

Aspects

A Better Way to Live

“Those who stand for higher standards than current conventions are always seen as critics who are best disposed of.” *Donald Guthrie*¹

There is surely no portion of Scripture more at odds with today’s standards and principles than that part of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes. This should not surprise since, indeed, they were concepts equally foreign to the time in which they were first uttered.

The verses we call the Beatitudes² are not evangelism; they’re not a template for salvation, outlining what someone must do before gaining entrance to the Kingdom. They do not, in and of themselves, outline New Testament doctrine; the believer who lives his life strictly according to the counsel of the Beatitudes — no more, no less — would be on thin doctrinal ice.

The Beatitudes are, however, a succinct, easily-understood portrait of a Spirit-filled life. The verses represent God’s perspective on a Spiritually-healthy believer’s heart.

The Highest Good

Any consideration of the Beatitudes must begin with a clarification of the word that begins each verse in most translations: “Blessed.”

The Greek word so translated is *makarios*. Some people, and paraphrases such as *The Living Bible* and the J.B. Phillips New Testament, prefer to update the Greek with the word “happy,” as in “*Happy* are the poor in spirit . . .” But this is too thin; the word encompasses much more.

“As for ‘happy,’ it will not do for the Beatitudes, having been devalued in modern usage. The Greek ‘describes a state not of inner feeling on the part of those to whom it is applied, but of blessedness from an ideal point of view in the judgment of others’ (Allen)” *D.A. Carson*³

“[*Makarios*] means more than mere happiness. The word conveys the idea of congratulation, rather than describing a state. The person to whom these beatitudes apply is to be envied.” *Guthrie*

It may be that I am personally drawn to these verses because so often in the past I have been criticized for not being sufficiently, demonstrably ‘happy.’

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3-10 niv

“Cheer up,” people would say. “Why are you so serious all the time?” My many and varied explanations over the years may have faltered, but could have been summed up in one word: *makarios*. To these myopic observers I may not have appeared happy, because I had long since moved past ‘happy’ to the more substantial state of Spiritual ‘joy.’

There is a deep, profound Spiritual joy that is far superior to any amount of superficial happiness. It speaks of God’s riches poured into a life, of a clearer understanding of one’s role in the Kingdom, of intimate communion that need not be revealed in one’s face.

It is this sort of blessedness that is described in the Beatitudes. And it is a blessedness to be envied.



spiritual Poverty

"Blessed are those who feel their Spiritual need, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!"⁴

Our God-space

Man is born with a *capacity* for God, but with no guarantee that the space will be filled. The Son of God was manifested on earth as a human being, not as a chickadee, or camel, or slug. He came as a person, because it was with people that God

desired a higher relationship — not slugs. So it was in people that God instilled this holy capacity.

We begin empty. The person who never fills that void with the gospel of Christ — the truth that He, and He alone can save — will die apart from God, thinking all the while that the space had been filled with something better.

Brokenness

But there *is* nothing better, and Jesus says that those who are truly blessed are the ones who have acknowledged the emptiness inside their souls, and that it is a space Christ alone is able to fill.

Poverty is the cry of the broken, repentant heart. Though he was the great king of Israel, and could purchase anything he desired — even another man's wife — David later acknowledged his own spiritual poverty and wrote

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast
spirit within me. *Psalm 51:9-10*

Admitting one's spiritual poverty is a sign of humility; refusing to make this admission is a sign of pride. Jesus illustrated the difference with a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector.

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." *Luke 18:9-14*

A Heart Filled to Overflowing

The arrogant man raises his angry fist up to God and cries out, "I don't deserve to be treated like this!" But the humble man lifts up open hands to God and, with bowed head and grateful heart, cries, "I don't deserve to be treated like this."

To be "poor in spirit" is to understand that in ourselves we are utterly unworthy before God, but that through Christ we may stand before Him with confidence. To be poor in this world is to have an empty purse; to be *spiritually* poor is to have one's heart filled with God.



Jesus, I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,
And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power,
Thou hast made me whole.

