

"The Character Traits of a Christian..."
A closer look at the Beatitudes of Christ"

Matt. 5:3-12

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for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Blessed are those who mourn,

for they will be comforted.

⁵Blessed are the meek,

for they will inherit the earth.

⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

for they will be filled.

⁷Blessed are the merciful,

for they will be shown mercy.

⁸Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will see God.

⁹Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil

against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus, in his only recorded sermon, The Sermon on the Mount stated a number of blessings that would be recognized in the children of God. I state the “the only recorded sermon” simply because throughout the rest of the gospels Jesus used parables, analogies and metaphors as his primary teaching tools. The blessings, which follow character traits of the believer are as follows:

- Theirs shall be the kingdom of Heaven.
- They shall be comforted.
- They will inherit the earth.
- They shall be filled.
- They will be shown mercy.
- They will see God.
- They will be called sons of God.

These blessings, also known as the Beatitudes, are listed according to what would be conditional character traits. Before we explore these character traits and the blessings afforded them. Lets prepare our minds with some questions we should ask ourselves.

If these blessings listed in the Beatitudes are what follow the believer, am I experiencing these blessings? Do I, or am I experiencing these same blessings that Jesus said “these” would be blessed with? Am I filled? Have I got this satisfaction? Is the fruit of the Spirit being manifested in my life? Am I aware of this dealing of God in my life? Am I experiencing love to God, to other people, joy and peace? Am I manifesting long-suffering, goodness, gentleness, meekness, faith and temperance?

Jesus stated that “those that hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.” Are we therefore, enjoying the life of God in our souls? Are we aware of the Holy Spirit working within us, forming Christ in us more and more each day? If we claim to be Christian, then we should be able to answer yes to all of these questions. Are we thus filled? Are we enjoying our Christian life and experience?

Do we know that our sins have been forgiven? Are we rejoicing in that fact and living accordingly, or are we still trying to make ourselves “Christian” trying somehow to attain righteousness in or of ourselves? Am I enjoying peace with God? Do I rejoice in the Lord always?

These are questions that I must ask myself...these are questions that we must ask ourselves if we are not enjoying these things. From the words of Jesus, the only explanation if I am not, is that I am not truly hungering and thirsting for Him and His righteousness. How can I make that deduction? God is not a man that He can lie (**Numbers 23:10**) and Jesus said, “Those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, shall be filled.” That is an absolute statement. There are no other qualifications or conditions.

Having posed these questions, let’s look at this a little more closely. Where does this “hunger” and “thirst” come from? Well, I believe that there is order in these blessings of Christ. Therefore, I suggest that we start with those blessings that precede “those that hunger and thirst.”

Jesus states, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

Why did Jesus start here? I cannot say for sure, but I have a strong inclination to believe that prior to being filled, a vessel must be emptied of its contents. Jesus stated elsewhere that one does not pour new wine into old wineskins. He also said that a kernel of wheat does not give forth life until it has died and fallen to the ground. What I feel the Master teaching is that we must become destitute in our Spirit...completely free of "self" and all that it believes that "it" can do. We become "aware" of our sin. We must understand that in us, "no good thing dwells" and realize our full and utter dependence on God. The revelation of God's holiness and God's grace provides the realization that we are truly "poor in spirit." **Isaiah 57:15** from the message states, "A Message from the high and towering God, who lives in Eternity, whose name is Holy: "I live in the high and holy places, but also with the low-spirited, the spirit--crushed, And what I do is put new spirit in them, get them up and on their feet again." We see this also in Isaiah when he caught sight of God, and exclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips."

Finally we see the perfect example in our Lord, Jesus himself who became a man, taking on the likeness of sinful flesh laying aside His glory to live as a man. He stated that, "I can do nothing of myself, but only the will of my Father who sent me." Jesus tells us, "Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven."

The next blessing Jesus proclaims is “Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.”

This progression of blessings, I believe, build on one another. This is why: One becomes poor in Spirit when they recognize their sin. This realization of wickedness, decay and moral bankruptcy produces mourning. The understanding of our wretchedness and that we, in and of ourselves, are not fit to be in the presence of God; produces this conviction of mourning.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “Conviction must by necessity precede conversion, a real sense of sin must come before there can be true joy of salvation.” He goes on to write, “So many people spend all their lives in trying to find this Christian joy. They say they would give the whole world if they could only find it, or could be like some other person who has it. They have failed to see that they must be convicted of sin before they can ever experience joy. They do not like the doctrine of sin. They dislike it intensely and they object to its being preached. They want joy apart from the conviction of sin. But that is impossible; it can never be obtained. Those who are going to be converted and who wish to be truly happy and blessed are those who first of all mourn. Conviction is an essential preliminary to true conversion.”

