is Christ's way to give you liberty in life.

8. BLESSED ARE THE PEACE- MAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD

Matthew 5.9

We are considering a third aspect of the Christian lifestyle, the blessed state of being a peacemaker. This ministry arises as a fruit of our relationship with Christ our righteousness and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

At the outset it is good to remind ourselves of the active nature of this Beatitude. Remember Jesus is teaching here about Christian conduct, something active. Here our Lord is calling us to be actively makers of peace. It is a work we have to be engaged in.

As we come to consider this Beatitude we need to ask: 'What is the foundation of this peace which we are called to be makers of?'

When Jesus speaks here of being peacemakers He is not saying we are the source, the actual peace itself. Rather, in being peacemakers we are simply ambassadors of peace, workers engaged in bringing about peace.

Our business first as peacemakers is to encourage people to come to the Gospel table to find peace in Christ. Paul described this ministry as being ambassadors of this peace for Christ (*2 Corinthians 5.20*). The subject, blessing, and wonder of this peace was a constant inspiration to Paul. In fact, each of the letters of Paul opens with a greeting which includes reference to peace from God. For example,

'To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' Romans 1.7.

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To be an ambassador of the Gospel of peace is indeed a high calling and great privilege. It brings with it a serious responsibility. As you are aware, an ambassador has a duty to know about the country he is representing. He has a duty to speak well of it. So we are called, as ambassadors of peace, to know what this peace is that we are actually representing.

What is this peace we are to promote? The peace we are called to represent and to pursue is what Paul describes as the 'peace of God' (*Colossians 3.15*). It is the peace which has at its heart the Gospel. The Gospel is, therefore, the foundation of the peace we are to represent and to pursue. Its source, its wisdom, and its effectiveness is of God!

The triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – are all perfectly united together in this grand cause of peace. The God of peace (*Philippians 4.9*) in eternity ordained a way of peace for unworthy sinners through Christ to be at peace with God. Before Christ was born, God inspired the prophet Isaiah to speak of Christ as the Prince of Peace (*Isaiah 9.6*). When Christ was born, the angels sang, 'On earth peace, goodwill toward men' (*Luke 2.14*). When Christ was about to leave this earth He said, 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you' (*John 14.27*). He left the wonderful message of the Gospel of peace revealed in Himself. He promised that the Spirit, the Comforter, would come to guide us, to help us to understand the wonderful truth of this Gospel of peace (*John 16.13*).

The point I am endeavouring to make here is to assure Christian believers that we are called and privileged to be ambassadors of the God of peace, a peace authenticated by God. This should govern our whole lifestyle in this world. The Gospel peace which we are ambassadors of is of a pure quality, and has eternal implications. This principle should govern all our peacemaking ministry and inspire us. We are called to be peacemakers: this is part of the Christian lifestyle!

In answer to the evil designs, divisions, and hatred induced by Satan

Blessed are the Peacemakers

in this world, Christian believers are to take up and use the armour provided by the Lord, going forth to battle with their feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace (*Ephesians 6.15*). It is not a message of war but a message of the Gospel of peace in Christ Jesus. They understand that they are debtors to the world to proclaim this Gospel of peace (*Romans 1.14-15*).

Blessed are the peacemakers who are engaged in guiding men and woman, boys and girls, to Christ, the Peacemaker between God and man. These peacemakers are instruments in God's hands. They are peacemakers first in terms of their role in their proclamation of the Gospel, and in their witnessing of the Gospel.

Now the Gospel peacemaker is one who seeks to bring the offender to the Offended. They do so with absolute confidence in the God of peace. The peacemaker knows that an offended God is more ready to forgive than the offender is to say sorry and repent. The peacemaker knows that God delights in mercy. The peacemaker knows that Christ is ready to receive repenting sinners, to make reconciliation between the offending sinner and the offended God. The peacemaker has no worries about the faithfulness of God in His part of the reconciliation. The burden of the peacemaker, in his role as ambassador of the Gospel of peace, is to realise the fruit of a sinner acknowledging his sin and need of reconciliation through Christ, and coming in repentance and, by faith, to Christ. He has a passion for fruitfulness in this matter.

