



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
MATTHEW



PART 2

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Lesson 10 (3-10-24)

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:1-3)

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

- Matthew 5:1-3 ESV

The Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7) is the first of five major discourses in Matthew (see also chs. 10; 13; 18; 24–25). In it Jesus expounds on the radical reality of everyday discipleship lived in the presence and power of the kingdom of God. The traditional site of this sermon is on a mountain near Capernaum with a magnificent view of the Sea of Galilee. Once Jesus is seated, his disciples gather around him and he begins to teach them. “Disciples” refers to those who have made a commitment to Jesus as the Messiah. “Crowds” refers to a neutral though curious group of people who are astounded by Jesus’ teaching and ministry but who have not yet made a commitment to him (7:28–29).

The sermon begins with the Beatitudes, a list of kingdom qualities that summarize the essence of Jesus’ teaching (vv. 3–12). To be “blessed” is more than to be happy. Blessedness, meaning one is in relationship to God, belongs to those who respond to Jesus’ ministry. The “poor in spirit” are those who recognize their need for God’s help. Those who confess their spiritual bankruptcy, rather than claiming spiritual self-sufficiency, live in the power of the kingdom.¹

Discussion Questions

How do you usually evaluate the maturity of Christians? What measuring sticks do you use?

What do verses 1-2 tell us about the setting of this message and those who heard the message from Jesus’ lips?

What does it mean to be “blessed?”

Who do you normally consider to be “blessed?”

¹ David Gundersen, “Psalms,” in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1295.

How does our normal description of the “blessed” person compare with those Jesus considers blessed?

What does it mean to be “poor in spirit?” Why is this an indispensable condition for receiving the kingdom of heaven?

How is this description (“poor in spirit”) in stark contrast to the characteristics celebrated in our culture?

How would you describe the opposite of “poor in spirit?”

Is Jesus *describing* who his followers are? Or is he *prescribing* what his followers must do? Explain.

A popular message in modern Western culture is that each of us is already *enough*. It’s the idea that, in ourselves, we have enough to face whatever comes our way. How does this first Beatitude challenge this way of thinking?

Psalm 34:18 says, “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Can you think of a time when you were at a low point and God met you there and rescued you?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 15–24.]

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is so famous and powerful that we can hardly overstate its influence. St. Augustine, for example, described it as “a perfect standard of the Christian life.” The great preacher-poet John Donne spoke of it in the most ornate terms:

As nature hath given us certain elements, and all our bodies are composed of them; and art hath given us a certain alphabet of letters, and all words are composed of them; so, our blessed

Saviour, in these three chapters of this Gospel, hath given us a sermon of texts, of which, all our sermons may be composed. All the articles of our religion, all the canons of our Church, all the injunctions of our princes, all the homilies of our fathers, all the body of divinity, is in these three chapters, in this one sermon in the Mount.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer based his classic, *The Cost of Discipleship*, upon its exposition. The influence of the Sermon on the Mount is truly past reckoning. The Sermon on the Mount has even exerted a great influence on those outside the Christian faith. Its influence upon Gandhi's political approach is a matter of common knowledge. Those who hate Christianity and its ethics likewise have made it an object of contempt. It is seen as the source of the "slave morality" that Nietzsche so hated. When Nietzsche's teaching bore its terrible fruit during the ascendancy of National Socialism in Germany, the Sermon was vigorously attacked by men like Alfred Rosenberg, and a modified version was produced for those who wanted to remain within the Christian tradition and accommodate themselves to Hitler's philosophy. So like it or not, everyone in western civilization has been touched in some way by the Sermon on the Mount. No one can legitimately minimize its influence.

For the Christian believer, it is simply the greatest sermon ever preached. Why is this? To begin with, it came from the lips of Jesus. The original sermon was probably quite long, possibly even several hours, and what we have in Matthew 5–7 (which takes about ten minutes to read) is a distillation of his teaching. The Sermon on the Mount is the compacted, congealed theology of Christ and as such is perhaps the most profound section of the entire New Testament and the whole Bible. Every phrase can bear exhaustive exposition and yet never be completely plumbed. Along with this, it is the most penetrating section of God's Word. Because the theme is entering the kingdom of heaven, it shows us exactly where we stand in relation to the kingdom and eternal life (see 5:3; 7:21). As we expose ourselves to the X-rays of Christ's words, we see whether we truly are believers; and if believers, the degree of the authenticity of our lives. No other section of Scripture makes us face ourselves like the Sermon on the Mount. It is violent, but its violence can be our ongoing liberation! It is the antidote to the pretense and sham that plagues Christianity...

We will begin with the Beatitudes, which someone has, not inaccurately, called the "Beautiful Attitudes" of the kingdom, for they give us the character of those who are true children of God. Many suggested titles say essentially the same thing: "The Character of the Kingdom," "The Manifesto of the Kingdom," "The Norms of the Kingdom." The first four Beatitudes focus on our relationship to God, and the second four on our relationship to our fellowman. Each of the eight builds upon the other, so that there is an amazingly beautiful and compelling progression. At the same time there is a profound unity. The first Beatitude (verse 3) and the last Beatitude (verse 10) end with the same reward, "the kingdom of heaven," which according to Hebrew style means that the Beatitudes between them all deal with that very same theme.

As we begin our study, we must envision the snowballing of interest in Jesus' ministry leading up to this event. He has been traveling around Galilee teaching in the synagogues, and people are coming to him by the droves for healing. News has spread all the way to Syria, and every

kind of case imaginable is coming to him. Great multitudes were following him clear out into the wilderness beyond the Jordan. Matthew 5:1, 2 tells us: “Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying ...”

In the midst of his escalating ministry, Jesus chose a prominent rise or hill, sat down in the customary teaching posture of a rabbi, surrounded by many disciples (that is, those who were at that time interested in learning), and began to teach them...

BLESSEDNESS: THE APPROVAL OF GOD

Each of the eight Beatitudes opens with the word “blessed.” So it is essential that we understand here in the beginning what this word means, because it bears on everything that will be said in the remainder of this book.

Contrary to popular opinion, *blessed* does not mean “happy,” even though some translations have rendered it this way. Happiness is a subjective state, a feeling. But Jesus is not declaring how people feel; rather, he is making an objective statement about what God thinks of them. *Blessed* is a positive judgment by God on the individual that means “to be approved” or “to find approval.” *So when God blesses us, he approves us.*

Of course, there is no doubt that such blessing will bring feelings of happiness and that blessed people are generally happy. But we must remember that the root idea of “blessed” is an awareness of approval by God. Blessedness is not simply a nice wish from God; it is a pronouncement of what we actually are—*approved*. Blessedness indicates the smile of God or, as Max Lucado has so beautifully put it, *The Applause of Heaven*.

As we begin this study of the Beatitudes, let us realize that if God’s blessing/approval means more to us than anything else—even the approval of our friends, business acquaintances, and colleagues—then the Beatitudes are going to penetrate our hearts, speaking to us in the deepest of ways. The question is, do we really want his approval more than anything else? Not, do we want to be happy (as proper as that desire is) but, do we truly want God’s approval above all else? If so, then we must heed every word of the first Beatitude, for it gives us the condition of blessing in just three words: “poor in spirit.” “Blessed/approved are the poor in spirit.”

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY OF SPIRIT

Let us understand what poverty of spirit is not. It is not the conviction that one is of no value whatsoever. It does not mean the absence of self-worth or, as one theologian put it, “ontological insignificance.” It does not require that we believe ourselves to be zeros. Such an attitude is simply not scriptural, for Christ’s death on our behalf teaches us that we are of great value (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). Neither does “poor in spirit” mean shyness. Many people who

are naturally shy and introverted are extremely proud. Nor does “poor in spirit” mean lacking in vitality, spiritually anemic, or gutless.

Certainly, “poor in spirit” also does not refer to showy humility like that of Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens’s *David Copperfield*, who kept reminding people that he was a “very humble person.” ...Uriah Heep—the man who thus, as it were, glories in his poverty of spirit and thereby proves he is not humble.” We all have met this kind of person, who by his own self-conscious diffidence is begging for us to say that he is not really nothing but actually quite wonderful. When this attitude is present, there is an absence of poverty of spirit.

What, then, does “poor in spirit” mean? The history of the Greek word for “poor,” *ptochos*, provides some insight. It comes from a verbal root that denotes “to cower and cringe like a beggar.” In classical Greek *ptochos* came to mean “someone who crouches about, wretchedly begging.” In the New Testament it bears something of this idea because it denotes a poverty so deep that the person must obtain his living by begging. He is fully dependent on the giving of others. He cannot survive without help from the outside. Thus an excellent translation is “beggarly poor.”

Now, if we take this meaning and combine it with the following words (“in spirit”) we have the idea, “Blessed are the *beggarly* poor in spirit.” The sense is: “Blessed are those who are so desperately poor in their spiritual resources that they realize they must have help from outside sources.”

“Poverty of Spirit, then, is the personal acknowledgment of spiritual bankruptcy.” It is the awareness and admission that we are utterly sinful and without the moral virtues adequate to commend us to God. John Wesley said of the poor in spirit, “He has a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin which he brought with him from his mother’s womb, which overspreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof.” It is the recognition of our personal moral unworthiness. The “poor in spirit” see themselves as spiritually needy. My favorite rendering of the verse is: Blessed are those who realize that they have nothing within themselves to commend them to God, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The World Rejects Poverty of Spirit

Poverty of spirit is the antithesis of the proud selfishness and self-sufficiency of today’s world. The world has its own ideas of blessedness. “Blessed is the man who is always right.” “Blessed is the man who is strong.” “Blessed is the man who rules.” “Blessed is the man who is satisfied with himself.” “Blessed is the man who is rich.” “Blessed is the man who is popular.”

Today’s men and women think that the answer to life is found in self...Christian narcissism is promoted as biblical self-love. King Jesus becomes the imperial self. When this happens, Christianity suffers a massive shrinkage, as David Wells explains: Theology becomes therapy.... The biblical interest in righteousness is replaced by a search for happiness, holiness by

wholeness, truth by feeling, ethics by feeling good about one's self.... The past recedes. The Church recedes. The world recedes. All that remains is self.

Someday, if history is allowed to continue, a perceptive artist may sculpt a statue of twentieth-century man with his arms wrapped around himself in loving embrace, kissing his image in a mirror. To this, Jesus answers, "Blessed [approved of God] are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Poverty of Spirit is Essential for Knowing God's _____

We must understand and embrace a true poverty of spirit, for that is the only way we can ever know God's smile. David became the greatest king of Israel, and the key to his rise to greatness was his poverty of spirit. Listen to his words when it all began: "Who am I, and what is my family or my father's clan in Israel, that I should become the king's son-in-law?" (1 Samuel 18:18). Later in life, before his fall, he said, "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" (2 Samuel 7:18).

Similarly, Gideon, whom we celebrate for his amazing deliverance of Israel with just 300 men, began with these words: "But LORD ... how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family" (Judges 6:15).

Significantly, when Jesus began his public ministry he opened the scroll to Isaiah 61:1 and began with this opening line: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (see Luke 4:18). In Isaiah's context the poor were the exiled people of Israel who had not compromised and who looked to God alone to save them and establish his kingdom. These are always the people to whom he comes. The incarnate Son of God was born of a woman who sang, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant" (Luke 1:46–47). When Christ was born, the angels announced it to humble shepherds, not to the Establishment (Luke 2:8–15). And when Jesus was presented in the Temple, aged Simeon and Anna, representatives of the poor of Isaiah's prophecy, exalted God because of him (Luke 2:25–38). These are the people to whom Christ is born, and *in* whom he is born. Lay this to heart: "The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). This is the way it will always be.

Poverty of Spirit is Essential for _____

Poverty of spirit is an indispensable sign of grace. No one can truly know Christ without it. There are most likely scores of evangelicals in your own community, prominent "Christians," who do not know Christ. They are tares amidst wheat who perhaps do not even know it (Matthew 13:24–30). They have never come to a blessed emptiness, to the very end of themselves. They have never confessed, "There is nothing in me to commend me to God"; and thus they are lost.

The changeless truth is, no one can come to Christ without poverty of spirit. This is not to say that one must have a *perfect* sense of one's spiritual insufficiency to be saved. Very few, if any, come to this. Rather, it means that the spiritually proud and self-sufficient, those who actually think there is something within them that will make God accept them—these people are lost.

Positively stated, “Those who acknowledge themselves as spiritually bankrupt enter the kingdom of heaven.” No one enters God's kingdom without such an acknowledgment, regardless of how many times he or she has walked the aisle, raised a hand, signed a decision card, prayed “the sinner's prayer,” or given his or her testimony.

Salvation is by faith alone, *sola fide* (Ephesians 2:8–9; Romans 11:6); but poverty of spirit is the posture of faith. God pours out his grace to the spiritually bankrupt, for only they are open to believe and receive his grace and salvation. He does this with no one else. No one can enter the kingdom without poverty of spirit.

Poverty of Spirit is Essential for _____

We never outgrow the first Beatitude, even though it is the basis by which we ascend to the others. In fact, if we outgrow it, we have outgrown our Christianity—we are post-Christian. That is what was happening in the Laodicean church. Christ rebuked that failing church with these stern words: *“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.”* (Revelation 3:17–18)

Just as no one can come to Christ without poverty of spirit, no one can continue to grow apart from an ongoing poverty of spirit. Poverty of spirit is foundational because a continual sense of spiritual need is the basis for ongoing spiritual blessing. A perpetual awareness of our spiritual insufficiency opens us to continually receiving spiritual riches. Poverty of spirit is something we never outgrow. In fact, the more spiritually mature we become, the more profound will be our sense of poverty. It is because of this that every believer should commit the Beatitudes to memory and make the first Beatitude, especially, his or her conscious refrain: “Blessed are the beggarly poor in spirit”; “blessed are the spiritually bankrupt, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

THE RICHES OF POVERTY

Now we turn to the statement of the reward: “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” “Theirs” is emphatic. It means theirs in the sense of *theirs alone*, barring all others who approach God with a different spirit than that of beggarliness. Again, none but those who are “poor in spirit” will enter the kingdom of heaven.

