

Mourning, Meekness, and Hungering and Thirsting for Righteousness (Matt 5.4-6)

I. REVIEW: ORIENTING OUR LIVES TOWARD GOD'S KINGDOM

- A. The Sermon on the Mount is the most comprehensive teaching from Jesus on what it means for a believer to partner with him in grace. This picture of a life in partnership with the grace of God is centered around the things that he calls valuable (“blessed”), the things that stand in the way of that pursuit (Matt 5.21-48), and the practices that facilitate and promote the growth of these values in our hearts (Matt 6).
- B. Jesus invites his followers to intentionally order our lives around these teachings. We must both hear and Jesus invites us to intentionally order our lives around these teachings. It is not enough to hear the words of Jesus and accept them, we are invited to *obey* them through intentionally pursuing cooperation with God’s grace in response to his teaching.
- C. The Sermon on the Mount begins with Jesus’ statement about the value-system of the kingdom of heaven. The eight “beatitudes” operate like invitations into holding and embodying the things that are truly great in God’s economy and kingdom. These are like fruits that we must cultivate by the grace of God in partnership with the Spirit’s activity in our lives. They are supernatural gifts that are given and grown.
- D. Another way to think about values is to talk about the ideas of satisfaction and fulfillment (what is the “good life”). Every society in human history has presented a picture of what it believes will provide true and lasting satisfaction (wholeness, happiness, joy, etc.) to people. Humans are hard-wired to orient our lives around what we believe will provide us the most true and lasting fulfillment. Whatever we picture in our minds as providing us ultimate happiness (money, status, freedom, etc.) will be the things we orient our actions around attaining.
- E. These eight fruits are the “litmus test” for our growth in grace and godliness. In many ways, these are the measure of our real and true impact in the kingdom of God — not the size and scope of our ministry or the number of disciples we convert/make/etc. Possessing these fruits (and seeing them grow) define a life of love and spiritual maturity that is at the heart of a life oriented around God’s kingdom.
- F. Each of these eight markers runs counter to the ways that the world defines success, growth, maturity, and greatness. Because of this, we must *intentionally* and *consistently* reorient our lives by God’s grace to see these realities as truly blessed. If our minds and hearts are captivated by the cares of this life, or by the patterns of this world (what our culture/age defines as valuable), then we will not see these realities as markers of a blessed life before God.

II. POVERTY OF SPIRIT (MATT 5.3)

- A. The foundational, or chief virtue in the life of the kingdom is poverty of spirit. To be poor in spirit is to rightly *see* ourselves and our need in light of God’s great design for us, and our own inability to attain to this (both by our limited capacities *and* because of our sin).
- B. To be poor in spirit is to understand and rightly evaluate that we are spiritually poor, not spiritually rich, in ourselves. We do not possess within ourselves the means (power, virtue, ability, righteousness, faculties, etc.) to experience and impart deep spiritual life. We must see our great need for God and his grace to experience the depths of what he has called us to walk in.
- C. ***Theirs is the kingdom:*** Jesus is declaring that the poor in spirit (those who understand that utter dependence before God for salvation and for fullness) will experience kingdom reality *now* in their lives. This is not in its fullness but is substantive and real. The presence of the kingdom in our lives includes: *internal reality in God; answer to prayer; growing in the experience of intimacy with the Trinity; real and lasting transformation; dynamic healing; the gifts of the Spirit;* and much more.

III. MOURNING (MATT 5.4)

- A. Spiritual mourning is dynamically related to the reality of our poverty of spirit. If poverty of spirit is how we **see** (evaluate, assess) our spiritual condition before God, spiritual mourning is how we **feel** in response to that assessment.
- B. The progression of the beatitudes demonstrates a fundamental principle of the human condition: how we feel is correlated to how we see/perceive. The result of seeing ourselves rightly — our desperate sinfulness, our utter inability to produce God's purposes in ourselves and our ministry, and the realities of our coming to Jesus to die — cause us to experience real sorrow.
- C. Godly sorrow is a spiritual blessing (or a supernatural grace) that is worked in us by the power of God's Spirit. The working of this reality leads us to salvation (when confronted with our desperate plight in sin) and will lead us to places of greater dependence and deliverance (dullness, powerlessness, etc.).
- D. Learning to receive the painful graces of the Spirit is essential in our growth in maturity and godliness. Many do not rightly assess this emotional work in their lives and it causes them to draw back in feelings of condemnation and shame.
- E. Experiencing the pain of mourning in our lives is **evidence of the Spirit's presence**. Apart from the activity of God's grace in our lives we cannot feel the sorrow that comes from our poverty of Spirit.
- F. There are four primary elements of spiritual mourning as outlined in this beatitude:

- 1. We mourn when we **feel godly sorrow over our sin**. Godly sorrow over our sin has the ability to produce true and lasting repentance in our lives. This is the place where confession (*poverty of spirit*) meets contrition (*mourning*).

⁹As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! (2 Cor 7.9-11)

- 2. We mourn when we **grieve the reality of our spiritual apathy, dullness, and powerlessness**. There is a grace available to God's people to be *troubled* over our present spiritual condition. This is directly tied to receiving a revelation of all that God has made available in Christ to those who are his (a vibrant heart, experience of his grace, experience of his power, etc.). When we see all that he has promised us and our present condition, we experience the desperate pain of our own lack.

²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? ³My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, "Where is your God?" (Ps 42.2-3)

- 3. We mourn when we **experience the cost of following Jesus**. Jesus calls each of his followers to lose their lives in order to follow him (and ultimately find true life in the end). This is not a sentimental call, but one that requires true spiritual cost (Matt 13.44) and spiritual violence (Matt 11.12). There are real things that we 'lose' in order to follow Christ, and we do a disservice to ourselves and others to minimize the real cost/pain of these losses.

⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (Phil 3.8)

4. We mourn when we ***grieve the brokenness of the world***. Until the renewal of all things, we sojourn in a broken and fallen world. This means that we will suffer the results of this present evil age (sickness, death, injustice, etc.) until we are with Christ. There is a unique invitation in the Christian life to enter into a sorrow and lament that the world is not the way it should be *while* we hold on to hope of all of God's promises.

¹How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ²How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? (Ps 13.1-2)

¹²Hope deferred makes the heart sick (Prov 13.12)

- G. The pain of mourning can be one of the greatest spiritual teachers if we allow it to be. Rather than seek to numb the pain, or excuse it, we can steward it as a catalyst for change, growth, and momentum in our lives. Spiritual mourning can cause us to become extreme in rearranging our lives to give everything to pursue all that God has for us.
- H. We truly enter into this beatitude when we refuse to be comforted by anything less than God's highest purposes for our lives (personal, family, ministry, church, etc.). Similar to the discontent of poverty of spirit, there will always be well-intended people who seek to talk you out of spiritual mourning.
- I. ***They will be comforted***: The glorious promise to those who mourn is that they will experience true and lasting comfort. This will be experienced in part in this age and in fullness in the age to come. We experience the comfort of God's presence by:
1. ***Tasting and seeing his goodness in this life***. There will be aspects of true comfort given by God to those who wait upon him and refuse to be comforted elsewhere.

¹³I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living! ¹⁴Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD! (Ps 27.13-14)
 2. ***Seeing him face to face in eternity***. The particular promise for those who mourn is that there is a day coming when God himself will wipe every tear away from the eyes of his people.

³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Rev 21.3-4)

IV. MEEKNESS (MATT 5.5)

- A. There is a powerful progression and train of thought to the first four beatitudes. Once we begin to ***see*** our spiritual condition (poverty), that causes us to ***feel*** the pain of our condition (mourning). The next beatitude turns then to deal with how we ***act*** in light of those two realities — this is the nature of meekness.
- B. Meekness is possessing a "servant spirit" in the use of our natural strengths and resources in relation to others. Meekness and humility are closely tied together. To be meek is to use our resources (time, money, reputation, power, etc.) for the purpose of serving without any regard for receiving gain from others.
- C. If we truly understand that my abilities cannot produce the highest of God's purposes for my life (they cannot produce deep life, transformation, impartation, power, etc.), then I am free to use my strengths not for my own gain, or to further my own cause, and can trust the God will hold my lot.

