

# Sermon on the Mount Sermons

## SERMON ON THE MOUNT SERIES

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## THE BEATITUDES

C. H. Spurgeon

Matthew 5:1-12

In the year 1873, Mr. Spurgeon delivered what he called "a series of sententious homilies" on the Beatitudes. After an introductory discourse upon the Sermon on the mount and the Beatitudes as a whole, he intended to preach upon each one separately; but either illness or some other special reason prevented him from fully carrying out this purpose. There are, however, eight Sermons upon the Beatitudes, three of which have already been published in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, — No. 422, "The Peacemaker;" No. 2,103, "The Hunger and Thirst which are Blessed;" and No. 3,065, "The Third Beatitude:" — the other five will now be issued in successive weeks, and will form the Monthly Sermon Part for August, price Fivepence. Mr. Spurgeon's Exposition of each of the Beatitudes and of the whole Sermon on the mount also appears in the Gospel of the Kingdom (now sold at 3s.6d.), the volume upon which he was at work at Mentone up to a little while before his "home-call" in 1892.

One enjoys a sermon all the better for knowing something of the preacher. It is natural that, like John in Patmos, we should turn to see the voice which spake with us. Turn hither then, and learn that the Christ of God is the Preacher of the Sermon on the mount. He who delivered the Beatitudes was not only the Prince of preachers, but he was beyond all others qualified to discourse, upon the subject which he had chosen. Jesus the Savior was best able to answer the question, "Who are the saved?" Being himself the ever-blessed

Son of God, and the channel of blessings, he was beset able to inform us who are indeed the blessed of the Father. As Judge, it will be his office to divide the blessed from the accursed at the last, and therefore it is most meet that in gospel majesty he should declare the principle of that judgement, that all men may be forewarned.

Do not fall into the mistake of supposing that the opening verses of the Sermon on the mount set forth how we are to be saved, or you may cause your soul to stumble. You will find the fullest light upon that matter in other parts of our Lord's teaching, but here he discourses upon the question, "Who are the saved?" or, "What are the marks and evidences of a work of grace in the soul?" Who should know the saved so well as the Savior does? The shepherd best discerns his own sheep, and the Lord himself alone knoweth infallibly them that are his. We may regard the marks of the blessed ones here given as being the sure witness of truth, for they are given by him who cannot err, who cannot be deceived, and who, as their Redeemer, knows his own. The Beatitudes derive much of their weight from the wisdom and glory of him who pronounced them, and, therefore, at the outset your attention is called thereto. Lange says that "man is the mouth of creation, and Jesus is the mouth of humanity;" but we prefer, in this place, to think of Jesus as the mouth of Deity, and to receive his every word as girt with infinite power.

The occasion of this sermon is noteworthy; it was delivered when our Lord is described as "seeing the multitudes." He waited until the congregation around him had reached its largest size, and was most impressed with his miracles, and then he took the tide at its

flood, as every wise man should. The sight of a vast concourse of people ought always to move us to pity, for it represents a mass of ignorance, sorrow, sin, and necessity, far too great for us to estimate. The Savior looked upon the people with an omniscient eye, which saw all their sad condition; he saw the multitudes in an emphatic sense, and his soul was stirred within him at the sight. His was not the transient tear of Xerxes when he thought on the death of his armed myriads, but it was practical sympathy with the hosts of mankind. No one cared for them, they were like sheep without a shepherd, or like shocks of wheat ready to shatter, out for want of harvest-men to gather them in. Jesus therefore hastened to the rescue. He notices, no doubt, with pleasure, the eagerness of the crowd to hear, and this drew him on to speak. A writer quoted in the "Catena, Aurea" has well said, "Every man in his own trade or profession rejoices when he sees an opportunity of exercising it; the carpenter, if he sees a goodly tree, desires to have it felled, that, he may, employ his skill on it; and even so the preacher, when he sees a great congregation, his heart rejoices, and he is glad of the occasion to teach." If men become negligent, of hearing, and our audience dwindles down to a handful, it will be, a great distress to us if we have to remember that, when the many were anxious to hear, we were not diligent to preach to them. He who will not reap when the fields are white unto the harvest, will have only himself to blame if in other seasons he is unable to fill his arms with sheaves. Opportunities should be promptly used whenever the Lord puts them in our way. It is good fishing where there are plenty of fish, and when the birds flock around the fowler it is time for him to spread his nets.

The place from which these blessings were delivered is next worthy of notice: "Seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain." Whether or no the chosen mount was that, which is now known as the Horns of Hattim, is not a point which it falls in our way to contest; that he ascended an elevation is enough for our purpose. Of course, this would be mainly because of the accommodation which the open hill-side would afford to the people, and the readiness with which, upon some jutting crag, the preacher might sit down, and be both heard and seen; but we believe the chosen place of meeting had also its instruction. Exalted doctrine might well be symbolised by an ascent to the mount; at any rate, let every minister feel that he should ascend in spirit when he is about to descant upon the lofty themes of the gospel. A doctrine which could not be hid, and which would produce a Church comparable to a city set on a hill, fitly began to be proclaimed from a conspicuous place. A crypt or cavern would have been out of all character for a message which is to be published upon the housetops, and preached to every creature under heaven.

Besides, mountains have always been associated with distinct eras in the history of the people of God; Mount Sinai is sacred to the law, and mount Zion symbolical of the Church. Calvary was also in due time to be connected with redemption, and the mount of Olives with the ascension of our risen Lord. It was meet, therefore, that the opening of the Redeemer's ministry should be connected with a mount such as "the hill of the Beatitudes." It was from a mountain that God proclaimed the law, it is on a mountain that Jesus expounds it. Thank God, it was not a mount around which bounds had to be placed; it was not the mount which burned with fire, from which Israel retired in fear. It was, doubtless, a mount all carpeted with grass, and dainty with fair flowers, upon whose side the olive and fig flourished in abundance, save where the rocks pushed upward through the sod, and eagerly invited their Lord to honor them by making them his pulpit and throne. May I not add that Jesus was in deep sympathy with nature, and therefore delighted in an audience chamber whose floor was grass, and whose roof was the blue sky? The open space was in keeping with his large heart, the breezes were akin to his free spirit, and the world around was full of symbols and parables, in accord with the truths he taught. Better than long-drawn aisle, or tier on tier of crowded gallery, was that grassed hill-side meeting-place. Would God we oftener heard sermons amid soul-inspiring scenery! Surely preacher and hearer would be equally benefited by the change, from the house made with hands to the God-made temple of nature.

There was instruction in the posture of the preacher: "When he was set," he commenced to speak. We do not think that either weariness or the length of the discourse suggested his sitting down. He frequently stood when he preached at considerable length. We incline to the belief that, when he became a pleader with the sons of men, he stood with uplifted hands, eloquent from head to foot, entreating, beseeching, and exhorting, with every member of his body, as well as every faculty of his mind; but now that he was, as it were, a Judge awarding the blessings of the kingdom, or a King on his throne separating his true subjects from aliens and foreigners, he sat down. As an authoritative Teacher, he officially occupied the chair of doctrine, and spake ex cathedra, as men say, as a Solomon acting as the master of assemblies or a Daniel come to judgement. He sat as a refiner, and his word was as a fire. His posture is not accounted for by the fact that it was the Oriental custom for the teacher to sit and the pupil to stand, for our Lord was something more than a didactic teacher, he was a Preacher, a Prophet, a Pleader, and consequently he adopted other attitudes when fulfilling those offices, but on this occasion, he sat in his place as Rabbi of the Church, the authoritative Legislator of the kingdom of heaven, the Monarch in the midst of his people. Come hither, then, and listen to the King in Jeshurun, the Divine Lawgiver, delivering not the ten commands, but the seven, or, if you will, the nine Beatitudes of his blessed kingdom.

It is then added, to indicate the style of his delivery, that "he opened his mouth." "How could he teach without opening his mouth?" to which the reply is that he very frequently taught, and taught much, without saying a word, since his whole life was teaching, and his miracles and deeds of love were the lessons of a master instructor. It is not superfluous to say that "he opened his mouth, and taught them," for he had taught them often when his mouth was closed. Besides that, teachers are to be frequently met with who seldom open their mouths; they hiss the everlasting gospel through their teeth, or mumble it within their mouths, as if they had never been commanded to, "cry aloud, and spare not." Jesus Christ spoke like a man in earnest; he enunciated clearly, and spake

loudly. He lifted up his voice like a trumpet, and published salvation far and wide, like a man who had something to say which he desired his audience to hear and feel. Oh, that the very manner and voice of those who preach the gospel were such as to bespeak their zeal for God and their love for souls! So, should it be, but so it is not in all cases. When a man grows terribly in earnest while, speaking, his mouth appears to be enlarged in sympathy with his hearers: this characteristic has been observed in vehement political orators, and the messengers of God should blush if no such impeachment can be laid at their door.

“He opened his mouth, and taught them,” — have we not here a further hint that, as he had from the earliest days opened the mouths of his holy prophets, so now he opens his own mouth to inaugurate a yet fuller revelation? If Moses spake, who made Moses’ mouth? If David sang, who opened David’s lips that he might show forth the praises of God? Who opened the mouths of the prophets? Was it not the Lord by his Spirit? Is it not therefore well said that now he opened his own mouth, and spake directly as the incarnate God to the children of men? Now, by his own inherent power and inspiration, he began to speak, not through the mouth of Isaiah, or of Jeremiah, but by his own mouth. Now was a spring of wisdom to be unsealed from which all generations should drink rejoicingly; now would the most majestic and yet most simple of all discourses be heard by mankind. The opening of the fount which flowed from the desert rock was not one half so full of joy to men. Let our prayer be, “Lord, as thou hast opened thy mouth, do thou open our hearts;” for when the Redeemer’s mouth is open with blessings, and our hearts are open with desires, a glorious filling with all the fullness of God will be the result, and then also shall our mouths be opened to show forth our Redeemer’s praise.

Let us now consider the Beatitudes themselves, trusting that, by the help of God’s Spirit, we may perceive their wealth of holy meaning. No words in the compass of Sacred Writ are more precious or more freighted with solemn meaning.

The first word of our Lord’s great standard sermon is “Blessed.” You have not failed to notice that the last word of the Old Testament is “curse,” and it is suggestive that the opening sermon of our Lord’s ministry commences with the word “Blessed.” Nor did he begin in that manner, and then change his strain immediately, for nine times did that charming word fall from his lips in rapid succession. It has been well said that Christ’s teaching might be summed up in two words, “Believe” and “Blessed.” Mark tells us that he preached, saying, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel;” and Matthew in this passage informs us that he came saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” All his teaching was meant to bless the sons of men; for “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.”

***“His hand no thunder bears,***

***No terror clothes his brow***

***No bolts to drive our guilty souls***

***To fiercer flames below.”***

His lips, like a honeycomb, drop sweetness, promises and blessings are the overflowings of his mouth. “Grace is poured into thy lips,” said the psalmist, and consequently grace poured from his lips; he was blessed for ever, and he continued to distribute blessings throughout the whole of his life, till, “as he blessed them, he was taken up into heaven.” The law had two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, one for blessing and another for cursing, but the Lord Jesus blesses evermore, and curses not.

The Beatitudes before us, which relate to character, are seven; the eighth is a benediction upon the persons described in the seven Beatitudes when their excellence has provoked the hostility of the wicked; and, therefore, it may be regarded as a confirming and summing up of the seven blessings which precede it. Setting that aside, then, as a summary, we regard the Beatitudes as seven, and will speak of them as such. The whole seven describe a perfect character, and make up a perfect benediction. Each blessing is precious separately, ay, more precious than much fine gold; but we do well to regard them, as a whole, for as a whole they were spoken, and from that point of view they are a wonderfully perfect chain of seven priceless links, put together with such consummate art as only our heavenly Bezaleel, the Lord Jesus, ever possessed. No such instruction in the art of blessedness can be found anywhere else. The learned have collected two hundred and eighty-eight different opinions of the ancients with regard to happiness, and there is not one which hits the mark; but our Lord has, in a few telling sentences, told us all about it without using a solitary redundant word, or allowing the slightest omission. The seven golden sentences are perfect as a whole, and each one occupies its appropriate place. Together they are a ladder of light, and each one is a step of purest sunshine.

Observe carefully, and you will see that each one rises above those which precede it. The first. Beatitude is by no means so elevated as the third, nor the third as the seventh. There is a great advance from the poor in spirit to the pure in heart and the peacemaker. I have said that they rise, but it would be quite as correct to say that they descend, for from the human point of view they do so; to mourn is a step below and yet above being poor in spirit, and the peacemaker, while the highest form of Christian, will find himself often called upon to take the lowest room for peace sake. “The seven Beatitudes mark deepening humiliation and growing exaltation.” In proportion as men rise in the reception of the divine blessing, they sink in their own esteem, and count it their honor to do the humblest works.

Not only do the Beatitudes rise, one above another, but they spring out of each other, as if each one depended upon all that went before. Each growth, feeds a higher growth, and the seventh is the product of all the other six. The two blessings which we shall have first to consider have this relation. "Blessed are they that mourn" grows out of "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Why do they mourn? They mourn because they are "poor in spirit." "Blessed are the meek" is a benediction which no man reaches till he has felt his spiritual poverty, and mourned over it. "Blessed are the merciful" follows upon the blessing of the meek, because men do not acquire the forgiving, sympathetic, merciful spirit until they have been made meek by the experience of the first two benedictions. This same rising and outgrowth may be seen in the whole seven. The stones are laid one upon the other in fair colors, and polished after the similitude of a palace; they are the natural sequel and completion of each other, even as were the seven days of the world's first week.

Mark, also, in this ladder of light, that though each step is above the other, and each step springs out of the other, yet each one is perfect in itself, and contains within itself a priceless and complete blessing. The very lowest of the blessed, namely, the poor in spirit, have their peculiar benediction, and indeed it is one of such an order that it is used in the summing up of all the rest. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven" is both the first and the eighth benediction.

The highest characters, namely, the peacemakers, who are called the children of God, are not said to be more than blessed; they doubtless enjoy more of the blessedness, but they do not in the covenant provision possess more.

