

THE CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN

(Number 2)

Matthew 5:5-8

It would be hard to find a statement more at variance with the point of view of the average person today than this one: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." The last thing the ordinary man would like to be known for is the quality of meekness. Thinking that meekness is only a synonym for weakness, the worldly man says: "Stand up for your rights; make the most of yourself; don't let any man put one over on you." Then, he adds: "If you don't look out for number one, no one else will. If you expect to get anywhere and accomplish anything, you must assert yourself and push yourself." In the estimation of the world, meekness has no place in a code of honor or a list of virtues.

According to present-day usage, a "meek" man is a weak, timid, shrinking, cowardly soul, a Mr. Casper Milquetoast, a sort of human door mat who allows others to trample upon him almost at will. The majority of people do not look upon meekness as a virtue at all. Rather, they think of meekness as an infirmity and a vice. With scorn they look upon the man who refuses to answer insult with insult and blow with blow. They firmly believe that it is weak and unmanly to submit to injuries, and to be patient under wrong treatment by others. But this is a far cry from what Christ had in mind when He said, "Blessed are the meek."

Three ideas are imbedded in the word which is translated "meek." First, there is the idea of freedom from pretense or ostentation. The meek man does not go about showing off his own ability. There is no arrogance or sham in the meek and humble man. Second, there is the idea of gentleness. A meek man is a gentleman. One can certainly deal gently and kindly with others without forfeiting conviction or firmness. Meekness was the one virtue in Himself to which Christ called our attention. He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Third, there is the idea of patient endurance of injury. To be meek is to endure hardship and injury without complaint or retaliation.

Meekness, as exemplified and taught by Christ, is the patient endurance of all trials, whether just or unjust, without retaliation. It is the spirit which Christ manifested when He was condemned, beaten, vilified and crucified, and bore it all with patience and without complaint.

Those who insist on their "rights" and shove their way to the front may stand in the limelight of success for the moment, but they never stay there for long. Just keep watching and you will see them fade out of the picture. The people who maintain the highest respect of others and receive the most lasting tributes are those who incorporate the spirit of meekness in their lives. The man who stands at the forefront in human respect and in history is the man who has learned how to be humble, gentle and patient.

As to the fruit of meekness Christ said, "They shall inherit the earth." These words apply to the present and the future. A calm, submissive acceptance of the divine will and obedience to it, and a loving and unresentful attitude toward men, bring with them a peacefulness of heart which gets the highest good out of the supplies which God's providence sends us. To inherit means to receive from Him whose right it is to bestow. Those inherit the earth who find on it the richest, freest, sweetest and fullest life, and who get the most out of it. Meekness enables one to get so much enjoyment out of his earthly portion, be it large or small. Delivered from a greedy and grasping disposition, he is satisfied with such things as he has.

The meek and humble Christian is far more happy in a cottage than an unsaved man is in a palace. One admires the spirit of the Christian who spent some time sight-seeing in New York City. Upon returning to the room in his hotel after a delightful day, he bowed reverently before God and said: "Lord, I just want to thank Thee that I haven't seen a thing today that I want." That man was inheriting the earth. He had reached the place in his Christian life where he could enjoy without owning and admire without coveting. Contentment of mind is truly one of the products of meekness. Therefore, let us diligently give ourselves to the adornment of our lives with a spirit of meekness which, while making our lives more useful and helpful to others, will lay up for us an inheritance unsurpassed and unbounded.

This verse, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled," conveys a greatly needed message in these days of restless disappointment when so many are seeking that which does not satisfy. Perhaps it will help us to recall that those to whom Christ first addressed our text were eagerly desiring and seeking what they supposed were the blessings of the Messiah's kingdom -- deliverance from a foreign yoke, wealth, dignity, honor and dominion. Those who were cherishing those desires were merely dreaming. They were soon to awake to disappointment, because the Messiah had not come with any intention of bestowing such blessings.

Hunger and thirst are the strongest desires of our physical nature. Not only are they the strongest desires, but they are the most familiar ones. All of us know their force and significance. Even a small child, who cannot speak the words "hunger" and "thirst," knows the desire for food and drink. These desires remain to the end of life.

If a man is hungry, he knows that he is in need, and nothing will satisfy him except food. If a man is thirsty, he knows that his throat is parched, and nothing will satisfy him but drink. If a person is hungry or thirsty, he is neither comfortable nor contented. He is alertly looking for food or drink. He is neither finicky nor fussy. He is not concerned about the service but the food. He does not complain about the plate on which his food is placed, or about the cup from which he drinks, because the cells of his body are crying out with an intolerable craving.

Both hunger and thirst are outreaching instincts; they look to the environment for their satisfaction. Hunger within, food without -- that is the law. No man can satisfy his own hunger or thirst; he must go forth and seek the bread and the water which he craves.

Multitudes are hungering and thirsting for wealth. Many have hungry minds. Millions hunger and thirst after pleasure. There are so many who hunger and thirst for honor and fame. They are seeking happiness, but are trying in vain to make it. Satisfaction can never come from this world. It can never be made by man, nor won by works. It can come from God only. It is given by Him to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. To all who are hungering and thirsting for the things that can never satisfy, our Lord appeals to change the direction of their desires and to aim higher. He said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Righteousness is not the state of being in good standing with one's fellow men, but it does involve the proper relationship with God. It implies Christlikeness. It includes being and doing what is right. The soul beholds righteousness, sees in it the reflection of God, and has a burning desire for likeness to Him. The one possession we should desire supremely and seek most earnestly is that of a Christlike char-

acter. Seek first, as the chief object of your striving, to be right in your relationship with God and with others. Make righteousness the supreme aim of your life as a Christian.

To say that one hungers and thirsts after righteousness implies that he is convinced that he lacks it, and yet cannot be happy without it. It is a longing to see the whole of life brought under God's rule -- our homes, our friendships, our dealings with others, etc.

What is the promise to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness? "They shall be filled." "Filled" is a very strong and graphic word, originally applied to the feeding and fattening of animals. It was also used of the multitudes who were fed with the loaves and fishes. It is manifestly appropriate here as expressing the complete satisfaction of spiritual hunger and thirst.

The fulness of God is infinite. God is a fountain. If we bring the vessels of our desire to this fountain, God will fill them. However, we must be emptied of self in order to be filled with God.

On the farm we fattened hogs by giving them all the corn they wanted to eat. We kept corn on the ground, where the hogs fed, all the time. That enabled them to be full and fully satisfied. Even so shall those who yearn after righteousness, who long to be righteous and to do good, be "fed full, and completely satisfied." Giving does not impoverish God. May He fill our hearts with a yearning for righteousness, purity and Christlikeness, such as we have never had!

In the biblical sense mercy is something much wider than letting an offender escape his deserved punishment. It means compassion -- suffering with, sympathy -- feeling with, pity and forgiveness.

Christ Himself was mercy incarnate. So it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). He still exercises mercy toward us as our "merciful and faithful High Priest" (Hebrews 2:17). He has taught all of His followers to be tender towards the helpless, gentle with the weak, kind to the poor, and sympathetic with the oppressed and distressed.

Mercy refers to disposition rather than to action. It signifies pain of heart, arising from a sight of misery. It is a disposition to feel for and to relieve the misery of those around us. Mercy implies sensibility to all suffering, whether deserved or undeserved.

Christian mercy is not a mere external quality or accomplishment. It is not just a cold theoretical principle of the mind, but it is identified with the feelings and sympathies of the soul. Christian mercy is a supernatural quality. It does not dwell in the unrenewed nature of man. It is produced only by the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit on the heart. Christian mercy is active. It will be seen in works of mercy. The mind will devise plans of mercy; the tongue will plead in the cause of mercy; and the hands will distribute to the objects of mercy.

Mercy can never stop with feelings, although it includes them. In his Life Of John Bright, G. M. Trevelyan tells a story of Jacob Bright, John's father. One day he was coming up the hill from town to his home, and found a poor neighbor in great trouble on the road. His horse had met with an accident and it was necessary that the animal be killed. People were crowding around the man and saying how sorry they were. To one who kept on repeating this most loudly, Jacob Bright said: "I

am sorry five pounds. How much are you sorry?" Then, Jacob Bright passed around the hat to take a collection to buy the man another horse. That was something of the spirit of Christ, His mercy led to action.

We should be merciful because God has dealt so mercifully with us. We should be merciful because we will have need of mercy from others. Mercy pays dividends in kind. Kindness breeds kindness as surely as cruelty breeds revenge. Only the forgiving can really be forgiven. If a heart contains hatred, there is no room in it for love. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." If we give, we shall get; if we sow, we shall reap. Mercy is a good investment. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." To refuse to show mercy is to shut the door of mercy in your own face.

The purity which is praised by Christ is in the heart. To the Jew the heart was the entire inner life -- the reason, the desires, the affections and the will. It is in that inward realm that purity is to reign supreme. "Heart" as used here may be understood to mean the interior life of the personality.

It is important for us to discover what it means to be pure in heart, and what it means to see God, before we can learn the real secret of this Beatitude, for both of these expressions are misunderstood by the masses.

Purity means freedom from foreign substance. Drugs are pure if they are what they are supposed to be, with no other substances contained.

The pure in heart are those who have been saved, whose thoughts have been cleansed, whose intentions are sincere, whose desires are unmixed, whose affections are dedicated to God, and whose wills are yielded to His perfect will. Purity of heart implies that "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). Pride is destroyed, and the soul is clothed with humility. The understanding is enlightened; the will is made comfortable to the will of God; the affections are placed on the proper objects. An undue love of the world having been uprooted, and a supreme love for God having been implanted in the mind, murmuring and complaining are at an end, and a blessed contentment is joyfully experienced.

What is the blessedness which results from purity of heart? "They shall see God." There are many sights which bring great joy to us; for example, some rare work of art, the skyline of a modern city, a lofty mountain range, or a beautiful sunset. Not all of us are able to travel and to see the treasures of art or the wonders of nature. But there is one object of vision more satisfying than any other, the contemplation of which brings the deepest and highest joy man can know, and that is the vision of God. How could one fail to be happy, if he could see God? What would we not give for this blessing? The vision of God is promised to the pure in heart. The condition for a vision of God is that the heart shall be clean and pure.

What are some of the blessings that come as a result of this vision of God? To see God is to obtain a clear revelation of self. When we have a vision of God we are always convicted of sin. Whenever there is a consciousness of God's presence there is always a sense of sin. A lack of the consciousness of sin is due to the failure to recognize the presence of God.

This promise, "They shall see God," has both a present and a future fulfillment. In the present life, the pure in heart possess spiritual discernment and with the eyes of their understanding they obtain clear views of God's character and perceive

the excellency of His attributes. They also enjoy intimate and delightful communion with God. This promise, however, will not be fulfilled completely in this life. Here God's children see Him by faith, and all too often only darkly because the lens of their hearts are not clean and clear enough. In the next world they shall see Him face to face, and with clear sight. What a sight that will be! How satisfying it will be! The sight of God will be an everlasting source of blessedness. As the Psalmist said, "I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15). Then, but not until then, will the full meaning of these words be understood.