

## The Beatitudes

By Ben Cordes

*"1) And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: 2) And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, 3) Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4) Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. 5) Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. 6) Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. 7) Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. 8) Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. 9) Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. 10) Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11) Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12) Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Matthew 5:3-12)*

### The Poor in Spirit

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Christ's Sermon on the Mount stands as a distinct example of God's excellent wisdom stated in profoundly simple ways. And though Christ spoke in simple terms, it remains for God's people to study what Christ preached so that we can uncover the truths buried deeply in the message.

The blessings spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount are called the Beatitudes (which means a state of great joy). The Beatitudes are declarations of the state of existence for God's born-again children. It must be said that it is only by the grace of the Holy Ghost that a person comes to realize their own spiritual existence. The characteristics that describe the child of God are the result of a change God has made in the individual and are not attitudes that are simply learned or selected. These are discoveries made by God's people, not inventions, and the discoveries only come by God uncovering them for us.

The first Beatitude is to the poor in spirit. Usually, we do not regard poverty as being a blessing. To be monetarily poor is regarded as a hardship in life. By the world's standards, the rich and wealthy are the blessed ones. However, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demonstrated an Old Testament truth regarding God's nature versus man's nature:

*"...the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7b)*

*"8) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. 9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

Samuel and Isaiah learned that God's perspective is far greater than man's. Jesus also revealed in the Sermon on the Mount that what God considers important is not always what man considers important, and vice versa. Man typically only considers the appearance, but God looks deeply at the heart and soul of the inner man. God does the same when examining righteousness and holiness, to Him they are more than just appearances.

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As Tevye, from the musical *The Fiddler on the Roof*, said to God in a prayer, "it's no shame to be poor, but it's no great honor, either." Tevye humorously sang about how he would live frivolously if he possessed a fortune. Though the point is made as to why Tevye didn't have great riches (as he would make waste of it), he still understood that God is rich and He gives of those riches to men. The truth is, we are all poor, and what we have is not our own. We are stewards of God's things. The same is true with spiritual things. Every person is spiritually destitute and what we possess does not originate with us.

Why, then, is it a blessing to be poor in spirit? The blessing is not the sole fact that mankind is spiritually poor, but that we realize we are spiritually poor. When God shows us our spiritual emptiness due to the presence of sin, we can then begin to understand our great need for Him. It is a blessing to see God as a wealthy Father, and to consider our pathetic state of utter emptiness in contrast. It is at that point when we begin to understand that only God can give us what we desperately need.

*"4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."* (Eph. 2:4-6)

Spiritual riches are what God gives to His children. The man who trusts in himself and feels no need for God is not capable of understanding his own spiritual penury nor the importance of God's riches. He is dead in his sins. Those who are alive in Jesus Christ are the poor in spirit and, by His grace, will realize they are such. They long to be filled with the supply that only our rich and generous God can give.

In God's economy, it's not gold or silver that are given to enrich the poor in spirit, but rather the greater riches of love, joy, mercy, forgiveness, faith, and peace. It is only through the blood of Jesus Christ that our redemption has been secured and the costly gifts of salvation have been supplied to a people who were once dead in sin but are now alive.

God has a kingdom in store for the poor in spirit. Not an earthly kingdom with conflict and sorrow, but the heavenly kingdom of God's righteousness, joy, and tranquility. God allows for us to receive a portion of the kingdom of heaven after we have been awakened to our spiritual poverty and confess our need for the Savior, Jesus Christ. Through repentance and baptism, we press into the kingdom and are blessed with the joy of salvation that our abundantly merciful and loving God gives to those who follow His gospel instruction (Luke 16:16).

If you feel you are in need of forgiveness. If you long for peace and separation from the sins and mistakes of the past. If you believe that God is unbelievably kind to you despite your faults and failures, then you are among the blessed poor in spirit. However, poverty is not your end, because you have a rich and generous Friend! Jesus Christ is the elder brother of the poor and afflicted children of God. You have an inheritance because of Him, and He has made you part of His royal heavenly family.

*"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* (Rom. 8:32)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for we have a King who freely gives to us all things. What a blessing it is to know of our rich Heavenly Father.

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### They That Mourn

*"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."* (Matt. 5:4)

The Bible is a book of comfort for the children of God. It plainly speaks of the great troubles in the world, but also assures us of God's power over the world and all its grief. The Bible informs us of the hope that saves us from despair and reminds us of what God has done so that we may wipe away tears and rejoice (Rom. 8:24).

God knows this world is difficult, but He does not spare us from all sorrow. Instead, God assures us that He will walk with us and help us through the troubles of life. He has promised that he is with us always, even to the end of the world (Matt. 28:20).

The second beatitude acknowledges the reality of sadness that exists in the world. Mourning is evidence of regret and pain. People mourn when they wish things weren't as they are. God's children have a spiritual yearning to be made free from the painful existence of sin.

The heart of one who cries out in regret of sin is doing so because God has given a new heart to them, and they are now aware of sin. Not just sin in general, but the sin within their own personal nature. The child of God may mourn and feel remorse and unworthiness, but God is ready to comfort the hearts of His children who are broken. The hope for mourners is that they shall be comforted by the only one who can condemn them but has chosen to forgive them instead.

Consider the woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her hair:

*"37) And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, 38) And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment."* (Luke 7:37-38)

The weeping woman enters the house of a Pharisee, willing to suffer his prejudiced glares and condemning speech, in order to express love to the only person who can grant her forgiveness. Why is she mourning? Because she knows the truth about herself. It's not the Pharisee she believes, it's the law that God has written on her heart that is accusing her conscience.

*"15) Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;"* (Rom. 2:15)

She is mourning because God has opened her eyes to her own sins. However, sin is not the only thing God has revealed to her, but He has also revealed to her the Forgiver of sins. God's grace has allowed for her to see Jesus as her only hope. After Jesus defended the woman's act of love and humility, the weeping woman departed in peace, having received word that her sins are forgiven.

*"47) Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, [the same] loveth little. 48) And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven... 50) And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."* (Luke 7:47-50)

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Some who lost their loved ones to death came to Jesus for help. The Lord raised their dead back to life, and they were comforted. Others were sick, and Jesus healed them. The lame were given strength to walk. The lepers were cleansed. The blind were given sight. Jesus gave these mourners comfort and peace through restoration.

Though the miracles of healing are wonderful, we are comforted with an even greater promise than a reinstatement of this natural body. And though we mourn, yet our Savior, Jesus Christ, has promised us an end to our mourning altogether. God has assured His children of eternity where every tear shall be wiped away.

*“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”* (Rev. 21:4)

We mourn because of sin and the overwhelmingly destructive effect it has in this present world. We mourn because of sin around us, and we mourn because of sin within us, but sin has an end. When Jesus Christ returns, He will resurrect the dead in Christ and change their corrupted bodies and make them sinless and incorruptible (1 Cor 15:52). We shall be gathered, the entire host of God’s elect family, with Jesus Christ, and we shall never mourn over sin and death ever again.

We mourn here for a little while, but hope is given to us in Christ so that we may carry on the way of our pilgrimage. The Holy Spirit abides with us, to console us, and to encourage us (John 14:16,26). If it weren’t for the comforting grace and hope of the Lord Jesus, which is applied to us through the Spirit, we would all be too miserable to operate. Thanks be to God that our mourning is only for a little while. We may sow in tears, but by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will reap in joy (Ps. 126:5).

## The Meek

*“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.”* (Matt. 5:5)

The third Beatitude concerns the matter of meekness. It is important to remember that the qualities for which Christ reserves blessings are not things to be acquired through desire, but are attributes given by God to the elect to be exercised and perfected. They are not earned. They are gifts of grace. Meekness is a fruit that comes forth from the Spirit who abides in every regenerated child of God (Gal. 5:23). Therefore, only the born again may demonstrate meekness.