Note, also, with delight, that the blessing is in every case in the present tense, a happiness to be now enjoyed and delighted in. It is not "Blessed shall be," but "Blessed are." There is not one step in the whole divine experience of the believer, not one link in the wonderful chain of grace, in which there is a withdrawal of the divine smile or an absence of real happiness. Blessed is the first moment of the Christian life on earth, and blessed is the last. Blessed is the spark which trembles in the flax, and blessed is the flame which ascends to heaven in a holy ecstasy. Blessed is the bruised reed, and blessed is that tree of the Lord, which is full of sap, the cedar of Lebanon, which the Lord hath planted. Blessed is the babe in grace, and blessed is the perfect man in Christ Jesus. As the Lord's mercy endureth for ever, even so shall our blessedness.

We must not fail to notice that, in the seven Beatitudes, the blessing of each one is appropriate to the character. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" is appropriately connected with enrichment in the possession of a kingdom more glorious than all the thrones of earth. It is also most appropriate that those who mourn should be comforted; that the meek, who renounce all self-aggrandisement, should enjoy most, of life, and so should inherit the earth. It is divinely fit that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness should be filled, and that those who show mercy to others should obtain it themselves. Who but the pure in heart should see the infinitely pure and holy God? And who but the peacemakers should be called the children of the God of peace?

Yet the careful eye perceives that each benediction, though appropriate, is worded paradoxically. Jeremy Taylor says, "They are so many paradoxes and impossibilities reduced to reason." This is clearly seen in the first Beatitude, for the poor in spirit are said to possess a kingdom, and is equally vivid in the collection as a whole, for it treats of happiness, and yet poverty leads the van, and persecution brings up the rear; poverty is the contrary of riches, and yet how rich are those who possess a kingdom and persecution is supposed to destroy enjoyment, and yet it is here made a subject of rejoicing. See the sacred art of him who spake as never man spake, he can at the same time make his words both simple and paradoxical, and thereby win our attention and instruct our intellects. Such a preacher deserves the most thoughtful of hearers.

The whole of the seven Beatitudes composing this celestial ascent to the house of the Lord conduct believers to an elevated table-land upon which they dwell alone, and are not reckoned among the people; their holy separation from the world brings upon them persecution for righteousness' sake, but in this they do not lose their happiness, but rather have it increased to them, and confirmed by the double repetition of the benediction. The hatred of man does not deprive the saint of the love of God, even revilers contribute to his blessedness. Who among us will be ashamed of the cross which must attend such a crown of lovingkindness and tender mercies? Whatever the curses of man may involve, they are so small a drawback to the consciousness of being blessed in a sevenfold manner by the Lord, that they are not worthy to be compared with the grace which is already revealed in us.

Here we pause for this present, and shall, by God's help, consider one of the Beatitudes in our next homily.

## THE FIRST BEATITUDE

BY C. H. SPURGEON,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." — Matthew 5:3.

In the year 1873, Mr. Spurgeon delivered what he called "a series of sententious homilies" on the Beatitudes. After an introductory discourse upon the Sermon on the mount and the Beatitudes as a whole, he intended to preach upon each one separately; but either illness or some other special reason prevented him from fully carrying out this purpose. There are, however, eight Sermons upon the Beatitudes, three of which have already been published in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, — No. 422, "The

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Bearing in mind the object of our Savior's discourse, which was to describe the saved, and not to declare the plan of salvation, we now come to consider the first of the Beatitudes:-

***Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."***

A ladder, if it is to be of any use, must have its first step near the ground, or feeble climbers will never be able to mount. It would have been a grievous discouragement to struggling faith if the first blessing had been given to the pure in heart; to that excellence the young beginner makes no claim, while to poverty of spirit he can reach without going beyond his line. Had the Savior said, "Blessed are the rich in grace," he would have spoken a great truth, but very few of us could have derived consolation therefrom. Our Divine Instructor begins at the beginning, with the very A B C of experience, and so enables the babes in grace to learn of him; had he commenced with higher attainments, he must have left the little ones behind. A gigantic step at the bottom of these sacred stairs would have effectually prevented many from essaying to ascend; but, tempted by the lowly step, which bears the inscription "Blessed are the poor in spirit," thousands are encouraged to attempt the heavenly way.

It is worthy of grateful note that this gospel blessing reaches down to the exact spot where the law leaves us when it has done for us the very best within its power or design. The utmost the law can accomplish for our fallen humanity is to lay bare our spiritual poverty, and convince us of it. It cannot by any possibility enrich a man: its greatest service is to tear away from him, his fancied wealth of self-righteousness, show him his overwhelming indebtedness to God, and bow him to the earth in self-despair. Like Moses, it leads away from Goshen, conducts into the wilderness, and brings to the verge of an impassable stream, but it can do no more; Joshua Jesus is needed to divide the Jordan, and conduct into the promised land. The law rends the goodly Babylonish garment of our imaginary merits into ten pieces, and proves our wedge of gold to be mere dross, and thus it leaves us, "naked, and poor, and miserable." To this point Jesus descends; his full line of blessing comes up to the verge, of destruction, rescues the lost, and enriches the poor. The gospel is as full as it is free.

This first Beatitude, though thus placed at a suitably low point, where it may be reached by those who are in the earliest stages of grace, is however none the less rich in blessing. The same word is used in the same sense at the beginning as at the end of the chain of Beatitudes, the poor in spirit, are as truly and emphatically blessed as the meek, or the peacemakers. No hint is given as to lower degree, or inferior measure; but, on the contrary, the very highest benison, which is used in the tenth verse as the gathering up of all the seven Beatitudes, is ascribed to the first and lowest order of the blessed: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What more is said even of the co-heirs with prophets and martyrs? What more indeed could be said than this? The poor in spirit are lifted from the dunghill, and set, not among hired servants in the field, but among princes in the kingdom. Blessed is that soul-poverty of which the Lord himself utters such good things. He sets much store by that which the world holds in small esteem, for his judgement is the reverse of the foolish verdict of the proud. As Watson well observes, "How poor are they that think themselves rich! How rich are they that see themselves to be poor! I call it the jewel of poverty. There be some paradoxes in religion which the world cannot understand; for a man to become a fool that he may be wise to save his life by losing it, and to be made rich by being poor. Yet this poverty is to be striven for more than riches; under these rags is hid cloth of gold, and out of this carcase cometh honey."

The cause for placing this Beatitude first is found in the fact that it is first as a matter of experience; it is essential to the succeeding characters, underlies each one of them, and is the soil in which alone they can be produced. No man ever mourns before God until he is poor in spirit, neither does he become meek towards others till he has humble views of himself; hungering and thirsting after righteousness are not possible to those who have high views of their own excellence, and mercy to those who offend is a grace too! difficult for those who are unconscious of their own spiritual need. Poverty in spirit is the porch of the temple of blessedness. As a wise man never thinks of building up the walls of his house till he has first dugged out the foundation, so no person skillful in divine things will hope to see any of the higher virtues where poverty of spirit is absent. Till we are emptied of self we cannot be filled with God; stripping must be wrought upon us before we can be clothed with the righteousness which is from heaven. Christ is never precious till we are poor in spirit, we must see our own wants before we can perceive his wealth; pride blinds the eyes, and sincere humility must open them, or the beauties of Jesus will be for ever hidden from us. The strait gate is not wide enough to allow that man to enter who is great in his own esteem; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a man conceited of his own spiritual riches to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Hence it is clear that the character described in connection with the first Beatitude is essential to the production of those which follow after; and unless a man possesses it, he may look in vain for favor at the hands of the Lord. The proud are cursed, their pride alone secures them the curse, and shuts them out from divine regard: "The proud he knoweth afar off." The lowly in heart, are blessed for to them and to their prayers Jehovah ever has a tender regard.

It is worthy of double mention that this first blessing is given rather to the absence than to the presence of praiseworthy qualities; it

is a blessing, not upon the man who is distinguished for this virtue or remarkable for that excellence, but upon him whose chief characteristic is that he confesses his own sad deficiencies. This is intentional, in order that grace may be all the more manifestly seen to be grace indeed, casting its eye first, not upon purity, but, upon poverty; not upon showers of mercy, but upon needers of mercy; not upon those who are called the children of God, but upon those who cry, "We are not worthy to be called thy sons." God wants nothing of us except, our wants, and these furnish him with room to display his bounty when he supplies them freely. It is from the worse and not from the better side of fallen man that the Lord wins glory for himself. Not what I have, but what I have not, is the first point of contact, between my soul and God. The good may bring their goodness, but he declares that "there is none righteous, no, not one;" the pious may offer their ceremonies, but he taketh no delight in all their oblations; the wise may present their inventions, but he counts their wisdom to be folly; but when the poor in spirit come to him with their utter destitution and distress he accepts them at once; yea, he bows the heavens to bless them, and opens the storehouses of the covenant to satisfy them. As the surgeon seeks for the sick, and as the alms-giver looks after the poor, even so the Savior seeks out, such as need him, and upon them he exercises his divine office. Let every needy sinner drink comfort from this well.

Nor ought we to forget that this lowest note upon the octave of Beatitude, this keynote of the whole music gives forth a certain sound as to the spirituality of the Christian dispensation. Its first blessing is allotted to a characteristic, not of the outer, but of the inner man; to a state of soul, and not to a posture of body; to the poor in spirit, and not to the exact in ritual. That word spirit is one of the watchwords of the gospel dispensation. Garments, genuflections, rituals, oblations, and the like are ignored, and the Lord's eye of favor rests only upon hearts broken and spirits humbled before him. Even mental endowments are, left in the cold shade, and the spirit is made to lead the van; the soul, the true man, is regarded, and all beside left as of comparatively little worth. This teaches us to mind, above all things, those matters which concern our spirits. We must not be satisfied with external religion. If, in any ordinance, our spirit does not come into contact with the great Father of spirits, we must not rest satisfied. Everything about our religion which is not heart-work must be unsatisfactory to us. As men cannot live upon the chaff and the bran, but need the flour of the wheat, so do we need something more than the form of godliness and the letter of truth, we require the secret meaning, the ingrafting of the Word into our spirit, the bringing of the truth of God into our inmost soul: all short of this is short of the blessing. The highest grade of outward religiousness is unblest, but the very lowest form of spiritual grace is endowed with the kingdom of heaven. Better to be spiritual, even though our highest attainment is to be poor in spirit, than to remain carnal, even though in that carnality we should want of perfection in the flesh. The least in grace is higher than the greatest in nature. Poverty of spirit in the publican was better than fullness of external excellence in the Pharisee. As the weakest and poorest man is nobler than the strongest of all the beasts of the field, so is the meanest spiritual man more precious in the sight of the Lord than the most eminent of the self-sufficient children of men. The smallest diamond is worth more than the largest pebble, the lowest degree of grace excels the loftiest attainment of nature. What sayest thou to this, beloved friend? Are you spiritual? At least, are you enough so to be poor in spirit? Does there exist for you a spiritual realm, or are you locked up in the narrow region of things seen and heard? If the Holy Spirit has broken a door for thee into the spiritual and unseen, then thou art blessed, even though thine only perception as yet be the painful discovery that thou art poor in spirit. Jesus on the mount blesses thee, and blessed thou art.

Drawing still nearer to our text, we observe, first, that The Person Described Has Discovered A Fact, he has ascertained his own spiritual poverty; and, secondly, By A Fact He Is Comforted, for he possesses "the kingdom of heaven."

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I. The fact which he has ascertained is an old truth, for the man always was spiritually poor. From his birth he was a pauper, and at his best estate he is only a mendicant. "Naked, and poor, and miserable" is a fair summary of man's condition by nature. He lies covered with sores at the gates of mercy, having nothing of his own but sin, unable to dig and unwilling to beg, and therefore perishing in a penury of the direst kind.

This truth is also universal, for all men, are by nature thus poor. In a clan, or a family, there will usually be at least, one person of substance, and in the poorest nation there will be some few possessors of wealth; but, alas for our humanity! its whole store of excellence is spent, and its riches are utterly gone. Among us all, there remains no remnant of good; the oil is spent from the cruse, and the meal is exhausted from the barrel, and a famine is upon us, direr than that which desolated Samaria of old. We owe ten thousand talents, and have nothing wherewith to pay; even so much as a single penny of goodness we cannot find in all the treasuries of the nations.

This fact is deeply humiliating/A man may have no money, and yet it may involve no fault, and therefore no shame; but our estate of poverty has this sting in it, that it is moral and spiritual, and sinks us in blame and sin. To be poor in holiness, truth, faith, and love to God, is disgraceful to us. Often does the poor man hide his face as one greatly ashamed; far more cause have we to do so who have spent our living riotously, wasted our Father's substance, and brought ourselves to want and dishonor. Descriptions of our state which describe us as miserable are not complete unless they also declare us to be guilty; true, we are objects of pity, but much more of censure. A poor man may be none the less worthy of esteem because of the meanness of his apparel, and the scantiness of his provision; but spiritual poverty means fault, blameworthiness, shame, and sin. He who is poor in spirit is therefore

a humbled man, and is on the way to be numbered with those that mourn, of whom the second benediction says that “they shall be comforted.”

The fact discovered by the blessed one in the text is but little known; the mass of mankind are utterly ignorant upon the matter. Though the truth as to man’s lost condition is daily taught in our streets, yet few understand it; they are not anxious to know the meaning of a statement so uncomfortable, so alarming; and the bulk of those who are aware of the doctrine, and acknowledge that it is Scriptural, yet do not believe it, but, put it out of their thoughts, and practically ignore it. “We see,” is the universal boast of the world’s blind men. So far from realising that they are destitute, the sons of men are in their own esteem so richly endowed that they thank God that, they are not as other men. No slavery is so degrading as that which makes a man content with his servility; the poverty which never aspires, but is content to continue in its rags and filth, is poverty of the deepest dye, and such is the spiritual condition of mankind.

