

During Lent this year, we are studying the Beatitudes as contained in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. In the Beatitudes, Jesus promises “blessings” to all who will come to Him; to all who decide to live their lives each day by following His example. Jesus is not saying “live like this in order to be saved;” He is saying “live like this because you are saved and are one of my followers.” Thus, this is an excellent passage for us to study during Lent when we should be asking ourselves: “Who is Jesus Christ to me? What is my relationship to Him? What must I do to grow closer to Him?” Listen again to the Beatitudes from the fifth chapter of Matthew, the first twelve verses.

Read Matthew 5:1-12

Last Sunday we started our discussion of the Beatitudes with some background information and looked at the first beatitude in verse 3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This morning, let’s discuss the next two beatitudes beginning with verse 4: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” In the *Common English Bible*, this verse is translated as follows: “Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.” The *Message* paraphrases it this way: “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.” As I said last Sunday, I prefer to use the term “blessed” more than happy, because to me it has a deeper meaning; it comes from the heart while happiness depends on exterior circumstances, what’s happening around you.

For example, some people bring happiness wherever they go, while others only bring happiness when they leave. If you don’t believe that happiness depends on the circumstances around you, did you hear about the man who mistakenly locked his dog and his wife in the trunk of his car and left them there for over an hour? When he finally opened the trunk, who do you think was the happiest to see him? Happiness depends on what is going on around you, while blessedness is an inner joy and peace that comes from being in a right relationship with God.

It should be noted that the Greek word used here for “to mourn” is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning the dead, for the passionate grieving for a loved one. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, it is used to describe Jacob’s grief when he believed that his son Joseph was dead. Unfortunately, we all know how this feels; who of us has not felt the pain of the passing of a loved one; who of us have not shed tears for the void left in our life by death, divorce or separation?

As noted last Sunday, many of the Beatitudes are based on an Old Testament passage to which Jesus applies a new interpretation. Like last week’s beatitude concerning the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn is also based on a passage from Isaiah 61. In this passage, Isaiah

foretells of the coming of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. He says that the Messiah will bind up the brokenhearted and proclaim the hour when the mourners would be comforted, when their ashes of sorrow will be replaced by a crown of joy, and their mourning will be replaced with the oil of gladness.

Now there are several ways to interpret this particular beatitude. It can be taken quite literally: "Blessed is the person who has endured the bitterest sorrow that life can give." Sorrow can do two things for us. It can show us, as nothing else can, the essential kindness of our fellow human beings. And it can also show us as nothing else can the comfort and the compassion of God. Many of us in our hour of sorrow have experienced the love and support of our church family, friends and neighbors, and God as never before. Thus, in our deepest hour of sorrow, we find new strength and the ability to keep going.

In funeral services I like to read the 23rd Psalm. I have found it to be one of the most comforting scripture passages in times of grief. I especially like verse 4 from the King James Version of the Bible which states: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." In our times of loss, we walk through the valley, we don't stay there. God, with the support of family members, friends and our church family, leads us through this dark valley to the other side where there is healing. In our mourning, God's arms reach out to us, to embrace us and comfort us.

Another way to look at this beatitude is: "Blessed are those who are desperately sorry for the sorrow and suffering of this world." Remember that Jesus said we are to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. As Christians we are called to care for each other; when our heart goes out to those who are suffering, then we are blessed; when our focus is on the needs of others then our life is more blessed. Jesus set the example for us. In the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11:35, we are told that as Jesus stood before the tomb of his friend Lazarus, He wept. When we are not self-centered and put others before ourselves our life is indeed blessed. The heart is happiest when it beats for others; when we give ourselves in service to others. Someone once said: "The roots of happiness grow deepest in the soil of service."

Now while Jesus may have been talking about those who have lost loved ones or those who are concerned for the suffering of the world, many believe that in this beatitude Jesus is referring to those who recognize their sins and are truly sorry for them. In other words, blessed is the person who is sorry for their own sin and their own unworthiness. Remember that Jesus calls us to repent and to return to God. No one can truly repent until they recognize what sin is doing to their life and are determined to change how they live.

A Sunday School teacher asked her class what the word "repentance" meant. A little boy put up his hand and said: "It's being sorry for your sins." A little girl added: "It's being sorry enough

to quit.” Now, there’s an excellent point! Jesus came to restore the broken relationship between God and us. Because of the gift of free will, we tend to drift from God and live in sin. The way back to God is by recognizing how far we have drifted, how much we need Him, and how sorry we are; and then by doing something about it, by repenting of our sins.

King David understood this when the prophet Nathan confronted him concerning his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. David’s sorrow for his sin is recorded in Psalm 51 where he states: “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you and you only, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment.” As God forgave David, so He forgives us when we fall short of His expectations. The arms of the cross reach out to us to embrace us, forgive us, and comfort us.

