

INTRODUCTION

People of God, two weeks ago we began a series on the sermon on the mount. There we were introduced to the glories of Christ's Heavenly kingdom. Today we are going to look at the Beatitudes, which are the cardinal virtues of the kingdom of Heaven. God's blessing is only to be found in and with those who live according to this rule.

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

What does it mean to be ‘blessed?’ To be blessed means two things: first is that God is your God, and you are His people. Your only comfort in life and death is that you do not belong to yourself, but you belong to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ. That is first meaning of blessed. It is a term of relation.

The second meaning of blessed describes the benefits that being in such relationship with God produces. Happy is another way to understand the Greek word for blessed. Happy is how Calvin even translated it in his commentary. But happy in our age is a bit to superficial.

Makarios is the word for blessed in Greek, and in the ancient world there were a whole bunch of sayings known as macarisms, which were “pronouncements, based on observation, that a certain way of being in the world, produces happiness, or, better yet, human flourishing and felicity.”¹ In the OT Hebrew we could

¹ Pennington, The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing, 42.

use the idea of Shalom, wholeness, and peace to get an understanding of the word.

Psalm 1 says blessed is the man who delights in the Torah and meditates on it day and night. He does not walk in the way of sinners. He is like a fruitful tree. That is, he flourishes, and prospers, and reproduces blessings to the world.

Likewise, Ps. 2, says, blessed, or, flourishing are those who take refuge in the Son.

Ps. 128 – flourishing is the man who fears Jehovah. He will eat the fruit of his labors, his wife is like a fruitful vine, he will see his children's children.

Likewise, Ps. 33:12 – Blessed, *flourishing* is the nation who God is Yahweh, the people he has chosen for his heritage.

Other images of blessed are a man sitting under his own vine and fig tree; or a land flowing with milk and honey. To be blessed is to experience an overabundance of provision. Or, if you go back to my introductory sermon 2 weeks ago, it is the Arthurian Kingdom of Summer I spoke of. That is truly a blessed, flourishing, and happy realm.

That is what is behind the idea of blessed intended here in the beatitudes.

To be poor in spirit does not mean having a low view of oneself. Low self-esteem, or having an inferiority complex is not the same as being poor in spirit. The person who thinks low of himself has the same problem as the person who thinks much of himself. His problem is, he thinks too much about himself.

“There is a great advantage” says Calvin, “in almost forgetting ourselves and in surely neglecting all selfish aspects.”

To be poor in spirit, therefore, is to be convinced of one’s own spiritual poverty.²

“To be poor in spirit means to be beggarly in spirit, and describes someone who is spiritually destitute and must rely entirely on the grace of God for salvation and deliverance. The poor in spirit are those who stand without pretense before God, stripped of all self-sufficiency, self-security, and self-righteousness.”³

A person who is poor in Spirit has been made conscious of their misery and want. Their old pride has been broken. They have begun to cry out ‘O God, be merciful to me, a sinner’ (Luke 18:13). The poor in spirit are those of a contrite heart and who tremble at God’s word (Is. 66:2; 57:15). They realize their own helplessness (Rom. 7:24), they expect nothing good from self, and rely upon God for everything.⁴

² Calvin, *Harmony of the Gospels*, 260, 261.

³ Charles Quarles, *Sermon the Mount*, 43, quoting Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 98.

⁴ Hendriksen, *NTC*, 269.

The poor in spirit are those who cry out to God for help, who depend entirely on God's grace to meet their needs, have humble and contrite hearts, experience God's deliverance, and enjoy his undeserved favor. Ps. 86:1-5 illustrates this beautifully:

Bow down Your ear, O Lord, hear me;

For I am poor and needy.

² Preserve my life, for I am holy;

You are my God;

Save Your servant who trusts in You!

³ Be merciful to me, O Lord,

For I cry to You all day long.

⁴ Rejoice the soul of Your servant,

For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

⁵ For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,

And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.