Wherever the truth as to our condition is truly known, it has been spiritually revealed. We may say of every one who knows his soul poverty, “Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonas, for flesh and blood hath not, revealed this unto thee.” To be spiritually poor is the condition of all men; to be poor in spirit, or to know our spiritual poverty, is an attainment specially granted to the called and chosen. An omnipotent hand created us out of nothing, and the like omnipotence is needed to bring us to feel that we are nothing. We can never be saved unless we are made alive by infinite power, nor can we be made alive at all unless that self same power shall first slay us. It is amazing how much is needed to strip a man, and lay him in his true place. One would think that so penniless a beggar must be aware of his penury; but he is not, and never will be, unless the eternal God shall convince him of it. Our imaginary goodness is more, hard to conquer than our actual sin. Man can sooner be cured of his sicknesses than be made to forego his bouts of health. Human weakness is a small obstacle to salvation compared with human strength; there lies the work and the difficulty. Hence it is a sign of grace to know one’s need of grace. He has some light in his soul who knows and feels that he is in darkness. The Lord himself has wrought a work of grace, upon the spirit which is poor and needy, and trembles at his Word; and it is such a work that it bears within. It the promise, yea, the assurance of salvation; for the poor in spirit already possess the kingdom of heaven, and none have that but those who have eternal life.

One thing is certainly true, of the man whose spirit knows its own poverty, he is in possession of one truth at least; whereas, before, he breathed the atmosphere of falsehood, and knew nothing which he ought to know. However painful the result of poverty of spirit may be, it is the result of truth; and a foundation of truth being laid, other truth will be added, and the man will abide in the truth. All that others think they know concerning their own spiritual excellence is but a lie, and to be rich in lies is to be awfully poor. Carnal security, natural merit, and self-confidence, however much of false peace they may produce, are only forms of falsehood, deceiving the soul; but when a man finds out that he is by nature and practice “lost”, he is no longer utterly a pauper as to truth, he possesses one precious thing at any rate, one coin minted by truth is in his hand. For my own part, my constant prayer is that I may know the worst of my case, whatever the knowledge may cost me. I know that an accurate estimate of my own heart can never be, otherwise than lowering to my self-esteem; but God forbid that I should be spared the humiliation which springs from the truth! The sweet apples of self-esteem are deadly poison; who, would wish to be destroyed thereby? The bitter fruits of self-knowledge are always healthful, especially if washed down with the waters of repentance, and sweetened with a draught from the wells of salvation, he who loves his own soul will not despise them. Blessed, according to our text, is the poor cast-down one who knows his lost condition, and is suitably impressed thereby; he is but a beginner in Wisdom’s school, yet he is a disciple, and his Master encourages him with a benediction, yea, he pronounces him one of those to whom the kingdom of heaven is given.

The position into which a clear knowledge of this one truth has brought the soul is one peculiarly advantageous for obtaining every gospel blessing. Poverty of spirit empties a man, and so makes him ready to be filled; it exposes his wounds to the oil and wine of the good Physician; it lays the guilty sinner at the gate of mercy, or among those dying ones around the pool of Bethesda to whom Jesus is wont to come. Such a man opens his mouth, and the Lord fills it; he hungers, and the Lord satisfies him with good things. Above all other evils we have most cause to dread our own fullness; the greatest unfitness for Christ is our own imaginary fitness. When we are utterly undone, we are near to being enriched with the riches of grace. Out of ourselves is next door to being in Christ. Where we end, mercy begins; or rather, mercy has begun, and mercy has already done much for us when we are at the end of our merit, our power, our wisdom, and our hope. The deeper the destitution the better;-

***“Tis perfect poverty alone***

***That sets the soul at large;***

***While we can call one mite our own***

***We get no full discharge.”***

Should the heart be distressed because it cannot even sufficiently feel its own need, so much the better; the poverty of spirit is just so much the greater, and the appeal to free grace all the more powerful. If the want of a broken heart be felt, we may come to Jesus

for a broken heart, if we cannot come with a broken heart. If no kind or degree of good be perceptible, this also is but a clear proof of utter poverty, and in that condition we may dare to believe in the Lord Jesus. Though we are nothing, Christ is all. All that we need to begin with we must find in him, just as surely as we must look for our ultimate perfecting to the selfsame source.

A man may be so misled as to make a merit out of his sense of sin, and may dream of coming to Jesus clothed in a fitness of despair and unbelief; this is, however, the very reverse of the conduct of one who is poor in spirit, for he is poor in feelings as well as in everything else, and dares no more commend himself on account of his humblings and despairings than on account of his sins themselves. He thinks himself to be a hardhearted sinner as he acknowledges the deep repentance which his offenses call for; he fears that he is a stranger to that saved quickening which makes the conscience tender, and he dreads lest he should in any measure be a hypocrite in the desires which he perceives to be in his soul; in fact, he does not dare to think himself to be any other than poor, grievously poor, in whatever light he may be viewed in his relation to God and his righteous law. He hears of the humiliations of true penitents, and wishes he had them; he reads the descriptions of repentance given in the Word of God, and prays that he may realize them, but he sees, nothing in himself upon which he can put his finger, and say, "This at least is good. In me there dwells at least some one good thing." He is poor in spirit, and from him all boasting is cut off, once for all. It is better to be in this condition than falsely to account, one's self a saint, and sit in the chief places of the synagogue, yea, it is so sweetly safe a position to occupy, that he who, is fullest of faith in God, and joy in the Holy Ghost finds it add to his peace to retain a full consciousness of the poverty of his natural state, and to let it run parallel with his persuasion of security and blessedness in Christ Jesus. Lord, keep me low; empty me more and more; lay me in the dust, let me be dead and buried as to all that is of self; then shall Jesus live in me, and reign in me, and be truly my All-in-all!

It may seem to some to be a small matter to be poor in spirit; let such persons remember that our Lord so places this gracious condition of heart that it is the foundation-stone of the celestial ascent of Beatitudes; and who can deny that the steps which rise from it are beyond measure sublime? It is something inexpressibly desirable to be poor in spirit if this be the road to purity of heart, and to the godlike character of the peacemaker. Who would not lay his head on Jacob's stone to enjoy Jacobs dream? Who would scorn the staff with which in poverty he crossed the Jordan if he might but see the kingdom of heaven opened as the patriarch did? Welcome the poverty of Israel if it be a part of the conditions upon which we shall receive the blessing of Israel's God. Instead of despising the poor in spirit, we shall do well to regard them as possessing the dawn of spiritual life, the germ of all the graces, the initiative of perfection, the evidence of blessedness.

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II. Having spoken thus much upon the character of those who are poor in spirit as being formed by the knowledge of a fact, we have now to note that It Is By A Fact That They Are Cheered And Rendered Blessed: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

It is not a promise as to the future, but a declaration as to the present; not theirs shall be, but "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This truth is clearly revealed in many Scriptures by necessary inference; for, first, the King of the heavenly kingdom is constantly represented as reigning over the poor. David says, in the seventy-second Psalm, "He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy... He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall-save the souls of the needy." As his virgin mother sang, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away." Those who enlist beneath the banner of the Son of David are like those who of old came to; the son of Jesse in the cave of Adullam, "Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one, that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them." "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." His title was "a Friend of publicans and sinners." "Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor," and it is therefore meet, that the poor should be gathered unto him. Since Jesus has chose in the poor in spirit, to be his subjects, and said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," we see how true it is that they are blessed.

The rule of the Kingdom is such as only the poor in spirit will endure. To them it is an easy yoke from which they have no wish to be released; to give God all the glory is no burden to them, to cease from self is no hard command. The place of lowliness suits them, the service of humiliation they count an honor; they can say with the psalmist (Psalm 131:2), "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child." Self-denial and humility, which are main duties of Christ's kingdom, are easy only to those who are poor in spirit. A humble mind loves humble duties, and is willing to kiss the least flower which grows in the Valley of Humiliation; but to others a fair show in the flesh is a great attraction, and self-exaltation the main object of life. Our Savior's declaration, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," is an iron rule which shuts out all but the poor in spirit; but, at the same time, it is a gate of pearl which admits all who are of that character.

The privileges of the Kingdom are such as only the spiritually poor will value; to others, they are as pearls cast before swine. The self-righteous care nothing for pardon, though it cost the Redeemer his life's blood; they have no care for regeneration, though it be the greatest work of the Holy Spirit; and they set no store by sanctification, though it is the Father himself who has made us meet to

be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Evidently the blessings of the covenant were meant for the poor in spirit; there is not one of them which would be valued by the Pharisee. A robe of righteousness implies our nakedness; manna from heaven implies the lack of earthly bread. Salvation is vanity if men are in no danger, and mercy a mockery if they be not sinful. The charter of the Church is written upon the supposition that it is formed of the poor and needy, and is without meaning if it be not so. Poverty of spirit opens the eyes to see the preciousness of covenant blessings. As an old Puritan says, "He that is poor in spirit is a Christ-admirer; he hath high thoughts of Christ, he sets a high value and appreciation upon Christ, he hides himself in Christ's wounds, he bathes himself in his blood, he wraps himself in his robe; he sees a spiritual dearth and famine at home, but he looks out to Christ, and cries, 'Lord, show me thyself, and it sufficeth.'" Now, inasmuch as the Lord has made nothing in vain, since we find that the privileges of the gospel kingdom are only suitable to the poor in spirit, we may rest assured that for such they were prepared, and to such they belong.

Moreover, it is clear that only those who are poor in spirit do actually reign as kings unto God. The crown of this kingdom will not fit every head; in fact, it fits the brow of none but the poor in spirit. No proud man reigns, he is the slave of his boastings, the serf of his own loftiness. The ambitious worldling grasps after a kingdom, but he does not possess one, the humble in heart are content and in that contentment they are made to reign. High spirits have no rest; only the lowly heart has peace. To know one's self is the way to self-conquest, and self-conquest is the grandest of all victories. The world looks out for a lofty, ambitious, stern self-sufficient man, and says he bears himself like a king and yet in very truth, the real kings among their fellows are meek and lowly like the Lord of all, and in their unconsciousness of self lies the secret of their power. The kings among mankind, the happiest, the most powerful, the most honorable, will one day be seen to be not the Alexanders, Caesars, and Napoleons, but the men akin to him who washed the disciples' feet, those who in quietness lived for God and their fellow-men, unostentatious because conscious of their failures, unselfish because self was held in low esteem, humble and devout because their own spiritual poverty drove them out of themselves, and led them to rest alone upon the Lord. The time shall come when glitter and gewgaw will go for what they are worth, and then shall the poor in spirit be seen to have had the kingdom.

The dominion awarded by this Beatitude to the poor in spirit is no common one; it is the kingdom of heaven, a heavenly dominion, far excelling anything which can be obtained this side the stars. An ungodly world may reckon the poor in spirit to be contemptible, but God writes them down among his peers and princes; and his judgement is true, and far more to be esteemed than the opinions of men or even of angels. Only as we are poor in spirit have we any evidence that heaven is ours; but having that mark of blessedness, all things are ours, whether things present or things to come. To the poor in spirit belong all the security, honor, and happiness which the gospel kingdom, is calculated to give upon earth; even here below, they may eat of its dainties without question, and revel in its delights without fear. Theirs also are the things not seen as yet, reserved for future revelation, theirs the second advent, theirs the glory, theirs the fifth great monarchy, theirs the resurrection, theirs the beatific vision, theirs the eternal ecstasy. "Poor in spirit;" the words sound as if they described the owners of nothing, and yet they describe the inheritors of all things. Happy poverty! Millionaires sink into insignificance, the treasure of the Indies evaporate in smoke, while to the poor in spirit remains a boundless, endless, faultless kingdom, which renders them blessed in the esteem of him who is God over all, blessed for ever. And all this is for the present life in which they mourn, and need to be comforted, hunger and thirst, and need to be filled; all this is for them while yet they are persecuted for righteousness' sake; what then must be their blessedness when they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father, and in them shall be fulfilled the promise of their Master and Lord, "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne"?

### **THE THIRD BEATITUDE.**

C. H. SPURGEON,

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." — Matthew 5:5

I Have often reminded you. that the beatitudes in this chapter rise one above the other, and spring out, of one another, and that those which come before are always necessary to those that follow after.

This third beatitude, "Blessed are the meek," could not have stood first., — it would have been quite out, of place there.

When a man is converted, the first operation of the grace of God within his soul is to give him true poverty of spirit, so the first beatitude is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

The Lord first makes us know our emptiness, and so humbles us; and then, next, he makes us mourn over the deficiencies that are so manifest in us.

Then comes the second beatitude: "Blessed are they that mourn."

First them is a true knowledge of ourselves; and then a sacred grief arising out of that knowledge.

Now, no man ever becomes truly meek, in the Christian sense of that word, until he first knows himself, and then begins to mourn

and lament that he is so far short of what he ought to be.

Self-righteousness is never meek; the man who is proud of himself will be quite sure to, be hard-hearted in his, dealings with others. To reach this rung of the ladder of light., he must first set his feet upon the other two., There must be poverty of spirit and mourning of heart before there will come that gracious meekness of which our text speaks.

Note too that this third beatitude is of a higher order than the other two. There is something positive in it., as to, virtue.

The first two are rather expressive of deficiency, but here there is a something supplied.

A man is poor in spirit; that is, he feels that he lacks a thousand things that he ought to possess.

The man mourns; that is, he laments over his state of spiritual poverty.

But now there is something really given to him by the grace of God ; — not a negative quality, but a positive proof of the work of the Holy Spirit within his soul, so that he has become meek.

The first two characters that receive a, benediction appear to be wrapped up in themselves. The man is poor in spirit; that relates to himself. His mourning is his own personal mourning which ends when he is comforted; but the meekness has to do with other people. It is true that it has a, relationship to 'God, but a man's meekness is specially towards his fellow-men. He, is not simply meek within himself; his meekness is manifest in his dealings with others. You would not speak of a hermit, who nearer saw a fellow-creature, as being meek; the only way in which you could prove whether he was meek would be to put him with. those who would try his temper-. So that this beatitude is a virtue, larger, more expansive, working in a wider sphere than the first, two characteristics which Christ, has pronounced blessed. It, is superior to the others, as it should be, since it grows out of them; yet, at the same time, as there is, through the whole of the beatitudes, a fall parallel with the rise:, so is it here. In the first case, the man was poor, that was low; in the second ease, the man was mourning, that also was low; but if he kept his mourning to himself, he might still seem great among his fellow-men. But, now he has come to be meek among them , — lowly and humble in the midst of society, so that he is going lower and lower; yet he is rising with spiritual exaltation, although he is sinking as to Personal humiliation, and so has become more truly gracious.

