

The Beatitudes: Matthew 5:1–10

The Beatitudes are a concise summary of the foundational principles of the spiritual life. They are the attitudes required from one who desires to live a blessed life (from the Latin, *beātitudō*-happiness, blessedness).

During the Small Entrance with the Gospel Book, the Russian Orthodox parishes chant the Beatitudes to demonstrate that one enters the Mysteries of Christ and His Kingdom through following these principles.

I. Being Poor in Spirit: Dependence Upon God

- A. The Greek word for *poor*, *πτωχός*, denotes one who is a destitute beggar and unable to provide for himself; he is totally dependent upon another if he is to survive.
- B. This is where the spiritual life begins; nothing else happens until one is poor in spirit. *Poor in spirit* is an inner belief, feeling, and persuasion of heart and mind that not only don't you have anything to contribute to your spiritual health but you also need God to give to you if you are to survive spiritually. It is an inner conviction that never leaves you, just like the destitute beggar who is unable to forget that he is destitute, his clothes and hunger always witnessing to the reality of his condition.
- C. *Poor in spirit* is a poverty and emptiness that welcomes any contribution, no matter how small. It is an openness to God to receive the things of the Spirit, an openness of one's heart, understanding, and will.
- D. Those who are deceived by Satan, the world, and their own sin believe that they are rich while in actuality they are destitute. Revelation 3:15–18
- E. To be *poor in spirit* is to be devoid of all pride and trust in the power of one's own spirit. It means to be free from reliance upon one's own ideas, opinions, and desires. Jer 17:9; Rom 1:21

- F.** Consider Mary's Magnificat—Luke 1:51–54, and see it exemplified in Christ in John 5:19 and 30.
- G.** Consider the sin and fall of Adam and Eve. They did not follow what God had told them about how to live, but they relied upon their own reasoning about how to live. As a result, they did not live at all, but died.
- H.** If you are unwilling to recognize and admit to the reality of your spiritual poverty, or you are unwilling to live in accordance with it, then anything else you may do in the spiritual life will be severely hampered or impossible. Many people are frustrated with living the spiritual life, and they are convinced that it just is not true or it does not really work, only because they are attempting to be spiritual without first being poor in spirit.
- I.** Being *poor in spirit* is the foundation of Kingdom living. The Kingdom of Heaven is the place where God has full rule; it is the future (eschatological) Kingdom of God. The poor in spirit receive within themselves the glory, power, and blessings of that future kingdom now in the present, and they have the hope, anticipation, and confidence of receiving the fullness of that Kingdom in the future.

II. Mourning: Understanding Man's Fallen State

- A.** When you truly accept the reality of your status as a destitute beggar, you will repeatedly mourn for yourself and for others like you. You will mourn because you understand how foolish and pitiable it is to be mastered by sin, and to be made a victim by falsehood, evil, and Satan, and to welcome destruction and Death into your bosom.
- B.** You will mourn when you realize what you have lost because of your own sin: Paradise; communion with the infinite, loving God; glory; tranquility, and true life. Recall the hymns that remember the Expulsion of Adam from Paradise on Cheesefare or Forgiveness Sunday.

- C.** Through mourning the Prophets wept over sinful Israel; Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus, John 11:35, and over the estrangement of Jerusalem, Matthew 23:37, 38.
- D.** This mourning is not hopeless. It turns in hope toward Christ in patient anticipation of receiving any amount of His merciful provision. Jonah 3:5–9; 2 Corinthians 7:10
- E.** Mourning is not an end in itself. It has little value unless it leads us to repentance and God’s Kingdom.
- F.** Mourning leads to comfort by raising us above the sorrows and brokenness of this world to the Kingdom of God.
- G.** Those who mourning are comforted by realizing and participating in the joy and victory of God’s Kingdom.

III. Being Meek: Yielding to Jesus’ Already Accomplished Victory

- A.** The Greek word for *meek* (πραῦς) denotes that which is mild and gentle, but not a gentleness arising from passive submission or weakness, but from actively bringing one’s power under control.
- B.** This gentleness from power under control is seen best in Jesus, Who was not passive or weak, but, although being omnipotent God, He showed Himself to be mild and meek. Matt 11:27–30; 26:52–54
- C.** Although James indicates that meekness arises from wisdom and not power, it is a wisdom that manifests itself in controlled conduct: peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy. James 3:13–17
- D.** To be meek means to be unmoved by external coercion and violence. It means to rest in the firm and calm conviction that good is more powerful than evil, and that good is always ultimately victorious. Revelation 21:2–5

E. *Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind, which remains the same in honor and dishonor.*

Meekness consists in praying calmly and sincerely for a neighbor when he causes many turmoils.

Meekness is a rock overlooking the sea of anger, which breaks all the waves that dash against it, yet remains completely unmoved.

Meekness is the fellow-worker of obedience, the guide of the brotherhood, a bridle for the enraged, a check to the irritable, a minister of joy, the imitation of Christ, something proper to angels, shackles for demons, a shield against bitterness.

See the Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 24.

F. By yielding the energy and direction of their life to goodness and righteousness, i.e., to God, the meek participate in Jesus' victory of truth over falsehood, good over evil, Life over Death, God over Satan, and thus they will inherit the new earth.

Revelation 21:1

Hiatus:

The subject or person in each of these first seven Beatitudes is identified by either a substantival adjective (an adjective that is functioning as a noun [The *wicked* are evil people.]) or a substantival participle (a verb that is functioning as a noun [The *believing* will be saved.]). The significance of this fact is that the adjective denotes a constant condition or characteristic of a person, while the participle denotes either an ongoing, continuous action or a continual, repeated action performed by a person. The adjective indicates that a person is *always being* what the quality of the adjective is, while the participle indicates that a person is *always doing* what the quality of the participle is. Again, the significance is that in either case that person spoken of in these Beatitudes is to *always be* or *always be doing*. The Greek adjective is revealed in English by *the*—*the poor, the meek*, and the Greek participle is revealed in English by *those who*—*those who mourn, those who hunger*.

IV. Hungering and Thirsting: Righteousness Sought as a Necessity for Survival

- A. Hungering for food and thirsting for water are survival mechanisms for ensuring man's physical-biological well being and survival. In the same manner, hungering and thirsting for Righteousness ought to be (and actually are, although not often recognized as such) survival mechanisms for the spiritual life.
- B. *Righteousness* is doing the *right* thing according to God with reference to what presents itself before you. For example, is it morning? Then, righteousness is doing your morning prayers. Is your friend sorrowful? Then, righteousness is lifting up his heart and helping to bear his burden.
- C. One's spiritual life flourishes when righteousness is sought out as a survival necessity, as something that a Christian simply must have to be Christian. Note well that righteousness itself is the necessity for spiritual survival, while the hungering and thirsting for righteousness are the survival urges. Note also that the hungering and thirsting is not for righteousness to be manifested in another's life, like the life of the person who annoys or angers you, but the hungering and thirsting for righteousness is a survival necessity for your own life. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is a survival mechanism for Kingdom dwellers.
- D. The Greek word that Matthew uses for *shall be filled* (χορτάζω) is the same word used in the narratives of Christ miraculously feeding the multitudes, when all present were filled and there was still more leftover. Those who are pursuing righteousness will be satiated, satisfied, and made full because God will bring the blessings of His Kingdom to them (Matt 6:31–33). In this life we shall always be hungering and thirsting, so let us hunger and thirst for righteousness and not vanity, and we shall be made full.

V. Being Merciful: Receiving What You Need

- A.** Being merciful is looking upon the distress or injury of another and being moved emotionally deep within one's soul toward that person so that one exhibits pity and compassion. This kind of mercy is not a merely human ability, but a Christian virtue that characterizes God and comes from God. Ex 34:6–7; Luke 6:36
- B.** Showing mercy arises from one's sense of his own need for mercy, realizing that he himself might one day be suffering similar difficulties or that he has already done such things as might bring such turmoil into his own life.
- C.** Being merciful is not tolerating or justifying falsehood and sin. It is not an ongoing tolerance of foolishness and evil. It is not overlooking injustice and iniquity. Exodus 34:6–7
- D.** Mercy is for people—to be directed toward people. Being merciful is having and demonstrating compassion for evildoers, and having sympathy for those bound by sin. To be merciful is to refuse to exhibit self-righteousness and self-justification toward others. Showing mercy is to refuse to condemn wrongdoers; it is to offer forgiveness to those who harm themselves and others. Matthew 6:12; 18:33
- E.** To be merciful is to be compassionate toward one's self also, not to be plaguing one's self with neurotic guilt and sinful scruples, but to be accepting God's mercy and forgiveness for one's own failings and faults.
- F.** Showing and receiving mercy are intrinsic actions in our fallen existence because we will all do wrong and suffer wrong. This is why the Church's fundamental cry is Κύριε ἐλέησον in our services, and why *The Jesus Prayer* is called, *The Prayer*.
- G.** Because receiving mercy is so necessary for us, and because obtaining mercy operates on the principle of sowing, it is critical for fallen man to be merciful to others. Matt 6:12–15; Gal 6:7

H. By being merciful, one obtains mercy for himself from God and man now in this life, and mercy from God in the life to come.
James 2:13

VI. Being Pure in Heart: Having the Longed-for Beloved as One's Only Vision

- A.** To be *pure in heart* is to be, within one's inner being, a soul of honesty, integrity, and single-mindedness.
- B.** It is to have consistency between what is internal within one's soul and what is manifested externally with one's body. To be *pure in heart* is to live by God's revealed truth. Matthew 7:22, 23
- C.** To be *pure in heart* is to be a person with a single focus or aim, a person with an unwavering pursuit, and a person of single allegiance. James 1:6–8, 4:8; Matthew 6:24
- D.** It is to be free from that which captivates the heart and darkens the nous (νοῦς) so that one does not reflect and shine the light of God (Matt 6:22). It is to turn the nous from being scattered throughout creation and to bring it into the heart to be focused upon God alone.
- E.** To be *pure in heart* is to be free from self-centered motivations, sinful thoughts and intentions, unworthy interests, and wicked desires. It is to be free from that which blinds and darkens the mind so as not to see clearly and honestly (Matthew 7:3–5).
- F.** To be *pure in heart* is to seek God and His kingdom as the *summum bonum* of one's life. It is to seek the face of the Lord, to desire the light of the Lord in the depth of one's soul.
- G.** The pure in heart are blessed because they will see God. This *vision of God* occurs in various ways and on several levels. First, they will see God in His written word: His will, desires, promises, mighty deeds, and victories. Although most any person may read the Scriptures and see some of these things, the pure in heart will see more, recognize more, and understand more.
- H.** Secondly, they will see God in themselves and in others as the recognition of His attributes and His glory. In our services we hear repeatedly that God is glorified in His saints. Gregory of Nyssa says purity allows the divine beauty to shine in one's life—this is “seeing

God,” i.e., seeing God in one’s life (Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Beatitudes*, Sermon 6). Again, while others may see some of this, the pure in heart can see God in other people as no other person is able.

