

# The Beatitudes

Believer Happiness in a Postmodern Age

John H King

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The Beatitudes: Believer Happiness in a Postmodern  
Age

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## *The Beatitudes*

“If we were to set out to establish a religion in polar opposition to the Beatitudes Jesus taught, it would look strikingly similar to the pop Christianity that has taken over the airwaves of North America.”  
— Tony Campolo

“I have often wondered why people never want to put a stone monument of the Eight Beatitudes on a courthouse lawn. Then I realize that the Eight Beatitudes of Jesus would probably not be very good for any war, any macho worldview, the wealthy, or our consumer economy.” — Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

“When God wants to sort out the world, as the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount make clear, he doesn't send in the tanks. He sends in the meek, the broken, the justice hungry, the peacemakers, the pure-hearted and so on.” — N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is*

“The Beatitudes are no spiritual “to do list” to be attempted by eager, rule-keeping disciples. It is a spiritual “done” list of the qualities God brings to bear in the people who follow Jesus.” — Ronnie McBrayer, *How Far Is Heaven?: Rediscovering the Kingdom of God in the Here and Now*

### *Matthew 5:3-13*

3. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
5. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
7. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
10. Blessed 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.
12. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## *The Heart of The Matter*

I had been accused by church leadership of preaching a more psychological rather than theological message but was this not what Jesus did the day He taught His disciples the secret to being happy? (Matthew 5:1-10 “blessed” means “happy”) The Beatitudes, as we called them are not attributes of God, nor do they represent the 10 commandments, nor are they fruit of the Spirit. The Beatitudes are no theology. They profile the heart of a follower of Christ whose focus is on following Him. A true follower stripped of all other passions is possessed of no other interest. There is no scripture more psychologically revealing of a true follower of Christ than here.

What if these verses were taught once again in the spirit in which they were originally presented to encourage God’s people to recognize within themselves the highest calling of having a heart after God. What if these 10 principles could be translatable into everyday life and believers could be given to see that beyond this they need not go. All other church interests, theologies, programs, support groups, and activities are peripheral concerns.

Here is the heart of the matter. Here is a lesson in happiness that denies pleasure and self-indulgence. Here is a way of life Jesus calls blessed even though it is a path to that delight through—to use William Goldman’s phrase from his work, “The Princess

Bride"—the dark forest of despair. (Psalms 37:4;<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:1-2)<sup>2</sup>

The beatitudes are the book within the book, the sum of all things spiritual, the ultimate goal in becoming like Christ. This is the image, His image, we are being made into. (Romans 8:29) There is a sense in which all other sermons find their text here. All biblical emphasis rests on this fulcrum of truth.

For years in ministry I sought to understand in some visible or recognizable way the difference between believers and non-believers. In a persecuted world, that difference is a sharp contrast in so many ways, but in a country where religious freedom reigns, the line begins to fade as material interests hold sway over believers equally as with non-believers. Even the clergy, many, own multiple properties and large bank accounts. Some credit their material blessings to God's goodness—a comment that flies in the face of these verses before us here. I now believe that the beatitudes represent that line. Here is profiled what distinguishes a child of God. Each time we read this chapter with devotion these verses should come more and more alive with meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Some learn to swim quickly by being tossed into the water of persecution but in a country cited for its religious freedom the change is more subtle. For those believers who have enjoyed material blessings it seems like these verses have no relevance, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Regardless the number of bathrooms and fireplaces in the home or the acreage of the homestead or how many properties we may boast, we need to recognize that the abundance of our happiness is a function of how little we cherish these things and how readily, if called upon by God, we would spontaneously, like Matthew at his receipt of custom, without a forethought abandoned them! It was not to brush aside an annoyance when the rich young man asked the Savior, *“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”*<sup>3</sup> that Jesus shared the wisdom of heaven with him, *“distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.”*<sup>4</sup>

Notice Jesus presented these eight characteristics in a logical order. Stripped of all ambition, in our spiritual poverty, (*“poor in spirit”*) we prepare to become true followers. The final step (*“when men shall revile you...rejoice”*) is obtained when we have discovered a happiness that transcends the world we live in, a world that has no concept of where—or who—we are. “We have disappeared

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 18:18

<sup>4</sup> Luke 18:22



forever,” as one commentary interpreted Colossians 3:3: *your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

## *Destitute*

This is real Christianity. There is no greater testimony or witness. I have no intention of writing a commentary on the beatitudes nor to write a sermon but to imagine a congregation of believers who have begun the journey into spiritual poverty. It is this group that can—just by living—witness to the power of their salvation. It is this group that has found the secret of triumphing over desperate circumstances and setbacks. Life has become a spiritual not material journey. They know a heart that treasures heavenly things over what can be accumulated in this life.<sup>5</sup> They are living their lives in the light of eternity.

