

Text: Matthew 5:2-12

Title: The Sermon on the Mount, Part 2

Truth: The Blessing Bestowed on the Righteous

Date/Location: Sunday March 21, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

The text tells us that in verse 2—after seeing the crowds, being seated on the mountain, and the disciples coming to Him—Jesus opened His mouth and taught the people. The need for such teaching is obvious—both then and today. People needed to hear from God at that time, and equivalently, from God’s Word today.

I. Reading Properly

- A. We must read this passage the right way to grasp its meaning. Last time, we cautioned that the blessings are connected to spiritual virtues—not physical ones. Poverty is not the issue—spiritual poverty is. Sadness over life’s losses is not the issue—mourning over sin is. Being physically hungry and thirsty is not the issue—hungering and thirsting for righteousness is. If you went left on all these decisions, you would make mince-meat of the Sermon on the Mount, and it would mean something entirely different than what the Divine Preacher intended.
- B. There is another pitfall in reading the passage, and that is thinking that we must by our own moral reformation “become” the qualities that are listed, and only *then* will we get the blessing from God. “If I do not exhibit meekness, I am not going to earn the kingdom of heaven!” That is a self-centered, effort-based approach which is contrary to the grace of the gospel. It is like the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23): it comes as a multi-faceted package, but it is not self-generated. You do not make the fruit of the Spirit, though you participate in it.
- C. In contrast to a works-focused mindset, we should read the passage with a God-centered mindset. The virtues listed here are self-reduction virtues, not self-magnification virtues. This self-reduction comes to us when we recognize that we need God and the forgiveness of Christ Jesus. It comes to use when we recognize we are unable, apart from God, to show any of these virtues truly. As it is, God works in us the virtues as we seek them from Him. The blessing of each virtue is the end outcome that is listed (kingdom of heaven, inherit the earth, etc.). This means that true spiritual contentment, satisfaction, and deep-seated joy and happiness comes from pursuing the things of God, not the materialism or pleasures

of the world. The world's happiness is nowhere near the Christian's blessedness!

There is another part of the blessing: the state of existing in the virtue itself. In other words, it is not only what you *get* that is the blessing. It is what you have *become* by faith that is part of the blessing. Part of the reason I say this is that Jesus presents the blessing as *now*, not just *later*. He says, "Blessed ARE the poor in spirit" not "Blessed WILL BE the poor in spirit."

Of course, your energetic and thoughtful participation is required in this endeavor—God uses that among other things to produce this kind of blessed situation in you. Trust God to do that work in you (Phil. 1:6).

- D. What is a blessing? I alluded to it just now with words like contentment and happiness. Often this is read as "Happy is the person who is poor in spirit." But the word *happy* has been so watered down in modern English that it does not accurately convey the idea. Everyone wants to be happy today, but that can be such a fleeting emotion that depends on circumstances and the hour of the day. People demand that they themselves be happy, and that is the measure of what is right or wrong in their life. According to the Bible, the more important issue is that God is happy.

The Friberg *Analytical Greek Lexicon* defines it as someone who has transcendent happiness.

Fortunate has too much of a "luck" idea in it. I prefer *privileged* or *favored*, with the nuance that the favor or privilege or *blessing* comes from God. Such people are specially advantaged. They have a high standing with God.

The idea of blessing connects with the concepts of blessing and *shalom* in the Old Testament, such as in Psalm 1:1 and Numbers 6:26. These refer to the state of a person who is spiritually well, whole, in a good relationship with God, one who fears God but also knows the love of God. In ideal conditions, such as in the future kingdom and to a more limited extent the era of the Mosaic Law when Israel obeyed God, the peace encompasses physical blessing as well as spiritual.

- E. With this in mind, carefully think about how you would process each of these statements as if you were one of the crowd gathered on the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus did not hurry through these statements. He let them sink in. You need to let them sink in too. Ask yourself if the characteristics are true

descriptions of your own life. Ask yourself what God wants to do with your character in light of what we read here.

II. Eight Character Traits of Godly People

Jesus speaks of eight such virtues and pronounces a blessing from God on a person of faith who exhibits the following characteristics. Note that: these are manifestations of faith in God and in Christ. The one...