The spiritual implications of being a peacemaker

The peacemaker of the Beatitudes is one who first appreciates the wonders of that vertical peace obtained for him at Calvary by Christ, Emmanuel – God with us, not against us.

‘Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ Romans 5.1.

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*Peace, by His cross, hath Jesus made,
The Church's everlasting Head;
O'er hell and sin hath victory won,
And with a shout to glory gone.*

*When o'er thy head the billows roll,
And shades of sin obscure thy soul;
When thou can'st no deliverance see,
Yet still this Man thy Peace shall be.*

*In tribulation's thorny maze,
Or on the mount of sovereign grace
Or in the fire, or through the sea,
This glorious Man thy Peace shall be.*

*Yea, when thy eye of faith is dim,
Rest thou on Jesus, sink or swim;
And at his footstool bow the knee,
For Israel's God thy Peace shall be.*

John Kent, 1766-1843

The peacemaker of the Beatitudes understands first that he is at peace with God and experiences that peace as a vital principle in his heart.

'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful' Colossians 3.15.

The practical implications of being a peacemaker

The peacemaker of the Beatitudes is concerned first for the vertical peace between God and man. However, in that peacemaking ministry he is also aware of the horizontal peacemaking ministry, that is, doing what he can to seek peace and pursue it in terms of human rela-

Blessed are the Peacemakers

tionships. This ministry could be described as a practical outworking of the Gospel of peace.

Now in this practical peacemaking ministry there are steps we must take to nurture and keep the peace. I would like to suggest some practical elements of this particular ministry of being a peacemaker for peaceful human relationships.

- A peacemaker knows when to speak and when to keep silent.

‘So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath’ James 1.19.

- A peacemaker constantly keeps control of his speech. The ‘I must speak my mind’ is replaced by –

‘Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips’ Psalm 141.3.

- A peacemaker is like a brick wall to gossip and unkind words.
- A peacemaker is known to be approachable and kind.
- A peacemaker is one who will be willing to take second place in the interests of peace, even to the point of going separate ways, as Abraham behaved with Lot. When there was not enough pasture in the land for them both Abraham stepped aside first for Lot to choose.

‘So Abram said to Lot, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left”’ Genesis 13.8-9.

- A peacemaker speaks in a spirit of truth and love with discernment.
- A peacemaker follows after the things which make for peace.

‘Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace’ Romans 14.19.

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- A peacemaker does something positive for their enemy in the interests of peace for God's honour.

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust' Matthew 5.43-45.

- A peacemaker is fruitful because he lets peace rule in his heart.

'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful' Colossians 3.15.

- A peacemaker prays for peace.
- A peacemaker avoids false peace but seeks a peace which can be prayed about with a clear conscience.
- A peacemaker should follow the example of Christ in His humility, patience, and longsuffering.

'They shall be called the sons of God'

Once more we conclude with a profound promise.

'They shall be called.' This means God owns blessed peacemakers as His.

- He adopts them as saved sinners into His family in Christ. He gives to them the spirit of adoption by Whom they can cry, *'Abba, Father'* (*Romans 8.15*).
- They are greatly privileged as the children of God.
- They are secure in God's inseparable love.
- They are called by His grace and saved from His wrath and an eternity in hell.

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- They are eternally secure in Christ with an eternal and glorious inheritance.
- They are given precious promises from His Word for their encouragement.
- Their prayers are heard in Heaven by the most high God as their Father.
- God is willing to use and accept their service for Him.
- All things are working together for their good (*Romans 8.28*).
- He will own them as His when He makes up His jewels at the end of the world.

“They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.” Malachi 3.17.

