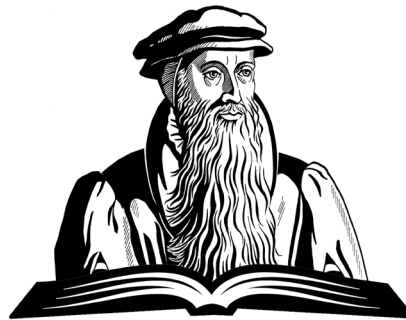
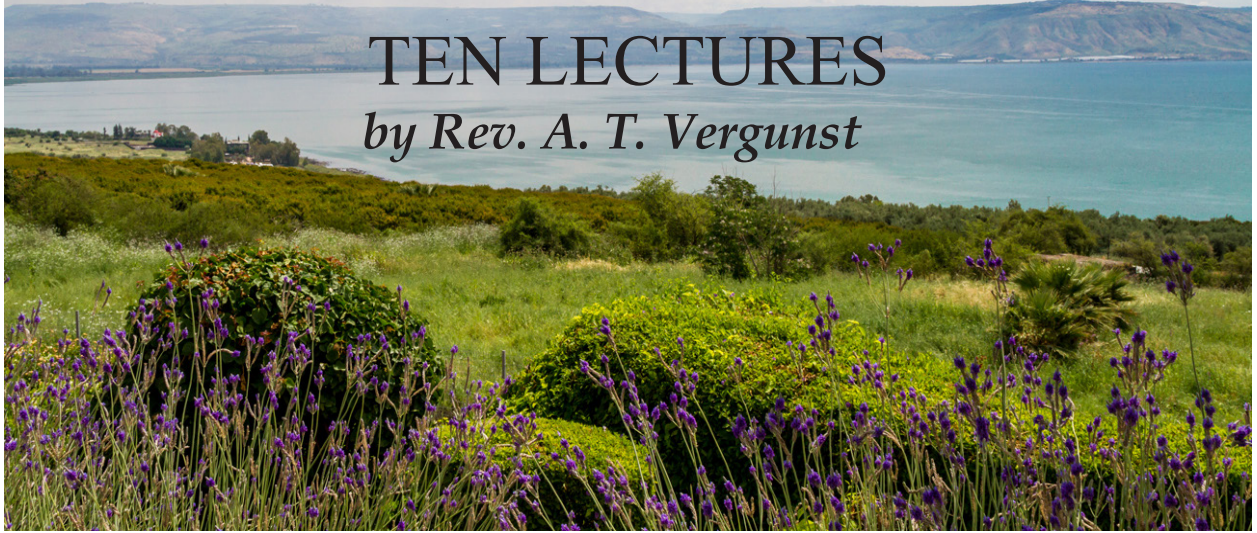


A VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Beatitudes

TEN LECTURES

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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The Beatitudes

10 Lectures

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

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The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #1

General Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

Dear friends, it is my privilege to introduce to you the portion of the Scripture called the beatitudes, found in the Sermon on the Mount. We pray that this word may sanctify us and bless us together.

Every realtor is aware of a very important principle in sales, the principle that the context in which the house is found has an impact on the value of the property. That is also a principle that applies to the value of the Scriptures that we discuss, as the context explains much of the portion of the Scripture. Taking a Scripture out of its context and just taking it by itself is like examining a finger by only looking at the finger without the connection. Instead, we would determine the value of a finger by looking at the whole hand and the relationship to the muscles and the nerves and the tendons and the arm and the shoulder and the whole body. Before we take a close look at the beatitudes, which are the nine statements beginning with “blessed are” found in Matthew 5:3-12, we need to first start with a bird’s-eye view of the context, the context of the Gospel of Matthew, and the context of the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 to 7.

First, the context of Matthew’s gospel: Matthew is writing primarily to Jewish ears. The New Testament Church was at first primarily Jewish. They estimate that shortly after Pentecost, there were around 20,000 Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. These Christians experienced the first level of persecution from fellow Jews, sometimes family members or other Jewish neighbors who accused them of being unfaithful to the Old Testament Scriptures or the teachings of the forefathers. Matthew was called to write to these Jewish Christians to encourage them and to show them that the charge is false. They were not unfaithful to the Old Testament Scriptures. Matthew presents Jesus Christ and His teaching as the Messianic King and His kingdom as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. When you go through Matthew, you find about 65 Old Testament Scriptures quoted. That is more than any author of the other Gospels. Within Matthew’s Gospel, you find him emphasizing Jesus’ words. Matthew records six of Jesus’ Gospel sermons, and you will recognize them as each of them ends with a statement similar to the one you find in the end of Matthew 7:28—“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings.” That statement marks the end of the sermon. In the sermons that Matthew has recorded of Jesus, there is a common theme - the theme of the kingdom of Heaven or the kingdom of God. That theme was the burden of Jesus’ ministry. Matthew notices in 4:23—“And Jesus went about all Galilee... preaching the Gospel of the kingdom.” The kingdom here is a major theme that is also very closely related to the beatitudes. You see it in Matthew 5:3. The first beatitude is linked to the kingdom of

heaven. In the beatitudes, Jesus identifies the genuine citizen or subject of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ. So that much about Matthew's context.

Now a little closer look at the context of the Sermon on the Mount which is contained in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. The sermon begins with an historical comment, "And seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them saying... (5:1-2)," and then comes this masterful sermon, which William Perkins called the key of the whole Bible. For in this sermon, Jesus Christ opens the summary of the old and the new, and He brings them together. In the rest of this lecture, I would like to share with you five general comments about the Sermon on the Mount that I think will be helpful to show you how majestic this portion of Scripture is and how it also relates to the rest of the beatitudes we will look at it together. This sermon is very important for these five reasons.

First, in this sermon, Jesus Christ presents Himself, focuses on Himself, as both the Lord and Savior of the kingdom. The Lord Jesus came to this earth with one mission—to do His Father's will. His Father's will was of course varied, but one purpose of His Father's will was to destroy the kingdom of the devil. As 1 John 3:8 tells us, "For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." These works of the devil are like a kingdom that operates in hatred and evil and bitterness and violence and selfishness and destruction. That is opposite to the kingdom of Jesus and the restoring of peace and joy. Jesus' ministry is to build His kingdom and not just nationally.

This is beyond boundaries. This is a kingdom among all the nations of the world. You will notice as you read through this sermon, as well as the rest of Jesus' ministry, He emphasizes kingdom over 100 times where only twice He speaks about church. That is significant. What does Jesus mean by the kingdom? What does He think of when He speaks about the kingdom of God? He thinks of the way of our life. It begins here in the heart. As it is in the heart, it radiates into our life, into our actions. Our attitude becomes action. Again, Matthew 4:17 reads, "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand." There is repentance of sin to enter this kingdom. For the kingdom, friends, is a way of life, a way of life that begins here and that will continue into the future new earth wherein all the citizens are the subjects of His glorious kingdom, living and dwelling in perfect righteousness. That is indicated in Matthew 5:3, the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Now what does the church in this? The church is the pivot, the center. The weekly church gathering is when the Captain of salvation gathers His kingdom soldiers together to teach them. In these gatherings, He encourages them in the battle. He corrects them. He might stir them up to take up the battle again, or He may comfort them as they have experienced defeat. That is the church, weekly gathering, studying and reading the Word and in fellowship with one another. Through that, the Spirit nourishes, strengthens, expands the kingdom. After having heard that word, He expects all His followers to go and to do the kingdom work and to live out the kingdom life wherever we are placed to be His laborers in the kingdom. As we think about the kingdom life, everything and every aspect of our existence is included. It begins with how you think, the renewing of the mind, about God, how you think about yourself, how you think about others, how you think about the world. The kingdom is how you use your time, how you use your mouth, your money, how you manage your relationships with your family, your marriage, with your church family, with your neighbors and even with your enemies. It is so different; you are to love your enemies. How do you handle those who have failed you or those who have offended you or those who want to make use you? All that is part of the kingdom life, and many of these aspects come back in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, sometimes the Sermon on the Mount is called the constitution of the

kingdom of God.

Jesus teaches us, secondly, that to be part of His kingdom is to have a personal relationship with Him. There is a startling end to the Sermon on the Mount which I want to call your attention to, if you read it yourself, from Matthew 7:21-23. He sketches a people who have an encounter with God, and Jesus teaches here that the Christian life is not just a life of knowing things but living relationship with Himself. Jesus makes it very clear that no one is a Christian by simply doing Christian things or reciting Christian truth or preaching Christian messages. We only are a true Christian when we are united with Jesus Christ by faith as a fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit and begin to reflect this in how we are from our inside towards our daily interactions with others. To underline in importance back to the beginning of the sermon, Jesus begins the sermon with the beatitudes. Now there is no Scripture, in my opinion, that more clearly defines who is the true Christian than these opening statements of the Sermon on the Mount. As we experience this sovereign and gracious power of God's reign in our life, this teaching will change us to become like the beatitude man or woman.

Thirdly, Jesus is teaching us by this opening section of the beatitudes, as it is amplified in the rest, the absolute necessity of regeneration to be part of His kingdom. "Except a man be born again," He says to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "He cannot see the kingdom of God." While you do not find anywhere in the Sermon on the Mount the word *regeneration*, He defines in the beatitudes the born-again regenerated citizen of His kingdom. Therefore, consider this sermon of Jesus as a major correction of the Old Testament teaching gone wrong. You hear Him say often, "Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time (Matthew 5:21). The Jews of Jesus' time thought that to be genuine safe person meant to be living up to the right standards, and they were rigid, a means to keep a list of all kinds of do's and don'ts, and you earned your way to God by that. In Christ's kingdom, the heart becomes first before the behavior, and the Lord shows that it is not by doing all kinds of things that we earn our way. His kingdom teaching is about Christ and what He has done that earns the way into the presence of God. All the emphasis on the internal and the heart relationship with the Lord and who we are is not new. 1 Samuel 16:7 reads: "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." That is still the way that God wants us to consider ourselves, looking at the heart. This portion does that. To Jesus, the Christian life is first being right in the heart which is followed with doing right, and that is the way we live. Both to be right and to do right is really a beautiful and simple definition of the Biblical key word *righteousness*.

Fourthly, Jesus addressed in this sermon an issue that is as much needed today among Christians as it was needed among the Jews of Jesus' days. This is the issue of superficiality or surface religion, the issue that Jesus called "white sepulcher religion", people that look religious and orthodox and traditional and rigid, but really, on the inside, they are full of dead men's bones. What does He mean with that but the attitude of pride, being selfish, insincere, hypocritical, all out there for power, for status, for your own honor, that is dead men's bones. Now that superficiality was heavily promoted in the Jewish culture, when they reduced being godly to measuring up to a whole list of outward standards set by the scribes and Pharisees. While you look to the Scriptures, and there are all kinds of outward standards that God wants us to maintain, He keeps reminding us that the heart is more important in a relationship than all the outward things. Think about your marriage. Your marriage relationship is not defined by the rules you keep, the standards you uphold, the behaviors you display. It is the hearts that are merged in a commitment of love to one another. The health of that relationship and the quality of the heart of that relationship of course are maintained by the standards—and high standards—that will protect the relationship. It is first the heart, then the rules and regulations, as it were, that keeps it protected. That is so also with genuine Christianity. To be

a Christian is first and foremost to be in a relationship with Jesus Christ who has raised you from your spiritual death. That phrase *spiritual death* is a term describing our spiritual separation from God, or our spiritual divorce from Him, which is dated back to Genesis 3:6, when our forefathers Adam and Eve rebelled and fell away from God and we with them. If that spiritual relationship is not restored, then Christianity is just an adopted creed we try to live. If it is a relationship restored and a heart renewed, then it becomes an adopted son or a daughter who lives a devoted life to the God Who saved them out of this horrible plight of life. That is what Jesus is after. The error in Jesus' day remains the problem for us today. What the Jews did, we do today. It is devastating to Christianity when we are holding it simply or defining it by living in certain creeds and living by certain standards or holding certain traditions. No, friends, genuine Christianity, according to the King of the kingdom, is a life that is devoted to God and to our neighbor, while we are trusting upon the King and upon His work as the Savior as the only ground of our acceptance with God. It is Jesus Himself, who in John 13:34—35 really hammers down that emphasis. Listen to His word. It says, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." That is already an Old Testament commandment, but the newness of the commandment is that you love one another as I have loved you. That ye also love one another like I did. By this, He says, shall all men know you are My disciples, if you have love one to another.

This aspect of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount makes it timeless and searching, even confrontational with the answer of who is in the Kingdom or who is saved or who is a genuine believer. It is not if you measure up to certain outward standards, if you appear Christian, if you have a certain creed that is good, if you are faithful, or successful or religious. No, it is if you measure up to what the Lord describes the citizen of the kingdom to be like as He writes and describes in the beatitudes. The seven beatitudes are heart issues, are inner attitudes, and all seven are the unmistakable fingerprints of the Holy Ghost. All of this is searching of the superficiality comes to a startling climax in Jesus' words that no doubt were felt like a shock to the original hearers in Matthew 5:20. Imagine all these people standing there. They have all been bred to revere the scribes and the Pharisees. These are the examples of ultra-godliness. These are the spiritual giants of the day. They were church leaders, everyone revered them, and Jesus' words must have been like a hammer blow when He says in verse 20, "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of Heaven." There is the kingdom of Heaven again. We shall not enter if it does not exceed. This word *exceed* does not mean if you add more layers on top of each other. That is what the scribes and Pharisees did. No, exceed means it has to go deeper, to the heart. Can you see that a steady diet of this teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and the beatitudes and the really intensive law teaching Jesus did in this sermon is confrontational yet profitable? It will not give an increase in the numbers of Christians, but with God's blessing, it will surely enhance the quality of Christianity, and that may also become a tool of evangelism.

The last observation is that Jesus gives us in the beatitudes an unmatched model by which to examine what is genuine Christian experience. There is as great a variety in genuine Christian experiences as there is a variety in the woods, in all the different trees. No one who has come to know Christ and the glory of His teaching and has been converted from a lifestyle of unchristian to Christian is similar to another. Look at the contrast between Matthew, Levi is his name in the Scripture story, and how he was called by the Lord as compared to how a Saul of Tarsus was called, who became Paul, the author of many epistles. Take John the Baptist and his evidence of new life before he was born, to the thief on the cross, the man who was nearly dead before he comes to Christ. Think of Jesus' mother Mary, sweet mother as it were, and then a demon-possessed Mary Magdalene who was also brought into the kingdom. Or I see a serious-minded Nathaniel sitting

under the fig tree, and I see the wild Corinthians and Ephesians who come to Christ. Now we tend to emphasize a dramatic conversion as more real. That is not Biblical. The power of God is not only in an eruption of a volcano. The power of God is seen in a little flower or even a blade of grass, both amazing, both powerful. So back to the beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, the uniqueness of God's work is that no matter what way God saved you, no matter the circumstances you went through in order to come to know the grace of God and Jesus Christ, every regenerated soul is able to identify him or herself in the beatitudes. If your heart is not sketched or outlined in these seven, number of completeness, beatitudes, you miss this necessary spiritual character needed to be part of God's kingdom. Therefore, as Jesus opens His Sermon on the Mount, purposely with this outline of the citizen of the kingdom, again and again emphasizing that the renewed character comes before the task of the Christian. First, who are you, then what are you, the salt and the light. The behavior follows the change of heart. Now after this overview of the Sermon on the Mount, we are ready to take a closer look at the beatitudes. May God bless this teaching and make us all a blessing to others with what we have so far learned already. Thank you.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #2

General Introduction to the Beatitudes

Dear friends, welcome to the second message related to Matthew 5:2–12, commonly known as Jesus' Beatitudes. May God enable us and bless us as we examine His word there in Matthew together. Now Jesus is the chief of all prophets. I'll call Him the Master Teacher, not only with regard to the content, what He teaches, but also to His methods, or how He teaches. As we go through Jesus' teachings in the Bible, you'll notice that He loves to teach in surprising contrasts, He often puts white against black or good versus evil. We see that also in this astonishing Scripture of the Beatitudes. There are some amazing contrasts that we would usually not combine together. Who of you would call someone blessed (the word *blessed* you find in these Beatitudes and in every opening word—that means supremely happy)—would you call someone blessed who is poor? Or sad? mourning? Or someone who is hungry (and the word is *starving*)? Wouldn't we call *blessed* those who are rich and well fed, or laughing and in a nice condition? So that's a surprising contrast in the Beatitudes.

The second amazing thing about these Beatitudes is not only the contrast, but that Jesus knows how to say something very profound in a very simple way. What Jesus accomplished in the Beatitudes' teaching is really unequalled, for He has united in these seven statements all His people scattered over all ages of the world history, over all the cultures, in one—in one picture. Even though there is enormous diversity among them all, He is able to unite them in these seven statements, identifying His people by the essentials. Jesus has innumerable followers throughout all the ages, and they are incredibly diverse. Just think of how different the ancient Eskimos are, hunting and fishing, compared to the modern Generation Z with all their technology and their wit. I mean, how far apart can they be? Many of His followers can't even properly read or write, but others of His followers are writing books, developing software, are doctors with PhDs and invent rockets. Yet Jesus is able to describe the common denominator of all His kingdom people, among all that diversity, into one set of seven statements that describes them as they are. Even if the world would last for another 6,000 years or 10,000 years, and even if our technology would advance beyond what we today think is possible, the Beatitudes do not need to be updated, or they do not need to be adjusted. We do not need to have any addition to it to describe the character of the citizens of the kingdom of Jesus, and the kingdom people that are on their way to the kingdom of Heaven. That is an amazing accomplishment He had on this mountaintop, as He sits there with all His disciples surrounding Him, teaching them. He also proved Himself, and that's another amazing aspect of Jesus as teacher, He proved Himself well enabled to connect with His hearers where they are.

Most of the Jews sitting around Jesus Christ at this moment on this mountain, as well as His own

closest disciples, are people who were filled with wrong expectations. Their idea of the expected Messiah was wrong. They were somehow looking for a reinvented David figure who would chase away all the nasty Roman soldiers out of the country of Israel. That was their expectation. These people were expecting that, and what they met in Jesus didn't match their expectations. This Rabbi Jesus, who speaks about another kingdom, never called for a rebellion, didn't organize an armed uprising, didn't raise His voice in any way to stir the people to action. No, He came as a prophet, He came to preach. He came to bring a message. Not only did He come as a prophet to preach a message that was unexpected, He also came as a King, but not as an earthly king. He came to deliver His people from something far worse than the Romans were—the enemy of pride, the enemy of hunger to power, the enemy that destroys everything, selfishness, greed, anger, unbelief. These are the things this King came to deliver us from. Thirdly, He also came as a priest and as a sacrifice, to make atonement for sin, and that aspect of Christ was totally foreign to the Jews that are here around Jesus. So not only were their thoughts about the King way off, their ideas of God's kingdom differed greatly to what Jesus was teaching. Jesus says somewhere in Luke, My kingdom doesn't come with outward bells and whistles. It's not in material things, in buildings, in parades of armies and soldiers. My kingdom is an inward change of heart that obviously leads to an outward change seen in a godly lifestyle. So nothing of these material things, nothing of these secretive organizations, nothing of this undermining of the current political leaders, nothing of that in Jesus' kingdom. No, His kingdom is a personal devotion, of loving God above all, and every neighbor no matter how unliked he might be; you love them as you love yourselves. In Jesus' kingdom, the heroes and the stars, they aren't the military strategists. They aren't accomplished businessmen or elites, they're not the handsome looking actors who can entertain everyone. No, they are not those who stand tallest among men. Who then are the kingdom people? These Beatitude people are they who bow the deepest, they who quietly and humbly and joyfully serve their fellow men out of a love to God, that's Jesus' kingdom's teaching.

Now it's clear from how Matthew ends Jesus' sermon and describes the end of the sermon, that Jesus was able to connect with His hearers. Matthew writes, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28–29). Now literally this means they were struck out of themselves for a while—they were awestruck. They were amazed. They were dumbfounded by what Jesus is teaching us in the Sermon on the Mount.

Now before we move into the worm view to examine the details of Matthew 3:12, I once more, in this lecture, want to take the bird's-eye view of the entire Beatitude section. It's always very helpful to have an overview of the general character and the structure of a passage before we take it apart line by line, and sometimes even word for word. Let me begin with making first three general observations about the section we call the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3, beginning with "Blessed are the poor in spirit", until the last one, verse 12, in which Jesus speaks about *rejoice*.

Now each of these Beatitudes has a strong and purposeful emphasis on our spiritual being—that's why it's the word *Be*-attitude—rather than on our physical doing. This is an important observation to keep in mind. Jesus describes His kingdom people by who they are rather than by what they possess or what they accomplish. Who they *are*. Notice He doesn't call, in any of these statements, attention to their material wealth or their physical strength or their social status or their influential positions in life. He doesn't. He emphasizes the inner disposition of someone poor in spirit, somebody who's mourning, meek. In Christ's teaching, it's about the attitude of *being* rather than the action of *doing*, though of course, there are doings flowing out of these attitudes within. Therefore, friends, when we look at this passage, Jesus here trumpets a message that it is so acultural, it is so unnatural to our thinking, it is so opposite, and there's the contrast to what we might expect. You are not blessed because you possess much, or because you are admired by everyone, or you're in a top position, or successful. None of these are included in this list of

blessedness. Instead, you are blessed if you are a person with this attitude, with this mindset, with this inner drive, with this inner motivation. It's not in Jesus' kingdom about wearing a special distinct uniform with stripes and stars—it's not. In His kingdom, it's about having a special distinct heart within that bears the evidences of the Holy Spirit. Again, as I said in my previous lecture, the kingdom life is not reduced to a list of do's and don'ts that we tick off. Instead, kingdom life is an elevated life of godly character that reflects the glory of the King, like the King—King Jesus.

Secondly, a general observation about these Beatitudes is that all seven Beatitudes form together a flawless portrait of a born-again sinner—there are seven sketches. Seven is the number of perfection, fullness. Jesus' seven statements are just not a random collection in a random order. As you will see, there's a purpose in the order that Jesus placed them in the Beatitudes. The one is connected and interconnected, not only to the one that precedes or follows, but even to those down the line. None of them can be missed, and none of them will be missed in this new creation of a born-again soul. A normal, healthy person will have lungs, and heart, and hands, and feet. So the born-again soul will possess each of these seven characteristics. None of these seven can be missed. Yet, as with natural children, so with spiritual children, none are born mature. A little child makes noise, and sometimes lots of noise, but it doesn't talk. The little child moves but doesn't walk. A little child does trust in mother and father, but they can't verbalize it. It's all part of them. So you have immature children that develop and grow into mature adults. Now, so it is with Christ-born-again people, they possess all the characteristics of the new life, but each of them begins immature. Each begins small, needs to grow, and each will be growing—how long?—all their lifelong, towards the perfection that is finally reached in glorification.

Now the third observation is that all seven Beatitudes together have a very beautiful structure. I like to compare this seven to my rib cage. There is a breastbone in the middle, there are ribs on either side. In Jesus' Beatitudes, there are three ribs on each side, and the middle one, the fourth Beatitude, I liken or compare to the breastbone. That is the heart of the Christian. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Some have called that the heartbeat of the genuine Christian. Now a close examination of numbers one, two, and three versus numbers five, six, and seven, on the other side of the breast bone, as it were, show there is a corresponding relationship between them. This is the masterful structure of these Beatitudes. The first three—poor, mourn, meek—are the internal attitudes, the disposition or frame of our heart. Five, six, and seven are, as it were, the external expressions of the attitudes of the heart. They are related.

Let me illustrate this internal relationship between the first three and the last three just a little bit deeper. The first one, poor in spirit—once you know your own poverty, your own weakness (that's number one), you will be much more merciful, much more compassionate, much more understanding to others (number five). So numbers one and five link. Again, if you sense your sin, you're wrong in what you've done, you feel sorrowful about this, what you've done to God, you reflect on that, it hurts what you've done. Now such a one will also be very sincere in heart, and you will take sin seriously as you strive after holiness—that's the sixth one, the pure in heart. So numbers two and six are linked together. Those who have been learning all this about themselves end up to be meek—the quality of meekness, what a beautiful quality of character. Now such will do all to seek reconciliation of others with God, and so they will be the true peace makers. They're willing to give up their rights, if necessary, to be a peacemaker. So we see that three, the meek and the peacemakers are linked together. In the middle of that sits the fourth one, the center, the heart. So to conclude these three general observations, can you see the structure that the Savior built in these Beatitudes. Isn't that beautiful?

This is not just a random list. This is carefully tailored teaching to bring across very strongly the point about who are the citizens of the kingdom. Now the majesty of the Beatitudes is that they tie very many lines of truth together. We could have expected that, of course. Look around in

nature. The Creator has not just randomly put our nature together. Everything is organized to the finest details. There is design. There's correlation. There is interrelationship. Even though now, due to sin, we see much chaos and sickness and weakness and brokenness in our nature around us, there is, on the bottom of it, order. Similarly, we find it here in the words of the Re-creator, God's work of re-creation in salvation, also is orderly. There is a unity in it. There is a structure in it. So in the concluding part of this lecture, let me highlight three other structures the Master Teacher brings together in these seven short statements, structures that are a little bit beyond the Beatitudes, but there are structures that are very much interrelated to the Christian teaching and the Christian truth. Jesus brings them together again in these Beatitudes.

The first one is that the Beatitudes show us that the work of salvation is the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It's Trinitarian. All three are involved. Now let me illustrate at first that it is a part of the salvation of the Father. The first three reflect the Father's drawing a sinner to Christ, as John 6:44 states, "No man can come to Me," Jesus says, "except the Father which hath sent me draw him." Well, how does the Father draw? How does He bring someone to come to Jesus Christ? Well, He does that opening our eyes for Himself, God Himself, and in reflection, opens our eyes for ourselves. Now, what does this knowledge do? When I compare myself to this great, majestic glory of God and see myself in the light of that, this knowledge brings humility, the first Beatitude, "poor in spirit," it makes me mourn, and it turns me into a meek person. We see the first three dealing with the work of the Father.

Now the fourth one reflects reconciliation with the Father. Again, if we listen to what Jesus says in John 6:45: "Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Now the Father that is reflected in the fourth Beatitude is the Father who has reconciled a sinner with Himself by providing His Son as the needed righteousness, and that's where the fourth one comes to.

Now lastly, the fifth, sixth, and seventh Beatitudes reflect the Father's ultimate purpose in predestination. Romans 8:29 states that the purpose of predestination is this, "For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." In other words, we will be made partakers of God's divine glory in reflecting the nature of His Son again. We had it in our original state, and we will again experience it in salvation. Secondly, the work of salvation is the work of Jesus Christ as a prophet, as a priest, and a king, and all three are again reflected. The first three are the fruit of Jesus' teaching as a prophet. As He's teaching us, we begin to see ourselves, what we are, poor, sinful and guilty, and in reflection of that, we become humble and meek. So those are the three that are the result of His prophetic ministry. The fourth one points to Jesus' priestly ministry. The main work of Jesus Christ as a priest is to provide us the righteousness we need to be accepted with our Creator. That's the fourth one. Now the third office of Jesus is kingly, and Beatitude numbers five, six, and seven are fruit of Christ's kingly work in sanctifying His people. The main purpose in salvation is not comfort. The main purpose of salvation is holiness, God-likeness, or godliness.

Now then thirdly, it is Trinitarian, so we've seen the Father, we have seen the Son, but salvation is also the fruit of the indispensable work of the Holy Spirit. Again, the first three are the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the discovering work of the Spirit, convicting work. What does that convicting work prepare our hearts for but to look and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? The whole goal of the Spirit is to glorify Jesus. So He leads then to the fourth Beatitude in which the Holy Spirit's most delightful work is illustrated. His delightful work is to be the Friend of the Bridegroom and to bring the sinner and Jesus together, to reveal Jesus Christ as the only way, truth, and life, as the only hope for us as lost and guilty sinners. As one of the beautiful hymns says, "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross (or to the righteousness of Christ) I cling."

The last three Beatitudes also illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. So one other structure that is clearly seen in the Beatitudes is something that is related to the experiential

nature of salvation. Now what, first of all, is meant with experiential salvation or experiential Christianity? Well, let me contrast it first. There is a Christianity, friends, that is mainly historical, mainly intellectual, and many Christians, so-called in the world today, who hold the right doctrines or the right teachings while there is no evidence of a transformation of their heart and of their life. Paul describes, for example, in 1 Corinthians 13 about all those who do all kinds of things and speak heavenly words and do divine miracles, but without charity. That's nothing, that's no Christianity. That is an historical Christianity. Experiential Christianity is when the power of God's truth is experienced in our heart, either as convicting or humbling, transforming, liberating. They do something to us, they change us ultimately. That is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work as He applies each truth to our heart. They become part of us, and we change, we can change radically, we change in repenting from sin and returning to a life that is devoted to God and to others. We will experience the Gospel truth as something elevating, something renewing, something comforting, making us more and more like Jesus Christ. That is experiential.

If we go back now to the Beatitudes, you see this experiential nature of salvation has various distinct aspects that are reflected in the born-again soul and are found here in the Beatitudes. We will be acutely aware of those. The first three—poor, mourn, meek—reflect the experiential pain and the awareness of a sense of our misery, of our lostness, of our guilt against God. Sensing my poverty and my guilt will obviously bring some meekness before God and men. So there you have a sense of misery. The fourth one speaks about deliverance. It reflects the experiential awareness and longing and desire for deliverance which is in Jesus Christ and His righteousness. Now every sinner learns that deliverance only comes through being perfect, and how we can't be—a perfect righteousness is not in us. So that is found in that fourth one. Now in the fifth, sixth, and seventh Beatitudes, they reflect the experiential desire of a thankful heart, having been saved and having been redeemed, pardoned from sin and provided all what there is in Christ. Someone wants to reflect that, and this thankfulness is best expressed in the life of devotion, of being merciful, being sincere of heart, pure in heart and peacemakers.

Lastly, one more structure, the Beatitudes support the teaching of the three main requirements in the Gospel. Now if we listen to the Gospel message as it comes to us in the teachings of the kingdom, the first is a call to repentance toward God, there is a call to faith in Jesus Christ, and, thirdly, there is a call to the obedience of life. Repentance, faith and obedience. Those three, you notice, are beautifully interwoven in the Beatitudes man or woman and his or her life. Look again at the first three—the poor, the mourner, the meek. It is a portrait of a repenting sinner. He or she who has become aware of himself or herself in the sight of God, of the need of Jesus. What is repentance, friends? It's an awareness of sin, it's a turning away from those sins. It's a sorrow over sin. It's a meekness, accepting God's just punishment for sin. Now you have the first three. The fourth one is the portrait of a believing sinner who embraces the offer of grace in Jesus Christ. Now the object of faith is Jesus and His righteousness, and there we have faith, the heart of the believer. Now fifth, sixth and seventh are the portrait of the obedient believer who lives the life of Christ in reflection of Him, loving and doing His commandments. So beautiful are the structures that the Beatitudes together portray.

Now to wrap up this study. I want to share three more concluding observations that are general about each one of the Beatitudes. I don't have to repeat them in each one of the upcoming lectures. First, take note that each Beatitude in the Greek has a verb form that we would call today the present tense with an ongoing activity. In other words, each Beatitude is not just a past, not just a future, it is a present. It isn't just a snapshot from a particular stage of my spiritual journey. No, Jesus says this is the continued picture of the disciples in My kingdom. There is an ongoing experiential reality that every born-again soul feels till the last breath of their life. Just as I am hungry when I'm a baby, I'm hungry when I'm an old man. Just as I live when I'm a baby, I'm alive when I'm an old man. That's an ongoing activity. Also spiritually, there are ongoing experiential aspects to the

spiritual life. Paul, as a great example, shares his ongoing awareness of the indwelling sin which made him poor in spirit, even though he was a giant spiritually. It made him mourn continually, “O wretched man that I am!” It made him meek. That will be the born-again soul’s experience, and that’s why Jesus phrases each of these Beatitudes in the ongoing sense. Paul says he hungered to be found “in Christ, not having mine own righteousness,” he hungered to know Jesus Christ “and the power of His resurrection” (Philippians 3:9–10), and he writes that in one of the last letters he ever wrote in his life. So his life illustrates—as all living souls and saints will experience—the desire, the ongoing desire of these Beatitudes in his life. At the end of Philippians 3, Paul says that he’s looking forward to the return of the Lord Jesus, “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). Therefore, friends, the believer has not arrived until he is brought from grace to glory.

Now, secondly, take note that every Beatitude starts the same—it starts with “blessed are”—and there is a description, and then a promise. Let’s look for a moment at the opening “blessed are.” Jesus’ intention in these Beatitudes is not only to identify the citizens of His kingdom. No, He’s saying, “Blessed are you.” He was to comfort them in the midst of their trials, in the midst of their setbacks, in the midst of their ongoing struggles, in the midst of the accusations, in the midst of their intense longings. He wants to comfort them with His glorious Gospel promises, “Blessed are.” You will inherit a kingdom. You shall be comforted. You shall be filled. You shall obtain mercy. You shall be called the children of God, and you shall be treated as His children. Finally, at last, you shall see God, that means enjoy Him in full communion forever and ever. Praise the Lord, fellow saints! Your journey in this life will go from strength to strength and through the troubles indeed, through the challenges. It goes from grace to grace to grace to grace, and *finally* it will go from grace to glory. “Blessed are” is an ongoing state that the Lord Jesus declares you to be in.

Therefore, take note of these appended statements. Now then, in the end we find two Beatitudes that are slightly different. The seven are followed with two. What is different in those last two? The first seven describe the person in whom Christ is at work. The last two, which are in essence one, describe the reaction of the ungodly world upon Christ’s people and particularly upon Christ’s work in His people. Satan is not ready to give up. He will fight, as the kingdom of darkness, against anything that is Christ and His people, and this rage of Satan will burn now against Jesus’ followers, as he cannot reach Jesus anymore. So be prepared. Jesus says the more Christ-like you are, the more Christ-like your church is, the more you will experience the reviling, the persecuting, the false accusations. The Apostle writes to Timothy, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). Peter added to this, in the midst of more persecution, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy (blessed) are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Peter 3:14). So after this overview of the Beatitudes, we are now ready to examine the details of each of them individually. So may God bless this teaching and make us all a blessing to each other. Thank you.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #3

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

Dear friends, we finally reached the point to launch out and to dive deep into Jesus' Beatitudes. Let our prayer be that God will open our eyes for His truth and His work within us.

Throughout the Scriptures, beatitudes are not uncommon. There about thirty of them throughout the Bible, statements which clearly define who are the blessed people according to God's standards. You will notice that none of these thirty are connected to possessions or positions in life, but all of them are connected to having certain characters or relationships or possessing a certain knowledge. What we learn from that is that God mostly declares you to be blessed by who you are and who you are related to, and not by any outward things like positions or possessions, either materially or socially. Let's never lose sight of this comforting and assuring truth that it is none else but the King of the kingdom, Jesus Christ, who declares you blessed in these Scriptures. That means that if you possess within you—the inner person—this inner identity, this new identity sketched in the Beatitudes, then Jesus declares you, beyond what heaven and earth can ever give you, blessed seven times over. Please do not allow yourself to be robbed of this great comfort and encouragement. Do not allow anyone to trick you with saying that you need something more than this—you need some special divine whisper or divine vision to own these comforts to be yours. It's true that, in some measure, we need the Holy Spirit to enable us to read God's own evidences of grace in us, because within us is a lot else going on than what these Beatitudes are speaking on. Nowhere does Jesus say that we need more than being born again in order to know we are blessed. Please also avoid the error of basing your hope on what you see within yourselves, for as we examine each line of thought in this beatitude list, you will see many shortcomings within yourself. Do then exactly what you do, or should be doing, with little children. Even though they fail because of their youthfulness or their immaturity or their clumsiness, we encourage them, we build them up, we remind them of how special they are, or we correct them and instruct them and help them to grow, but we do not throw them under the bus as if they are no good just because, here and there, they fail. We are not to do that with those who are Christ's. In the "blessed are", we are listening to Jesus Christ Himself. He divinely declares you blessed. If you measure up to this, believe Him, trust Him, embrace what He declares. That, and that only, is the reason to rejoice, even if others reject you or mock you or, as it says in the end, persecute you.

"Blessed are"—the definition of the word *blessed* is hard to capture in one word. Blissful, happy, privileged, blessed, the word hints at something that exceeds anything we can ever possess in this life. For example, if you gain the whole world in your hand, you still hold less than one grain of sand compared to the entire universe around us. Yet even that comparison fails entirely, for even if you gained the entire universe, it would not satisfy, it will never stay with us, for we all know we are to die and need to let go of whatever we have in this life. It matters that Jesus calls us

blessed. Now these character issues are the evidences of a new creation, of a spiritual life that has an eternal dimension, that has an infinite duration, as it will never fade.

Let us examine the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Jesus declares you blessed if you are poor in spirit. Let us ask what is it to be poor in spirit? Secondly, why are you blessed if you are poor in spirit? What is it then to be poor in spirit? Let us first look at these words. To be poor in spirit is not the same as to be poor. This beatitude has nothing to do with material or physical or social poverty. Any interpretation that leans into that direction is turning Jesus’ teaching in the Beatitudes and in the Sermon on the Mount into some social gospel. Of course, Jesus’ teaching in both the Old and the New Testaments has much to say about the poor and about the oppressed, and how we as Christians should minister to them and then represent the care and the love of God. Neglecting to take care of the poor is a sore evil, yet this beatitude is not dealing with that sort of poverty. It is dealing with a spiritual poverty or a spiritual disposition of the heart *about* our own poverty. To be poor in spirit is also not the same as to be spiritually poor.

Each of us is born spiritually poor as a result of what Genesis 3 tells us, our fall from our glorious beginning. We are therefore now spiritually poor in the sense that we are helpless, we are powerless to restore, powerless to change from the condition that we are in now back to the condition God spoke about in Genesis 1 and 2. When you read Genesis 6:5, it is quite shocking what God says, “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” That is a very bleak and black statement. This same truth is a New Testament truth, the spiritual depravity emphasized in Romans 3:10–18. Paul writes there, as he concludes from all the teaching in the Old, “As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10–12). That sounds radical, but that is what the Scriptures confirm over and over. We are all spiritually poor, yet Jesus is not saying that this is what poor in spirit is, because normally we do not see this in ourselves. We are proud, we can be very self-satisfied or very conceited, arrogant about ourselves. We feel rich and able, we feel capable, we feel competent with regard to being good before God and men. It is because we look very shallowly at ourselves. In Luke 18, we read about an example of a Pharisee who stood before God, and he had one big rehearsal about himself, about how good he was and how worthy he was and therefore how entitled to salvation. Perhaps none of us would really blow our own trumpet publicly like he did, yet this is our inner attitude. In our inner attitude, we are not far from making these rehearsals about ourselves. Well, let us be honest. We simply think the world of ourselves. To be spiritually poor is in no way what Jesus is teaching us in the first beatitude. What then? To be poor in spirit is a mindset that is growing increasingly aware of one’s own spiritual poverty.

Now to see this spiritual poverty, we can need a reference point to compare to. That reference point is the first two chapters of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2, and the study of those truths in comparison to where we are now as mankind together is the Spirit’s means to bring us to this being “poor in spirit” mindset. Friends, we have fallen so deeply from our original glory, from our original blessedness, happiness or joy. If you open Genesis 1 and 2 and read through it, it informs us of a beautiful truth. First, God placed us in a perfect and splendid living place, where we lived in the most beautiful and the most soul satisfying communion with God and with each other as humans, and with all of nature around us, nothing out of place. No sickness, no ill feelings, nothing. A place without thorns and thistles, without sickness and sadness, and place without fear and flaws, something we can hardly imagine. Besides our living place, we were the masterpiece of God’s creative power and wisdom. Genesis 1 tells us we were made to reflect the image of God. In what? It was mostly in the devotional love, in the holiness, or sinlessness of our living to Him, to each other and to nature around us. We were living and moving temples, dedicated to and filled

with God. Contrary to now, then we were spiritually rich. What does that mean? They were able to serve our God and Creator in loving service, with all of our being, all of our strength, all of our might. We were able to purely serve our neighbor, in total self-denial, in love. We were able to manage the earth, and explore, and invent, and develop, and engineer without ever bringing discredit to our Creator. There was then absolutely nothing wrong in us. There was no bent to sin. There was no battle with temptations to be selfish, there were not these embarrassing filthy imaginations we would dare to share today. There was no inner weakness or flaws that would lead us to stumble despite our best efforts. We were spiritually rich. In contrast to that today, we are now radically poor. The Greek word that Jesus uses for poor is someone who is bankrupt, totally penniless, not just poor but nothing else anymore. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the bankrupt. Now how true is that description spiritually? We are indeed completely, spiritually destitute and needy. We lack every quality in ourselves to be right and to do right before God's all-seeing eye according to His standards. We cannot love God with all our heart, and all our mind, and all our strength, and every ounce of our being, at all times and in all situations. We don't love, we can't love every neighbor as we love ourselves in the same degree as Jesus loved even His enemies. We miss that ability to love. We also missed the ability to make things right between God and us. We simply do not have the righteousness anymore. All we try to be or to do before God fails to bridge the breach, as all falls short of the glory of God and the satisfying of the demands of His holiness and justice.

Before we look at the second half of this verse, let us pause for one moment. Imagine you are sitting in a doctor's office, and he rolls out the X-ray in front of you. He reads you the devastating report that it tells you. "You not only have cancer," he says, "you have cancer in every organ, in every muscle, in every nerve and all over your skin." As you are just trying to process this devastating truth sinking into your mind, and as you kind of sense the evidence of it in your body, imagine that your doctor says to you, "Well, my friend, you are a blessed man. Congratulations." Wouldn't you look a little bewildered at him? Wouldn't you feel the urge to run out of the office? At least, would not you raise your voice to reject his congratulations? That is kind of the essence of what Jesus did. "Blessed are you who are poor in spirit," and not only the poor in spirit, but those that mourn, are meek and hunger. Jesus calls you blessed when you are dealing with spiritual poverty, when you grieve and feel guilty, when there is a gnawing spiritual hunger. What is the point? Why would He call such blessed? Well, that is our second thought.

Why are you blessed if you feel or if you see you are poor in spirit? Now, let us be clear, to be spiritually poor, or to be poor in spirit, or to discover this spiritual bankruptcy, is not a blessing in itself. Jesus is not glorifying poverty. He is not relishing negative feelings. He didn't say either; and please keep it in mind in all of these statements, He didn't say you are blessed when you *feel* poor in spirit or you *feel* mournful or you *feel* hungry. Yes, feelings are reflected in these first four beatitudes, but they aren't sweet, they aren't exciting, they aren't comfortable. If you would only understand these statements from the feeling perspective, it will be impossible to understand why He calls such people blessed. Yet "blessed are the poor in spirit." He declares you are blessed if you are poor in spirit, as a fruit of a growing understanding of your spiritual and moral bankruptcy. There are three reasons why you are blessed.

The first one is because you bear one evidence of the saving work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. This poor in spirit beatitude isn't a fruit of some self-reflection. It's not a fruit of some mental depression, it's not just the negativity of mind. Though all of those above can bring a sense of need or poverty and sadness, none of them bring a sense of mourning and grief over the sins I did, or a meekness before God and others, or a hunger and thirst after righteousness of Jesus Christ. This poor in spirit beatitude is fruit of the Holy Spirit's saving ministry. Without His personal ministry in us, we remain spiritually blind to our own selves. We remain unconcerned about the condition we're in, unmoved. However, as a fruit of this saving touch of God, He's preparing our heart for greater blessings than humanity or the earth can ever give or reach out to us. It's His preparation

for what is coming next. This is the first reason *why* it's blessed.

The second reason why it's blessed is because it is through this discovery that the Holy Spirit leads us to the feet of Jesus Christ, the King of the kingdom. As Jesus Christ was preaching these beatitudes, He had many listeners who were very impressed. You will notice that every time in His messages, many came to listen. At the end of the sermon, we already heard, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:28–29). Jesus had many admirers who followed Him for days, weeks, months, yet at the end of most of this ministry, these admirers turned away, and the number became smaller and smaller. Finally they rejected Him. Why? It is because they never embraced the main purpose of Jesus' spiritual ministry. Many wanted Him simply to cast off the oppressive government systems. They wanted Him to take the lead, to take away the physical sicknesses. They wanted Him to make everyone healthy and wealthy, like in the days of David and Solomon. That was not Jesus' main ministry. His ministry on earth was not with that intention or that purpose. The angel announced to Joseph, in Matthew 1:21, about the coming of Jesus, "Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins"—from their wrong, from their unbelief, from all that evil that is in us and takes hold of us and is around us. The Holy Spirit's ministry, friends, is to glorify Jesus Christ. It is to make the Person of Jesus irresistible to your heart as the Physician of your soul, as the One who can bridge the gap between you and your Creator with His atoning blood, as the One who's able to provide us the perfect obedience and righteousness that we need. Will we stand in the presence of the almighty and holy God with a righteousness we don't have? We are spiritually bankrupt. To accomplish that, the Holy Spirit makes us aware of our real spiritual need, and the need of our radical poverty and inability to make amends and satisfy God's demands. It is His preparatory work to lead us to the feet of Jesus Christ and His cross. This painful awareness of our spiritual poverty makes you diligent to seek Him. It is going to make you diligent to inquire, "How can I be saved from this reality?" That is the preparatory attitude by which the Spirit makes us ready to come to Jesus Christ as the provision of the Father of heaven and earth to meet our needs.

Now, and lastly, the third reason why you are blessed when you are poor in spirit is the promise that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Talk about an astonishing truth to these spiritually destitute people who are bankrupt, humbled, broken about this lost and poor condition, unable to restore it! He says to *you* belongs the kingdom of heaven! That means everything that belongs to the kingdom of heaven is yours already and will be so forever. In other words, these poor in spirit are not poor at all. All the blessings, all the riches, all the security, the provision, the promises, the content of God's gracious redemption and His future kingdom belong to these already. In 2 Samuel 9, we read about King David. He brings a paralyzed and impoverished son of Jonathan to his palace, and David tells him when he's there in his palace, "Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and I will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually" (verse 7). Upon hearing that, Mephibosheth bowed before the king in stunned amazement. Now keep that picture in mind. Each born-again soul is like that paralyzed Mephibosheth, taken up by King David. Though in some ways you will be like Mephibosheth, you will remain spiritually poor in your own estimation about yourself all this life. Yet you are part of Jesus' kingdom of heaven already, you live on heaven's cost. As Paul writes, "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able" (Romans 8:38–39) to oust you out of that kingdom of heaven. Therefore, you are blessed.

In review of what we learned today, let me state two closing observations about this first beatitude. First, spiritual life, real spiritual life, is always accompanied with a convicting and a humbling sense of our spiritual poverty. The Spirit's saving ministry teaches us what John Newton, the old slave trader, saved by grace, the author of "Amazing Grace," once said quite powerfully,

“With regards to my salvation, I have nothing, I am nothing, I can do nothing, I can change nothing, I can give nothing.” I may add to it, and yet I have everything in Christ. That continually poor condition of spiritual poverty is what the Apostle Paul also experienced as he says, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death” (Romans 7:24). It remains with us all our life, but not beyond.

Secondly, the blessedness Jesus declares is not gauged in the feelings or experiences. While spiritual poverty is not a nice feeling, it is the common way that God uses to make our souls seek for the remedy in Jesus Christ. No one of us likes pain—physical pain—but while physical pain is no blessing in itself, yet it is a blessing, for it alerts us that there is some serious problem in your body that needs attention. Think of that when you think of this first beatitude. As Matthew Henry comments, “This poverty in spirit is a gracious disposition of the soul, whereby we are emptied of self in order to be filled with Christ.” Therefore, this conviction that we are nothing and void of all before our holy God is a foundational aspect of all spiritual growth.

May God bless this exposition of the first beatitude. Then we will be ready to move on to the next one, “Blessed are they that mourn.” Thank you, and may God bless you and make you a blessing.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #4

Blessed Are They That Mourn

Dear friends, I may welcome you to this fourth section of the study of the Beatitudes. As we've seen in the previous sections, Jesus' teaching is both profound yet simple. It is searching and yet comforting. Let's continue to seek the Lord's blessing on this portion of Scripture in our own hearts and lives.

The question I want to begin with is the question that Jesus actually ends the sermon with. What is a real Christian, and am I one of those? Now obviously that question implies that there are Christians that aren't real. That is definitely Jesus' own teaching at the end of this Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7. It's not an isolated fact either. No, listen to how Jesus speaks in Matthew 7:22, and He states a startling truth, a surprising truth. He says there in verse 22, "Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name have cast out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess"—Jesus speaking—"unto them, I never knew you." No relationship between you and me. That's what it is. "Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." That's a solemn conclusion. We must conclude from that, that knowing Christian truth, and teaching Christian lectures, or being involved in Christian ministry are not the ultimate litmus test of being a genuine Christian.

So then, where do we go to answer this searching question? The answer is back to the beginning of the sermon, Matthew 5:3–9, in which Jesus describes the answer in the Beatitude man. In that portion of Scripture, Jesus defines a true Christian, not by the amount of knowledge he has, but by the experiential knowledge or awareness of Biblical truth a person has in his or her own life. Now what do I mean with an experiential knowledge or awareness? That is when the heart and the true facts of God's truth, as given in both law and Gospel, affect us. They do something to us. They humble our heart. They change the direction of our life when they inspire different choices or stir up to unnatural action. An example of experiential awareness is what our children learn when they still touch the hot surface of the stove that you warned them not to touch. After that experiential touch, they have experiential knowledge of what *hot* means, and that will influence their choice, their action. I hold the view that, in the Beatitudes, God has given us the simplest, the clearest, the most searching, and yet also the most comforting answer on our question of what is now a real Christian. The Beatitudes, dear friends, is like a spiritual anatomy of the born-again soul or the regenerated heart.

After this introduction, let's now take a closer look at the second Beatitude under the same two headings as we looked at the first. What is the mourning that Jesus considers blessed—"Blessed are they that mourn"? Secondly, why are such mourners blessed – "for they shall be comforted?" "Blessed are they that mourn." What is this blessed mourning? Don't you see that Jesus' second Beatitude stands again completely perpendicular to how we think or how we feel? We would

call them that are happy, that are joyful, that are laughing, that are having a feast—we call them blessed. Generally, we like to shy away from sadness and mourning and grief, though Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 7:2, “It is better to go to the house of mourning”—to the funeral home. Let’s be honest, who likes funerals? Our Lord Jesus has no problem stating a startling truth in Luke 6:26, that is kind of connected to this Beatitude. He says, instead of blessed, “*woe* unto you that laugh now”—that are only thinking about the laughing—“for you shall mourn and weep.” Over against that stands these words of our second Beatitude, “Blessed are they that mourn.”

So that is why I’m asking that we think about this—what does Jesus mean in calling the mourners blessed? He’s not talking about the mourning and grief we feel when a loved one dies, or when our business goes bankrupt, or when I fail an important exam, or miss a beautiful opportunity. To be sad and to be grieving in such a case is, of course, totally normal and acceptable, but not a reason to call anyone blessed. Would you ever think of writing a card with the words—“Wow, what a blessed person you are for having lost your business or your spouse!” You wouldn’t ever think of saying something like that. Jesus is also not talking about the mourning and the grief that we sense when our pride gets hurt, when we make a total fool of ourselves, or when you get exposed about dishonesty or theft. That is also grief. That’s also a mourning; but that sadness is biblically called *worldly sorrow* and, according to 2 Corinthians 7:10, ends up in loss or in more death. It simply will not bless us if we don’t repent and return from the actions that may have caused that particular loss. No, Jesus is talking about a different mourning, friends. He’s talking about a mourning that flows from that first Beatitude, that flows from a discovery when we are spiritually destitute in the sight of God, to be and to do what we are meant to do and to be. This discovery of our spiritual condition, as spiritually lost or destitute or bankrupt, kindles a mourning or a grieving of the heart about that very reality. We will feel sadness when we see how we have dishonored God, how we have offended Him. Once we begin to realize how we have ruined His beautiful creation and are continuing to do that in ourselves and in our world, we will feel sad, and we notice that we don’t reach the mark for which we were created—to glorify Him, to praise Him, to serve Him. We will grieve when you begin to discover that everything you do is tinged with this self-idolatry. Pride enters so much in everything we do, it’s about I, me, and myself, so often. Seeing also how maybe our actions, or our words, or our attitudes offend, or pain, or wound others, now that brings grief, that brings a sorrow over the sin, over the wrong that is in it. Sin always hurts us in three ways. It first hurts ourselves. It hurts others. Above all, it hurts God, and it is this last aspect particularly, when we sin against a good-doing, wonderful, a lovely, a tender, compassionate and almighty God, that is where this mourning is most felt. This is the mourning in which you see the weeping or the tears of love.

I know there’s also in our Scripture that he’s talking about mourning rather than weeping. We all weep at times. How many of us have not gone to funerals where we are moved to weep as we see the loss of others and we share their loss to a certain extent. These are emotional tears that we share with them. Let’s be honest, they disappear rather quickly. After we have gone away from the funeral and from that scene, we move on. Who don’t move on? That’s the ones who go home to the empty home, who face the empty place, now that is when weeping becomes mourning. Now those who have buried a loved one miss their loved one, they mourn. So I always say that mourning usually begins when weeping stops, and that it becomes a condition in which you, in a person, grieve over a loss.

So that is our next question. What is then the ultimate cause of this ongoing mourning? “Blessed are they that mourn” is ongoing, and what is that? It is that constant discovery, that in me there is much that is not good. There are sins or sinfulness in a spiritually bankrupt condition that I face in various ways in my life, in my daily walk. This realization brings sorrow, that brings a sadness, that brings a grief, that brings a mourning. You go to the Bible, you find in Romans chapter 7 a man that I consider holy and good and sacrificial and a model of godliness. Yet he shares with us that

continual tug of the old man within him, that in moments of weakness and inattention, despite his best efforts, continues to be there, and that makes this mourning intense. For as we increase in the understanding of the raw facts of our fallen character, and we see the flaws in comparison to the great Captain of salvation, Jesus Christ, as we see His glory, as we contemplate on Jesus' glory, we mourn. For we compare ourselves, and we see envy of others in ourselves. We see discontent with the lot we are having, or we still meet with this inner covetousness, or this self-exalting principle, wanting to be in the first row and being on the pedestal. All of that is completely absent in the Lord Jesus Christ, as He completely moved Himself out of the picture all the time. Maybe you say, well, that doesn't quite square, this whole talk, with 1 John 3:9 when John writes, "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin." So why mourn? "For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." So how do we explain that with this ongoing mourning that Jesus speaks about? Well, that's a misunderstanding of John. John is not speaking at all about sinless perfection. He says indeed that new man doesn't sin, but there is still an old man living within us. So John points that out in chapter 1:8, when he writes to counterbalance the other verse, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." So instead, what John is teaching is that someone who is born-again will not live habitually and continually in the practice of a known sinful lifestyle or action, though it is true, and sadly true, that even the best of God's saints are not immune to falling into grievous sins.

One more question then, before we look at the comforts of this beautiful Beatitude. In 2 Corinthians 7:10, the Apostle Paul writes about two kinds of sorrow. He writes about the sorrow of the world, that leads to more loss and death, and the godly sorrow. Now, how can I be sure that *my* sorrow is this godly sorrow, this godly mourning? The answer is again by the simple and the sensible test that Jesus gave us in a principle in the end of this sermon—by the fruits, you shall know the tree. That really also applies to the godly sorrow. If your Bible is open to 2 Corinthians 7:10–11, notice what he says, "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort." Now, what did that do to you—the fruits? First – "What carefulness it wrought in you"—to make things right again. Secondly, "What clearing of yourselves"—what you did to purge it out or to reform it. Thirdly, "Yea what indignation." Indignation is a righteous anger against your own sin that you see and that you want to resist. Fourthly, "Yea, what fear"—fear of falling into sin again. Fifthly, "Yea, what vehement desire"—the desire to be kept from the temptations. Sixthly, "Yea, what zeal," not only for yourselves, but also for others, for as we see sin as offensive to the God you love and destructive to sinners, you will zealously do all to destroy sin. Seventh and last, "Yea, what revenge"—revenge against yourself for all what you have done wrong. Then he caps it off—he says, "In all things, you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." You've proven this godly sorrow.

Now a second evidence of this godly sorrow that confirms it to be genuine is that it is not a sporadic sorrow. It's a sorrow that continues, it's a sorrow that goes along with you all your life. In some way, it also increases, and the reason is because the presence of this old nature of sin remains within us as a reality. There's a battle between the flesh and the Spirit. As I already hinted that in Romans chapter 7, Paul confesses his own personal struggle with this inner corruption. He says simply, I cannot master or drive this away forever as I want to. He groaned under that reality. He panted, as it were, to be delivered from it. Other well-known words—Oh! the wretched indwelling sin, who shall deliver me from this, from this inability to cancel out my evil desires and evil imaginations and my pride and my selfish motivations?

Now our third evidence that confirms this to be a genuine mourning is that we not only mourn about the sins in ourselves. The real Beatitude man mourns about the sins he sees in others, he sees in the world around him, he sees in the church to which he may belong, he sees even in the saints of God. That is what makes him also mourn. You say, why would anyone mourn over the sin in others? It's not their problem. It is because the sins I see in others are sins done against Him whom

we love. If someone would touch your spouse or your child, and say bad things about them, or do bad things to them, you would feel sorrow, you would mourn, you would be angry even, but also grieve because you love them. So this, when we see others sin, we mourn as well about that.

So then, in conclusion, why is this mourning called *blessed*, especially because it's kind of bitter. It's kind of a constant reality. Jesus said before, and as I have already pointed out, these Beatitudes are rather startling. Why call a mourner a blessed person? The first is the same as the previous Beatitude. This is a second evidence confirming that there is a spiritual work of God going on in your heart. When we get a child born, we rejoice when the newborn child cries. Now, if you ask the newborn, he doesn't feel well when he cries, but we feel joy when the baby cries because we know that means his lungs are working. Now so spiritually, godly sorrow, spiritual mourning is a sign of life. It's not the basis of salvation. It's not salvation itself, but it's an evidence that God has begun a good work within you. For example, after God stopped the very vicious and angry Saul, persecuting the Christians, on the way to Damascus, He called Ananias to go there. The Lord convinced this hesitating and objecting Ananias to go visit this man with one short clip about Saul. He says to him, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). So likewise, God could have said, "Behold he weeps, he mourns about his sins." It is an evidence of a new life.

Now the second reason that Jesus calls His people blessed is because He says they shall be comforted. What God has begun He will also finish. The tears He has caused to flow in opening our minds to this ugly and painful reality of sin, He also will wipe away from our eyes by removing the *cause* of these tears and sorrows forever—that is sin. So how does God comfort us as we face this reality of our fallenness and of our inability and of our bankruptcy? That's the precious work of the Holy Spirit. One of His names is the Comforter, and His work is to comfort sinners in this grieving process. How does the Spirit comfort these spiritual mourners about their sins? He does that in three ways, first, by leading them to the promise and the truth of Jesus Christ. When the Holy Spirit enables us to rest our heart upon the Gospel truth of the finished work of Jesus Christ, we experience the comfort of the rest and of the hope. I see that His life that He lived as a sacrifice to God is a sufficient payment to the justice of God which I cannot satisfy; that He gave Himself as the Savior and the substitute on behalf of sinners; and that He invites me to come unto Him and to rest my life, my failures, my guilt and everything on Him with the promise that "whosoever"—no matter who you have been, no matter where you have been—that "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish" (John 3:16). My friend, *then* I experience comfort; I experience a security and joy and a hope.

The second way that the Holy Spirit comforts this mourner is when He leads us into truth of the reconciliation and the favor with God the Father through Christ. There's nothing more comforting, when the child that is hurting and feeling sorrowful about what he's done, to again feeling the loving embrace of his father and his mother reassuring him all is well. Likewise, there is nothing more comforting when, in the sorrowfulness of your soul, you begin to sense the loving embrace of God the Father, and you sense the deliverance from the spirit of fear and bondage that held you in some despair, and to be able to say "Abba, Father" and rejoice in Him.

Now, ultimately and thirdly, the fullest comfort is experienced when finally God will deliver these mourners from the presence of indwelling sin and out of the scene of sin when we are brought into the eternal glory. Nothing appears as a greater joy than to be free from sin forever, never again having to face the reality of sin and evil in myself and others—in my thoughts and in my words—never again to have to hear and to witness the utter disregard and dishonor done to the God we love. Now clearly these comforts, they are precious, and they are divine. It is truly God who needs to wound us to make us see the need for healing. So He wounds us in discovering us to ourselves, but He heals us in discovering and bringing us to Himself, as He opens His heart and grace and love and mercy.

So let us wrap this up with stating just one or two points in conclusion. First, don't make the

mistake to think that these spiritual mourners are people that walk with long faces, are depressed and unattractive people, depressed mindsets. No! The mourner can be a very jovial person, optimistic person, positive person, and yet within their heart there is this constant tear, the inner tears about the sins that he has committed or feels striving within or sees around him. Secondly, the closer you live to God, and the closer you aim to live to His glory, and the more you serve others, the more you will mourn over all that dishonors God either by yourself or by others. Therefore it may sound like an exaggeration; it is a poetic expression in Psalm 119:136, where the author says, “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes”—and why?—“because they keep not Thy law.” That then is the comfort that I may point to here at the end. There’s a world coming in which all this mourning will cease forever because sins have ceased forever. Revelation 7:17 reveals that “God shall wipe away all tears from” the eyes of the redeemed, not only the tears of our own actual sins, but there are also so many tears in eyes over the sins that others have done to you. There are now wounds and scars in your life that ooze with pain, also the sins we see others do in the world—it will be all over forever. What a delightful prospect, for then we shall truly be comforted. So may God bless these words and make us all a source of a real blessing to others. Thank you very much.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #5

Blessed Are the Meek

Dear friends, welcome again to the fifth session of our study of Jesus' teachings in Matthew 5:3–12. The passage known as the Beatitudes is one of the most amazing and, I believe also, needed portions of Scripture for us to study. There's a proverb that perhaps you know, that says, "all that shines is not gold." Now that truth also applies to Christianity. Not all who say they are Christians are, sadly, real Christians. The other side of the truth is also true—that not all real gold shines brightly, while it is still real gold. That also applies to believers. Some believers may not appear as golden to us, while, in God's eyes, they are His precious gems. So the third Beatitude will bring us face to face with one of the gemlike aspects of the born-again soul. "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." So to warm up our thinking, let me start with a statement and a question.

First, the statement—a meek man is your best neighbor, though he may challenge you the most. Now the question is, how can this statement be true? The best neighbor who may yet challenge me the most is true for two reasons. First, when this neighbor's own name or his own reputation or even his own rights are at stake, he is as meek as a lamb, and he will not insist on his own honor or on his own rights, if that would promote harmony and peace within your relationship. This meek neighbor will take the least place to become the most genuine peacemaker. However, watch out. His meekness is by no means weakness. He's no pushover. When God's name or God's reputation or God's rights are at stake, he is as bold as a lion and as immovable as an ox. He will challenge you as he stands strong on the convictions of the standards of God. So he is the best neighbor, yet he may challenge you the most. That introduces us to one of the most beautiful character traits of the citizen of the kingdom of Heaven. Jeffrey Wilson wrote about meekness, "Meekness is the mark of a man who has been mastered by God." Now where you see this meekness, you know that the person who possesses this quality dwells near to God, for this meekness that Jesus described is always a fruit of someone who is living in closeness and in the awareness of the great majesty of Heaven. God is great, and that greatness reflects itself in meekness in the person who lives near to Him.

So let's consider this third Beatitude as we did the first two, by merely asking two questions. First, what is this meekness that Jesus speaks of, and [second], why are such meek ones blessed? First, what is this meekness—"blessed are the meek"? As we work our way through these Beatitudes, you can see how interconnected these Beatitudes are, and you'll see that really beautifully in these first three. As I discover my personal poverty, the poor in spirit, my personal poverty in relationship to God and in the presence of God, as I discover that I am spiritually destitute, unable to change my condition, and that I cannot be before God what I ought to be—as a fruit of that—I experience the second, mourning. I feel sad, grieving about this sad condition which dishonors and grieves the God I love. Then upon further reflection, as the Holy Spirit's ministry is teaching me, I realize more and more that this condition of poverty is brought upon myself. It is a fruit of an action I took as we rebelled against God. We became poor and destitute and bankrupt when we caved into Satan's temptation, and we sold ourselves into his service, to do iniquity. So as fruit of that, we are now what we are—proud, boastful, arrogant, narcissistic, selfish, and even demanding. I demand my rights. No, especially this *demanding* mindset is the total opposite of meekness. The meekness that Jesus is teaching about is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It's a supernatural characteristic and is very often misunderstood

when we look at it from a human perspective. Biblical meekness is a strength. It is a great strength rather than a weakness, a feebleness of mind or spirit. The meek person is not someone who gives in easily, the meek person is not a pushover. Do not think of the meek person as a person who has no spine, who lives just to please everyone else, who just sacrifices and sacrifices rather than competing, a person who lets things happen, who everyone walks over. Such a characteristic indeed is weakness or dullness, and that's not at all the meekness Jesus speaks about. The meek person that Jesus here describes is someone who has learned to accept the natural consequences of his own doings with grace, with humility instead of fighting and self-justification. The meek person is a person who bows, a person who surrenders, who accepts the consequences of what he sowed in his life, no matter how bitter or painful it is. As we learn to see our spiritual condition as a fruit of our spiritual rebellion, so we learn by the Spirit's work to surrender ourselves before God, as a person who has no more rights—except the right to be punished for our wrongdoing, our sins.

Now to illustrate meekness, let's look at three examples in the Scripture to show you the beauty of this characteristic. The first one you find in Genesis 13:5–12, where we read about Abraham—Father Abraham. A quarrel arose between the shepherds in Abraham's tribe about grazing rights, between Abraham and Lot his nephew. Now Abraham had the right for the best grazing lands, for, first of all, he was the oldest of the two; secondly, he has been benefiting Lot by his gracious care for all the years already; and thirdly, God had given Abraham all the land by promise. When it came to this quarrel, Abraham gave up his rights. He allowed a younger Lot to choose first. Now, see, that's meekness, standing away from your rights in order to promote peace and harmony. That's meekness. The second example is Moses. We read of Moses in Acts 7:22 that he was a man "mighty in words and in deeds." He was a strong, fierce character. Yet later on, in Numbers 12:3 we read that "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." So what happened to this fierce Moses? How did he become so meek? This meekness was fruit of Moses's long and repeated encounters with God. He lived in God's nearness, and that transformed this fierce man into one of the meekest men on earth. One of the greatest moments of meekness is when Moses is ready to give up all his privileges and rights, even in the face of the utter failure and wickedness and ingratitude of the Jewish people he was leading to the land of promise. He was willing to give up his privilege to promote peace and harmony. Now thirdly, take David, the strong warrior king who fought many battles with wild beasts and giants. Yet in a very sad part of David's life, Nathan the prophet needs to confront this king with some of the darkest deeds a man can ever do. He murdered a faithful husband to cover up the cheating on his wife. Nathan confronts him with that sin. David bows without an objection before God, and he said this, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," and then he says, "that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest" (Psalm 51:4). Whatever Thou dost, I have no more rights before Thee and for any of Thy mercies. That's Biblical meekness. The meekness Jesus has in mind is therefore an attitude of heart—a *Be*-attitude—which flows from the awareness of the first Beatitude—my awareness of sin and guilt—as we face the truth of God's judgment upon what we have done wrong. So let it be clear to us all that this meekness is nothing of self-education, nothing of a natural characteristic. We are by nature not ready to give up our rights. Look at a little child as they grow up. They will fight, they'll bite to not give up their rights. None grow meekness also by just knowing yourself. Knowing yourself may grow depression and sadness. Do not mistake—a depressed person and a sad person, about his own choices, can still be proud and assertive about his own rights. A person who begins more and more to comprehend that his or her choices have offended, have dishonored or misrepresented his good and gracious God, now such a person will experience a growing meekness of heart. They'll step off their own pedestal, and they will bow before God, and to such, God can do no wrong anymore, even if He would pass them by with His grace and leave them in the mess that they themselves have created, even if He would cast them off forever. "Blessed are the meek."

Now this meekness as a fruit of the Spirit becomes a characteristic of the born-again soul. Therefore, this meekness is not only visible in our attitude of heart before God in relationship to Him. No, the beauty of this characteristic is, and we'll see that later in the next Beatitudes, but this meekness also becomes known in our attitude of heart before other men around us. Meekness is not that I will allow others to walk over me. No, I already said that meekness is *not*, I will never assert myself. That's not meekness, that's weakness. Instead, meekness is that I don't assert myself for every right I have, or that I will bear patiently an insult or an injustice *if* that would promote peace and harmony, *if* that would bring people back in the

right relationship with God or with myself or others. This meekness is the spirit that is willingly sacrificing the rights, our rights, if it serves God's cause and our neighbor's good. I'll give you one example out of the further teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:41. The Lord says there, "And whosoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him twain." Now this, of course, has an historical context. Imagine the surprise, when a battle-hardened Roman soldier, who compels you to carry his pack for one mile, which by Roman law he was allowed to compel you to do—imagine that, after that one mile, he looks into your kind face, and he hears you say, "My friend, though it is hot and though I am tired, I'll carry your pack for one more mile even though I don't need to do this." Doing that will show that battle-hardened soldier a strength he may not possess himself. It is the strength of meekness in which I give my rights to serve a neighbor. I give up my rights to serve a neighbor *even* if he is my enemy. So considering this meekness, I can see why Martin Luther said this kind of meekness is one of the rarest herbs among men. So before we now consider the blessing Jesus adds in this Beatitude, let me give one more evidence that this meekness is not natural and not a personality thing that some of us are born with, but it is definitely a fruit of the Spirit's ministry—someone, something that looks like Jesus. It's noteworthy that in all of Jesus' own ministry that is recorded, He has only *once* said something about His own character. Of course, we can see His character in His actions, in His ministry, which reveals Him in all His glory and beauty, but only once He said something directly about His own character. You find it in Matthew again, in Matthew 11:28–29, in which He directs us to His own meekness. Before I read that passage of Scripture, let me just remind you to whom He is speaking. He is speaking to sinners who are rejecting Him, who are offending Him, who are grieving Him and His Father, who are hostile to Him, who are disdainful of His Father, sinners who have destroyed His creation, sinners—men, women, boys and girls—all wasting the glorious things that God gives us and [has] given us. Now, to them He speaks in this verse, and He says, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . for I am meek and lowly in heart." Now don't you need that? He's not berating us, He's not berating us at all for the real reason why we are laboring, are heavy laden and are struggling in our life's journey. He's not rubbing it in by saying, "See, that's what you've got for doing what you have done!" No, no, instead of that, He warmly, He genuinely, He compassionately invites us to come to Him, and then He encourages us not to be afraid. He encourages us to overcome our timidity or shyness as we realize how unworthy we are, as you sometimes see in the eyes of a child, or you see in those who are guilty. Then He adds, "Come . . . for I am meek and lowly in heart." I've got no stones to cast, I am ready to receive you. I don't insist on My rights. I am willing to sacrifice Myself to make things well between you and God. Now isn't He an awesome and a glorious Lord? Isn't He worthy to know and to follow? Jesus is the real Peacemaker. You notice then how here the third Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek," is interconnected to the seventh Beatitude, the peacemaker—"they shall be called the children of God," and we'll see that in our next lectures.

So then why are such meek ones called blessed—our second question? Now, first of all, like all others, because this meekness is again an evidence of the Father's work in us, making us fit for a new world, for the inheriting of the kingdom of God. Let's not forget that not only do we need Christ's work on the cross to save us from the guilt that we have, we also need the Holy Spirit's work within us to save us from our sinfulness, for in that new society, there will not be fighting and destroying. There will be harmony and peace. We need to be prepared for that. Jesus' work was to provide the price to open the door to God, and the Spirit's work is to provide us the fitness for dwelling with God in eternal glory. So the second reason why "blessed are the meek"—"for they," as our promise says, "shall inherit the earth." Notice the word *inherit*. Inherit points to something you receive as a gift instead of wages you earned. Now this inheritance also is willed to you by the good will of the One who possessed what He gives us in the inheritance. So again, this receiving of the earth as an inheritance has nothing to do with us. It is not based on being meek or good or worthy. The Scriptures declare, from beginning to end, that God's gifts always flow from His sovereign, good, and gracious pleasure, not what we earned. One of the great occupations of eternal life will be the increasing marvel of why God, in this great, loving mercy, caused the lot to fall on them this inheritance, for they all will understand that this gift was *despite* of what we did and how we were and what we gave to God.

I'll secondly notice what they will inherit—the earth. That means the earth. Together, the redeemed humanity will again be given the earth as God's gift. You go back into the beginning of the Bible—Adam and Eve were given the earth to enjoy, to manage, to culturally develop, to beautify every part of God's creation, to be something similar to the garden that God planted Himself, called the Garden of Eden,

Paradise. It was a delightful task that we were given as mankind, to develop, and to engineer, and to invent, and to manage the resources that God has given, and to joyfully share the riches and the resources with one another. We all know how the entrance of sin has turned this earth in a scene of destruction and competition, oppression, violence, injustice, unfairness, and destructive exploitation. The promise is that the meek will inherit the earth. That's a brilliant and an exciting future. No, that will not be the earth in its current state. The Lord reveals in the Scripture that He will create a new Heaven and a new earth which will be filled with, and catch that word, *righteousness*, perfectness, holiness. This is the final act, and will be the final act of the Redeemer of Heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, once He returns upon this earth, and once He's finished preparing the new earth, as He finished preparing the first earth as we read of in Genesis 1 and 2. After He's finished with that, He will cause the meek to inherit this new earth. Consider the promise in 1 Peter 1:3–4, where Peter has also a beatitude, but this one about God, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you." So therefore, ye meek ones, be encouraged. Even though you will endure various forms of injustice, even though you may need to sacrifice, and you *will* sacrifice your rights from time to time for peace's sake, and though you will experience unfair setbacks and abuse, be reminded how Paul writes in Romans 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

So finally, are you having the same experience I have? The deeper I dig and have dug in these amazing statements of the Beatitudes, the more beauty and riches I find in this mine of Biblical truth. Friends, though we have no control over the Holy Spirit, like we have no control over the wind in the realm of nature, yet you have control over where you place yourself in the wind, you can go outside. So also, we can place ourselves in the wind of the Holy Spirit, where He blows, where He is active. Therefore, I encourage you to place yourself daily before your open Bible, take and read and hear and let the Spirit blow, and pray for the meekness. That is God's promise in Psalm 25:9, "The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way." So thank you for listening again. After this session, we are ready to listen to the heartbeat of the Beatitudes—"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." Thank you.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #6

Blessed Are They Which Do Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness

Welcome, dear friends, to our sixth section in the study of the Beatitudes. May God's Spirit continue to lead us, as well as to comfort or convict us, as we're listening to Jesus' teaching in this portion of Scripture. Let me begin with a well-established fact that is illustrated throughout all world history, and that is that Christianity isn't the only religion in our world. With religion, it is about the same as with cars. There are many models of cars, and so there are also many different models in religion. Now back to cars, no matter what model car you have, no matter how simple or how fancy, it is true that every car is actually very similar to the other ones. They all have wheels and axles. They have a motor and steering wheel, and, as I speak, all, most of them at least, still need a person to drive it. Now so it is with religion. In religion, all worship a god, some higher being, all hold to certain standards or moral codes. Most of them are occupied with seeking an answer on the question that is asked in Job 9:2, "How should man be just with God?" Among all these religions, Christianity isn't only unique, it is unapologetically exclusive in its answer that the question, as well as the morals, are the only ones. Listen to Jesus as He speaks it in one sentence, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). Now if you read that faithfully and carefully, He says there is no other way to approach God and to be reconciled with God than through Him. That's exclusive, unapologetically so. Jesus also taught that, no matter what you say or what you do or what you give, nothing matters more if it is not done in charity. He has incredibly high standard on this charity, as you can find in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Now charity is love, but it's a love that isn't based on the quality of the thing you love. Charity is the exercise of love as the result of a deliberate choice to love, even though the object you love is unworthy or unattractive. Although I would really desire to explore the matter of charity—this high moral quality of Christianity—I need to leave that; I need to focus on the question why Jesus claims exclusivity among all the varieties of religions. Why is He the only Name, the only Person "under Heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," as Peter claimed about Jesus in Acts 4:12.

Now the answer to this question brings us to the fourth Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." In the previous talk, I have drawn attention to the fact that Jesus' seven Beatitudes are carefully structured. You recall, hopefully, that I compared them to a person with a rib cage of six ribs, with a breastbone connecting in the middle—the fourth one, and then three on both sides. Let me add a different mental picture, and this is the picture of a fruit tree. The first three of the Beatitudes, compare those to the roots feeding into the trunk—poor, mourning, meek. The second set of the three are the fruit bearing branches

that come out of the trunk. That makes the fourth Beatitude a massive, solid tree trunk. That's the picture I would like you to have in mind as we look at this fourth one. Let me expand that, extend that picture of the tree a little. A sense of my spiritual poverty—the first Beatitude; the sense of my mourning over that sin—the second; and a sense of meekness, as I see God's majesty and justice, awakens in us a hunger and a thirst for deliverance, for a solution. That deliverance is provided in the word *righteousness*, and it is in the righteousness of Jesus. So then, the second set of the three Beatitudes (5, 6 and 7), are the fruit-bearing branches which grow out of the fourth one. As I see and as I taste the deliverance in the righteousness of Jesus, that will lead to the blossoming of a life of righteousness that is expressed in a devotional love to God and my neighbor. Jesus sketches these three aspects of devotion in being merciful, in being pure in heart, and in being a peacemaker.

So in examining this fourth vital sign of the spiritually regenerated soul, we will seek the answer on two basic questions we have asked in the previous Beatitudes. The questions are: [first], what is exactly meant with this hunger and thirst after righteousness? Secondly, then what is meant with this blessing that is attached to this hunger and to this thirst, for they shall be filled? So again, what is now the exact meaning of this hunger and thirst after righteousness that the Lord Jesus here pronounces? As we have seen before, Jesus didn't call you blessed simply because you were poor, or simply because you were sad, and here also, not simply because you are hungry or thirsty. Matter of fact, we're all in that condition already. We all long hungrily and thirsty for satisfaction. We hunger and thirst for an often lost and eluding happiness. We all long, no matter who you are, for a solid security in life and death. Every person longs for a fulfillment or satisfaction of the inner void that we carry within us. We desire to be like that infant who lays contentedly in the arms of his mother with a sense of peace. We long for that, we hunger for that. Yet to satisfy this hunger that is in all of us, most men religiously pursue something or someone to meet our inner need or to quench this raging thirst. In Isaiah 55:2, God addresses that humanness when He asked, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread?" It doesn't really feed you. Why do you "labor for that which satisfieth not? Now the ways we labor and we sweat in order to be satisfied, of course, differ greatly from one to another. Some people are pursuing that in material gain, but such gain will never hug you when you're lonely. It will not comfort you when you're in pain, all that material gain cannot buy you happiness, and it will not work to avoid death. Now others go a different direction to deal with this inner void. They labor hard to get rid of God idea. They like to live as if He doesn't exist, either because we can't figure Him out—it's too many contradictions, or we find it a useless mind game, or simply because God doesn't fit in our lifestyle. However, the majority of men get religious, and they force themselves into all kinds of religious exercises which are boring or often irksome or unexciting or even enslaving. Sadly, sometimes they even become cruel or violent, all with one purpose—to somehow find salvation, to somehow secure peace, somehow to escape maybe the fear of death and hell, or to somehow quiet the nagging conscience. We do all to secure the favor of God. In all these cases, it remains true—it's not real bread to feed us. All the labors, all the accomplishments, all the successes, all the acquisitions don't truly satisfy. There still remains an inner void or restlessness. Why is that? It's because none of those pursuits provide us what Jesus alone can provide us, and what we lost in our fall, and that's the word *righteousness* that He speaks about. So therefore, the blessedness Jesus speaks of is not just in being hungry or being thirsty—all of us have that—but the blessedness is in the *object* of this hunger and thirst—righteousness.

So then, what did Jesus mean with righteousness? The word righteousness is a key word in the Bible. It is mentioned over 280 times. The first time it's mentioned is Genesis chapter 15:6, in connection with Abraham. There we read, "And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness." Another passage [where] we find this word *righteousness* is a Psalm of David—Psalm 31:1—where David prayed, "In Thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in Thy righteousness." He points away from himself. In Psalm

71:16, he did the same thing when he says, “I will make mention of Thy righteousness, even of Thine only,” not his own. So the Old Testament already speaks about this word *righteousness*, and that carries out into the New Testament, but what does this word really mean?

Righteousness. My favorite definition is a very simple one. It means to be right and to do right. First, to be right means I will be the right person within my heart. I have the right condition in my heart. To be right means that I find within myself thoughts, motives, desires, imaginations or abilities that would be right according to God’s standard. So besides be right, it’s do right. To do right means that I would do all the right things, so I use my words, so I do actions or reactions, again according to the standard of God’s law. To be right and to do right can therefore be summed up with one other key word which is very much similar, the word *obedience*. Think of the words *righteousness* and *obedience* as similar words. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness”—after obedience.

To put it in perspective and to illustrate what Jesus is teaching in this Beatitude, let me ask you what you would fill in, in the blank of this statement: As water is to clouds, as heat is to sun, so happiness is to what? The answer is *obedience*. Happiness is obedience, obedience to the law of devotional loving God and my neighbor. Once you see how happiness and obedience or righteousness are married, you understand the deepest reason of the deep unhappiness or dissatisfaction found in us humans. If you see this connection between happiness and obedience, you understand why Jesus calls them *blessed* who have learned to hunger and to thirst, not for money, goods, status, position, but for righteousness, for obedience. The word *satisfaction* is in connection to this. In most of our minds, the word satisfaction is defined as having enough. Interestingly, in the Latin root of that word, satisfaction does not mean having enough, it means doing enough, and this little tidbit of language study is a key to understanding the fourth Beatitude. Someone who is hungry and thirsty is not satisfied. When will he be satisfied? Not when he *has* enough, but when he *does* enough, when he does enough to answer the original purpose for which we were created—to glorify God, to love Him, to serve Him and to serve our fellow creatures in devotional love. That *doing enough* is to be right and to do right, that *doing enough* is righteousness and is the key to true happiness. To say it in another way, only when I live in perfect righteousness before God and with all my fellow creatures, will I again experience what Paradise was before sin broke it apart. Can you see now how deep-seated our problem is? Can you see that, since we are spiritually poor, we’re destitute or bankrupt in being right and doing right, that we are lost, that we are doomed to be in a life that will never, never satisfy. Why? Because we aren’t righteous. We can’t be righteous or, to say it simpler, I can’t be and I can’t do what is right in the eyes of God.

Now that brings us back to the fourth Beatitude. What does it mean that someone is hungry and thirsty for righteousness? It means obviously that this person doesn’t find righteousness within him or herself. You know you are hungry and thirsty when your stomach is empty. You can’t fill that with yourself—you need that outside of you. So the person that Jesus is here describing as the blessed person, is a person who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness he obviously doesn’t possess. He doesn’t find it in himself. He can’t produce it either. You cannot just fill your own stomach with yourself. Did this person try to be right and to do right in themselves first? Well, undoubtedly, we all do that at first. Once we discover that we are not what we are to be, and not do what we do, we try to polish ourselves up. We try to change, we try to make ourselves acceptable to God by our doing or by our undoing, by our thinking, by our inner being. Yet, as the Holy Spirit opens up your eyes, you learn what Scripture says elsewhere, that our best is still filthy in God’s sight (Isaiah 64:6). Why? because God looks deeper than the outside. He sees us fall short of the perfection that is in God, and that we once were able to love in perfection. That discovery [that] it all falls short of being perfect in righteousness creates this intense hunger and thirst.

So then secondly, why is this a blessing to experience this kind of hunger and thirst after righteousness? Now that question is even more urgent when we learn to see the meaning of the

original Greek for hunger and thirst. Jesus is here not describing a healthy, normal appetite or thirst. No, the hunger is painful hunger. The word thirst is parched thirst. Those are the words He describes here. Now, why would you call that condition blessed? Now again, as in before, this kind of hunger and thirst for righteousness is not a natural hunger. As in all Beatitudes, again this hunger and thirst for the righteousness is a fruit of the Spirit's saving work. Secondly, this hunger and thirst for righteousness, the Holy Spirit uses to lead us to Jesus Christ. Let's just for a moment ask the question, Who is Jesus Christ? I'll let you hear the answer from Jeremiah 23:6, where it says He is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." That Scripture speaks prophetically about the Lord Jesus Christ as being the Lord *our* righteousness. As Jesus was born, He was sinless. As He lived His life—as you can see in the biographies of the Bible—He lived a sinless life. He was continually declared innocent. In other words, He was right, sinless—He did right. He is the Righteous One, the only One. In Him, God the Father provided a perfect Savior, exactly suitable to what we need. Friends, what God requires from us—to be right, to do right—He provided in Jesus our righteousness. To say it simply, in Jesus Christ, God provided us the *enough being* and *enough doing*. Jesus did enough in His life to provide the required obedience to live with God forever. Jesus did enough in His suffering and in His death to provide the required obedience that would pay the ransom price we owe God. As J. C. Ryle put it in one brilliant, short sentence, "Our salvation is in Jesus' doing and dying, and in both He did enough; and on basis of His righteousness, we can be reconciled to God and be received in God's eternal embrace, without Him ever lowering His standards of justice and holiness."

Now, can you see how this hunger and thirst after Jesus Christ is like the heartbeat of the new creature? Friends, it is good to have a sense of your spiritual poverty. It is good to be humbled about it. It is totally fitting to mourn over your sins, as you see the loss you've caused. It is also proper to be meek before God. Yet poverty, sadness, meekness, will not save you; it doesn't pay for the guilt against a broken law. It doesn't restore God's honor. It doesn't wipe away guilt. It doesn't satisfy the charge against us of holy justice. It is only the righteousness of Jesus Christ, received by faith, that will put you right before God. Blessed is he that hungers and thirsts after righteousness provided and seen in Jesus Christ.

Now be sure to hear what Jesus says. Even if your faith doesn't come any further at this moment than a hunger and a thirst for righteousness that is provided in Jesus Christ, you are blessed already. That brings me to my third and final reason why He calls you blessed—"they shall be filled." Your hunger and thirst after righteousness will not always remain—"they shall be filled." Jesus' original wording in the Greek is very strong again. He says they shall be fully satisfied or saturated. That means every need that we feel now, in this *not being righteous*, shall be met, every hunger pain for righteousness shall be filled. All our unrighteousness, our unfitness, will be covered in the sight of God by Jesus' righteousness, like a garment covers my body. All our unrighteousness, every lack of being right and of doing right, will be completely removed, for we shall all be made like unto Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. Psalm 89:15–16, in a brilliant way, states this promise in a different beatitude. Here it is, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound" of this Gospel and believe it. "They shall walk, O LORD, in the light of Thy countenance (that means "in Thy favor"). In Thy name (the name of Jesus) they shall rejoice all the day." Then, here it comes, "and in Thy righteousness (Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' doing enough) they shall be exalted." "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

I have a couple questions to conclude. Do you know this type of hunger and thirst? I mean this hunger and thirst after righteousness, after being like Jesus, after being conformed in the image of God. If you do, you are blessed man or woman. Now is this lack of your righteousness that you can't find in yourself bringing a certain sense of despair about yourself and about your self salvation? How blessed is this if this leads you to look and to depend on Jesus Christ only. Thirdly, has the Spirit begun to open your mind to the Gospel of Jesus, that in Him, God provides

us the righteousness and the obedience we need? How blessed you are, for if God created in you this hunger and thirst after Jesus Christ and Him the righteousness, He will surely satisfy you. So is His promise. So may God bless this message and again make us a blessing to others as we share His glorious truth. Thank you.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #7

Blessed Are the Merciful

Dear friends, welcome to our next study of the Beatitudes as they are given by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:3–12. Today we will consider the fifth Beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” May we all be as Mary, sitting at Jesus’ feet, to hear what He has to say to us in this Beatitude. In the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated a simple but very effective truth with which I want to begin. He says later in Matthew 7:17–18 [that] by the fruit you shall know a tree. Now that’s not only true about trees, but it’s also about people in general and about believers in the kingdom of Jesus Christ. How you act, both in public but mostly in private, reveals who you really are. James, building on this principle of Jesus Christ, applies that also to faith in James 2:17. He writes there, “Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead being alone.” So again, by the fruits you shall know the tree. Why do I begin the study of the fifth Beatitude with drawing your attention to the fruit of faith? It’s because in the fifth Beatitude, the Lord Jesus changes His focus slightly in the description of the new man—the man of His kingdom. In the first four [Beatitudes], the poor in spirit, the mourning, and the meek and also somewhat in that fourth one, the hunger and thirst, Jesus is highlighting the inner exercises and the attitudes of the heart. As I said before, claiming to be a Christian without finding these experiential matters within your heart is as baseless as claiming to be a musician simply because you own a piano. So in the last three Beatitudes, the Master draws attention to the *outward* fruits of holiness.

Now these outward fruits, of course, must not be separated from an inward root, an inner attitude, but these three last ones certainly have a much more outward dimension. In other words, because a person is merciful, therefore he acts in mercy. The heart is merciful; therefore the fruit is mercy. It is therefore groundless to claim to partake in the heart-renewing ministry of the Holy Spirit when there is not a transformation of our heart that flows over in our walk and talk, the evidence of a life of holiness. So let me highlight therefore, at the beginning of this lecture, a most fundamental doctrine of the work of salvation through Jesus Christ, and that doctrine is the union of Jesus Christ with believers. Over 100 times the New Testament emphasizes the union of the two. Probably the clearest and most easy picture of that is the vine with the branches in John 15. To be born again is to be like an engrafted dead and barren branch into the living vine, Jesus Christ. That act of God is the beginning of the new life. It’s a sovereign act. It’s a gracious act of a powerful God. That’s something we have as little control over as our own natural conception. The fruit of this union with Christ is that we all change, and that change is that we more and more will begin to look and to act and to speak and, deeper, to think like Jesus Christ. Maybe in this connection I may refer to a missionary story I read the other day. It’s about a missionary who preached among the African natives. As this preacher was preaching about Jesus Christ, the African natives responded excitedly with, “We know Him, we know Him!” This perplexed the missionary. “Why do you

know Him? How do you know Him?” Upon enquiry how they did know Him, they answered this: “As you preached Jesus Christ, we remember the doctor who worked among us for years. He was very much matching the description you gave of Jesus Christ.” That’s the point, union with Christ will transform us. Now this transformation isn’t an instant thing. It’s a gradual, lifelong growing in which Jesus Christ Himself will, through His Spirit, bring His own work to perfection, for each believer, each Beatitude man or woman, boy or girl, is the workmanship of Jesus Christ; and what He has begun, He will finish perfectly. That’s why the doxology in the last verses of Jude’s epistle (vs. 24–25) are very comforting. He says, “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” Now why is that so comforting? It’s because every one of these Beatitude people, in their own estimation, if you ask them, they make barely a beginning, they feel, in the life and walk of holiness or Christ likeness. But if there is a beginning, then what is that beginning? Now the next three Beatitudes answer that question, as Jesus has chosen three marks that identify this beginning of the transformation of a life.

So in this fifth Beatitude, we will focus again a little differently than the others—first, on the heart of mercy, then on the hand of mercy, and thirdly, the promise to the merciful. So first, let’s consider the heart of mercy, “Blessed are the merciful.” In Luke chapter 6:36, Jesus directed His disciples with this command, “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” So what is implied in that statement is that the Father is merciful. Now mercy is a revelation of God’s innermost being of love. Friends, God is essentially love, He’s not just lovely. He *is* love, that is His essence, and this glory of God is a major theme in the whole of the Scriptures. Biblical experts tell us that there are over a thousand different forms or emphases of the word “love” found in the Scriptures, such as love, of course, and loving and lovingkindness, and grace, mercy, goodness, kindness—those are all words related to this love. If you listen to Jesus’ words in John 14:17, His last words on earth, He uses the word “love” 33 times in that passage.

As you page through the Scriptures, you’ll notice how the Bible authors, inspired by the Spirit, added the most beautiful adjectives to the adorable attribute of love in God. Some of those are great or plenteous or tender or abundant, or from everlasting, or unspeakable love, or infinite—all to emphasize this glory of God’s love. Now, often we use the words “mercy” and “grace” interchangeably, and that’s not correct. There’s a distinction. Though both are the revelations of God’s love, mercy and grace are not exactly the same. They are the same in that both grace and mercy are completely undeserved and unmerited from our side, but they’re also different. God’s grace is His goodness to those who are guilty—grace/guilty. God’s mercy is His goodness to those who are miserable or needy. That’s the difference. They’re both goodness but with a different object; one is the guilty given grace, the other is the miserable and needy given mercy. So therefore, mercy in the Scriptures is more often correctly associated with compassion, with kindness, with tenderness, with pity. For example, take the one great key passage about God’s character in Exodus 34:5–7. It is an answer that God gives to Moses, who pleaded with God, please “show me Thy glory,” Lord, let me see Thee. God answered that, not with seeing, but with hearing something. He gave a sermon on His own name. Now notice what is first in this very glorious description of God’s glory in His own words. God opened His sermon with the attribute of mercy. Here are the words from Exodus: “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful (first one) and gracious,” and then He continues on with all the other glorious attributes of Himself, exemplifying His mercy, His holiness. Let’s for a moment walk alongside with Jesus in His last weeks of His life and on the way to the cross. Notice His emphasis on mercy, on compassion when He sees the misery, the needy people around Him. First thing He shows of that mercy is when He sees the city of Jerusalem. He begins to sob—He wept seeing the city that soon would experience deep misery. The Savior is moved with compassion. Then on the way to the

cross, as He's hauling that cross, He sees the women weeping, weeping for Him, and He stops, and He tells them "don't weep for Me, weep for yourselves, and weep for your children." He's moved with compassion to others. As they finally nail Him to the cross and lift Him on that painful cross, hear His mercy as He prays, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). So [was] His mercy, His compassion, His kindness; and fail not to notice that in all these instances, He is moved with compassion or mercy toward people that are hostile or people that are hurting Him or hurting themselves.

Now all this leads us to one conclusion. As Thomas Watson says somewhere in his writing, "Mercy is the darling attribute of God," or the attribute closest to His heart. Now what happens? When we are united to Jesus Christ in the act of [being] engrafted as the branch into the vine, or regeneration, what happens? The Spirit of God begins to dwell within us. As fruit of that, we become partaker of the divine nature. We begin to show a likeness to our Heavenly Father, who has compassion and mercy in His heart, and now we will have that in our heart. Friends, saving grace is *always* transforming, it transforms our character. It will fill us with a merciful, compassionate tenderness to others; that is the visible, the sensible, the touchable side of salvation. So that's the heart of mercy.

Let's now consider the hand of mercy. Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful." He's not just calling attention to our *heart* of mercy. He's here speaking about the *act* or the hand of mercy. "Blessed are they that *are* merciful," that begin to manifest this mercy in their walking, in their talking, of their daily life in relationship to others. Now the more you reflect on how God stooped down to our wretched and needy condition, the more we reflect on how He spared not His Son the incredible, immeasurable death of the cross, to open the way to show and exercise mercy to us; the more you reflect on how He gave you the gift of faith in His provision of righteousness, the more you are going to ask this question, "Lord, what can I do? What can I do back? What can I render for such great benefits that Thou hast showed toward me? What can I do for Thee?" Now God's answer dovetails exactly with the inner design that is glowing within us. He says, "Be ye merciful." Not only in your heart, have these feelings of compassion, but be merciful in your hand, in your deed, in your actions, as your Father in Heaven is merciful.

Let's use just a few examples of this merciful or compassionate Beatitude in action, and now you can see why such a person is a blessed person. I think again of Moses, the great leader of the Israelites through the wilderness. He was moved with compassion in Exodus 32:31. The context of that moment is incredible. Israel did it—did what?—they committed adultery on their honeymoon. The sounds of Sinai have hardly died down, and they're dancing around a golden calf, and substituting that for the God who spoke to them and brought them out of Egypt. Understandably, God is angry. God says to Moses, "Moses, I'm ready to wipe these people off the earth." Instead of Moses saying, "Good, Lord, I agree," Moses falls on his knees, though he's livid with the people for what they have done, and he offers this amazing plea to God. Here it is he says, "This people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin," and he stops. "And if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written." That's a striking example of mercy. Moses was moved with the wretched future of Israel, and he is willing to endure anything that this people may be spared. "Blessed are the merciful." Let me give you another example in Jesus' ministry of the hand of mercy as found in Luke 10. Jesus is dealing with a very self-justifying lawyer who is asking Jesus finally a question again in the sense of justifying himself with "who is my neighbor?" That's the question, you can read it yourself in Luke 10. Jesus then gives the parable of the good Samaritan. He draws attention to one of the most despised neighbors of the Jews, the Samaritans. In this story, He makes the priest, the Levite (the church leaders) walk past a wounded traveler dying of his wounds. He makes the good Samaritan stop, risk his life, sacrifice his time and money to show mercy to a stranger. That's mercy. The last example of mercy is Deacon Stephen. While stoned to death out of hostility by the Jews, he

pleaded with God, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60). Now though his clothes are showing more and more the stains of blood of the stones thrown at him, his attitude of heart was more and more merciful as he dies. That is merciful. Jesus says, “Blessed are the merciful.” These people are the people who want to share the Gospel with family and friends, with neighbors, with coworkers. Why? Because they’ve experienced the mercy of God in their own wrecked lives, and they want to share it. Why does the merciful do this? Why do they want to share what they have experienced with others? I’ll let Thomas Watson answer us as he beautifully comments, “God’s salvation birthed tenderness in us, and as it melts the heart in a godly sorrow towards God, so it melts the callous and the selfish hearts in feelings and desires of compassion toward others.” Therefore it is vain to claim to be a Christian, a Beatitude man or woman, to belong to Jesus Christ, when there is no compassion with those who live a wretched life of misery and poverty and injustice. If we can pass them by as the Levite and the priest did, then we don’t know God. John wrote in 1 John 3:17, this very litmus test of spirituality, “Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?”

So then thirdly, let’s look at the promise of mercy. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” In no way is the Lord Jesus here teaching that salvation is somewhat based on being merciful to others, [as though] you are merciful, and *therefore* you will obtain mercy. That thinking would totally contradict the entire message of the Gospel of grace. Listen to Ephesians 2:8, where Paul says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;” not only the faith but the grace to salvation, it is all gift of God—nothing earned. So even our best works of mercy, if God would look at them through the standards of His perfection, then they’re not perfect. They’re not pure from sinful motivations or from proudful reflections. Therefore, according to God’s holy standard, even our best mercies fall short, and therefore can never be the basis for obtaining mercy or grace. That would contradict the entire Gospel message. What the Lord Jesus is teaching is a beautiful principle in the kingdom of God. It is the principle, worded in Psalm 19:11, that “in the keeping of them [His commandments] there is a great reward.” Jesus promises that the ones who act out mercy in unconditional love, or in sacrificial love, or in a non-judgmental love, they shall obtain mercy. That’s the simple Biblical principle—what you reap, that is what you sow. For example, in Proverbs 11:25, “The liberal (that means the generous) soul shall be made fat (shall be increased): and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.” Second Corinthians 9:6 emphasizes also this principle [that] what we sow, we shall reap. Paul writes there, “But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall also reap bountifully.” Once more, in Galatians 6:7–8, Paul writes to the Galatians, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh (in the interest of himself and of his own life) shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit (spiritually focused on serving and loving devotionally) shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Friends, we all can see that connection. If I am unmerciful, what do I reap? I reap distance, I reap coldness, I reap bitterness. But if I am merciful, and I sow that in my action, I will reap joy and peace and harmony and closeness. See how “blessed are the merciful” in that way, as they sow mercy, they are getting the return of mercy. “They shall obtain mercy”, and not only in our relationship with others, but they shall also obtain mercy in a closer walk and communion with God, for in the keeping of God’s commandments there is an exceeding great reward.

One of the chiefest of the rewards is the presence and comfort of the Holy Spirit, living and manifesting the glory of God to us. Again, if I may quote Thomas Watson, he says, “You shall be overpaid with overplus; for a wedge of gold which you have parted with, you shall have a weight of glory.” He says, “For a cup of cold water, you shall have the rivers of God’s pleasures which run at God’s right hand forevermore.” You will say, why then did Jesus not say that they

shall be *rewarded* with mercy? Instead, He says, “they shall *obtain* mercy.” He doesn’t use the word reward in this Beatitude. That is to assure and to comfort His people of a graciousness in the promise. When His people consider their own works of mercy, they see their own failings, they see their own shortcomings, for who can show mercy and perfection? Who can be totally genuine and pure? Who can be totally God-focused in the exercise of mercy? Therefore, to comfort also His followers, His disciples, that even though they face their own imperfections in all what they do in the exercise of mercy, Jesus reassures them, “Blessed are the merciful”—even if it’s not perfect—“for they shall obtain mercy.” That’s why the great Puritan Thomas Watson, which I have quoted several times in this contribution, is so correct when he said, “Those are best prepared to obtain the greatest mercies that see themselves unworthy of the least.” “Blessed are the merciful.” Well, may God bless these teachings and comfort us with His gracious love. Thank you very much.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #8

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Dear friends, welcome again. I'm really delighted to present to you the sixth Beatitude in this part of our studies of Jesus' words in Matthew 5:2–12. I pray that each reflection that we have given to this majestic opening of the Sermon on the Mount may have done at least two things to you. First of all, comfort, as you recognize the workmanship of Jesus Christ in your own heart and life, for that was the intent of this “blessed are.” However, you see many imperfections, and let not these imperfections in how you experience to live out these Beatitudes rob you of the comfort Jesus is giving in these words. God's promise is that He will finish the good work He has begun in you, He will perform it and complete it in the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6). So let that comfort you. However, it may also [be] that listening to this may have discomfited you—discomfited if you are comparing yourself to these Beatitudes, and you must conclude you are not prepared for the kingdom of God because you miss these essential characteristics in your person. This is what Jesus was teaching to Nicodemus, a Jewish leader of high standard and well liked, but He said to him, Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot enter (or he cannot see or enjoy) the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Notice Jesus didn't say you *may not* enter the kingdom, but you *cannot* enter. Think of a fish. He is at home in the water. He's not prepared to live in your beautiful flower garden laying in a comfortable lawn chair. He's out of its place. So the unregenerate person is not prepared to live in the glory of God's kingdom *unless* we are born again from above. So Jesus teaches. So if you miss this [being] born again, seek that new birth, give heed to the Word of God. Place yourself where the Spirit of God is at work through His Word.

Before we consider in detail the sixth Beatitude, let me draw your attention for a moment to something that is very private—your inner being. I am sure that even if you know yourself a little, you know there are thoughts in us. There are imaginations brewing in us, or there are sometimes feelings that we rather don't publish for every eye to see. The reason is clear—there are sometimes thoughts that are very evil, that are very impure—adulteries, or even murders, wishing someone bad, wicked thoughts, wicked imaginations or very proud—though we try to sound humble. We like to hide that, but we can't cancel that. Please do not think that if you recognize this, you're an exceptional or an isolated case—that's not it—but even that doesn't make it less ugly. What is so touching [is that] the Beatitude people don't deny this reality. They don't want to flower this up or minimize it. No, they do hate it. They do mourn it. They resist it, they want to flee it, and they desire daily to be godly like Jesus Christ. So if that is in us, where does this inner drive and this inner warfare against sin come from? Friends, that comes from the One to whom the believer is united. It comes from Jesus Christ and through His Spirit. Ephesians 2:10 says we are the workmanship of Jesus Christ, “created...unto good works,” and exactly this wanting to walk in a God-honoring life, that is the sum of the sixth Beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

So let us look at what Jesus says here and examine the blessing of being pure in heart. What is that exactly to be *pure* in heart? Secondly, what is the promise that He gives, “for they shall see God”? What is it to be pure in heart? Let’s first take a note at the grammar of this sentence that may already relieve a troubled heart reading this Beatitude. Notice what Jesus didn’t say. He didn’t say, “Blessed are the pure *of* heart.” To be pure *of* heart, which also will be meaning we are pure *in* heart, that was our condition before we fell, when God created us perfectly. Then our hearts were like a fountain of purity, out of which streamed thoughts of purity, motives of purity, love that was pure. This *pure of heart* is the condition of the unfallen angels that are surrounding God’s throne. It is already the condition of the souls of the redeemed who have moved from grace here to glory hereafter. They are pure altogether *of* heart and *in* heart. This was also the condition of our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect, undefiled, sinless Son of man. Friends, He was pure *of* heart, perfect, and pure *in* heart—all that flowed out of Him was pure. Therefore, it is Jesus Christ alone who could answer the requirements that are listed in Psalm 24:3–5. There’s a question there, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation.” So this misreading of the sixth Beatitude has caused many sincere hearts to be deeply troubled. Let’s not forget that to be born again is not to have a perfected heart. That is not until we move from grace to glory. Within each regenerated person will, to the last breath on this earth, be a spiritual warfare of the flesh against the Spirit. The old indwelling nature, friends, that is the old indwelling sin, is not regenerated, is not born again, is not changed or converted. Besides this reality of the old man, there is born a new principle of life within the heart, and this new part delights in the law of God after the inner man. This is the one that hungers and mourns and is meek. This is the one that delights in holiness. This is the one that strives to be perfect in love. The Apostle Paul puts it all together perfectly in Romans 7, and he concludes (in verse 25), “So then with the mind (my renewed mind) I myself serve the law of God (in devotional love to Him and others); but with the flesh the law of sin.” There is the battle. So we will therefore not be pure *of* heart till we are completely freed from the old heart. The Apostle Paul again in Philippians 3:10 confesses this spiritual desire as well as battle when he says, “And that I may know Him (Jesus), and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death,” that all that old man is dead and gone. So, please, let it be clear to us all, here spoke a man, the Apostle Paul, who was pure in heart, and yet he admitted that still he wasn’t pure of heart.

So what does it mean to be pure in heart? The word *pure* is best defined first by comparing it with three Scriptures, which use this similar word, the pure. In 1 Timothy 1:15, Paul writes to his young spiritual son, “Now the end of the commandment is charity (love) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” Now pure in that sense means sincere, upright. Again in 2 Timothy 1:3, Paul wrote about serving God “with pure conscience,” an upright conscience. Paul even had that conscience before he was converted, when he was genuine (though he was wrong), living by his conscience. It was erring but still genuine, pure, sincere. In James 1:27, James also used the word *pure*: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows.” Now again, friends, that can’t mean sinless religion. That is not there. It means an upright and sincere and devoted religion. So let’s look at seven brief comments about the pure in heart to expound this more clearly. First, the pure in heart are those whose heart—that is, your inner person, your mind, your will, your affections—are sincere in their desire or their aim to live to God’s glory. Wherever you find these pure in heart, in no matter what culture or age of the world, they all breathe in essence the prayer of Psalm 86:11. What’s that say? “Teach me Thy way, O LORD; and I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart (with one focus) to fear (esteem, to love) Thy name.”

Now secondly, the pure and heart will never deny that their sinful flesh is still present. They

don't deny a lack of good and holy thoughts. They don't deny the presence of covetousness or discontent. As Arthur Pink comments, "The heaviest burden of the pure in heart is the discovery that there is still an ocean of unclean waters indwelling in him." That's how the pure in heart thinks and speaks.

Now thirdly, the pure in heart take this matter to the Lord. They're honest in their confessions and petitions. Listen to David, how honest is he. He says, Lord, "incline my heart unto Thy testimonies (unto Thy Word) and not to covetousness" (Psalm 119:36). Please, Lord, turn my eyes away from the vanities [as] he is still thrilled with some of those things. He says, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust (it clings to the earthly): quicken Thou me (make me alive) according to Thy Word" (Psalm 119:25).

Fourthly, the pure in heart pursue holiness or Christ likeness in all their life, and this pursuit is most of all personal, because the pure in heart see within their own heart so much that is still wrong, so much impurity in their motives, in their words or actions. Maybe you say, well, how then, what are the impurities they observe? Well, let's just look at this for a moment—all the impurity, of the shallowness, the fickleness, the partiality of our devotion in our love to God and love to our neighbor, in contrast to the steadfast and the pure and the genuine love we see in Jesus.

Now fifthly, the pure in heart also do all to walk separately from all that is impure and unholy. As they see the dishonor done to God their Father and to the Lord their Savior, they shrink from any unnecessary association with the impure of the world. They daily [strive], and yet often fail, to have a conscience void of offense, yet they strive for it all day. Richard Sibbes makes this comment, he says, "If the company doesn't stir us, it will taint us, unless we are put upon them in our daily callings," [which is] unavoidable, of course; but he says we should make a special choice in our company and walk in continual watchfulness. See, that's the intent of the pure in heart.

Now sixthly, the pure in heart will not only fight against every sin in their own life and heart. No, they go beyond that, they will also do all to purify others—their family members, their friends, their co-workers, they'll do all to promote an environment of love and purity in where they work or where they live, in their neighborhoods, in the nations in which they live. So in that effort, they'll do all to promote holiness in others, and in that effort to promote, they reveal the sincerity of their heart. Indeed a hypocrite may be exercised to a certain extent with his or her own sin, because they know how that eventually may affect them; but they will not really be exercised with the sins they see in others, for there's no real love for God and the souls of others in their heart.

Then lastly, the pure in heart are such who increasingly sense the need and to make use of the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. The purest in heart are those whose hearts reach forth, like the Apostle Paul, to Jesus Christ. In Philippians 3:9, you can read the intensity of the pure in heart in Paul's need for Jesus. This is how he puts it: he says, "And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness (my own purity, my own law work), which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Then he concludes this portion in Philippians 3, with the admission and confession, and here we have a wholly pure-in-heart man speaking—he says, I "look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change [my] vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (vs. 20–21). Paul himself could never reach the goal of perfection, of perfect purity. Therefore, he looked daily to Jesus Christ who is able even to subdue all the corruptions by completely transforming His believing people.

So far then, looking at the pure in heart, please take heed that Jesus proclaims us already blessed when we are pure *in* heart even though we are not pure *of* heart, and that's because this purity in heart, expressed in these longings and these wrestlings, is a fruit of being united to Jesus Christ and having the Spirit dwell within you. How will that be evident? Well, it's like when new owners move into a house. The house will be cleaned and emptied of all the old furniture and junk that was left. Finally, the new house will be fixed up and will be restored, and new furniture will come to sit in the house. Now that's the picture of God's work. When God's Spirit makes

His residence in our heart, He begins to clean house, and He begins to restock the house with the graces and the virtues of godliness as we see in Jesus Christ. So let us then conclude with asking what is the promise Jesus declares to such pure in heart? The promise is, they shall see God. *See God*. That promise is not only true for the life hereafter, that's also for the life here on earth. Let's first consider this seeing of God, what it is, as promised and as experienced here on earth already? This seeing God is not something literal, it's not something physical. God is a Spirit, and the Lord Jesus Christ is no more on earth. So seeing God has the sense of experiencing Him spiritually through the Word in our hearts. For example, we find delight in grasping something of the great glory of God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ; and seeing Him and sensing this glory is enjoying Him. David writes in Psalm 63:1-2, "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee... to *see* Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have *seen* Thee in the sanctuary," or in the temple. Now again, David is not referring to a physical seeing of God, he is referring to a spiritual experiencing of the message of love, the message of the pardon of sin, the message of the acceptance with God the Father, the sense of peace and joy in believing the Word of God. Believe me, such are the sweetest moments in the life of a believer when we may so see God and taste His grace. Yet don't fail to notice that this seeing of God and this experience of the communion of God is always in the context of holy living. The pure in heart, *they* shall see God. There is connection between that joy of communion and the living in purity. Psalm 97:11 reads, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright (or pure) in heart."

In our relationship with God, friends, we will experience the exact same as in an earthly relationship with your spouse, your children, your parents and your friends, even if you don't physically see them. When we act in sin, when we offend or hurt them with our words or actions, it will instantly bring a chill and a distance in our *communion* of our union, and we do not see and feel and enjoy the love and the closeness and the intimacy. Now so it is in our relationship between God and His people. Sin grieves the Spirit, and when the Spirit is grieved, He withholds Himself. He will not be comforting. We will not be seeing God and enjoying God. He will not reassure us through His ministry of the joy and the peace we have in God.

Now besides seeing God in communion through faith as we live here, the pure in heart will also see God with their own eyes in heavenly glory, in the future new earth, that of course, will still be in the person of Jesus Christ because God remains invisible. Listen how God spoke about that through the Apostle John, in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." We shall *see* Him, Jesus as He is, and it will instantly transform us entirely. So in this afterlife, God will be seen in and through the full glory of Jesus Christ His Son, for it is still true that God remains invisible and is only visible to us humans in the visible person of Jesus Christ. Matthew Henry concluded on this—he says, "It is the perfection of the soul's happiness to see God, to see Him forever, and to never lose sight of Him. This is Heaven's happiness." So may God bless these thoughts to comfort and to convict, as He knows what we need most. Thank you very much.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #9

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Dear friends, welcome again to this study of the Beatitudes, as we find in Matthew 5:3–12. This session is devoted to the exposition of the seventh Beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” I hope and pray that at the end of our series, we may share something of what the original hearers of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount experienced, for we read that they were astonished. Why did it have this effect on them? It is not just because Jesus’ teaching was just novel or new, though it was in some ways definitely that also; but His teaching was so entirely opposed to how we are used to think or trained to think.

Let’s take again these Beatitudes to where He has put them. We envy the rich, the joyful, the assertive, the satisfied and successful person. But Jesus’ eyes rest in favor upon a group of people that we won’t favor so much at first view, those who are of a humble mindset on account of feeling guilty as a sinner before God. He sees those who aspire to be devoted in genuine love to God and their fellow men and have no other agenda but to serve God. His eyes are on those who respect His law as their delight, even though it may be costly to obey; and to the Lord of Heaven and earth, these people are not only blessed. No, if we look back further in the Sermon, notice what Jesus does in verses 13 and 14, He exalts these people—the Beatitude people—with two very significant statements. He says, “Ye are *the* salt of the earth:...Ye are *the* light of the world.” Now both of those statements are emphatic—the words *the* salt and *the* light. Though you may not count much in the eyes of the world, according to Christ’s estimate, you are the most valuable of all people *if* you live and *if* you are like the Beatitude woman or man or girl or boy.

So this brings us to the concluding description of the citizen of Jesus’ kingdom. The seventh one is the peacemaker. The more each Christian lives out this aspect of the new birth, the peacemaker, the greater the value of genuine Christianity will be understood. It’s exceedingly sad that this Beatitude often is not lived out as it should [be]. So in exploring the meaning of this declaration of blessedness, let me draw attention to, first, the nature of the peacemaker, and then secondly, the dignity of the peacemaker, because it says they shall be called the children of God.

So first, the nature of the peacemaker. Now to grasp the meaning of this last characteristic Jesus uses to describe the new man, let’s go back to Genesis 1. When God made man, what did he look like? Or better, who did we resemble? I don’t mean physically, but I mean spiritually, mentally, emotionally. We reflected the image of our Creator, and we carried with us the reflection of the attributes of Him that we are *able* to reflect. Genesis 1:27 reads this, “So God created man in His own image,” in the likeness of God, or “in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” So in extension of that, my second question is, when God renews a sinner, what will he or she look like? The answer is similar. He will be conformed back to the image that we were originally created in. Paul writes in Romans 8:29 about this. He says that His people that He

foreknew, that He predestinated, he says they will “be conformed (transformed) to the image of His Son.”

Now as we have studied the Beatitude man or woman, you have noticed that the number of them are clear reflections of the Lord Jesus Christ, of His glory and of His Father. Let me recall again. The meekness, that was one of the first ones—Jesus is meek; followed with righteousness—Jesus was righteous; merciful—how merciful, how pure in heart; and now the concluding likeness, the peacemaker. It is therefore undoubtedly very intentional that Jesus adds to this final statement, “They shall be called the children of God.” The greatest glory of God is that He is called in the Scripture the God or the Lord of peace. The Scripture reveals that from all eternity He had thoughts of peace, and this revelation of His character continues to shine through the entire Scripture and course of time. Go back to Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve have rebelled against God. How did God approach Adam and Eve? With a fist? Or in the spirit of peace? “Where are you?” Like a Shepherd seeking for His lost sheep. Isaiah prophesies about the coming Messiah, Jesus, and what is He called? The Prince of *Peace*. As we hear the story of Jesus’ birth, we read the angels singing about Jesus’ birth. What do they sing? *Peace* on earth. As God’s ambassadors are sent out into this world to preach the Gospel, what are they called, and what are they to bring? The Gospel of *peace*. Matter of fact, if you go through the New Testament, you’ll notice that God calls Himself seven times the God of peace or the Lord of peace. I’ll give you two examples. Romans 15:33, “Now the God of *peace* be with you all.” Hebrews 13:20 contains a lovely phrase, “Now the God of *peace*, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep...” Notice the emphasis—*peace*. So the conclusion is inevitable. God Himself is the foremost peacemaker, and to make this peace possible, He was willing to sacrifice His own Son, as the heavenly peace-child to restore the relationship of peace and harmony. So though at first it may appear contradictory, yet it is true that to make this spiritual peace will include warfare. That doesn’t seem to match—peace and warfare. In Romans 16:20, we find this remarkable combination of peace and warfare in these words, relating it back to Genesis 3:15, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

This revelation of God’s warfare against Satan and sin is also the revelation of the mission of God’s peace; and understanding this will help us also to understand the nature of this seventh Beatitude, the peacemaker. The peacemaker, who he is and how he does, does also include warfare, but a different kind. So it equally will help us to understand this very curious saying which Jesus seems to make and which seems to contradict this Beatitude and the song at the birth of Jesus. Jesus says in Matthew 10:34: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” Why that is and how that will happen will be clearer when we grasp the nature of the peacemaker in the seventh and the final Beatitude.

So who or what then is the peacemaker that Jesus declares to be blessed? First of all, friends, He’s not speaking about people who are merely peace *lovers*. There is some difference between peace lovers and peacemakers. Peace lovers are those people who prefer peace above what is right or what is truth. A peace lover will minimize, will ignore sin, stuff it under the carpet type of thing, all for the sake of peace; but that’s not peacemaking. That’s not a peacemaker according to God’s heart. Notice God Himself is the supreme peacemaker, but He never, never ignores or never trivializes or tolerates sin or covers it with the carpet. Likewise His children. The peacemaker, who is filled with the love and the zeal for God’s glory and the well-being of their neighbors, will pursue peace in a holy war type of manner. Oh, not violent, not at all, but he will not let sin be uncontested. Jesus is speaking about people who do what their name tells them. They are *peacemakers*. They will do all to promote, all to secure peace, and all to live in peace, if at all possible, with all men, but never without confronting the sins that harm genuine peace, that break it, that strain it.

For what is now real peace or rather, what is Biblical peace? Biblical peace, friends, is not just the absence of war, or it’s not just the absence of discord. You find that in most of our neighborhoods.

We live in peaceful and quiet neighborhoods. Is that the peace Jesus speaks about? Or we live in a nation at peace with each other. Is that the peace Jesus speaks about? No. Biblical peace is the condition of a perfect harmony between God and us and between man and all his fellow man around him—harmony. This is the peace that existed in the universe before sin tore apart the flawless unity and the harmony that existed among all men and between God and men. This brought separation, this brought brokenness, disharmony, destruction. That peaceful neighborhood is full of separation, full of brokenness, full of disharmony, full of destruction. There's no peace. No, this harmony and this close relationship between God and men, as well as between men and men, can be completely absent even though people dwell together in an amiable neighborhood, or in a larger or smaller family setting. So the Beatitude peacemakers are persons who are engaging in a spiritual warfare against all that breaks the real peace, which is sin, Satan, and all what they do, all what causes disharmony, all what brings separation. They will fight against that. Their goal is not more war, their goal is not more disharmony, not "I'll be right and win"—that's not their goal. Their goal is peace in a restored harmony of love with fellow man, with each other and above all, with God their Creator. So by the peacemakers are meant those who not only seek peace and avoid quarrels as far as lies in their power, but are those who labor hard, do everything necessary to settle the differences among others to bring them together, who advise all men to live at peace and show how it is needed to be done, and who take away every occasion of hatred and strife. This is somewhat quoted of John Calvin. But above all, the peacemakers are those who seek to lead men and women to Christ for the true and spiritual peace that's only found in Him.

So it must be clear now that the peacemaker isn't fighting for his own rights. The peacemaker doesn't seek revenge to get even. He doesn't, even when he's wronged, even when he faces injustice, he's not seeking to get right. No, God's peacemaker, God's kind of peacemaker is the one who is meek, the third Beatitude—he turns his other cheek to someone who offended him rather than getting even. That's what the other cheek means—I'm not getting even. He will not pay back each injustice done to him if this will help to restore peace. The peacemaker, as fruit of self-discovery—think of the first and the second Beatitudes—and in the painful awareness of his own personal sinfulness and unworthiness, while he's yet tasting the love of God and His kindness to him; that peacemaker is meek, he's willing to love and to give up his rights to win the other person's heart, though of course, he *will not* ignore sin. The peacemaker is the one that Jesus speaks about later in the chapter. They will go the second mile after having been forced to do the first mile—why?—so that they can send a message of love and kindness in the face of injustice in order to make peace and a peaceful relationship, and to lead the other person to the peace of God. The peacemakers are the ones that Paul writes about who heap coals of fire on the head of their enemies. Coals of fire means acts of love; they seek to overcome evil with good. That's the peacemaker. In that mindset and in those actions, that peacemaker resembles their God and Father, their Lord and Master, "for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

Now lastly, the peacemaker shows a great tolerance towards the faults and failures of others. He is the person who covers a multitude of shortcomings, and even sins done out of weakness, out of infirmity—sins that are things that are said or done wrong, but are not done so with an intention, but are done because of either ignorance or immaturity of the person, or just weakness—he covers them. Therefore, the peacemaker is peaceable, he's not quarrelsome, he's amiable like Jesus. Friends, can you see that if all Christians would live like this, truly what a different world would ours be if it would be inhabited by these peacemakers? How blessed and how beautiful would every marriage and every family and every church family and society and work environment be, if we would be peacemakers, where all are meek about "my own rights" and where all are desirous to honor God and His rights above anybody else's?