The reward of the kingdom is both now and future. It is present because all who have life are in the kingdom now. We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places *now* (Ephesians 2:6). We

are subjects of Christ *now*. We are overcomers *now*. We are a kingdom of priests *now*. This means we are kings and queens, and that we reign in life and exercise vast authority and power. It means that our poverty of spirit, our weakness, is a reservoir of authority and power. Our weakness is the occasion for his power, our inadequacy for his adequacy, our poverty for his riches, our inarticulation for his articulation, our tentativeness for his confidence (see 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10; Colossians 2:9, 10).

As kings and queens, we are also free. Pride makes slaves out of all whom it possesses; not so with poverty of spirit. We are free to be full of God, free to be all that he would have us to be, free to be ourselves. We reign now and for all eternity. The kingdom is ours—ours alone!

Conclusion

The supreme lesson of this Beatitude is that without poverty of spirit no one enters the kingdom of heaven. Its prominent position—as the opening sentence of the Sermon on the Mount—declares for all time that no one is saved who believes there is something within him that will make God prefer or accept him.

Self-righteousness, moral pride, vain presumption will damn the soul! Jesus made this crystal-clear with the account of the tax-gatherer and the Pharisee who went up to the Temple to pray:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10–14)

Listen again to Jesus’ words, “Blessed [approved of God] are the [beggarly] poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [now and forevermore].” The question I must ask is, have you experienced true poverty of spirit? Can you say, *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, 1740–1778

Is this your heart’s cry? Or are you a church attender without Christ? Are you an unregenerate evangelical? Are you a Christless “Christian”? If so, hear God’s Word and take it to heart: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Lesson 11 (3-17-24)

Blessed Are the Mourners (Matthew 5:4)

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

- Matthew 5:4 ESV

Those who mourn are not necessarily the bereaved, or even the penitent. They are the suffering, those whose life is, from a worldly point of view, an unhappy one, and particularly those who suffer for their loyalty to God. The verse echoes Isaiah 61:2, which promises consolation as a part of the Messiah’s work. In God’s salvation they will find a happiness which transcends their worldly condition.¹

Discussion Questions

Why would those who are poor in spirit feel a need to mourn?

Those who mourn feel sorrow not only for their own sin but also for the sin they see around them. What have you seen or heard lately that caused you to mourn?

How might mourning be expressed?

How do we know whether our mourning is godly or not?

How do you think those who mourn will be comforted? How have you been comforted?

How does our culture view mourning?

Do you think the church has a right view of mourning?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 115.

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 26–31.]

THE BLESSED _____

When read apart from its context, the second Beatitude is startling: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” This is, of course, a paradox—and it is meant to grab us.

G. K. Chesterton once defined a paradox as “truth standing on its head calling for attention,” and this is certainly true here. Jesus states one of the essential truths of life in such a way that it cries for all to come and take a good long look, a look that can bring life. “Blessed/approved are those who mourn.”

The intimate connection of this second Beatitude with the first is beautiful and compelling. The first Beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” is primarily *intellectual* (those who understand that they are spiritual beggars are blessed); the second Beatitude, “Blessed are those who mourn,” is its *emotional* counterpart. It naturally follows that when we see ourselves for what we are, our emotions will be stirred to mourning.

Again, as with the previous Beatitude, we cannot place enough stress on the importance of these spiritual truths as they relate to the gospel. The Beatitudes are *not* the gospel because they do not explicitly explain Christ’s atoning death and resurrection and how one may receive him. But they are *preparatory* to the gospel.

The Beatitudes are preparatory in the sense that they slay us so that we may live. They hold us up against God’s standards for the kingdom so that we can see our need and fly to him. They cut through the delusions of formula Christianity and expose the shallowness of evangelicals who can give all the “right” answers but do not know Christ.

To begin with, what does the paradoxical pronouncement “Blessed are those who mourn” mean? Let us first note what it does not mean. Jesus does not mean, “Blessed are grim, cheerless Christians.” Some believers have apparently interpreted it this way. The Victorian preacher Charles Spurgeon once remarked that some preachers he had known appeared to have their neckties twisted around their souls. Robert Louis Stevenson must have known some preachers like that because he once wrote, ironically, in his diary, “I’ve been to church today and am not depressed.” Christ certainly is not pronouncing a Beatitude on a forlorn disposition.

Neither does Jesus mean, “Blessed are those who are mourning over the difficulties of life.” The Bible does not say that mourning by itself is a blessed state. Sorrow is not blessed any more than laughter is. In fact, some mourning is cursed. For example, Amnon mourned because his lust was not fulfilled by Tamar (2 Samuel 13:2). Also, Ahab mourned because he wanted but couldn’t get Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kings 21:4).

Mourning Over Sin

A great day has come when we see our sinful state for what it is apart from God's grace and begin to mourn over its devastating dimensions in our souls, words, and deeds as described in Romans chapter 3.

- *Souls*: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (vv. 10–12).
- *Words*: "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit"; "the poison of vipers is on their lips"; "their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness" (vv. 13–14).
- *Deeds*: "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know" (vv. 15–17).

Such are we all if left to ourselves. There is always room for decline if we refuse the grace of God. But it is an even greater day when we are truly confronted with our individual sins, when we refuse to rationalize them, when we reject facile euphemisms, when we call sin "sin" in our lives. And it is the greatest of all days yet when in horror and desolation over our sin and sins we weep, so that the divine smile begins to break.

Mourning Over the Sins of the World

Such personal mourning is naturally expansive because one who truly mourns over his own sins will also sorrow over the power and effects of sin in the world. David mourned for the sins of others in Psalm 119:136: "Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed." The great characteristic of Jeremiah, the Weeping Prophet, was that he wept for his people (Jeremiah 9:1; 13:17).

Of course, our sinless Lord Jesus was also deeply grieved by sin in the world. Through the mystery of the Incarnation his heart became a spiritual seismograph, registering the slightest tremors of the earth's pain and sorrow. No wonder some thought Jesus was Jeremiah returned from the grave (Matthew 16:14).

Now we begin to see the force of the brilliant paradox of the second Beatitude. The Lord Jesus has stood truth on its head, and it shouts for us to take notice and understand. "Blessed [approved] are those who mourn [over sin—that is their own sin and the sin that poisons the world], for they will be comforted." Christ shouts for our understanding. Blessed are we if we hear and put our understanding to work.

MOURNING!

The world thinks mourners (those who mourn the course of the world, who mourn sin) are mad. John Wesley observed that they consider it "... to be more moping and melancholy, if not downright lunacy and distraction." Some have actually argued that Martin Luther was insane because of his deep mourning over his sin before his new birth. They judge his behavior as psychotic. Indeed, the world regards pain of heart with suspicion and restraint.

The church is much the same. Some actually hold that if we are good Christians, filled with the Spirit, we will experience no sorrow and will wear eternal beatific smiles like plastic Mona Lisas... True Christianity manifests itself in what we cry over and what we laugh about. So often we laugh at the things that we should weep over and weep over the things we should laugh at. In our heart of hearts, what do we weep about? What do we laugh about?

In matters of spiritual life and health, mourning is not optional. Spiritual mourning is necessary for salvation. No one is truly a Christian who has not mourned over his or her sins. You cannot be forgiven if you are not sorry for your sins...The saddest thing in life is not a sorrowing heart, but a heart that is incapable of grief over sin, for it is without grace. Without poverty of spirit no one enters the kingdom of God. Likewise, without its emotional counterpart—grief over sin—no one receives the comfort of forgiveness and salvation.

If you have never sorrowed over sin in your life (not just its consequences, but sin itself), then consider long and carefully whether you really are a Christian. Genuine believers, those who are truly born again, have mourned, and continue to mourn, over sin. For Christians, mourning over sin is essential to spiritual health. The verb used here is the most intensive of the nine verbs employed in the New Testament for mourning, and it is continuous. Godly believers, therefore, perpetually mourn, and thus perpetually repent of their sins.

It is significant that the first of Martin Luther's famous *95 Theses* states that the entire life is to be one of continuous repentance and contrition. It was this attitude in the Apostle Paul that caused him to affirm, well along into his Christian life, that he was the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1:15). What is the result of our mourning? In the first Beatitude we saw that an ongoing poverty of spirit leaves us open to ongoing blessings of the kingdom. Here, our ongoing mourning opens us to His unspeakable comfort and joy. This naturally anticipates and introduces the paradoxical reward: "... for they will be comforted."

THE _____ OF MOURNING

Notice that the comfort is actually immediate. Don't misinterpret the future tense, which is used merely to sequence mourning and comfort. The actual sense of Christ's words is, "Blessed are the mourners, for they will be immediately comforted, and they will continue to be so."

Forgiveness

Notice, above all, that the basis of comfort is forgiveness. Believers are the only people in the world who are free from the guilt of their sins. The word “they” is emphatic. The sense is: “Blessed are those who mourn, for *they alone* will be comforted.” We actually know we are mourners if we have the paradoxically comforting sense of God’s forgiveness. This forgiveness is also accompanied by changed lives, diminishing the sources of so much personal sorrow—arrogance, judgmentalism, selfishness, jealousy, to name a few. Therefore, comfort springs from within—from changed lives.

The Holy Spirit

The very Greek word used here for “they will be comforted” has the root from which we get *paraclete*, which is also used for the Holy Spirit, the One who comes alongside and comforts us. God’s comfort is relational. It comes in the form of his divine companionship. He is our ally. He personally binds up our sorrows and consoles us. How comprehensive our comfort is! It is immediate. It comes to us alone. It comes personally in the Person of the Holy Spirit. And it is based on the forgiveness of our sins. That is why we are called “blessed.” What a stupendous paradox! Jesus stands truth on its head to get our attention, and he says, “Would you be comforted? Then mourn. Would you be happy? Then weep.”

Salvation

To those who are not yet believers, perhaps unsaved evangelicals, understand that this paradox is meant to lead you to salvation. If a spirit of mourning is welling up within you, then let your mourning elevate you to him...Do you acknowledge that there is nothing within you to commend you to God? Are you mourning? Do you ache with the guilt of your sin before God and man? If so, and if you are a Christian, return to the Lord and be restored to fellowship. If you are not a believer, come to him now and he will give you the kingdom. He will put his robe on your shoulders, his ring on your hand, his sandals on your feet, and will prepare a feast for you. You will be comforted!

Conclusion

Knowing whether or not we have godly mourning is not difficult. First, we need to ask ourselves if we are sensitive to sin. If we laugh at it, take it lightly, or enjoy it, we can be sure we are not mourning over it and are outside the sphere of God’s blessing.

The mock righteousness of hypocrites who make every effort to appear holy on the outside (see Matt. 6:1–18) has no sensitivity to sin, only sensitivity to personal prestige and reputation. Nor does the mock gratitude of those who thank God they are better than other people (Luke 18:11). Saul regretted that he had disobeyed God by not slaying King Agag and by sparing the best of the Amalekite animals. But he was not repentant; he did not mourn over his sin. He instead tried to excuse his actions by claiming that the animals were spared so that they could be sacrificed to God and that the people made him do what he did. He twice admitted that he had sinned, and even asked Samuel for pardon. But his real concern was not for the Lord’s

honor but for his own. “I have sinned; but please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel” (1 Sam. 15:30). Saul had ungodly regret, not godly mourning.

The godly mourner will have true sorrow for his sins. His first concern is for the harm his sin does to God’s glory, not the harm its exposure might bring to his own reputation or welfare. If our mourning is godly we will grieve for the sins of fellow believers and for the sins of the world. We will cry with the psalmist, “My eyes shed streams of water, because they do not keep Thy law” (Ps. 119:136). We will wish with Jeremiah that our heads were fountains of water that we could have enough tears for weeping (Jer. 9:1; cf. Lam. 1:16). With Ezekiel we will search out faithful believers “who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed” around us (Ezek. 9:4; cf. Ps. 69:9). We will look out over the community where we live and weep, as Jesus looked out over Jerusalem and wept (Luke 19:41).

The second way to determine if we have genuine mourning over sin is to check our sense of God’s forgiveness. Have we experienced the release and freedom of knowing our sins are forgiven? Do we have His peace and joy in our life? Can we point to true happiness He has given in response to our mourning? Do we have the divine comfort He promises to those who have forgiven, cleansed, and purified lives? The godly mourners “who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126:5–6).²

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 164–165.

Lesson 12 (3-24-24)

Blessed Are the Meek (Matthew 5:5)

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

- Matthew 5:5 ESV

This verse echoes Psalm 37:11. The meek are not the weak or cowardly. They are those who under the pressures of life have learned to bend their wills and to set aside their own notions as they stand before the greatness and grace of God. They are characterized by humble trust rather than arrogant independence. The earth does not belong to the self-trusting or self-assertive who seek to possess it but to “the poor in spirit” who are willing to lose all for the kingdom. This paradox belongs to the larger teaching which sees that one lives by dying, receives by giving, and is first precisely when willing to be last.¹

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to be meek? Who is someone you know who is meek?

What is the opposite of meekness?

Would you consider yourself to be a meek person? Why or why not?

How did Jesus display meekness?

What does it mean that the meek will “inherit the earth?”

From the world’s point of view, why would it be surprising that the meek inherit the earth?

How can a person become meek?

Why is meekness necessary?

¹ Frank Stagg, “Matthew,” in *Matthew–Mark*, ed. Clifton J. Allen, Broadman Bible Commentary (Broadman Press, 1969), 105.

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 33–38.]

Two men faced each other on the pavement before the governor's palace. One was Jesus Christ, the meekest man who ever lived. The other was Pontius Pilate, a man of extraordinary pride.

Jesus appeared as the epitome of weakness, a poor Jew caught on the inexorable tides of Roman history, frail and impotent, a man destined to be obliterated from the earth. Pilate was the personification of Roman power. The tides of history were with him. As part of Rome, he was heir to the earth.

The two figures are opposite ends of a tragic paradox. Jesus Christ, the prisoner, was the free man. He was in absolute control. Jesus, the meek, would inherit not only the earth but the universe. On the other hand, Pilate, the governor, was the prisoner of his own pride. He could not even control his soul. He had no inheritance. Jesus not only taught the paradox "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"—he lived it. Christ was master of the paradox. His teaching is salted with shining contrasts like:

Last is first.