Conclusion

We have considered seven Beatitudes which relate to Christian character and lifestyle. Seven in the Word of God is considered as a perfect number, a complete number. So to be a complete Christian in character and lifestyle we need to embrace and follow all these Beatitudes given to us by our Lord.

9. BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Matthew 5.10-12

We now come to consider the final Beatitude given to us by our Lord. Whereas the first seven Beatitudes are to do with our own character and lifestyle, the eighth Beatitude has to do with opposition that comes upon us because of our testimony and witness.

In following Christ's teaching for the complete Christian, we will undoubtedly experience persecution. It is particularly significant that in Christ's perfect teaching and order, He places persecution directly after peacemaking. As we seek to follow Christ and witness for Christ in spreading the Gospel of peace in word and action, we will be persecuted.

'Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' 2 Timothy 3.12.

This final Beatitude is actually teaching us about the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake. There is blessing even in suffering persecution. There will be a reward in Heaven!

Persecution

The word 'persecution' here means a Christian believer is pursued, harassed, troubled, and molested physically, emotionally, and verbally. In its fullest sense it means Christian believers are opposed and attacked within their mind, heart, and emotions, and outwardly against their body, even to death. They are reviled, slandered, and attacked

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particularly for Christ's sake because they trust, believe in, and follow Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Persecution is a pathway to which a Christian is called. It is all part of following Christ Who endured above all the pain of persecution from the tongue and from the hand of His adversaries, persecution that ultimately resulted in His crucifixion.

Let us consider some aspects of persecution.

a. Satan persecutes directly

This persecution comes when Satan tempts and attacks the mind with his evil insinuations of spiritual wickedness. He is described in the Word of God as the '*accuser of our brethren*' (*Revelation 12.10*). His great ambition is to disturb the Christian. His great ambition is to destroy the testimony of the Christian.

'For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' *Ephesians 6.12*.

Yet in Christ a Christian believer can overcome. Christ has spoiled principalities and powers!

b. Satan persecutes through people

It is the reaction of the carnally-minded person against a spiritually-minded person. The unbeliever persecuting a believer is really saying, 'I want to blot you out of my mind. Your testimony makes me feel uncomfortable. I am going to pursue you and drive you out of sight and mind.'

Persecution is the action of people who are driven by Satan against those who are led by the Lord. The persons persecuting are tools of Satan being used against servants of Christ. As the Puritan Thomas Watson says, 'Every Abel will have his Cain'; so every Nehemiah will have his Sanballat and Tobiah. This is the reality!

Blessed are Those Who Are Persecuted

c. Satan persecutes through authorities

As governments are making more and more laws which are against the Word of God there is an inevitability about persecution. Driving the law-making agenda is a so-called tolerant society, a society which is actually becoming increasingly intolerant of those standing fast for Biblical principles! A secular society has no room or respect for godliness because God is not in all their thoughts (*Psalms 10.4*). He is an irrelevance to their thinking – He has no room or space in people’s minds. So we must expect increasingly difficult days ahead. We need wisdom in how we respond to the authority of our society-driven rulers while not dishonouring the name of the Lord.

d. Persecution is a way of life for the Christian believer

Persecution is Satan’s way of pouring out his evil against Christ by attacking His Church.

*‘And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ’
Revelation 12.17.*

This reality will be so until the end of time in ever-increasing strength. Satan is at war with all those who believe in and follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

e. Persecution of the worldwide Church

It is reliably reported that ongoing and increasing persecution against Christians is evident in no less than thirty-seven different countries in the world today. It is vitally important to remember our brethren in other lands who are severely persecuted for Christ’s sake. It is extremely moving when you witness with your own eyes, or on television, or in reports, the suffering of our persecuted brothers and sisters in other lands.

We may take the example of a new convert who comes from a non-

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Christian home where idols are worshipped, or false religion is followed. He is likely to be beaten, locked away in a room without food, provoked, or thrown out of his home. In society at large he is despised, his children are ill-treated at school with teachers refusing to teach them. Young people are denied qualifications and jobs, while pastors and Christian workers may be beaten, stoned, and imprisoned, and churches burned.

