

**Ten Blessings, Part 1 of 3**  
“Blessed are those Who Mourn.”

a sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish  
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“Blessed are the poor in spirit...

“Blessed are those who mourn...

“Blessed are the meek...

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness... (Matthew 5:3-6).

When we think of blessings we do not usually think of sadness, difficulty or want. We usually think of happiness, peace and plenty. Indeed the word, blessing, means happiness and suggests that we have everything we need.

Why, then, does the Lord seem to say the opposite? You know, an awful lot of people today are dedicated to the principle that we should *not* be poor in spirit. They say we should be rich in spirit, meaning self-confident, with healthy self-esteem and even self-love. They say we need to know how to be self-assertive, to know what we want and to feel good about “going for it.” They say we can’t possibly love others or be happy in society unless we feel good about ourselves first – which is true in a way, but it’s not what this is about.

Why, then, does the Lord plainly say that the people who are poor in spirit are blessed – not “*will be* blessed” but *are* blessed? Why does He say that the kingdom of heaven is theirs – not “*will be* theirs,” but *is* theirs? How can we *be blessed* when we are “poor in spirit?”

We can ask the same questions of the teaching about those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and of course, most of all, those who are persecuted. Really, how can you be happy when you are being persecuted!

The answer of course rests in the fuller, deeper meaning of the Lord’s words. To be poor in spirit does not mean to be self-deprecating or to have no self-esteem. It is simply a state of self-awareness and self-acknowledgment: in effect it is a state of knowing how little we know in relation to how much there is to know. This isn’t a *sad* state, it’s an exciting state, full of hope and promise, full of the anticipation of learning and growing, and, among other things, never being bored because we know that the Lord always has more and more marvelous things to show and teach us – forever!

The word, spirit, in the Lord’s teaching specifically refers to the understanding. It is the same as the word for wind or breath, which of course has to do with “inspiration” [breathing in]. On the spiritual level we are “inspired” when we get a new insight or idea, when we suddenly understand something that has perhaps eluded us in the past. We are then filled with anticipation and delight. But what if we are already “rich in spirit?” What if we think we know all that we need to know in any given area? Will we be open to new ideas? Will we be receptive? This is exactly the situation the Lord referred to when He said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” There is nothing wrong with natural wealth, that was not the point. The Lord was stressing intellectual humility.

And He said of those who have this quality, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Note the present

tense. The word, kingdom, obviously, refers to the realm of a king, and the king governs by means of laws. So in the spiritual sense a king represents the truths (or falsities) by which we live in society. And his kingdom is the whole realm of life and thought based on those principles. Therefore we possess the kingdom of *heaven* as we acknowledge our need and willingness to learn what the Lord teaches us in His Word. It is not a promise, it is a fact.

The second blessing the Lord mentioned is for those who mourn. Again, it seems like a contradiction: how can you be sad and happy at the same time? Because it seems impossible many have supposed that the Lord was simply talking about delayed gratification: mourn now, be happy later. Suffer now, get your blessing later. From this perspective it might seem like we're *supposed* to be miserable in this world, or that there's something wrong with us if we enjoy our life in the world. But this is not what the passage says. Those who mourn *are* blessed, and, what's more, "they *will* be comforted." So what is this about?

Obviously, mourning is grieving, usually over some deprivation or loss. It's not just an acknowledgment, as in the first blessing, but a real *feeling* about what's missing in our lives. So on a spiritual level it has not so much to do with truth or understanding but with what is good. In fact it arises from a real awareness of the lack of good, and not just good *things*, but good will, good loves, good affections for the Lord and other people, usually due to the presence of some selfish feelings that prevent us from receiving them.

So when we mourn spiritually we are painfully aware of the evils in our lives and we wish to be rid of them so that we can feel the goodness of the Lord's love again.

But how can this troubled, sometimes miserable state of mind be a blessing? Well, as in the first blessing it makes us eager for and receptive of the missing good. In fact it plainly reveals our longing for it, which is itself a good thing and a gift from the Lord. So when we find ourselves in this state one thing we can do is recognize the Lord working in us to produce it, since without this we simply wouldn't care. And when the Lord is working in us we are blessed.

This is where the promise of comfort comes in. Remember the teaching in John about the Holy Spirit, where the Lord called this "the Comforter" and promised to send it to them after He Himself had gone away from them (John 14:16; 16:7)? In the New King James translation this is called "the Helper," and the same word used as a verb means "to help." That word is *Paraclete* which comes from a word meaning to call alongside. This is the word now used for "comfort" in the phrase, "they shall be comforted." Literally, they shall be helped. The Lord will walk by their side.

Briefly stated, then, this is the second of the ten blessings: Happy are those who acknowledge their evils, for they will get help! And they'll get it because they want it, for there is no lack of help offered by the Lord at any time in our lives; it's just that most of the time we resist it because we don't think we need it. "Blessed are those who mourn."

The third blessing that the Lord promised is for the meek. Now meekness is not necessarily a problem for us, but the truth is that we often think of the term in a derisive sense representing weakness or even cowardice, as in the sentence, "He stood by meekly as his friend was attacked." But if we think that this is what the Lord meant in His teaching about blessing we could not be much farther from the truth. First of all the word here translated "meek" really means "gentle" and

suggests a spiritual softness that is to be associated with patience and kindness, not at all with weakness or tolerance of evil. It is indeed the *weak* who tolerate evil, but the truly *meek*, those who are truly kind, will not tolerate evil, especially in their own lives, and so they labour constantly and courageously to act from charity in all that they do, shunning evils as sins against the Lord and doing what is right and good because it is right and good.

The teaching that the meek will inherit the earth is, by the way, a direct quotation from Psalm 37:11, where the Hebrew version of the word, meek, means exactly the same thing with, perhaps, the added notion of humility and *willingness to suffer* if necessary rather than inflict suffering on others. Of course the Lord Himself gave the supreme example of this quality when He permitted the crucifixion – not because He couldn't prevent it but because He knew that it was necessary for the process of His glorification to be completed. So we can follow in His steps, not so much resisting the evils that are outside of us in others, but resisting and indeed aggressively fighting against the evils that we find in ourselves: evils of jealousy, greed, hatred, lust and resentment, to name just a few examples.

The Lord plainly says that when we do this we *are* blessed. The blessing is in the doing. But as with those who mourn there is an additional promise, “for they *shall* inherit the earth.” Those of us who are familiar with the study of correspondences know that “the earth” does not mean the planet in a worldly sense, but *our* world, the world of our own experience, the world of our minds and especially the spiritual world that is the church in us. So the truth is that when we exercise the disciplines of genuine charity we do take control of our spiritual lives, we do inherit the “promised land” of love and wisdom from the Lord.

Before we go on to the fourth blessing let's just notice that the first three form a beautiful trilogy. The first relates to the understanding, as we recognize our need to learn and receive the spirit of truth. The second relates to the will, as we recognize the evils in our hearts and take advantage of the Lord's help in overcoming them. The third now relates to the way we behave, in that we act from charity, not from weakness but with gentleness and kindness toward others as we fight against the evils of our own lives.

The fourth blessing that the Lord promised was for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and He said, “they shall be filled.” Hunger relates to food and thirst to drink. Again, they are both cravings and they relate to an awareness or acknowledgment of need.

Now the food that nourishes our spirits is the goodness of love; the drink is the knowledge of truth. And if we're hungry and thirsty we are aware of our need for these essential things. But the teaching specifically stresses the hunger and thirst for *righteousness*, which like meekness has to do with the way we live. A curious thing in the Scriptures, though, is that the word, righteousness, really should be translated “justice.” “Righteousness” conveys a heavy sense of doing what is strictly right, strictly according to the truth, but that isn't what the Lord meant in His teaching about blessing. Rather He was referring to those who long for the goodness of life, that is, a life in which decisions are made on the basis of what is good for people, not just on the basis of truth, which would be truth separated from good.

This teaching therefore follows in order after the one about meekness. For if meekness has to do with the quality of one's own life, including the willingness to sacrifice it for the sake of others or the Lord, the longing for justice has to do with the consequences of that life, that the good we and

others do may be effective, and be recognized, so that all are treated fairly according to their works, that is to say, their working intentions.

And those who hunger and thirst for justice **are blessed**. Like those who mourn they are blessed in that they do appreciate what is good. They are **fortunate** to know about it and they are happy to have the longing for it. True, the lack of it makes them sad, but the blessing isn't in the lack, it's in the longing. And, we read, "they shall be filled." Sooner or later, one way or another, their hunger and thirst will be satisfied. For whether they are given the truth in this world or not, whether they are shown what is genuinely good in this world or not, if they long for it they will receive it as soon as it can be provided – which in many cases happens after death in the spiritual world. And that is no shame, for the purpose of life in this world, which is so short, is to prepare for life in the next, which lasts forever.

We will move on to the next three blessings, which are all expressed in terms of positive, outward-looking virtues, next week. Then, sometime in June, we will complete the series by reviewing how the Lord can bless us even when we are persecuted.

For now, and in conclusion, let us do what we can to remember, integrate and reflect on the fact that all the blessings relate to internal, spiritual states, and that all of the ones we have reviewed today relate especially to states of acknowledgment, self-awareness or desire. "The kingdom of God," Jesus said in Luke, "does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

Bad things happen. And there are bad things within each of us. But when we see them and acknowledge them we are taking the first steps toward genuine happiness and peace, indeed toward the spiritual wealth and prosperity that is the blessing of heaven. The beatitudes were the very first systematic teachings of the Lord in His ministry. In a sense they contain all things that follow. Not only do they tell us what to do first (in acknowledging our needs), they assure us of the Lord's active presence in that work so that we can feel His love and wisdom as we do it. And finally, of course, they promise even more fulfillment in the future as with the Lord's help we sustain our efforts and discover the profound reality of inner peace, "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7), "peace that flows as a river from the eternal Source alone" (hymn 882).

Amen.

Lessons: 1 Kings 20:selections  
Children's talk on Ahab & Ben Hadad: Israel Conquering Syria - sort of

Matthew 5:1-12 & Arcana Caelestia #1937:4-5