Max Lucado in his book *Applause of Heaven* translates this second beatitude as follows: “Blessed are those who know that they are in trouble and have enough sense to admit it.” This attitude encourages us to admit our failures and to accept God’s grace. When we do this, God promises to comfort us with: 1) courage for the present situation; 2) calm during the storm; 3) companionship for the journey; 4) compassion for our shortcomings; and 5) confidence for the future.

Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven and we have the promise of eternal life. Revelation 21:4 states: “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” This is the comfort that Jesus promises in this beatitude to all who believe in and follow Him.

Now let’s look at the third beatitude as recorded in verse 5: “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.” Another translation of Bible states: “Happy are people who are humble.” The *Message* paraphrases it this way: “You’re blessed when you are content with just who you are – no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that cannot be bought.” As I noted earlier, many of the Beatitudes are based on an Old Testament reference. In this case, it is from Psalm 37:11 which states: “But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.”

Just like last week’s discussion on the poor in the spirit, this beatitude is also contrary to the world’s way of thinking. Because in today’s world to refer to someone as meek is insulting; it means that they are weak, wimps who have no backbone, submissive, letting others walk all over them. However, in the Bible the meek are those who have a spirit of gentleness and self-control; they are free from malice and a condescending spirit. The meek do not exploit and oppress others; they are not given to vengeance; they are not violent; and they do not try to seize power or control the lives of others for their own benefit. In short, they try to imitate the

example of Jesus Christ in their daily lives. This does not mean that they are weak or ineffective in life. They may be gentle and humble, but they can and do champion the needs of the weak and the oppressed. Meekness is not weakness; it is strength submitted to the control of God and His will.

In this beatitude, Jesus is talking about an attitude; a form of humility that is sorely lacking in our world today. A famous baseball coach once declared that “nice guys finish last.” Let’s face it, we live in a me-first society where no one is meek by nature. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. Look at Peter; he was as head-strong and impulsive as anyone, but led by the Spirit at Pentecost, he delivered one of the greatest sermons of all times. And then there is Paul who was persecuting the early Christians until he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. Before they met Jesus both of these two great apostles were not meek. However, Jesus set the example for them and for us to follow.

Now without humility, a person cannot learn, for the first step in learning is the realization of our own lack of knowledge. Describing his class, an ancient famous Roman teacher said: “They would no doubt be excellent students, if they were not already convinced of their own knowledge.” You cannot teach someone anything who already thinks they know everything; take teenagers for example, I think we all have stories about our kids when they were going through this stage of life. To be meek is to be the opposite of the egotistical know-it-all who has to have the last word on every subject. To know God, to live as close as possible to Jesus, you must have what John Calvin called a “teachable spirit.” Without humility there can also be no true religion, for all true religion begins with the realization of our own weakness and of our need for God.

Peter Marshall, the former Chaplain of the United States Senate, had a great prayer on humility: “Lord, when we are wrong, make us willing to change; when we are right, make us easy to live with.” Now that’s a great prayer and words to live by!

There were two brothers who grew up on a farm. One went away to college, earned a law degree, and became a partner in a prominent law firm in the state capital. The other brother stayed on the family farm. One day the lawyer came home and visited his brother, the farmer. He asked: “Why don’t you go out and make a name for yourself and hold your head up high like I do?” His brother pointed and said: “See that field of wheat over there? Look closely. Only the empty heads stand up. Those that are well filled always bow low.” Said differently: “The branch that bears the most fruit is bent the lowest to the ground.”

Jesus says that those who are meek, humble and self-controlled will inherit the earth. It is a fact of history that there have always been passionate men and women with this gift of self-

control who have made a difference for the Lord. Humility is not denying the power that you have, but realizing that the power comes through you, not from you.

Numbers 12:3 tells us that "Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth." Now Moses was no milk toast character; he was no pushover; he could be quite forceful, just ask Pharaoh. Dwight L. Moody said that Moses spent forty years thinking he was somebody in Pharaoh's palace; then he spent forty years on the back side of the desert realizing that he was nobody; and finally, he spent the last forty years of his life learning what God can do with a nobody; somebody who gave God control of his life. Meekness is based on a trust in God; it involves submission to Him and His will, which leads a person to do the right thing.

Those of you who enjoy horseback riding know that some horses have what is called a "tender mouth," while other horses are toughed mouth. Those with a tender mouth are sensitive and responsive to the movement of the reins. This is the attitude towards God of one who is meek. This goes back to what we discussed last week and that is giving God complete control of your life. If you really want to experience the presence of God in your life and enjoy the hope and peace of mind that only He can offer, then let Him have the control of your life, lean on His everlasting arms and discover the happiness that you have been longing for in your life. Blessed are those who recognize their need for God and walk in faith with Him each day. Amen