

THE KING'S EXPECTATIONS

Matthew 5:1-16

When Moses led the Israelites out of their captivity in Egypt, God used him to help form the nation of Israel. Very soon God gave Moses details about what was expected of this new nation with regard to their relationship to Him and how they were to interact with each other. It was through this new nation that the promises that God had made to Abraham would find partial fulfillment as they occupied and lived in the land that was an integral part of the covenant God made with Abraham.

Before the nation moved into the land God had promised to the descendants of Abraham, God had Moses review the law with them and we see that review throughout the account recorded in Deuteronomy. You recall that the adults who had been there when the law was first given had died and a new generation needed to know God's expectations. Toward the end of Moses' discourse on the law we find a list of "blessings" associated with various behaviors of the people as they did what God expected of them as given in His commandments and precepts. These blessings were related to their flocks, herds, families, businesses, and battles. These were the physical rewards of faithfully living under the Old Covenant. The ideas that the word translated "blessed" are related to "prosperity" and having "the praise of God."

Over a period of about 1400 years the requirements of the law had been interpreted and refined and defined to such an extent that by the time that Jesus came most of the people did not know the details of the laws and all the convoluted intricacies that the religious lawmakers had developed. There were so many twists and turns and possibilities of the letter of the law that many just ignored it and those who paid attention to it tried to game the system to their own advantage.

When John the Baptist and Jesus came along, they both proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven. In such a spiritual realm, the important things about the law would, of course, be the spirit of the law. The spirit of the law turns out to be much simpler to follow than the complications of the letter of the law that had evolved. Part of the ministry of Jesus was taking on the role of teacher in a Moses-like way to communicate to the people the expectations of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The New Moses – 5:1-2

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. ² He opened His mouth and *began* to teach them, saying, Matthew 5:1-2 (NASB95)

Why were crowds following Jesus? The news of the ministry of Jesus in healing the sick and casting out demons had gotten around and there were crowds of people who needed and were seeking help. They would gather around Him wherever He went. This provided Jesus with an opportunity to teach the people and especially those who were disciples of this new Teacher. Most of the people in the land where Jesus walked and taught were downtrodden, poor, and had little of the luxuries that we consider to be necessities in life. And yet, they were interested in finding a better life for themselves. So Jesus taught them how to live life successfully.

As we see from the first verse there were crowds following, but when He sat down to teach, His disciples drew near to hear. The implication was that not all in the crowd heard the message. When Moses gave his final discourse, the text in Deuteronomy 1:1 said that "he spoke to all Israel." Most commentators suggest that the leaders of the people rather than hundreds of thousands of people who actually heard Moses at that time. The expectation was that those who heard would pass along the information to those who were not there. In the same way, those

who hear Jesus' message need to share the expectations of the Kingdom with others.

The New Blessings – 5:3-12

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. ⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. ¹⁰“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹²“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:3-12 (NASB95)

Most commentaries tell us that the Greek word “makarios” means blessed or happy. Don Carson in *The New Bible Commentary* says that the word is closer to the idea of a word of “congratulation” or “recommendation.”

In keeping with the contrast of emphases of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, we see a focus on spiritual qualities and values rather than physical and material assets. Throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus He was constantly redirecting those who heard Him to take an eternal viewpoint rather than having a short-term focus on the temporary aspects of living.

The teaching technique that Jesus used was designed to help the hearers to be able to more easily remember the messages. In addition to using parables, Jesus also used a series of couplets of “qualification requirements” and “fulfillment” to help us remember what He taught.

For example, the first beatitude gives the requirement of “poor in spirit” and the fulfillment is “the kingdom of heaven.” It seems ironic that being “poor in spirit” would be what God (through Jesus) would recommend or something for which a person would be congratulated. To better understand this, let's consider what is the opposite of being “poor in spirit.” We are familiar with the parable Jesus used (Luke 18) about two men who were praying in the temple.

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.

This is a picture of the opposite of being “poor in spirit.”

We call it **pride** and the opposite is **humility**. However, “poor in spirit” communicates so much more than does the word “humility.” **Poor** implies poverty – it implies being without the basic necessities. The truth of the matter is that all humanity (without God) is in spiritual poverty. However, not everyone realizes their condition. Realizing that we (in and of ourselves) are spiritual beggars leads to action and attitudes that we classify as humility. In other words, humility is an expression of a realization of being poor in spirit. Failure to realize our condition as spiritual beggars leads to pride.

Only those who realize that something is missing in that we are not fulfilled in our humanity will look beyond themselves. We need to have the presence of God in our lives in order for us to be complete and only those who have this presence will find that they are pleasing to God. This desirable status finds its consummation in the rule and reign of Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives which is the “kingdom of heaven.” (Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.)

If we are satisfied, or if we think that manmade remedies are the solutions to the problems of the world, then we will always be frustrated and continually chasing after rainbows (a euphemism for magical solutions or luck) – always looking for approval, never finding it.

What do you think would be the response of a person who realizes his or her spiritual poverty? A realization of our spiritual condition should produce regret and sorrow and result in mourning over our situation. A person who mourns will literally cry out for help.

In verse four, we see the promise that if we do cry out for relief and mourn because of our condition, then we will have help and be comforted.

The comforting starts when we hear the Good News that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life.” Let’s assume that we have realized the poverty of our spiritual condition and have taken steps to invite Jesus into our life, making Him Lord. Having done this, we now have the peace of God that gives us the greatest comfort we can have: just knowing that we are in right relation to God.

Those who are familiar with various methods of presenting the Plan of Salvation to a lost person will recognize that the first two beatitudes are related to the initial steps in a person coming to Christ for salvation.

The initial step is to realize that something is missing – that we have a spiritual need (poor in spirit) and then have a sense of needing help to the point of remorse and calling out for help (those who mourn).

Both these beatitudes relate to our relationship with God.

In **verse five**, Jesus addressed our relationship with other people. How then shall we relate to others?

If being meek is to *have a tolerant, polite and tactful attitude toward others*, then that can only come from our sense of “well being and security” that we find in God’s protection and love. That truth becomes clearer as we examine the nature of His protection and love. We see from Romans 8:31 “if God is for us, who can be against us?”

If we believe that is true, then there is no need to demand our rights, there is no need to demand our own way, and there is no need to try to prove anything in our relationship with others. This is the essence of MEEKNESS.

Meekness is the quality that allows a person to be in control of himself. It is “strength in submission to the will of God.” In that submission we are willing to suffer a wrong for Jesus. It is a choice we make. We can see how meekness is a requirement for finding fulfillment and being pleasing to God and these are achievable in the here and now on the earth.

Poor in spirit (or humility) and meekness are characteristics that were demonstrated by Jesus: lowliness and meekness. Lowliness and meekness are not the same. For us, humility relates to our having a proper understanding of our own situation. We are finite and powerless to save ourselves. We are creatures and not the creator. We are totally reliant on the mercy of God even for our existence. Humility looks up into the sky and asks, “What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” Meekness, on the other hand, relates to the way we deal with others. It involves the ability to make others see themselves as worthwhile individuals and treats people as people and not as objects to be manipulated.

The consequences or outcome of being “meek” is that we will inherit the earth. Verse five is also found in Ps 37:11 “But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” In the passage in Psalms, the implication and expectation of the descendants of Abraham (through Isaac) were to possess the promised land. The phrase “inherit the land” was a generally used expression that implied great blessings. [It is probable that its use here is a reference to the manner in which the Jews commonly expressed themselves to denote any great blessing. It was promised to them that they should inherit the land of Canaan. For a long time the patriarchs looked forward to this. They regarded it as a great blessing. It was what they talked about in the journey in the wilderness; and their hopes were realized when they took possession of the promised land. In the time of Jesus, people used “inherit the land” as a

proverbial expression to denote any great blessing, perhaps as the sum of all blessings.]

We could argue that “inherit the earth” means to receive and enjoy every earthly and spiritual blessing that is for our best good here, and that we will reign with Christ forever hereafter. Consequently, the sinful and lost condition of men need not hinder us from being truly and forever blessed. Some see the fulfillment of “inherit the earth” as a reference to our reigning with Christ in His millennial kingdom on earth.

(Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are they who mourn, blessed are the meek.) As Jesus continued in His teaching, He built up each new thought on the foundation of the previous thought. Realizing the poverty of spirit leads to sorrow that is expressed in mourning (first steps toward accepting God’s salvation) which lead to such confidence in our relationship with God that we act with graciousness toward our fellow man. To put this into terms with which we are more familiar, we could say, “When we realize that we are lost and when we realize that we cannot save ourselves, we then turn in repentance to God and receive by faith His salvation in which we are born again and we then live above the pettiness of the world around us.” That leads us to the next Beatitude that we see in verse six.