Giving is receiving.

Dying is living.

Losing is finding.

Least is greatest.

Poor is rich.

Weakness is strength.

Serving is ruling.

For Christ, paradoxes were an especially effective way of getting people to see essential spiritual truth—in this instance, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

The beauty of a paradox is that it grabs our attention because it falls on the ear with an elevating dissonance. In the case of Matthew 5:5, it seems far truer to say, "Blessed are the proud, the intimidating, for they will inherit the earth." But Jesus is teaching the survival not of the fittest but of the meekest! How in the world are the meek going to inherit anything? Life simply does not work that way. Jesus' Beatitude contravenes the laws of nature—and of society...The last thing the average man wants to be known for is meekness. It seems that Jesus

has made a great mistake, but of course we know that our Lord has not. Indeed this Beatitude provides an infallible law of life and a remarkable power for living and dying.

STEEL

So to begin, what does “Blessed are the meek” mean? Specifically, what does the word “meek”—or as many translations have it, “gentle”—mean? Understand first that meekness is *not* weakness. It does not denote cowardice or spinelessness or timidity or the willingness to have peace at any cost. Neither does meekness suggest indecisiveness, wishy-washiness, or a lack of confidence. Meekness does not imply shyness or a withdrawn personality, as contrasted with that of an extrovert. Nor can meekness be reduced to mere niceness.

Bearing this in mind, we must note that the Greek word’s development in classical literature and its other usages in the New Testament absolutely confirm the popular translations of *meek* and *gentle*. In classical Greek the word was used to describe tame animals, soothing medicine, a mild word, and a gentle breeze. “It is a word with a caress in it.” The New Testament bears the same sense. John Wycliffe translated the third Beatitude, “Blessed be mild men.” *Gentleness* and *meekness* are, indeed, caressing words.

Meekness/gentleness also implies self-control. Aristotle explained that it is the mean between excessive anger and excessive angerlessness. So the man who is meek is able to balance his anger. It is strength under control. The meek person is strong! He is gentle, meek, and mild, but he is in control. He is as strong as steel.

STEEL

A reading of Psalm 37 shows that Jesus consciously alluded to verse 11, “But the meek will inherit the land,” when he formulated the third Beatitude. This statement’s location in the heart of this great Psalm is deeply revelatory of what meekness/gentleness rests upon. The Israelites to whom the Psalm was written, despite living in the land, did not truly possess it because of the working of evil men. What were they to do? In a word, *trust* (“trust,” vv. 3, 5; “be still ... wait,” v. 7). Thus a deep trust in the sovereign power of God is the key to meekness.

Gentle Jesus himself forever displayed the dynamic of trust that is part and parcel of meekness. “When,” as Peter records, “they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23).

MEEKNESS

Jesus said of himself, “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). As the incarnation of meekness, he displayed it in two ways, both of which showed his power. In respect to his own person, he practiced neither retaliation nor vindictiveness. When he was mocked and spat

upon, he answered nothing, for he trusted his Father. As we have noted, when he was confronted by Pilate, he kept silent. When his friends betrayed him and fled, he uttered no reproach. When Peter denied him, Jesus restored him to fellowship and service. When Judas came and kissed him in Gethsemane, Jesus called him “friend.” And Jesus meant it. He was never insincere. Even in the throes of death, he pleaded, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). In all of this Jesus, meek and mild, was in control. He radiated power.

Yet, when it came to matters of faith and the welfare of others, Jesus was a lion. He rebuked the Pharisees’ hardness of heart when he healed the man’s withered hand on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9–45). He was angered when his disciples tried to prevent little children from coming to him (Mark 10:13–16). Jesus made a whip and drove the moneychangers from the temple (John 2:14–17). He called Peter “Satan” after the outspoken fisherman tried to deter him from His heavenly mission (Matthew 16:21–23). All of this came from Jesus, the incarnation of gentleness.

Bringing this all together, we have an amazing picture. The one who is meek has a gentle spirit because he trusts God. Indeed, there is a caress about his presence. At the same time the meek person possesses immense strength and self-control, which he exhibits in extending love rather than retaliation against those who do him evil. He stands up fearlessly in defense of others or of the truth as the occasion arises.

JESUS’ SMILE

Our Lord’s words “Blessed are the meek” make it clear that a gentle and meek spirit has the divine approval. Therefore the presence or lack of such is indicative of one’s spiritual status.

Of course, no one perfectly manifests meekness in his or her life. No one’s life is a perpetual caress. No one is so strong that his or her only response is love. No one totally escapes pride and self. Nevertheless, Jesus’ warnings are clear.

- *Harshness*: If you are mean in your treatment of others, if there is an absence of gentleness in your treatment of others, take heed.
- *Grasping*: If you make sure you always get yours first, if *numero uno* is the subtle driving force in your life, if you care little about how your actions affect others, beware.
- *Vengeful*: If you are known as someone never to cross, if you always get your “pound of flesh,” be on your guard.
- *Uncontrolled*: If rage fills your soul so that life is a series of explosions occasioned by the “fools” in your life, watch out.

Again, this is not to suggest that you are not a Christian if you fall into these sins, but rather to point out that if they are part of your persona, if you are a self-satisfied “Christian” who thinks

that the lack of gentleness and meekness is “just you” and people will have to get used to it, if you are not repentant, you are probably not a Christian. Jesus’ words are not demanding perfection. The point is, however, that if a gentle/meek spirit is not at least imperfectly present in your life, if it is not incipient and growing, you may very well not have the smile of Christ, which is everything.

THE SUBLIME PARADOX

The reward for meekness is truly amazing: “They will inherit the earth.” As was mentioned, the inspiration for this magnificent paradox is Psalm 37, which encourages God’s people not to fret because of evil, but rather to trust because “the meek will inherit the land” (v. 11; cf. vv. 9, 22, 29, 34). In the New Testament, God’s people are not a physical nation—they are gathered from all nations and tongues. And the land/earth they inherit is not a physical plot of ground—it is heaven itself. The time is coming when, as fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), we will reign with him in his earthly kingdom. We will inherit the earth. We will even judge the world (I Corinthians 6:2). The paradox will be literally fulfilled, far beyond our wildest dreams.

But there is also a present inheritance that abundantly enriches our earthly existence. There is a sense in which those who set their minds on riches never possess anything. This was given classic expression by one of the world’s wealthiest men when asked how much is enough money. “Just a little bit more,” he answered. He owned everything, yet possessed nothing!

It is the meek who own the earth now, for when their life is free from the tyranny of “just a little more,” when a gentle spirit caresses their approach to their rights, then they possess all...The meek are the only ones who inherit the earth. The “they” in “they shall inherit” is emphatic: “*They alone, only they*, shall inherit the earth.” They are rich right now; and fifty billion trillion years into eternity they will be lavishing in the unfolding of “the incomparable riches of his grace” (Ephesians 2:7).

BECOMING MEEK

There are three concurrent paths to Christlike meekness.

First, we must realize that a gentle, caressing spirit is a gift of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23). Therefore, it comes only through grace. We must cast ourselves on God, asking in humble prayer that he give us life, make us his children, and instill in us a spirit of meekness. At the same time, we can ask confidently because we know that if we ask anything according to his will he will do it (cf. John 14:13; 1 John 5:14). Such asking ought to be continual because every soul needs to grow in grace regardless of one’s level of spiritual maturity.

Second, we must yoke ourselves to Jesus, for he was the incarnation of meekness. Our Lord said of himself, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light”

(Matthew 11:29, 30). Jesus promises us that if we yoke ourselves to him, we will learn gentleness and humility. In Biblical times a young ox was yoked to an older, experienced ox so that the older might train him to perform properly. By bearing the same yoke, the untrained ox learned the proper pace and how to heed the direction of the master. We learn by being yoked to Christ, as we surrender our lives to him for direction.

Third, we must give close attention to the progression of thought in the Beatitudes, for it provides us with a three-step ladder to meekness. The initial step begins in the first Beatitude (Matthew 5:3) with poverty of spirit, which comes from a true knowledge of ourselves. We realize that there is nothing within us that would commend us to God. We fall short. We need God.

In the next Beatitude (v. 4) we progress to mourning. We most naturally lament our state of spiritual poverty. This mourning is an enviable state because in it we are blessed and comforted. We should note that poverty of spirit and mourning are negative. However, when true poverty of spirit and spiritual mourning are present, they make way for the positive virtue of meekness. In a sense, meekness is superior to the two preceding states because it grows out of them. The process is all so natural, so beautiful, and yet also quite supernatural!

We must stop here and say to ourselves, “I see how the progression works, and I see that it comes by grace, but how can I know when I am truly meek?” That is a good question. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave his congregation in Westminster Chapel the answer, and I can say it no better. “The man who is truly meek is the man who is amazed that God and man can think of him as well as they do and treat him as well as they do.” The test as to whether we are truly meek is not whether we can say we *are* poor sinners, but rather what we *do* when someone else calls us vile sinners. Try it!

Conclusion

Meekness is necessary first of all because it is required for salvation. Only the meek will inherit the earth, because only the meek belong to the King who will rule the future kingdom of the earth. “For the Lord takes delight in His people,” says the psalmist; “he crowns the humble with salvation” (Ps. 149:4, NIV). When the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom, “He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’ ” (Matt. 18:2–4).

Meekness is also necessary because it is commanded. “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility” (Zeph. 2:3). James commands believers, “Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls” (James

1:21). Those who do not have a humble spirit are not able even to listen rightly to God's Word, much less understand and receive it.

Meekness is necessary because we cannot witness effectively without it. Peter says, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15). Pride will always stand between our testimony and those to whom we testify. They will see us instead of the Lord, no matter how orthodox our theology or how refined our technique.

Meekness is necessary because only meekness gives glory to God. Pride seeks its own glory, but meekness seeks God's. Meekness is reflected in our attitude toward other children of God. Humility in relation to fellow Christians gives God glory. "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:5–7).²

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 175–176.

Lesson 13 (3-31-24)

The Resurrection Body (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

⁵⁰ I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

- 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 (ESV)

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is not just a lofty theological idea. It is the most powerfully practical of theologies, for Christ’s resurrection from the dead is our resurrection from the dead also! Through the resurrection of Jesus, not only is sin defeated, but also sin’s effect: death. In fact, the resurrection is absolutely necessary for the work of salvation to be made complete in us. These bodies made of flesh and blood are decidedly not eternal! We all know the feelings of aging and decline. But the promise of God in Christ is victory over death and new life for eternity.

Dr. Stephen Wellum, Professor of Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary writes, “Paul, having argued for the reasonableness and then certainty of the believers’ resurrection body now completes his argument by insisting, in the strongest of terms, for the absolute necessity of it—our perishable and mortal body must be clothed with that which is imperishable and immortal (v. 53). Believers, whether dead or alive, must be transformed in order to enter the kingdom of God in its fullness (see vv. 50, 53-54). As Anthony Hoekema comments: “It is impossible for us in our present state of being, in our present bodies, weak and perishable as they are, to inherit the full blessings of the life to come. They must be changed.”

Consider the epitaph of Benjamin Franklin wrote for himself, and had etched on his tombstone in Christ Church Cemetery in Philadelphia: 'The body of Benjamin Franklin, printer, like the cover of an old book, its contents torn out and stripped of its lettering and gilding, lies here

food for worms - but the work will not be lost, for it will appear once more in a new and more elegant addition, revised and corrected by the Author'.

Discussion Questions

What do you think “We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed” (15:51) means?

Why does a trumpet call herald the resurrection (see 15:52)? What do trumpets represent? (See, for example, Leviticus 25:9; Isaiah 27:13; Matthew 24:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Revelation 11:15–18.)

Why must all natural, physical bodies be changed, even those that have not died (see 15:42–44, 50, 53)?

What will be the result when this occurs (see 15:54–55)?

Why is sin the sting of death (see 15:56)? (See, for instance, Romans 5:12; 6:23.)

How is the Law the power of sin (see 15:56)? (See Romans 4:15; 7:7–13.)

Yet how has God given us the victory over sin, and therefore death, through Christ (see 15:57)? (*Optional:* See Romans 5:12–19; 6:6–7, 14, 22.)

Does 15:54–57 mean Christians shouldn’t grieve or hurt when loved ones die? Why or why not?

Read 15:1–2, 30–32, 58. How does Paul say the fact of Christ’s resurrection and the promise of your own should affect your attitudes and actions?

How does 15:1–58 encourage you if you have lost a beloved believer to death?

How should this chapter affect your attitude toward your own future? What difference should it make to your life that death is defeated?

What will our resurrected bodies be like?

Lesson Outline

What the Bible says about our victory:

1. There will be a great _____. (v. 50-53)

(Adapted from David Prior) The glorious future to which Paul has been referring earlier in the chapter virtually defies all human understanding, let alone description. Faced with such an immense hope, mortal men can resort only to very basic questions: 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' (35). Paul answers this very understandable question in the ensuing verses and through them all runs one fundamental principle: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (50). These physical bodies of ours simply are incapable of coping with the glory of God. If we are going to be resurrected in Christ, we need also to be transformed into his likeness. Only Christ-like people will be suitable for such a quality of life. Yet, however radical and total such a transformation must inevitably be, due to the vulnerability of our present bodies, there is nevertheless a clear continuity between Christians now and Christians then: 'we shall be raised', not destroyed and reincarnated in a different existence altogether. This continuity guarantees the fulfilment of such natural desires as being able to recognize and enjoy those whom we have known here in this life, when we have come to share in the life of the world to come.

Paul illustrates from nature this continuity transformation (36–41). Jesus had himself used a similar picture to describe the absolute necessity of his own death, if there was to be any such reality as resurrection: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.' Thus, the Creator has written into nature the principle of resurrection: without death and burial there is no new life. At present the whole creation is in bondage to the endless cycle of birth-life-age-death-birth, etc. (what Paul calls 'decay'). The raising of Lazarus is an illustration of such life: he was raised from the dead, only to die again. Jesus, through his resurrection to an indestructible life, has broken out of this bondage to decay and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. He died, was raised from the dead and will never die again. 'Much fruit' will result from his death and resurrection: he is the 'first fruits' of this bountiful harvest. So there has to be death before life, even in nature.