As the man that becomes aware of his sin confronts himself and ponders his position as it relates to God, he mourns. He mourns that he is in that condition, he mourns that he can do nothing to himself to right that condition. The process of self examination and recognition of the wicked principles of the flesh at work in him (**Romans 7** “...¹⁷*But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help!* ¹⁸*I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it.* ¹⁹*I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I*

do it anyway. ²⁰*My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.*") drives the man to repentance. This repentance is what produces comfort. Turning from our wickedness to God's holiness driven by an awareness of being poor in Spirit...mourning....seeking comfort in God's grace. "Blessed are those that mourn, for they will be comforted."

Jesus declares in the third beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

This statement stands in contrast to everything that the world would have us to believe. The world tells us we must "stand up for ourselves" and we hear of "self-made men", but here Jesus tells us that the "meek shall inherit the earth."

Building on those that are "poor in spirit" or understanding our weaknesses and inabilities and confronting our sin before a holy God begins to shed light on the words that Jesus shares with us here. "Blessed are the meek." What does Jesus mean? Is he portraying one that is easily influenced? Is he describing someone that exhibits niceties and is soft-spoken? I don't think so. I believe that the meek person that is described here is that person that walks in humility. To be more exact, One that is meek has "died to self." There is an absence of pride. The man that has "crucified self" does not feel the need to boast or glory in anything he has done or does. He does not feel the need to defend himself from what others may say...there is no self pity for how terribly unfair life is or has been to me. To be sure, meekness is to mean that you have finished with yourself altogether, and you come to see you have no rights...you deserve nothing at all. You come to realize that no harm can come to you; you are dead to self, but alive in Christ. (**Galatians 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*)

Finally, it may be understood as this. Leave everything to God – ourselves, our rights, our cause, our future...all in the hands of God. We learn to say as the Apostle Paul said to the church at Philippi (**Philippians 3:7-8** *“But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”*) It is at this point that the man has in a sense already inherited the earth, for he is truly satisfied. Nothing can be taken from him for he has already counted it loss. He is content. *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”*

In this, the fourth blessing of the beatitudes, Jesus changes direction. The first three blessings are born of introspection or self examination. This blessing begins to focus on man turning to God. The blessing reads, “Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

So much can be summed up into this promise of God, yet so much is lost in the utter simplicity of its truth. The whole of man seeks to find satisfaction...happiness...bliss...joy. In this first half of these beatitudes Jesus has given the outline for the formula to succeed in that quest. It goes like this:

- (1) **Man recognizes his sinful state** – *“blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*
- (2) **Man repents of his sin** – *“blessed are those that mourn for they shall be comforted.”*
- (3) **Man submits his will and seeks the will of God** – *“blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”*
- (4) **Man loves God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind** – *“blessed are those that hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.”*

Unfortunately, the perfection of God's plan and the Words of Christ are lost in the distorted perceptions and understandings of man. Man hungers for happiness...man hungers for joy, and man does not find it. Man makes excuses and allows the thorns of life to steal the seed of God, but Jesus states that "those that hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled." Those that hunger as if they are starved with all their soul and all their heart for the righteousness of God will find it. They will be filled. Does my daily life consume my energy or is my daily life fueled by my desire for God. That is the question that we must continually ask ourselves. As we seek God and as we endeavor to grow closer to Him it is critical that we continue to seek the continuous filling of God's Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit is the power with which we are overcomers in this physical world. There is no way that man, on his own can overcome the world or achieve righteousness. God and God alone provides righteousness and that is done by the work of and through Jesus Christ.

So then, what does this pursuit of righteous mean? It means an all consuming desire and quest to become like Jesus. (**1 Peter 1:16** "*Be holy, as I am holy*") Why is this important? All who lack the righteousness of God remain under the wrath of God and are facing death. Anybody who dies in this world without being clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ is cast out. Remember the revelation of Isaiah (**Isaiah 6:1-7**), seeing the things we are guilty of so often in the sight of God, and in the sight of utter holiness, we would hate them even as He does. That is the greatest reason for hungering and thirsting for righteousness – to obtain the mind of Christ and see sin as the despicable blight that it is. For in God, there is no darkness and as we progress toward Him and embrace His nature we will refuse to defend our sin and come to despise it as much as God does.