We certainly have a duty of care in praying for the persecuted brethren in other lands, but in doing so we must not limit the reality of our Lord's teaching here regarding persecution. Christ teaches that whoever lives out the Beatitudes will suffer persecution in some form or another. It may be much less severe but it is nevertheless a form of persecution. Remember *2 Timothy 3.12* quoted earlier.

A godly lifestyle, being conformed to the image of Christ, will undoubtedly bring about spite from unbelievers, including sarcasm, teasing, being despised and rejected of men. This is the calling of a believer who follows Christ. It happens in the UK in the here and now.

For example, a young Christian at school may be the only one who stands up against evolution in his class. As he puts up his hand to acknowledge he believes in Creation this young believer will face mockery from the teacher, and derision from his classmates.

Another example would be the Christian at work who refuses to drink with work colleagues, who declines to join in with the filthy conversation and language style of the world today. Such a stand can bring with it opposition in varying forms.

f. Persecution is part of the Christian's call to identification with their Lord

It is one of the great evidences of true conversion. While the depth and severity of persecution varies, the experience of it, in whatever measure, is a reality for every true, born-again Christian.

Blessed are Those Who Are Persecuted

Persecution for righteousness' sake

Now this part of the text is very searching. Our Lord puts down a crucial test of our persecution. We are called first to put the experience of persecution through the sieve of righteousness. How has this persecution come about? Why am I being opposed? Why am I being despised? This is a vital question for us!

The prophets of old did not suffer because they were objectionable, arrogant men. They did not suffer because they were difficult personalities. They suffered for righteousness' sake as men of God. Their stand for godliness made the unbelievers uncomfortable. Their stand against idolatry disturbed the consciences of the idolaters.

Sadly, we can bring persecution upon ourselves when our walk does not match our talk and God's name is dishonoured by our own actions and attitude. It is a blessing if we can say with the Paul, who was terribly persecuted for the sake of Christ and the Gospel:

'But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance' 2 Timothy 3.10.

People can also bring a form of persecution in opposition and rejection upon themselves by speaking the truth in an aggressive and impolite manner. The Word of God says to speak the truth in love (*Ephesians 4.15*). God's Word is severely undermined by throwing it at people. I was once waiting at some traffic lights listening to a street preacher. He was using a megaphone and was hurling out statements of truth with an aggressive look on his face. His attitude did nothing to attract people to the Gospel, in fact it was doing the very opposite.

Therefore we must test the reason for the persecution. Our motives, attitude, actions and manner of speech are so important. We must not credit ourselves with being numbered among God's precious band of the persecuted if we have brought opposition upon ourselves.

'Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to

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the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps' 1 Peter 2.18-21.

The Beatitudes believer will suffer persecution for righteousness' sake.

Persecution for Christ's sake

'Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake' Matthew 5.11.

Here it is meant that our identification with Christ, and all that He is, and all that He stands for, will inevitably bring persecution. We will be opposed for the sake of Christ our Righteousness. What a privilege!

When we speak about being persecuted for Christ's sake it is important we understand that this comes about only as we are identified with His Person, His practice, and His precepts. May I remind you of these non-negotiable and fundamental truths about Christ, adherence to which will inevitably bring persecution. If we truly believe these truths, and we proclaim them without compromise, we will undoubtedly be persecuted and rejected of men.

- His Deity: He is the Son of God and the Son of Man. He is One perfect Person in His two natures as God and Man.
- He is the only Saviour Who died and rose again from the dead.
- He alone is the way, the truth and the life, the only way to God the Father.
- He alone is the faithful High Priest ever living to make intercession.
- He is enthroned in Heaven at the Father's right hand.

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- He is the Judge of all mankind.
- He is coming again in glory.