Sadly, much of a christian's interpretation of life, in our civilized world, may still reason we are entitled to a thousand blessings and advantages God's counsel never offered. We see blessings in material terms or natural terms or as something acquired in this life, not as an eternal asset.<sup>6</sup> Our sight is fixed downward, like chickens in the barnyard, only on the moment, only on our immediate need. We may need to raise our sights higher.

There are desperate times and times when critical need takes us to the edge and as we cry unto the Lord He does hear us. But those who have a true

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:19-20 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20** But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

<sup>6</sup> James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

spirit of poverty don't cry "unfair." Even when all our ducks are quacking merrily in a row and life is good, we affirm our total dependence on Him!

Poverty is destitution. Poverty of spirit is sensing our utter need of God. And this has implications for our attitude and our prayer life.

As believers we need to forget about what's fair or unfair. If God is overseeing our lives and directing our footsteps (Psalms 17:5;<sup>7</sup> 37:23)<sup>8</sup>, to feel entitled or to assume faith should provide what we decide in our distress is appropriate, tosses the word *unfair* in God's face. Much more: it is a temper tantrum of sorts, a noise drowning out that inner small voice of peace that reassures us that God has all things in hand.

Beside, life's downside is the underside of an unfinished tapestry God is sowing. The poor in spirit realize the beauty of His work is yet to be put on display.

Poverty of spirit is, therefore, a giving spirit rather than a desire to accumulate blessings. Poor in spirit is a willingness to accept one's own need to meet another's first.

In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.<sup>9</sup>

Their spirit is a great influence, a powerful influence on others. If most of the congregation is a

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<sup>7</sup> My steps have held to your paths; my feet have not stumbled.

<sup>8</sup> The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him;

<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:2

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watered down version of something “christian” with a sprinkling of the unconverted among them—still—these, who are poor in spirit, will bring a message of love that will shout from the rafters and be heard! The heart not the mouth speaks loudest!

Poverty of spirit is a worldview, a way of seeing life—if I can be so bold to say—*through God’s eyes*. “Mourning” takes on a different meaning and value to these believers.

## *A Tearful Start*

Scholarship defines mourning: A grief that so possesses one's entire being that it cannot be hid. Mourning is an activity of the heart—to be sure.

"This state of mind is explained by the poverty in spirit from which it springs." John Peter Lange

Lord, give us those who mourn for the lost—not just who shout praises at the thought of the final judgment. Give us hearts that cry for others, that help carry the divine burden for Your creation. Amen

Now that I have that out, let's look more closely at this "blessing."

Grief cannot be hid, we really mean to say, "should not be hid." Persons who live with unresolved bitterness and those who see themselves boastfully above tears, will suppress grief to their own psychological harm. The poor in spirit know how and when to allow the tears to flow. (John 11:35)<sup>10</sup> They know the value of expressed grief.

Those who mourn are not professional mourners nor are they living a mournful life. They are burden bearers who know that grief must be expressed, not hidden or suppressed, who know the value of tears. (Acts 20:31;<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:4)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jesus wept

<sup>11</sup> So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

<sup>12</sup> For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.

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There is such a thing as *godly sorrow* (2 Corinthians 7:10)<sup>13</sup>.

When the scripture calls them blessed, it is a blessing in mourning, not a blessing that is anticipated once the tears cease. The blessing is not eschatological or referring to when God will wipe the tears away. There is an immediate value in being able to express tears, healing tears, tears that come with pray, tears that begin to release us from burdens otherwise too heavy to bear, tears that move the heart of God. (Psalms 51:17;<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 66:2)<sup>15</sup>

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Romans 8:26

There is a blessing when one is expressing *God's* heart. Mourning in this sense is foundational to any calling. Without knowing the heart of God, we only know the mechanics of ministry. (Ezekiel 19:1)<sup>16</sup> In a civilized world, ministry has become more—to use C.M.Ward's phrase from the "Revival Time" broadcast from years gone by—"too much administrated, too little led." Following a divine vision is following a divine burden, something Ezekiel's prophetic work could not make clearer. We want a

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<sup>13</sup> Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

<sup>14</sup> My sacrifice, O God, is[a] a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

<sup>15</sup> Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the Lord. "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.

<sup>16</sup> Take up a lament concerning the princes of Israel

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more direct voice in the decision process and we want reason and logic more than faith to energize the vision. But God's way has always led through a valley of sorrow, as the Psalmist reminds us (Psalms 23)<sup>17</sup>, because this world is a sorrowful place since Adam and Eve left Eden and it is impossible to intellectualize pain. ..nor should we.

These are Christians who know how to carry God's burden with Him, who know how to pray, who are at liberty to cry, who know that grief is inevitable and the healing process begins when we learn that mourning is a part of it. These are Christians for whom praying is not just words but tears as well, not just a public display but at times burdens which cannot be uttered, not the mechanics of chosen phrases or just rote repetition but real heart. Their poverty of spirit is in tune with God's great heart of love. They prioritize a time to pray together for the needs of others and for whom "*pray without ceasing*" (I Thessalonians 5:17) is not a riddle but a way of life.

Why mourn when the age of science has replaced the dark ages of ignorance? Before there was science, there was always God. Science is nothing more than the reader's manual of His creative genius. And God never proposed that science replace prayer because the reasons for prayer, for God wanting to commune with us and share His heart, remain undiscoverable by the laws of science. The

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<sup>17</sup> Verse 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

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burden remains for the poor in spirit to mourn the lost of Eden until the seraphim lower their flaming swords and God once again opens the way for our return. We call it a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:1),<sup>18</sup> and until then our happiness as believers will remain the benefit of a prayer life that mourning has called us to.

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<sup>18</sup> Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.



## *Dying Ambitions*

Knowingly or not, a believer's desire through prayer to empathize with God—impassioned about the very things that are on His great heart—is the first sign of meekness. But there is another quality that needs the spotlight first: humility, because there is no meekness without humility.

Meekness in scripture presumes a humility that scholarship teaches

“is an acknowledgment not merely of sinfulness but of creatureliness, of absolute dependence, of having nothing, but receiving all things of God.”<sup>19</sup>

And adds,

“it is only the humble heart which is also the meek”<sup>20</sup>

These 2 terms, humility and meekness, are not just words and I might venture to say, they are not words whose meanings come easy to us. They join a treasury of Bible terms that, as we learn:

“Revelation has given ... a depth, a richness, a fulness of significance which they were very far from possessing before.”<sup>21</sup>

Meekness is a gentle spirit, to be sure. Wives are enjoined to converse with their non-believing husbands in a gentler tone as the expression of a quiet spirit, an inner calmness, a heart at rest, in the knowledge that God alone can draw them to Himself.

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the The New Testament* (London) 1880. p. 153.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

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Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.<sup>22</sup>

But we must dig deeper: If humility betokens a total dependence on God, meekness is the passion to be all that, a disposition to rely absolutely on God's wisdom and strength. (Ephesians. 4:2;<sup>23</sup> Colossians 3:12;<sup>24</sup> cf. Zephaniah. 3:12)<sup>25</sup> . The meek are resigned to follow Christ. It is in their spiritual DNA to do so, to submit to His voice and leading. We are, after all, the sheep of *His* pasture.

"[meekness]... is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God (Matt. xi. 29; Jam. i. 21). It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting;<sup>26</sup>

There is in meekness an intentional desire to follow Christ. The one possessing it proceeds with spontaneous abandonment to His will. It becomes a natural interest of the meek to serve the higher cause of God, either through insight into His Word, or simply by the peaceful acceptance of who they are becoming in Christ. They are in love with Him and want to follow.

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<sup>22</sup> I Peter 3:4

<sup>23</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

<sup>25</sup> But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the Lord.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Trench, *Synonyms of the The New Testament* (London) 1880. p. 153.

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Sadly, many christians show a wild side to their nature, a militancy which they justify as an apologetic defense of the gospel. The Gospel is empowered to represent itself, simply in the sharing of it. One thing is sure: wild is not meek.

May we be among those whose poverty of spirit and mourning for the lost reflect a gentler conviction that does not feel the work of God needs swords and battle cries. Believers who do not boast of victories against other believers, who do not think that love must be hard and uncompromising. May we be people of God that can forgive offense with such spontaneity and immediacy that our acceptance of one another is unassailable and our unity indisputable.

May we cherish peace over all other virtues. May we practice "*a soft answer turns away wrath*" (Proverbs 15:1) especially among fellow believers. ...foremost realizing that in prayer victory is achieved. May we with focused and unreserved intent follow our Savior even in the hard decisions: to carry a cross or turn the other cheek or go the extra mile or sell all first, because it is the natural thing to do, because it is the christian thing to do, because it is the only thing to do.<sup>27</sup>

There is an old hymn, now long forgotten. Rumor has it was written by a young man who died

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<sup>27</sup> John 6:63, 68 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. ... Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

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soon after he penned it: "The Vision." It was found in an old Assembly of God Hymnal. The chorus captures the meek heart best:

Take me, Master, break me, use me. I am leaning on Thy breast. All ambitions fast are dying; from their pain now give me rest.

## *An Inspirational Feast*

These are persons passionate about learning, but it's not about studying the Bible as an intellectual exercise or being schooled in theology. These are persons in a hurry to be like Christ, to follow Him. They hunger and thirst to be righteous; they desire to live the Word of God. And it makes sense to find these persons described here because they are, indeed, the meek.

Just a close walk with Him.  
Grant it Jesus is my plea.  
Daily walking close to Thee.  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be!

It is one thing to theologize over the Word of God and still another to apply it to life. It is one thing to debate the message with people whose beliefs differ from our own and still another, together with them, to discover the Bible as a life changing message.

Hunger and thirst means wanting to take in more than give out. These words describe someone who is doing the listening far more than the talking.

We must allow ourselves to see the Word from this perspective as instructions for living, to find meaning to life as we hunger together, as we ask our Lord the questions through our dialog and await the move of His Spirit through group sharing for a scriptural reply.

Lord, bring to an end theological discussions that disrupt harmony. May our Bible studies become spiritual support groups. Give us a fellowship that

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answers a joint passion to apply God's Word to life's situations and watch it present solutions. Amen.

I tire of people who already know what I need before I do. I want to be with people who allow me room to discover for myself how God's Word answers my quest to be closer to my Lord and closer to His people. I want to be part of a fellowship whose faith feeds mine and I, theirs, as we reread and restudy and rehearse the message.

I want to be a part of a group that would never think of arguing down the Word or explaining it away as something culturally out of date or unscientific or part of an ignorant past. Together we see the relevance of God's instructions and commands. We see learning in biblical history. We see today in an ancient record.

I want to be part of a group that has no theology to feature, no denomination to promote. I want to be in a group that will take a chance at a possibility that we do not know yet all that is to be known, that we need to stay hungry and thirsty. I want to share with a people who are open to new interpretations of truth, open to change, open to hard lessons, and open to challenges. I want to be with people who are open to being wrong and open to correction.

I want to be in a group where we all recognize from the start that we are all at different places in the journey and our Lord alone is leading. It is a group

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that does not criticize or analyze one another's shortfalls, mistakes, or missteps.

I want to be with people who are sensing their own spiritual poverty and are carrying a burden to get back to full, Eden-level, fellowship with God. These are persons predisposed to follow, which is what meekness is, wherever He leads and are now desperate—nothing is more important to them than—to learn Christ and to be like Him.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death

## *No Frills Service*

These are a giving folk. They don't give advice. They don't seek to be in charge. What they give is of themselves. They want to share the love of Christ in tangible ways.

The force of the New Testament word for *mercy* is the *act* of showing it. It is more than compassion or a feeling of pity. Showing mercy in Jesus' day included alms giving with the Savior's caution that it be done anonymously not for public recognition—if we want the act entered in the Divine record or chronicled with angelic applause. (Matthew 6:1-4) These believers do not need this advice; it comes naturally to them. These are my kind of people. They find a way to assuage the suffering of others.<sup>29</sup>

There is nothing in the word that suggests attached conditions. It is not our place to say who is in and who is out. God decides, which makes *mercy* another word for *grace*.<sup>30</sup> In our Old Testament, as a matter of fact, the word *grace* leaned too far toward showing favor and could be seen as a quid-pro-quo; so, the prophets and later writers under inspiration replaced the Old Testament word for *grace* with the word *mercy*. It is that big a word!

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<sup>29</sup> Jesus would heal the sick, as an example. Matthew 20:30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

<sup>30</sup> Romans 9:15-16 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.



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Let's make it bigger and biggest in ministry. Take the offerings and aside from a designated amount to pay rent on the building and some utility bills, give it all away to the poor and to missions in a no frills approach to service. Trustees are no longer needed to finance steeples and all the features we pay for to identify us as "christian." This approach isn't really working so well for us anyway. Let the community know who we are by our giving, by our service to lessen the suffering of others in ways we can contribute. They'll know we are here and they'll know who we are—christians!

It isn't possible to hunger for righteousness, to desire to live the Word and to be like Christ without wanting in the next moment to show mercy! Mercy, in the Biblical sense, *is* a righteous act. Think of Jesus' life and ministry which climaxed in that final breathe on Golgotha with the supreme act of mercy. I don't need to tell you other than to point out the next size in an enlarging Christian heart of love is mercy in action.

May we be a people quick to share our resources—not just money—with those less fortunate and in need. We must put such a value on giving that we fail to see the benefit in enlarging our own borders, of spending time or energy on personal comfort—beyond what is reasonable for life and safety. May we prioritize others, may we empathize and weep with those who weep—oh, to be His hand extended! Make me an instrument, Lord, of Your mercy. It's as simple and straightforward as that! May we resolve to take no ownership of things we

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know belong to God. Lord, may we abhor greed and repulse hoarding what can be distributed to others in need of those things. Make us a people who cannot imagine a “blessing” or being happy in the acquiring of things, a people whose individual and collective happiness hinges on giving to others as God’s Word enjoins them.

## *A Pure Heart*

Luke 6:20-26<sup>31</sup> is said to be a second account of this sermon on the mount but with some marked differences. Luke's record is more naturalistic. He does not speak of the poor in spirit, just the poor. And those who hunger, they do not hunger after righteousness; they simply hunger. Reference to a pure heart is missing from Luke's account. What are we to make of this?

Matthew was there that day; so, perhaps, his recollection is more complete. And maybe Luke's source is interpreting Jesus' words in a more temporal setting—this should remind us of Jesus' warning to his disciples to beware the leaven of the pharisees. They thought He was talking about bread not doctrine. Is it possible Luke's account is how Jesus

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<sup>31</sup> **20** Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

**21** Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

**22** Blessed are you when people hate you,  
when they exclude you and insult you  
and reject your name as evil,  
because of the Son of Man.

**23** “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

**24** “But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.

**25** Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

**26** Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,  
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

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began His comments and Matthew saw them in a spiritual sense? Possibly Jesus' mentioning the poor led to a discussion of being poor *in spirit*. It opened the door for the Savior to reveal the spiritual side of a follower's life. And now Jesus mentions *purity of heart*.

Purity of heart, by scholarly reckoning refers to moral purity. If this is saying that our happiness as believers is directly related to our living free from sin—and that rings true—it is more logical than instructive, more future than now (I John 3:2)<sup>32</sup>, since we are not there yet.

I am asking: is a pure heart possible in this life?

Jesus' thoughts seem to be future (eschatological). In this life we are poor and persecuted and hungry (well, some of us) but our happiness is on the way. Christ is bringing it with Him. This sounds a reasonable interpretation but I have been maintaining—and I am not alone—that our happiness can be found *in* the poverty and *in* the hunger and even *in* the persecution. (Acts 16:25)<sup>33</sup>

It is not simply poverty but *poverty of spirit*. It is not hunger for food but hunger for *righteousness* we seek which holds the secret to a believer's happiness. All this should be happening in *this* life for reasons, I hope, I delineated. With a *pure heart* we have arrived at a secret to our happiness as followers of Jesus that

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<sup>32</sup> Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

<sup>33</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

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might be overlooked if we conclude that our happiness is only future on Christ's return. Purity of heart necessarily does follow being merciful. It is explained in this context.

According to the scholars:

"It [a pure heart] consists of full and unreserved self-offering to God"<sup>34</sup>

Pure in heart is pure in motive. It is transparently altruistic. A pure heart is a pure conscience without ulterior interests or hidden intentions. And to be this pure, they must be doing what they're doing "as unto the Lord,"<sup>35</sup> The merciful are not giving to others for personal recognition or praise. There is a sense in which their gifts are not primarily to the beneficiary of their benevolence; they are giving of themselves and resources *to God*. (Matthew 25:40)<sup>36</sup> Jesus is taking us 1 step beyond the natural expression of alms giving. He is uncovering the hidden reality that for His followers no act of mercy is just an isolated act of kindness. It is always done *to*—not just for—Him and that is how it is a pure, unselfish, "*separated-unto-God*" act of the *heart*. It has to be said or done from the heart, not through duty or coercion. (But you knew that.)

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<sup>34</sup> Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol III, Pg 425

<sup>35</sup> Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,

<sup>36</sup> "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

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It follows, therefore, that in talking about giving to the needy Jesus should indelibly impress upon His followers that no expression of christian love goes unnoticed and unrewarded if it is done unto Him, if it is the outward sign of who we are becoming in Him, if it is “Christ in us” (Colossians 1:27)<sup>37</sup>.

Mary was a loving christian lady whose love for her husband was challenged by his seeming neglect of her interests and needs. She debated within herself whether or not it was worth the relationship, now, decades old and a long time unattended. Somehow love can become ordinary, slipping unnoticed into a state of neglect, but she craved the deepening relationship, the vibrancy of days long gone. Then in prayer she found the secret how to revive what seemed ready for burial. She learned to love him *as unto the Lord*. She knew the scriptures encouraged her to be what God wanted *her* to be toward him even if he seemingly lacked the ability to be what God wanted him to be toward her. (The golden rule?) And it worked to uplift her heart and return a smile to a beautiful christian countenance.

Lord help us perceive the hidden reality behind everything we do and say. It is Jesus to and for whom we are saying or doing it. May we see that the spoils of Egypt were taken for God’s service, the

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<sup>37</sup> To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

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Tabernacle, and not as personal gain. Israel's contributing their gold and silver to overlay an altar or build a Menorah, was the most sensible and reasonable thing they could do. It made sense at last why they carried such things in a wilderness. These things were for Him! They gave to the Lord.

Lord, help us see the New Testament, the new covenant, the christian, application of this truth. Make us followers of You who know with an unshakeable conviction that what we possess (even our ability to love) is not ours but Your property held in trust.<sup>38</sup> May we be a people who know that giving to others is giving back to the Lord with interest what He has invested in us. Teach us, Lord, the secret of happily focusing on Jesus as the recipient of our love, He who loves us in return. May we rest in the truth that we are giving to You who has given us all things necessary to live for You.<sup>39</sup> We realize that we are not asked to love others but to let Christ love others through us. Amen.

If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Luke 16:12 And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

<sup>39</sup> 2 Peter 1:3 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

<sup>40</sup> Romans 14:8

## *Peace at All Cost*

Believers who see their blessing in terms of every opportunity to give of themselves in service to God, are believers who know the value of reconciliation, forgiveness, unity, and making peace. There is no part of Christ or His mission that calls for dividing God's people into opposing liturgical or doctrinal camps. To prove this statement wrong, one must find 1 scripture that supports disunity. But the New Testament is replete with references on unity. (John 17:23;<sup>41</sup>Ephesians 4:3)<sup>42</sup> instead. Peacemakers are called "*sons of God*" because, as scholarship explains: "*they are like Him.*"<sup>43</sup>

The word *peacemaker* (not just peacekeepers) is only found here in this beatitude, recalled by Matthew, and nowhere else in our New Testament. And although *peace making* is not used here as a euphemism for personal evangelism—that would be a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18)<sup>44</sup>—Paul used the term to describe Jesus' ministry (Colossians 1:19<sup>45</sup>; Ephesians 2:14-15<sup>46</sup>) which we

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<sup>41</sup> I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

<sup>42</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

<sup>43</sup> Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol II, Pg 419

<sup>44</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

<sup>45</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

<sup>46</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,



herald when we evangelize. We have so few verses for such an important truth, but do we need anymore emphasis?

*“The reference,”* says scholarship, *“is to those who disinterestedly come between two contending parties and try to make peace.”*<sup>47</sup> This is an amazing statement I do not recollect ever preached. And I think this sad.

I have been through congregational wars in which well intentioned believers contented for the faith, as they saw it. Congregations were torn apart and this is nothing new or even strange in church and denominational history.

So far: if I am interpreting correctly what Matthew recalls about Jesus’ sermon on the mount:

1. *Poor in spirit:* True happiness begins when a believer realizes how destitute they are without God. They realize that this life is a passage way to the next and all things have a spiritual significance.
2. *Those who mourn:* They have taken to heart God’s concerns and burdens realizing that carrying these is true communion with Him.
3. *The meek:* They find themselves more and more desirous of giving God His way in their lives.
4. *Who hunger and thirst to be righteous:* They are passionate about living and experiencing God’s Word.

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<sup>47</sup> Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol II, Pg 419

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5. *Who are merciful*: They find themselves growing closer to the Savior's heart toward all need: physical as well as spiritual.
6. *Who are pure in heart*: Which leads to the revelation that anything they do in God's will for others, they are really doing for Jesus.
7. *Who are peacemakers*: They realize that Jesus' prayer for oneness among them is now their prayer which releases the power of the Gospel in their lives for effective witness.

