

Upside Down Kingdom 2 1-18-04

Matthew 5:1-12

¹Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them, saying: ³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV)

Two weeks ago we began looking at Jesus' introduction of heaven's perspective as He taught on a hillside near Capernaum. We saw that the word "blessed" means to live before the face of God. It is to have an awareness of presence of God's activity in your life. The condition that precluded all the others was to be poor in spirit. We must first come to God out of recognition of our great need. Those who think they can find blessedness by their own efforts will end up with no awareness of the presence of God. The one who humbles himself to ask, seek and knock will find God active in their life. Jesus began His message teaching about this place of humility. The humble are all ears because they recognize their need to learn.

The teaching of the poor in spirit being blessed is contrary to the way the world thinks. The world would say that if you are a spiritual giant, sure of your spiritual greatness, you have got it made. If anyone has God's ear and the kingdom of heaven, it is these spiritually rich people. To the listener's amazement, Jesus declared the opposite was true. But if that teaching was hard to swallow, the next blessing is truly a mind boggler. ⁴*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.* Is the person with a broken heart blessed? The world says the one who laughs, parties and has a great time has got it made. Remember, blessed means the active presence of God in your life. To grieve over a loss, a set back in life, or another person's pain, invites the comfort of God. We sometimes grieve over the wrong things, but whatever our grief is over, we have moved into a place outside of our normal thinking and routine. It's a place where God can meet us.

We mourn at the loss of someone close to us. Funerals present an opportunity to share the Gospel. Some people don't like that, because we are most vulnerable when life is suddenly ended. It causes us to consider our own mortality. The world doesn't want to think about that, but God shows up there. That's where His still small voice breaks through and gets us to question what is truly important. Grief is painful, but it is not bad. It is where God meets us to comfort us with the hope of His purposes. He challenges us there to have faith in the unseen. (Psalm 116:3-7)

Commented [notes1]: ³The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.
⁴Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, save me!"
⁵The LORD is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.
⁶The LORD protects the simplehearted; when I was in great need, he saved me.
⁷Be at rest once more, O my soul, for the LORD has been good to you.
Psalms 116:3-7 (NIV)

Jesus came to a funeral and mourned. He shared the grief of those He loved. Even though He was going to turn it into victory, He wept with those who wept. (John 11:35) He challenged those closest to Him to believe that He is resurrection and life. (John 11:25-26) He gave the ultimate comfort to those who mourned, the hope of eternity.

Commented [notes2]: ³⁵Jesus wept. John 11:35 (NIV)

Then there is the mourning over one's own sinful ways. (Psalm 32, 51) There are a number of psalms that voice this type of mourning. We want to do good, but we fail God. When we sense His displeasure and begin to realize the consequences of the way we have chosen in selfishness or in pursuit of personal pleasure, we mourn. We see we have gone the way we were once determined never to go again, and we mourn over our sin. God soon comforts those who recognize the error of their ways. (Isaiah 30:19; Isaiah 57:17-18)

Commented [notes3]: ²⁵Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; ²⁶and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25-26 (NIV)

Mourning can go even deeper, and that is to let your heart mourn over the things that God's heart mourns over. Some of the greatest evangelists and church planters have allowed themselves to mourn with God over the lost. Do you dare to go there? God hurts with you as you endure the inevitable cruelty of life in a fallen world, but do you dare to hurt with Him? If He loved the world enough to give His only Son, imagine the pain in His heart as people refuse His goodness and turn to some self-destructive pleasure. Imagine the grief of watching someone you love destroy their life while you look on, unable to tear your heart away from loving them. Would you dare to hurt with God over those entrapped by the enemy's snare, even when it means that entrapment is resulting in them personal loss to you? That's why they are hurting others; they are ensnared. (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

Commented [notes4]: ¹⁹O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Isaiah 30:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: ¹⁷I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways. ¹⁸I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, Isaiah 57:17-18 (NIV)

We keep seeing how Jesus is our perfect example. In the expression of this blessing He is also. (Luke 19:41-44) He saw the crowd that was hailing His entry into Jerusalem but realized their shouts of praise would turn to rejection when He didn't act according to their preconceived notions. He wept because He could see the consequences of their actions and the terrible outcome that would be the result. God is especially near those who mourn with Him over lost and misguided souls, and He comforts them.