Now, having spoken of the connection of this beatitude, we will make two enquiries with the view of opening it up. They are these — first, who are the meek? and, secondly, how and in what sense can they be said to inherit the earth ?

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### **I. First, then, Who Are The Meek ?**

I have already said that they are those who have been made poor in spirit by God, and who have been made to mourn before, God, and have been comforted; but, here, we learn that they are also meek, that, is, lowly and gentle in mind before' God and before men..

They are meek before God, and good old Watson divides that quality under two heads, namely, that they are, submissive to his will, and flexible to his Word. May these two very expressive qualities be found in each one of us!

So the truly meek are, first, of all, submissive to God's will Whatever God wills, they will. They are of the mind of that shepherd, on Salisbury Plain, of whom good Dr. Stenhouse enquired, "What kind of weather shall we, have to-morrow?" " Well," replied the shepherd, "we, shall have the sort. of whether that pleases me." The doctor then asked, "What do you mean?" And the shepherd answered, "What, weather pleases God always pleases me." "Shepherd," said the doctor, "your lot seems somewhat hard." "Oh, no, sir!" he replied, "I don't think so; for it abounds with mercies." "But you have to work very hard, do you not? ... Yes," he answered, "there is a good deal of labor, but that is better than being lazy." "But you have to endure many hardships, do you not? ... Oh, yes, sir!" he said, "a great many; but. then I don't have so many temptations as those people have who live in the midst, of toms, and I have more time for meditating upon my God. So I am perfectly satisfied that where God has placed me is the best position I could be, in." With such a happy, contented spirit as that,, those who are meek do not quarrel with God. They do not talk, as some foolish people do, of having been born under a wrong planet, and placed in circumstances unfavorable to their development.. And even when they axe smitten by God's rod, they do not rebel against him, and call him a hard Master; but they are either dumb with silence, and open not their mouth because God hath done it,, or if they do speak, it is to ask for grace, that the trim they are enduring may be sanctified to them, or they may even rise, so high in grace as to, glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon them. The proud-hearted may, if they will, arraign their Maker, and the thing formed may say to him who formed it, "Why hast thou made me thus?" But these men of grace will not do so. It is enough for them if God wills anything; if he wills it, so los it be, — Solomon's throne or Job's dunghill; they desire to be equally happy wherever the Lord may place them, or however he may deal with them

They are also flexible to God's Word; if they are really meek, they are always willing to bend. They do not imagine what the truth ought to be, and then come to the Bible for texts to Prove what they think should be there; but they go to the inspired Book with a candid mind, and they Pray, with the psalmist, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." And when, in searching the Scriptures, they find deep mysteries which they cannot comprehend, they believe where they cannot understand; and where, sometimes, different parts of Scripture seem to conflict with one another, they leave the explanation to the great Interpreter who alone can make all plain. When they meet with doctrines that are contrary to their own notions, and hard for flesh and blood to receive, they yield up themselves to the Divine Spirit, and pray, "What we know not, teach thou to us." When the meek in spirit find, in the Word of God, any precept, they seek to obey it at once. They do not cavil at it or ask if they can avoid it, or raise that oft-repeated question, "Is it essential to salvation?" They are not so selfish that they would do nothing except salvation depends upon it; they love their God so much that they desire to obey even the least command that he gives, simply out of love to him. The meek in spirit, are, like a photographer's sensitive plates, and as the Word of God passes before them, they desire to have its image imprinted upon their hearts. Their hearts are the fleshy tablets on which the mind of God is recorded; God is the Writer, and they become living epistles, written, not with ink, but, with the finger of the living God. Thus are they meek towards God.

But meekness is a quality which also relates largely to men; and I think it means, first, that the man is humble. He bears himself, among his fellow-men, not as a Caesar who, as Shakespeare says, doth "bestride the narrow world like a Colossus," beneath whose huge legs ordinary men may walk, and peep about to find themselves dishonorable graves; but he, knows that he, is only a man, and that, the best, of men are but mine at the best, and he does not even claim to be one of the best, of men. He knows himself to be less than the least of all saints; and, in some respects, the very chief of sinners. Therefore he does not expect, to have the first place in the synagogue, nor the highest seat at the feast; but he is quite, satisfied if he may pass among his fellow-men as a notable instance of the power of God's grace, and may be known by them as one who is a great, debtor to the lovingkindness of the Lord. He does not seem himself up to be a very superior being. If he is of high birth, he does not boast of it; if he is of low birth, he does not try to put himself on a level with those who are in a higher rank of life. He is not one who boasts of his wealth, or of his talents; he knows that a man is not judged by God by any of these things; and if the Lord is pleased to give him, much grace, and to make him very useful in his service, he only feels that he owes the more to his Master, and is the more responsible to him. So he lies the lower before God, and walks the more humbly among men. The meek-spirited man is always of a humble, temper and carriage. He is the very opposite of the proud man who, you feel, must be a person of consequence, at any rate to himself; and to whom you know that you must give way, unless you would have an altercation with him. He is a gentleman who expects always to have his top-gallants flying in all weathers, he must ever have his banner borne in front, of him, and everybody else must, pay respect to him. The great "I" stands conspicuous in him at all times. He lives in the first house in the street, in the best room, in the front parlour; and when he wakes in the, morning, he, shakes hands with himself, and congratulates himself upon being such a fine fellow as he is! That, is the very opposite of being meek; and, therefore, humility, although it is not all that there is in meekness, is one of the, chief characteristics of it.

Out of this grows gentleness of spirit. The man is gentle; he does not speak harshly; his tones are not imperious, his spirit is not, domineering. He will often give up what he thinks to be lawful, because he does not think it, is expedient for the good of others. He seeks to be a true brother among his brethren, thinks himself most, honored when he can be the doorkeeper of the house of the 'Lord, or perform any menial service for the household of faith. I know some professing Christians who are very harsh and repellent. You would not think of going to tell them your troubles; you could not open your heart, to them. They do not seem to be able to come down to your level. They are up on a mountain, and they speak down to you as a poor creature far below them. That is not, the true Christian spirit; that, is not, being meek. The Christian who is really supra-for to others amongst, whom he moves is just the man who lowers himself to the level of the lowest, for the general good of all. He imitates his Master, who, though he was equal with God, "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form, of a servant." And in consequence, he is loved and trusted as his Master was, and even little children come to him, and he does not repel them. He is gentle towards them, as a leering mother avoids all harshness in dealing with her children.

In addition to being humble and gentle, the meek are patient. They know "it must needs be that offenses come;" yet they are too meek either to give offense or to, take offense. If others grieve them, they put, up with it. They do not merely forgive seven times, but seventy times seven; in fact, they often do not feel as if anything had been done that needed any forgiveness, for they have not taken, it as an affair they consider that a mistake was made, so they are not angry at it. He may be angry for a moment; he would not be a man if he were not. But there is such a thing as being angry, and yet not sinning; and the meek man turns his anger wholly upon the evil, and away from the person who did the wrong, and is as ready to do him a kindness as if he had never transgressed at all. If there should be anybody here who is of an angry spirit, kindly take home these remarks, and try to mend that matter, for a Christian must get the better of an angry temper. Little pots soon boil over; and I have known some professing Christians, who are such, very little pots, that the, smallest fire has made them boil over. When you never meant, anything to hurt, their feelings, they have been terribly hurt. The simplest remark has been taken as an insult, and a construction put upon things that never was intended, sad they make their brother offenders for a word, or for half a word, ay, and even for not saying a word. Sometimes, if a

man does not see them in the street through being short-sighted, they are sure he, passed them on purpose, and would not speak to them because they are not so well off as he is. Whether a thing be done ca: be left undone, it, equally fails to please them. They are always on the alert for some cause of annoyance, and almost remind one of the Irishman at Donnybrook Fair, trailing his coat in the dirt,, and asking for somebody to tread on it, that he may have the pleasure of knocking that somebody down. When I hear of anybody like that losing his temper, I always pray that he may not, find it again, for such tempers are best lost. The, meek-spirited man may be, naturally, very hot. and fiery, but he has had grace given to him to keep his temper in subjection He does not say, "That, is my constitution, and I cannot help it," as so many do. God will never excuse us because of our constitution; his grace is given to us to cure our evil constitutions, and to kill our corruptions. We are not, to spare any Amalekites because they are called constitutional sins, but we are to bring them all out, — even Agog who goeth delicately, — and slay there before the Lord, who can make us more than conquerors over every sin, whether constitutional or otherwise;.

But since this is a wicked world, and them are, some men who will persecute us, and others who will try to rob us of our right,, and do us serious injury, the meek man goes beyond merely bearing what has to be borne, for he freely forgives the injury that is done to him. It is an ill sign when anyone refuses to forgive another.

I have heard of a father saying that his child should never darken his door again. Does that, father know that he can never miter heaven while he cherishes such a spirit as that? I have heard of one saying, "I will never forgive So-and-so." Do, you know that God will never hear your prayer for forgiveness until you forgive others? That is the very condition which Christ taught his disciples to present: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive, our debtors." If thou takest thy brother by the throat, because he oweth thee a hundred pence, canst, thou think that God will forgive thee the thousand talents which thou owest to him? So the meek-spirited man forgives those who, wrong him; he reckons that injuries are permitted to be done to him as trials of his grace, to see whether he can forgive them, and he does so, and does so right, heartily. It used to be said of Archbishop Cranmer, "Do my lord of Canterbury an ill turn, and he will be, a friend to you as long as you live,." That was a noble spirit, to take the mail who had been his enemy, and to make him henceforth to boa friend. This is the way to imitate him who prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;," and this is the very opposite of a revengeful spirit. There are, some who say that they have been wronged, and they will retaliate; but "retaliation" is not a, Christian word. "Revenge" is not a word that ought to he found in a Christian's dictionary; he reckons it to be of the Babylonian dialect, and of the language of Satan. His only revenge is to heap coals of fire upon his adversary's head by doing him all the good he can in return for the evil that, he has done.

I think that meekness also involves contentment. The meek-spirited man is not ambitious; he is satisfied with what God provides for him. He does not say that his soul loathes the daily manna,, and the water from the rock never loses its sweetness to his taste. His motto, is, "God's providence is my inheritance." He has his ups and his downs, but he blesses the Lord that his God is a God of the hills, and also of theirs, lies; and if he can have God's face shining upon him, he cares little whether it be, hills or valleys upon which he walks. He is content with what he; has, and he says, "Enough, is as good as a, feast." Whatever happens to him, seeing that his times are in, God's hand, it is with him well, in the best and most emphatic sense. The meek man is no Napoleon who will wade through human blood to reach a throne, and shut the gates of mercy on mankind. To meek man is no miser, hoarding up, with an all-devouring greed, everything that comes to his hand, and adding house to hour, and field to field, so long as he lives. The meek man has a laudable desire to make use of his God-given talents, and to find for himself a position in, which he. may do more good to his fellow-men; but he is not unrestful, anxious, fretful, grieving, grasping; he is contented and thankful.

Put those five qualities together, and you have the, truly meek man, — humble, gentle, patient, forgiving, and contented; the very opposite of the man who is proud, harsh, angry, revengeful, and ambitious. It, is only the grace of God, as it, works in us by the Holy Spirit,, that. can make, us thus meek. There: have; been some who have thought themselves meek when they were, not,. The Fifth Monarchy men, in Cromwell's day, said that they were meek, and that they were, therefore, to inherit, the earth; so they wanted to turn other men out. of their estates and houses so that they might have them, and thereby they proved that they were not meek; for if they had been, they would have been content with what they had, and let other people enjoy wheat belonged to them. There are some people who are very gentle and meek so. long as nobody tries them. We are all of us remarkably good-tempered while, we, have our own way; but the true meekness, which is a work of grace, will stored the fire of persecution, and will endure the test of enmity, cruelty, and wrong, even as the meekness of Christ, did upon the cross of Calvary.

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II. Now, in the second place,, let us think of How The Meek Inherit The Earth.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit, the earth." This promise is similar to the inspired declaration of Paul, "Godliness is profitable, unto all things, having promise, of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." So, first, it is the meek mall. who inherits the earth, for he is the earth's conqueror. He is the conqueror of the world whenever he goes. William the Conqueror canto to, England with sword and fire, but the Christian conqueror wins iris victories in a superior manner by the weapons of kindness and meekness. In the Puritan times, there was an eminent and godly minister, named Mr. Deering, who has

left some writings that are still valuable. While sitting at table, one day, a graceless fellow insulted him by throwing a glass of beer in his face. The good man simply took his handkerchief, wiped his face, and went, on eating his dinner. The man provoked him a second time by doing the same thing, and he even did it a third time with many oaths and blasphemy. Mr. Deering made no reply, but simply wiped his face; and, on the third occasion, the man came, and fell at his feet, and said that the spectacle of his Christian meekness, and the look of tender, pitying love that Mr. Deering had cast upon him, had quite subdued him. So the good man was the conqueror of the bad one. No Alexander was ever greater than the man who could bear such insults like that. And holy Mr. Dodd, when he spoke to, a man who was swearing in the street, received a blow in the mouth that knocked out two of his teeth. The holy man wiped the blood from his face, and said to his assailant, "You may knock out all my teeth if you will permit me, just to speak to you so that; your soul may be saved;" and the man was won by this Christian forbearance. It is, wonderful what rough natures, will yield before gentle natures. After all, it is not the strong who, conquer, but the weak. There, has been a long enmity, as you know, between the wolves and the sheep; and the sheep have never taken to fighting, yet they have won the victory, and there are more sheep than wolves in the world to-day. In our own country, the wolves are all dead. but the sheep have multiplied by tens of thousands. The, anvil stands still while, the hammer beats upon it., but one anvil wears out many hammers.

'And gentleness and patience will ultimately win the day. At this present moment, who is the mightier? Caesar with his legions or Christ with his cross? We know who will be the victor before long, — Mahomet with his sharp scimitar or Christ with his doctrine of love. When all earthly forces are overthrown, Christ's kingdom will still stand. Nothing is mightier than meekness, and it is the meek who inherit the earth in that sense.