- A. Who is poor in spirit, v. 3. Think of the opposite—rich in spirit. It sounds like someone who has a high view of one's self, pride, arrogance, haughtiness, self-sufficiency, perhaps atheistic, self-autonomous.
 1. Someone who is poor in spirit recognizes that they are lowly before God, they need God, they are humble, esteeming others as better than self (Phil. 2:3), oriented toward serving others (Mark 10:45). Without God, they know they are in a hopeless condition. They live responsibly but recognize that any favor they have comes from God.
 2. Such humility is not without reward. It is not pointless, it is not without a light at the end of the tunnel. To such people belong the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:14). Connecting the dots with Jesus's teaching to Nicodemus, we see that these poor in spirit people are born again. They have believed in Christ. This way, they will enter the kingdom and "possess" it. And they will enjoy its blessings to the fullest extent.
- B. Who mourns, v. 4. The opposite is found in 1 Cor. 5:2. There, church people were proud about maintaining fellowship with a man who was an openly immoral person. Instead, they should have mourned over the sin that was done in their midst.
 1. To mourn means to have godly sorrow over sin (2 Cor. 7:9-10). It means to be vexed by sin in self (first) and in society. It means that we repent of our sin and despise it. It means being one of those who ask the question, "How long, O Lord, until righteousness is poured out like a flood, until justice flows like a mighty river, until the earth is full of the love of God?"
 2. At the end of their mourning, these blessed ones will be comforted. I believe the Kingdom of Christ as well as the (more obvious) heavenly state will bring that kind of comfort to those who decry their own sin and the results of it, and those who are troubled by the sin of their societies. Individually we will be forgiven and saved. Corporately, society will be put in an upright condition. In the kingdom, it will be

forced into that mold. In Heaven, all will be willing participants in the righteousness of God!

C. Who is meek, v. 5. This is another self-deprecating character trait.

1. It is those who are gentle, humble, considerate, and meek that will inherit the earth. The meek one is contrasted against the wicked in Psalm 37:10 and 12. A very rich or powerful person could be meek—not too impressed with him or herself.

Meek is not weak. It is not passive. It is not uncertain, out of control, no aims, goals, etc. You can be meek and be certain, confident, in control (in a self-controlled manner), have goals, plans, etc. Meekness is not that you permit everyone to walk all over you. To be meek is a quality of a righteous person.

2. The future blessing for the meek is that they will inherit the earth. This is drawn from Psalm 37:11. (I reject the translation in NET of *oppressed* in this Psalm—too much social justice going on with it and the term is commonly translated as meek or humble.¹) The land in view there is the land where Israel lived, part of the entire earth made by God. Those who obeyed God would live long in that land (Exodus 20:12). The same principle applies to all who are by faith gentle in their conduct. They will inherit the “land” of the kingdom of Christ. The translators have done perfectly well to render the word as *earth* because that is what it means. Gentile meek will not inherit the land of Israel as a future generation of Jews will; but they will be part of the kingdom of heaven on earth. In effect, this blessing is the same as 5:3’s blessing of the kingdom of heaven.

We do not get any idea from this that the poor in spirit get heaven and the meek get the earth, as if there are two levels of people with two different destinations. That is a made-up distinction with no support whatsoever in Scripture. The meek and the poor in spirit are all part of the same crowd who receive the same basic inheritance.

D. Who desires righteousness, v. 6.

1. The figure of speech of hungering and thirsting for righteousness is perfect. Picture yourself as very thirsty or starved—I mean really starved—and you need nourishment to feel yourself again and to be strengthened. We should desire the attribute of righteousness with

¹ For an alternative viewpoint, see http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1015-87582016000200008

that kind of intensity. That is, we should long for right standing with God, moral rectitude in life, holy behavior, pious conduct.

This righteousness is not only imputed righteousness—it is practical righteousness as well. The believer wants to be right before God in Christ, and right before God in practice. The fact that it is sought out and desired indicates that the person knows it comes from elsewhere, not within himself. Just like food comes from outside, so righteousness does too. You must take it in to “be” it.

When you are in this mindset or *modus operandi*, you will be far less enamored with sin and temptation.