Meekness is a profound feature of the elect, but one that requires defining. It is a gentleness of the spirit of the child of God. It requires that humility be present since the two are so closely tied together. However, meekness should not be understood as weakness. Rather, it is a spiritual strength that resists the excited urges and impulses of the flesh. The meek do not fight with God, instead, they accept His word and cling to His promises, come what may.

Like the other subjects of the beatitudes, meekness is a spiritual characteristic that is opposed by the carnal world. Nevertheless, Christ calls His followers to not conform to this present world but be transformed by the mind as it is renewed and refreshed in Jesus Christ (Rom 12:2). The spirit and heart that God gives the elect by grace is equipped with the heavenly nature that is opposed to the fallen carnal nature received by flesh and blood. Though our nature of flesh wars against the spirit now, at the resurrection the flesh nature

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will no longer resist, but will also be transformed to be made glorious and incorruptible. Then, all the qualities of eternal life will shine, and the children of God will rejoice in how the Lord has made us perfect.

At least two examples are given to us of people from the Bible who were meek. While Israel spent time in the wilderness, Moses was declared to be *“very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth”* (Num. 12:3). Moses demonstrated his meek nature through gentle entreaty toward God, requesting that He spare Israel after they sinned (Exod. 32:11-14). Moses possessed strength to control himself from becoming angry with Israel, and humbly begged the Lord for His mercy.

Jesus Christ, above all, is declared to be *“meek and lowly in heart”* (Matt. 11:29). The humility that the Son of God displayed in condescending to mankind, stooping to wash their feet, and reaching to touch and heal the sick allows for us to see that Jesus Christ is meek. Even as Christ was tormented and ridiculed, He possessed His soul with patience and strength to remain silent in the face of false accusers. Christ suffered death, not because He couldn't overcome His persecutors, but because He was serving the purpose of the Father through dying rather than in saving His own life. The meekness of Christ was demonstrated in His obedient submission to the Father, even through great difficulty.

Meekness in the children of God provides evidence of Christ. Every time a Christian bears patiently through trials, he is demonstrating meekness. When he withstands provocation and remains charitable despite the temptation to fight back, he is demonstrating meekness. When he is faced with terrible news, he doesn't ask *“why me?”*, but instead he asks *“why not me?”*. Meekness in the character of a Christian reveals the humility and strength of faith that Christ has issued to him.

The Lord promised the meek that they shall inherit the earth. The Lord wasn't speaking of this present earth, but of the new earth to come.

*“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”* (2 Pet. 3:13)

The Psalmist, David, also spoke of the new earth being inherited by the meek. The new earth will be a place where no evildoer exists and peace will be abundant.

*“9) For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. 10) For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 11) But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”* (Ps. 37:9-11)

This present earth is not the home of the meek children of God. We may spend time here, but living for this earth and the things in this earth is not what Christ has commanded His people to do. Foes and devils may fight for this current ground on which we dwell, but they only live for temporal pleasures and carnal lusts, and then they are judged. We, the elect of God, are to set our affection on things which are heavenly (Col. 3:2). We are anticipating the Lord's return and the abode He has in store for us, wherein we will dwell with Him in righteousness forever.

*“15) Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16) For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17) And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”* (1 John 2:15-17)

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What a hope the Lord has given us! To observe meekness in our brothers and sisters is to see the evidence of the promises of God in them. Remember, friends, to exhibit the grace that God has given to patiently possess your soul, and to live in meekness. When you charitably bear with one another, and when you choose to love instead of fight back against those that provoke, you are demonstrating Christ. May the Lord bless us to live meekly while in this present world.