To end on a somewhat positive note, if we see these things with the heart of God, we will desire no less. We will desire to know Him and the power of his resurrection (**Philippians 3:10**). We will ask, and it shall be given. We shall knock, and it will be opened to us (**Matt 7:7-8**). “We will hunger and thirst for righteousness, and we will be filled.”

I close today with the same questions that I opened with... If these blessings listed in the Beatitudes are what follow the believer, am I experiencing these blessings? Do I, or am I experiencing these same blessings that Jesus said “these” would be blessed with? Am I filled? Have I got this satisfaction? Is the fruit of the Spirit being manifested in my life? Am I aware of this dealing of God in my life? Am I experiencing love to God, to other people, joy and peace? Am I manifesting long-suffering, goodness, gentleness, meekness, faith and temperance?

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Do we know that our sins have been forgiven? Are we rejoicing in that fact and living accordingly, or are we still trying to make ourselves “Christian” trying somehow to attain righteousness in or of ourselves? Am I enjoying peace with God? Do I rejoice in the Lord always?

If you answer no to any of those questions, I urge you to consider your relationship with God. Don’t put off for another minute what God is calling you to today. Ask, you shall receive...Hunger and thirst, you will be filled.

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Part II

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We last discussed the first half of these beatitudes and as I spoke with you, I suggested that our Lord had reason for speaking them in the order in which He did. As we have already looked at these first four blessings let us take a moment to recap before moving on:

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"I am poor in spirit; I realize that I have no righteousness; I realize that face-to-face with God and His righteousness I am utterly helpless; I can do nothing. Not only that, I mourn because of the sin that is within me; I have come to see, as the result of the operation of the Holy Spirit, the blackness of my own heart. I know what it is to cry out, 'O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?' and desire to be rid of this vileness that is within me. Not only that, I am meek, which means that now that I have experienced this true view of myself, nobody else can hurt me, nobody else can insult me, nobody can ever say anything too bad about me. I have seen myself, and my greatest enemy does not know the worst about me. I have seen myself as something truly hateful, and it is because of this that I have hungered and thirsted after righteousness. I have longed for it. I have seen that I cannot create or produce it, and that nobody else can either. I have seen my desperate position in the sight of God I have hungered and thirsted for that righteousness which will put me right with God, which will reconcile me to God, and give me a new nature and life. And I have seen it in Christ. I have been filled; I have received it all as a free gift..."

Following this insight to self and motivated to hunger and thirst for God, Jesus says we will be filled. I say that it is only logical then to see my attitude towards others change, and radically so. Jesus states in this blessing, **“Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.”** If these preceding statements are true, then I can see man the way I saw him previously. I see them as slaves to sin; oppressed and lied to by the one that would deceive us in effort to damn our souls. I now look upon man without dislike or criticism, but rather look upon him with pity. I understand that he is where I, but for the grace of God, would be. I separate the sin from the sinner now. I treat him now with mercy. I pray for his salvation. I extend a hand to him in encouragement...my desire is to relieve his suffering. That essentially is the definition of merciful; it is pity plus action. So then, I have a feeling of pity for my fellow man; and my concern about his state, and his misery leads to an anxiety to relieve it. I am merciful. I have been shown mercy, therefore I extend mercy.

In the **18th chapter of Matthew**, Jesus speaks a parable of forgiveness. He tells of an account of a king who was owed a large sum of money by a man. The man begged forgiveness and the king forgave all the debt that was owed...That same man being owed himself the repayment of a debt that was but a pittance of the amount he owed; had the debtor owing him thrown into jail. He showed no forgiveness. No mercy. The king who had forgiven the debt found out about this act or lack of forgiveness and, in turn, rescinded his act of kindness. The man was jailed and turned over to be tortured until his debt was paid. Jesus states, regarding this action, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” What makes me merciful is the grace of God. So then, if I am not merciful, it only stands to reason; I have never understood the grace and the mercy of God. Therefore, I am outside Christ; I am yet in my sins, and the same as the unmerciful, unforgiving man in the parable of Jesus, I too am unforgiven. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

