

On the Way to the Cross - Part 7 and 8 - Christianity's Manifesto

As we continue our journey with Jesus, we find the Lord's ministry gaining both momentum and profile (be it unintentionally). It's now approximately eighteen months since He came out of the wilderness and started His ministry. Let's take up the story from Luke 6...

"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor. And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all." (verses 12-19).

The next thing that occurs is described best in **Matthew 5:1**. *"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him."* What follows is one of the most well known passages in the entire Bible. The Lord's inspiring "Sermon On The Mount" is a complete 'outline' of what might easily be called a true Christian "counter-culture."

It presents us with a completely new value system - ethical standards, religious devotion, attitudes toward material things, and correct personal relationships (all in contrast to the world system). The Sermon on the Mount comes closer to being Christianity's manifesto than any other single portion of scripture. Matthew breaks a 400-year-long scriptural silence - between Malachi and the birth of Christ. We have no record that God sent any prophets during that period. But when God began speaking again, He spoke through His Son. Here, the King of the kingdom of heaven outlines the characteristics of those who are subjects of His kingdom. Jesus sits as He proclaims the laws of His Kingdom and His posture is better seen as symbolic of the King sitting on His throne and laying down the law to His subjects (rather than a prophet speaking).

Jesus starts by listing specific characteristics which are essential to the subjects of His Kingdom. Each Beatitude includes; (a) a pronouncement of blessings, (b) a description of those considered as blessed, and (c) an explanation of the blessing itself. We need to fully understand the word "blessed" because, as some have rightly noted, the Greek word used by Matthew, *'makarios'*, can also be translated as "happy." Happy, however, is not the correct translation in this context. Happiness is subjective; the same things do not always make everybody happy. And, we can certainly rule out mourning as a producer of happiness.

Instead, Jesus makes objective judgments about the spiritual state of the citizens of His Kingdom. He reveals, not what they feel like, but rather what God thinks of them. People with these qualities gain God's approval. And because God thinks well of them, they are "blessed." Note, God's blessing is far broader and exceedingly more important than merely being happy! It all hinges on whether God thinks well of you. Quite simply, you are "blessed" because God is pleased with you! Blessings are a result of God's response to your actions and attitude.

You will notice that the second half of each Beatitude reveals what the blessing is; **“for they...”** or **“for theirs...”** As surely as all eight of these qualities should be part of each of us, so each of us should share in the eight blessings. Just as each of the eight qualities provides us with a broad overview of our responsibilities, the eight blessings also give us insight into the privileges that come to us because we are meeting those responsibilities. Privileges that are only there because God is well pleased with us. Note also, the first four Beatitudes, that have to do specifically with our relationship with God, set the stage for the final four, which have more to do with our dealings with other people.

Let's go through them one at a time (**Matthew 5:1-11**):

(1) Blessed Are the Poor In Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Here, "poor" is translated from *πτωχός*, which literally means *“to crouch or cower as one who is helpless.”* It signifies the beggar, one who is totally dependent on others for help, and destitute of even the bare necessities of life. At first "poor" simply indicated to be in material need, but gradually, its usage spread to many other areas to include people in weakness, frailty, feebleness, dependence, subservience, defencelessness, affliction and distress.

To grasp the use of "poor" in this Beatitude, we must try to understand the mind of a person who finds himself in such poverty. One who recognises his poverty and then takes the necessary steps to be “poor” no longer. In other words, he tries to change his present circumstances. God wants His us to have this view of poverty when dealing with spiritual matters. Thereafter, possess the drive to seek a way out through Christ, and Him alone.

To be *poor in spirit* is to acknowledge your spiritual poverty - indeed your spiritual bankruptcy - before God. On the strength of our lives we deserve nothing but God's judgment. We have nothing to offer, nothing to plead, nothing with which to buy His favour. However, upon profession of our faith, coupled with repentance, God allows (by His grace) the blood of Jesus Christ to cover our transgressions, justifying us and providing us with unrestricted access into His presence.