The contrast between the physical body and the spiritual body is underlined in verses 42–49, particularly in the succession of phrases in verses 42–43. The totality of that contrast is indicated by using opposite epithets. Paul does not mean that there is no honor or power in

our physical bodies, but that the very greatest honor and power inherent in these bodies could not begin to cope with life in the kingdom of God in all its fullness.

The fundamental reason for this is their bondage to decay (42). There is no way in which this corruption can be halted; it can only be buried. Paul's choice of glory (doxa) and power (dynamis) in verse 43 to describe life in the kingdom of God evokes the ascription at the end of the Lord's Prayer: 'Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.' These two words summarize Paul's consistent vision of the consummation of God's kingdom.

2. There will be a great _____. (v. 54-56)

Paul then returns to the contrast between Jesus and Adam (45–49). All human beings share in the characteristics of Adam. 'The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.' Adam—and every human being—was from the earth, a man of dust (47). We have all borne the image of the man of dust (49). It is important to recognize that this was all by the command and express purpose of God, as the Genesis account makes plain. The last Adam, Jesus, himself partook of flesh and blood, eventually being put to death and buried.

Everything that happened from that point onwards revealed the resurrection. From that point of no return he became a life-giving spirit (45); raised from the dead, he revealed his true origin as the man ... from heaven (47)—truly and fully man, not condemned to lie in the dust, but destined to resume his place at the right hand of God the Father.

All those who belong to him will bear his image (49), both in the sense of being made like him and in the sense of sharing his resurrection-body. Indeed, it is probable that Paul's description of Jesus in these verses provides us with the only intelligible category for appreciating the nature of his resurrection appearances prior to his ascension. He was recognizable as the crucified One, i.e. there was continuity with his past existence; but he was released into a quality of life unshackled by mortality and the finiteness of time and space, i.e. there was discontinuity. So, the resurrected Jesus, indwelt by the Spirit of God, was able to give life in a new dimension to all who trusted him. What happened to Jesus after his death and resurrection will happen also to all those in Jesus when they are all together raised on the last day (cf. 51–53).

Paul here is contrasting the body which expresses this natural human life with the body which will eventually express the supernatural life of God's Spirit in the fullness of his kingdom. Even now God's Spirit dwells in our mortal bodies: but the more the Spirit makes us like Jesus, the more these mortal bodies groan under the strain of anticipating their own demise and the freedom of totally new bodies designed for glory and power. The first body has all the limitations of our earthiness; the second body has all the capacity of God's Spirit. From this perspective it is obvious that the first body (flesh and blood) cannot inherit the kingdom of God, because decay and corruption cannot be part of what is eternally incorruptible (50).

In summary, we must acknowledge that in this whole discussion Paul is struggling to describe the indescribable. As Ladd says, 'Who can imagine a body without weakness? or infection? or tiredness? or sickness? or death? This is a body utterly unknown to earthly, historical

experience.... it is an order of existence in which the “laws of nature” ... no longer obtain. In fact, when one puts his mind to it, it is quite unimaginable.’

3. There will be great _____ . (v. 57)

As MacArthur rightly states, How can we do anything but thank and praise God for what He has done for us? He has promised us an imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual body for one that is perishable, dishonorable, weak, and natural. He promises us the heavenly in exchange for the earthly, the immortal in exchange for the mortal. We know these promises are assured because He has already given us victory over sin and death.

4. The chapter closes with a great _____ . (v. 58)

And what does this cause us to do? *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

- 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)

Dr. Wellum writes,

“What a fitting way to end this theological treasure. To a church that was wracked with aberrant theology, divisions, and discord, Paul brings them back, as he has done time and time again, to the sureties of the gospel. This is where they were to take their stand. And, we must add, this is where we must take our stand as well. If they were to remain faithful to the Lord in the midst of a pluralistic and pagan culture, they had to remove from their thinking the syncretistic ideas that they had adopted and return once again to the truth of God’s Word. The same is true for us as well. Living in a pluralistic and postmodern culture has incredible dangers if we do not keep our theological bearings, but it also poses wonderful opportunities. May we heed seriously Paul’s exhortation to stand firm, to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, for in our risen and glorified Redeemer our labor is never in vain, rather it is that which will last for all eternity.”

There are 4 imperatives that come from these promises:

1) Be STEADFAST.

“Steadfast” literally refers to being seated, and therefore to being settled and firmly situated.

2) Be IMMOVABLE.

This word carries the same basic idea but with more intensity. It denotes being totally immobile and motionless. We are to be rooted and grounded in the Word of God.

3) Always ABOUND in God’s work.

Knowing our former condition, our redeemed present, and our future resurrected status, we are more than motivated to do whatever God commands and whatever His

Spirit leads us to do.

4) KNOW that our Christian life and service is worth it.

Don't serve the Lord out of emotions for the time may come when you simply "don't feel like it". Serve out of knowledge of the promises of God – especially our everlasting rewards. Be motivated by what you KNOW IS TRUE.

Conclusion

Our work for the Lord, if it is truly for Him and done in His power, cannot fail to accomplish what He wants accomplished. Every good work believers do in this life has eternal benefits that the Lord Himself guarantees. "Behold, I am coming quickly," Jesus says, "and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Rev 22:12). We have God's own promise that our toil [labor to the point of exhaustion] is not in vain in the Lord.

- MacArthur

Lesson 14 (4-7-24)

Blessed Are the Righteous (Matthew 5:6)

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

- Matthew 5:6 ESV

This beatitude speaks of strong desire, of driving pursuit, of a passionate force inside the soul. It has to do with ambition—ambition of the right sort—whose object is to honor, obey, and glorify God by partaking of His righteousness. This holy ambition is in great contrast to the common ambitions of men to gratify their own lusts, accomplish their own goals, and satisfy their own egos.¹

Discussion Questions

Take a moment and describe 3-4 things your soul hungers and thirsts for at the deepest level?

The first three verses of the Sermon on the Mount have all pointed to man’s need and have shown the type of approach that is necessary if a man is to be made spiritually happy by God. What must man do, according to Matthew 5:6, to obtain this happiness?

What is righteousness?

How do the hunger and thirst for righteousness resemble physical hunger and thirst?

What is significant about the phrase “will be filled” being in the passive voice (“we will be filled”), not active (“we will fill ourselves”)?

Even though Jesus promised that we would be filled, why do we continue to hunger and thirst for inner righteousness?

How would you describe your current appetite for righteousness?

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 177.

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *James Montgomery Boice, The Sermon on the Mount: An Expositional Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 37–42.*]

Ever since famine drove Joseph's brothers to Egypt in the second millennium B.C. (and probably also before that time) crop failures, and consequent hunger and starvation, have been a chronic problem of mankind. Drought, wars, and plant disease have swept through history, leaving behind a trail of misery and death. Often little could be done to stop them.

Famine came to Rome in 436 B.C., causing thousands of people to throw themselves into the Tiber River and end their lives. Famine struck England in 1005. All Europe suffered in 879, 1016, and 1162. Even in the nineteenth century, with its great advances in technology and commerce, hunger stalked many countries—Russia, China, India, Ireland—and many died. Today, in India, thousands die of malnutrition and its accompanying diseases, and hundreds more perish in the nations of Latin America and the other emerging nations. Hunger, like war and pestilence, has always been a bellicose neighbor to large sectors of the human race.

Unfortunately, the physical hunger of some men is only a pale reflection of a far more serious hunger that affects all mankind. It is a spiritual hunger, which is satisfied only by God through the Lord Jesus Christ. St. Augustine spoke of this hunger when he wrote, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee" (*Confessions*, I, 1). Jesus showed how this hunger could be satisfied. He said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6). This statement of Jesus Christ's is the fourth beatitude of the Sermon on the Mount. It is God's answer to man's spiritual longing.

God's _____

This beatitude follows in a very definite order upon the first three of Christ's beatitudes, and there is a sense in which it stands at the heart of this short compendium of Christ's teachings.

The first three verses of the Sermon on the Mount have all pointed to man's need and have shown the type of approach that is necessary if a man is to be made spiritually happy by God. First, the man who comes to God must be "poor in spirit." He must recognize that he is spiritually bankrupt in God's sight and that he has no claim upon him. Second, he must "mourn." This does not refer simply to the kind of sorrow experienced for the sick or dying. It is sorrow for sin. And it implies that the one who sorrows must come to God for comfort. Third, the man who would experience God's salvation must also be "meek." This refers to his taking a lowly place before God in order that he might receive God's salvation. These beatitudes have all expressed man's need. Now in the fourth beatitude there comes a solution: if a man will hunger

and thirst after righteousness, God will fill him with righteousness and will declare him righteous. That man will be justified before God, and he will embark upon the blessed and effective life outlined in the remainder of Christ's sermon.

Does this verse touch your heart as an expression of all that is most precious in the Christian gospel? Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes of this verse, "This beatitude again follows logically from the previous ones; it is a statement to which all the others lead. It is the logical conclusion to which they come, and it is something for which we should all be profoundly thankful and grateful to God. 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 quite certain you are a Christian; if it is not, then you had better examine the foundations again." The verse is precious because it offers the solution to man's great need by pointing to the offer of God's greater remedy in Christ.

True _____

The verse is most specific about how one can obtain this happiness, but the reason why so many people are unhappy spiritually is that they will not accept God's remedy. What must man do? First, he must desire *righteousness*. Second, he must desire a perfect (and, therefore, a *divine*) righteousness. Third, he must desire it *intensely*. That is, he must desire it enough to abandon all hope of achieving salvation by his own efforts, and cling instead to the efforts made for him by God. Each of these points is suggested explicitly in the beatitude.

In the first place, the man who would be happy must come to God seeking righteousness. So many come seeking anything and everything else. Some seek happiness itself. But the verse says that the happy people are those who seek, not happiness primarily, but holiness before God. Some people seek happiness through other things, such as fortune or fame. Some seek it through sex and marriage. The Bible teaches that happiness comes only through righteousness.

A moment's reflection will show why this must be so. God is the source of all good things: fortune, fame, sex, success, happiness, and other things besides. James says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). But God is also holy, and, because he is, he can have no dealings with those who are not holy. Men are sinners. Sin breaks the fellowship that should exist between men and God; it makes all who are sinners God's enemies. The only way that man can enter again into fellowship with God and find the happiness and blessing he longs for is to possess a righteousness and holiness that will commend him to God.

Can this be done? Not by man, certainly. But God can and will do it. The heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that in him God has obtained our redemption and provided all who believe in Christ with that righteousness. The Bible says that Jesus Christ "has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). And those who hunger and thirst after his righteousness shall be filled.

Moreover, *Christians* must hunger and thirst after righteousness. For that which enters into their becoming a Christian must also characterize their life. Dr. Lloyd-Jones writes, “There are large numbers of people in the Christian Church who seem to spend the whole of their life seeking something which they can never find, seeking for some kind of happiness and blessedness. They go around from meeting to meeting, and convention to convention, always hoping they are going to get this wonderful thing, this experience that is going to fill them with joy, and flood them with some ecstasy. They see that other people have had it, but they themselves do not seem to get it.... Now that is not surprising. We are not meant to hunger and thirst after experiences; we are not meant to hunger and thirst after blessedness. If we want to be truly happy and blessed we must hunger and thirst after righteousness. We must not put blessedness or happiness or experience in the first place.”

What is the case in your life? Do you put righteousness first or do you seek after something else, even something quite good in itself? Do not forget that righteousness *must* come first. Jesus said, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33).

A _____ Righteousness

The second point of the fourth beatitude is that the one who would know true happiness must desire not merely righteousness but perfect righteousness, and this means desiring the righteousness of God. It is necessary that we see this and see it clearly, for you and I are always ready to settle for something less than God requires, and if it were possible, we should always rush to substitute some of our own goodness for God’s...the one who hungers and thirsts as Christ intends him to hunger and thirst must hunger, not after a partial or imperfect righteousness (either his own or God’s), but after the whole thing. He must long for a perfect righteousness, and this means, therefore, a righteousness equal to and identical with God’s.

Of course, this is exactly what most people will not do. Most men and women have a desire for some degree of righteousness. Their self-esteem demands at least that. Thieves will have some code of honor among themselves, however debased. A murderer will strive for some small spark of nobility. A good man will take great pride in his philanthropy or good deeds. But the problem comes from the fact that few (and none unless God has prodded them) seek for the perfect goodness which comes only from him. If I were to rephrase the verse in order to recapture this flavor of the language, I would say, “O how happy is the man who knows enough not to be satisfied with any partial goodness with which to please God, who is not satisfied with any human goodness. He alone is happy who seeks for the divine righteousness, because God will certainly provide it.”

_____ and _____

The third point of advice in Christ’s statement about how to discover God’s righteousness is that a man must desire it intensely. In Christ’s words, he must “hunger and thirst for

righteousness” if he is to be filled. How quickly these words pierce to the spiritual heart of a man! And how quickly do they separate real spiritual hunger from mere sentimentality and vaguely religious feeling!

Since there is almost nothing in our experience today to suggest the force of Christ’s words, we must put ourselves in the shoes of his listeners if we are to fully understand them. Today almost none of us knows hunger. And few of us have ever known more than a momentary thirst. But it was not that way for Christ’s contemporaries. In the ancient world men often knew hunger. Wages were low, if they existed at all. Unless men were of the aristocracy they seldom grew fat on the fruit of honest labor. Many starved. Moreover, in a desert country where the sun was scorching and sand and wind storms were frequent, thirst was man’s constant companion. To such a world hunger meant the hunger of a starving man, and thirst, that of a man who would die without water.

It was against this background that Christ’s words were spoken. And they were, in effect, “So you think that you would like to be pleasing to God, that you would like to taste of his goodness. Well, how much do you want it? Do you want it as much as a starving man wants food or a parched man wants water? You must want it that desperately in order to be filled. For it is only when you are really desperate that you will turn to me and away from your own attempts to earn that goodness.”

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that where there is this desire for righteousness there will be filling. And the filling will be Christ himself.