Commented [notes6]: ²⁴And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (NIV)

Why must we endure these sorrowful and painful experiences? Rebellion against God causes loss to everyone involved and even those related to the rebel. We live in a fallen world that is not the way God intends it to be. Adam and Eve's choice has resulted in untold suffering and pain.

Commented [notes7]: ⁴¹As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you." Luke 19:41-44 (NIV)

Some of the reasons will remain a mystery until we stand before our Savior. But here is one reason the Apostle Paul shared with us in his letter to the Corinthians. ³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. ⁵For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NIV)

Our mourning draws the comfort of God. In time, we will meet those who are enduring things similar to what God has seen us through. God means for us to share the comfort we have received from Him with others that are enduring similar situations.

He comforts us even when the pain is self-inflicted. Some of the situations we brought upon ourselves, but that doesn't mean that God will not comfort us when we mourn in them. He will bring us through the valley of the shadow of death to a place of victory in Him. (Psalm 23:4-5) Have you noticed that in that famous psalm, it is the Shepherd that leads us to the still waters, green pastures and paths of righteousness, but I am the one that walks into the Valley of the Shadow of Death?

I am reminded of Jacob. Every time his treachery brought him to a place of mourning, the Lord met him. At Bethel, at Jabbock and back at Bethel again, the Lord comforted Jacob, in spite of Jacob's selfish heart. God comforted Jacob and brought him through to a change of character. His grief was an instrument to transform him from Jacob to Israel. Your grief can be an instrument to transform you while God comforts you. *Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.*

Thomas Aquinas thought that there were times when God would allow a person to fall in some reprehensible public way just to bring them to grief over their pride, which is the greater but more easily hidden sin. I don't know if that is true, but it certainly seems to be the case. Our grief can often lead us to a place of blessing and comfort and spiritual growth that we could not have found any other way.

The next state of being blessed goes to the meek. *⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.* Here we go again with Jesus' kingdom perspective that is so upside down from the world. The world says that those who aggressively go for whatever they seek will take hold of it. It sees the power mongering potentates inheriting the earth. Lord help us, even some Christian authors seem to lean toward self-assertiveness as the key to individual and corporate success. They miss the lesson of the poor in spirit. But what exactly is Jesus revealing to us in this beatitude?

First we must understand the way the word "meek" is used in the Bible. Let me refer to Strong's definition of the word.

Meekness toward God is that disposition of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting. In the Old Testament, the meek are those wholly relying on God rather than their own strength to defend them against injustice. Thus, meekness toward evil people means knowing God is permitting the injuries they inflict, that He is using them to purify His elect, and that He will deliver His elect in His time. (Isaiah 41:17) Gentleness or meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. It stems from trust in God's goodness and control over the situation. The gentle person is not occupied with self at all. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, not of the human will. (Galatians 5:22-23) —Strong's Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

Did you catch that? It is a disposition of spirit that accepts what God brings into our lives as good, whether it is fun or difficult. It is not occupied with self at all. In what ways have you been or refused to be meek as of late? Is the disposition of your spirit accepting of whatever joy or difficulty, task or burden that has come into your

Commented [notes8]: ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Psalms 23:4-5 (NIV)

Commented [notes9]: ¹⁷"The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them.
Isaiah 41:17 (NIV)

Commented [notes10]: ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV)

life because you are certain of the character of the One who has allowed it? That is meekness. God is seeking those who are open to His will to run the earth. No wonder He promises that the meek will inherit the earth.

