

The Teachings Of Jesus

(The Sermon on the Mount)

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The Beatitudes (5:3-12)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom (basileia – rule or reign) of the heavens. 4 Blessed are the ones mourning, for they will be comforted (parakaleomai). 5 Blessed are the humble (praeis), for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the ones showing mercy, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are the ones being persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom/rule of the heavens. 11 “Blessed are you should they censure (oneidismos – to silence, censure, reproach) and persecute (dioko – to pursue) you, and say all kinds of evil against you, speaking lies because of me. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for large is your reward in the heavens; in this manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you, (Matt 5:3-12, author’s translation).

All of these beatitudes have to do with emptying oneself “of oneself” in order that one may be filled with the presence and reign of God. The person whose spirit was full of self, self-concern, self-centeredness, egoism, and pride has no room for the presence of the reign of God in their life. The spirit with which Jesus found himself in conflict was the spirit of the proud, haughty, or arrogant spirit. This was especially the case with the scholastic community of Judaism (the priests, scribes, rabbis, and Torah lawyers, etc.). In this discourse, Jesus opposed the greater part of the moral teachings of Orthodox Judaism. He spoke to the meek and lowly in heart as one who

was, himself, meek and lowly in heart (Matt 11:29); a completely different attitude than that of the elitism of the Jewish hierarchy.

There are eight beatitudes, all of which are concerned with certain attributes associated with one's moral character, either explicitly or implicitly. In all these sayings we are dealing with a collection of statements, which contain maxims of general truth, rather than absolute mandate. The point here is that if a person is poor in spirit, he possesses an attribute necessary to opening his life to the reign of God. It is not the case, however, that the possession of that attribute alone, is guaranteed the rule of heaven in one's life; there may be other factors involved, although this characteristic is necessary for access to God and God's approach to him, we need to be careful that we do not reduce the will of God the adverbs "alone" or "only," as have many in their view of what one must do to receive the redemption God.

Further, we must remember that Jesus is not suggesting one attribute to the exclusion of others is required of God for the restoration of the image of God in fallen man. All of what God has revealed concerning the restoration of the human race is to be valued and accepted if we are to be well pleasing to God. All of what Jesus teaches is equally essential to receiving the restoration of man's original state of being. The one who is poor in spirit is also to be pure in heart; those who long to be filled with the righteousness of God must also seek peace among those who are filled with ill will toward them.

The deliverance of which we speak here is God's deliverance of man from his self-destruction. In the first century period the messianic deliverance was associated primarily with belief in the coming of a redeemer sent from God to restore Israel to its ancient grandeur, but Jesus seems to have the human race as a whole in mind in that his teaching addresses not only the moral character of the Jews the children of Abraham, but the children of Adam, and those who seem to have been the most receptive of the deliverance of which Jesus spoke were the *anawim*, as are addressed in the Isaiah 61 text. This is the context out of which these beatitudes are best understood.

*Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit,
for Theirs Is the Reign of Heaven (5:3)*

The essence of this beatitude is found in numerous OT passages:

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud (Proverbs 16:18-19)

A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor (Proverbs 29:23)

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit (Psalms 34:18)

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalms 16-17).

Perhaps the text that most captures the idea Jesus is communicating here is Isaiah, 57:15 and 66:2, where God, speaking to the leadership of Israel through his prophet Isaiah, expresses his disgust with their arrogant and haughty spirit, which had resulted in the corruption of the religion God had revealed to them,

For this is what the high and lofty One says - he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite (Isaiah 57:15).

Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the Lord. "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word (Isaiah 66:2)

It is only with a humble and contrite spirit that one can receive the reign of God in his or her life. Those who have misplaced their sense of values and who reign as lords over themselves and others have no need for the reign of God in their lives. These are the ones who rejected their

Messiah; only those who needed the rule (*basileia*) of God in their lives received it.

***Blessed Are the Ones Mourning,
for They Will Be Comforted (5:4)***

This beatitude is very similar to the one preceding it. The Greek word used here means to weep out loud or lament. As the previous saying dealt with the broken in spirit, this saying deals with the brokenhearted. The language here is almost identical to that of Isaiah 61:1-3,

. . . because the Lord has anointed [the Hebrew here is meshach from which derives the word Messiah] me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. (Psalms 37:11) those the Lord blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off (Psalms 37:22).