It is our wholehearted identification with Christ, revealed to us in the Word of God, which singles us out as specific targets of Satan. Professing Christians who do not hold to these fundamentals about Christ rarely suffer persecution. Their 'gospel' can allow them to live quite comfortably in worldliness. Neither is Satan worried about so-called 'signs and wonders'. He is not concerned about the liberal approach to Christianity. Satan is not worried about the worldly contemporary church scene. In fact he fuels it! But wholehearted Christians serving Christ, committed to His cause in the Gospel, he will undoubtedly attack. But Christ-centred people remember His words:

'If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me'
John 15.18-21.

Once again we are called to examine the cause of the persecution. Is it for Christ's sake? Is it for the sake of His Gospel? Is it because of our Christ-centred character and lifestyle?

Persecution – its privilege and purpose

'Rejoice and be exceedingly glad' Matthew 5.12a.

Christ is instructing us to rejoice, to rejoice exceedingly. It means here to literally jump for joy when we are persecuted! Whatever is Christ meaning here? What an incredible statement! Am I being called to rejoice, to actually, as it were, jump for joy at what is happening to

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me? How can this be, and why should it be? I would like to suggest to you briefly some reasons, and then conclude with Christ's supreme reason, which he gives us in verse 12. Persecution is:

- an evidence of your calling;
- an evidence you are walking with Christ;
- an evidence that your life is that of a true Christian;
- an evidence that, you are counted worthy of suffering;
- a means of giving us assurance:

'If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us' 2 Timothy 2.12.

- a means through which God sanctifies and prepares His people for Glory;
- an opportunity to show the world the example of Christ.

Persecution does not happen by chance. It is allowed under the permissive will of God. Satan is on a lead! Man, with all his aggression, can only go as far as God allows him. Its measure and timing is in His control. God can wonderfully turn the pain of persecution to our spiritual blessing.

A dear pastor friend of mine, who has experienced deep persecution first hand, said:

'Persecution is a time of proving the truthfulness of our Saviour's Word in a wicked and hostile world with an inward joy and certainty, pleading for souls (even those persecuting you) while surrounded by pain and uncertainties.'

Persecution – its reward

'...for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you' Matthew 5.12b.

Persecution for righteousness' sake, for Christ's sake, is not an experience unknown or unrecognised by God. In fact, persecution

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has its reward. Our Lord clearly promises a great reward to the persecuted. What is this reward promised? In time, we know it is His constant presence, His sustaining grace, His comforting Word applied through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the fruit of your labour in prayer and service for the Lord, seeing souls saved, believers growing in grace, and people being helped. However, I believe Christ is speaking about our reward in Heaven, our eternal home.

Now as you are aware, we are saved by grace alone in Christ alone. That is our ticket and our passport into Heaven. But in terms of our experience actually in Heaven, our Lord speaks about the reward of persecution. Now this does not mean that persecution is a reward of works. It remains all of grace, inasmuch as God has by His grace sustained you in the persecution. But then He will graciously reward you for Christ's sake in Glory.

Christ speaks of this reward being great. For the Almighty God to assess this reward as great we can be sure it will be something amazing! Now this brings us to an important point in our consideration of the reward. Satan means the persecution to be a curse and a real pain for the Beatitude Christian. But God graciously ensures that persecution is not wasted. It will actually be rewarded by God! Now this again puts meaning and purpose to persecution. Thomas Watson said:

‘Suffering shall increase our reward. In this the devil helps us and increases our blessing. Every reproach adds to the depth and blessing of our reward in glory.’

So, with this in mind, we need grace not to live our Christian lives in a compromised way to avoid persecution. Such a lifestyle may prove more comfortable on earth but it will detract from our reward, our treasure in Heaven.

In terms of answering the question, ‘What is this reward in Heaven?’ we have to say words fail us to describe its beauty and magnitude. Words are inadequate to describe what Glory really means, so the

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Word of God gives limited detail. But we do know Heaven is a place of perfection and peace. We know we shall see Christ as He is and worship in His glorious presence.