Oh, how great Thy loving kindness,
Vaster, broader than the sea!
Oh, how marvelous Thy goodness,
Lavished all on me!
Yes, I rest in Thee, Beloved,
Know what wealth of grace is Thine,
Know Thy certainty of promise,
And have made it mine.

Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,
I behold Thee as Thou art,
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless,
Satisfies my heart;
Satisfies its deepest longings,
Meets supplies its every need,
Compasseth me round with blessings:
Thine is love indeed!

Ever lift Thy face upon me,
As I work and wait for Thee;
Resting 'neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus,
Earth's dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father's glory,
Sunshine of my Father's face,
Keep me ever trusting, resting,
Fill me with Thy grace.

Jean S. Pigott

Gr., ptochos

NIV, poor

Matthew 11:5
Matthew 19:21
Matthew 26:9-11
Mark 10:21
Mark 12:42-43
Mark 14:5-7
Luke 4:18
Luke 14:13-21
Luke 16:20-22
Luke 18:22
Luke 19:8
Luke 21:3
John 12:5-6
2 Cor. 6:10
Galatians 2:10
Galatians 4:9
James 2:2-6
Rev. 3:17

Grief's Consolation

"Blessed are the mourners, for they will be consoled!"

Bad Advice

The world with all its tinsel charm would convince us that grief is something from which we should flee. The counsel of the world is to flee any and all discomfort, unpleasantness, sorrow and pain, hard times or trials.

NIV, mourn ~ Gr., penitence

Matthew 9:15
Mark 16:10
Luke 6:25
1 Cor. 5:2
2 Cor. 12:21
James 4:9
Rev. 18:11
Rev. 18:15
Rev. 18:19

The world says that anything unpleasant is bad, but Jesus says that everything in the hands of God is good — even when it is unpleasant.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." *Matthew 5:11-12*

Blessed Assurance

There is, however, another kind of mourning. When a member of the family dies, we mourn; when tragedy strikes either ourselves or someone we love, we grieve. The believer can be considered fortunate (blessed) because in times of sorrow, there is comfort found in the arms of the Lord.

But there is yet another type of mourning — grief over sin.

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged. *2 Cor. 12:20-21*

A person who, as in the first Beatitude, acknowledges his or her dependence on God, will be grieved over the existence of sin — sin either personal or corporate. Those sensitive to the cloying smog of sin will be found on their knees, and will find there consolation in their grief.



"An Armenian arguing with a Calvinist remarked, 'If I believed your doctrine and were sure that I was a converted man, I would take my fill of sin.'

'How much sin,' replied the godly Calvinist, 'do you think it would take to fill a true Christian to his own satisfaction?'

Here he hit the nail on the head. 'How can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?' A truly converted person hates sin with all his heart, and even if he could sin without suffering for it, it would be misery enough to him to sin at all."

Charles H. Spurgeon

Superiority

"Blessed are the humble-minded, for they will possess the land!"

NIV, meek ~ Gr., prais, et al

Matthew 5:5
Matthew 11:29
Matthew 21:5
James 1:21
James 3:13
1 Peter 3:4
1 Peter 3:15

"The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in

God, everything. That is his motto. He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring. He rests perfectly content to allow God to place His own values. He will be patient to wait for the day when everything will get its own price tag and real worth will come into its own. Then the righteous shall shine forth in the Kingdom of their Father. He is willing to wait for that day." *A.W. Tozer*⁵

A Mixed Message

God the Father knew we would need the help of a visual aid. He knew that we would need help with some of the concepts that would be part of His new-covenant Kingdom.

So He sent Jesus.

The concept of Christ-like humility and gentleness is difficult to understand in the context of contemporary culture — just as it was in the culture of 1st Century Israel.

We live in a time of the 'art of the deal,' a time in which strength through deceit is lauded, a time when 'looking out for number one' has become a worldwide religion. In our time the gospel of brash self-sufficiency is preached from the school room, the seat of government, even the pulpit.

"In the world of men we find nothing approaching the virtues of which Jesus spoke in the opening words of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Instead of poverty of spirit we find the rankest kind of pride; instead of mourners we find pleasure seekers; instead of meekness, arrogance; instead of hunger after righteousness we hear men saying, 'I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing'; instead of mercy we find cruelty; instead of purity of heart, corrupt imaginings; instead of peacemakers we find men quarrelsome and resentful; instead of rejoicing in mistreatment we find them fighting back with every weapon at their command. Of this kind of moral stuff civilized society is composed.

"The atmosphere is charged with it; we breathe it with every breath and drink it with our mother's milk. Culture and education refine these things slightly but leave them basically untouched. A whole world of literature has been created to justify this kind of life as the only norm alone. And this is the more to be wondered at seeing that these are the evils which make life the bitter struggle it is for all of us. All our heart-aches and a great many of our physical ills spring directly out

of our sins. Pride, arrogance, resentfulness, evil imaginings, malice, greed: these are the sources of more human pain than all the diseases that ever afflicted mortal flesh." *Tozer*⁶

A Hunger for Heaven

"Blessed are those who are hungry and thirsty for uprightness, for they will be satisfied!"

Clarity

So it's not surprising that we would need help in the person of Christ to grasp a concept so foreign to our nature. We must look to the example of His life for a clear illustration of what it means to be truly meek.

Jesus took many opportunities to teach His disciples the idea of humility,

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." *Mark 9:33-35*

through handy illustrations,

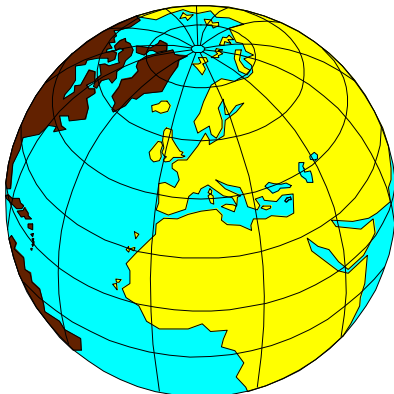
He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." *Mark 9:36-37*

as well as being an example Himself when it appeared that His reputation was being challenged by strangers:

"Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." *Mark 9:38-41*

Power in Weakness

The wily executive, treading upon the backs of others on his way up the corporate ladder, may become rich; the duplicitous politician may acquire great power; the crafty, morally bankrupt celebrity may gain worldwide fame. But it is the meek — the one gently resting in the superior strength of Christ — that will inherit the entirety of the earth.



NIV, righteousness ~ Gr., diakosune

Matthew 3:15
Matthew 5:10,20
Matthew 6:33
Matthew 21:32
John 16:8-10
Acts 10:34-35
Acts 17:31
Romans 1:17
Romans 3:21-26
Romans 4:3-6
Romans 5:17
Romans 6:13
Romans 8:10
Romans 10:10
Romans 14:17
1 Cor. 1:30
2 Cor. 9:10
2 Cor. 11:15
Galatians 2:21
Galatians 5:5

Draw me to Thee, till far within Thy rest,
In stillness of Thy peace, Thy voice I hear –
For ever quieted upon Thy breast,
So loved, so near.

By mystery of Thy touch my spirit filled,
O Magnet all Divine;
The hunger of my soul for ever stilled,
For Thou art mine.

For me, O Lord, the world is all too small,
For I have seen Thy face,
Where Thine eternal love irradiates all
Within Thy secret place.
And therefore from all others, from all else,
Draw Thou my soul to Thee . . .
. . . Yea – Thou hast broken the enchanter's spells,
And I am free.

Now in the haven of untroubled rest
I land at last,
The hunger, and the thirst, and weary quest
For ever past.
There, Lord, to lose, in bliss of Thine embrace
The recreant will;
There, in the radiance of Thy blessed face,
Be hushed and still;
There, speechless at Thy pierced feet
See none and nought beside,
And know but this – that Thou art sweet,
That I am satisfied.

Gerhard Tersteegen

A Holy Yearning

Satisfaction comes only to those who understand that they need satisfying. Only those who admit their hunger can be truly filled.

Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.
I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.
Psalms 119:17-20

If we feel like a stranger on this earth, the remedy for our discomfort will not be found in anything of this earth.

Our solace, our peace, will be found in the things of God — those things which not only instruct and counsel, but envelop us in His love and protection.

God's word reminds us of His ongoing commitment to us, of His justice, grace and mercy. His word describes the righteousness and holiness of our heavenly Father, bringing conviction as well as comfort. His word will answer the questions that nag at us from those who have no portion of His grace. His word will enlighten, encourage, and strengthen.

To be truly filled with His righteousness, we must hunger for it.

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
Psalms 42:1-2a NKJV



“Note well that our desire after the mind of God should be constant; we should feel holy longings ‘at all times.’ Desires which can be put off and on like our garments are at best but mere wishes, and possibly they are hardly true enough to be called by that name — they are temporary emotions born of excitement, and doomed to die when the heat which created them has cooled down. He who always longs to know and do the right is the truly right man. His judgment is sound, for he loves all God's judgments, and follows them with constancy. His times shall be good, since he longs to be good and to do good at all times.” *Spurgeon*

Building up the Weak

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy!”

The Atrophied Grace

It's impossible to isolate the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount — to remove one from its companions. They, as a package, represent a cohesive description of someone who is Spirit-minded, following a logical sequence in which if one is true, they all are.

Someone who is humble will also be merciful; someone who is meek or gentle will surely be merciful with others; and someone who has hungered after righteousness, and has been satisfied by his quest, will be quick to extend mercy to another.

Mercy — the demonstration of heartfelt compassion — is in short supply these days, both within the church and without. One of the easiest ways for those without to condemn the workings and beliefs of those within, is for them to point out their lack of mercy for each other — and, especially, for those without.

NIV, mercy ~ Gr., eleeo / eleemon

Matthew 15:22-28
Matthew 17:15-18
Matthew 18:33
Matthew 20:30-34
Mark 5:19
Luke 16:24-26
Romans 9:15-16
Romans 12:6-8
1 Tim. 1:16
Hebrews 2:17
Jude 1:22-23

Organized religion was in a similar state during the time of Jesus.

“Jewish piety had a deliberately merciless approach to those who did not know the law. To keep the law was of greater moment than sensitivity towards the weakness of those who failed to keep its demands.” *Guthrie*

Tough Love

Compounding this paradox, when members of the body of Christ do get around to displaying mercy, it can very often be misguided.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? *1 Cor. 5:1-2*

Mercy is not winking at sin, and Paul showed that it often includes what we would refer to in this day as ‘tough love.’

Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. *1 Cor. 5:3-5*

Out of all the players in this story, it was the apostle Paul who demonstrated the purest form of mercy, for he was the only one concerned about the sinner's eternal soul.



“Were there no guilt in the world, no pain and no tears, God would yet be infinitely merciful; but His mercy might well remain hidden in His heart, unknown to the created universe. No voice would be raised to celebrate the mercy of which none felt the need. It is human misery and sin that call forth the divine mercy.” *Tozer⁷*

Pure Motives

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God!”

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to an idol
or swear by what is false.
He will receive blessing from the LORD
and vindication from God his Savior.
Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, O God of Jacob. Selah

Lift up your heads, O you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is this King of glory?

The LORD strong and mighty,
 the LORD mighty in battle.
 Lift up your heads, O you gates;
 lift them up, you ancient doors,
 that the King of glory may come in.
 Who is he, this King of glory?
 The LORD Almighty — he is the King of glory. Selah
Psalm 24:3-10

Humanity in the Raw

Purity can be a frightening prospect to such generously imperfect human beings. How in the world can we attain to anything so obviously outside our reach?

Because absolute purity *is* impossible, we can find a clue to the meaning of this Beatitude in the story of King David.

The life of David was anything but pure. He was a man of war and bloodshed, of political intrigue and, ultimately, of adultery and murder.

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of

Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant." *2 Samuel 11:2-5*

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, "Put Uriah [Bathsheba's husband] in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

2 Samuel 11:14-17

As a result of his profound sin, David and his family experienced gross corruption, incestuous rape, and attempted patricide. Near the end of his life, seventy-thousand Israelites paid the ultimate penalty of death for another sin he committed.⁸ On the day of his death, David looked back on a life of countless failures and disappointment. Yet, even with all this, David was declared a man after God's own heart.

"After removing Saul, [God] made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised." *Acts 13:22-23*

Why? How could such a flawed man be so close to God's ideal? How, indeed, could an adulterer and murderer be someone declared by God to be a "man after my own heart"?

A Persistent Devotion

The answer lay in *his* heart. Throughout his entire life David met disappointment with praise, crisis with worship, and great sin with brokenness and confession. He never permitted his mistakes, or God's decisions, to stand between him and his Lord. Time and again, when a lesser man would have railed against what some might have called bad breaks or unfair treatment, King David knelt in devotion to His God.

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill.

David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.

On the seventh day the child died. "Is the child dead?" he asked [his servants]. "Yes," they replied, "he is dead." Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. *2 Samuel 12:13-18a, 19b-20a*



Like King David, those who are pure in heart are not perfect. Striving after perfection is a fool's occupation. Purity of heart means, instead, that in our imperfection — in our failures and missteps and outright sin — we never lose our connection with the Lord. We never turn on Him. We never blame Him for what happens. In all things we continue to worship and praise His name — and in our praise we see His face.

Peace, Perfect Peace

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called God's sons!"

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. *Ephes. 2:13-18*



"We should be ambitious and industrious how to be calm and quiet in our minds, in patience to possess our own souls, and to be quiet toward others; or of a meek and mild, a gentle and peaceable disposition, not given to strife, contention, or

Gr., katharos

NIV, pure

Matthew 23:26
 Luke 11:41
 John 13:10-11
 John 15:3
 Acts 18:6
 Acts 20:26
 Romans 14:20
 1 Tim. 1:5
 1 Tim. 3:9
 2 Tim. 2:22
 Titus 1:15
 Hebrews 10:22
 James 1:27
 1 Peter 1:22

division. Satan is very busy to disquiet us; and we have that in our own hearts that disposes us to be disquiet; therefore let us study to be quiet." *Matthew Henry*

An Active Pursuit

If we would study to be Christ-like, we would study to be peacemakers, for He is the supreme peacemaker, placing Himself between not only Jew and Gentile, but between both communities and the heretofore untouchable holiness of God. Christ, at the cross, became, in His person, our peace.

NIV, peace, maker, peacemaker ~ Gr., eirenoποιος

Matthew 3:8
Matthew 3:10
Matthew 4:19
Matthew 10:13
Matthew 10:34
Mark 5:34
Mark 9:50
Luke 1:79
Luke 2:14
Luke 2:29
Acts 24:2
Romans 1:7
Romans 2:10
Romans 5:1
Romans 8:6
Romans 10:15
Romans 12:18
2 Cor. 13:11
Galatians 5:22
Galatians 6:16
Ephes. 4:3
Ephes. 6:15
1 Thes. 5:13

But Jesus was no milquetoast appeaser; He was no simple-minded fool looking to just get along so all would be happy and placidly at ease. That's not an accurate picture of the Son of God, for He was willing to pay the ultimate price for the peace we enjoy with God. His peace-making was gritty and tough, devoted to the right. And it cost Him His earthly life.

In fact, this Beatitude has little to do with simply 'getting along,' but is a call for us to become *active* peace-makers.

"This beatitude is not, however, directed to those who are at peace with others, but to those who actively create conditions of peace. Admittedly the difficulties of creating peace are immense. But Jesus was not simply commending an impossible ideal. The disposition towards peace is a moral and spiritual quality which can be achieved only by spiritual means." *Guthrie*

The Cost

"Blessed are those who have endured persecution for their uprightness, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!"

"Jesus takes it for granted that those who display the qualities of the previous beatitudes will not escape persecution." *Guthrie*

There is an interesting play on words taking place in this Beatitude that is not readily apparent in the modern translations. The Greek word translated "persecuted" is *dioko*, (pronounced dee-o'-ko), a prolonged (and causative) form of a primary verb *dio* (**to flee**); **to pursue** (literal or figurative); by implication **to persecute**. In fact, the same word is used in Romans:

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not **pursue** righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who **pursued** a law of righteousness, has not attained it. *Romans 9:30-31 (emphases added)*

In other words, if we pursue (*dioko*) righteousness, we may be persecuted (*dioko*) for that righteous pursuit.

The Common Enemy

It's a little uncomfortable for anyone in the western world to speak of the possibility of — let alone actual — persecution for the faith. Compared to the saints of old, and contemporary saints in some parts of the world, we have enjoyed nothing less than an easy, effortless road.

But absent tangible persecution in the classic sense — physical or psychological opposition because of one's faith — there is still the universal experience of opposition from the evil one. Every Christian has experienced his unique style of confrontation — and very often when we are at our best Spiritually.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. *1 Peter 5:8*

Satan has a special gift for sniffing out believers who have been soaring closer to the Lord. He knows he can safely leave alone Christians who are flirting with the baser life; they've already done half his work for him. But his radar is set for those climbing ever higher toward righteousness. His priority is to nail them with an unhealthy dose of temptation, or doubt, before they soar too close to the Son.

An easy path without fear or temptation is not necessarily sign of a healthy spiritual life; it may just mean Satan doesn't need to bother with you. Constant bombardment from his flaming arrows,⁹ however, is a sure sign that we're on the right track.



I am resolved no longer to linger,
Charmed by the world's delight;
Things that are higher, things that are nobler,
These have allured my sight.

I am resolved to go to the Saviour,
Leaving my sin and strife;
He is the true One, He is the just One,
He hath the words of life.

I am resolved to follow the Saviour,
Faithful and true each day;
Heed what He sayeth, do what He willeth,
He is the living way.

I am resolved to enter the Kingdom,
Leaving the paths of sin;
Friends may oppose me, foes may beset me,
Still will I enter in.

Refrain:

I will hasten to Him, hasten so glad and free;
Jesus, Greatest, Highest, I will come to Thee.

Palmer Hartsough

Notes:

1. *New Testament Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), p903.
2. Latin *beatus*, "blessed."
3. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984), Frank E. Gaebelien, General Editor, p131.
4. This and subsequent renderings of the individual Beatitudes are from *The Bible: An American Translation* (University of Chicago Press, 1935), translated by Edgar J. Goodspeed.
5. *The Pursuit of God* (Christian Publications, 1982), p113.
6. *Ibid*, p109f.
7. *The Knowledge of the Holy* (HarperCollins, 1992), p141f.
8. 2 Samuel 24:10-15
9. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
Ephes. 6:16.

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With Thanksgiving

Linda and I have been sincerely grateful for subscribers who have expressed their appreciation with a gift. Our praise continues to be lifted up to God, as these contributions are seen as a sign of His affirmation of this work.

If you feel led by the Spirit to contribute, we would like to express our appreciation in a tangible way.

Winter Reflections

We are preparing a series of booklets based on my weekly column, *Reflections by the Pond*. The first booklet in the series is called "Winter Reflections" — a collection of columns from winter months around the pond.

With your gift we would like to send you a copy of *Winter Reflections*. Simply request the booklet, and include your name and address when you send your gift; we'll express our sincere appreciation with this brand new booklet.

Here's a sample:

The Christian never loses the companionship of the Holy Spirit. Like the brown oak trees that surround the frozen pond, no matter how dead and lifeless the Christian appears on the outside, there is always extravagant life bubbling inside in the person of the Spirit. Like the dry brittle weeds of the winter field, the deep roots of the Spirit never die.

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth."
John 14:16

The Christian never loses his or her life-giving connection to God. Which sets us apart from the trees of the field. There will come a day when the death-like appearance of the tree will be real, when the spring bud will no longer form. There will come a day when the deeply hidden roots of the grass will indeed wither and die. But for the one who has placed his or her trust in Jesus Christ, that day will never come.

(from *Winter Reflections*)