In this first sermon, given early in his three-year ministry, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; for they will be filled,” but he did not elaborate further on the filling. Later, when his teachings began to make their impact on the small circle of his listeners, he did. He said to the woman of Samaria, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.... Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:10, 13–14). To the disciples who had witnessed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves in Galilee he added, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

Have you drunk deeply at that spring and fed on that bread? Or are you still feeding on things that do not satisfy? When the prodigal son left home he expected to find complete satisfaction. He wanted to live; and life to him meant money, clothes, food, companionship, and gay times. Instead of these things he found poverty, rags, hunger, loneliness, and misery. When he was hungry he turned to feeding swine. It was only when he was finally starving that he turned back to his father. In his father’s company he found all he had thought to find in the world. His father clothed him, fed him, welcomed him, and rejoiced in his return.

How sad if you should turn from the One who guarantees satisfaction in life to things that will never satisfy for long! How blessed for you to return to the Father through the way in which he has told you to come, through the Lord Jesus Christ!

Lesson 15 (4-14-24)

Blessed Are the Merciful (Matthew 5:7)

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

- Matthew 5:7 ESV

The first four beatitudes deal entirely with inner principles, principles of the heart and mind. They are concerned with the way we see ourselves before God. The last four are outward manifestations of those attitudes. Those who in poverty of spirit recognize their need of mercy are led to show mercy to others (v. 7). Those who mourn over their sin are led to purity of heart (v. 8). Those who are meek always seek to make peace (v. 9). And those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are never unwilling to pay the price of being persecuted for righteousness’ sake (v. 10).

The concept of mercy is seen throughout Scripture, from the Fall to the consummation of history at the return of Christ. Mercy is a desperately needed gift of God’s providential and redemptive work on behalf of sinners—and the Lord requires His people to follow His example by extending mercy to others.¹

Discussion Questions

What is mercy?

Does Matthew 5:7 mean that if we show mercy to others, others will show mercy to us? If not, what does it mean?

How does mercy relate to forgiveness, love, grace, and justice?

How did Jesus epitomize mercy?

Describe a time when you received mercy from someone else. What difference did it make in your life?

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 187.

How can we show mercy to others?

Do we gain salvation by showing mercy to others? Explain.

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985)*]

THE MEANING OF MERCY

For the most part, the days in which Jesus lived and taught were not characterized by mercy. The Jewish religionists themselves were not inclined to show mercy, because mercy is not characteristic of those who are proud, self-righteous, and judgmental. To many—perhaps most—of Jesus' hearers, showing mercy was considered one of the least of virtues, if it was thought to be a virtue at all. It was in the same category as love—reserved for those who had shown the virtue to you. You loved those who loved you, and you showed mercy to those who showed mercy to you. That attitude was condemned by Jesus later in the Sermon on the Mount. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy' " (Matt. 5:43). But such a shallow, selfish kind of love that even the outcast tax-gatherers practiced (v. 46) was not acceptable to the Savior. He said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.... For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?... And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" (vv. 44–47).

Yet many people have interpreted this beatitude in another way that is just as selfish and humanistic: they maintain that our being merciful causes those around us, especially those to whom we show mercy, to be merciful to us. Mercy given will mean mercy received. For such people, mercy is shown to others purely in an effort toward self-seeking...The underlying motive of self-concern has characterized men in general and societies in general since the Fall. We see it expressed today in such sayings as, "If you don't look out for yourself, no one else will." Such popular proverbs are generally true, because they reflect the basic selfish nature of fallen man. Men are not naturally inclined to repay mercy for mercy.

The best illustration of that fact is the Lord Himself. Jesus Christ was the most merciful human being who ever lived...Yet what was the response to Jesus' mercy? He shamed the woman's accusers into inaction, but they did not become merciful. By the time the accounts of John 8 ended, Jesus' opponents "picked up stones to throw at Him" (v. 59). When the scribes and

Pharisees saw Jesus “eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers,” they asked His disciples why their Master associated with such unworthy people (Mark 2:16).

The more Jesus showed mercy, the more He showed up the unmercifulness of the Jewish religious leaders. The more He showed mercy, the more they were determined to put Him out of the way. The ultimate outcome of His mercy was the cross. In Jesus’ crucifixion, two merciless systems—merciless government and merciless religion—united to kill Him. Totalitarian Rome joined intolerant Judaism to destroy the Prince of mercy.

The fifth beatitude does not teach that mercy to men brings mercy from men, but that mercy to men brings mercy from God. If we are merciful to others, God will be merciful to us, whether men are or not. God is the subject of the second clause, just as in the other beatitudes. It is God who gives the kingdom of heaven to the poor in spirit, comfort to those who mourn, the earth to the meek, and satisfaction to those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those who are **merciful ... shall receive** mercy from God. God gives the divine blessings to those who obey His divine standards.

Merciful is from *eleēmōn*, from which we also get eleemosynary, meaning beneficial or charitable. Hebrews 2:17 speaks of Jesus as our “merciful and faithful high priest.” Christ is the supreme example of mercy and the supreme dispenser of mercy. It is from Jesus Christ that both redeeming and sustaining mercy come...Mercy is meeting people’s needs. It is not simply feeling compassion but showing compassion, not only sympathizing but giving a helping hand. Mercy is giving food to the hungry, comfort to the bereaved, love to the rejected, forgiveness to the offender, companionship to the lonely. It is therefore one of the loveliest and noblest of all virtues.

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS

A clearer understanding of mercy can be gained by working through some comparisons. Mercy has much in common with forgiveness but is distinct from it. Paul tells us that Jesus “saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). God’s forgiveness of our sins flows from His mercy. But mercy is bigger than forgiveness, because God is merciful to us even when we do not sin, just as we can be merciful to those who have never done anything against us. God’s mercy does not just forgive our transgressions but reaches to all our weakness and need. “The Lord’s loving kindnesses [mercies, KJV] indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22). God’s mercy to His children never ceases.

MERCY AND LOVE

Forgiveness flows out of mercy, and mercy flows out of love. “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our

transgressions, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph. 2:4–5). Just as mercy is more than forgiveness, love is more than mercy. Love manifests itself in many ways that do not involve either forgiveness or mercy. Love loves even when there is no wrong to forgive or need to meet. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, although they both are without sin and without need. They both love the holy angels, although the angels are without sin and need. When we enter heaven we, too, will be without sin or need, yet God’s love for us will, in comparison to eternity, only be just beginning. Mercy is the physician; love is the friend. Mercy acts because of need; love acts because of affection, whether there is need or not. Mercy is reserved for times of trouble; love is constant. There can be no true mercy apart from love, but there can be true love apart from mercy.

MERCY AND GRACE

Mercy is also related to grace, which flows out of love just as forgiveness flows out of mercy. In each of his three pastoral epistles Paul includes the words “grace, mercy and peace” in his salutations (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4, KJV). Grace and mercy have the closest possible relationship; yet they are different. Mercy and its related terms all have to do with pain, misery, and distress—with the consequences of sin. Whether because of our individual sins or because of the sinful world in which we live, all of our problems, in the last analysis, are sin problems. It is with those problems that mercy gives help. Grace, on the other hand, deals with sin itself. Mercy deals with the symptoms, grace with the cause. Mercy offers relief from punishment; grace offers pardon for the crime. Mercy eliminates the pain; grace cures the disease. When the good Samaritan bound up the wounds of the man who had been beaten and robbed, he showed mercy. When he took him to the nearest inn and paid for his lodging until he was well, he showed grace. His mercy relieved the pain; his grace provided for healing. Mercy relates to the negative; grace relates to the positive. In relation to salvation, mercy says, “No hell,” whereas grace says, “Heaven.” Mercy says, “I pity you”; grace says, “I pardon you.”

MERCY AND JUSTICE

Mercy is also related to justice, although, on the surface, they seem to be incompatible. Justice gives exactly what is deserved; whereas mercy gives less punishment and more help than is deserved. It is difficult, therefore, for some people to understand how God can be both just and merciful at the same time to the same person. If God is completely just, how could He ever not punish sin totally? For Him to be merciful would seem to negate His justice. The truth is that God does *not* show mercy without punishing sin; and for Him to offer mercy without punishment *would* negate His justice.

Mercy that ignores sin is false mercy and is no more merciful than it is just. It is that sort of false mercy that Saul showed to King Agag after God had clearly instructed Saul to kill every Amalekite (1 Sam. 15:3, 9). It is that sort of false mercy that David showed to his rebellious and wicked son Absalom when he was young. Because David did not deal with Absalom’s sin, his

attitude toward his son was unrighteous sentimentality, neither justice nor mercy—and it served to confirm Absalom in his wickedness.

That sort of false mercy is common in our day. It is thought to be unloving and unkind to hold people responsible for their sins. But that is a cheap grace that is not just and is not merciful, that offers neither punishment nor pardon for sin. And because it merely overlooks sin, it leaves sin; and the one who relies on that sort of mercy is left in his sin. To cancel justice is to cancel mercy. To ignore sin is to deny the truth; and mercy and truth are inseparable, they “are met together” (Ps. 85:10, KJV). In every true act of mercy, someone pays the price. God did, the Good Samaritan did, and so do we. To be merciful is to bear the load for someone else.

To expect to enter the sphere of God’s mercy without repenting from our sin is but wishful thinking. And for the church to offer hope of God’s mercy apart from repentance from sin is to offer false hope through a false gospel. God offers nothing but merciless judgment to those who will not turn from their sin to the Savior. Neither relying on good works nor relying on God’s overlooking sin will bring salvation. Neither trusting in personal goodness nor presuming on God’s goodness will bring entrance into the kingdom. Those who do not come to God on His terms have no claim on His mercy.

God’s mercy is grounded not only in His love but in His justice. It is not grounded in sentiment but in Christ’s atoning blood, which paid the penalty for and cleanses from sin those who believe in Him. Without being punished and removed, even the least of our sin would eternally separate us from God.

The good news of the gospel is that Christ paid the penalty for all sins in order that God might be merciful to all sinners. On the cross Jesus satisfied God’s justice, and when a person trusts in that satisfying sacrifice God opens the floodgates of His mercy. The good news of the gospel is not that God winked at justice, glossed over sin, and compromised righteousness. The good news is that in the shedding of Christ’s blood justice was satisfied, sin was forgiven, righteousness was fulfilled, and mercy was made available. There is never an excuse for sin, but always a remedy. Mercy, therefore, is more than forgiveness and less than love. It is different from grace and is one with justice. And what is true of God’s mercy should be true of ours.

...Those who are unmerciful will not receive mercy from God. In one of his imprecatory psalms David says of an unnamed wicked man, “Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord, and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually, that He may cut off their memory from the earth.” David’s anger was not vengeful or retaliatory. That man and his family did not deserve mercy because they were not themselves merciful. “He did not remember to show lovingkindness, but persecuted the afflicted and needy man, and the despondent in heart, to put them to death” (Ps. 109:14–16).

...In His Olivet discourse Jesus warned that those who claim to belong to Him but who have not served and shown compassion on the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned will not be allowed to enter His kingdom. He will say to them, “Depart from Me,

accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.” When they say, “ ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry,’ ... He will answer them, saying, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me’ ” (Matt. 25:41–45).

James writes, “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy” (James 2:10–13a).

In the midst of our corrupt, ego-centered, and selfish society that tells us to grab everything we can get, the voice of God tells us to give everything we can give. The true character of mercy is in giving—giving compassion, giving help, giving time, giving forgiveness, giving money, giving ourselves. The children of the King are merciful. Those who are merciless face judgment; but “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13b).

THE _____ OF MERCY

Pure mercy is a gift of God. It is not a natural attribute of man but is a gift that comes with the new birth. We can be merciful in its full sense and with a righteous motive only when we have experienced God’s mercy. Mercy is only for those who through grace and divine power have met the requirements of the first four beatitudes. It is only for those who by the work of the Holy Spirit bow humbly before God in poverty of spirit, who mourn over and turn from their sin, who are meek and submissive to His control, and who hunger and thirst above all else for His righteousness. The way of mercy is the way of humility, repentance, surrender, and holiness.

...We cannot have the blessing apart from the Blessor. We cannot even meet the condition apart from the One who has set the condition. We are **blessed** by God when we are **merciful** to others, and we are able to be merciful to others because we have already received salvation’s mercy. And when we share the mercy received, **we shall receive mercy** even beyond what we already have. We never sing more truthfully than when we sing, “Mercy there was great and grace was free; pardon there was multiplied to me; there my burdened soul found liberty, at Calvary.”

THE _____ OF MERCY

The most obvious way we can show mercy is through physical acts, as did the good Samaritan. As Jesus specifically commands, we are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and give any other practical help that is needed. In serving others in need, we demonstrate a heart of mercy.

It is helpful to note that the way of mercy did not begin with the New Testament. God has always intended for mercy to characterize His people. The Old Testament law taught, “You shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks” (Deut. 15:7–8). Even in the year of release, when all debts were canceled, Israelites were to give their poor countrymen whatever they needed. They were warned, “Beware, lest there is a base thought in your heart, saying ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing” (v. 9).

Mercy is also to be shown in our attitudes. Mercy does not hold a grudge, harbor resentment, capitalize on another’s failure or weakness, or publicize another’s sin...The vindictive, heartless, indifferent are not subjects of Christ’s kingdom. When they pass need by on the other side, as the priest and the Levite did in the story of the good Samaritan, they show they have passed Christ by.

Mercy is also to be shown spiritually. First, it is shown through pity. Augustine said, “If I weep for the body from which the soul is departed, should I not weep for the soul from which God is departed?” The sensitive Christian will grieve more for lost souls than for lost bodies. Because we have experienced God’s mercy, we are to have great concern for those who have not.

Jesus’ last words from the cross were words of mercy. For His executioners He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). To the penitent thief hanging beside Him He said, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (v. 43). To His mother He said, “ ‘Woman, behold your son!’ Then He said to the disciple [John], ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household” (John 19:26–27). Like his Master, Stephen prayed for those who were taking his life, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” (Acts 7:60).

Second, we are to show spiritual mercy by confrontation. Paul says that, as Christ’s servants, we should gently correct “those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25). We are to be willing to confront others about their sin in order that they might come to God for salvation. When certain teachers were “upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain,” Paul told Titus to “reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith” (Titus 1:11, 13). Love and mercy will be severe when that is necessary for the sake of an erring brother and for the sake of Christ’s church. In such cases it is cruel to say nothing and let the harm continue...

Third, we are to show spiritual mercy by praying. The sacrifice of prayer for those without God is an act of mercy. Our mercy can be measured by our prayer for the unsaved and for Christians who are walking in disobedience.

Fourth, we are to show spiritual mercy by proclaiming the saving gospel of Jesus Christ—the most merciful thing we can do.

THE _____ OF MERCY

Reflecting on the fact that when we are **merciful** we **receive mercy**, we see God's cycle of mercy. God is merciful to us by saving us through Christ; in obedience we are merciful to others; and God in faithfulness gives us even more mercy, pouring out blessing for our needs and withholding severe chastening for our sin.

As in the other beatitudes, the emphatic pronoun *autos* (**they**) indicates that *only* those who are merciful qualify to **receive mercy**. David sang of the Lord, "With the kind Thou dost show Thyself kind" (2 Sam. 22:26). Speaking of the opposite side of the same truth, James says, "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:13). At the end of the disciples' prayer Jesus explained, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14–15). Again the emphatic truth is that God will respond with chastening for an unforgiving disciple.

Neither in that passage nor in this beatitude is Jesus speaking of our mercy gaining us salvation. We do not earn salvation by being merciful. We must be saved by God's mercy before we can truly *be* merciful. We cannot work our way into heaven even by a lifetime of merciful deeds, any more than by good works of any sort. God does not give mercy for merit; He gives mercy in grace, because it is needed, not because it is earned.

Conclusion

To illustrate the working of God's mercy Jesus told the parable of a slave who had been graciously forgiven a great debt by the king. The man then went to a fellow slave who owed him a pittance by comparison and demanded that every cent be repaid and had him thrown into prison. When the king heard of the incident, he called the first man to him and said, " 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart" (Matt. 18:23–35).

In that parable Jesus gives a picture of God's saving mercy in relation to forgiving others (vv. 21–22). The first man pleaded with God for mercy and received it. The fact that he, in turn, was unmerciful was so inconsistent with his own salvation that he was chastened until he repented. The Lord will chasten, if need be, to produce repentance in a stubborn child. Mercy to others is a mark of salvation. When we do not show it, we may be disciplined until we do. When we hold back mercy, God restricts His flow of mercy to us, and we forfeit blessing. The presence of chastening and the absence of blessing attend an unmerciful believer.

If we have received from a holy God unlimited mercy that cancels our unpayable debt of sin—we who had no righteousness but were poor in spirit, mourning over our load of sin in beggarly,

helpless condition, wretched and doomed, meek before almighty God, hungry and thirsty for a righteousness we did not have and could not attain—it surely follows that we should be merciful to others.

Lesson 16 (4-21-24)

Blessed Are the Pure (Matthew 5:8)

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

- Matthew 5:8 ESV

Pure in heart should not be restricted to moral, still less sexual, purity; it denotes one who loves God with all his heart (Deut. 6:5), with an undivided loyalty, and whose inward nature corresponds with his outward profession (cf. Isa. 29:13). ‘Such is the generation of those who seek him’ (Ps. 24:6), and they receive the promise that *they shall see God*. This can only fully be realized in heaven, when ‘we shall see him as he is’ (1 John 3:2); then ‘we shall be like him’, and the longings of v. 6 will be finally satisfied. But in a lesser sense the vision of God is already the experience of his true lovers on earth, who persevere in his service ‘as seeing him who is invisible’ (Heb. 11:27).¹

Discussion Questions

Think of someone you know whom you would describe as “pure in heart.” What are the distinguishing marks of that person’s life?

What is the meaning of *pure* in this text?

What is the meaning of *heart* in this text?

How can a person become “pure in heart?”

What does it mean that the pure in heart *shall see God*?

Can the pure in heart see God now? If so, how?

How can Christians enhance their purity of heart?

¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 116.

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 53–60.]

In 1982 the *Los Angeles Times* carried the story of Anna Mae Pennica, a sixty-two-year-old woman who had been blind from birth. At age forty-seven she married a man she met in a Braille class; and for the first fifteen years of their marriage he did the seeing for both of them until he completely lost his vision to retinitis pigmentosa. Mrs. Pennica had never seen the green of spring or the blue of a winter sky. Yet because she had grown up in a loving, supportive family, she never felt resentful about her handicap and always exuded a remarkably cheerful spirit.

Then in October 1981 Dr. Thomas Pettit of the Jules Stein Eye Institute of the University of California at Los Angeles performed surgery to remove the rare congenital cataracts from the lens of her left eye—and Mrs. Pennica saw for the first time ever! The newspaper account does not record her initial response, but it does tell us that she found that everything was “so much bigger and brighter” than she ever imagined. While she immediately recognized her husband and others she had known well, other acquaintances were taller or shorter, heavier or skinnier than she had pictured them.

Since that day Mrs. Pennica has hardly been able to wait to wake up in the morning, splash her eyes with water, put on her glasses, and enjoy the changing morning light. Her vision is almost 20/30—good enough to pass a driver's test.

Think how wonderful it must have been for Anna Mae Pennica when she looked for the first time at the faces she had only felt, or when she saw the kaleidoscope of a Pacific sunset or a tree waving its branches or a bird in flight. The gift of physical sight is wonderful. And the miracle of seeing for the first time can hardly be described.

Yet there is a seeing that surpasses even this—and that is seeing God. Since nothing is higher than God, seeing God is logically the greatest joy one can experience. Thus, when we pass from this world and see the face of Christ, the joy of that first split second will transcend all the accumulated joys of life. It will be the highest good, the *summum bonum*, the greatest joy, beside which the wonderful story of Mrs. Pennica's “miracle” fades in comparison.

This is what the sixth Beatitude is about—seeing God. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Jesus' words tell us how to get 20/20 spiritual vision. If we want to see God, this is *the* great text.

THE BEATITUDE: “BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART”

As we begin, we must determine what “pure” means. Its Old Testament usage tells us that it refers to internal cleansing. Very likely Jesus’ reference to “pure in heart” comes from the famous rhetorical answer to the questions of Psalm 24:3, 4: “Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

Significantly, the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the time when God would give the people clean hearts. Ezekiel records God’s words:

“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (36:25, 26)

Jeremiah similarly envisaged a new covenant in which God would put his “law in their minds and write it on their hearts” (31:33). In Jesus’ day the need was urgent because of the Pharisees’ externalizing. Hence Jesus’ warning:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.” (Matthew 23:25–28)

The Pharisees could well be characterized as saying, “Blessed are the outwardly clean, for they shall see God.” So we see the necessity for the sixth Beatitude’s call for a radical inner purity: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

In addition to this primary meaning, “pure” also calls for a purity of devotion. William Barclay tells us that the Greek word was used to describe clear water, sometimes metals without alloy, sometimes grain that had been winnowed, and sometimes feelings that are unmixed. As it is used in our text, it carries the idea of being free from every taint of evil.

We must keep this squarely in mind because it is normally supposed that “pure” as in “pure in heart” primarily refers to being pure in mind regarding matters of sensuality. It certainly includes these matters. But the idea cannot be so limited, for it goes far deeper. Here in the sixth Beatitude it means a heart that does not bring mixed motives and divided loyalties to its relationship with God. It is a heart of singleness in devotion to God—pure, unmixed devotion. James refers to this idea when he says, “Purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). That is, “Get rid of your mixed motives, your duplicity, your double-mindedness; be simple and pure in your devotion. (Cf. the commendations for an “undivided heart” in Psalm 86:11, Jeremiah 32:39, Ezekiel 11:19, 1 Corinthians 7:35.)

Negatively, we can imagine this idea from everyday life if we reflect on those people who, having been introduced to us, keep talking and smiling, while at the same time looking behind and around us at other people and things. They really are not interested in us; they only see us as objects or a means to an end. In the God-man relationship such behavior is scandalous. Positively stated then, “pure” is represented by the words *focus, absorption, concentration, sincerity, and singleness*.

“Blessed are the pure” is a searching statement, because focusing on God with a singleness of heart is one of the biggest challenges to twentieth-century Christians. Very few in this frenetic age are capable of the spiritual attention this Beatitude calls for.

Depth of Devotion

The depth of what is called for here is seen in the qualifying words “in heart.” We are to be singly focused “in heart” on God. In the Bible, *heart* means more than just the mind; it also includes the emotions and the will. It is the totality of our ability to think, feel, and decide. So “pure in heart” means that not only our minds but our feelings and actions are to be concentrated singly on God. If our focus is merely intellectual, we are not pure in heart. As Martyn Lloyd-Jones paraphrases it, “Blessed are those who are pure, not only on the surface but in the center of their being and at the source of every activity.” This is a daunting requirement—a radical cleanness of heart, totally focused on God.

The depth of this heart requirement is further underlined by the realization that it is from the heart that all our human problems come. Jeremiah said, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jeremiah 17:9). Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Matthew 15:19). Again he said, “Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean.’ ... For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts” (Mark 7:15, 21). The Scriptures are conclusive. But our hearts tell us the same. All we have to do is look into our own hearts of darkness, observing the mixed motives, the distractions, the divided loyalties, to know this is perfectly true.

An Impossible Depth

The looming question is, therefore, how can we ever accomplish this? This Beatitude is beyond our reach. Jesus is asking for perfection. And at the end of the first section of the Sermon on the Mount, this is precisely what he says: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). This drives us to despair, for none of us *perfectly* models any of the Beatitudes. None of us perfectly exhibits a poverty of spirit. None of us perfectly mourns our sins. None of us is perfectly humble and gentle. None of us perfectly thirsts. No one is perfectly pure in heart.

Then what are we to do? There is only one answer. We must cast ourselves on the grace of God and thus receive his radical renewal. We must ask him to implant and nourish the character of the kingdom in our lives. If we do this, these qualities will take root and grow within us, though we will never attain absolute perfection in this life.

If the character of the kingdom is not present, then we must question whether we are truly believers. Here, with the sixth Beatitude—“Blessed [approved] are the pure in heart”—we must ask ourselves, “Is my heart clean, and do I know anything of single-hearted devotion to God?” The answers to these searching questions may indicate the authenticity of our faith or, if we are believers, the state of our spiritual health. God demands a humanly impossible character, and then gives us that character by his grace. And with that he bestows a humanly impossible vision.

THE BOON: “FOR THEY WILL SEE GOD”

The Beatitude’s sublime benefit is a vision of God himself. Here, as in the preceding Beatitudes, the word “they” is emphatic: “for they [they alone] will see God.” And as with the other Beatitudes, the future is in immediate reference to what goes before. They will see God as they become pure in heart. And the seeing is continuous.

What this means is that it is possible to actually see God in this life—now. I think this is what blind and deaf Helen Keller meant when someone bluntly said to her, “Isn’t it terrible to be blind?” To which she responded, “Better to be blind and see with your heart, than to have two good eyes and see nothing.” Perhaps if it were possible for her to have heard of Mrs. Pennica’s miraculous operation, she would have said, “That is wonderful. But there is yet a better seeing.”

Christians see God now. Of course, they do not see him in his total being, because that would be too much for them. However, they do see him in many ways. That has been my experience. Before I became a Christian I won a Bible-reading contest, but the words meant nothing to me. Just a short time later when I met Christ, the Word of God came alive. I couldn’t get enough. I even read at night with my flashlight! The Bible was living, and I saw God in its pages.

Believers also see and celebrate God in creation. Psalm 29 records that David watched a thunderstorm and saw God. Of thunder he says, “The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic” (vv. 3, 4). When David saw the lightning his response was, “The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning” (v. 7). This kind of seeing is the special possession of the believer. We see the footprints and the hand of God in nature.

Those of faith also see him in the events of life—even difficulties. Job exclaimed after his varied experiences of life, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5).

Seeing More of _____

The sixth Beatitude tells us that the purer our hearts become, the more we will see of God in this life. The more our hearts are focused on God, absorbed with him, concentrated on his being, freed from distractions, sincere—*single*, the more we will see him. As our hearts become purer, the more the Word lives and the more creation speaks. Even the adverse circumstances of life seem to sharpen our vision of God.

Seeing God in this life is the *summum bonum*—the highest good, because those who see him become more and more like him. “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

_____ Seeing

But there is even more to seeing God, for the “pure in heart” will one day see him face to face. As we have said, in that split second of recognition believers will experience more joy than the sum total of accumulated joys of a long life. They will behold the dazzling blaze of his being that has been, and will always be, the abiding fascination of angels. Scripture and reason demand that we understand that it will be the greatest event of our eternal existence—the *visio Dei*, the vision of God. We need to believe it! We need the faith and vision of Job who said, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25–27). Fainting hearts should be our reaction at the prospect of the vision of God.

Now think of the complete Beatitude: “Blessed [approved of God] are the pure in heart [those with a clean, unmixed heart for God] for they will [continuously] see God [in life and in eternity].” Have we experienced, do we know, a purity of heart, an unmixed devotion to God? This is not to suggest that this is our perfect experience at every moment. But rather, do we ever experience it? Moreover, is this singleness our desire? If not, listen closely, for the answer exists.

ON RECEIVING _____

The irony of Mrs. Pennica’s “miracle,” according to Dr. Pettit, was that “surgical techniques available as far back as the 1940s could have corrected her problem.” Mrs. Pennica lived forty of her sixty-two sightless years needlessly blind! Now hear this, and hear it well: The “technique” for curing spiritual blindness has existed for two millennia. The procedure is radical and 100% effective, because God is the physician. You must be born again. To be pure in heart, you must be given a new heart.

When Jesus informed Nicodemus of this necessity, Nicodemus quite naturally questioned how it could be. Jesus answered, “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John

3:6), saying in effect, “That which is animal is animal, that which is vegetable is vegetable, and that which is of the Spirit is spirit. Nicodemus, it is radical indeed.” Jesus explained how spiritual birth happens in these words: “You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:7, 8). That is to say, “Nicodemus, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. You do not see his work, just as you do not see the wind, but only its effects.” To us he says, “Trust God’s Word, believe that Jesus’ death on the cross paid the penalty for your sins, and thereby receive a new, pure heart in place of your heart of darkness.” It is a miracle. It is all of God. It is free. It is yours as you believe.