The kingdom of Heaven belongs to the poor in spirit. As I said two weeks ago, the kingdom of Heaven refers to the reign of God from Heaven over the earth and its inhabitants. The kingdom of Heaven, begins therefore, in the hearts of those who are poor in spirit. There is no room for pride and arrogance in the kingdom of Heaven.

That is the kingdom of the world, and of Satan, who boasted in his pride and was thrown down to the pit as a result. Anything that smells of the least bit of pride is an affront to the aroma of heaven and is a stench in God's nose. It is the noxious gas of

sulfur and brimstone. But the broken and contrite heart, the poor in spirit is one whose spirit is so lowly that God must lift him up in his grace and mercy. It is to this one God's looks upon with favor and blessedness, and in whose heart is the throne room of God.

**⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.**

People mourn for many reasons – sickness, pain, bereavement, material loss, wounded pride, troubled childhood, and tumultuous upbringing, financial loss, etc. The mourning that Christ speaks of here does not mean that you are sad about the fact you have had a hard and difficult life.

There are plenty of people who think that because they have suffered in this life, and they are run down, and things haven't gone the way they wanted, and are generally miserable because of it, that God owes them Heaven. They had all their hell here, and so when they die they will go to Heaven. This idea is reflected in an old rabbinic blessedness of mourning which said, "that much misery here makes up for punishment hereafter."⁵ This is not true.

Rather, the type of mourning spoken of here, follows naturally from being poor in spirit. Once a person recognizes their own spiritual poverty, they will then mourn over their own sins and the consequences it has led to in his or her own life. But such

⁵ Edersheim, 368.

mourning will propel them to be comforted in the free forgiveness of sins, and in the hope of the restoration of all things.

Concerning our mourning over sin, such mourning is not limited to ourselves. The Psalms are full of grieving and sorrow and sighing over all the wickedness of God's people, who do not walk uprightly according to the ways of their God, as well as cries of lamentation over the wicked enemies of God who use their great power and influence to bring shame, ruin, and destruction to God's people and the world.

Part of the ministry of Christ in the world is to comfort those who mourn because of such great evils in the world:

¹*The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me,
because he has anointed me*
²*To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,*
³*To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."*

It is the great Messianic hope that the Christ will right all the wrongs, and in that we find great comfort.

But a word of caution must here be spoken. As I said already, those who mourn are those who, first of all, mourn over their own sins. Only after you have adequately assessed the poverty of your own spiritual condition first, and mourning over our own sins, should we then move toward mourning over the sins of God's people, and of the unbelieving world. Why is this important?

Because there are those who are tempted to make a career in elevating the sins of others. There are those who enjoy throwing great big fits and tantrums over other peoples sins and failures, pointing out all the faults of others, and act as if those people's sins are the chief cause for why things are wrong in their life, and in the world. And yet these people never once bat an eye or duly consider the severity of their own sinfulness first, and how their sins negatively affect others, and the world.

GK Chesterton once wrote an article titled "What is Wrong?" And there he noted that "the answer to the question, 'What is Wrong?' is, or should be, 'I am wrong.' Until a man can give that answer his idealism is only a hobby."⁶

So for all the uproar that a person puts himself through in complaining and decrying the great evils of other people, for him, his idealism is just a hobby.

Like the Pharisee who justified himself that he was not as sinful as the tax collector. But he went away condemned. His only

⁶ GKC, Letter to the "Daily News", August 16, 1905, "What is Wrong"

concern is presenting himself as righteous before the eyes of others. Such a person is a hypocrite, and knows absolutely nothing of heart of the God he claims to believe in. It was the tax collector who couldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven, but only beat his breast and said, 'God be merciful upon me, a sinner' that went away justified.

Our Lord is clear, the person who is blessed, the person who knows God to be His God and to be receiver of God's good gifts and favor, and who will receive comfort, is the one who mourns his own sins.