*There shall we see His face,
And never, never sin!
There, from the rivers of His grace,
Drink endless pleasures in.*

Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

The promise given by Christ is designed to reassure those suffering persecution in whatever form or measure for His sake. What Satan means for evil God will work out for our good.

Preparation for persecution

Now we are facing the prospect of increasing persecution in our own land. This, I believe, is the sober reality of the direction in which this nation is heading. Therefore we need to prepare for the likelihood of increasing persecution.

A Puritan guide

- Make the Scripture familiar to you, treasuring up the suffering promises.
- Develop in your knowledge of Christ.
- Beware of two evils – the love of the world and the fear of man.
- Thirst after righteousness.
- Exercise self denial.
- Keep a good conscience.
- Keep in mind the examples of suffering.
- Compare time with eternity.
- Compare Heaven with hell.
- Remember Who you are suffering for!

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Remember, the first Beatitude promised the Kingdom of Heaven: so does the last!

Conclusion

We are coming to the end of our series on the Beatitudes. However, I would like to take one more study with the purpose of seeing how the Beatitudes were fulfilled in Christ.

10. CHRIST IN THE BEATITUDES

Matthew 5.1-12

The Beatitudes are the Lord's teaching regarding the Christian character and way of life. Each one of these Beatitudes is accompanied with wonderful encouragements. Each one is prefixed with the word 'Blessed', meaning being divinely favoured of God in a person's spiritual state and attitude. Such people are the truly happy people! They realise, as the hymnwriter wrote:

*The one thing needful, dearest Lord,
Is to be one with Thee.*

Augustus M Toplady, 1740-78

We can see, if we take an overview of the first seven Beatitudes, that there is a clear pattern for our direction and encouragement. The first three Beatitudes teach about the Christian character, which lead us up to the fourth, which teaches about Christ's righteousness. The following three Beatitudes, teaching about the Christian lifestyle, are a fruit of Christ's righteousness. Therefore, having Christ at the centre of our lives, our Christian character and lifestyle will harmonise together. Poverty in spirit will have the fruit in your life of being merciful to other sinners; mourning over your sin will have the fruit of wanting purity of heart in your life. A spirit of meekness will evidence itself in your life by being of a peacable spirit.

While the first seven Beatitudes are to do with our Christian character and lifestyle, the eighth Beatitude has to do with the opposition that comes upon us because of that testimony and witness. In following Christ's teaching for the complete Christian, we will undoubtedly experience persecution!

'Yes, and all who desire to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution' 2 Timothy 3.12.

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The final Beatitude is actually teaching us about the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake. There is blessing even in suffering persecution. There will be a reward in Heaven!

I now seek to focus upon the example of Christ in the Beatitudes, for to appreciate the Beatitudes we must first appreciate Christ! When Christ teaches the Christian character and lifestyle, He does so as the Good Shepherd. He goes before His people, walking in the same pathway before them. He has lived out the Beatitudes. He is not calling us to character and lifestyle which He knows nothing of. One of the points Christ is making in the Beatitudes is, 'Follow Me by faith, here upon earth, and ultimately you will have your reward in Heaven.' So the Beatitudes set out what it really means to follow Christ.

They are Christ's standards. Following this teaching will undoubtedly lead to spiritual blessing both on earth and ultimately in Heaven. When I was in business we had to prepare a manual setting out our procedures to obtain and ensure quality according to British Standard BS5750. The Beatitudes are Christ's standard for a Christian life of quality and blessing. He has written the manual and lived out the standards in the manual. He is our inspirational Leader and Guide.

This is a vital truth for us to grasp by faith in order to understand the Beatitudes. We are Christians being conformed to the image of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit! The Beatitudes are Christ's principles through which the Spirit works.

'He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you' John 16.14-15.

To help us remember Christ as our inspiration for the Christian character and way of life, I would like to take you through each Beatitude again, noting how Christ is seen in the first part of each one, albeit in a sinless manner.

Christ in the Beatitudes

a. *'Blessed are the poor in spirit' Matthew 5.3.*

Christ identified with the poor in spirit in the poverty of His own life.