- I. The pure in heart will also see God in the events and circumstances of life. They will see Him working out blessings, answers to prayer, protection, sanctification, conviction, and more.
- J. Psalm 24:3–4 (LXX, 23) is a passage found in the prayers for the preparation for receiving Communion. It indicates that if one is to see and to commune with God, then he must first be pure in heart.
- K. The pure in heart will see Jesus in fuller glory than was made visible on Mount Tabor, where He manifested His glory only to the extent that His disciples could presently endure it (see the Apolytikion for the Transfiguration). The pure in heart will see Jesus as He is. I John 3:2.
- L. In the world to come, in the fullness of God’s Kingdom, the pure in heart will see God as they never had before, and in a way that we can only meditate upon, but not yet know. 2 Cor 13:12; Rev 22:4

VII. Being Peacemakers: Internal Tranquility Creating Its Own External Ambience

- A. The significance of peacemakers is not that they possess peace, although this is true, but that they create an atmosphere of peace around themselves that rests upon those people who are near them.
- B. Peacemakers are filled with the peace of Christ that has been given to them by Christ (John 14:27; 16:33). This peace is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that permeates the νοῦς (the part of our soul that communes with God) and the mind and consequently affects the body so that a person emits and radiates peace as the sun does light. Galatians 5:22; Philippians 4:7
- C. This peace is not a freedom from tribulation or struggle, but a freedom from anxiety and fear. While this peace is a fruit of the Spirit and is given by Christ, it is also connected with a true understanding of God and a solid trust in Him. Matthew 6:25–33; Romans 8:31–39

- D. The Christian who has Christ's peace permeating his own being will be used by Christ to bring peace to the people, situations, and circumstances around him. He is a peacemaker first within his own soul and life, the realm over which God has given him control, and then he works to bring peace to the people, places, and world outside himself and around him where peace is threatened or lost. This is Kingdom living—bringing the peace of the future Kingdom to the present, troubled world.
- E. The Greek word translated here as *son*, υἱός, denotes one who possesses or is perceived to possess the essential characteristics of the father, i.e., one who is seen as being like the father. This word may also denote one who is perceived to be or understood to be in relationship to the father.
- F. Peacemakers will exhibit, emit, and seek to produce a tranquility that can only be identified as or called divine. People around the peacemakers will perceive what can only be called a *divine presence*. This ambience of tranquility will identify the peacemakers as people who have divine characteristics, as people who are in a relationship to the infinite God. These peacemakers will be called *sons of God* by others.
- G. In the eschatological Kingdom of God, when the future, complete rule of God is over all creation, the peacemakers will also be called *sons of God* by God Himself (Rev 21:7). Then these peacemakers will be in an unhindered and free relationship with God and they will be like Him throughout eternity. 1 John 3:2

VIII. Having Been Persecuted for Righteousness: Quintessential Delayed Gratification

- A. In this last Beatitude, Matthew speaks of those believers who *have been persecuted*, who have endured persecution as a past event. They have allowed themselves to be persecuted, i.e., they endured persecution and they did not flee from it, when the will of God called for that extreme kind of response.
- B. They were persecuted *on account of righteousness*. These people have matured spiritually to the point that their divine life is evidently visible to those who are not believers in God or participants in His Kingdom. Because unbelievers are continually presented with the

truth about God (Rom 1:19, 20; 2:12, 14, 15) and because the only way that they can reject God is to consciously or unconsciously actively repudiate Him (Rom 1:18, 21, 28), unbelievers also become active adversaries of those who follow God and His laws.

- C.** The persecuted ones live out the commandments and truth of God and the values of the Kingdom, and so this fallen world, which is against God, is against them and persecutes them. 1 John 2:15–17; 3:10–13; John 15:18–21
- D.** While their persecution may manifest itself in social, racial, economic, or political modes, its origin is a spiritual cause.
- E.** Only those who have the Kingdom living within them are willing and able to endure persecution on account of whatever point of righteousness that God calls them to uphold.
- F.** Those people who do not live for God's Kingdom are to be most pitied, for they seek an earthly reward now, and they certainly receive it (Matt 6:1, 2, 5, 16), but at the cost of losing their future well being.
- G.** The future Kingdom of Heaven, however, belongs to these persecuted ones. By enduring this persecution now in this world, they obtain for themselves the glory, power, and blessings of the future Kingdom, as a down payment now in this life, and in its fullness after this life.