

## **" Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven "**

In Hebrew the word *poor* was used to describe the humble and the helpless man who put his whole trust in God. Therefore, " Blessed are the poor in spirit " means: **Blessed is the man who has realised his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God.**

If a man has realized his own utter helplessness, and has put his whole trust in God, there will enter into his life two things which are opposite sides of the same thing. He will become completely *detached from things*, for he will know that things have not got it in them to bring happiness or security; and he will become completely *attached to God*, for he will know that God alone can bring him help, and hope, and strength. The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has realised that things mean nothing, and that God means everything.

We must be careful not to think that this beatitude calls actual material poverty a good thing. Poverty is not a good thing. Jesus would never have called blessed a state where people live in slums and have not enough to eat, and where health rots because conditions are all against it. That kind of poverty it is the aim of the Christian gospel to remove. The poverty which is blessed is the *poverty of spirit*, when a man realizes his own utter lack of resources to meet life, and finds his help and strength in God.

## ***Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.***

It is first of all to be noted about this beatitude that the Greek word for to *mourn*, used here, is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved.

There are three ways in which this beatitude can be taken.

It can be taken quite literally: Blessed is the man who has endured the bitterest sorrow that life can bring.

Some people have taken this beatitude to mean: Blessed are those who are desperately sorry for the sorrow and the suffering of this world.

No doubt both these thoughts are in this beatitude, but its main thought undoubtedly is: Blessed is the man who is desperately sorry for his own sin and his own unworthiness

Christianity begins with a sense of sin. Blessed is the man who is intensely sorry for his sin, the man who is heart-broken for what his sin has done to God and to Jesus Christ, the man who sees the Cross and who is appalled by the havoc wrought by sin.

The way to the joy of forgiveness is through the desperate sorrow of the broken heart. The real meaning of the second beatitude is:

**O THE BLISS OF THE MAN WHOSE HEART IS BROKEN FOR THE WORLD'S SUFFERING AND FOR HIS OWN SIN, FOR OUT OF HIS SORROW HE WILL FIND THE JOY OF GOD**

## ***Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.***

In our modern English idiom the word *meek* is hardly one of the honourable words of life. Nowadays it carries with it an idea of spinelessness, and subservience, and mean-spiritedness. It paints the picture of a submissive and ineffective creature

Aristotle defines *meekness*, as the mean between *excessive anger*, and *excessive angerlessness*. *Meekness*, as Aristotle saw it, is the happy medium between too much and too little anger. And so the first possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time.

If we ask what the right time and the wrong time are, we may say as a general rule for life that it is never right to be angry for any insult or injury done to ourselves; that is something that no Christian must ever resent; but that it is often right to be angry at injuries done to other people. Selfish anger is always a sin; selfless anger can be one of the great moral dynamics of the world.

Other ways to state it....

Blessed is the man who has the humility to know his own ignorance, his own weakness, and his own need.

Blessed is the man who has every instinct, every impulse, every passion under control.  
Blessed is the man who is entirely self-controlled

**O THE BLISS OF THE MAN WHO IS ALWAYS ANGRY AT THE RIGHT TIME AND NEVER ANGRY AT THE WRONG TIME, WHO HAS EVERY INSTINCT, AND IMPULSE, AND PASSION UNDER CONTROL BECAUSE HE HIMSELF IS GOD-CONTROLLED, WHO HAS THE HUMILITY TO REALISE HIS OWN IGNORANCE AND HIS OWN WEAKNESS, FOR SUCH A MAN IS A KING AMONG MEN!**

## **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

Words do not exist in isolation; they exist against a background of experience and of thought; and the meaning of any word is conditioned by the background of the person who speaks it. That is particularly true of this beatitude. It would convey to those who heard it for the first time an impression quite different from the impression which it conveys to us.

The fact is that very few of us in modern conditions of life know what it is to be really hungry or really thirsty. In the ancient world it was very different. A working man's wage was the equivalent of three pence a day, and, even making every allowance for the difference in the purchasing power of money, no man ever got fat on that wage. A working man in Palestine ate meat only once a week, and in Palestine the working man and the day labourer were never far from the border-line of real hunger and actual starvation.

It was still more so in the case of thirst. It was not possible for the vast majority of people to turn a tap and find the clear, cold water pouring into their house. So, then, the hunger which this beatitude describes is no genteel hunger which would be satisfied with a mid-morning snack; the thirst of which it speaks is no thirst which could be slaked with a cup of coffee or an iced drink. It is the hunger of the man who is starving for food, and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks.

Since that is so this beatitude is in reality a question and a challenge. In effect it demands, "How much do you want goodness? Do you want it as much as a starving man wants food, and as much as a man dying of thirst wants water?" How intense is our desire for goodness?