That leads me then to the second part—the dignity of these peacemakers. "They shall be

called the children of God,” it says. The peacemakers, they shall be known—that’s what it means, “called”—they will be owned, they will be esteemed, they will be recognized—that is the child that resembles God. That’s what that means. This promise is at the same time again a declaration of an exceeding great privilege. I personally count myself very privileged because I had an awesome father, a godly father who owned me and treated me like his child and sacrificed everything for me as a child. What a privilege to be owned by God as His child, and every child of God may count himself exceedingly privileged, for they shall be called, they shall be owned, they shall be cared for as the children of God the Father. Notice that Jesus said that they shall be *called* the children of God. By whom shall they be called the children of God? Don’t count on the world to necessarily call you a child of God. People in the world may even disown you or disdain you or, as we will see in the last part of these Beatitudes, persecute you. Why is that? Well, for a variety of reasons, but sometimes your godliness, your example, they just kind of prick their conscience. So don’t count on even your own families always to own you as a child of God. Sometimes the enemies will be those of your own household, your own family. Even though you may be a genuine peacemaker, a meek person, a loving person among them, they may reject you as a troublemaker. So count on it, you will be called *by God* a child of God, God owns you and calls you His child. Even if the whole world disowns you, He owns you as His. How sweet is the testimony, and that Spirit of God “beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ,” that Paul points out in Romans 8:16–17.

With that truth from Romans, this heir of God, we’ve come full circle in the Beatitudes, because, notice how the first one started—“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the *kingdom of God*. The privileges of grace always bring the obligations of gratitude. So let therefore all God’s children strive to be Biblical peacemakers. If that is habitually absent in our life, or if we live as quarrelsome, judgmental, arrogant, proud, unforgiving people, or if we can just live on with broken relationships, without having tried all things to make peace, or if our religion is full of friction and full of discord, while we’re feeding on rumors or gossip or slander—all then in our confession to be a child of God is a falsehood. Thomas Watson again, in his book on the Beatitudes, said it well; he says, “Let men either lay down their contentions with their neighbors or lay down the coat of their profession to be a Christian.”

So in conclusion, friends, as we’ve looked at these seven Beatitudes, Jesus has in these seven Beatitudes outlined the born-again and the blessed soul. If you can’t deny that these Beatitudes are the ones that are found in your heart and in your life, even very immature, very weak, even if they’re only like the dawning of the early morning, then please give thanks daily unto the Father which has made us fit, meet, fitting to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, for it is He who has delivered us from the power of darkness. The presence of darkness will always be there till the end, but the power of darkness is broken, and He has translated or has transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son. So does that mean that the born-again soul will perfectly reflect this portrait in this life? The answer sadly is no. Even the best of God’s children, the farthest advanced, remain imperfect in this life, not always will they be consistent in their mercy or their sincerity or in their peacemaking efforts. No, sadly, not always will they mourn their sins as they ought to, not always will they be so meek as not to fight for their own name or their own rights. So this reality of the abiding, indwelling sin, which often clouds the heart, and which often even takes the overhand in times of weakness or inattention, that will keep us meek, that will keep us mourning. That will keep us poor in our own strength, but it also will keep us hungering and feeding on the righteousness as provided in Jesus Christ. Mostly it will keep us feeding. It will keep feeding the growing longing for the new Heaven and the new earth wherein dwells perfect righteousness and everlasting peace. Yet before it is so far, we need to be prepared to bear the cost of being the disciple of Jesus Christ—to be a Beatitude man is costly. Now the cost of that is what the Lord speaks about in the next two Beatitudes, which in some ways are one. That’s why I added

the two statements in verses 10, 11 and conclusion in 12, which we will consider in our next and final installment. Well, thank you, and may the Lord bless you to be a blessing.



The Beatitudes

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Lecture #10

Blessed Are They Which Are Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake

Dear fellow students—I'll call us that together—I welcome you to our last combined session of the study of the Beatitudes. Yet I hope that this will not be the end of your personal study of these opening words of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. There's always much more gold to be found in prayerful meditation on the Scriptures, especially if you compare it with other Scriptures, and passages that are related to this. So please continue to study these words of Jesus, also the entire Sermon on the Mount, which, of course, we haven't covered. In this section today, we will focus our thoughts on verses 10, 11 and 12, which close the Beatitudes' section.

Now, let me first place these verses in the context again, and in the connection to the previous seven verses. In the Beatitudes, the Master Teacher has given us the portrait of every citizen of His vast Kingdom and a deep and great variety of His people in them. Now that shows an exceeding great wisdom, for the variety among Jesus' citizens of His Kingdom at least are huge. There are young and old believers. There are educated and illiterate believers. There are rich and poor. There are some that are on a high social level of influence, and others who are very low on the social ladder. Yet Jesus was able to draw a unified picture in all that diversity of His people, and to me, that is one of the unsurpassed beauties of the Beatitudes, that He accomplished that in seven statements.

Now before we step away from the portrait of this born-again soul, and see how the world reacts on it, let me illustrate once more how *Christ-centered* the Beatitudes are, as all of the Scripture really is. In Beatitudes 1, 2 and 3, we read of a man or woman who says, "I need the Savior Jesus Christ because I am poor and needy." Beatitude 4 is the expression of "I embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as my hope, my righteousness, my salvation," and Beatitude 5, 6 and 7 is the expression of one who says, "I will follow the Lord Jesus Christ." So as we now look at the concluding Beatitudes which are in essence one, the Lord touches upon one of the greatest ironies that is found in this fallen world. It's an irony that involves both the Master—the King, the Lord Jesus—and that follows His most faithful followers. Friends, there's never been a person in the history of mankind who has loved more, served more, gave more, reached out to more, accepted more and sacrificed more than Jesus Christ did in His very short-lived life on earth. You read His biography, written by four credible authors, and He was the best ever. He went about doing good. He showed endless acts of kindness to the most unkind people. He ministered to every need that was placed before Him. He denied His own comforts all the time. He sacrificed His strength and His sleep to help needy people over and over. He even opened Himself up to the vilest slander by eating with the outcasts, rebels, among the Jews. He stood up for the vulnerable and enslaved women and

children, and lovingly He warned and preached the truth as genuine and as compassionate as none ever did. And what was the end result? He was hated, haunted, forsaken, slandered and finally innocently condemned to death. He was slaughtered as if one of the vilest fellows who ever lived on earth.

Well, Jesus has never hidden the fine print of being His disciple. He warned repeatedly throughout His teaching as He's leading His disciples, about suffering, about bearing a cross, His cross, about sharing in His rejection. So Jesus warned that if you would resemble Him in godliness, you will be disliked, you'll be sidelined, slandered, set aside. You may face solitary confinement. You may even be killed or slaughtered. Here are a few verses to illustrate it. Matthew 10:16: "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves;" or John 15:20–21: "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for My name's sake, because" (here it is), "they know not Him" (My Father), "that sent me." They misunderstand, they're ignorant, they're in darkness. In John 16:33, He adds, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." So clearly, Jesus taught and never hid it, the content of a small but sweet saying—salvation is free, but discipleship is costly.

Now on the basis of these Beatitudes and the concluding part of it, Martin Luther taught that every true church and every genuine Christian will be known by the level of persecution they endure. Therefore, this last Beatitude or these two last Beatitudes, are both searching as well as comforting. How is it searching? Well friends, if I never experience any level of persecution by the unregenerate surroundings, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ?" Or am I kind of like a chameleon Christian—I adapt to my surroundings, to blend in with the principles and the manners of life so that I avoid confrontation or rejection or whatever level of persecution we may receive. On the other hand, it's also extremely comforting, especially for those who experience any level of persecution, as Jesus here points out in these Beatitudes. Now it is this second aspect, the comfort, that was Jesus' main intention in these closing Beatitudes. So let's again hear the Savior, He declares you blessed if you are persecuted for His name's sake or reviled falsely. So let's consider, what does Jesus mean with persecution? Secondly, why would you call such people blessed and to rejoice? So what does Jesus mean with persecution?

Now with persecution, the Lord means any level of opposition or rejection or oppression, subjection or harassment, or maltreatment, or discrimination, or finally, even torture or death. That's what all is included in the word *persecution*. There are indeed many Christians today who suffer in prisons, who are enslaved, who are separated from their loved ones involuntarily, or banished out of their country. Many others, [in] much milder form of persecution, may suffer in denial of a promotion in a business, or lose the position altogether, or miss out on a beautiful business opportunity because of their faithfulness to Jesus' holy, perfect will. Again, others may endure slander or a sneer or a comment or just really despising smile or an outright reviling by neighbors as a form of persecution, or yes, some of them are even abandoned and ostracized by their family. I mean, look at what they did to Jesus—they called Him all kinds of names. They called Him a drunk, a winebibber, they called Him a friend of sinners. They called Him a rabble rouser. You look at the Apostle Paul. He was accused of being a troublemaker, and [enemies] repeatedly attempted to kill him. The blind man healed by Jesus in John 9, when he was confessing Christ, what happened to him? Cast out by his religious community, forbidden ever to come in the temple again. So Jesus touches with His word, *persecution*, any physical, emotional, social, economic, and spiritual suffering.

Yet notice that the Lord conditions the persecution with two important qualifiers we must never omit. He says, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" and "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of things against you

falsely, for My sake.” Those two core clarifications, we need to keep in mind. Let it be clear that not all suffering Christians are included in this Beatitude. Anyone who as a Christian suffers for his own wrongdoing is in vain claiming the comfort of Jesus’ words. Peter touches upon that truth in 1 Peter 4:15. He says, “Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.” So obviously, any Christian who is imprisoned because he’s a murderer or a thief or an adulterer or an abuser cannot claim the comfort from this Beatitude. Even if you are going around in this world as a judgmental Christian, as an arrogant Christian, as a disdainful-of-other-people Christian, an unkind Christian, oppressive or overzealous or over righteous or, in short, if you go around as a Christian *unlike* Jesus Christ, you will suffer. Such behaviors will invite pushback, sidelining, rejection, persecution; but forget not, these do not fall under Jesus’ Beatitude.

So keeping these Beatitudes in the *context* of Matthew 5 means then that those people who live the Beatitude life, who live as this Beatitude person, the more you may live like that, the more you *will* experience some level of the world’s opposition, persecution, rejection, reviling for His name’s sake or for righteousness’ sake. Friends, be prepared. When you live in harmony with God’s holy will, when you practice true godliness, when you act like the salt of the earth and the light of the world, if you live more and more like the Master, the King, then be ready to experience what the Master Himself experienced. Think of godly Daniel, what he experienced. Though every statesman around him recognized his wisdom, his incredible integrity, his faithfulness and commitment to his king, his honesty in all his business dealings and government guidance, yet he ended up plotted against to be killed by his colleagues. Why? Not because he acted evil. They *hated* the Beatitude character in his life.

So Matthew, Mark, [and] Luke all record Jesus’ call to discipleship. Let me read it to you. “He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Now to come after Jesus Christ, to be His follower, that means to be His disciple, that means to be His imitator, His learner. To be a disciple is to live like Him in love, in holiness, in meekness, in reaching out to the needy. That includes, friends, that we deny ourselves, and that means we take up sometimes the painful cross of being associated with our Lord, as we follow Him in the battles of His Kingdom, doing His will. For some, that means to distance themselves from the loved ones who refuse to honor Jesus’ Kingship over all aspects of life, and so many indeed face that very sore reality. For others of Jesus’ disciples, that may mean they have to give up a prestigious position or a very profitable business deal because they’re asked to violate God’s laws of honesty and purity and integrity.

So therefore, count on it—don’t be surprised when you will be persecuted for righteousness’s sake, when you act like a good Samaritan, showing your mercy and pouring yourself into the life of a total stranger who is found along your life’s path. Or when you acted like the father of that son who just totally screwed everything up in his life, and you embraced him and forgave him and reinstated him even though you’re hurt so badly. Some can’t understand that. Or when you feed your enemy who seeks to kill you or destroy your business, and you go out of your way to minister to him or to her. Or when you reach out to the reject and to those who seek your help, who are left by others. Now, especially if you are Christ’s faithful preacher, you are to expect this experience of the force of darkness.

If you notice in verse 11, there’s a slight change of person. Jesus directed verse 11 particularly to His disciples standing around Him, while verse 10 is more general. The last part of verse 11 supports that, this is really directed to the preachers, for He says they “shall say all manner of evil against you falsely...for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” So He’s speaking to the prophets that stand around Him, that will be His teachers. So, brethren in the ministry, those of you who are teaching, let us take instruction and comfort of Jesus’ Beatitude. If you are faithful to your calling and if you preach God’s truth as Christ preached it, without adding,

without twisting it, without minimizing it, without darkening one part or favoring another part above some other aspect of the truth, if you preach whole counsel of God and if you back it up with a ministry life like Jesus lived, then expect what Jesus says. They shall revile you, they shall persecute you, they shall say all manner of evil against you falsely. They will drag you into courts with false accusations. Instead of groaning and moaning about that, what does the Captain ask you to do? He says, “rejoice, and be exceeding glad.”

So that leads us to our second thought: why are such persecuted Christians blessed and called to rejoice or to be glad? Well, our Lord’s teachings in these verses again must have caused a shock wave of astonishment, as they did in many other places, for to the Jews, if you were suffering, that always means, in their thinking, that God is displeased with you—you suffer because you’re a bad boy, bad girl, you’re a sinner. To the worldly leaders, they look at this as an utterly ridiculous statement, it makes no sense. You’re blessed when you’re valued, when you’re praised, when you’re promoted, when you’re flattered, when you’re honored, not when you are persecuted. So let me then share five reasons why persecuted Christ-like people are blessed and have reasons to rejoice.

First, this type of persecution—for righteousness’ sake, for His name’s sake—indicates genuine character of faith. Satan, friends, is not bothered with the half-hearted. The compromising Christians to him [are] no threat, he leaves them alone, lets them go.

Secondly, because persecutions like this improve or promote the growth of godly character. In 1 Peter 1:6–7, Peter compares persecutions and trials to the fire that cleans up the gold—they are like the fire that purifies the gold. Therefore James adds, for example, James 1:2–3, he says, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.” Of course, it works other things, but that’s just the benefit of it.

Thirdly, these persecutions and trials are also blessed because they keep your heart focused on the hereafter. We all face a great spiritual struggle as we are rooted into this ground of this earth and the life we live here, even though it’s not to stay. To be unrooted is one way by which God accomplishes that, through persecution. We are to remain pilgrims on a journey to another world. We are to remain looking out for Jesus Christ, and with Paul, share the longings of his life as he wrote, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Why gain? Because it will be all of Christ that he couldn’t have here. So persecution is God’s aid to make us more ready to depart to be with Christ.

Now fourthly, why are you blessed? Because persecution happens to be one of the best ways to evangelize God’s truth to others. History has proven over and over that the blood and the sufferings of the martyrs always is the seed of the church. How many prison guards, how many fellow prisoners, as well as observers, have come to Christ through the sufferings of believers, and seeing them suffer with such a fortitude and joy? “What is it?” they ask.

Lastly, they are blessed because, “Great is their reward which is in Heaven,” Jesus says in verse 12. Jesus reaffirmed, “theirs is the kingdom of Heaven,” as He already has said in the first Beatitude, He repeats here again in verse 10. The glories of eternal life with God are the reward of Heaven. The communion with Him and the fellowship with all saints on a new earth, where there is only righteousness, is the reward He speaks about. In Matthew 19:28–29, Jesus encourages all His people who suffer for His Kingdom’s sake. “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory” that is, when He returns, He shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, “and every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name’s sake,” (and some of them indeed, I know who have done that) “shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”

Therefore, rejoice and be exceeding glad, my friends. Therefore, followers of the Master, or fellow sufferers for the King, you who are persecuted for righteousness’s sake, instead of self-pity,

instead of retaliation or resentment, no, rejoice and be exceedingly glad, be filled with an unrestrained gladness, that means. How's that possible? How can you do that? That's only possible when we keep solid faith in Jesus' promises. Remember the promise, "In the world, ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Therefore the Apostle Paul, who had gone through incredible sufferings for Jesus, could triumph despite the sufferings he endured. Romans 8:17–18, he says, "And if children" (the Beatitude men) "then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." Then he concludes, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Then he continues in verse 28, I am sure a statement of his own faith, he says, "And we *know* that all things" (even the hard things, the painful things) "work together for good to them that love God, and to them who are called according to His purpose." Finally, he triumphs in verses 37–39, and what a reason to rejoice, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present," (persecution) "nor things to come," (more persecution maybe) "nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature," (or any other event) "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Well, that brings us to our conclusion, friends. We've studied a curious group of people, God's Kingdom people, and how opposite most of them are to those our society esteems or reveres and honors. Christ-like people don't receive many rewards in this life or recognition or Nobel prizes or gold medals. No. However, they receive something far more exceedingly beautiful. What? They are declared *blessed* by the King, by Jesus. Once we see the glory of all what the promises Jesus gives to His Beatitude people in this portion and in the rest of the Scripture, we will join Paul's doxology in Ephesians 1:3, and there we use the word *blessed* in a different way—"Blessed" (which means worthy of all praise) "be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." So may God bless these messages on the Beatitudes to His glory and to your comfort. Thank you, and God bless.