⁵ **Blessed *are* the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.**

This third Beatitude follows quite naturally from the first two. To be meek is like being poor in spirit. "Being poor in spirit describes the man more as he is in himself, namely he has a broken heart. Whereas being meek pictures his relation toward God and his fellow man."⁷

To be meek therefore is to not be resentful, it is to bear no grudge. To be meek is to be of a mild and gentle disposition. A meek person is one who is not easily provoked by insults and injuries. He does not easily take offense, but is prepared to endure anything against him, rather than return sin for sin.⁸

⁷ Hendriksen, NTC, 271.

⁸ Calvin, 262.

A meek person knows that it is not a sin for him to be sinned against. And instead of retaliating back, like when one slaps him on the right cheek, he will turn to him the other cheek also. And if anyone sues him and takes his savings account, he will give him his 401K also.

A meek man does not live by an eye for eye, or a tooth for tooth. His greatest weapon is love. He loves his enemies, as his heavenly Father loves, and does good to the wicked and the righteous alike. The meek person finds his refuge in God and entrusts himself totally to the judge of all the earth to do what is right.⁹

The book of Hebrews pictures it like this, as “joyfully accepting the plundering of your property, since you yourselves have a better possession, and abiding one.” – Heb. 10:34.

People like that, Christ says, will inherit the earth. Which is quite remarkable since we know from experience and history that it is the strong oppressors who take from the poor righteous, and who hold power over the earth and its resources. But Psalm 37, which is the Psalm where Jesus gets this idea of the meek inheriting the earth, is written to encourage the poor persecuted righteous.

Although it appears that the wicked prosper and the good suffer, the meek are those who trust that God will indeed judge the wicked, and bless the righteous. All we have to do is wait expectantly for the Lord. And he will act. Ps. 37 says:

⁹ Hedriksen, 271.

*Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
²For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.*

*³Trust in the Lord, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
⁴Delight yourself also in the Lord,
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

*⁵Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass.
⁶He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.*

*⁷Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
⁸Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm.*

*⁹For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the Lord,
They shall inherit the earth.
¹⁰For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more;
Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,
But it shall be no more.
¹¹But the meek shall inherit the earth,
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.*

The rest of the Psalm follows along the same line. The Lord delivers the righteousness from the wicked, precisely because the righteous find their refuge in God, and they do not take vengeance into their own hands. The meek are the ones who will inherit the earth, precisely because their great inheritance is God in Heaven. They will inherit the New Earth, over which they will reign as kings with Christ, and the wicked will be no more.

**⁶Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.**

The fourth beatitude follows very naturally after the first three. The one who is conscious of his spiritual poverty, who mourns over sin, but entrusts himself to God to vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked – this one hungers and thirsts for righteousness.

Righteousness in the bible is linked to God's salvation.

*My **righteousness** is near, My salvation has gone forth, - Isa. 51:5
My salvation will be forever, And My **righteousness** will not be
abolished. – Isa 51:6*

God's righteousness is the fulfillment of all God's promises to right the wrongs of the world and to establish his kingdom reign over all things in Jesus Christ. The one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, will be satisfied, precisely because God will work it in them by the Holy Spirit.

This is the promise of Pentecost. Salvation will come to God's people when he takes his seat on His heavenly throne, and sends the Holy Spirit to write his law on our hearts and causes us to walk in his ways by His spirit, making us ethically virtuous. This is the ethical righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, which Jesus says, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Simply put, the righteous do not live as hypocrites in the world, we are not whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones, we do not find loop holes in the law in order to invalidate the law of God for our own pleasure. No, we are perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, because our righteousness is from a sincere heart, and not from some external conformity.

Righteousness is therefore best to be understood **as whole-person behavior that accords with God's nature, will, and coming kingdom in Christ.**¹⁰ The one who hungers and thirsts for that – will be satisfied. Because Jesus Christ has come to accomplish salvation and apply it personally and individually to His people.

⁷ **Blessed *are* the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.**

Mercy is the same as being tender-hearted, compassionate, kind, beneficent, full of pity, and having all that tied to forgiveness.

¹⁰ Jonathan T. Pennington, The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing, 91.