'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich' 2 Corinthians 8.9.

Now Christ had no need to be poor in spirit in terms of conviction of sin – He had no sin to be convicted of. Nevertheless, He was identified with the poor in spirit, being those convicted of their sin in the sense that He was most certainly the Friend of sinners.

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed' Luke 4.18.

He experienced in its deepest sense what it meant to be poor in spirit, as the One sin-burden bearer. He Who knew no sin was made to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5.21). Such a sacrifice brought forth the ultimate cry of one poor in spirit.

'And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which is translated, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"' Mark 15.34.

Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd, saying, 'Follow Me'.

b. *'Blessed are those who mourn' Matthew 5.4.*

While Christ was here upon earth He was described as being a '*Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*' (Isaiah 53.3). He had no sin of His own to grieve over. However, He grieved over the curse which

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sin had brought upon His creation. He grieved over the hardness of unbelief. He grieved over the sin of unbelief as He entered Jerusalem to suffer and die on behalf of sinners, knowing the way in which He would be rejected. It is written that He wept over Jerusalem (*Luke 19.41*). How willingly He would have gathered repenting sinners to Himself, but they would not come to Him (*Luke 13.34*).

Then, if we go in our meditation by faith to Gethsemane, we see Him in prayer, mourning because of our sin and burdened by its consequences for Him.

‘Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” And He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.” He went a little farther, and fell on the ground, and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will.”’ Mark 14.32-36.

Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd saying, ‘Follow Me.’

c. ‘Blessed are the meek’ Matthew 5.5.

Christ calls us to come to Him because He is meek and lowly in heart.

‘Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls’ Matthew 11.29.

In His meekness He displays perfect humility and compassion for the needs of others. His leadership is kind, gentle and compassionate. In His meekness He submitted perfectly to his Father’s will. This was demonstrated clearly in His baptism and profoundly in His death. As

Christ in the Beatitudes

He entered Jerusalem, in submission to His Father's will, to die on the cross, He demonstrated wonderful meekness, perfectly fulfilling the prophecy in *Zechariah*.

All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey'" Matthew 21.4-5.

Christ is not calling us to follow Him where He has not first gone before. Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd saying 'Follow Me.'

d. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness' Matthew 5.6.

Because He is righteous, He consistently and constantly desired to show it in His life. It was said of Him that, '*Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins*' (*Isaiah 11.5*). This was His great hallmark in life. He had a deep desire and objective to bring honour and glory to His Father by living a righteous life.

The Psalmist, writing prophetically about the righteous human nature of Christ and His relationship with God, said:

'You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions' Psalm 45.7.

Christ Himself, being perfectly righteous, came to fulfill the perfect law of God, not to destroy it. He is the perfect fulfillment of the righteousness that believers hunger and thirst after. He is therefore called in Scripture, '*The Lord our Righteousness*' (*Jeremiah 23.6*).

When we meditate on Christ hungering and thirsting after righteousness we may ask, 'In what way?' because He is already righteousness itself. He hungered and thirsted after righteousness to be evidenced in people's lives. He would say, after dealing with a person's

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problem, 'Go and sin no more' (John 8.11). He hungered and thirsted after His own righteousness being imputed to His people as their righteousness. This was His great objective.

This is evidenced in His death as the perfect Righteous One made sin for us.

'For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him' 2 Corinthians 5.21.

Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd saying 'Follow Me'.

e. *'Blessed are the merciful' Matthew 5.7.*

Mercy was a great characteristic of Christ's ministry. Thousands came to Him for help simply because they were assured He was merciful. On one of the few occasions we read of the righteous anger of Christ we see Him rebuking the disciples for their harsh treatment of the children. In the cause of mercy, He was willing to rebuke the disciples in public to show the importance of kindness and mercy. Being merciful was an issue of which He told the self-righteous Pharisees to go home and consider seriously.