### The Hungry & Thirsty

*“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.”* (Matt. 5:6)

Hunger and thirst will always be two very clear indications of life. The dead hunger and thirst for nothing, but the living have appetites and require nourishment to have their lives sustained. The physical needs for the body are supplied by God in and through His creation. The fruits, vegetables, and meats that our bodies desire, God has supplied to us on the earth. We read that we should not become overwhelmed by worry about food and nourishment since Christ declared in His Sermon on the Mount that the Father is faithful to give us our physical needs (Matt. 6:25-34).

However, the Beatitudes are spiritual blessings concerning spiritual subjects. The hunger and thirst being spoken of in the above text are not concerning our corporeal needs but are in reference to the spiritual nature. The regeneration (new birth) that God works in His elect brings forth a living spirit. Jesus calls the regeneration of the spirit a birth.

*“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:3)

The effectual work of God brings forth spiritual life and enables us, by faith, to hear spiritual words, such as the gospel, and to see spiritual things, such as the kingdom of God. The new birth also causes the heart of our newborn spirit to cry out in desire for the Heavenly Father.

*“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”* (Gal. 4:6)

God gives a longing for His presence, like a newborn baby desires his mother’s closeness—to be loved, held, comforted and nurtured. Being made new in the spirit creates a similar yearning for God as our Father, to be with God and to be nourished by Him. If a person is longing for God, it then stands as evidence that they already possess spiritual life, and God is their Father.

The spiritual hunger and thirst is not for natural sustenance, but for godliness, truth, virtue, and the like. Christ said that righteousness is for what the blessed people of God hunger and thirst. God’s people long to see righteousness in the world, and they desire for their lives to be filled with it. They also desire to hear from God and be fed with His word of truth, which God has faithfully supplied in the Holy Bible.

*“2) As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: 3) If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.”* (1 Pet. 2:2-3)

The desire to hear God’s word, to read, understand and be nourished by it, does not come naturally, but supernaturally. We do not long for spiritual nourishment because we are simply born of a mother and father,

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but because we are born of the Heavenly Father. And our Heavenly Father knows our spiritual needs, and He is faithful to supply them to us.

The promise to the people of God who long for righteousness is that they shall be filled. What Christ has assured us of is that God doesn't create a longing in our spirit that He doesn't also intend to supply. What we hope for is a world without sin and death. What we shall receive is a home in heaven where God and all His saints and angels are, and where sin and death are not (Rev. 21:4). What we hunger and thirst for is unending joy, peace and love within our souls, and what God has promised is to reveal the pure glory of His holiness within us along with all the rich treasures of life and immortality (Rom. 8:18).

God does not intend to give us a portion of righteousness that will become empty and must be replenished. He promised to fill us with a never-failing supply of righteousness to the pure delight of our spirit. Jesus Christ is revealing how generous and caring our Heavenly Father is to us.

Christian, if life in this present world causes you to wish for a better land. If your heart becomes overwhelmed with the troubles and sorrows of life, then be assured, God has something much better in store for you. Your spirit longs to be fed with the satisfying righteousness of God! (Ps. 17:15) Your soul thirsts for the living water that springs up into eternal life! (John 4:14) And only Jesus Christ is able to supply you with what you desire. Do not seek to be filled by the beggarly elements of a sin-cursed earth. Do not bother looking for satisfaction in the dead, dark places of this present world. Rather, seek first the kingdom of our Father that is found in the church of the living God. Righteousness is what your spirit longs for, and the living God is the only One who can supply what your spirit truly desires.

## The Merciful

*"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."* (Matt. 5:7)

The righteous judgment of God demands that the sins of mankind be accounted for. The consequence of sin is death, therefore, what every sinner deserves is death (Rom. 6:23). Almighty God declared from the beginning, before any sin was committed, that to transgress His law meant death for the transgressor (Gen. 2:17).