Those who possess *poverty of spirit* are pronounced "blessed." In one sense, they are blessed because they now have a new nature - the very opposite of their natural one. This is perhaps a fundamental proof that God has begun working in them (by His Spirit) to transform them into His own image. *“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* (**2 Corinthians 3:18**) Remember, your view of “self” will determine whether you are truly “blessed!”

(2) Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Since a person cannot come to Christ unless the Father first changes his heart, one who is poor in spirit is also one whose “heart” God has already softened. Therefore, anyone who acknowledges his sinfulness and helplessness before God naturally mourns his previous condition. This mourning is neither a general sadness nor an emotional upheaval, but rather, a strong mental grief resulting from the realisation of his own frailties. The mourning Jesus desires is the kind that exhibits a tenderness of heart that is ready for change (in a righteous direction). One that is eagerly willing to have itself

cleansed into holiness.

With regards holiness, this generation faces an uphill struggle because, through such media as the internet, television and movies, almost everyone has unwittingly experienced the moral decay of society in unparalleled frequency. On the screen life is cheap, property is meaningless, sexual purity is scoffed at, stealing is acceptable "if it's necessary," And, faithfulness or loyalty is nerdish and corny. Where is our God in all of this? How much of the world's attitudes have we embraced? Has the conscience been severed?

The "mourning" that Jesus is speaking about plays a positive role in producing the changes God desires to bring about in order to change society by transforming us into His own image. We need to constantly pray, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me*" (**Psalm 51:10**). Notice, David asks God to give him what did not exist before, that his affections and feelings might be made right, and that he might not have the callused attitude which led him to adultery and murder. A plea of this kind is one that God cannot deny.

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted! Comforted (in the Greek) implies that God will draw along-side you. Literally, God will be called to your side! I don't know about you, but I can't think of anything better! Having God by my side is all I need!

(3) Blessed Are The Meek

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Meekness means a calm temper, someone who is not easily provoked. It is a special type of humility. One that is considerate and gentle. It does not mean weakness. The greatest leaders among God's people were meek, that is, strong, but not boastful: "*The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*" (**Numbers 12:3**). Meekness is a 'self-control' quality that Christians are instructed to develop. Jesus, while physically and psychologically strong, was also **meek**. The Lord was not proud, not arrogant, not abusive. He always had "power under perfect control", which is a true rendition of meekness.

Note, the meek person does not restrain himself because he is timid, but because he **trusts in God** to vindicate and promote him. In fact, a righteous man is more courageous than a wicked man because he is confident and secure in God: "*The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion*" (**Proverbs 28:1**). He is bold to assert God's rule and to proclaim God's word. This is not true with the wicked because all he has is himself, and all he lives for is himself, and so he exerts all his efforts to gain what is insufficient and fleeting.

Jesus says, "**What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?**" (Mark 8:36). And notice, in this Beatitude the Lord states that the meek will "**inherit the earth**". Any inheritance has to do also with prosperity in the physical realm. Therefore, the promise is not completely spiritual or metaphorical. For as the supreme example of "meekness" (and gentleness), Jesus indeed *inherited* the whole earth, saying, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**" (Matthew 28:18). Christ is now reigning over all the earth! And having sat down at the right hand of God. Paul writes, "**He must reign until He has put all his enemies under his feet**" (1 Corinthians 15:25). The meek are to inherit all that Jesus has secured for them in heavenly places, and the manifestation of this

blessing in here on earth! Being “meek” is a product of the quiet confidence you have because you know where your authority comes from!

(4) Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). It is not at all uncommon these days to hear of an ambitious person as being “hungry” to accomplish certain things. The fact is, very few of us know what it is to be really “hungry” or really “thirsty.” Therefore, Jesus is not using “hunger” or “thirst” as we would describe the emptiness or dryness we feel between meals. But a hunger or thirst that seemingly can never be satisfied. This would be a hunger and thirst that, even after a full meal with plenty of drink, we would still feel as though we could eat and drink a lot more! One commentator describes it as, *“the painful hunger of the man who is starving for food, and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks.”* Nothing can better express the genuine desire we should all have in order to obtain **righteousness** (right-standing with God).