Once again we can see how Christ not only taught mercy – He is mercy! It was His heart and mind of mercy which inspired Him to be our Saviour. God looked down from Heaven. He considered the awful effect the Fall of man would bring. He understood that man's condition was hopeless. He realised there was no intercessor. So Christ, the Son of God, accepted the call of the Father to come to this earth as the Saviour of sinners. Scripture puts it so powerfully:

'He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him' Isaiah 59.16.

Christ in the Beatitudes

- We depend upon His mercy as the Saviour.

‘Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit’ Titus 3.5.

- We depend upon His mercy as the Intercessor.

‘Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people Hebrews 2.17.

- We depend upon His mercy as the Judge.

‘The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day’ 2 Timothy 1.18.

Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd saying ‘Follow Me.’

f. *‘Blessed are the pure in heart’ Matthew 5.8.*

The motives, thoughts, words, and actions of Christ were and are entirely pure. He remained uncontaminated with sin, holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. In Him is absolutely no sin. Whereas out of our sinful hearts comes unrighteousness, only pure righteousness pours out of His heart. Therefore His intentions to needy sinners are totally pure.

After His death and resurrection He ascended up on high. Having spent thirty-three years in a sin-sick, evil world, untainted in His soul even by the fierce temptations of Satan and the sinful deeds of man, He entered into Heaven as pure as He was when He left it. (See *Psalm 24.*)

Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd saying ‘Follow Me.’

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g. *'Blessed are the peacemakers' Matthew 5.9.*

When He was born, the angels sang, *'On earth peace, goodwill toward men'* (Luke 2.14). There was an unbridgeable divide between God and us. Christ has bridged the gap. He has appeased God's wrath, and satisfied the demands of God's broken law. He is described as having *'made peace through the blood of His cross'* (Colossians 1.20). He has accomplished peace with God thus ensuring eternal peace for all those that trust in Him, in the present, in Heaven, and in the future new Heavens and the new earth. Therefore He is described as the *'Prince of Peace'* (Isaiah 9.6), a worthy title for the One Who has provided us with the greatest and most complete peace we can ever know.

Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd saying 'Follow Me.'

h. *'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake' Matthew 5.10.*

Christ was only ever persecuted for righteousness' sake. In such a manner He was persecuted from the day He was born. As Mary lay Him down in the manger Christ was destined to be rejected of men. As a little child His life was in danger from the evil king Herod; He was rejected by His brethren; He was rejected by the religious leaders; He was rejected by the people who shouted, *'Crucify him... We have no king but Caesar!'* (John 19.15). Having cruelly scourged Him, and mocked Him, putting a crown of thorns on His head, they crucified Him, and there they stood beneath His cross and continued to blaspheme and revile Him. In response our Lord said, *'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do'* (Luke 23.34).

Christ in the Beatitudes leads the way as our Good Shepherd saying 'Follow Me.'

Conclusion

As you are aware, all the Beatitudes come with ‘*exceedingly great and precious promises*’ (2 Peter 1.4). These promises are also fulfilled in Christ. He is:

- verse 3: The One Poor in spirit – Who now reigns in the Kingdom of Heaven;
- verse 4: The Mourning One – now comforted seeing the fruit of the travail of His soul, the building of the Church;
- verse 5: The Meek One – now enthroned as Ruler over the earth for time, and over the new earth for eternity;
- verse 6: The One hungering and thirsting after righteousness – now satisfied knowing He has accomplished, by His righteous Person and Word, the redemption of His people;

‘He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied’ Isaiah 53.11.

- verse 7: The Merciful One interceding – ensuring mercy is bestowed upon His people from a merciful God;
- verse 8: The One Pure in heart – Who now sees God the Father as His Beloved Son in whom His Father is well pleased;
- verse 9: The Peacemaker – now acknowledged in Glory as the Great Redeemer before Whom the redeemed bow as their Saviour and Lord;
- verse 10: The Persecuted One – His reward is to be given a name above all others.

‘Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ Philippians 2.9-11.