Mercy is having a “forgiving spirit toward sinners, and it embraces both the kindly feeling and the kindly act.”¹¹

Like the story of the Good Samaritan, who not only had merciful feelings toward the man who was injured, but he acted in a way toward him that was merciful – he tended his wounds and gave to the inn keeper money to help care for him. Jesus practiced mercy toward us because he is the True Good Samaritan. He showed mercy to us, forgave us of our sins, and clothed us in his righteousness and seated us with him at His table.

In Matt. 9 the Pharisees asked why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, and Christ responded by quoting from Hosea 6:6, saying, “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’*” And Jesus says the same thing again in 12:7 when the Pharisees again condemned him and his disciples for eating the heads of grain on the sabbath day. “*If you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.*”

The whole ministry of Jesus is showing mercy, compassion, kindness, and tender heartedness toward those who are downtrodden and oppressed by sins and miseries.

Therefore James 2:13, reflecting Christ’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, says “*So speak and act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty* – which is the sermon on the mount. For

¹¹ Henriksen, 275.

judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

It is the merciful who will obtain mercy. But those who are not merciful, those who do not possess a forgiving disposition, but rather a judgmental and condemning attitude toward others, they will not receive mercy.

This does not refer to the judicial system here. I am talking about how we relate to one another personally. Are you quick to take offense, and to hold on to past offenses? Are you a person who is quick to condemn others for their sins? Being meek is the willingness to accept being sinned against. But being merciful in going a further step forgiving those who sin against you, as our Lord Jesus forgave you, and as he forgave those who crucified him.

For if you do not forgive your brother from the heart, neither will our Heavenly Father forgive you. If you know you need mercy, then you must be a person who is merciful. But the person who knows nothing of being merciful, will not obtain mercy on judgment day.

**⁸Blessed *are* the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.**

Jesus is clearly thinking of Ps. 24 here, which asks,

“Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

*And who shall stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who does not lift up his soul unto vanity or swear deceitfully.
He shall receive, the blessing of the LORD
And righteousness of the God of His salvation.
Such is the generation that seek the face of the God of Jacob.”*

To be pure in heart, therefore means, to hold the faith of the Lord Jesus in sincerity of heart, which results in having single minded devotion to God. People who are pure in heart are those whose thoughts, actions, and words are without hypocrisy. It is precisely what Christ refers to a bit later as being perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

To be pure in heart is to worship God in spirit and truth. It is to practice what you preach. They are not double minded, or double tongued. Your yes is yes. Your no is no. Like Nathanael in John 1. Philip told him to Come and See. And when he saw Jesus, Jesus said ‘Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit.’ The one who lacks deceit, who is genuine and sincere in his faith, is pure in heart, and he will see God. And Nathanael did.

Now the opposite of the pure in heart is what the Pharisees were. Which is to say, they were hypocrites. Hypocrites are those who pose as loving God, but whose hearts are far from God. They pretend to care about righteousness, they make great showings to other people about how righteous they are, or, who feign

righteousness by exposing other people's sins. As if being righteous consisted of exposing others people's faults.

A hypocrite will destroy you the moment you confront them about their hypocrisy. They will slander you, insult you, curse you, and reveal the vilest evils of the heart in their interactions with you. They pretend to be your friend the one minute, flattering you with praises.

But the moment that you see through their façade, they turn into the devil, their pride is enflamed, they accuse and attack you, and then play the victim. The hypocrite is the one who cries out in pain as he attacks you. This is clearly the picture we have of the Scribes and Pharisees in the Gospels.

People who are like that manifest themselves very clearly in a Christian community, and their time in strong churches does not last long. Unless they repent, and become pure of heart, and poor in spirit, and who mourn over their sins, and who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and who practice mercy, they will not see God. For only those who are of pure of heart seek the face of God. God himself is the reward of the pure of heart. But for the hypocrite, they have all the reward they seek in the praise they receive from men in their fake external righteousness.