This beatitude says, it is not enough to be satisfied with a partial goodness. Blessed is the man who hungers and thirsts for the goodness which is total. . So, then, the translation of the fourth beatitude could run:

**O THE BLISS OF THE MAN WHO LONGS FOR TOTAL RIGHTEOUSNESS AS A STARVING MAN LONGS FOR FOOD, AND A MAN PERISHING OF THIRST LONGS FOR WATER, FOR THAT MAN WILL BE TRULY SATISFIED!**

## **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**

EVEN as it stands this is surely a great saying; and it is the statement of a principle which runs all through the New Testament. The New Testament is insistent that to be forgiven we must be forgiving.

Hebrew word for mercy does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term; it does not mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. It means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings.

Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; clearly this demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will.

The supreme instance of *mercy*, is the coming of God in Jesus Christ.

It is only those who show this mercy who will receive it. This is true on the human side, for it is the great truth of life that in other people we see the reflection of ourselves. If we are detached and disinterested in them, they will be detached and disinterested in us. If they see that we care, their hearts will respond in caring. It is supremely true on the divine side, for he who shows this mercy has become nothing less than like God.

So the translation of the fifth beatitude might read:

**O THE BLISS OF THE MAN WHO GETS RIGHT INSIDE OTHER PEOPLE, UNTIL HE CAN SEE WITH THEIR EYES, THINK WITH THEIR THOUGHTS, FEEL WITH THEIR FEELINGS, FOR HE WHO DOES THAT WILL FIND OTHERS DO THE SAME FOR HIM, AND WILL KNOW THAT THAT IS WHAT GOD IN JESUS CHRIST HAS DONE!**

## **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

It is very seldom indeed that we do even our finest actions from absolutely unmixed motives. If we give generously and liberally to some good cause, it may well be that there lingers in the depths of our hearts some contentment in basking in the sunshine of our own self-approval, some pleasure in the praise and thanks and credit which we will receive. If we do some fine thing, which demands some sacrifice from us, it may well be that we are not altogether free from the feeling that men will see something heroic in us and that we may regard ourselves as martyrs.

This beatitude demands from us the most exacting self examination. Is our work done from motives of service or from motives of pay? Is our service given from selfless motives or from motives of self-display? Is the work we do in Church done for Christ or for our own prestige? Is our Church-going an attempt to meet God or a fulfilling of an habitual and conventional respectability?

So, then, this sixth beatitude might read:

**O THE BLISS OF THE MAN WHOSE MOTIVES ARE ABSOLUTELY PURE, FOR THAT MAN WILL SOME DAY BE ABLE TO SEE GOD!**

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## **Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God.**

In Hebrew it is SHLOAM which is never only a negative state; it never means only the absence of trouble; in Hebrew *peace* always means *everything which makes for a man's highest good*. In the east when one man says to another, does not mean that he wishes for the other man only the absence of evil things; he wishes for him the presence of all good things. In the Bible peace means not only freedom from all trouble; it means enjoyment of all good.

It must carefully be noted what the beatitude is saying. The blessing is on the *peace-makers*, not necessarily on the *peace-lovers*. It very often happens that if a man loves peace in the wrong way, he succeeds in making trouble and not peace. We may, for instance, allow a threatening and dangerous situation to develop, and our defense is that for peace's sake we do not want to take any action. There is many a person who thinks that he is loving peace, when in fact he is piling up trouble for the future, because he refuses to face the situation and to take the action which the situation demands. The peace which the Bible calls blessed does not come from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them.

But there is another meaning for this word peace. It is a meaning on which the Jewish Rabbis loved to dwell, and it is almost certainly the meaning which Jesus had in his mind. The Jewish Rabbis held that the highest task which a man can perform is to establish *right relationships* between man and man. That is what Jesus means

**O THE BLISS OF THOSE WHO PRODUCE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MAN AND MAN, FOR THEY ARE DOING A GODLIKE WORK**

**"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and  
utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.**

**Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven,  
for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

ONE of the outstanding qualities of Jesus was his sheer honesty. He never left men in any doubt what would happen to them if they chose to follow him. He was clear that he had come " not to make life easy, but to make men great." It is hard for us to realize what the first Christians had to suffer. Every department of their life was disrupted.

Christianity often came to send, not peace, but a sword which divided families in two. It was literally true that a man might have to love Christ more than he loved father or mother, wife, or brother or sister. Christianity often involved in those days a choice between a man's nearest and dearest and Jesus Christ.

Still further, the penalties which a Christian had to suffer were terrible beyond description. All the world knows of the Christians who were flung to the lions or burned at the stake; but these were kindly deaths. Nero wrapped the Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the most tender parts of their bodies; eyes were torn out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ.