

"How Can I be Blessed?" Part II

Matthew 5:5-6

Jesus' message on the mountainside along the Sea of Galilee was a breath of fresh air on the one hand because as His message ends the people were "*amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*"

It's possible they thought Jesus was giving a new teaching. But Jesus assured them in 5:17-20

¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. ¹⁹Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²⁰For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

So yes, Jesus' teaching was a breath of fresh air in contrast to the Pharisees, but Jesus raised the bar of righteousness back to God's requirements which was a righteousness based on faith not by external works.

His message begins with 8 blessings; eight being the number Scripture uses at times to describe that which is one better than perfect (7 often symbolizing perfection or wholeness). The first and 8th beatitude form the framework around the blessings by beginning and ending the same way, "for Yours is the Kingdom of heaven" – a present reality then because the King had come, but also anticipating future fulfilment with the King's rewards as blessings two through 7 are all in the future tense (near future and far future).

The kingdom exists today for those who believe Jesus is the Messiah and have confessed their unworthiness. 'Poor in spirit' means we all lack the resources to be saved. Our sin separates us from God and so we fall short of His glorious presence. Jesus, the sinless Son of God, died for our sins so each of us must confess we are a sinner and accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of our life. The Pharisees were trying to be meticulously and externally clean but were not dealing with their hearts. They felt they were fine when they were not. They did not mourn over their own sin or anyone else's. Jesus rebuked them for adding burdens to people rather than relieving them.

The term "blessing" has two main ideas: favour and joy. To be blessed of God means God has favoured you, He has graced you. And that makes you happy, content, filled with joy. It's not a happiness based on circumstances but a joy based on confidence that God is with you and for you. Ultimately this is what God meant when He told Moses to tell Aaron and all the priests to bless the people with Num. 6:24-26 at every worship service. The Pharisees had led the people to believe that God's blessing rested on you if you were wealthy, healthy and successful.

The next two beatitudes continue to contrast the Pharisees teaching with Scripture.

⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

The word meek has taken a bad rap. It is often associated with weakness which is actually the opposite of what meekness means. Meekness means to be in control because we are settled or confident in who we are in God not in our own skills and resources. Jesus actually is quoting Ps. 37:11 (as well as 22, 29, 34). When a New Testament writer quotes an Old Testament verse he is referring to the context as well. So Ps. 37 is the background for this blessing. Let's just read vv.1-11.

- ¹ Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;*
- ² for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.*
- ³ Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*
- ⁴ Take delight in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
- ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:*
- ⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.*
- ⁷ Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.*
- ⁸ Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.*
- ⁹ For those who are evil will be destroyed,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.*
- ¹⁰ A little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look for them, they will not be found.*
- ¹¹ But the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy peace and prosperity.*

Here's what we learn about how we can receive God's blessing on our life; when we . . .

Rest in God's Promise to Bless **(5:5; 11:29; 21:5)**

The psalmist encourages the one who trusts in God for his life through faith to not fret about the evildoers who harm you or what you read about on the news. Why? Because eventually they die, like grass and wither away. The wages of sin is death and ultimately the evildoers get paid for their evil wages, unless they repent and turn to God. The believer than trust in the Lord because God has a payday for His people as well; the inheritance of the earth. We get the new earth. God owns everything and we receive everything. The meek are those whose faith in God is not rattled when evil wins small skirmishes because in the long run God wins the battle. This

Frees us from fretting (Ps. 37:1, 7, 8)

The opposite of fretting is trust. The meek person is confident in God's ability to keep his promise to bless His people and can hang in there when circumstances tempt us to think otherwise. In our lifetime laws have passed in our country that allow abortion, same sex marriages and smoking marijuana. "Do not fret". God is still in control. He is allowing the wicked to reap the consequences of their actions so that some of them will hit bottom and start to find that sin doesn't satisfy but God does. So delight yourself in God, wait patiently for Him because He has promised us the world. The new earth in Rev. 21-22 will only contain believers in God and no sin. That's what the meek inherit.

But in the meantime, He is also with us and reassures us through His Spirit of His joyful presence – I'm trying not to jump to the next beatitude yet but we can see why these two follow each other. *"Refrain from anger and turn from wrath, do not fret it leads only to evil."*

The meek person is confident in God and frets less because they know God is in control. And when they are personally attacked, they resist the desire to retaliate with revenge because resting in God . . .

Frees us from a defensive attitude (Num. 12; 1 Pet. 2:21-23)

When we are attacked or accused wrongly or our faith is misrepresented, the meek person doesn't need to react with anger, instead they can respond with kindness and confidence and state simply what God says. Sometimes we don't need to defend ourselves at all, like Moses. In Num. 12 his sister Miriam and his brother Aaron complained about Moses because he had taken a Cushite wife. But that was an excuse to parade their own selfish thoughts;

² "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this.

³ (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

⁴ At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the tent of meeting, all three of you." So the three of them went out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When the two of them stepped forward, ⁶ he said, "Listen to my words: "When there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. ⁷ But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Then God struck Miriam with leprosy. Aaron pleaded for Moses to plead with God – and he did – but God said Miriam has essentially spat in my face and the law says she must be put out of the camp for 7 days. Her leprosy lasted for 7 days.

Meekness is the spiritual evidence of one who trusts God to vindicate them and resists the urge to defend themselves.

And Peter gave us the example of Jesus in 1 Pet. 2:21-23,

²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Jesus described Himself as meek in Matt. 11:28-29,

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus wasn't a wimp or indecisive and never spoke out. But He knew when to speak truth confidently and when to refrain from self-defensiveness. When he strode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the people quoted Zech. 9:9 seeing this as a fulfilment. It says of Jesus,

⁵ "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

A king rode a donkey when He was coming in peace but a horse when he was coming for war. Jesus came riding a donkey. Jesus will return riding a horse. Jesus offers us peace with God and peace with ourselves and peace between each other. God is our judge, jury and lawyer. It's His Word that declares us saved, that defines who we are (loved and accepted) and His Word that reminds us to trust Him because He's in control. And those who are meek, who rest in God's promise to bless us understand the more we rest in God's promises it . . .

Produces a receptive spirit (Gal. 5:23; James 1:19-21)

Listen to these familiar words from James 1:19-21,

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

'Humbly accept' is the same word as meekness. When I trust God's promise to bless and rely on His Word I will slow down and listen more because I won't feel the need to always share my opinion or defend myself or even correct someone if the timing isn't right, and genuinely listen to them. That will produce a receptive spirit (to God through the Word because I'm actually doing what the Word says) resulting in a less harsh defensive spirit who always feels they must speak resulting in anger more often than not.

See, you can't go out and practice meekness or humility. It's a spiritual quality that develops as we trust God more and ourselves less. Because meekness or gentleness is a fruit of the Spirit. And we develop fruit over a long period of time of invisible growing. The more we trust God, the more we listen to Him and do what He says, we'll listen more to others and defend ourselves less. This quiet confidence in God's promise to bless us also comes because we are . . .

Pursuing God with an Unquenchable Thirst **(5:6)**

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Unfortunately, we usually have to learn the hard way that only God truly satisfies us. The Old Testament background for this blessing is probably Is. 55:1-7,

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

³ Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples.

⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor."

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. ⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

God promises those who seek Him that they will find their satisfaction in the Son of David who will receive the worship of the nations one day. God wants us to seek Him . . .

So that we are not deceived by temporal trinkets (Is. 55:1-7)

Don't waste your time and resources, God says through Isaiah finding out that the things you paid for and pursued here did not fulfil you. "Listen to me that you may live". Vv. 6-7 are a plea to people to find God before its too late. To admit that life's pleasures are fleeting and empty and find that God alone satisfies. Hunger and thirst for righteousness; that which makes you right with God that which results in right living and seeking what God declares right even if the world says its not.

When we seek a relationship with God and desire to know God more through His Word we find . . .

True satisfaction (Ps. 16; 63)

God has set eternity in our hearts (Ecc.3:11) which means we were not wired for the temporal but for the eternal. That's why even the best things life offers loses its value and excitement after awhile. But God doesn't. Listen to David in these two psalms,

Ps. 16:1 Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.

² I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." ³ I say of the holy people who are in the land, "They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight."

⁴ Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.

I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips. ⁵ LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. ⁶ The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely, I have a delightful inheritance. ⁷ I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. ⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, ¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. ¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

David sought God because God satisfied Him. He enjoyed the hand God dealt him. He knew the pursuits of men don't satisfy. He was satisfied during his life in God's presence and looked for eternity to when he would experience God's fullness. David also wrote Ps. 63,

Ps. 63:1 O You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.

⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.

⁵ I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.

David described with powerful metaphors that he pursued God like a parched man desperately looking for water. He experienced God's presence and power in worship with God's people. He said God was more satisfying than fresh strawberries and ice cream or trifle!

God satisfies our souls not our tongues and stomachs – that’s why He’s better! He lasts longer and we never get filled that we don’t have room for more of Him. We pursue God in His Word of course but also with a perspective of . . .

Looking forward (2 Pet. 3:11-14)

This world, Paul says in 2 Tim. 3, is getting worse and in the last days

²People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵having a form of godliness but denying its power.

And just as God destroyed the world with water in Noah’s day, He will destroy the earth we stand on with fire. Bad for the unsaved but good for us so that Peter writes

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. ¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. ¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Peter says the destruction of all that won’t last should encourage us who are looking to what will last so we also pursue God . . .

By looking forward (2 Pet. 3:11-14)

To the promised future blessings of the inheritance of the new earth and eternal enjoyment in the presence of God forever. Forward looking people grow in righteousness, holiness and godliness speeding its coming – by telling more people about Jesus resulting in their salvation – and being found blameless, spotless and at peace with Him. A result of our growth in meekness; the settled confidence that God is in control and with me so that fretting reduces and self-defensiveness is not as important.

If we want to be blessed of God we need to grow in confident strength; in meekness and pursue Him more each day. Isn’t that what we truly want anyway?

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