⁹ **Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.**

Peacemaking “involves putting an end to conflict by refusing to postpone apologies, or restitution, refusing to seek revenge, humbly serving one’s enemies, and having a love for others that is stronger than hatred.”¹²

A peacemaker is not the same as a peacekeeper. Peacekeepers have a disinclination to engage in disputes. But peacemakers are people who end hostilities and bring the quarrelsome together.

Neither are peacemakers appeasers, or compromisers, who willingly forsake righteous and godly principles in order to appease the loud and wicked mob. A peacemaker is one who actively overcomes evil with good. He doesn’t sacrifice the good in order to not make waves because of the wicked.

Peacemakers also do not take personal offense when sinned against. Instead he is able to apply the blood of Jesus Christ to a broken situation in order to seek reconciliation with his enemy. Jesus speaks of like this.

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. ²⁵Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.”

¹² Ibid, 69.

One of the ultimate purposes of our salvation, is to be sons of God. Sons of God rule and reign with God over heaven and earth. The fallen sons of God, the fallen angelic hosts who rule over the nations, are evil and corrupt and incite war and violence between different peoples.

But as adopted sons of God, our destiny is to replace them and bring healing and peace to the nations of the earth through the Gospel. Our future salvation as sons of God is connected to whether or not we are peacemakers here. And so we come into worship every Lord's day, ready to seek reconciliation **with anyone who we think has something against us. That is why we pass the peace.**

Now notice that Jesus does not say, **if you have something** against another person, go be reconciled. Though that is true. But he says, if you think that your **brother has something against you**, then you ought to go and seek reconciliation with your brother first before you go to the altar.

The burden of the responsibility to be reconciled falls on you. You need to consider your own actions, your own words, your own behavior toward others. You must be a mature believer who does the work of self-assessment in his relationship with others. Ask yourself the honest question – have I sinned against someone? Have I done anything that I need to apologize for and repent of? If so, how have I sinned, and how can I seek reconciliation between me and them? I need to apologize to them

for such sins, and ask for forgiveness, and then commit myself to not doing that again.

The Christian who practices peacemaking regularly, is a mature believer, they are perfect, as their heavenly Father is perfect. They will be blessed to be sons of God, and will be given authority to rule over the nations, because they imitated their Father in Heaven and were peacemakers.

¹⁰ **Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

¹¹ **Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Believers in Jesus are hated by the world because we are righteous. Because we have the new life of the Spirit within us, and we seek to live according to God's commands. And so we condemn the world by our very being. Jesus said in John 15, when the Spirit comes he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

Because we seek to be faithful to God and love him and his commandments the world wants to kill us. We are living testimonies to the world that their deeds are evil. 1 John 3 says Cain murdered his brother because his own deeds were evil and his brother's deeds were righteous. So do not be surprised that the world hates you.

The kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these, because they do not hold on to the things of this life at all costs, but are willing to give up everything, even their lives for Jesus Christ and his heavenly righteousness. They are true citizens of Heaven.

And so 2 Tim 3 likewise says, all that desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. When you try to live truly godly lives in the world according to these cardinal virtues, you will be persecuted. When you claim that Christ is Lord, and you live in a humble way according to that creed, the world will persecute you, call you all kinds of names, and try to convince you that you are evil, and wicked, and are harmful to society.

Do not listen to them. And do not feel bad about being a Christian, and do not ever apologize to the mob of Christ haters. They will accuse you of all sorts of things and they will try to get you to apologize, and recant and back away or tone down some belief that you hold to be dear.

Don't do it. Their rage is proof that you are doing good. They persecuted the prophets who were before you. They persecuted Christ. And a disciple is not greater than his master. You are in good company. Instead, rejoice and be glad, for you are blessed if they treat you this way, for your reward is great in heaven.

CONCLUSION

All who are blessed, will live like this. They will be poor in spirit, and mourn their sins, and they will be meek, and hunger and thirst for righteousness. They will be merciful and pure in heart,

and practice peacemaking. And as a result of this, they will be persecuted and falsely accused of all sorts of horrible things. Rejoice and be glad, for this is how Jesus lived, and this is why he died. You are blessed to be like him.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.