This next blessing of our Lord is truly something to behold. In this blessing, Jesus states, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”** Wow! This is the goal though, right? But what does Jesus mean by “pure in heart?” First, we should come to an understanding of the meaning of “heart” and how it is scripturally defined or portrayed. Scripture includes all of the components of man when it references the heart. It includes the emotions, intellect and the will or desire of man. It defines the heart as essentially the center of man’s being and personality. It is the total man. That is the emphasis of our Lord when he states, “Blessed are the pure in heart.” However, there is an antithesis or opposite of this statement...look at **Mark 7:21**, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders...” Why do I throw that scripture in here? So we can see the contrast. You see there are actually a couple of components to this purity of heart. The first would be single-mindedness. That is to be all consumed; mind, body and soul for a single purpose. I want to live like and for Jesus. The second component is motive. Why do I want to do this? Do I want to do this for my own benefit? If so, I have entirely missed the message. I should desire to live in this single-minded state for the glory of God. This should be the supreme desire of my/our life. It means that we desire God; that we desire to know Him, which we desire to love Him and to serve Him. And Jesus states in this blessing that only those who are like that will see God....pretty sobering. Let us make it a little more so. Consider this: What is it that Jesus is saying must be necessary before I can see God? Holiness. It is a pure heart, an unmixed condition of my being. Holiness is a driven, all-consuming desire to live for and be like Him. Do not be confused though, it is not just a matter of decency, morality or an intellectual understanding of the Christian doctrines. It is nothing less than the whole person involved. (**1 John 1:5**) “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” In the spiritual realm, there is no mix of light and darkness, black and white...God and sin. There is no connection between them. That is why we are commanded by God, “be holy, as I am holy.” Only those who are like Him can see God and be in His presence. That is why we must be pure in heart before we can see God. I say again...do not get this confused with a spiritual list of “do-good” things. This “purity

of heart” is not about a Pharisaical lifestyle of “white-washed” outsides. It is the sincere inward desire to be like Him that sets forth action on the outside to be like Him.

Here is a thought before moving on...Those that are pure in heart are going to see God! Do you agree that this is the greatest, most earth-shattering, mind-boggling news that you have ever heard? Is this your greatest desire and ambition? To see God...? If this is true of you, and you believe the gospel, then you must agree with the beloved John, **(1 John 3:3)** “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” Are you preparing yourself for the audience with the King? Do you look forward to it? Are you wasting time on things that are of no value to you on that great day? We are now, bound by time...however there will come a day when we will be with Him and worship Him in all His glory, eternally. Until then, our confidence can be that He is working in us to prepare us for that day. But we also, as John wrote, should work to purify ourselves even as he is pure. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

This brings us to this next beatitude, where our Lord states, **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of god.”** But, what is a peacemaker? Perhaps the better way to answer that question or understand the definition would be to gain understanding of what it is not. A peacemaker is not one that avoids conflict. The mindset, “peace at any price” usually involves a great deal of compromise, which when found to involve the holiness of God, is not an option. Therefore, compromise or peace at all cost cannot be included in the definition of peacemaker. The avoidance of conflict or confrontation does not satisfy or solve the problem or generate peace. It may postpone confrontation or conflict, but it does nothing for lasting peace. The problems still exist.

So, what is a peacemaker? I will answer with another negative. He is not an argumentative person. By definition, a peacemaker cannot be quarrelsome. In a positive state, a peacemaker is active. The name itself demands action. Therefore, a peacemaker is one who actively seeks peace.

How does a peacemaker seek peace? The first way he does this is by being unbiased. In other words, he does not look at his best interest. Self has been removed as a variable. The first thing, therefore, we must say about the peacemaker is that he has an entirely new view of himself, a new view which really amounts to this. (Remember, we are building on these characteristics) He has seen himself and has come to see that in a sense this miserable self is so wretched; it has no rights or privileges; it does not deserve anything. You have seen yourself as “poor in spirit.” You have mourned because of your sinful nature. You have truly seen yourself and you “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” You no longer stand for your rights and privileges, you no longer ask “what about me in this?” You have forgotten self. Perhaps one of the best tests of whether we are truly Christian or not is just this: Do I hate my natural self? Jesus said, (**John 12:25**) “he that loves his life (in this world) shall lose it.” By this, he meant loving ourselves, the natural man, and the natural life. That is one of the best tests of whether we are Christian or not. Have you come to hate yourself, your natural self: Can you say with Paul, (**Romans 7:24**) “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” If you have not, or if you cannot, you cannot be a peacemaker. You see, the Christian man is a man who has two men in him, the old and the new. He hates the old and takes it captive...telling it, “I’m done with you.”