The word for “comfort” (*paraklatis*) the same word used in John’s account (John 14) of Jesus’ promise to the twelve that he would send a comforter (*paraklatos*) after he has ascended to God.

***Blessed Are the Humble,
for They Will Inherit the Earth (5:5)***

The Psalms speaks throughout of God’s deliverance of the *anawim* (the weak, the poor, the meek, the oppressed) from the oppression of the wicked. A better translation of both the Hebrew and Greek terms here would be “humble” or “gentle” rather than “meek;” especially in view of the contemporary connotation of the term “meek.” The Greek word, *praus*, is used in Greek literature to describe one whose disposition was under control (i.e., he was a gentle person, not arrogant, imposing, or violent). This was the word used to describe a wild animal that had been tamed or

made gentle (e.g., a horse). Here Jesus is saying, "Happy are those of a gentle spirit, for they will see the goodness of this life."

In Matt 11:29 Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart." Jesus' way of dealing with evil was not that of retaliation. In 1 Peter 2:23 we are told, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats." When we come to the material in Matt 5:38-47, we will see the significance of this saying more clearly. It is not those who live by "an eye for an eye" philosophy that enjoy the blessings of the earth; rather, it is those who have the moral courage to deal with conflict in a better way who will know what *makarios*) is about.

***Blessed Are Those Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness,
They Will Be Filled (5:6)***

Righteousness, justice, and intolerance of evil are all characteristics of God's holiness. Because God is holy, he does that which is right; because he is just, he does that which is just or fair; and because he is intolerant of evil, he is indignant in its presence; when we are in fellowship with evil, we have no fellowship with God. When man is holy, as God is holy, he too, will do what is right, he will be just or fair as God is just, and he will be intolerant of evil and indignant in its presence. To long to be like God is too long to be restored in the image of God; this is how this beatitude is fulfilled. This is a constant theme of the OT, found repeatedly in the Psalms:

*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with
God? (Psalms 42:1-2)*

*O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my
body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (2) I
have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. (3)
Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. (4) I will praise
you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands (Psalms 63:1-
4).*

Jesus has much to say in this sermon about righteousness. Here he speaks of hungering and thirsting for righteousness (5:6). In 5:10 he speaks of those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. In 5:20 he talks of a righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, and in 5:21-48, he expounds on a higher righteousness that goes beyond the strict requirements of the Law. In 6:33, he encourages his listeners to seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God. The whole of the third unit of material making up this sermon (6:11-18) is devoted to a contrast between the righteousness of traditional Judaism and righteousness as taught by Jesus. In fact, Jesus' words here only introduce this theme, as is the case with the other beatitudes.

*Blessed Are the Ones Showing Mercy,
for They Will Be Shown Mercy (5:7)*

Mercy is not rendering to a person the punishment deserved. Showing mercy, in the Hebrew sense, involves forgiving one of their wrongs. In the teaching of Jesus, the theme of mercy and the theme of forgiveness are virtually interchangeable. This was a very popular teaching in first century Judaism. The OT apocryphal writing, *Sirach* 28:2, we read: "Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray." Rabbi Gamaliel II wrote, "So long as you are merciful, the Merciful One is merciful to you."

As for Jesus' teaching on this theme, this same idea is found in the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12), and in the seventh petition: "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt 6:4). In Matt 18:23-35 Jesus again addresses this theme, with the same emphasis in his story of the unforgiving servant. This issue is by no means dropped here (Matt 9:13; 12:7).

*Blessed Are the Pure in Heart,
for They Will See God (5:8)*

This verse could be more loosely translated, "Blessed are those whose heart is pure, for they will truly know God." The concept expressed here is an intriguing one. In Jewish theology, to worship God is to enter into his

presence. To enter into his presence, one must be ritually clean. This is expressed in Psalms 24, a psalm of worship:

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? (4) He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. (5) He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior. (6) Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob, Selah (Psalms 24:3-6).