They do not inherit the earth in another sense, namely, that they enjoy what they have. If you find me a man who, thoroughly enjoys life, I will tell you at once that he is a meek, quiet-spirited man. Enjoyment of life does not consist in the possession of riches. There are many sick men who are, utterly miserable, and there are many poor men who are equally miserable. You may find misery, or you may have happiness, according to your state of heart in any condition, of life. The meek man is thankful, happy, and contented, and it is contentment that makes life enjoyable. It is so at our common meals. Here comes a man home to his dinner; he bows his head, and says, "For what we are about to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful;" and then opens his eyes, and grumbles, "Wiretapper! cold mutton again?" His spirit is very different from that of the good old Christian who, when he reached home, found two herrings and two or three potatoes on the table, and he pronounced over them this blessing, "Heavenly Father, we thank thee that thou hast, ransacked both earth and sea to find us this entertainment." His dinner was not so good as the other man's, but he was content with it, and that made it better. Oh, the grumbings that some have, when rolling in wealth, and the enjoyment that others have, where they have but little, for the dinner of herbs is sweeter than the stalled ox if contentment be but there. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," but in the meek and quiet spirit which thanks God for whatever he pleases to give.

"Oh!" says someone, "but that is not inheriting the earth; it is only inheriting a part of it." Well, it is inheriting as much of it as we need, and there is a sense in which the meek do really inherit the whole earth. I have often felt, when I have been in a meek and quiet spirit, as if everything around belonged to me. I have walked through a gentleman's park, and I have been very much obliged to him for keeping it in such order on purpose for me to walk through it. I have gone inside his house, and seen his picture gallery, and I have been very grateful to him for buying such grand pictures, and I have hoped that he, would buy a few more so that I might see, them when I came next time. I was very glad that I had not to buy them, and to pay the, servants to watch over them, and that everything was done for me. And I have sometimes looked, from a hill, upon some far-reaching plain, or some quiet village, or some manufacturing town, crowded with houses and shops, and I have felt that. they were all mine, although I had not the trouble of collecting the rents which people perhaps might not like to pay. I had only to look upon it, all as the sun shone upon it, and then to look up to heaven, and say, "My Father, this is all thine; and, therefore, it is all mine; for I am an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ." So, in this sense, the meek-spirited man inherits the whole earth.

He also inherits it in another sense, — that is to say, whatever other men have, he is glad to think that they have it. Perhaps he is walking, and gets weary; someone comes riding by, and he says to himself, "Thank God that man does not need to walk, and get tired, as I do. I am glad there is somebody who is free from that trial." He works very hard, and perhaps earns very little; but he lives next door to a working-man who has twice his wages, and he says, "Thank God that my neighbor does not have such a pinch as I have; I should not like to see him in such a plight as I am in." Sometimes, when I am ill, someone comes in, and says, "I have been to see somebody who is worse than you are;" but I never get any comfort out of such, a remark as that, and my usual answer is, "You have made me feel worse than I was before by telling me that there is somebody worse even than I am." The greater comfort for a meek man is this, "Though I am ill, there are plenty of people who are well;" or this, "Though I am blind, I bless God that my dear brethren can see the flowers and the sun;" or this, "Though I am lame, I am thankful that others can run;" or this, "Though I am depressed in spirit, I am, glad that there are sweet-voiced singers;" or this, "Though I am an owl, I rejoice that there are larks to soar and sing, and eagles to mount towards the sun." The meek-spirited man is glad to know that other people are happy, and their happiness is his happiness; he will have a great number of heavens, for everybody else's heaven will be a heaven to him. It will be a heaven to him to know that so many other people are in heaven, and for each one whom he sees there he will praise the Lord.

Meekness gives us the enjoyment of what is other people's, yet they have none the less because of our enjoyment of it.

Again, the meek-spirited man inherits the earth in this sense,-if there is anybody who is good anywhere near him, he is sure to see him. I have known persons join the church, and after they have been a little while in it, they have said, "There is no love there." Now, when a brother says, "There is no love there," I know that he has been looking in the glass, and that his own reflection has suggested his remark. Such persons cry out about the deceptions and hypocrisies in, the professing church, and they have some cause for doing so; only it is a pity that they cannot also see the good people, the true saints, who are there. The Lord still has a people who love and fear him, a people who will be his in the dry when he makes up his jewels; and it is a pity if we are not, able to see what God so much admires. If we are meek, we shall the more readily see the excellences of other people. That is a very beautiful passage, in the second part of "The Pilgrim's Progress," which tells that, when Christians and Mercy had both been bathed in the bath, and clothed in the fine linen, white and clean, "they began to esteem each other better than themselves." If we also do this, we shall not think so badly as some of us now do of this poor present life, but shall go through it thanking God, and praising his name, and so inheriting the earth.

With a gentle temper, and a quiet spirit, and grace, to keep you so, you will be inheriting the earth under any circumstances. If trouble should come, you will bow to it, as the willow bows to the wind, and so escapes the injury that falls upon sturdier trees. If there should come little vexations, you will not allow yourself to be vexed by them; but will say, "With a little patience, they will all pass away." I think I never admired Archbishop Leighton more than when I read a certain incident, that is recorded in his life. He lived in a small house in Scotland, and had only a manservant beside himself in the house. John, the manservant, was very forgetful; and, one morning, when he got up before his master, he thought he, would like to have a day's fishing, so he went off, and locked his master in. He, fished until late in the evening, forgot all about his master, and when he came back, what, do you think the bishop said to him. He simply said, "John, if you go out for a day's fishing another time, kindly leave me the key." He had had a happy day of prayer and study all by himself. If it had been some of us, we should have been fuming, and fretting, and getting up a nice lecture for John when he, came, back; and he richly deserved it; but I do not suppose it, was worth while for the good man to put himself out about, him. The incident is, I think, a good illustration of our text.

But the text means more than I have yet. said, for the promise, "They shall inherit the earth," may be read, "the... shall inherit, the land," that is, the promised land, the heavenly Canaan. These are the men who shall inherit heaven, for up there they are all meek-spirited. Thence are no contentions there; pride cannot enter there. Anger, wrath, and malice never pollute the atmosphere, of the celestial city. There, all bow before the King of kings, and all rejoice in communion with him and with one another. Ah, beloved, if we are ever to enter heaven, we must fling away ambition, and discontent, and wrath, and self-seeking, and selfishness. May God's grace purge, us of all these; for, as long as any of that evil leaven is in our soul, where God is we cannot go.

And then, dear friends, the text means yet more than that, — -are shall inherit this earth by-and-by. David wrote, "The meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight, themselves in, the abundance of peace." After this earth has been purified by fire, after God shall have burned the works of men to ashes, and every trace of corrupt; humanity shall have been destroyed by the fervent heat, then shall flits earth be fitted up again, and angels shall descend with new songs to sing, and the New Jerusalem shall come down out of heaven from God in all her glory. And then upon this earth, where once was war, the clarion shall ring no more; there shall be neither swords nor spears, and men shall learn the arts of war no more. The meek shall then possess, the land, and every hill and valley shall be glad, and every fruitful plain shall ring with shoutings of joy, and peace, and gladness, throughout the long millennial day. The Lord send it, and may we all be among the meek who shall possess the new Eden, whose flowers shall never wither, and whose: no serpent's trail shall ever be seen!

But this must. be the work of grace. We must, be born again, or' else our proud spirits will never be meek. And if we have been born again, let it be our joy, as long as we live, to show that, we are the followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, with whom gracious words I close my discourse: "Come unto me, all ye that, labor and are heavy laden, and I will give, you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." So may it be, for Christ's sake! Amen.

### **Mt 5:1-16 THE NEW SINAI**

by Alexander Maclaren

AN unnamed mountain somewhere on the Sea of Galilee is the Sinai of the new covenant. The contrast between the savage desolation of the wilderness and the smiling beauty of the sunny slope near the haunts of men symbolises the contrast in the genius of the two codes, given from each. There God came down in majesty, and the cloud hid Him from the people's gaze; here Jesus sits amidst His followers, God with us. The King proclaims the fundamental laws of His kingdom, and reveals much of its nature by the fact that He begins by describing the characteristics of its subjects, as well as by the fact that the description is cast in the form of beatitudes.

We must leave unsettled the question as to the relation between the Sermon on the Mount and the shorter edition of part of it given by Luke, only pointing out that in this first part of Matthew's Gospel we are evidently presented with general summaries; as, for example, the summary of the Galilean ministry in the previous verses, and the grand procession of miracles which follows in chapters viii. and ix. It is therefore no violent supposition that here too the evangelist has brought together, as specimens of our Lord's preaching, words which were not all spoken at the same time. His description of the Galilean ministry in ch. 4:23, as 'teaching' and 'healing,' governs the arrangement of his materials from chapter 45. to the end of chapter 9. First comes the sermon, then the miracles follow.

The Beatitudes, as a whole, are a set of paradoxes to the 'mind of the flesh.' They were meant to tear away the foolish illusions of the multitude as to the nature of the kingdom; and they must have disgusted and turned back many would-be sharers in it. They are like a dash of cold water on the fiery, impure enthusiasms which were eager for a kingdom of gross delights and vulgar conquest. And, no doubt, Jesus intended them to act like Gideon's test, and to sift out those whose appetite for carnal good was uppermost. But they were tests simply because they embodied everlasting truths as to the characters of His subjects. Our narrow space allows of only the most superficial treatment of these deep words.

### **I. The foundation of all is laid in poverty of spirit.**

The word rendered 'poor' does not only signify one in a condition of want, but rather one who is aware of the condition, and seeks relief. If we may refer to Latin words here, it is mendicus rather than pauper, a beggar rather than a poor man, who is meant. So that to be poor in spirit is to be in inmost reality conscious of need, of emptiness, of dependence on God, of demerit; the true estimate of self, as blind, evil, weak, is intended; the characteristic tone of feeling pointed to is self-abnegation, like that of the publican smiting his breast, or that of the disease-weakened, hunger-tortured prodigal, or that of the once self-righteous Paul, 'O wretched man that I am!' People who do not like evangelical teaching sometimes say, 'Give me the Sermon on the Mount.' So say I. Only let us take all of it; and if we do, we shall come, as we shall have frequent occasion to point out, in subsequent passages, to something uncommonly like the evangelical theology to which it is sometimes set up as antithetic. For Christ begins His portraiture of a citizen of the kingdom with the consciousness of want and sin. All the rest of the morality of the Sermon is founded on this. It is the root of all that is heavenly and divine in character. So this teaching is dead against the modern pagan doctrine of self-reliance, and really embodies the very principle for the supposed omission of which some folk like this Sermon; namely, that our proud self-confidence must be broken down before God can do any good with us, or we can enter His kingdom.

The promises attached to the Beatitudes are in each case the results which flow from the quality, rather than the rewards arbitrarily given for it. So here, the possession of the kingdom comes by consequence from poverty of spirit. Of course, such a kingdom as could be so inherited was the opposite of that which the narrow and fleshly nationalism of the Jews wanted, and these first words must have cooled many incipient disciples. The 'kingdom of heaven' is the rule of God through Christ. It is present wherever wills bow to Him; it is future, as to complete realisation, in the heaven from which it comes, and to which, like its King, it belongs even while on earth. Obviously, its subjects can only be those who feel their dependence, and in poverty of spirit have cast off self-will and self-reliance. 'Theirs is the kingdom' does not mean 'they shall rule,' but 'of them shall be its subjects.' True, they shall rule in the perfected form of it; but the first, and in a real sense the only, blessedness is to obey God; and that blessedness can only come when we have learned poverty of spirit, because we see ourselves as in need of all things.

### **II. Each Beatitude springs from the preceding, and all twined together make an ornament of grace upon the neck, a chain of jewels.**

The second sounds a more violent paradox than even the first. Sorrowing is blessed. This, of course, cannot mean mere sorrow as such. That may or may not be a blessing. Grief makes men worse quite as often as it makes them better. Its waves often flow over us like the sea over marshes, leaving them as salt and barren as it found them. Nor is sorrow always sure of comfort. We must necessarily understand the word here so as to bring it into harmony with the context, and link it with the former Beatitude as flowing from it, as well as with the succeeding. The only intelligible explanation is that this sorrow arises from the contemplation of the same facts concerning self as lead to poverty of spirit, and is, in fact, the emotional side of the same disposition. He who takes the true measure of himself cannot but sorrow over the frightful gulf between what he should and might be and what he is, for he knows that there is more than misfortune or unavoidable creatural weakness at work. The grim reality of sin has to be reckoned in. Personal responsibility and guilt are facts. The soul that has once seen its own past as it is, and looked steadily down into the depths of its own being, cannot choose but 'mourn.' Such contrition underlies all moral progress. The ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount puts these two, poverty of spirit and tears for sin, at the foundation. Do its admirers lay that fact to heart? This is Christ's account of discipleship. We have to creep through a narrow gate, which we shall not pass but on our knees and leaving all our treasures outside. But once through, we are in a great temple with far reaching aisles and lofty roof. Such sorrow is sure of comfort. Other sorrow is not. The comfort it needs is the assurance of forgiveness and cleansing, and that assurance has never been sought

from the King in vain. The comfort is filtered to us in drops here; it pours in a flood hereafter. Blessed the sorrow which leads to experience of the tender touch of the hand that wipes away tears from the face, and plucks evil from the heart! Blessed the mourning, which prepares for the festal garland and the oil of gladness and the robe of praise, instead of ashes on the head and sackcloth on the spirit!