The peacemaker has a new view of the world. The peacemaker is the man who does not talk about people when they are offensive and difficult. He does not ask, “Why are they like that?” He understands that they are like that because they are still being governed by the god of this world...the spirit that works in the children of disobedience. The poor person is a victim

of self and of Satan. In that light, the peacemaker has pity and mercy upon him. At that moment, he is capable of helping that person and is likely to make peace with him. Continuing that thought, it also means an entirely new view of the world. The peacemaker has only one concern, and it is the glory of God amongst men. That was the Lord Jesus' only concern. His one interest in life was not Himself, but the glory of God. Moreover, the peacemaker is the man whose central concern is the glory of God. He spends his life in trying to minister to that glory. He knows that God make man perfect, and that the world was meant to be Paradise, so when he sees disputes and quarrelling, he sees something that is detracting from the glory of God. This is the thing that concerns him, nothing else. Lastly, and in a practical sense, as peacemakers, we should endeavor to diffuse peace wherever we are. This is done by being selfless, by showing love, and by being approachable. If we do not think of self at all, people will feel that we are approachable. They will know that they will get sympathy and understanding. They will know that they will get an unbiased outlook. In that, the peacemaker will be able to minister the gospel of Christ and the captives will be set free receiving peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God."

We close with these final blessings of our Lord from these beatitudes. Jesus states, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."**

Throughout the New Testament, we are told and even given examples of persecution of the followers of Christ. However, before expounding on this blessing let us look at what is being persecuted. Let us do that by looking at what is not meant as it pertains to persecution.

It does not say, "Blessed are those who are having a hard time in their Christian life because they are being difficult." It does not say, "Blessed are those that are being persecuted as Christians because they are lacking in wisdom and lacking in wisdom in what they regard as their testimony." There is no need to really belabor this point, but so often, we meet people, Christian people, who are suffering mild persecution entirely because of their own design...because of something either in themselves or in what they are doing. However, the promise does not apply here. The promise states, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness." We can and so often do bring endless suffering upon ourselves; we can create difficult situations, which are unnecessary, most often because of self-righteousness. We are often long in understanding the differences between prejudice and principle and slow to realize the difference between being offensive, in a natural sense, because of our particular makeup and temperament, and causing offence because we are righteous. Going one-step further, the beatitude does not state, "Blessed are those that are persecuted for being good, or noble, or self-sacrificing. No, it states, "Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness."

This beatitude tests our ideas as to what a Christian is. The Christian is like his Lord. Jesus said, (**Luke 6:26**) "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets." But isn't that what we would believe a good Christian to be? Someone that gets along with everyone is nice and people speak highly of? That is not what Jesus says. He states that the real Christian is a man who is not praised by everybody. They did not praise Jesus, and they (the world) will not praise his followers.

To be a Christian, ultimately, is to be like Christ; and one can never be like Christ without being entirely changed. We must get rid of the old nature that hates Christ and hates righteousness; we need a new nature that will love these things and love Him and thus become like Him. If you try to imitate Christ the world will praise you; if you become Christ-like it will hate you.

Finally, we are to rejoice in the face of these persecutions and trials. Why? How? Rather than lean to negatives or “why nots” I will leave you with this thought:

We are identified with Christ. That is why we are persecuted for righteousness sake. It is like Christ that we have been associated with. Heaven awaits those that are faithful. Unmixed joy, and glory and holiness....purity and wonder! That’s what awaits the child of God. If you are in Christ, that is what awaits you. How absolutely crazy it is to not spend our time thinking about that, or for the trivialness of the blink of an eye that this life is that we lose sight of that. Paul told the Colossians to set their sites on things above. We cannot afford to cling to this unhappy wretched world and fail to think on these things and to meditate upon them. So, if people are unkind, cruel, and spiteful, and if we are being persecuted, well then we must say to ourselves, Ah-Ha! Unhappy people; they are doing this because they do not know Him, and they do not understand me....They are indirectly proving to me that I belong to Him. This fuels my joy. Does it fuel yours?

(2 Corinthians 13:5) Challenge to examine ourselves in the Faith.