*I thirsted in the barren land of sin and shame,
And nothing satisfying there I found;
But to the blessed cross of Christ one day I came,
Where springs of living water did abound.*

2. The blessing is that those who so seek shall be filled. See Matthew 7:7. Here you could read it as a future provision, which it will be, but I believe again the blessing is multi-faceted. To have a mindset of desiring righteousness is *itself* a favor from God. And, in the ongoing provision of moral rectitude, there is a blessing as well. Just like you cannot eat once and be done with eating ever after that, so hungering for righteousness and being filled goes on over the course of one’s entire life. Being pleasantly full after a meal is a blessing, just like finding your conduct to be becoming more like Christ. Psalm 42:1-2, 63:1; Isa. 55:1; John 6:35, 7:37; Rev. 21:6, 17.

E. Who is merciful, v. 7.

1. The merciful are those concerned about people in need, sympathetic, compassionate. Heavenly wisdom is that which demonstrates mercy (James 3:17).
2. The blessing upon the merciful ones is that they will themselves obtain mercy. That is what we all need desperately, because sinners do not deserve the blessing of God—only the curse and punishment due for failing God’s righteousness. Judgment is without mercy to those who have shown no mercy (James 2:13), but mercy is extended to those who have shown mercy. We in our sin stand in need of mercy in a similar way that someone who is in physical need requires mercy appropriate to their case.

F. Who is pure in heart, v. 8.

1. What is pure in heart? To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure because their minds and consciences are defiled (Titus 1:15). The pure in heart are those who are clean, who are free from guilty activity, guilty intentions and hopes and desires. They are those who have pure desires. Perfectly? Impossible. Noticeable and growing? Certainly.
2. The blessing for the pure in heart is that such people will see God. No one has seen God in His unveiled glory (John 1:18, 1 John 4:12). But Rev. 22:4 teaches that the people of God *will* see the face of God—once they are purified and made completely righteous. They will walk not only by faith, but also by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). God is good to those who are pure in heart (Psalm 73:10).

G. Who is a peacemaker, v. 9.

1. These ones try to reconcile people who are having difficulties between themselves. Evangelists who bring peace between God and His enemies through the gospel are of this sort. Pastors who help reconcile family members and church members are in this tribe as well. They must teach the warring parties how forgiveness works, and why they need to exhibit it. They must show what love is and how to exercise it.
2. The blessing of being a peacemaker is that such people will be called sons of God. Again, do not read this as “if I make enough peace then I will become a child of God.” The blessing is that you will be declared openly to be what you are—a child of God by faith in Christ. Being called a son of God indicates that you have taken on the characteristics of who God is. In this case, those who make peace are like God in that way because God is a peacemaker. He works to reconcile us to Himself and thus shows us how to be reconciled to one another.

That statement is a bit anachronistic, I will admit, because Jesus did not say “by faith in Christ,” but in the present era, that is how people come to God and come to be a person who is a peacemaker and have all these other attributes.

H. Who is persecuted for God, v. 10-12.

1. Being lightly opposed for the sake of the gospel can hardly be called persecution. It is active, hard persecution that Jesus is talking about. It is not just people who say “no” to the gospel or even argue against it,

but who revile you and call you evil and try to harm you and close your church and put you in jail and make you pay fines and things like that.

2. Those who suffer under the oppression of such persecutors, like the poor in spirit, will inherit the kingdom of heaven, which is one and the same as the kingdom of God. Those who have been persecuted will receive more than the equivalent of everything back and more. The affliction of persecution will appear to be light in view of the glory that they will receive. This way, these ones can rejoice and be glad because they have a great reward in heaven.

There is no doubt that God has a special place in his heart, so to speak, for those who have endured such trouble from evildoers. They will be rewarded richly.

Conclusion

The world says “blessed are those who are confident, bold, wealthy, powerful, fulfilled, following their hearts, “good.” No so the Lord Jesus.

The eight traits of character proclaimed by Jesus are descriptions of what a person looks like when he “repents for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” When a person comes into a right relationship with the king, he is blessed in the ways we read about in verses 3-12. At the same time, these traits are checkpoints for us to see if we are living responsibly before the Lord.

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