Jesus repeatedly confronted the Jewish community on the inconsistency of stressing ritual purity while being morally corrupt (cf. Matt 15:1-20). The numerous Levitical teachings on purification, especially as taught by the priestly party, the Sadducees, had resulted in an inadequate concern for moral purity, even though this was a major theme in the prophetic writings of the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Hebrew concept of "the heart" involves not only the emotions, but one's thinking as well (cf. Gen 6:5; 8:21; Deut 4:29; 4:39; Psalms 19:14; 37:31; 40:8, 10; 44:21; 51:10; 119:11; Prov 2:2; 4:4, 20-23; 23:7). The concept of "seeing God" is a diverse one in Jewish thinking. One cannot visibly see God and live (Exodus 33:20).

The idea we have here is that of standing before the face of, or coming into the presence of God. In both Hebrew and Greek the word for "face" and "presences" are the same. In the Middle East, "coming before the face of" or "into the presence of" was a way of referring to having an audience with a ruler or monarch. To be granted an audience with deity was to enter into his presence to worship him (cf. Psalms 17:15; 41:12; 63:2; 140:13).

To see God in the sense in which Jesus is speaking is to see what God is truly like, to see the moral image, the image in which man was created, and consequently, to see what we are supposed to be.

***Blessed Are the Peacemakers,
for They Will Be Called "Sons of God," (5:9)***

Essentially, Jesus is saying, "Blessed are those who desire to be at peace with others, they are created in the image of God." *Shalom* in Hebrew

was and is one of the most uttered words among the Jews of yesterday and today. Peace was longed for in the first century period during the Roman occupation, but peace never seemed to come, nor has it come even today. The expression "conflict in the Middle East" is at least three thousand years old.

The primary meaning of the word peace, in Hebrew and Greek, is "the absence of conflict" or "the resolution of conflict." The peacemaker must know how to deal with conflict, and it is important to know that conflict isn't always bad. Whether conflict has adverse or positive effects depends on how one handles it. If we handle it well, the results can be growth on the part of both parties involved in the conflict. If it isn't handled well, the results can be harmful to all involved. The successful peacemaker tries to move all parties involved in the conflict toward happy co-existence. This is the practical meaning of peace!

This is the concept of peace Israel has prayed for throughout its long history. In fact, this was one of the greatest longings of the messianic expectation of first century Judaism. The coming of the Messiah would usher in a reign of peace. One of the titles ascribed to him was "prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6). To many Jews, however, military conquest was the only way of bringing peace to Israel. These were those who lived by the edict of Leviticus:

If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth he has injured the other, so is he to be injured (Lev 24:19-20; cf. Exodus 21:23-25; Deut 19:21).

This is the rule by which many of the Jews of the first century lived, and so today. Living by this rule will never bring peace. Jesus addresses this issue in more detail later in Matt 5:38-48. We will give more discussion there.

***Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted Because of Righteousness,
Theirs Is the Reign of Heaven (5:10-12)***

Blessed are the ones being persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom/rule of the heavens. 11 "Blessed are you should they censure

(oneidismos – to silence, censure, reproach) and persecute (dioko – to pursue) you, and say all kinds of evil against you, speaking lies because of me. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for large is your reward in the heavens; in this manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you, (Matt 5:3-12, author's translation).

“Blessed are you,” says Jesus, “should they censure (*oneidismos* – to silence, censure, reproach) and persecute (*dioko* – to pursue) you, and say all kinds of evil against you, speaking lies because of me. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for large is your reward in the heavens; in this manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Jesus moves from dealing with conflict in the role of peacemaker, to these comments on being the recipients of persecution or conflict. What has been said in the previous comments apply here as well here. We are talking about conflict as it applies as a result of aggression, assault, violence, etc. The idea of responding well to conflict situations takes on more meaning when it is personally applicable. How does one find something positive about conflict under these circumstances? It is much harder to do and takes a person of an advanced stage of moral development, usually, associated with the maturity that comes with age.

The conflict Jesus speaks of here involves: insult, persecution (Greek lit. "to pursue"), and being falsely accused or spoken evil against. Jesus were repeatedly told his disciples that they would be persecuted: Mark 13:9; Luke 21:16-17; John 15:18-21. The NT evidences the fact that the early Christians were persecuted: Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 7:54-60; 8:1. The primary reason for this is stated by Paul in 2 Tim 3:12, "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Light cannot exist in darkness without causing adverse effect for the darkness. The conflict we sometimes experience is directly related to the reaction of the powers of darkness to the presence of light. The reign of God cannot co-exist with the reign of Satan, nor can grace reign where sin reigns (cf. Rom 5:21).

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