### **III. Meekness here seems to be considered principally as exercised to men, and it thus constitutes the first of the social virtues, which henceforward alternate with those having exclusive reference to God.**

It is the grace which opposes patient gentleness to hatred, injury, or antagonism. The prominence given to it in Christ's teaching is one of the peculiarities of Christian morals, and is a standing condemnation of much so-called Christianity. Pride and anger and self-assertion and retaliation flaunt in fine names, and are called manly virtues. Meekness is smiled at, or trampled on, and the men who exercise it are called 'Quakers' and 'poor-spirited' and 'chicken-hearted' and the like. Social life among us is in flagrant contradiction of this Beatitude; and as for national life, all 'Christian nations' agree that to apply Christ's precept to it would be absurd and suicidal. He said that the meek should inherit the earth; statesmen say that the only way to keep a country is to be armed to the teeth, and let no man insult its flag with impunity. There does not seem much room for 'a spirited foreign policy' or for 'proper regard to one's own dignity' inside this Beatitude, does there? But notice that this meekness naturally follows the preceding dispositions. He who knows himself and has learned the depth of his own evil will not be swift to blaze up at slights or wrongs. The true meekness is not mere natural disposition, but the direct outcome of poverty of spirit and the consequent sorrow. So, it is a test of their reality. Many a man will indulge in confessions of sin, and crackle up in sputtering heat of indignation at some slight or offence. If he does, his lowly words have had little meaning, and the benediction of these promises will come scantily to his heart.

Does Christ mean merely to say that meek men will acquire landed property? Is there not a present inheritance of the earth by them, though they may not own a foot of it? They have the world who enjoy it, whom it helps nearer God, who see Him in it, to whom it is the field for service and the means for growing character. But in the future the kingdom of heaven will be a kingdom of the earth, and the meek saints shall reign with the King who is meek and lowly of heart,

### **IV. Righteousness is conformity to the will of God, or moral perfection.**

Hunger and thirst are energetic metaphors for passionate desire, and imply that righteousness is the true nourishment of the Spirit. Every longing of a noble spirit is blessed. Aspiration after the unreached is the salt of all lofty life. It is better to be conscious of want than to be content. There are hungers which are all unblessed, greedy appetites for the swine's husks, which are misery when unsatisfied, and disgust when satiated. But we are meant to be righteous, and shall not in vain desire to be so. God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them. Such longings prophesy their fruition.

Notice that this hunger follows the experience of the former Beatitudes. It is the issue of poverty of spirit and of that blessed sorrow. Observe, too, that the desire after, and not the possession or achievement of, righteousness is blessed. Is not this the first hint of the Christian teaching that we do not work out or win but receive it? God gives it. Our attitude towards that gift should be earnest longing. Such a blessed hungerer shall 'receive... righteousness from the God of his salvation.' The certainty that he will do so rests at last on the faithfulness of God, who cannot but respond to all desires which He inspires. They are premonitions of His purposes, like rosy clouds that run before the chariot of the sunrise. The desire to be righteous is already righteousness in heart and will, and reveals the true bent of the soul. Its realisation in life is a question of time. The progressive fulfilment here points to completeness in heaven, when we shall behold His face in righteousness, and be satisfied when we awake in His likeness.

### **V. Again we have a grace which is exercised to men.**

Mercy is more than meekness. That implied opposition, and was largely negative. This does not regard the conduct of others at all, and is really love in exercise to the needy, especially the unworthy. It embraces pity, charitable forbearance, beneficence, and is revealed in acts, in words, in tears. It is blessed in itself. A life of selfishness is hell; a life of mercy is sweet with some savour of heaven. It is the consequence of mercy received from God. Poverty of spirit, sorrow, hunger after righteousness bring deep experiences of God's gentle forbearance and bestowing love, and will make us like Him in proportion as they are real. Our mercifulness, then, is a reflection from His. His ought to be the measure and pattern of ours in depth, scope, extent of self-sacrifice, and freeness of its gifts. A stringent requirement!

Our exercise of mercy is the condition of our receiving it. On the whole, the world gives us back, as a mirror does, the reflection of our own faces; and merciful men generally get what they give. But that is a law with many exceptions, and Jesus means more than that. Merciful men get mercy from God — not, of course, that we deserve mercy by being merciful. That is a contradiction in terms; for mercy is precisely that which we do not deserve. The place of mercy in this series shows that Jesus regarded it as the

consequence, not the cause, of our experience of God's mercy. But He teaches over and over again that a hard, unmerciful heart forfeits the divine mercy. It does so, because such a disposition tends to obscure the very state of mind to which alone God's mercy can be given- Such a man must have forgotten his poverty and sorrow, his longings and their rich reward, and so must have, for the time, passed from the place where he can take in God's gift. A life inconsistent with Christian motives will rob a Christian of Christian privileges. The hand on his brother's throat destroys the servant's own forgiveness. He cannot be at once a rapacious creditor and a discharged bankrupt.

#### **VI. If detached from its connection, there is little blessedness in the next Beatitude.**

What is the use of telling us how happy purity of heart will make us? It only provokes the despairing question, 'And how am I to be pure?' But when we set this word in its place here, it does bring hope. For it teaches that purity is the result of all that has gone before, and comes from that purifying which is the sure answer of God to our poverty, mourning, and longing. Such purity is plainly progressive, and as it increases, so does the vision of God grow. The more the glasses of the telescope are cleansed, the brighter does the great star shine to the gazer. 'No man hath seen God,' nor can see Him, either amid the mists of earth or in the cloudless sky of heaven, if by seeing we mean perceiving by sense, or full, direct comprehension by spirit. But seeing Him is possible even now, if by it we understand the knowledge of His character, the assurance of His presence, the sense of communion with Him. Our earthly consciousness of God may become so clear, direct, real, and certain, that it deserves the name of vision. Such blessed intuition of Him is the prerogative of those whose hearts Christ has cleansed, and whose inward eye is therefore able to behold God, because it is like Him. 'Unless the eye were sunlike, how could it see the sun?' We can blind ourselves to Him, by wallowing in filth. Impurity unfits for seeing purity. Swedenborg profoundly said that the wicked see only blackness where the sun is.

Like all these Beatitudes, this has a double fulfilment, as the kingdom has two stages of here and hereafter. Purity of heart is the condition of the vision of God in heaven. Without holiness, 'no man shall see the Lord.' The sight makes us pure, and purity makes us see. Thus heaven will be a state of ever-increasing, reciprocally acting sight and holiness, Like Him because we see Him, we shall see Him more because we have assimilated what we see, as the sunshine opens the petals, and tints the flower with its own colours the more deeply, the wider it opens.

#### **VII. Once more we have the alternation of a grace exercised to men.**

If we give due weight to the order of these Beatitudes, we shall feel that Christ's peacemaker must be something more than a mere composer of men's quarrels. For he has to be trained by all the preceding experiences, and has to be emptied of self, penitent, hungering for and filled with righteousness, and therefore pure in heart as well as, in regard to men, meek and merciful, ere he can hope to fill this part. That apprenticeship deepens the conception of the peace which Christ's subjects are to diffuse. It is, first and chiefly, the peace which enters the soul that has traversed all these stages; that is to say, the Christian peacemaker is first to seek to bring about peace between men and God, by beseeching them to be reconciled to Him, and then afterwards, as a consequence of this, is to seek to diffuse through all human relations the blessed unity and amity which flow most surely from the common possession of the peace of God. Of course, the relation which the subjects of the true King bear to all wars and fightings, to all discord and strife, is not excluded, but is grounded on this deeper meaning. The centuries that have passed since the words were spoken, have not yet brought up the Christian conscience to the full perception of their meaning and obligation. Too many of us still believe that 'great doors and effectual' can be blown open with gunpowder, and regard this Beatitude as a counsel of perfection, rather than as one of the fundamental laws of the kingdom.

The Christian who moves thus among men seeking to diffuse everywhere the peace with God which fills his own soul, and the peace with all men which they only who have the higher peace can preserve unbroken in their quiet, meek hearts, will be more or less recognised as God-like by men, and will have in his own heart the witness that he is called by God His child. He will bear visibly the image of his Father, and will hear the voice that speaks to him too as unto a son.

#### **VIII. The last Beatitude crowns all the paradoxes of the series with what sounds to flesh as a stark contradiction.**

The persecuted are blessed. The previous seven sayings have perfected the portraiture of what a child of the kingdom is to be. This appends a calm prophecy, which must have shattered many a rosy dream among the listeners, of what his reception by the world will certainly turn out. Jesus is not summoning men to dominion, honour, and victory; but to scorn and suffering. His own crown, He knew, was first to be twisted of thorns, and copies of it were to wound His followers' brows. Yet even that fate was blessed; for to suffer for righteousness, which is to suffer for Him, brings elevation of spirit, a solemn joy, secret supplies of strength, and sweet intimacies of communion else unknown. The noble army of martyrs rose before His thoughts as He spoke; and now, eighteen hundred years after, heaven is crowded with those who by axe and stake and gibbet have entered there. 'The glory

dies not, and the grief is past.' They stoop from their thrones to witness to us that Christ is true, and that the light affliction has wrought an eternal weight of glory.

## Mt 5:3 THE FIRST BEATITUDE

Alexander Maclaren

'YE are not come unto the mount that burned with fire, nor unto the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of "awful" words.' With such accompaniments the old law was promulgated, but here, in this Sermon on the Mount, as it is called, the laws of the Kingdom are proclaimed by the King Himself; and He does not lay them down with the sternness of those written on tables of stone. No rigid 'thou shalt' compels, no iron 'thou shalt not' forbids; but each precept is linked with a blessing, and every characteristic that is required is enforced by the thought that it contributes to our highest good. It fitted well Christ's character, and the lips 'into which grace is poured,' that He spake His laws under the guise of these Beatitudes.

This, the first of them, is dead in the teeth of flesh and sense, a paradox to the men who judge good and evil by things external and visible, but deeply, everlastingly, unconditionally, and inwardly true. All that the world commends and pats on the back, Christ condemns, and all that the world shrinks from and dreads, Christ bids us make our own, and assures us that in it we shall find our true blessing. 'The poor in spirit,' they are the happy men.

The reason for the benediction is as foreign to law and earthly thoughts as is the benediction of which it is the reason — 'for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' Poverty of spirit will not further earthly designs, nor be an instrument for what the world calls success and prosperity. But it will give us something better than earth, it will give us heaven. Do you think that that is better than earth, and should you be disposed to acquiesce in the benediction of those who may lose the world's gifts but are sure to have heaven's felicities?

Now, I think I shall best deal with these words by considering, most simply, the fundamental characteristic of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and the blessed issues of that character.

### **I. First, then, the fundamental characteristic of Christ's disciples.**

Now it is to be noticed that Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, which is much briefer than Matthew's, omits the words 'in spirit,' and so seems at first sight to be an encomium and benediction upon the outward condition of earthly poverty. Matthew, on the other hand, says 'poor in spirit.' And the difference between the two evangelists has given occasion to some to maintain that one or the other of them misunderstood Christ's meaning, and modified His expression either by omission or enlargement. But if you will notice another difference between the two forms of the saying in the two Gospels, you will, I think, find an explanation of the one already referred to; for Matthew's Beatitudes are general statements, 'Blessed are'; and Luke's are addressed to the circle of the disciples, 'Blessed are ye.' And if we duly consider that difference, we shall see that the general statement necessarily required the explanation which Matthew's version appends to it, in order to prevent the misunderstanding that our Lord was setting so much store by earthly conditions as to suppose that virtue and blessedness were uniformly attached to any of these. Jesus Christ was no vulgar demagogue flattering the poor and inveighing against the rich.

Luke's 'ye poor' shows at once that Christ was not speaking about all the poor in outward condition, but about a certain class of such. No doubt the bulk of His disciples were poor men who had been drawn or driven by their sense of need to open their hearts to Him. Outward poverty is a blessing if it drives men to God; it is not a blessing if, as is often the case, it drives men from Him; or if, as is still oftener the case, it leaves men negligent of Him. So that Matthew's enlargement is identical in meaning with Luke's condensed form, regard being had to the difference in the structure of the two Beatitudes.

And so we come just to this question — What is this poverty of spirit? I do not need to waste your time in saying what it is not. To me it seems to be a lowly and just estimate of ourselves, our character, our achievements, based upon a clear recognition of our own necessities, weaknesses, and sins.

The 'poor in spirit.' — I wonder if it would be very reasonable for a moth that flits about the light, or a gnat that dances its hour in the sunbeam, to be proud because it had longer wings, or prettier markings on them, than some of its fellows? Is it much more reasonable for us to plume ourselves on, and set much store by, anything that we are or have done? Two or three plain questions, to which the answers are quite as plain, ought to rip up this swollen bladder of self-esteem which we are all apt to blow. 'What hast thou that thou hast not received?' Where did you get it? How came you by it? How long is it going to last? Is it such a very big thing after all? You have written a book; you are clever as an operator, an experimenter; you are a successful student. You have made a pile of money; you have been prosperous in your earthly career, and can afford to look upon men that are failures and beneath you in social position with a smile of pity or of contempt, as the case may be. Well! I suppose the distance to the nearest fixed star is

pretty much the same from the top of one ant-hill in a wood as from the top of the next one, though the one may be a foot higher than the other. I suppose that we have all come out of nothing, and are anything, simply because God is everything. If He were to withhold His upholding and inbreathing power from any of us for one moment, we should shrivel into nothingness like a piece of paper calcined in the fire, and go back into that vacuity out of which His fiat, and His fiat alone, called us. And yet here we are, setting great store, some of us, by our qualities or belongings, and thinking ever so much of ourselves because we possess them, and all the while we are but great emptinesses; and the things of which we are so proud are what God has poured into us.

You think that is all commonplace. Bring it into your lives, brethren; apply it to your estimate of yourselves, and your expectations from other people, and you will be delivered from a large part of the annoyances and the miseries of your present.

But the deepest reason for a habitual and fixed lowly opinion of ourselves lies in a sadder fact. We are not only recipient nothingnesses; we have something that is our own, and that is our will, and we have lifted it up against God. And if a man's position as a dependent creature should take all lofty looks and high spirit out of him, his condition as a sinful man before God should lay him flat on his face in the presence of that Majesty; and should make him put his hand on his lips and say, from behind the covering, 'Unclean! unclean!' Oh, brethren, if we would only go down into the depths of our own hearts, every one of us would find there more than enough to make all self-complacency and self-conceit utterly impossible, as it ought to be, for us for ever. I have no wish, and God knows I have no need, to exaggerate about this matter; but we all know that if we were turned inside out, and every foul, creeping thing, and every blotch and spot upon these hearts of ours spread in the light, we could not face one another; we could scarcely face ourselves. If you or I were set, as they used to set criminals, up in a pillory with a board hanging round our necks telling all the world what we were, and what we had done, there would be no need for rotten eggs to be flung at us; we should abhor ourselves. You know that is so. I know that it is so about myself, 'and heart answereth to heart as in a glass.' And are we the people to perk ourselves up amongst our fellows, and say, 'I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing'? Do we not know that we are poor and miserable and blind and naked? Oh, brethren, the proud old saying of the Greeks, 'Know thyself,' if it were followed out unflinchingly and honestly by the purest saint this side heaven, would result in this profound abnegation of all claims, in this poverty of spirit.