The book of Genesis reveals that Adam, the father of the human race, committed sin by transgressing the law of God. Since Adam sinned, death came upon him, just as God said it would. He suffered the affliction of the presence of sin, and Adam and his wife were made to depart from the Garden of Eden. Death came between Adam's fallen flesh nature and the divine holiness of God. Adam, Eve, and the children that would follow them were pronounced dead in sins (Rom. 5:12).

The Bible makes it clear that death occurred at the moment Adam transgressed God's law. The original (first) sin brought death upon all mankind. Still, the Bible declares that a second death exists.

*"14) And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15) And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."* (Rev. 20:14-15)

From the verses above, we can conclude that the second death is reserved for those who will be cast into a lake of fire by God. The lake of fire is the everlasting punishment mentioned by Christ in Matt. 25:46. It is a death which all mankind is deserving of since all are guilty of sin, and because God is just.

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However, God is not only just, He is also merciful. He is just to condemn some, but He is also merciful to spare many, though, we shouldn't assume that God's mercy is unjust. Every sin has a recompense and must be dealt with (Heb. 10:30). For those who receive mercy, it is because Jesus Christ, the Son of God, took the punishment for their sins upon Himself.

*"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."* (Isaiah 53:5)

God has graciously given mercy to the great number of His elect; mercy that spares them from the second death—the everlasting lake of fire. Mercy can be defined as not receiving a deserved result. What God's people deserve is everlasting punishment, but that is not what they will receive since God's Son took the penalty for sins upon Himself, allowing those that He died for to be spared from God's righteous wrath.

The Spirit of God gives the new birth to all for whom Christ died. When God's children are made new creatures by the Spirit, they are also given spiritual attributes. Mercy is one of the attributes that the elect are able to exhibit, and a merciful person demonstrates the existence of a merciful God. If it weren't for God giving mercy to His elect and granting them the ability to have mercy on others, there would be no mercy in this world at all.

The Beatitudes do not speak of ways in which to achieve God's blessings. Rather, the Beatitudes teach us that God has made His children to live, who were once dead in sins, and now we can know that God has given us life through the evidence of spiritual behavior, such as mercy. We are able to show mercy because God has been merciful to us.

Therefore, our responsibility as Christians is to demonstrate the nature of Christ to those around us. We ought to examine the life of Christ in order for us to know how to behave like Christ. Jesus, our Great High Priest, stood in our place and offered Himself upon the altar of the cross of Calvary. His act of love and mercy was absolutely voluntary.

*"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."* (Heb. 2:17)

When we show mercy and forgiveness to those who offend us, we are demonstrating Jesus. The merciful are blessed because they have received mercy and will continue to receive mercy. Because of Christ, the just desserts are no longer ours, but have been placed upon the sinless Son of God. Christ suffered abandonment by God the Father so that we can say that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5). Let us remember how merciful God has been to us undeserving sinners, so that we may be more encouraged to extend mercy to others, and to let the light of Christ shine for the glory of God.

## The Pure In Heart

*"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."* (Matt. 5:8)

To be pure is to be clean. A clean heart is something David desired, but it is also something David knew only God could create in him.

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."* (Ps. 51:10)



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When Aaron and his sons, who represented the Levitical priesthood, approached the tabernacle, they were to wash themselves. In order to approach the altar and offer sacrifices for themselves and on behalf of Israel, they had to be made clean. The outward washings of the priesthood only cleansed their bodies, but it revealed the fact that God requires purity in order to approach His holiness.

No matter how much water Aaron and his sons used to wash themselves, it was never able to make their hearts pure. The cleansing of the heart is a work that is reserved for the Holy Ghost alone.

*“3) For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. 4) But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 5) Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;”* (Titus 3:3-5)

The washing of regeneration, as mentioned by the Apostle Paul, is what saves us from the dreaded results of death in sins. God, through His own love and kindness, gives a clean heart to His elect, which is done in accordance to His mercy. No good work could be done on the part of the sinner in order to receive the washing of regeneration since all that was within him was unclean. It is an act of grace by God to make His elect children pure.

When it came to outward rituals of washings, the scribes and Pharisees were rebuked by Christ for their pretenses. They knew the law required outward washings to be performed. The hypocrites did not understand the spiritual nature of what the law signified, rather, they were blind and only understood it simplistically. To wash hands and feet, to have a clean body, to the Pharisees, these things were what made them holy, but there was no regard for the heart. However, Jesus testified against them and exposed their fallacies.

*“25) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. 26) Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that [which is] within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27) Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28) Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.”* (Matt. 23:25-28)

Then what do we make of the admonitions to purify ourselves? There are plenty of verses that indicate we have a work to do in cleansing ourselves.

*“2) Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth 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. 3) And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”* (1 John 3:2-3)

*“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”* (James 4:8)

*“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:”* (1 Pet. 1:22)

The above verses are to be understood as commandments of repentance. For God's children to turn away from sins. It is impossible for a completely unclean person to cleanse himself, his ways, or his soul, yet God

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instructs us to cease from sinning. The washing of regeneration by the grace of the Holy Ghost must first occur, this enables a person to follow Christ's obedient behavior, which was a life of holiness. Although we are commanded to purify ourselves, we cannot absolutely rid ourselves of the influences of sin. The old sinful nature remains with us until we are made glorious at the return of Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:21).

Knowing that it is by grace alone that we are enabled to live according to a pure heart, we ought to choose purity and holiness over the vain pleasures of sin. There is joy in the Lord when we choose holiness, but sorrows abound for the child of God who continues to live according to the flesh (Gal 6:8).

The blessing that awaits the pure in heart is the promise of seeing God. The best that Aaron and his sons could achieve through outward washing was to approach the sacred altar and tabernacle. But for those whom the Lord has cleansed, their eyes shall see the face of the glorious God of heaven and earth. Though we can currently "see" Him and His kingdom through eyes of faith (John 3:3), we will one day see Him in the fullness of His majesty in the flesh with glorified eyes.

*"25) For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: 26) And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: 27) Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."* (Job 19:25-27)

Glory be to God who not only gives to us a pure heart, but also causes our cup to run over with joy at the rich hope of seeing our God and living forever in His blessed presence. May we be encouraged to live purer in heart by drawing nearer to Him.

## The Peacemakers

*"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."* (Matt. 5:9)

The flawed nature of man loves to fight. This is one of the most verifiable truths we can observe. Look no further than social media where self-control is abandoned, and people engage in arguments ad nauseam. People even argue about whether the arguments matter. Then, on a larger, more consequential scale, are the countless wars that nations have waged against other nations. Whether it is nuclear war, bloodshed, debate, or a simple misunderstanding, human nature exhibits an undeniable desire to fight.

If our nature is bent on fighting, how then do we have any peace in this world? The answer, of course, is God. God's influence is found even in our bitter, hate-filled planet. We are not totally consumed with wars of violence (though some places on earth may appear to be) because God has caused His peace to infiltrate the hearts of His people. These people of God have been equipped with a love for peace, despite their remaining human nature that revels in conflict.

It is the peacemaker that knows he is capable of fighting, but resists the urge to argue and debate, and instead chooses to speak a soft answer to turn away wrath (Prov. 15:1). The peacemaker is not easily offended and does not run to participate in a quarrel, but, rather, looks for a way to end the fight and bring previously conflicting parties together in peace. The peacemaker loves law and order, but most of all, the peacemaker loves forgiveness.

*"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."* (Isaiah 38:17)

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The love for peace isn't natural, it is supernatural. It is a product of regeneration, which is wholly God's work. Peace is the third fruit of the Spirit and certainly affirms God's saving presence (Gal. 5:22). This is why Christ states that the peacemakers shall be called the children of God, not only because their efforts to bring peace between man and man demonstrates they are children of God, but because they imitate their heavenly Father, who has brought peace between God and man through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." (Rom. 5:10)*

The elect of God, while dead in sins, were enemies toward God through sin and the friendship of the vain world (James 4:4). Nevertheless, God is unwilling to allow anything to separate His children from His love. Christ's atoning death took away the enmity that existed between God and His elect, and now peace exists between them. It is through faith that we come to realize that peace and righteousness have been given to us as gifts of God's amazing grace.

*"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1)*

The blessed peacemakers are living evidence of the Prince of Peace reigning in their hearts (Isaiah 9:6). They are proof that peace exists in this world as a result of God's blessing and influence. If it were not for God, the world would see no end to war and violence. Men would have destroyed themselves ages ago. But thanks be to God for granting peace through Christ, and for putting peace within the hearts of the elect. Blessed be the name of Jesus Christ, our gracious Peacemaker.

## The Persecuted

*"10) Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11) Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute [you], and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12) Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Matt. 5:10-12)*

The final Beatitude of the Lord Jesus expresses blessings for the elect of God who suffer. The suffering that is addressed is not to be understood as illness or afflictions that arise due to poor health. Persecution is when a person suffers hostility at the hands of others who reject that person's beliefs.

The Bible details many instances of people who suffered persecution for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible records the prophets, including John the Baptist, the apostles, and other disciples were persecuted, almost all of them to the point of death.

*"33) Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34) Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. 35) Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: 36) And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: 37) They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; 38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." (Heb. 11:33-38)*

## The Beatitudes

The story of the Christian faith reveals a history of persecution. However, the most notable persecution was the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. In some ways the story of Christ's suffering is so commonly understood that it does not carry with it the passionate response that it perhaps had on us when we first heard the account of Christ's afflictions. Nevertheless, we must remember that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. The King of Heaven and Earth descended to dwell among men and wasn't warmly received, but rather suffered abuse and death at the hands of men. May the effect of the gospel story never become dull to us.

It is absolutely contrary to our mortal nature to choose suffering. However, Christ showed us that He knew persecution would be what sinful men would express in response to the holy and virtuous words that Jesus spoke. It was His intention to save sinful men through His death knowing that the recipients of His salvation were also at enmity with Him.

As Christians, it is our duty to follow the example that Jesus Christ has set before us. To live in faithful obedience to God the Father in whatever scenario of life we may exist. Through bliss and ease, and through trials and torment. There is no greater cause for living or suffering than to do so for the belief in Jesus Christ. Though no one wishes suffering or death upon themselves, or others, yet it is the potential we must accept when we commit ourselves to living a Christian life.

In general, the martyrs (those who are killed because they refuse to renounce their belief in Jesus Christ) are acknowledged in the scriptures for their unwavering faith. They are highlighted for their confidence, not in their faith, but in the object of their faith, that is Jesus Christ. The Savior sees when His people suffer for His name's sake, and He cares. Augustine said, "It is not the punishment, but the cause which makes the martyr." Augustine was correct since it is no ordinary thing for which the persecuted are willing to suffer; it is the infallible, eternal, glorious Son of God to whom the whole earth shall bend their knees at His return (Phil. 2:10). People can die for various reasons, but it is the person who dies because they lived for Jesus that becomes a martyr.

The persecuted are blessed to know that they have a kingdom that awaits them. The martyr will close his eyes in this world at death and will open them in the glory of God's paradise where his faith is made complete. Those who suffer for the truth and their most deeply held belief in Christ Jesus are made assured by God that Whom they suffer for is worthy. Since Jesus, who knew no sin, was willing to suffer for sinners like us, we should also be willing to suffer for Him. We need to be thankful for the time of peace in which we live, though such peace isn't guaranteed to continue. We cannot allow the peace we now experience to soften our commitment and cause our faith to weaken. Let all who follow Jesus repeat the motto, "Till death!" May we all be happy, even as our fathers and mothers in the faith were, to live, suffer, and die for Christ, who gave His all for us.