

THE FIRST THREE BEATITUDES

Matthew 5:1-5

Intro: Last Sunday night we considered this first part of the Sermon on the Mount in an introductory way. We noticed that the Lord Jesus spoke these words to His disciples. It may have been that others were listening in, but the message is one for those who know the Lord, *and only for them!* The Christian life (and that is what the Lord was describing here) can only be lived by Christians. And who is a Christian? He, or she, is a person who has been convicted by God of his or her need of a Savior, and has trusted in the Lord Jesus to receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Eternal life is a divine life, and the people who have it show that they have it by living it. It is not something that we try to do. The Spirit of God enables us to live this life, the only kind of a life that is pleasing to God. To have eternal life not only means that we are going to live eternally, but it speaks of the different life that we begin living when we trust the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. It begins by faith, and it is lived by faith.

But God has given us the Bible to teach us what this life is. And our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount was explaining to His disciples that this life, which we call the Christian life, is a life which works from the inside out, not from the outside in. We don't become Christians by what we do; we live the Christian life because that is what we have in us, as a gift from God. We experience it more and more the longer we live. The object of our salvation which God has ordained, is that we are being made as we grow in this life, to be made progressively more like the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Now I am going to try to serve you the Beatitudes in small doses in the hope that we will all be better able to understand what a Christian really is.

A beatitude is a blessing, a blessing from God, which makes us happy, and it bring joy to the heart of God. It is really a benediction. Now usually we think of a benediction as a prayer by which a church service is closed. We seek the blessing of God upon what we have heard so that we will be able to use in our lives the truth of God which we have just heard.

But these beatitudes, or benedictions, that we have in Matthew 5, come at the beginning of our Lord's sermon. The Lord is giving us the blessing

expecting that in the message which follows we will see how these blessings work out in our daily lives.

The blessings come from God, but we are responsible with the Lord's blessing to see that we cultivate these blessings in our lives. So we don't just stand around and watch it happen. We learn what these blessings are, and then we work together with God to see that they are worked out in our lives. The Apostle Paul exhorted the believers, the Christians, at Philippi with these words which apply directly to these Beatitudes. You will find these words in Philippians 2:12-13. Listen to what the Apostle told them to do, and the same applies to us tonight:

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Now let's see how this applies to:

I. The First Beatitude (Matt. 5:3).

Now if you are a true child of God, the Lord has shown you that you are "poor in spirit," and this is a proof that your's "is the kingdom of heaven," or to state it another way, this is proof that you have really been saved.

What does it mean to be "poor in spirit."

Well, let me say that the "spirit" which our Lord mentioned here is not the Holy Spirit, so the translators of the Bible were right in beginning this word "spirit" with a small s, and not with a capital S. So this reveals a change, a basic change, that salvation has made in all of us who know the Lord.

"Poor in spirit" speaks of our personal poverty, our inability to be and do, to live up to God's standards, or even to live up to the standards of right and wrong that we had in our hearts even before we were saved.

The word that best describes a person who is "poor in spirit" is the word *humility*. Humility is not a natural characteristic of the human heart. We are proud by nature. People who don't know the Lord are naturally proud. They are so proud that they think that they can get through life

without God, and without Christ. The big problem that we face as a nation, and people in every nation face, is our pride. When you listen to the demonstrators that are making so much noise in our cities right now, what do you hear? PRIDE. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, what did they try to do? They took fig leaves to try to cover their nakedness to make themselves acceptable to God. But did it work? Absolutely not! When God came to be with them, they hid themselves among the trees of the Garden.

The first secret of happiness is to be humble, and to avoid pride. But the only possible way for us to be humbled is to see that there is nothing in us that would cause God to want us, or to save us.

This was the Devil's problem – pride! When the Apostle Paul was giving the qualifications for elders in the church, he said, “not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the Devil” (I Tim. 3:6). You see, we as Christians will have to battle the pride of our hearts until the day we die, or until the Lord comes. But we are learning that pride does not produce happiness, it is only as we recognize how spiritually poverty stricken we are, and we make a habit, by God's grace of humbling ourselves before God, before each other, and before the whole world.

We have a lot of national pride. Our politicians live on pride. So do most of our athletes. Advertisers appeal to our pride. Preachers can be proud. It is a curse upon all of us. But what guidance do we get from the Word. There are many commandments that deal with pride, such as, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord” (Jas. 4:10), and “Humble yours under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet. 5:6).

But the greatest example of humility is our Lord Jesus Christ. See Phil. 2: 5-11.

The first Beatitude is the foundation upon which all of the others rest.

II. The Second Beatitude (Matt. 5:4).

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Now we know that our God is “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort,” as we read in 2 Corinthians 1:3. And we can thank the Lord that

we can trust him to work in the hearts of those who are not Christians when some loved ones die. But what a wonderful hope we as Christians have when the Bible tells us that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. We are told, again in Philippians, “Be careful for nothing . . .

But as wonderful as that truth is, I don’t think that this is the point in the second Beatitude. Following from the first Beatitude, I believe, and I think that the majority of expositors believe that the mourning that it spoken of here is the mourning that follows having our pride humbled, and that is the mourning that believers do over their sins.