So little has the world been influenced by Christ's teaching that it uses 'poor-spirited creature' as a term of opprobrium and depreciation. It ought to be the very opposite; for only the man who has been down into the dungeons of his own character, and has cried unto God out of the depths, will be able to make the house of his soul a fabric which may be a temple of God, and with its shining apex may pierce the clouds and seem almost to touch the heavens. A great poet has told us that the things which lead life to sovereign power are self-knowledge, self-reverence, and self-control. And in a noble sense it is true, but the deepest self-knowledge will lead to self-abhorrence rather than to self-reverence; and self-control is only possible when, knowing our own inability to cope with our own evil, we cast ourselves on that Lamb of God who beareth away the sin of the world, and ask Him to guide and to keep us. The right attitude for us is, 'He did not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.' And then, sweeter than angels' voices fluttering down amid the blue, there will come that gracious word, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

## **II. Turn, now, to the blessed issues of this characteristic.**

Christ does not say 'joyful,' 'mirthful,' 'glad.' These are poor, vulgar words by the side of the depth and calmness and permanence which are involved in that great word 'blessed.' It is far more than joy, which may be turbulent and is often impure. It is far deeper than any gladness which has its sources in the outer world, and it abides when joys have vanished, and all the song-birds of the spring are silent in the winter of the soul. 'Blessed are the poor... for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

The bulk of the remaining Beatitudes point onward to a future; this deals with the present. It does not say 'shall be,' but 'is the Kingdom.' It is an all-comprehensive promise, holding the succeeding ones within itself, for they are but diverse aspects — modified according to the necessities which they supply — of that one encyclopedia of blessings, the possession of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God) is a state in which the will of God is absolutely and perfectly obeyed. It is capable of partial realisation here, and is sure of complete fulfilment hereafter. To the early hearers of these words the phrase would necessarily suggest the idea which bulked so large in prophecy and in Judaism, of the Messianic Kingdom; and we may well lay hold of that thought to suggest the first of the elements of this blessedness. That poverty of spirit is blessed because it is an indispensable condition of becoming Christ's men and subjects. I believe, dear friends, for my part, that the main reason why so many of us are not out-and-out Christian men and women, having entered really into that Kingdom which is obedience to God in Christ, is because we have a superficial knowledge, or no knowledge at all, of our own sinful condition, and of the gravity of that fact. Intellectually, I take it that an under-estimate of the universality and of the awfulness of sin has a great deal to do in shaping all the maimed, imperfect, partial views of Christ, His character and nature, which afflict the world. It is the mother of most of our

heresies. And, practically, if you do not feel any burden, you do not care to hear about One who will carry it. If you have no sense of need, the message that there is a supply will fall perfectly ineffectual upon your ears. If you have not realised the truth that whatever else you may be, of which you might be proud — wise, clever, beautiful, accomplished, rich, prosperous — you have this to take all the self-conceit out of you, that you are a sinful man — if you have not realised that, it will be no gospel to you that Jesus Christ has died, the just for the unjust, and lives to cleanse us.

Brethren, there is only one way into the true and full possession of Christ's salvation, and that is through poverty of spirit. It is the narrow door, like the mere low slits in the in ancient times were the access to some wealth-adorned palace or stately structure — narrow openings that a man had to stoop his lofty crest in order to enter. If you have never been down on your knees before God, feeling what a wicked man or woman you are. I doubt hugely whether you will ever stand with radiant face before God, and praise Him through eternity for His mercy to you. If you wish to have Christ for yours, you must begin, where He begins His Beatitudes, with poverty of spirit.

It is blessed because it invites the riches of God to come and make us wealthy. It draws towards itself communication of God's infinite self, with all His quickening and cleansing and humbling powers. Grace is attracted by the sense of need, just as the lifted finger of the lightning rod brings down fire from heaven. The heights are barren; it is in the valleys that rivers run, and flowers bloom. 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' If we desire to have Him, who is the one source of all blessedness, in our hearts, as a true possession, we must open the door for His entrance by poverty of spirit. Desire brings fulfilment; and they who know their wants, and only they, will truly long that they may be supplied.

This poverty of spirit is blessed because it is its own reward. All self-esteem and self-complacency are like a hedgehog, as some one has said, 'rolled up the wrong way, tormenting itself with its prickles.' And the man that is always, or often, thinking how much above A, B, or C he is, and how much A, B, or C ought to offer of incense to him, is sure to get more cuffs than compliments, more enmity than affection; and will be sore all over with wounded vanities of all sorts. But if we have learned ourselves, and have departed from these lofty thoughts, then to be humble in spirit is to be wise, cheerful, contented, simple, restful in all circumstances. You remember John Bunyan's shepherd boy, down in the valley of humiliation. Heart 's-ease grew there, and his song was, 'He that is low need fear no fall.' If we have this true, deep-rooted poverty of spirit, we shall be below the tempest, which will go clean over our heads. The oaks catch the lightnings; the grass and the primroses are unscorched. 'The day of the Lord shall be upon all high things, and the loftiness of men shall be brought low.

So, dear brethren, blessedness is not to be found outside us. We need not ask 'who shall go up into the heavens, or who shall descend into the deep,' to bring it. It is in thee, if at all. Christ teaches us that the sources of all true blessedness are within us; there or nowhere is Eden. If we have the tempers and dispositions set forth in these Beatitudes, condition matters but very little. If the source of all blessedness is within us, the first step to it all is poverty of spirit. 'Be ye clothed with humility.' The Master girt Himself with the servant's towel, and His disciples are to copy Him who said: 'Take My yoke upon you ... I am meek and lowly in heart... and ye shall find rest' — and is not that blessedness? — 'ye shall find rest unto your souls.

## **Mt 5:4 THE SECOND BEATITUDE**

Alexander Maclaren

AN ordinary superficial view of these so-called Beatitudes is that they are simply a collection of unrelated sayings. But they are a great deal more than that. There is a vital connection and progress in them. The jewels are not flung down in a heap; they are wreathed into a chain, which whosoever wears shall have 'an ornament of grace about his neck.' They are an outgrowth from a common root; stages in the evolution of Christian character.

Now, I tried to show in the former sermon how the root of them all is the poverty of spirit which is spoken of in the preceding verse; and how it really does lie at the foundation of the highest type of human character, and in its very self is sure of possessing the Kingdom of Heaven. And now I turn to the second of these Beatitudes. Like all the others, it is a paradox, for it starts from a wholly different conception from the common one, of what is man's chief good. If the aims which usually engross us are really the true aims of life, then there is no meaning in this saying of our Lord, for then it had been better not to sorrow at all than to sorrow and be comforted. But if the true purpose for which we are all gifted with this solemn gift of life is that we may become 'imitators of God as dear children,' then there are few things for which men should be more thankful than the sacred sorrow, than which there are few instruments more powerful for creating the type of character which we are set here to make our own. All lofty, dignified, serious thinkers and poets (who for the most of men are the best teachers) had spoken this same thought as well as Christ. But He speaks it with a difference all His own, which deepens incalculably its solemnity, and sets the truth of the otherwise sentimental saying, which flies often in the face of human nature, upon immovable foundations.

Let me ask you, then, to look with me, in the simplest possible way, at the two thoughts of our text, as to who are the mourners that are 'blessed,' and as to what is the consolation that they receive.

### **I. The mourners who are blessed.**

'Blessed are they that mourn.' Ah! that is not a universal bliss. All mourners are not blessed. It would be good news, indeed, to a world so full of miseries that men sometimes think it were better not to be, and holding so many wrecked and broken hearts, if every sorrow had its benediction. But just as we saw in the preceding discourse that the poverty which Christ pronounced blessed is not mere straitness of circumstances, or lack of material wealth, so here the sorrow, round the head of which He casts this halo of glory, is not that which springs from the mere alteration of external circumstances, or from any natural causes. The influence of the first saying runs through all the Beatitudes, and since it is 'the poor in spirit' who are there pronounced happy, so here we must go far deeper than mere outward condition, in order to find the ground of the benediction pronounced. Let us be sure, to begin with, of this, that no condition, be it of wealth or woe, is absolutely and necessarily good, but that the seat of all true blessedness lies within, in the disposition which rightly meets the conditions which God sends.

So I would say, first, that the mourners whom Christ pronounces 'blessed' are those who are 'poor in spirit.' The mourning is the emotion which follows upon that poverty. The one is the recognition of the true estimate of our own characters and failings; the other is the feeling that follows upon that recognition. The one is the prophet's clear-sighted 'I am a man of unclean lips'; the other is the same prophet's contemporaneous wail, 'Woe is me, for I am undone!'

And surely, brethren, if you and I have ever had anything like a glimpse of what we really are, and have brought ourselves into the light of God's face, and have pondered upon our characters and our doings in that — not 'fierce' but all-searching, 'light' that flashes from Him, there can be no attitude, no disposition, more becoming the best, the purest, the noblest of us, than that 'Woe is me, for I am undone!'

Oh, dear friends, if — not as a theological term, but as a clinging, personal fact — we realise what sin against God is, what must necessarily come from it, what aggravations His gentleness, His graciousness, His constant beneficence cause, how facilely we do the evil thing and then wipe our lips and say, 'We have done no harm,' we should be more familiar than we are with the depths of this experience of mourning for sin.

I cannot too strongly urge upon you my own conviction—it may be worth little, but I am bound to speak it — that there are few things which the so-called Christianity of this day needs more than an intenser realisation of the fact, and the gravity of the fact, of personal sinfulness. There lies the root of the shallowness of so much that calls itself Christianity in the world to-day. It is the source of almost all the evils under which the Church is groaning. And sure I am that if millions of the people that complacently put themselves down in the census as Christians could but once see themselves as they are, and connect their conduct with God's thought about it, they would get shocks that would sober them. And sure I am that if they do not thus see themselves here and now, they will one day get shocks that will stupefy them. And so, dear friends, I urge upon you, as I would upon myself, as the foundation and first step towards all the sunny heights of Godlikeness and blessedness, to go down, down deep into the hidden corners, and see how, like the elders of Israel whom the prophet beheld in the dark chamber, we worship creeping things, abominable things, lustful things, in the recesses within. And then we shall possess more of that poverty of spirit, and the conscious recognition of our own true character will merge into the mourning which is altogether blessed.

Now, note, again, how such sorrow will refine and ennoble character. How different our claims upon other men would be if we possessed this sober, saddened estimate of what we really are! How our petulance, and arrogance, and insisting upon 'what is due to us of respect and homage and deference would all disappear! How much more rigid would be our guard upon ourselves, our own emotions, our own inclinations and tastes! How much more lenient would be our judgment of the openly and confessedly naughty ones, who have gone a little further in act, but not an inch further in essence, than we have done! How different our attitude to our fellows; and how lowly our attitude to God! Such sorrow would sober us, would deliver us from our lusting after the gauds of earth, would make us serious and reflective, would bring us to that 'sad, wise valour' which is the conquering characteristic of humanity.

There is nothing more contemptible than the lives which, for want of this self-knowledge, foam away in idle mirth, and effervesce in what the world calls high spirits.'

'There is no music in the life  
That sounds with idiot laughter solely,  
There's not a string attuned to mirth

But has its chords in melancholy.'

So said one whose reputation in English literature is mainly that of a humorist. He had learned that the only noble humanity is that in which the fountains of laughter and of tears lie so close together that their waters intermingle. I beseech you not to confound the 'laughter of fools,' which is the 'crackling of thorns under the pot,' with the true, solemn, ennobling gladness which lives along with this sorrow of my text.

Farther, such mourning infused into the sorrow that comes from external disasters will make it blessed too. As I have said, there is nothing in any condition of life which necessarily and universally makes it blessed. Though poets and moralists and Christian people have talked a great deal, and beautifully and truly, about the sanctifying and sweetening influences of calamity, do not let us forget that there are perhaps as many people made worse by their sorrows as are made better by them. There is such a thing as being made sullen, hard, selfish, negligent of duty, resentful against God, hopeless, by the pressure of our calamities. Blessed be God, there is such a thing as being drawn to Him by them! Then they, too, come within the sweep of this benediction of the Master, and outward distress is glorified into the sorrow which is blessed. A drop or two of this tincture, the mourning which comes from poverty of spirit, slipped into the cup of affliction, clears and sweetens the waters, and makes them a tonic bitter. Brethren, if our outward losses and disappointments and pains help us to apprehend, and are accepted by us in the remembrance of, our own unworthiness, then these, too, are God's sweet gifts to us.

One word more. This mourning is perfectly compatible with, and indeed is experienced in its purest form only along with, the highest and purest joy. I have been speaking about the indispensable necessity of such sadness for all noble life. But let us remember, on the other hand, that no one has so much reason to be glad as he has who, in poverty of spirit, has clasped and possesses the wealth of the Kingdom. And if a man, side by side with this profound and saddened sense of his own sinfulness, has not a hold of the higher thing — Christ's righteousness given to penitence and faith — then his knowledge of his own unworthiness is still too shallow to inherit a benediction. There is no reason why, side by side in the Christian heart, there should not lie — there is every reason why there should lie — these two emotions, not mutually discrepant and contradictory, but capable of being blended together — the mourning which is blessed, and the joy which is unspeakable and full of glory.

## **II. And now a word or two with regard to the consolation which such mourning is sure to receive.**

It is not true, whatever sentimentalists may say, that all sorrow is comforted and therefore blessed. It may be forgotten. Pain may sting less; men may betake themselves to trivial, or false, unworthy, low alleviations, and fancy that they are comforted when they are only diverted. But the sorrow meant in my text necessarily ensures for every man who possesses it the consolation which follows. That consolation is both present and future.