Conclusion

For those of us who are Christians, this text is also an opportunity to develop and enhance the purity and focus of our hearts.

First, *be absolutely honest with God about your heart’s condition*. Is your heart inwardly clean? And more, is it pure in its focus on God? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the exact state of your heart.

Second, *acknowledge that only God can make your heart pure*. This is not to suggest passivity. Paul tells us, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12, 13). James says, “Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8). The Biblical balance is: I must do everything I can and still realize that it is not enough; only God can make my heart pure (cf. Romans 11:6 and Ephesians 2:7a).

Third, *fill yourself with God’s Word*. In the Upper Room Jesus told his disciples, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). Immersion and interaction with God’s Word will purify.

Fourth, *think about what you will be in eternity*. Make that hope a prominent aspect of your meditation. The Apostle John is very exact in explaining what such a hope will do to us:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:2, 3)

You and I are going to be transformed at the *visio Dei* into the likeness of Christ. This is the most stupendous thing we could ever be told! This is our purifying hope. Hear Paul’s charge to look for that day:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11–14)

Lesson 17 (4-28-24)

Blessed Are the Peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

- Matthew 5:9 ESV

In a world characterized by conflict and rivalry, a keeper of the peace is rare, a *peacemaker* still rarer. The absence of selfish ambition which has marked the earlier beatitudes provides the only basis for this quality, which is particularly pleasing to God (Ps. 34:14). God is the supreme peacemaker (cf. Eph. 2:14–18; Col. 1:20) and this quality marks disciples out as his *sons*, for the son shares the characteristics of the father.¹

Discussion Questions

What is peace?

How would you describe the connection between making peace and being a child of God?

Where does peace come from?

What are the main obstacles to peace?

What are some characteristics of a peacemaker?

Describe a time when you were a peacemaker.

How can you be a peacemaker in your home? At church? At work? In your neighborhood? At athletic events?

What are the costs of being a peacemaker?

¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 116.

What are the rewards of being a peacemaker?

How does this seventh Beatitude relate to the first six Beatitudes?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 209–218.*]

The God of peace (Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9) has emphasized that cherished but elusive reality by making peace one of the dominant ideas of His Word. Scripture contains four hundred direct references to peace, and many more indirect ones. The Bible opens with peace in the Garden of Eden and closes with peace in eternity. The spiritual history of mankind can be charted based on the theme of peace. Although the peace on earth in the garden was interrupted when man sinned, at the cross Jesus Christ made peace a reality again, and He becomes the peace of all who place their faith in Him. Peace can now reign in the hearts of those who are His. Someday He will come as Prince of Peace and establish a worldwide kingdom of peace, which will eventuate in ultimate peace, the eternal age of peace.

But one of the most obvious facts of history and of human experience is that peace does not characterize man's earthly existence. There is no peace now for two reasons: the opposition of Satan and the disobedience of man. The fall of the angels and the fall of man established a world without peace. Satan and man are engaged with the God of peace in a battle for sovereignty...The seventh beatitude calls God's people to be peacemakers. He has called us to a special mission to help restore the peace lost at the Fall.

The peace of which Christ speaks in this beatitude, and about which the rest of Scripture speaks, is unlike that which the world knows and strives for. God's peace has nothing to do with politics, armies and navies, forums of nations, or even councils of churches. It has nothing to do with statesmanship, no matter how great, or with arbitration, compromise, negotiated truces, or treaties. God's peace, the peace of which the Bible speaks, never evades issues; it knows nothing of peace at any price. It does not gloss or hide, rationalize or excuse. It confronts problems and seeks to solve them, and after the problems are solved it builds a bridge between those who were separated by the problems. It often brings its own struggle, pain, hardship, and anguish, because such are often the price of healing. It is not a peace that will be brought by kings, presidents, prime ministers, diplomats, or international humanitarians. It is the inner personal peace that only He can give to the soul of man and that only His children can exemplify.

Four important realities about God's peace are revealed:

THE _____ OF PEACE: RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUTH

The essential fact to comprehend is that the peace about which Jesus speaks is more than the absence of conflict and strife; it is the presence of righteousness. Only righteousness can produce the relationship that brings two parties together. Men can stop fighting without righteousness, but they cannot live peaceably without righteousness. Righteousness not only puts an end to harm, but it administers the healing of love.

God's peace not only stops war but replaces it with the righteousness that brings harmony and true well-being. Peace is a creative, aggressive force for goodness. The Jewish greeting *shalom* wishes "peace" and expresses the desire that the one who is greeted will have all the righteousness and goodness God can give. The deepest meaning of the term is "God's highest good to you."

The most that man's peace can offer is a truce, the temporary cessation of hostilities. But whether on an international scale or an individual scale, a truce is seldom more than a cold war. Until disagreements and hatreds are resolved, the conflicts merely go underground—where they tend to fester, grow, and break out again. God's peace, however, not only stops the hostilities but settles the issues and brings the parties together in mutual love and harmony.

James confirms the nature of God's peace when he writes, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17). God's way to peace is through purity. Peace cannot be attained at the expense of righteousness. Two people cannot be at peace until they recognize and resolve the wrong attitudes and actions that caused the conflict between them, and then bring themselves to God for cleansing. Peace that ignores the cleansing that brings purity is not God's peace.

The writer of Hebrews links peace with purity when he instructs believers to "pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Peace cannot be divorced from holiness. "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other" is the beautiful expression of the psalmist (Ps. 85:10). Biblically speaking, then, where there is true peace there is righteousness, holiness, and purity. Trying to bring harmony by compromising righteousness forfeits both.

Jesus' saying "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34) seems to be the antithesis of the seventh beatitude. His meaning, however, was that the peace He came to bring is not peace at any price. There will be opposition before there is harmony; there will be strife before there is peace. To be peacemakers on God's terms requires being peacemakers on the terms of truth and righteousness—to which the world is in fierce opposition. When believers bring truth to bear on a world that loves falsehood, there will be strife. When believers set God's standards of

righteousness before a world that loves wickedness, there is an inevitable potential for conflict. Yet that is the only way...

THE _____ OF PEACE: GOD

Men are without peace because they are without God, the source of peace. Both the Old and New Testaments are replete with statements of God's being the God of peace (Lev. 26:6; 1 Kings 2:33; Ps. 29:11; Isa. 9:6; Ezek. 34:25; Rom. 15:33; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Thess. 3:16). Since the Fall, the only peace that men have known is the peace they have received as the gift of God. Christ's coming to earth was the peace of God coming to earth, because only Jesus Christ could remove sin, the great barrier to peace. "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace" (Eph. 2:13–14).

...Christ brings back together God and man, reconciling and bringing peace. "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:19–20). How could the cross bring peace? At the cross all of man's hatred and anger was vented against God. On the cross the Son of God was mocked, cursed, spit upon, pierced, reviled, and killed. Jesus' disciples fled in fear, the sky flashed lightning, the earth shook violently, and the veil of the Temple was torn in two. Yet through that violence God brought peace. God's greatest righteousness confronted man's greatest wickedness, and righteousness won. And because righteousness won, peace was won...

If the Father is the source of peace, and the Son is the manifestation of that peace, then the Holy Spirit is the agent of that peace. One of the most beautiful fruits the Holy Spirit gives to those in whom He resides is the fruit of peace (Gal. 5:22). The God of peace sent the Prince of Peace who sends the Spirit of peace to give the fruit of peace. No wonder the Trinity is called Yahweh Shalom, "The Lord is Peace" (Judg. 6:24).

The God of peace intends peace for His world, and the world that He created in peace He will one day restore to peace. The Prince of Peace will establish His kingdom of peace, for a thousand years on earth and for all eternity in heaven. " 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope' " (Jer. 29:11). Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The one who does not belong to God through Jesus Christ can neither have peace nor be a peacemaker. God can work peace through us only if He has worked peace in us...

THE _____ OF PEACE: BELIEVERS

The messengers of peace are believers in Jesus Christ. Only they can be peacemakers. Only those who belong to the Maker of peace can be messengers of peace. Paul tells us that "God has called us to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15) and that "now all these things are from God, who

reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:18). The ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of peacemaking. Those whom God has called to peace He also calls to make peace. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us” (2 Cor. 5:19–20).

At least four things characterize a peacemaker. **First**, he is one who himself has made peace with God. The gospel is all about peace. Before we came to Christ we were at war with God. No matter what we may consciously have thought about God, our hearts were against Him. It was “while we were enemies” of God that “we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom. 5:10). When we received Christ as Savior and He imputed His righteousness to us, our battle with God ended, and our peace with God began. Because he has made peace with God he can enjoy the peace of God (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15). And because he has been given God’s peace he is called to share God’s peace. He is to have his very feet shod with “the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15)...

Second, a peacemaker leads others to make peace with God. Christians are not an elite corps of those who have spiritually arrived and who look down on the rest of the world. They are a body of sinners cleansed by Jesus Christ and commissioned to carry His gospel of cleansing to the rest of the world...

Third, a peacemaker helps others make peace with others. The moment a person comes to Christ he becomes at peace with God and with the church and becomes himself a peacemaker in the world. A peacemaker builds bridges between men and God and also between men and other men. The second kind of bridge building must begin, of course, between ourselves and others. Jesus said that if we are bringing a gift to God and a brother has something against us, we are to leave our gift at the altar and be reconciled to that brother before we offer the gift to God (Matt. 5:23–24). As far as it is possible, Paul says, “so far as it depends on [us],” we are to “be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18). We are even to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, “in order that [we] may be sons of [our] Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:44–45)...

Fourth, a peacemaker endeavors to find a point of agreement. God’s truth and righteousness must never be compromised or weakened, but there is hardly a person so ungodly, immoral, rebellious, pagan, or indifferent that we have absolutely no point of agreement with him. Wrong theology, wrong standards, wrong beliefs, and wrong attitudes must be faced and dealt with, but they are not usually the best places to start the process of witnessing or peacemaking.

God’s people are to contend without being contentious, to disagree without being disagreeable, and to confront without being abusive. The peacemaker speaks the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). To start with love is to start toward peace. We begin peacemaking by starting with whatever peaceful point of agreement we can find. Peace helps beget peace. The peacemaker always gives others the benefit of the doubt. He never assumes they will resist the gospel or

reject his testimony. When he does meet opposition, he tries to be patient with other people's blindness and stubbornness just as he knows the Lord was, and continues to be, patient with his own blindness and stubbornness.

God's most effective peacemakers are often the simplest and least noticed people. They do not try to attract attention to themselves. They seldom win headlines or prizes for their peacemaking, because, by its very nature, true peacemaking is unobtrusive and prefers to go unnoticed. Because they bring righteousness and truth wherever they go, peacemakers are frequently accused of being troublemakers and disturbers of the peace—as Ahab accused Elijah of being (1 Kings 18:17) and the Jewish leaders accused Jesus of being (Luke 23:2, 5). But God knows their hearts, and He honors their work because they are working for His peace in His power. God's peacemakers are never unfruitful or unrewarded. This is a mark of a true kingdom citizen: he not only hungers for righteousness and holiness in his own life but has a passionate desire to see those virtues in the lives of others.

THE _____ OF PEACE: ETERNAL SONSHIP IN THE KINGDOM

The merit, or result, of peacemaking is eternal blessing as God's children in God's kingdom. Peacemakers **shall be called sons of God**. Most of us are thankful for our heritage, our ancestors, our parents, and our family name. It is especially gratifying to have been influenced by godly grandparents and to have been raised by godly parents. But the greatest human heritage cannot match the believer's heritage in Jesus Christ, because we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17). Nothing compares to being a child of God.

Both *huios* and *teknon* are used in the New Testament to speak of believers' relationship to God. *Teknon* (child) is a term of tender affection and endearment as well as of relationship (see John 1:12; Eph. 5:8; 1 Pet. 1:14; etc.). **Sons**, however, is from *huios*, which expresses the dignity and honor of the relationship of a child to his parents. As God's peacemakers we are promised the glorious blessing of eternal sonship in His eternal kingdom.

Peacemaking is a hallmark of God's children. A person who is not a peacemaker either is not a Christian or is a disobedient Christian. The person who is continually disruptive, divisive, and quarrelsome has good reason to doubt his relationship to God altogether. God's sons—that is, all of His children, both male and female—are peacemakers. Only God determines who His children are, and He has determined that they are the humble, the penitent over sin, the gentle, the seekers of righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers.

Shall be called is in a continuous future passive tense. Throughout eternity peacemakers will go by the name "children of God." The passive form indicates that all heaven will call peacemakers **sons of God**, because God Himself has declared them to be His children...God puts the tears of His children in a bottle (Ps. 56:8), a figure reflecting the Hebrew custom of placing into a bottle the tears shed over a loved one. God cares for us so much that He stores up His remembrances of our sorrows and afflictions. God's children matter greatly to Him, and it is no little thing that we can call Him Father.

God's peacemakers will not always have peace in the world. As Jesus makes clear by the last beatitude, persecution follows peacemaking. In Christ we have forsaken the false peace *of* the world, and consequently we often will not have peace *with* the world. But as God's children we may always have peace even while we are *in* the world—the peace of God, which the world cannot give and the world cannot take away.

Conclusion

This seventh Beatitude is the last Beatitude that describes the *character* of the Christian, and all the other Beatitudes build up to it. Peacemakers are developed as they ascend the ladder (the spiritual logic) of the Beatitudes.

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|-------------------------|--|
| <i>Beatitude One:</i> | These have experienced poverty of spirit (the recognition that there is nothing within them to commend them to God). In fact, it remains their ongoing awareness and as such is the ground for ongoing spiritual blessing. |
| <i>Beatitude Two:</i> | These have come face to face with their own sin, and they mourn over it. |
| <i>Beatitude Three:</i> | Due to the authenticity of their poverty of spirit and mourning, these experience gentle ness and humility in dealing with others. |
| <i>Beatitude Four:</i> | Because these have experienced poverty of spirit and mourning and meekness, they hunger and thirst for all righteousness. |
| <i>Beatitude Five:</i> | The reality of their own need has made these merciful to others. |
| <i>Beatitude Six:</i> | These have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and their pure lives are focused on him, and thus they are blessed with an ongoing vision of God. |
| <i>Beatitude Seven:</i> | And now these, having been so infused by Christ's peace and the character of the kingdom, are peacemakers. |

Peacemakers are those through whom the entire Beatitudes course again and again—sometimes in order, sometimes out of order, sometimes singly, sometimes all together. They have the character of the King—they are peacemakers.²

² R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 67–68.