Did you ever think when you were young that some day you would weep over the sins which seemed to be so much fun then? And even as older Christians, do you ever weep and mourn over the hold that some sins have on you today? Do you mourn because it doesn’t take much to stir up your anger? Do you know what Peter was going through when after he had denied that he even knew the Lord, then when he realized what he had done, he went out and “wept bitterly”? Have you ever felt like the prodigal son so you have come to God like that son did to his father, saying as we read in Luke 15:18-19:

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

Some time ago Lucille and I began reading that book of Puritan prayers entitled, *The Valley of Vision*. We are over half way through the slightly over 400 pages. These prayers are words that various Puritans have expressed to the Lord in prayer. Some almost seem like their minds have been affected as they have felt in their hearts the sinfulness of sin. These prayers have made me realize how much I live on the surface of things. Let me give you an example. (Read pp. 132, 133.)

But how can we be comforted when we can’t go back and undo what we have done in the past? We need to go back to the Cross and the message of the Cross which we find in the Word. We read that “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” We read that our sins will never be remembered against us. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. And there are many more.

Or the hymns we sing, which are based on the Word of God, can give us comfort, like “Jesus, Lover of my soul.” The third verse goes like this:

Thou, O Christ, art all I want; More than all in Thee I find:
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint, Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is Thy Name; I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am, Thou art full of truth and grace.

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.”

III. The Third Beatitude (Matt. 5:5).

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” There seems to be an order to the way the Lord Jesus gave these Beatitudes. As the Holy Spirit works in us, He shows us that we do not have in ourselves what it takes to make ourselves acceptable to God. And so it takes the Holy Spirit to show us our total spiritual poverty. Then in the second Beatitude we see why we are “poor in spirit,” and that is because of our sin, sin both before we are saved, and sin after we are saved. And this grieves us, grieves us deeply, and we can only be comforted by the Word of God and the teaching that is given us there about the death of Christ.

Now as we come to the third beatitude, we read about meekness. What is meekness? The world looks upon it as weakness. But we are not learning in the Beatitudes about what is pleasing to the world. In fact, the meekness that the Lord was speaking about here is powerful. Read it again. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

We need to look at the Beatitudes, not as what we immediately possess in perfection, but what we look upon as progressive. When we are first saved, we are humbled before the Lord, but the longer we know the Lord, the more humble we should be. The same is true of sin. The longer we know the Lord the more we mourn over our sins, and the more we turn to the Word for our comfort.

So the next step in the Christian life is one in which we are getting a truer picture of ourselves. We are more conscious that we do not deserve what the Lord has done for us. Jacob in the OT was expressing meekness when he told the Lord as he was going home after twenty years and faced the prospect of seeing Esau again, and he said to the Lord, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou has showed unto thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am

become two bands” (Gen. 32:10). The meek person is a believer who has really seen himself. And the other part of meekness is that this sense of his own unworthiness is apparent in what Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones called, his “attitude and conduct with respect to others” (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, p. 69).

Let me steal a little thunder from the Tuesday Bible Class when I mention that when Abraham and Lot had to go in different directions because they could not stay together and have enough pasture for all of their animals. See Genesis 13:5-9. Who actually had the right to make the first choice? Abram did! But he manifested meekness by letting Lot make the first choice.

Do you remember how Moses was commended by the Spirit of the Lord in Numbers 12? Miriam and Aaron were critical of Moses because he had married an Ethiopian woman. And so they said, “Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?” (Num. 12:2). And the verse ends by telling us, “And the Lord heard it.” Then we are told how the Lord considered Moses in verse 3:

(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the whole earth.)

The result of all of this was that Miriam was stricken with leprosy. In fact, it seems that she was covered with it. She became “white as snow.” And then we read how Aaron appealed to Moses for Miriam. You find this in Numbers 12:11-12:

11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

12 Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he cometh out of his mother's womb.

How did Moses respond? Verse 13 of this chapter tell us:

13 And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee (Num 12:13).

Moses did not delay in doing what Aaron asked him to do. And he didn't pray a long prayer. This is meekness in action. When you and I can pray for our enemies, for those who try to harm us, this is meekness.

But the crowning example of meekness in the Bible is our Lord Jesus Christ. Have you wondered about the lowly birth that the Lord Jesus had, and even about those silent years from the time that the Lord was twelve until He was thirty? Do you remember those amazing words in Luke

2:52:

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

Without minimizing our Lord's Deity in the least, can it be that during those years the Lord was learning meekness as He has asked us to do?

Remember Matthew 11:28-30:

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

When the Lord Jesus prayed from the Cross, "Father, forgive them . . . ," that was meekness.

Paul wrote in Galatians 5:22 and 23 that "the fruit of the Spirit is . . . meekness."

What is the promise in our text? "And ye shall inherit the earth." It seems that the Lord was talking about our making conquests among the people of the world. The Church is not going to bring in the Kingdom. The Lord is going to do that. But it seems that we have in this third beatitude a principle which can help us in seeking to win people to Christ.

Concl: Well, we all have a lot to work on, don't we? At least, I do.

Let's not go the world's way. The world's way is for losers. The Lord has shown us "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31).