Our newly revived spirits need to be nourished and this need is expressed as hunger and thirst for righteousness. Those who have not experienced the New Birth do **not** hunger and thirst for righteousness since there is no spiritual life that needs spiritual food. Righteousness is simply a proper relationship to God and no one wants that for us any more than God does. If we want it and seek for it, then we will find it. It is obviously a condition that Jesus recommends to those who follow Him. It is something for which we will be commended by God.

In verse seven we see that somewhere along this journey we ought to realize that we did not do anything to deserve the blessings that come from a restored relationship with God and that it is possible only because of His **mercy**. Our response that leads us to experience more of His mercy is to imitate God by our being merciful to others.

The thing that caused a separation between God and man in the first place was that man sinned and since God is a Holy God, He cannot abide in the presence of sin. Therefore, if we are to have the indwelling presence of God in our lives, we must allow the Holy Spirit to do His work of purifying our hearts to take away our tendency (bent) to sin. The reward of such purity is that we will have a realization of the presence of God being in us and when all of life is through we will have the pleasure of coming before Him to be presented to Him with exceeding joy.

As we follow and participate in these expectations of the new Kingdom, we will realize the eternal spiritual value that comes from a restored relationship with God. The same kind of love that resulted in God sending His Son to provide salvation will be working in our lives and we will not want to keep all of this just to ourselves. We will want to share it with others. One of the ways that this happiness can be shared is in helping our fellow man to live peaceably with his neighbors as well as his enemies. The call to be a peacemaker goes out to everyone who has had an encounter with the Prince of Peace. Only the child of God can really be successful in doing this work because the starting point of peace between people is to have peace with God.

Not everyone will welcome our efforts. There will be resistance. Many messages from the Old Testament contained this teaching: “do what is right and you will prosper and be blessed.” This is a general truth that is a “cause and effect” relationship in our dealings within our boundaries. This paradigm is where Job’s friends were coming from. However, if we add in the spiritual dimension and the implications of eternity, we find that our world crosses with the world of the enemy or the kingdom of darkness. When our orderly world intersects with the chaos of the kingdom of darkness, then we find that *good* is called *bad*, *evil* is called *good*, and

things get twisted out of a logical context and become perverted. This may find expression in child abuse, drive-by shootings, terrorists attacks or acceptance of abortion or homosexuality. When we do that, we have a phenomenon such as Political Correctness being chosen over righteousness. Sometimes we are punished for doing what is defined as right by God. We are to remain faithful because the ultimate victory will see the demise of the kingdom of darkness and the blessings will come.

We can find satisfaction and true happiness in such situations knowing that we are doing what God wants us to do and that He will reward us either now or in eternity. We need to always remember that this life is preparation for eternity. We are here for just a moment, but eternity is forever. That should help set our priorities to live in accordance with these spiritual values that Jesus taught.

The New Expectations – 5:13-16

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty *again*? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. ¹⁴ “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; ¹⁵ nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. ¹⁶ “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16 (NASB95)

In the time before refrigeration, salt was very important to preserve meats. If we are to function as salt in the world, then we must be about the business of preserving or saving people and things. The influence of Christian concern has changed the way people are treated in nearly all areas of life. It is our Christian responsibility to be a good influence on people that might otherwise be ruined in moral and spiritual corruption. Sometimes the influence of salt is rather subtle and at other times a heavy application is needed. Our influence as Christians can be both subtle and obvious. The subtle ways are there by our example and help and the obvious ways are when we take united action as a body to change things that are blatantly wrong. The church should openly oppose gambling, the sale of liquor, abortion, divorce, pornography, drugs, and any other thing that are harmful to individuals and society in general.

In our role as the light of the world, we are to teach what the word of God says. Just as in the situation with the 300 men of Gideon who had their light in clay jars, the light could not be seen until the jars were broken. Being broken is the work of the cross, it is realizing that we are poor in spirit, it is being humble before God and meek before our fellow man. We should be ready at all times to be able to respond to whatever questions there may be in life or about life with what the Word of God says. Many people are in spiritual darkness because they do not know God’s way and we have an obligation to let the light we have been given shine.