Imagine being part of a group where peace is an indelible principle printed on each heart, where reconciliation with each other when necessary is prioritized over every other concern, where revival means true repentance and unity is diamond hard and uncrackable by all the demons of hell. Imagine being a part of a congregation that knows with clarity of conviction how satan devises wedges of doctrine and ritual between believers and our love for unity is far too strong for him. Envision being in a group that cannot be coerced or lead or deceived or driven or made in any other way to go to war against any other lover of Jesus. No weapon formed, means *no weapon*<sup>48</sup>: no word, no dogma, no denominational position, no disagreement, no argument, no belligerence will be sufficient to even suggest

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<sup>48</sup> Isaiah 54:17 no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD.

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disunity. Our hearts ... chained together by the strongest, unbreakable, bond of christian love.

## *Happy Hunting*

The word *persecuted* means actually to be *hunted* — like a deer on the first Monday after Thanksgiving in the woods of Pennsylvania. It doesn't imply being ridiculed or belittled but speaks of the *pursuit* by those who are relentless in their quest to destroy our ministry and silence our message.

And we should be happy about this!?

Absolutely, but on a higher level of enthusiasm that sees another reality at work behind this scene. In verse 12 we are encouraged to “jump for joy” but we will get there when we get there. Here, let us see what is really happening on a spiritual plain above the faltering plans of those who would put out our fire by pouring oil on it. (Acts 8:4)<sup>49</sup>

It is the peacemaker that is being pursued—a critical point to make up front. God's peacemakers are “in” the world but not “of” it (John 15:19<sup>50</sup>). Peace has given the peacemaker a different worldview, a different perspective on their circumstances that reveals the true and unseen battle (Ephesians 6:12;<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

<sup>50</sup> If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

<sup>51</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

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John 16:33<sup>52</sup>) that is on a spiritual level in a spiritual realm.

We must be aware that the first person a peacemaker has made peace with is *themselves* and that peace stems from their peace with God (John 14:27<sup>53</sup>). Peacemakers don't blame themselves or past sins for their "woes." They do not see persecution as a result of a thousand mistakes. They *know* they are forgiven. They are at rest, at peace, within their world, within themselves, and with the people of God. And this peace is foundational. Without peace, their woes are painfully magnified. Persecution would increase the stress level and not give them a sense of God's blessing in it.

Without peace among God's people, they are all alone. But there is strength in numbers, in fellowship, in unity and faith is made stronger. Persecution supports this unity because God's people tend to circle the wagons (called prayer: Acts 4:29<sup>54</sup>) when they share a common threat to their peace. When the stress of the pursuit is elevated, believers at peace will have a song in the night like Paul and Silas had in a prison cell—and at midnight. (Acts

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<sup>52</sup> I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

<sup>53</sup> Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

<sup>54</sup> Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.

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13:50-52<sup>55</sup>; 16:25<sup>56</sup> ) Being blessed or happy takes on new meaning.

Because God's grace is God's grace, persecuted believers are brought to a deeper conviction about the Truth they hold in trust. The spiritual message was once a confusing sermon note and hard to believe in a cacophony of materialistic and hedonistic worldly voices. Now, through persecutions, Christ's instructions make more sense because now they are learning the "*fellowship of His sufferings.*" (Philippians 3:10) God's people when persecuted can see beyond the trial (Hebrews 12:2)<sup>57</sup>. And those worldly noises begin to fade into unimportance, no longer a temptation to discard the cross they bear.

What believers in a "free" society need to see is that the society is not as free as the word suggests. The world is the world and persecution comes in many shapes and sizes. Believers live among non-believers who can and have redefined the norms of the societies they share. Issues arise that inflame the difference between them, so that, in one form or another, believers find themselves under verbal, if not physical, attack for what they believe. And because

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<sup>55</sup> But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

<sup>56</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

<sup>57</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

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society is evolving, the children and grandchildren are affected in ways the older generations never were.

Persecution is real, but so is the blessing! We should be believers whose hearts are at peace with God's will for our lives, who as a result, when persecuted, do not fight fire with fire but with silent prayer and a powerful witness. ...believers who are not influenced by social pressures, who are immune to cultural changes that would compromise our message or commitment to God's Word. ...believers who have been through hard times and whose faith has not only survived but flourished, who have learned to sing God's praises and worship Him through adversity. ...joining the small band of David's warriors—only, men and women who know how to fight spiritual battles in prayer. ....a people that know how to hold each other's arms up—in a spiritual sense—while the battle rages, who cannot be tempted to retreat into socially comfortable and acceptable lives, just because the armor of God seems heavier or the opposition frightening or the battle too long.

## *Living Up to the Vision*

Persecution is not the only attack on our vision. We are falsely ridiculed as well—as was Jesus (Matthew 27:44)<sup>58</sup>. While on the cross, His enemies accused Him of false claims and not living up to his promises. The word *revile* means they *cast it in his teeth*. The constant stress of the hunt has been elevated now to verbal assaults and we are to count this a blessing!?