Lesson 18 (5-5-24)

Blessed Are the Persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12)

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Matthew 5:10-12 ESV

These three verses address persecution and likely reflect the situation of those who first read Matthew’s Gospel (which may explain why the theme receives such extensive treatment). Later in the narrative, Jesus encounters each form of persecution recorded here and suffers the same fate as many OT prophets (see Matt 23:29–37).¹

Those who are “persecuted because of righteousness” are those who are wrongly treated for their stand for the gospel message. Since Jesus himself will experience opposition and persecution, his disciples should expect the same. Their reward may not come on earth, but it will surely come in heaven.²

Of all the beatitudes, this last one seems the most contrary to human thinking and experience. The world does not associate happiness with humility, mourning over sin, gentleness, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, or peacemaking holiness. Even less does it associate happiness with persecution.³

Discussion Questions

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake ...” is the only beatitude that receives further comment. How does 5:11–12 expand on it? Why do you think this beatitude alone was singled out for expanded treatment?

What does it mean to be “persecuted for righteousness’ sake?”

¹ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 5:10–12.

² David Gundersen, “Psalms,” in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1296.

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Matthew*, vol. 1, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 219.

Identify some differences between being persecuted for the sake of Christ and simply drawing opposition for being obnoxious.

Are *all* believers persecuted? Explain.

What might persecution look like in our context?

Kent Hughes states, “By far the greatest reason there is so little persecution is that the church has become like the world.” Do you agree with this statement? Explain.

Why would the world hate the kind of people described in the Beatitudes?

What reasons did Jesus give us to rejoice when we are persecuted?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 69–75.]

As we take up the final Beatitude we find a divinely composed paradox that involves the relationship of persecution and joy. To read this Beatitude for the first time is shocking. Imagine hearing these lines for the first time ever.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:10–12)

One of the Puritan commentators believed that the reason Christ repeated himself was because the statement was so incredible! And he was probably right.

Until now all the Beatitudes have been given in the third person—“Blessed are those,” and that is the way this Beatitude begins. But the repetition in verse 11 changes to the direct address of the second person—“Blessed are *you* when people insult *you*, persecute *you* ...” (emphasis

added). The repetition of the Beatitude, its personalization, and its position at the end of the list tell us that it is of supreme importance for the church. Significantly, when stretched on the loom of adversity the church has repeatedly woven persecution and joy into garments of divine praise.

JOY IN PRISON

Supernatural joy amidst trial has been the experience of the church. When Peter and the other apostles were flogged before the Sanhedrin soon after Pentecost, “the apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Acts 5:41).

Samuel Rutherford, the saintly Scottish pastor, wrote from his prison stay, “I never knew by my nine years of preaching so much of Christ’s love, as He taught me in Aberdeen by six months imprisonment.” “Christ’s cross,” he also said, “is such a burden as sails are to a ship or wings to a bird.”

And in our own time a Romanian pastor describes how he was imprisoned and tortured mercilessly and yet experienced joy. Locked in solitary confinement, he had been summoned by his captors, who cut chunks of flesh from his body, and was then returned to his cell, where he was starved. Yet in the midst of this sadism, there were times when the joy of Christ so overcame him that he would pull himself up and shuffle about the cell in holy dance. So remarkable was his joy that on his release from prison and his return to his home, he chose to fast the first day in memorial to the joy he had known in prison.

Hearing stories like these, we naturally ask how it is possible. In partial answer, notice that they did not *enjoy* persecution. To suggest that one should enjoy persecution is to suggest a perversion. We also must understand that persecution of itself is neither blessed nor joyous. However, there is a kind of persecution that has God’s blessing and results in joy.

THE PERSECUTION THAT BRINGS JOY

The Beatitude does not say, “Blessed are the persecuted, period!” Unfortunately, this is the way it is sometimes interpreted. And those who read it like this delude themselves into thinking that any time they experience conflict they are bearing the reproach of Christ...

Sadly, Christians are very often persecuted not for their Christianity, but for lack of it. Sometimes they are rejected simply because they have unpleasing personalities. They are rude, insensitive, thoughtless—or piously obnoxious. Some are rejected because they are discerned as proud and judgmental. Others are disliked because they are lazy and irresponsible. Incompetence mixed with piety is sure to bring rejection.

Christ's words must be read in their entirety. "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." In context, this is the righteousness (righteous living) taught in the preceding Beatitudes. The world cannot tolerate such a life. Why?

First, poverty of spirit runs counter to the pride of the unbelieving heart. Those whom the world admires are the self-sufficient who need nothing else, not the poor in spirit. Second, the mourning, repentant heart that sorrows over its own sin and the sins of society is not appreciated by the world. Third, the gentle and meek person, the one who has the strength not to take up a personal offense, is regarded as weak by those who do not know Christ. Conventional wisdom has it that "meekness is weakness."

Fourth, hungering and thirsting for the spiritual—for Christ—is foreign and repugnant to a world that lusts after only what it can touch and taste. Fifth, the truly merciful person who not only feels compassion and forgiveness but who gives it is out of step with the grudge-bearing callousness of our age. This person is an awkward, embarrassing rebuke to the uncaring. Sixth, the pure, single-minded heart focused on God provides a convicting contrast to impure, self-focused culture. Seventh, the peacemaker is discomforting because he will not settle for a cheap or counterfeit peace and has an embarrassing inclination to wage peace.

The foundational reason such a person will be persecuted is that he or she is like Christ. This is Jesus' point when he completes verse 11 with "because of me" instead of "because of righteousness," used in verse 10. Everyone who lives like Jesus will be persecuted. Listen to Jesus' testimony in John 15:18–20:

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

Jesus tells us that since the wind was in his face, it will be in ours too. Hear Paul's advice to Timothy: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12). Paul also warned the Thessalonians, "You know quite well that we were destined for them [trials]. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know" (1 Thessalonians 3:3, 4). Likewise, he told the Christians in Antioch, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Few people who have lived in our time have understood and expressed this better than Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master.... That is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those "who are persecuted and martyred for the Gospel's sake."*...

Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and a token of His grace.

During a stressful time in Charles Spurgeon's life when he was depressed by criticism, his wife took a sheet of paper, printed the eight Beatitudes on it in large, old English style script, and tacked it to the ceiling over his bed. She wanted the reality to saturate his mind morning and evening: Everyone who lives righteously will be persecuted. There are no exceptions!

How Do We Measure Up?

The logic is revealing: since the first seven Beatitudes describe the character of the true believer, we must conclude that ostracism, persecution, and rejection are just as much signs of the believer as being poor in spirit or merciful. We should not be surprised when persecution comes but rather, surprised when it does not. Therefore, if the person who claims to follow Christ never experiences any persecution at all, it may be reasonably asked if he really is a Christian.

If we evangelicals have never experienced rejection for the sake of the kingdom, are we citizens of the kingdom? If we have not been out of step with the surrounding culture and suffered its disapproval because we practice the ethics of God's children, are we truly God's children? Of course, we should be careful not to condemn ourselves if at the moment we are not undergoing persecution. No one is persecuted all the time. Also, we must be careful not to imagine persecution in overly dramatic terms. Most of it is mundane, and some is even quite "civilized."

THE _____ OF PERSECUTION

The word rendered "persecuted" in Matthew 5:10 bears the root idea of "pursue" or "chase." A good translation is "harass"—"Blessed are the harassed." The reiteration of the Beatitude in verse 11 amplifies this idea: "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely." This casting of insults means literally "to cast in one's teeth," so that the sense here is of throwing insults in one's face. Persecution can go to physical extremes as the church's bloody history records; but most often it is verbal harassment, sometimes audible, sometimes whispered, sometimes direct, sometimes innuendo. Verbal abuse and social ostracism may call for as much heroism as braving the arena.

Other examples of what believers endure include the conscientious worker who has given twenty years of faithful service but has been repeatedly passed over because the brass are uncomfortable with his uncompromising ethics; or the friendly student who is systematically excluded from conversation because he does not rubber-stamp all that is said; or the housewife who is considered dull by her neighbors because she does not delight in their gossip. Such indifference and condescension can sometimes be harder to take than physical violence.

THE _____ OF PERSECUTION

These are hard things. But the tragedy today is not that they happen to believers, but that very often, they do not. One reason for this is that many Christians are cut off from the world. They go to a church that is 100 percent Christian, attend Bible studies that are 100 percent Christian, attend Christian schools, exercise with believers, garden with churchgoers, and golf with believers—and thus are sealed from persecution. Others keep their Christianity secret so as not to make waves with non-Christian associates. The tragedy is that hidden Christianity is probably not Christianity at all.

But by far the greatest reason there is so little persecution is that the church has become like the world. If you want to get along, the formula is simple. Approve of the world's morals and ethics—at least outwardly. Live like the world lives. Laugh at its humor. Immerse yourself in its entertainment. Smile benignly when God is mocked. Act as if all religions converge on the same road. Don't mention hell. Draw no moral judgments. Take no stand on the moral/political issues. Above all, do not share your faith. Follow this formula and it will be smooth sailing.

But the fact is, the church must be persecuted or it is no church at all. People need to be told that if they follow Christ, there will be a price to pay. It will affect how they get along at school. It will affect their profile at the club. It will affect how they make their living.

The early church had no doubt about where a believer's duty lay. One hundred years after Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, a man approached the great church father Tertullian with a problem—his business interests and Christianity conflicted. He ended by asking, "What can I do? I must live!" Tertullian replied, "Must you?" When it came to a choice between loyalty to Christ and living, Tertullian held that the real Christian chooses Christ. It is a glorious thing when the church and the individual are persecuted for righteousness' sake, because that means they are like Christ.

THE _____ OF PERSECUTION

Persecution is glorious because it is the persecuted who know elite joy. In Matthew 5:12 Christ, the ultimate persecuted man, said, "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." The persecuted ought to rejoice in the fact that they keep "classy" company with the likes of Jeremiah and Elijah.

But the ultimate source of the believer's rejoicing is the ultimate reward, for Jesus says, "great is your reward in heaven." When John D. Rockefeller died, the public became understandably curious about the size of the famous man's fortune. One reporter, determined to find out, secured an appointment with one of Rockefeller's highest aides. He asked the aide how much Rockefeller left behind. The man answered simply, "He left it all."

Not so for those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness! The reward is “great,” *polus*, which means “immeasurably great.” God will not permit what has been done for his glory to go unrewarded. Hear Paul’s assurances: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17). “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7, 8). What then will it be like for such saints the first thirty seconds in heaven? The first half hour? The first day? The first 10,000 years?

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our exposition of this eighth and last beatitude. We should add a word now for those who are not and who never will be great martyrs for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. That includes most of us. What about us? Well, we may be certain that God sees the little martyrs as well as the great ones, and that he is as pleased—sometimes more pleased—with the small sacrifices and small insults patiently borne for his sake as he is with the far more spectacular persecutions.

Think of the persecutions of Job—not the loss of his family and possessions by a series of calamities caused by Satan, this was not persecution—but the persecution he suffered from his friends who accused him of sinning greatly because of his sudden and tragic losses. What historian would ever have mentioned Job? None! No ancient historian would have thought twice about him. You can be certain that if Job had risen to wealth in New York City and had later died in poverty in Harlem, his name would not even have made the obituary columns of the New York newspapers. Yet the struggles of Job in his persecutions were viewed by God and angels.

It may take more grace and it may be a greater victory for a man to spend forty years of his life at the same desk in the same office watching other men being promoted over him because he will not do some of the things that are demanded of officers in his company than it would take for a John Hus to be burned at the stake for his testimony. And it may be more of a victory for a housewife to stay at home, raising her family in the things of the Lord while her nit-picking neighbors laugh at her for being humdrum and unglamorous, than it would be for a Joan of Arc to die at Rouen.

We may all take comfort in this, and turn to Christ for the victory. If we have not known persecution, even in little ways, let us search our hearts before him. And let us ask for that righteousness of character that will either repel men or draw them to our blessed Savior.⁴

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 53–54.

Appendix: Answer Guide

Lesson 10 (3-10-24)

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:1-3)

Poverty of Spirit is Essential for Knowing God's Approval

Poverty of Spirit is Essential for Salvation

Poverty of Spirit is Essential for Spiritual Growth

Lesson 11 (3-17-24)

Blessed Are the Mourners (Matthew 5:4)

THE BLESSED PARADOX

GOOD MOURNING!

THE COMFORT OF MOURNING

Lesson 12 (3-24-24)

Blessed Are the Meek (Matthew 5:5)

TENDER STEEL

TRUSTING STEEL

JESUS' MEEKNESS

Lesson 13 (3-31-24)

The Resurrection Body (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

1. There will be a great TRANSFORMATION. (v. 50-53)

2. There will be a great TRIUMPH. (v. 54-56)

3. There will be great THANKSGIVING. (v. 57)

4. The chapter closes with a great EXHORTATION. (v. 58)

Lesson 14 (4-7-24)

Blessed Are the Righteous (Matthew 5:6)

God's Answer

True Righteousness

A Perfect Righteousness

Hunger and Thirst

Lesson 15 (4-14-24)

Blessed Are the Merciful (Matthew 5:7)

THE SOURCE OF MERCY

THE PRACTICE OF MERCY

THE RESULT OF MERCY

Lesson 16 (4-21-24)

Blessed Are the Pure (Matthew 5:8)

Seeing More of God

Ultimate Seeing

ON RECEIVING SIGHT

Lesson 17 (4-28-24)

Blessed Are the Peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)

THE MEANING OF PEACE: RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUTH

THE MAKER OF PEACE: GOD

THE MESSENGERS OF PEACE: BELIEVERS

THE MERIT OF PEACE: ETERNAL SONSHIP IN THE KINGDOM

Lesson 18 (5-5-24)

Blessed Are the Persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12)

THE NATURE OF PERSECUTION

THE REAL TRAGEDY OF PERSECUTION

THE JOY OF PERSECUTION

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