

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, February 13, 2011  
Rev. John Tapscott

## **"WHO ARE THE BLESSED? Part 2"**

Matthew 5:5,6

Last week we considered the first two beatitudes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God;" & "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Now recall that this word "blessed" describes a spiritual state, a spiritual condition. It doesn't have to do with how you feel at any given moment. Blessedness means that from God's perspective you are in a fortunate position, spiritually speaking. And the reason God calls you blessed is because you are now in a position to receive God's gift promised by the beatitude.

Now to be "poor in spirit" and "to mourn" are more passive qualities in that they come to us just as a result of our living in this world. We become this way through life's disappointments, stresses and losses. But in the two beatitudes for today, the state of blessedness is something we can seek and pray for, a characteristic that grows in us as we walk with the Lord Jesus by faith. They are a fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in us.

### **First: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."**

Now the word meek has come to mean weak and timid, afraid to act or speak, an easy mark, a push-over. If a scout described a young hockey player as meek, that would be the end of the player's prospects no matter what other skills he might have. It reminds me of what Harold Ballard once said of a particular player on the Maple Leafs, "If he went into the corner with eggs in his pocket, none of them would get broken." That's what we consider meekness.

But that's not what it meant originally. Please go from here today knowing that meekness does not equal weakness. Yes, it may have the connotation of gentleness, but rather than weakness, it means strength under control. A meek person seeks to put every passion, every ability, every emotion under God's control and to use them in the right way and at the right time.

Moses was one of the greatest leaders ever, yet the Bible says of him in Numbers 12:3, "Now...Moses was very meek, more than all the men that were on the face of the earth." Moses was not a spineless character; at times he

became very angry over injustice and unrighteousness. But Moses put his emotions and his gifts under God's control. He walked humbly with God. He was very meek.

It could have been said of Jesus himself. Now there was a gentleness of spirit in Jesus, but he was never timid or weak. He faced controversy and opponents head-on, overturned tables in the temple with righteous anger, courageously spoke truth to Pilate and the religious leaders, sweated blood as he prayed in the Garden, then rose up to willingly go forth to the Cross. Gentle Jesus meek and mild is true, but only if we keep in mind what was meant by meek - strength under control, harnessed and used for God's purposes. Again - meek does not mean weak. Meek means "a life under God's control." It is a spiritual state that God calls blessed, and while most of us are not there yet, it's a state that grows in us as we humbly walk with our Lord.

Now look at the promise given to the meek. "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth."

It's true in history. When the mighty try to take the earth, they inevitably lose what they have gained. Years ago Christian leaders gathered in West Germany for an unusual communion service. It took place in the very room where Adolf Hitler and Nazi leaders had planned for the 1,000 year rule of the Third Reich. The words "Heil Hitler" which had echoed through this room and brought so much bloodshed were nowhere to be heard. Instead the victorious words of Jesus Christ sounded clearly, "Do this in remembrance of me." These words spoken by the meek carpenter of Nazareth underline his truth that it's not the mighty that shall inherit the earth but those who put themselves under God's direction, as Jesus did.

Now there is an end-time dimension to this promise, as well, for when God creates his new heaven and new earth he promises that his saints shall rule with him, those who have humbled themselves and become obedient to God. They shall inherit the earth.

But there is a more present dimension to this promise. For the word "earth" can also be translated as "land." Jesus was speaking here to Jews, and the land was very meaningful to Jews. It meant the land of Israel which God had given to them after bringing them out of slavery. Now the people never fully inherited the land or lived at peace because they never put themselves fully under God's control. During the exile many were taken out of the land, and the prophets said it was a judgement on the nation's disobedience. Yet the land was always special to Israel and in time God brought many back to occupy the land again.

And over time the land came to mean the whole range of blessings that God had given his people. The more the people put themselves under God's control, the more they received and enjoyed the gifts God had poured out for them.

It's true for us. Think of the land as all the physical and spiritual blessings God offers to us. For example, as long as we try to save ourselves, we cannot receive salvation. But as we submit ourselves to God and let God do it for us, the miracle of grace takes place. We inherit the gift of salvation from God through Christ who lived and died and rose again for us. It's true for all God's blessings and gifts. "Blessed are those who increasingly put themselves under God's control, for they will inherit God's richest blessings." When we put ourselves under God's control and seek his way, he allows us to inherit more and more of his blessings. He knows that we can be trusted to use them in God-honouring ways. It's like a parent entrusting the automobile to a teenager more and more as he or she proves themselves worthy of using it responsibly. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

**Secondly today, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled (or satisfied)."**

Now the words Jesus used here for hunger and thirst mean famished and parched. Most of us have not experienced such deep hunger and thirst, unless we have fasted by choice. And no, I have never fasted beyond missing a meal or two for a medical test. But even that short period of fasting leaves one feeling quite hungry.

For one thing, fortunate are those who hunger and thirst for a personal righteousness. Commentators point out that this beatitude is related to Matthew 5:20, where Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of God." The Scribes and Pharisees hungered and thirsted for personal righteousness like no other people. In terms of their obedience to God's commandments they were, I daresay, far beyond any of us. Yet Jesus said we need a righteousness greater than theirs to enter the Kingdom of God. How is that humanly possible? Well- it's not. The righteousness which justifies us before God and allows us to enter God's Kingdom comes to us as a gift from God. Paul writes in Philippians "... not having a righteousness of my own which comes from the law but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." It's good to hunger and thirst after personal righteousness but the Scribes and Pharisees were trying to earn it from God, which meant they could not receive it as a gift. You are never satisfied when you try to earn righteousness on your own because you never know if you've done enough. You have no assurance. But your soul is filled when you receive righteousness as a gift from God

through faith in Jesus Christ. There is great peace in knowing that we enter the Kingdom of God not on the basis of our imperfect efforts and partial self-righteousness but on the basis of Christ's perfect righteousness which we share by faith. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

There is more to this beatitude. It was Jesus' meat and drink to do his Father's will, to do what is right. That was the food he longed for and the food that filled him. Do you hunger and thirst to do what is right? There is a deep sense of satisfaction when you do the right thing, especially when you resist the cheap and easy and popular way. Doing what is right and good fills the soul.

There is also a social aspect to this beatitude. Do you hunger and thirst for what is right in society? Do you long to see justice and righteousness for all God's children? Blessed are those who never lose their hunger to see justice and righteousness prevail. Yes, it's sometimes discouraging, for much is not right in our society and our world. But don't lose that hunger and thirst, for you will be satisfied, partially in this world and fully in the age to come.

In the 1960's Martin Luther King Jr. placed the righteousness of God above the unrighteousness of the Ku Klux Klan. When his home and church were bombed and his family harassed, Dr. King responded with, "I have decided to stick with love, hate is too great a burden to bear." When they couldn't silence him or break his spirit, they assassinated him. But out of his hunger and thirst for righteousness emerged rights and freedoms and opportunities previously denied to his people. And we can trust that God has allowed him to see the fruits of his labors from the heavenly shore, so that he is indeed filled and satisfied.

Christ promises that all who long to see and do what is right will be filled. And the resurrection of the Crucified One vindicates every word he spoke and guarantees every promise he made. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."