So what is Righteousness? At first it may seem like a ‘no-brainer’ because we all know it means “right doing.” But the Bible’s use of “righteousness” is both specific and broad. In the very familiar command Jesus gave in Matthew 6:33, **“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you,”** it has the sense of seeking all of God’s spiritual blessings. We see in this verse not only a broad application of the term, but also, (more importantly) its priority in life. This dovetails perfectly with the hunger-and-thirst metaphor. According to the Lord Jesus, it’s not enough to ambitiously yearn for accomplishment and success, because God’s Kingdom and His righteousness are meant to be the very top priorities in life. The question remains, *“What are you seeking first - every day of your life?”* Notice, God’s not interested in what you seek, but rather, what you seek first!

Remember, a blessing is pronounced on anyone who hungers and thirsts for righteousness; but such a person is also promised to be satisfied fully. If you have a thirst that no earthly stream can satisfy, and a hunger that must be fed on Christ alone, you will be **filled** (to overflowing) with living water. *“They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; ... for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters”* (**Revelation 7:16-17**).

(5) Blessed Are The Merciful

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” A literal translation reads, **“Exceedingly fortunate are the merciful, for they shall be set free.”** Hence, those who extend mercy are themselves liberated! This lines up with the ‘Parable of the Unmerciful Servant’ in **Matthew 18:32-34**, *“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?’ In anger his master delivered him to the tormentors until he paid all that was owing to him.”* Being unmerciful imprisons you, but showing mercy will set you free!

The great blessing promised to those who are merciful, is based on the universal principle that holds true, and that is, **we reap what we sow!** A person “reaps what he sows” in this life (**Galatians 6:7-8**). Therefore, those who constantly set higher standards for forgiveness toward others will have others extend the same high standards

toward them. They will obtain an harvest of mercy! This should also be understood in the light of the invitation, **“Come, you blessed of My Father,”** issued by Jesus to the faithful in Matthew 25:31-46. For this was not directed toward those who have worked and deserved to be blessed.

Rather, it was directed toward those who have obediently depended upon the mercy of God (and had given mercy toward others). They alone enjoy the blessedness of a Father who has extended **mercy** toward them. Therefore, whenever you exercise a merciful attitude toward those who have hurt or offended you, you are merely imitating God. And as mentioned in the opening statement, you will experience a liberty that releases the *joy of the Lord!*

(6) Blessed Are The Pure In Heart

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Attitudes are ‘matters of the heart’. When we get our attitudes right our “thinking” will be right also. *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7)*. Therefore, to be **pure in the heart** is to be ‘*pure in the mind*’, and in all the functions that the mind performs. So, if you had an impure heart, you would have an impure mind too. That is, impure thoughts, beliefs, motives, decisions, and emotions. Consequently, you will have impure actions as well! Jesus was referring to a **purity** that is deeper than an external conformity to God’s laws and precepts. A purity that draws you closer to God - so close that you can “see” Him.

We know that God’s word is sown in the heart (**Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:15**), thereafter, illuminating the mind. For this reason, we can safely assume that the “light” of God’s word is meant to shine into our hearts so that God may reveal Himself. So that, we can “see” Him! Besides, we also know that God’s word has a cleansing effect (**Ephesians 5:26**), and when received it purifies the heart. Therefore, a person who is **“pure in heart”** is someone who receives the word of God with gladness and “keeps it” (**Luke 8:15**). Therefore, there is a direct relationship between a “pure” heart and the word of God.

To “see” God is an expression referring to both a relationship with God and a revelation from God through His word. To “see” God, is to perceive Him with a mind that has been illuminated and transformed by a pure heart (a heart that has been cleansed by His Word). Therefore, the promise of Jesus is not *“If you will become pure enough in your heart, I will let you take a look at God,”* but rather, *“Those of you who are **pure in heart** are blessed because God will reveal Himself to you and cause you to know Him all the more!”* In fact, you will provoke God to intervene and appear in every circumstance. Now we know why Jesus calls us blessed!