Well, yes. As long as they hear the gospel message and as long as this assault is due to following Jesus. (Matthew 10:24<sup>59</sup>) An assault on us, the servants of Christ is an assault on our Lord, Himself.

What isn't obvious is that verbal abuse as a consequence of our witness in the Gospel message is intrinsic to a believer's happiness. It isn't the ridicule, sarcasm, contumely, mockery, derision or insolence, poking fun at our faith, that makes us happy. It is seeing the advancement of the gospel on which our happiness hinges. We need to settle the matter in our understanding that in a postmodern world we are going to be laughed at. Our message seems unscientific, a fantastic piece of insane hope, when we claim Jesus is alive again after a cruel death for our sins. Secular minds have built a worldview based on evolution and science that leaves no room for

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<sup>58</sup> In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

<sup>59</sup> The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master.



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miracles. Our Bible is picked apart by scholarly minds that have called the scriptural narrative a myth and our theology a compartmentalized ideology to support our religious ritual but with no bases in reality. And we are not educated enough—most of God’s people—to debate these matters.

May we be believers whose faith is unmoved by the gainsayers. ...a group of believers who live the gospel message, who wear the condemnation of modern society as a badge of courage and honor, and whose commitment to following Christ is not a compartmentalized or ritualized belief but a way of life.

At an installation service for a young pastor, the speaker referred to a pastor as “the keeper of the vision.” We, in like manner, must hold tightly to the Truth. We do not evolve. The gospel message will always be relevant without socializing away its power, above culture. Our outreach is a practical expression of who we are and what really drives our priorities. True christian witness has not lost its dynamic influence and its ability to impress the world. What worries the postmodernists: just maybe, there is something to this christian thing and it is not just ritual.

## *Redefining Happiness*

Persecution and verbal assaults invite us to be alumni in good standing in a very special class. Among us are Paul, Moses, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, all the prophets and apostles. ..and, of course, Jesus.

Think about it this way: have we ever been jealous? Jealousy and envy are the result of craving the status another enjoys as a member of some group we want in—and we have no such membership. We want to be millionaires! We want our PHD. We want promotions that demand a greater commitment in time and energy, but we may not have the resources to invest, or be willing to invest. We are proud social creatures that need group identity and we have picked the group we wish to be invited into. If that group has a membership requirement we may be looking from the outside in until we qualify.

Persecuted and martyred saints are members of the most prestigious roll call ever assembled. And when I, for one, read about the “cloud of witnesses” the writer to the Hebrews listed (Hebrews 12) I want to associate with them; I want to relate to them; I dream of my membership in that society. Such a membership would make me the happiest!

I want to hear Jesus say, *“Well done, my good and faithful servant.”*<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew 25:21

## *Feelings in Gear*

The group we are members in as believers? We are the children of God which is something we should value above any induction into any other society.

“If you can’t get happy about being saved [as a believer] your happiness is out of gear” — Jimmy Swaggart

We are indeed blessed! We indeed should be happy.

Happiness is a feeling and feelings should not be driving. They are passengers. A search for happiness will never be successful because happiness is incidental to right decisions and wise choices. For the believer, happiness comes because we are following Christ.

When we seek happiness for itself, we are really seeking the pleasure of the moment. Happiness as a goal has no future because pleasure like all feelings are tied to a present adventure. Pleasure is exhausted in the happening. But the appetite for pleasure, now confused as a search for happiness, craves a heightened experience which can, but does not have to, lead to addiction.

Feelings are “in-the-moment” creatures (and this is not unknown by the tempter). And we tend not to think beyond them at consequences. This is a problem a good conscience and good life-decisions can help us with. For believers, a solid prayer life and Bible reading should help us see warning signs when

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we are tempted to rush into the moment without thinking things through.

For the believer, following the sermon on the mount as Matthew outlined our Savior's teaching works to engender a happiness that is satisfying and makes praise and worship genuine even when we express these in religious ritual. (The word "glad" in Matthew 5:10<sup>61</sup> means to leap on the inside with joy.)

There are eternal benefits attached to each beatitude—to be sure: theirs is the kingdom of heaven; they shall see God and be comforted and shown mercy, etc. But looking forward to these promises is not the source of happiness. Spiritual poverty and the rest of the beautiful attitudes profile the follower of Jesus and their happiness .

Lord, grant us to be believers who see our happiness as the product of our piety and service to You. Amen.

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<sup>61</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.