

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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The Beatitudes in the Modern World: The Blessing of Meekness

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today* where we are about to discuss the second programme in a series of four which centre upon the Beatitudes of the Lord Jesus and how they impinge upon us today. If you are unsure what the Beatitudes are, they form part of that section of the teaching of Jesus which is sometimes called the Sermon on the Mount. This can be found in Matthew 5:1-7:29.

Last week my colleague, David Pulman, spoke upon the first two Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-4. For the next twenty minutes I shall be dealing with Matthew 5:5-6 which I shall read now from the King James Version: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Though I have no doubt that, last week, David provided the context for these verses; it will not be harmful to remind ourselves of the occasion. It would seem that these words were delivered by the Lord very near to the beginning of His public ministry. According to Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had been baptised in the River Jordan (Matthew 3:13-17), had preached in Galilee (Matthew 4:12-17), and had begun to call some of His disciples (Matthew 4:18-22). Perhaps, the immediate context can be summarised by Matthew 4:23-25: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan."

I quote this long passage to show that a great many people were following the Lord Jesus mainly, I suppose, to watch and participate in the healing miracles.

The Beatitudes follow immediately after the passage we have just read (Matthew 4:23-25), and it is specifically indicated that it was when He saw the multitude that He opened His mouth and taught them. The whole of the Sermon on the Mount that covers Matthew 5:1-7:29, contains a wealth of teaching for those who wish to follow Him. In fact, the Lord ends His sermon with the parable of the men who built houses, one on the rock and the other on sand (Matthew 7:24-27). The injunction follows that if we ignore His words we are like the man that built his house upon sand, which fell down when the rains and storm came.

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12), then, are to show the implications for those who become believers and disciples of the Lord Jesus. He brings before us the cost to our personal ambitions and lifestyle if they are based only upon the values of the material world. Those remarks, however, are by way of introduction, for we will better see the implications of the teaching of the Lord Jesus as we examine, in more detail, Matthew 5:5-6. Before we do that, perhaps, I ought to emphasise that we do not become Christians by trying to follow His teachings. We follow His teachings because we are His children and only those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and believe that Jesus is the Lord, the Son of God, who has been raised from among the dead, after dying a redeeming death at Calvary, are His children.

We must now move on to look at Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Kittel, in his *Theological Dictionary*, states that "the word 'blessed' is used for the distinctive joy that comes through participation in the divine kingdom." Therefore, anyone who is blessed is singularly favoured by God. We can be participators in God's kingdom when we come under the Lordship of Christ, even though that kingdom is not in full view at this present time. It is obvious, to any mature believer, that the distinctive blessings of the Beatitudes are contrary to that which brings success in this world. Meekness is not a characteristic that will take us far in the world of business and commerce. Money, power, fame and influence are the levers that usually open the doors of happiness and gratification in this present world. We must, emphatically, dismiss this view in the light of Matthew 5:5, where those who are meek are approved or blessed of God.

What then did the Lord mean when He claimed that the meek are blessed of God? It is not easy to define in a single sentence the New Testament meaning of the word "meek". Kittel, to whom we have already referred, quotes

Aristotle's definition as meekness being "between extreme anger and total indifference". By the time the Lord was teaching, it seems to signify gentleness and an absence of pretension. To be meek towards others implies freedom from malice and from a domineering desire to enforce our own demands. It does not, however, mean being cowardly, feeble or timid. A meek person does not compromise on important matters to avoid confrontation, which might bring personal suffering. To quote the words of another, to be meek is to be firm but not violently assertive, principled but not petty, tender but not touchy.

Meekness was a facet of a godly walk looked for by the writers of the Old Testament. We have only time to quote one example which is Psalm 25:9: "The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way."

The most important mention of meekness, in the New Testament, must be when the Lord Jesus applies it to Himself, in Matthew 11:29: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Everyone who wishes to follow the Lord Jesus must take these words seriously, for we have just read how the Lord asked us to learn from Him. We cannot display a proud and haughty spirit, or be known by our contemporaries as arrogant and self important, if we follow the Man who considered that meekness was pleasing to God. We must also emphasise that the apostles indicated, to the first Christians, that meekness was an essential part of the Christian character. Paul writing to the believers at Colossae told them to: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering..." (Colossians 3:12).

Notice, they do this as the elect of God, which is an amazing statement. We are called and chosen of God that we might show meekness and kindness to the world in which we live. We must also recognise that these are not natural qualities that are passed on to us by our parents, though I acknowledge that some people are naturally nicer than others. Christian meekness is part of the fruit of the Spirit as we learn from Galatians 5:23, though we have no time to refer to it now.

One of the best examples of meekness, that I can cite, is the prophetic passage from Isaiah 53, where the prophet foretells the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. Isaiah 53:7 states: "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

We can compare this with a statement of the Lord, in Matthew 26:53, when Peter had attempted to defend his Lord with a sword: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?"

We see then, the Lord Jesus endured the rejection and humiliation of Calvary because He was meek, not because he was weak and defenceless.

Many years ago, when I was an apprentice at the motorcar works in the town where I still live, I had to attend the local technical college one day a week. One of the subjects studied was mathematics, a branch of knowledge in which I am still deficient! Our lecturer, at this particular time, was a Christian missionary who had left the country where he was working so that he could return to the UK to look after his mother. He was brilliant at his subject, far more knowledgeable than even the best of our group. One day we decided to play a silly trick on him by writing a slogan, in large letters, that involved the lecturer. The board, on which the slogan was written, could be so arranged that when another board was moved the second board would appear. We all thought that this was extremely funny, especially as we had hidden the board duster. I still remember the effect when the slogan appeared partway through the lesson. This good Christian man simply pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket and rubbed off the slogan, which was supposed to annoy him. To me it was a lesson in meekness by a man superior in knowledge and authority, a lesson which, as you have gathered, I have never forgotten.

We must now move on to the thought that the meek inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). I feel I must say that this statement is not a lead into, or a plug for the prosperity gospel. To preach that we only have to believe and God will give us everything we demand is patently absurd. I have no doubt, whatsoever, that one day a King will rule this world in righteousness, and in that day there will be on the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD. Truly, then the kingdom of heaven will be seen on this earth and meekness will be valued. Meanwhile, as Harold St. John wrote in his commentary of the kingdom parables of Matthew 13: "...we see on the one hand that vast fabric, dissolute, worldly and defiled, and here on the other side that secret and select shrine where Christ dwells in the hearts of the saints." If you are a believer, Christ dwells in your heart, and you have been brought into a realm where your blessings are too many to count. The great redeeming work of the Lord Jesus, which gives us all spiritual blessing, also promises us entrance into the new heaven and the new earth. We await our inheritance when the kingdom is ushered in.

If you have just tuned into this channel, can I tell you that you are listening to *Truth for Today*, where we are discussing some of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:5-6. We now must move onto Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

As I write these words, it is Christian Aid week, and collectors all over England will be knocking on doors to retrieve the envelopes they gave out last week. If you have ever done this, you will be aware of the variety of responses that greet you. In a hungry world, it is sad to witness the carping nature of some of the comments that collectors have to endure. I say this because we have to remember the many parts of the world where hunger and thirst for physical sustenance is experienced by millions of people. I believe that we, as Christians, must be moved by the poverty, disease and homelessness that are too often apparent in our world.

That, however, is a different topic to what we have before us in Matthew 5:6, where hunger for righteousness is brought to our attention. In one sense, the lack of resources to feed and house people in some parts of the world, can be partly written down to injustice and unrighteousness. Rulers and dictators often line their own pockets, and squirrel away vast sums of money, to the detriment of the people whose welfare they are supposed to be looking after. In the Matthew 5:6, the hunger refers to a deeper desire for the things of God. Psalm 42:1-2 expresses a similar thought: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?"

A comparable thought is expressed in Psalm 63:1: "O GOD, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

In both of these passages, the psalmist expresses a heartfelt longing for the presence of God. It is the same in Matthew 5:6, where hunger and thirst signify an ardent desire for that which is spiritual, and not physical. Please note that the Lord speaks of those who hunger and thirst, not of those who are hungry and thirsty. The former would indicate that there is degree of actively seeking rather than a passive acceptance of the situation.