- D. Contrary to common conceptions, meekness is not a personality trait or a temperament. This is not speaking of timidity or sheepishness (can often be fear of man or lack of confidence in one's identity in Christ). Meekness is possessing the power and freedom to act in ways that are opposite of our own innate self-centeredness. If part of poverty of spirit is renouncing our own personal rights, meekness is the freedom to act toward others, with regards to our natural gifts, out of that posture.
- E. To be self-focused (or self-centered) in our pursuits is to live in profound bondage. We do this because we do not trust the promises and care of God over us and therefore fight to attain our own satisfaction, comfort, promotion, fulfillment, etc.
- F. Meekness is one of the few traits that Jesus used to describe himself. He invites us to submit ourselves to him (take his yoke upon us) and learn his ways precisely *because* he is meek.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle (meek, KJV) and lowly in heart (Matt 11.28)

- G. In the most beautiful exposition of true meekness in the Scripture, Paul invites us to see that Jesus did not utilize any of his divine rights for his own advantage. Rather, he used his strength to empty himself to the point of death — ultimately entrusting himself to God the Father to uphold his lot.

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil 2.6-8)

- H. David declared that his times were in the hands of God, and therefore he could entrust his spirit (everything he cared about most deeply) to him.

⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God... ¹⁴But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." ¹⁵My times are in your hand (Ps 31.5, 14-15)

- I. We grow in meekness by reorienting our preoccupations. We come to Jesus in a spirit of poverty and ask him to reveal himself as the source of everything we are and everything we possess. Because of this, we can be grateful for what we have been given and use it with generosity.
- J. However, we are naturally preoccupied with ourselves. Each of us believes that we deserve better in this world. We think we deserve more money, honor, or favor than we actually receive. This produces an entitled spirit that demonstrates our false esteem of our own gifting, accomplishments, and position.
- K. We gauge our growth in meekness by looking to how our hearts react when we are *overlooked, rejected, or resisted*.
- L. ***They will inherit the earth:*** the promise given to the meek is that they will inherit the earth. This speaks of receiving a reward of eternal vocation, value, and inheritance from the hand of God. This is a quotation from Psalm 37, which is an extended meditation on cultivating meekness when it looks like the wicked are prevailing in this life. Those who cultivate meekness trust that God will give them all they long for in the age to come, and therefore do not fight to possess what they believe they need in this life. This includes a resurrected body, life in God's presence, and an eternal assignment in partnership with Christ.

²⁶The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. (Rev 2.26-27)

V. HUNGERING AND THIRSTING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (MATT 5.6)

- A. The idea of hungering and thirsting for righteousness flows out of the previous three beatitudes. This speaks of the aching and the longing that those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, and who are meek will experience. Those who utilize their strengths with generosity and a servant spirit will find themselves *lacking*. There will be an ache and an emptiness that occurs with the pursuit of these values.
- B. Jesus declares that there is a glory and a freedom that comes from hungering for more of God's grace in our lives. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means that we long for (and therefore press in to receive) all that God desires to release in us. This is about experience with God and our desire for it.
- C. Hunger and thirst make us desperate and have the potential to elicit dramatic and radical responses from our lives. We will reorient *everything* in our lives around attaining that which we think will ultimately satisfy us. There is a profound relationship between hunger and pursuit.

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Ps 63.1)

⁹For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. ¹⁰When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. ¹¹When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. (Ps 69.9-11)

- D. There is a temptation in a society that has access to “everything-now” to live throughout our lives unaware of the hunger and thirst we possess for God. Because of this, we must cultivate practices of intentionally detaching ourselves from the love of pleasure, comforts, and fulfillment. We do this by practicing the spiritual disciplines with consistency over time and asking God to increase our experience of spiritual hunger.
- E. Hunger and thirst are essential signs of life. An experience of Christianity without hunger and thirst for the things of God is not normal from God's perspective. It is actually a sign of spiritual sickness.
- F. To remain in a posture of spiritual longing requires the grace of God to sustain us through the changing seasons of our lives. It is hard to stay steady in the place of hunger. We will often find other ways to try and satiate our aches and longings (talk ourselves out of it, numb it, etc.).
- G. The greatest temptation facing a sustained posture of hunger and thirst throughout our life is the temptation of despair. When our hearts experience the longing and aching of unfulfillment we are tempted to believe the lie that God will not make good on his promises. It requires sustained grace to remain in the place of faith over the long-haul — believing that God will make good on his promises and that those who hunger and thirst will ultimately be satisfied.

³My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” ⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation ⁶and my God. (Ps 42.3, 5-6)

- H. ***They will be satisfied***: One of the greatest promises of the Scripture in relation to our deepest needs and longings is that God himself will satisfy us. This will come in small ways through this life (experiences of grace, revelation, experience of his life, etc.), but will be the eternal inheritance of all those who are in him.

¹¹You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps 16.11)

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. (Ps 36.8)