

Community Church of Issaquah  
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## The Beatitudes: Part 2

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We began our four-week study of the beautiful Beatitudes last Sunday. Hopefully you remember our focus on the poor in spirit and those that mourn. These were the first two promises that Jesus Christ made to the crowd who were gathered at his feet on the Mount of Beatitudes near the Dead Sea. Today we will share the third and fourth of the promises from the Beatitudes. We already have had those two verses from Matthew 5 read to us but let me repeat them as we begin today's message.

*Blessed are the meek: for these shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

When we read and contemplate the messages of these verses we call the Beatitudes, there are some important lessons we must keep in mind. First, Jesus was not calling those listening to him to try to earn salvation by following any specific law or character qualities. These are teachings about God's grace, not the letter of the law. Second, there are no difficult demands made on the followers of Jesus who are already members of the Kingdom of God. The only request or imperative is to rejoice from God's blessings. Third, these are not blessings that will only be realized at the end of time or in heaven. These blessings will be found both in the present and in the future.

Sometimes when we hear or use the word “meek” it has a hidden message of some kind of weakness. We might hear, “That person is a wimp.” That is quite far from the meaning Jesus gives when he commends those who are meek and promises they will be the inheritors of the earth. We are all very familiar with aggressive, harsh, and domineering people who constantly want to be in control of things and at times even want to set up their own kingdom. The biblical understanding of meekness is something like power under control. Throughout the Scriptures, however, there are examples of people who are described as ‘meek’ but who have very strong roles in God’s created world. One example would certainly be Moses who was described as the meekest man of his time. And without a doubt, the man sitting before this crowd teaching them about a new life, Jesus, was a meek man who described himself as “meek and lowly.”

What does that word ‘meek’ even mean? We must understand that meek people consider themselves to be servants of God and do not think more highly of themselves than they should. Several translations of the Bible use the word ‘gentle’ instead of ‘meek.’ It seems that this is what Jesus is saying, that it is the gentle who will inherit the earth. In the thirty-seventh Psalm, David encourages those who have been treated badly by harsh or dominating people to remain gentle. In the day of Jesus, not only were the Jews being persecuted by the Romans, but those who chose to believe in and follow the teaching of Jesus were also victims of evil. Perhaps as Jesus sat on that hillside and spoke from his heart, he was well aware that there

were some sitting at his feet who were victims of that same type of evil.

When we reflect on the days in the life of Christ Jesus, it becomes quite clear that he was indeed the epitome of gentleness. Imagine what strength it took for Jesus to continue preaching the good news of salvation, even up to the day of his crucifixion and his return from death. His inner strength coupled with total selflessness created such a gentle person who endured so much to bring God's promises to His people. To be meek is our ability to accept our strengths and our limitations as they are and to see ourselves in the best possible way.

The promise of this third Beatitudes is that when we do adapt that gentleness of spirit and allow ourselves to be meek but not weak, we are assured that God will reward us with a spiritual inheritance of this earth. God's promise is not a material piece of land or property. Perhaps that inheritance is the self-assurance that through having a gentle character we will have an inner peace. We can rest in the knowledge that we have done and are doing God's will. Have you ever considered that a part of your inheritance for your faithfulness might be the influence your life has had on others? Was not the meekness and gentleness of Jesus something that brought so many to accept him as Messiah and to have a desire to follow his beautiful example.

The fourth Beatitude has perhaps one of the most powerful messages of this passage of scripture. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they

shall be filled. I must confess that each time I read that verse, I want to correct Matthew's English. Then I realize that Matthew didn't speak English and whoever had been tasked to translate these words from Greek to our language didn't have Miss Lewis for English in the eighth grade. She would have said boldly, "It should read 'they who hunger' not which." Regardless, there's a powerful lesson for us to consider here.

Before I get back to an attempt to be a good Bible teacher, I have to tell you a little story about Miss Lewis who inspired me to pursue English with a passion. In class we would often spend days dissecting sentences and such. She would correct any mistake with her words, "You've made a grammatical mistake, please fix it." One day a smart mouthed student named Danny Cupid must have grown weary of those words. When she spoke them to him, his response was, "I ain't made but one grammatical mistake in my life and I seen it when I done it and taken it back." How I wish I had been clever enough to think of that and bold enough to say it. By the way, did you know that my college degree has a double major? Religion and English. Now back to those who do hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Righteousness is another of those delicate words that has a host of meanings. For most of us, we immediately direct our thinking to the personal and ethical way of life any individual follows. For the Jews in the time of Jesus, righteousness meant to acquit, or vindicate or restore to a right relationship. We want to live our lives above the snares of sin. We want to walk in the way that we have

been taught all believers in Christ should pursue. It is our call to be right with God, to be in a right relationship with God. This must be a new life. Our own personal righteousness has to come from God. Remember in the Gospel of John when Jesus said, "You must be born again?" That is exactly how we become righteous. Accepting Christ and becoming a new person seeking to stay right with God forms the basis for our righteousness.

Now the complicated part of this Beatitude. The promise of being blessed is we hunger and thirst to be righteous or in the right relationship with God. Do most of us think about hunger or thirst being a spiritual thing. Each of us has been hungry and thirsty, and perhaps often. But those cravings are for food and water, something to eat or something to drink. We don't too often think of our spirit or inner being craving to find and maintain righteousness. Yet this is what Jesus is telling those listening to him preach and teach.

When in your spirit, you crave to be in rightness with God, you will be filled. But filled with what? Perhaps what will fill us is the peace that we indeed have been saved by our faith and that the Holy Spirit will reward us by directing us along a solid path of righteousness. When Paul told the believers in his letter to the Romans, chapter 1 verse 17. "The just shall live by faith." The same writer raised this question in the Book of Acts, chapter 16 verse 30 when he wrote, "What must I do to be saved?" or in other words, what do I need to do to be in that right place with God so that I will be filled with grace and peace?

Some would say by working hard to attain it, but God says it by atonement – being at one with God. If you think it is by maintain a certain personal and positive character, God would tell you that it's by believing that Jesus gave us righteousness through his death on the cross. For me, I believe that it is simply by trusting in God. I rest on that passage of scripture that says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path." That is exactly what we must do to satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness so that we can be filled to the brim. The Christian faith has been the source of many reforms simply because we saw the wrong and wanted to make it right – not only in our personal lives but in our world.

Spending time reflecting on these powerful words of the "Blessed are . . ." gives me so much to think about. The reality that the word "blessed" is in the past tense, meaning God has already done this. I wonder what must have been going through the heads of those who were sitting on the ground attentive to this Rabbi with words of comfort in a rather complex world. Caught in the middle of being subjected to the outside rule of the Roman Empire, and the rigid teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Now they are hearing promises of God's compassionate care and guardianship. My first thought is how they must have been filled with hope and a positive spirit that would cause them to walk back home on tiptoe.

When so much of their daily life was not joyful, here they are face to face with the Promised One experiencing an outpouring of blessings, one after the other. I wonder if

their inner voice was saying, “Yes, Jesus, I am blessed.” That in itself would be worth every moment of being in a crowd, sitting in the dirt, straining to hear and understand the beautiful words of these Beatitudes. Perhaps Jesus is saying the same thing to you and me. “Blessed are you. . .” God has already blessed you, but there is more to come. And I have no doubt that we are.