Nearly sixty years ago, I bought my first car, which was a two seater Morris 10. I was, as I have already stated, an apprentice in a motor car factory. My wages were not great, so I had difficulty finding the necessary cash to run the vehicle, and often the needle of the petrol gauge would stop working instead of hovering near the empty mark. Occasionally, I would run out of petrol, which meant my journey would come to a sudden stop because, unlike modern cars, there would be no warning light to show the petrol was running out! Sometimes, we are like my old car, with no consciousness of thirst or hunger when the tank is dangerously empty. The Lord, in Matthew 5:6, said that His disciples should be actively seeking, and longing, for righteousness and each of us, speaker and listener alike, has to ask how far that verse is an index of our intentions this morning

The next question must be what is meant by "righteousness" in the context of this beatitude? I can do no better than use the words of DA Carson, who said: "It is better to take this righteousness as simultaneously personal righteousness and justice in the broadest sense. These people hunger and thirst, not only that they may be righteous, but that justice may be done everywhere."

Always, in the Bible, righteousness seems to have very close links with salvation. One of the first texts I ever preached on was Isaiah 32:17 which says: "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."

Where else can we look to see the supreme work of righteousness, other than the Cross of Calvary? Those hours, when the Lord Jesus suffered as the just One dying for the unjust, must be the greatest display of love and grace the world has ever witnessed. If the Lord Jesus has made us righteous through His work on the cross, surely, it behoves us to seek those paths of righteousness that David wrote about in Psalm 23:3. The opposite of this is turning unto our own selfish way. For the Christian, the challenge is always there of loving pleasure more than prayer, or the sports arena more than the company of the saints.

Every Christian that hungers and thirsts after righteousness must be grieved by the actions and behaviour of the ungodly, and by the careless pleasure seeking and God-rejecting attitude that so marks sections of our society today. The prophets thundered against the hard hearted attitude of the people of God in their day, and I believe that we, in the church, need to be reminded of our responsibilities. We cannot preach against the ills in society, while we remain careless and indolent in our daily walk. The Apostle Peter wrote that judgment begins at the house of God and so it must. Believers are the salt of the earth, said the Lord, but, if the salt has lost its savour what use are we? If we are concerned with earthly matters only, and lack the Christian virtues mentioned by Peter in 2 Peter 1:9, we are blind, and cannot see afar off, and have forgotten that we have been purged from our sins. Rather let us make our calling and election sure by hungering and thirsting after righteousness that we may be filled.

As we come near to the end of our time together this morning, we must examine the meaning of being filled. There is a sense in which the act of being filled never actually satisfies, because when, through grace, we are granted our prayers for righteousness and holiness, we never arrive at a moment when we can say we are satiated with righteousness. As we move through this life, we should continue to hunger and thirst after yet more righteousness, for we live in a scene where righteousness does not yet dwell.

As we are all aware, this is the year of the Olympic Games, in London, and I am old enough to remember that last London Olympics. A few years after those games, an Englishman, named Roger Bannister, ran a mile in under four minutes, something that middle distance runners had been trying to achieve for a long time. Great was the rejoicing, when it was announced that the four minute barrier had been broken. Man did not stop then trying to run faster, and this year attempts will be made to break records in all the disciplines that are part of the Games. This is a poor illustration of one of the meanings of being filled, yet the implication is clear enough. Just as athletes continue to press on, so we continue to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Beyond this world, however, lies the world that will be, or that which the Lord, in Matthew 12:32, called the “world to come”, where every trace of unrighteousness will disappear. In his second letter, Peter encourages his readers with a similar thought, as can be seen in 2 Peter 3:11-13: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.”

This is not “pie in the sky when we die”, but an acceptance by faith of what will be put in place under the hand of God. Virtually every promise of the Bible requires an exercise of faith and we must always remember that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Righteousness will dwell in the new earth overseen by the almighty power of God. The basis for this has already been achieved by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is Lord which, for us, means His sovereign control of our lives, where a desire for righteousness and meekness should be manifest. We know the day is coming when every knee shall bow and own that He is Lord. Meanwhile, as we have just read, what manner of people we ought to be in all holy living and godliness? (2 Peter 3:11)

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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