

THE BEATITUDES (PART 2)

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Matthew 5:5-6

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-- We are in Matthew 5, looking at Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Jesus starts that amazing sermon with eight pronouncements commonly called the Beatitudes. Each of these statements begins with the word "Blessed." As we've seen, blessedness is a special kind of happiness - a happiness that comes from God and is not dependent on circumstances but is rooted in godly, Christ-like character. Each of the Beatitudes identifies an aspect of that character and contains a promise or assurance associated with that quality.

Last week we looked at the first two Beatitudes.

Cf., vv. 3-4

-- Today we are going to look at the next two Beatitudes.

Cf., vv. 5-6

I. The Third Beatitude (v. 5)

A. The Kingdom Characteristic: "The Meek"

1. The Most Surprising Beatitude

-- This has to be the most surprising of the Beatitudes. If there were any Zealots (Jewish resistance fighters and terrorists) in the crowd listening to Jesus, they had to be shaking their heads over this Beatitude and thinking to themselves, "What in the world are you talking about? Open your eyes, Jesus. It's the Roman legions that have possessed the earth - and they didn't do it by being meek - they did it with the sword and by shedding plenty of blood."

And our society doesn't look any more favorably on meekness. Listen to the presidential candidates, and you'll quickly see that they and their campaign advisers don't believe that the meek will inherit the White House, let alone the entire earth.

2. What It Means to be "Meek"

-- Now, to understand what Jesus is saying in this Beatitude we, of course, have to understand what Jesus means by meekness - what it means to be meek.

a. What Meekness Is Not

(1) To understand what Jesus means here we need to begin by saying what meekness is not. Meekness is not weakness. Those two terms are homonyms (they sound alike), but they are not synonyms - they don't mean the same thing. When we hear the word "meek," most of us probably get the mental image of a wimp - someone who is timid, uncertain, always playing it safe, but that image has nothing to do with this Beatitude. In fact, that image is in many ways the opposite of what Jesus is saying here.

(2) So meekness is not weakness - and neither is it a certain kind of a personality. We look at someone who is naturally soft-spoken and easy-going, who never seems to lose their cool, and we think that's what it means to be meek, but that isn't what Jesus is talking about either. Meekness isn't a certain personality type.

b. What Meekness Is

(1) Rather, meekness is a character trait - an attribute that can be possessed by a person regardless of their personality.

(2) The Greek word here is very interesting. It has the idea of mildness, gentleness and humility - but not weakness. The Greeks used the word in a variety of ways - to refer to a soothing medicine or a relaxing breeze or a colt that had been broken and trained for riding. A basic idea in meekness is that of power that is under control

(3) The context for this Beatitude gives us some help in understanding its meaning. Preceding the beatitude on meekness are the beatitudes about being "poor in spirit" and "mourning," and following the beatitude about "hungering and thirsting for righteousness." There's a definite

progression in these beatitudes. A person first recognizes their spiritual poverty and is broken by their sinfulness and then humbly (meekly) bows in submission to the holiness and majesty of God. Meekness is the bridge between mourning our sinfulness and earnestly seeking after God's righteousness.

(4) Jesus actually takes this beatitude from Psalm 37, a psalm about humbly submitting your ways to the Lord and then waiting and trusting in Him.

v. 3a, Trust in the Lord and do good.

v. 5, Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him

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vv. 7-8, Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! ⁸Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

v. 11, But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace

Instead of being filled with anger and worry and trying to defend themselves and demand their rights, the meek person trusts God and waits on Him.

If you want to see a study in meekness, watch the movie Chariots of Fire. Eric Liddell, the runner for the 1924 British Olympic team and future missionary to China, is a supreme example of meekness.

B. The Kingdom Promise: "Shall Inherit the Earth"

-- Jesus attaches a promise to this beatitude about the meek: "they shall inherit the earth."

1. Not the Way Things Are

-- That certainly isn't the way things are. Everything we see in the world today demonstrates that the proud, ambitious, and aggressive that take control of organizations, companies and countries.

We need to remember that the Sermon on the Mount is about the Kingdom of God, which is an "already-not yet" kingdom - it has already started but is not yet fully here - it started in Jesus First Coming but it will not be fully established until His Second Coming.

2. But the Way Things Will Be

-- Look again at exactly what Jesus promises. He says they "shall inherit." "Shall" is future; this is a promise that will be fulfilled in the future. And Jesus says that the meek "shall inherit the earth." The meek won't go out and take it over on their own; instead, they receive it as an inheritance.

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him

-- At the end of the book of Revelation Jesus returns to the earth on a white stallion. Emblazoned across His robe are the words "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." He proceeds to destroy all evil, to throw Satan and his evil forces into eternal hell and then fully establishes His Kingdom of everlasting righteousness.

In the last chapter of the book we see God on the throne of the new heaven and the new earth, surrounded by His people, and we read in verse 5:

v. 5, "They [God's people] will reign forever and ever."

-- The meek will, indeed, inherit the earth.

-- As I said earlier, this third beatitude is a bridge that prepares the way for the next beatitude.

II. The Fourth Beatitude (v. 6)

-- To much of the rest of the world it would appear that if there is any place to really enjoy the good life it certainly must be America. The reality, however, is that America is full of dissatisfied people. We go to plastic surgeons in ever-increasing numbers because we are dissatisfied with our appearance. We pile up mountains of credit card debt because we're dissatisfied with what we have. We get drunk on booze and high on drugs because we're dissatisfied with ourselves. What Jesus does in this beatitude is to give us a way to be sure to find satisfaction.

A. The Kingdom Characteristic: "Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness"

-- The kingdom characteristic that leads to true satisfaction involves both a right desire and a right manner.

1. The Right Desire

a. The primary reason we don't find anything that brings us lasting satisfaction is that we have the wrong desires. It's like the old country music song "Lookin' for Love in All the Wrong Places." We're looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places - a nice house, a new car, a party life. What Jesus is telling us here is that satisfaction doesn't come from possessions or pleasures but from righteousness - which is just about the last place that most Americans would think of looking for it.

b. There are two aspects to this righteousness.

(1) Salvation

-- The first righteousness that we must seek is the righteousness that comes to us through Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

Romans 3:22 ...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

(2) Sanctification

-- The righteousness that we are seeking starts with our salvation but continues in our sanctification - in seeking for the Holy Spirit to make us more Christ-like in our character and our conduct - in who we are and in how we live.

Romans 6:13b ...present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

2. The Right Manner

-- Finding satisfaction is a matter of pursuing the right desire and doing so in the right manner. Jesus says that we must "hunger and thirst" after righteousness. Either of these is one of the most powerful drives that humans can experience, but Jesus combines them, telling us to "hunger and thirst" for righteousness. Our desire for God and for the righteousness that we find in and from Him must be the most powerful drive in our lives - a passion that consumes and controls.

-- Food companies increase our appetite and desire by presenting amazing picture of their product. Well, the Bible does much the same for our spiritual desires. As we spend time reading and meditating about the glories of God, the Holy Spirit increases our appetite - our hunger and thirst - for the things of God.

B. The Kingdom Promise: "They Shall Be Satisfied"

-- Jesus closes this beatitude with a promise - that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness "shall be satisfied."

The word "satisfied" was originally used to refer to animals that could feed and graze until they were completely full. It pictures a beautiful pasture with luxurious green meadows and flowing streams, a picture described in Psalm 23.

Psalm 23:1-2 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul.

CONCLUSION

C. S. Lewis said that if we find in ourselves a desire that nothing in this world can fully satisfy, the most plausible explanation is that we were made for another world.

And so we were - the world of God's presence - the only place where our deepest hungering and thirsting can and will be satisfied.