As for the present, the mourning which is based, as our text bases it, on poverty of spirit, will certainly bring after it the consolation of forgiveness and of cleansing. Christ's gentle hand laid upon us, to cause our guilt to pass away, and the inveterate habits of inclination towards evil to melt out of our nature, is His answer to His child's cry, 'Woe is me, for I am undone!' And anything is more probable than that Christ, hearing a man thus complain of himself before Him, should fail to send His swift answer.

Ah, brethren! you will never know how deep and ineffably precious are the consolations which Christ can give, unless you have learned despair of self, and have come helpless, hopeless, and yet confident, to that great Lord. Make your hearts empty, and He will fill them; recognise your desperate condition, and He will lift you up. The deeper down we go into the depths, the surer is the rebound and the higher the soaring to the zenith. It is they who have poverty of spirit, and mourning based upon it, and only they, who pass into the sweetest, sacredest, secretest recesses of Christ's heart, and there find all-sufficient consolation.

In like manner, that consolation will come in its noblest and most sufficing form to those who take their outward sorrows and link them with this sense of their own ill-desert. Oh, dear friends, if I am speaking to any one who to-day has a burdened heart, let such be sure of this, that the way to consolation lies through submission; and that the way to submission lies through recognition of our own sin. If we will only 'lie still, let Him strike home, and bless the rod,' the rod will blossom and bear fruit. The water of the cataract would not flash into rainbow tints against the sunshine, unless it had been dashed into spray against black rocks. And if we will but say with good old Dr. Watts,

' When His strokes are felt,  
His strokes are fewer than our crimes,  
And lighter than our guilt,'  
it will not be hard to bow down and say,

'Thy will be done,' and with submission consolation will be ours.

Is there anything to say about that future consolation? Very little, for we know very little. But 'God Himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' The hope of that consolation is itself consolation, and the hope becomes all the more bright when we know and

measure the depths of our own evil. Earth needs to be darkened in order that the magic, ethereal beauty of the glow in the western heavens may be truly seen. The sorrow of earth is the background on which the light of heaven is painted.

So, dear friends, be sure of this, that the one thing which ought to move a man to sadness is his own character. For all other causes of grief are instruments for good. And be sure of this, too, that the one thing which can ensure consolation adequate to the grief is bringing the grief to the Lord Christ and asking Him to deal with it. His first word of ministry ran parallel with these two Beatitudes. When He spoke them He began with poverty of spirit, and passed to mourning and consolation, and when He opened His lips in the synagogue of Nazareth He began with, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the poor, to give unto them that mourn in Zion a diadem for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.'

## Mt 5:5 THE THIRD BEATITUDE

Alexander Maclaren

THE originality of Christ's moral teaching lies not so much in the novelty of His precepts as in the new relation in which He sets them, the deepening which He gives them, the motives on which He bases them, and the power which He communicates to keep them. Others before Him had pronounced a benediction on the meek, but our Lord means far more than they did, and, both in His description of the character and in the promise which He attaches to it, He vindicates the uniqueness of His notion of a perfect man.

The world's ideal is, on the whole, very different from His. It inclines to the more conspicuous and so-called heroic virtues; it prefers a great, flaring, yellow sunflower to the violet hiding among the grass, and making its presence known only by fragrance. 'Blessed are the strong, who can hold their own,' says the world. 'Blessed are the meek,' says Christ.

The Psalmist had said it before Him, and had attached verbally the same promise to the word. But our Lord means more than David did when he said, 'The meek shall inherit the earth.' I ask you to think with me now, first, what this Christian meekness is; then, whence it issues; and then, whither it leads.

### I. What Christian meekness is.

Now, the ordinary use of the word is to describe an attitude, or more properly a disposition, in regard to men, especially in regard to those who depreciate, or wrong, or harm us. But the Christian conception of meekness, whilst it includes that, goes far deeper; and, primarily, has reference to our attitude, or rather our disposition, towards God. And in that aspect, what is it? Meek endurance and meek obedience, the accepting of His dealings, of whatever complexion they are, and however they may tear or desolate our hearts, without murmuring, without sulking, without rebellion or resistance, is the deepest conception of the meekness which Christ pronounces blessed. When sorrow comes upon us, unless we have something more than natural strength bestowed upon us, we are all but certain, like fractious children when beaten, to kick and plunge and scream, or to take the infliction of the sorrow as being an affront and an injury. If we have any claim to this benediction, we must earn it by accepting our

sorrows; then the accepted sorrow becomes a solemn joy, or almost akin thereto. The ox that kicks against the goads only does two things thereby; it does not get away from them, but it wounds its own hocks, and it drives the sharp points deeper into the ragged wounds. Let Him strike, dear friend, for when He strikes He cuts clean; and there is no poison on the edge of His knife. Meekness towards God is, first, patient endurance of His Will.

And, in reference to Him, it is, next, unquestioning docility and obedience. Its seat is in the will. When the will is bowed, a man is far on his road to perfection; and the meaning of all that God does with us — joys and sorrows, light and darkness, when His hand gives, and when His hand withdraws, as when His authoritative voice commands, and the sweet impulses of His love graciously constrain — is that our wills may be made plastic and flexible, like a piece of wrought leather, to every touch of Y/His hand. True meekness goes far deeper down than any attitude towards men. It lays hold on the sovereign will of God as our supreme good, and delights in absolutely and perfectly conforming itself thereto.

And then there follows, as a matter of course, that which is usually the whole significance of the word, the meekness which is displayed in our attitude towards men. The truly meek heart remains unprovoked amidst all provocation. Most men are like dogs that answer bark for bark, and only make night hideous and themselves hoarse thereby. But it is our business to meet evil with good; and the more we are depreciated, the more we are harmed, the more we are circled about by malice and by scorn, the more patiently and persistently to love on.

Ah, brethren, it is easy to say and hard to do thus; but it is a plain Christian duty. Old-fashioned people believe that the sun puts out the fire. I know not how that may be, but sure I am that the one thing that puts out the fire of antagonism and wrath and malice in those who dislike or would harm us is that we should persistently shine upon, and perchance overcome, evil with good. Provoked, we remain, if we are truly meek, masters of ourselves and calm and equable, and so are blessed in ourselves. Meekness makes no claims upon others. Plenty of people are sore all over with the irritation caused by not getting what they consider due respect. They howl and whine because they are not appreciated. Do not expect much of men. Make no demands, if for no better reason than because the more you demand the less you will get; and the less you seem to think to be your due, the more likely you are to receive what you desire.

But that is a poor, shallow ground. The true exhortation is, 'Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.'

Ah, what a different world we should live in if the people that say, 'Oh, the Sermon on the Mount is my religion,' really made it their religion! How much friction would be taken out of all our lives; how all society would be revolutionised, and earth would become a Paradise!

But there is another thing to be taken into account in the description of meekness. That grace, as the example of our Lord shows, harmonises with undaunted bravery and strenuous resistance to the evil in the world. On our own personal account, there are to be no bounds to our patient acceptance of personal wrong; on the world's account, there are to be no bounds to our militant attitude against public evils. Only let us remember that 'the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.' If contending theologians, and angry philanthropists, and social reformers, that are ready to fly at each other's throats for the sacred cause of humanity, would only remember that there is no good to be done except in this spirit, there would be more likelihood of the errors and miseries of mankind being redressed than, alas! there is to-day. Gentleness is the strongest force in the world, and the soldiers of Christ are to be priests, and to fight the battles of the Kingdom, robed, not in jingling, shining armour or with sharp swords, nor with fierce and eager bitterness of controversy, but in the meekness which overcomes. You may take all the steam-hammers that ever were forged and batter at an iceberg, and, except for the comparatively little heat that is developed by the blows and melts some small portion, it will be ice still, though pulverised instead of whole. But let it get into the silent drift of the Arctic current, and let it move quietly down to the southward, then the sunbeams smite its coldness to death, and it is dissipated in the warm ocean. Meekness is conqueror. 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.'

## **II. Notice whence this Christian meekness flows.**

You observe the place which this Beatitude holds in the linked series of these precious sayings. It follows upon 'poverty of spirit' and 'mourning.' And it follows, too, upon the 'comfort' which the mourner is promised that he will receive. It is the conduct and disposition towards God and man which follows from the inward experience described in the two former Beatitudes, which had relation only to ourselves.

The only thing that can be relied upon as an adequate cold water douche to our sparks of anger, resentment, retaliation, and rebellion is that we shall have passed through the previous experiences, have learned a just and lowly estimate of ourselves, have learned to come to God with penitence in our hearts, and have been raised by His gracious hand from the dust where we lay at His feet, and been welcomed to His embrace. He who thus has learned himself, and has felt repentance, and has received the comfort of forgiveness and cleansing, he, and he only, is the man who, under all provocation and in any and every circumstance, can be absolutely trusted to live in the spirit of meekness.

If I have found out anything of my own sin, if my eyes have been filled with tears and my heart with conscious unworthiness before Him, oh, then, surely I shall not kick or murmur against discipline of which the main purpose is to rid me of the evil which is slaying me; but rather I shall recognise in the sorrows that do fall upon me, in the losses and disappointments and empty places in my life and heart, one way of God's fulfilling His great promise, 'From all your filthiness, and from all your idols, I will cleanse you.' The man who has thus learned the purpose, the highest purpose, of sorrow, is not likely to remonstrate with God for giving him too much of the cleansing medium.

In like manner, if we have, in any real way, received for our own the comfort which God gives to the penitent heart, we shall be easily pleased with anything that He sends. And if we have measured ourselves, not against ourselves, but against His law, and have found out how much we owe unto our Lord, it is not likely that we shall take our brother by the throat and say, 'Pay me that thou owest.' If any treat me badly, try to rob me, harm me, sneer at me, or turn the cold shoulder to me, who am I that I should resent that? Oh, brethren, we need, for our right relation to our fellows, a deeper conviction of our sinfulness before Him. Many of us are blessed with natural tendencies to meekness, but these are insufficient. Many of us seek to cultivate this grace from true and

right, though not the deepest, motives. Let us reinforce them by that which comes from the consideration of the place which this Beatitude holds in the wreathed chain, and remember that 'poverty of spirit' and 'mourning' must precede it.

Now, there is a sharp test for us Christian people.

If I have learned myself, and have penitently received God's pardon, I shall be meek with God and with man. If I am not meek with God and with man, have I received God's pardon? One great reason why so many of you Christian people have so little consciousness of God's forgiving mercy, as a constant joy in your lives, is because you have so little obeyed the commandment, 'Be ye imitators of God, and walk in love, as God hath forgiven and loved us.'

### **III. And now, lastly, note whither this meekness leads.**

'They shall inherit the earth.' The words are quoted, as I have already said, from one of the psalms, and in the Psalmist's mouth they had, I suppose, especial reference to Israel's peaceful possession of the promised land, which in that Old Dispensation was made contingent on the people's faithfulness. In that aspect, and looking at this Sermon on the Mount as the programme of the King Himself, what a bucket of cold water such words as these must have poured on the hot Messianic expectations of the carnal Jew! Here was a King that did not expect to win back the land by armed rebellion against the Roman legions, but said, 'Be meek, and you will truly possess it, whether there is a Pilate in the procurator's house at Caesarea or not.'

But for us the words have a double reference, as all the promises annexed to these Beatitudes have. They apply to the present; they apply to the future. And that is no mere looseness of interpretation, eking out an insufficient verification of them here upon earth by some dim hopes of a future fulfilment, but it flows from the plain fact that the gifts which a man receives on condition of his being a true disciple are one and the same in essence, and only differ in degree, here and hereafter. Circumstances alter, no doubt, and there will be much in that heavenly state unlike that which we experience here. But the essence of Christian blessedness is the same in this world and in the furthest reach of the shining but dim eternity beyond. And so we take the double reference of these words to be inherent in the facts of the case, and not to be a makeshift of interpretation.

There is a present inheritance of the earth which goes, as certainly as the shadow with the sunshine, with the meekness spoken of in our text. Not literal, of course, for it is not true that this Christian grace has in it any tendency whatever to draw to itself material good of any sort. The world in outward possession belongs to the strong men, to the men of faculty, of force and push and ambition. If you want to get through a crowd, make your elbows as sharp. and your feet upon the toes of your neighbours as heavy as you can, and a road will be made for you; but, in the majority of cases, the meek man on the edge of the crowd will stop there.

Nor is it true that there would be any real blessedness, though the earth were ours in that outward sense. For you cannot measure happiness by the acre, nor does an outward condition of the most full-fed abundance, and of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, and above the gnawings of care, ensure to any man even the shabby blessedness that the world knows, to say nothing of the solid beatitude that Christ proclaims.

So we must go deeper than that for the meaning of 'inherit.' Whatever are our circumstances, it is true that this calm, equable, submissive acceptance of the divine will and obedience to it, and this loving and unresentful attitude towards men, bring with them necessarily a peacefulness of heart which gets the highest good out of the modicum of material supplies which God's providence may send us. It used to be the idea that gods and beatified spirits were nourished, not by the gross, material flesh of the sacrifices, but by a certain subtle aroma and essence that went up in the incense smoke. So Christ's meek men do live and thrive, and are blessed in a true possession of earthly good, even though their outward portion of it may be very small. 'Better is a little that a righteous man hath than the riches of many wicked.'

And, beyond that, there is a further fulfilment of this promise, upon which I venture to say but very little. It seems to me very probable that our Lord's words here fall in with what appears to be a general stream of representation throughout Scripture, to the effect that the perfected form of the Kingdom of God is to be realised in this renovated earth, when it becomes the 'new earth in which dwelleth righteousness.' Whether that be so or no, at all events we may fairly gather from the words the thought that in the ultimate state of assimilation and fellowship with God and Christ to which Christian people have a right to look forward, there will be an external universe on which they will exercise their activities, and from which they will draw as yet unimagined delights.

But, at all events, dear brethren, we may be sure of this blessed thought, that they who meekly live, knowing and mourning their sin, and who meekly take to their hearts as their only hope the comfort of Christ's pardon and cleansing, who are meekly recipient, meekly enduring, meekly obedient, shall have in their hearts, even here, a quiet fountain of peace which shall make the wilderness rejoice and blossom as the rose, and hereafter shall be crowned with the lordship of all. Meekness overcomes, 'and he that

overcometh shall inherit all things.'