“Blessed (exceedingly fortunate) are the pure in heart, for the light of their purity will cause God to reveal Himself.” Another way of looking at this verse is, *“Exceedingly fortunate are the pure in heart, for they shall cause the light (revelation) of God to flood their hearts.”* Notice, purity is of the heart, but so to is “seeing.” The place where your purity is located, is the very place you will “see” God. In **1 Samuel 16:7** the Lord said to Samuel, *“Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”* God only has eyes for your heart!

(7) Blessed Are The Peacemakers

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” A “peacemaker” is one who seeks to bring harmony and reconciliation between those who are estranged. Peacemaking seeks to produce right relationships between persons. God hates those who sow discord and stir up trouble (Proverbs 6:19).

Yet every community and every local church and many homes have people who thrive on divisions and conflict and unrest. Peacemakers are needed in our churches. Holding grudges and evil speaking are common sources of conflict among believers. Busybodies, slanderers and disagreeable people can cause havoc. Peacemakers are needed in our homes. Quarrelling and disagreements and unwillingness to respect God’s order of authority, often lead people to mistreat those who really love them the most — intimate family members. Peacemakers are needed among nations. We are to seek to live at peace with all persons (**Romans 12:18**). Our faith requires that we love God and our neighbours and pray for our enemies.

1 John 3:1 says, *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.”* As a child of God you have a ministry of reconciliation. You are to reconcile others to God through Christ Jesus. This is what brings lasting peace in a man’s life, in his family and in society. **2 Corinthians 5:18** tells us, *“And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and has given unto us the ministry of reconciliation.”* It is every believer’s calling, to reconcile others back to God. To make peace between God and those who do not yet know Him. You are the glue that holds things together - in the church, your family and in society!

(8) Blessed Are Those Who Are Persecuted

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.” In this Beatitude, Jesus is hitting at the core of what it means to be a **follower of Christ** (a subject of the Kingdom of God). He is warning those people who are sold out completely to living a life for Him and His cause. Such people will have a distinct aroma of the Spirit of God on their lives, and this scent is the smell of death for those who are dying spiritually. For this reason, true followers of Christ will probably be rejected by the immoral and politically correct. But in contrast, believers who do not hold to their faith are not persecuted - for there is no reason to be. They are not making a loud enough stand against the systems of this world to merit being silenced. Strong, uncompromising Christians who are not afraid to speak the truth of God’s Word may not be martyred, but they will certainly not be considered a guest of honor at a pro-abortion gathering either.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
“Exceedingly fortunate are those who are victimized for righteousness sake.” The word “persecuted” means; ‘to be pursued’ or ‘chased after’, or ‘to stalk with hostile intent’. Persecution and all the variations of this word are used in the Bible 76 times. The word signifies “being chased after.” It is a hostile intent to chase down and hunt prey!

This Beatitude appears to contradict itself by saying; *“blessed are those who are victimized,”* but if you read it in the

context of **Matthew 16:17-19** you'll see that the church is blessed because it has all spiritual authority. Therefore, when ever you are 'being hunted down' for the Cause of Jesus Christ, you must remember that you are blessed! "Blessed" because you have the **keys of authority** in the spirit realm; "blessed" because your enemy has already been defeated. "Blessed" because you can infiltrate and occupy enemy territory!

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (**Matthew 11:12**). The idea is that the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, so it requires an equally strong and radical reaction from us! To be forcefully antagonistic toward the enemies of God! *"The gates of hell will not prevail against the church"* (**Matthew 16:18**). Whenever you are persecuted, remember that the spiritual conflict is never lost. Jesus offers all those who are persecuted for His name, an inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. And heaven is where the blessings and promises of God are housed. We are exceedingly fortunate when being persecuted for righteousness sake. Why? Because we have access to every blessing of God *in heavenly places*. So keep reminding yourself, whatever is loosed in heaven is loosed on earth - being loosed into your life!

Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

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

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

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