The Bible refers to Moses as meek. ³*(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)* Numbers 12:3 (KJV) Yet Moses was strong enough to stand up to the most powerful leader in the world. He could cry out to God for His people when they were in sin, and he could command them to drink water polluted with their ground up idol. He could be used to part a sea or endure the people's complaints about his choice of a wife. Whatever his situation, he turned to God to do as God commanded, regardless of personal cost. At times the command was to be still and endure, and at others it was to speak a rebuke. He was not occupied with self at all. Moses did not take matters into his own hands. He learned how catastrophic that could be. When he was younger, he learned from painful experiences of doing things his way. Through his mistakes, and his mourning over them, God transformed the character of Moses into the meekest man on the face of the earth.

We must not compare meekness with weakness. Biblical meekness is that attitude of heart one has when they have complete faith in the authority and sovereignty of God. They know that whatever is happening is in His almighty hands and will be for their good in the end. It is a position of total faith. It is a heavenly perspective of the way things really are. We tend to get angry and assertive when we think things are out of our control. The meek trust God to work through the situation. They know God is in control.

Again, Jesus is our ultimate example. He was meek. He said, ²⁹*"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:29-30 (KJV) (NIV uses the word "gentle" in place of meek.)

Meekness is yielding to God's hand and not trying to get out from under it. Whether that hand moves you before a king to make a demand in God's name, or bear up under the whip of your persecutor. Meekness could be expressed in Jesus making a whip to cleanse the Temple, or giving His back to the whips of the Romans. He accepted whatever the Father directed. He did not try to find His own way, but sought the will of His Father. That is true meekness. It is the blessed way, the way filled with the presence and active involvement of God.

⁶*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.* Do you see how this fits together so well with being poor in spirit and meek? It takes a heart that's poor in spirit to recognize its need to be able to hunger and thirst for righteousness. It takes a meek spirit to desire righteousness. This hunger and thirst is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We don't long for righteousness unless the Spirit implants that desire in us. When you sense that hunger to be right with God, to drink and dine on the Word of God, you can be sure that the Spirit of

God is working in you. Without His work in us, we wouldn't desire that which makes us uncomfortable.

What is this thing that He causes us to hunger and thirst for? What exactly is righteousness? It is rightness with God. It is to have His eye upon you and finding nothing that grieves His heart. It is to desire a relationship with God that pleases God's heart. Are you hungry and thirsty for that? Do you see how God focused that is? It is not self-absorbed, but God absorbed. When you experience that, you can be sure that you are about to be filled with the righteousness of Christ.

These descriptions of blessedness, poor in spirit, mourning, meekness, and a hunger and thirst for righteousness are all things that result from the work of the Spirit in your heart. Jesus is describing Himself, for He is the blessed One. He lives before the face of His Father. He is describing anyone that has yielded their life to the Spirit, seeing through His eyes with faith and trust, and focusing on the heart of God.

Today we have looked at mourning, meekness, and a hunger and thirst for righteousness. They all have the common thread of a focus on the heart of God. We have been learning from the Purpose Driven Life that it's not about me, but instead, it's all about God. So many people wander through life trying to make themselves the center of their world, trying to bring everything around them to focus on them. In their self-absorbed lifestyle they miss something far greater than having the world focus on them. They miss the fact that God is focused on them. In missing the focus upon God, they miss the meaning and purpose of their life and step into eternity empty and worn.

Someone was relaying a story to me this week of a friend that had used their looks to gain the focus of their world. Age has a way of giving us a wake up call. Now that gravity was having its inevitable affect, what could they use now to call their world to focus on them, to instill in their ego a sense of worth? They might find their quick wit might work for a while, but even that fades in time. But oh what they have missed if they do not discover that God is focused on them. You have incalculable worth because God loves you and designed you for eternity. Your value is not in the attention you can attract, but in the One who is attracted to you.

As your focus shifts away from self and to this all consuming love, mourning, (sharing His heart) meekness, (realizing His authority and sovereignty over your life) and hunger and thirst to be in an unimpeded relationship with God, are all products of a revelation of His love. And that is why I continue to pray for you to know the height and depth and width and length of the love of God (Ephesians 3:16-19). Then you can mourn with Him. Meekness will be your reaction to His direction. Hungry and thirsty for righteousness will be the description of your heart, and you will be blessed, living before the face of God, and filled with all the fullness of God.

Commented [notes11]: ¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV)