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Matthew 5:3 - 5:6 (Beatitudes 1 - 4)



Sermon on the Mount - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the first four Beatitudes found in Matthew 5:3-6. He explains that being merciful will lead to obtaining mercy and that the comfort promised in God's kingdom is not limited to heaven but rather is something that Christians can experience in the present. Gregg clarifies that the promised justice and righteousness in the Beatitudes are not political but reflect the reign of God's kingdom, which Jesus came to establish. He also emphasizes the importance of humility and meekness as necessary qualities for inheriting the earth and satisfying one's hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Transcript

Alright, we're going to be looking at the Beatitudes again. Basically, we talked a little, very little bit about the first Beatitude last time, after having an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount in general, and mainly, even though we talked about the first Beatitude, it was not really the first Beatitude in Matthew that we talked about. I talked more about the first Beatitude in Luke's version.

I'd like to look again at Matthew 5, 3. Jesus says, Now, before I talk about what it means to be poor in spirit, I want to talk about what is meant by the kingdom of heaven. Each of the Beatitudes has a promise attached to it, or a benefit attached to it, that explains why the persons described are described as blessed. And each of them is certainly something to be desired.

Those who mourn, according to verse 4, shall be comforted. Those who are meek shall inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled or satisfied.

Those who are merciful will obtain mercy. Those who are pure in heart will see God. Peacemakers will be called the sons of God.

And those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, it says of them, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The very same thing it said about the poor in spirit, so that we come full circle here. We have, although each of these has its own blessing attached or its own benefit attached to it, the first and the last Beatitudes have the same one, which is probably not because Jesus lacked imagination or originality and couldn't think of

anything else good to say, but it's probably a literary device to tie it all together and say we've come full circle now.

The kingdom of heaven is what the poor in spirit have, and when you get around through all the Beatitudes, that's what the last group has as well. And the last group is the same as the first group, because we're only really talking about one group of people. These are all just so many descriptions of the same people.

And by tying it in with this circular method of mentioning that theirs is the kingdom of heaven in the beginning and the end, it may be a way of saying that all of the things in between are part of being in the kingdom of heaven, that they all have something to do with life in God's kingdom. In God's kingdom we have comfort, we inherit the earth, we are satisfied, we obtain mercy, we see God, we are called sons of God. All of these things are benefits that come from having the kingdom of God.

It's interesting to me that all of the benefits that are mentioned, except for the first and the last one, which, as I pointed out, are identical to each other, are in the future tense. Those who are mourning shall be, in the future, comforted. Now, we don't have to assume that this means in the distant future.

It doesn't have to mean that they will be comforted in heaven. It may be, I mean, perhaps that too. But a person who is mourning, for the right reasons, may well be experiencing at the same time, and whenever they mourn, they experience, they shall experience comfort.

I'm not saying that the future tense necessarily puts everything off until heaven, or until some time in the far distant future, but it's just an observation that each of the benefits, in verses four through nine, are mentioned in the future tense. They shall be comforted, they shall inherit the earth, and so forth. But the one about the kingdom of heaven is in the present tense.

Because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And, therefore, the kingdom of heaven is now. The kingdom of heaven is the present possession of those who are Jesus' disciples, and who fit this description.

Now, that doesn't mean there's nothing more. That doesn't mean there's not a heaven elsewhere as well to anticipate. But it does, it is remarkable that though Jesus talks about some of these benefits in the future tense, the possession of the kingdom of heaven is mentioned in the present tense.

And we know that Paul said, in Colossians 1.13, that God has translated us out of the power of darkness into the kingdom of his own dear son. This is a present tense reality. It's actually Paul states it has been fulfilled in the past, that he has translated us, Colossians 1.13, into the kingdom of his dear son.

In another place, Romans 14.17, Paul said the kingdom of God is not food and drink. It's not a matter of what you eat or drink. He says what the kingdom of God is, is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

And, obviously, he's not talking about something that awaits in heaven. He's talking about something that is the Christian's current experience. Righteousness in the Holy Spirit, peace in the Holy Spirit, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

These are fruits of the Spirit. That's what the kingdom consists in, according to Paul. It's interesting, really, when you consider how Paul's views must have changed in order to reach that conclusion, because as a Pharisee, prior to his conversion, he would have held the general Phariseic understanding that the kingdom of God would be a political phenomenon.

That when the Messiah would come, he would drive out the political enemies of Israel and he would establish in their place a regime of righteousness and of peace and of rejoicing for the people of Israel. And when he read the Old Testament scriptures about the kingdom of the Messiah, he would read frequently of the righteousness of that era. Righteousness essentially means justice.

It's the same word in Hebrew and in Greek. The justice, that the king would reign in justice. And he would read of the peace of that time.

They'll beat their swords into plowshares and their spears to pruning hooks and nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. And they'd read in the Old Testament prophecies of the rejoicing and the joy of the Messianic age, because it would say, therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion and shall flow together for the goodness of the Lord. And it says, therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return with songs of joy upon their heads.

They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighs shall flee away. These are the Old Testament prophecies about the kingdom age. There would be justice or righteousness.

There would be peace. There would be joy. And Paul, now having become a Christian, becoming spiritual instead of a Pharisee, he says the kingdom of God is, in fact, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So that Paul no longer believed that the kingdom of God was a political phenomenon, but that it was a spiritual reality which Christians enjoy through the Holy Spirit. We have that righteousness. We have that peace.

We have that joy. We know that Paul said elsewhere in Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace. He refers to the Spirit.

And so the kingdom of God is spiritual. That's why Jesus had to correct Nicodemus, who was the teacher of Israel, and say, unless you are born again, unless you are born of the Spirit, you will not see the kingdom. The kingdom of God is spiritual.

It cannot be perceived. Jesus said to the Pharisees when they demanded of him when the kingdom of God would appear in Luke 17.20, he said, well, the kingdom of God doesn't come with observation. A man will not be able to say, oh, here it is or, oh, there it is.

But the kingdom of God is in your midst, or it's within you, sometimes they say, most of them say. And so Jesus indicated that the kingdom was not an observable phenomenon in the sense that the Jews thought it would be. It would not come in a political sense.

The kingdom is a spiritual reality. You have to be born of the Spirit even to see it. And that obviously makes it clear that it's not a visible reality, or else ordinary people could see it.

Now here in Matthew we have the expression, kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Obviously, kingdom of heaven is a different expression than the expression kingdom of God.

But that doesn't mean it's a different concept. There are those, you've heard me mention before, various areas of disagreement I have with dispensational theology. Well, one of the areas that dispensationalists differ from most other Christians is they make a great number of distinctions between things that there are no distinctions between.

For example, you'll find Paul talking about the day of the Lord in some passages and the day of Christ in other passages. And the dispensationalists say, well, the day of the Lord is one thing and the day of Christ is a different thing. Although what you do with 1 Corinthians chapter 1 where Paul talks about the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, it gets a little sticky for them because they try to make the day of the Lord as a technical term for something and day of Christ as a technical term for something else.

But unless they're denying that Jesus Christ is the Lord, then it would seem that the day of the Lord is nothing else but the day of the Lord, Jesus Christ, the day of Christ. Same day, and of course it is the same day, but for the sake of certain theological prior commitments, they have to find distinctions in these things. Likewise with the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God.

It is an aspect of the dispensational method of interpretation. As far as I'm concerned, as far as I know, no other system does this, but they make a distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is one thing, the kingdom of God is another.

Now this is rather artificial, well not rather, it's entirely artificial. The term kingdom of heaven is found only in the gospel of Matthew. Now I don't mean to suggest that

Matthew never uses the term kingdom of God, he uses both terms.

Matthew uses the term kingdom of God and the term kingdom of heaven. But one thing that is easily observed if you compare the gospels is that if you take the statements in Matthew, where the term kingdom of heaven is used, and look at the parallel statements in either Mark or Luke or both, you'll find that the term kingdom of God is used by Mark or Luke in the same place that Matthew uses the term kingdom of heaven. In fact, even in the Beatitude, in Luke 6.20, and we have the first Beatitude there we talked about last time, blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Here, blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now, that in itself would not prove for sure that kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven are the same thing, but you'll find that in the last Beatitude in both lists, in Matthew and Luke, the kingdom of heaven is mentioned in Matthew, kingdom of God is in its place in Luke. And this is true throughout, throughout the teaching of Jesus.

The kingdom of heaven is a frequent expression in Matthew, but it's never found outside of Matthew, but its parallel is found in Mark and Luke, and always it is the kingdom of God. It's just two different ways of saying the same thing. In fact, even Matthew points that out.

I don't know if he intentionally points it out, but he demonstrates it. In Matthew chapter 19, when Jesus is lamenting that the rich young ruler has not been willing to pay the price to become a disciple, in Matthew 19, 23 and 24, Jesus says, Assuredly I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, 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.

He's got kingdom of heaven in one verse and kingdom of God in the next verse, and yet he states very clearly that the second verse is simply a repetition of the first. He says, Again I say unto you. He's not saying something different in verse 24 than he said in verse 23.

And yet the terms are used, both terms are used here of the same phenomenon. We don't have time to go into all the comparisons that could be made to demonstrate this, but suffice it to say that the kingdom of God is a concept that, is a major concept in the Jewish mind, certainly a major concept in Jesus' teaching, and in John the Baptist and in the apostles. The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would come and would establish a kingdom.

The Jews expected this to be a material kingdom like that of David, where the Gentiles were all conquered by David, all the surrounding Gentiles were, and they paid tribute to him, and the Jews were elevated above all the nations around about them under David, and the devout Jews fondly anticipated the same type of arrangement coming about

when the Messiah, a second David, would arrive. And that is why on one occasion we read in John chapter 6 and verse 15 that the people that Jesus fed, the multitudes, John 6, 15, says that the people were going to take Jesus by force and make him king, that he grew away and separated so they couldn't do that, he didn't let them do that. And the kingdom, therefore, was anticipated by the Jews to be political in nature, but Jesus' teaching was very not pleasing to them, because he didn't have any interest in bringing about the kind of kingdom they anticipated.

Now there's two ways of understanding Jesus' negligence on this part. One is the dispensational way. The dispensationalists believe that Jesus actually did come offering a political kingdom, but that the Jews rejected him as their Messiah, and therefore he withdrew the offer until later, and that the kingdom of God was not established during Jesus' first time here.

He took it away, and there's been a long parenthesis since his absence, but when he returns he will then establish his kingdom on earth, the very political, millennial kingdom that the Jews anticipated from the Old Testament prophets. In other words, those Old Testament prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, they will be literally fulfilled when Jesus comes back, because the Jews rejected the offer the first time. That is the dispensational way of looking at that.

The non-dispensational way of looking at it is that Jesus did establish the kingdom. He said he was going to, that's what he was sent to do, and at the end of his ministry he said that he had done everything that he had been sent to do. In John 17, 4, Jesus said as he prayed to his father, I have finished everything you sent me to do.

He didn't fail to do it, and it was not in fact ever the case that Jesus offered himself as a political king, and the Jews rejected it, it's the other way around. They attempted to make him a political king, and he rejected that. The kingdom Jesus came to bring, he did bring.

He succeeded, and he established the kingdom. And to those that were sitting around him on the occasion of this sermon, he said, yours is the kingdom, you have it, you are in it. On a later occasion when the infants were brought to him and the disciples tried to shoo them away, Jesus said, don't permit them to come to me, he says, of such is the kingdom of heaven, they are in it.

They are in the kingdom. They are citizens. A kingdom is simply those who are subject to a king, those who are the subjects.

And therefore Jesus' disciples following King Jesus, subject to him, are his kingdom. They possess the kingdom and all the benefits, the righteousness, the joy, the peace in the Holy Spirit, and all these benefits that the Beatitudes lay out for us. Tremendous benefits to anyone who has a spiritual interest.

That's why he mentions among them those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The Jews of his time did crave deliverance. They craved the coming of a Messiah.

But they didn't have spiritual cravings. They were religious, they were political, they were selfish, they were greedy, but they were not spiritual. And they were very eager to have the yoke of bondage of Rome removed from them by a coming deliverer, but they were not eager to repent of their sins and to surrender to God, to take up a cross, follow the way of Christ, and therefore they didn't like his kingdom and crucified him.

Now, this first Beatitude says that the kingdom of heaven is in the possession of those who are poor in spirit. Now remember, as we read through all of these eight Beatitudes, all of them really are descriptions of what kind of person is subject to the king, what kind of person is in the kingdom, possesses the kingdom. And the first quality that is mentioned is they are poor in spirit.

Now, as we were closing the session last time, I mentioned that in Israel there's two different terms, two different categories that we call poor. There's the poor who had barely enough to get by on a daily basis. They had to work day in and day out, backbreaking work, farming with, you know, primitive tools and animals and so forth, just to make enough food to keep their family alive through the next winter.

And they managed. They were not the aristocratic sort, but they managed to survive, barely. And they were poor.

They were called the poor of the land, actually. The people of the land were largely poor. But there was a second category of those that were called poor, and those were those who were genuinely destitute, who had nothing, usually because they were incapable of working.

They maybe didn't own land. Maybe they were crippled, blind, elderly, or for some other reason, and they had no relatives to support them. They were totally destitute.

Now, see, there were many people in those days who were handicapped or elderly, but they had family. You know, Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5 that the church should take on the support of widows, but not widows who have living relatives who can support them. He said if any widow has children or nephews who can support them, well, then let those relatives repay their parents and show piety at home by supporting them so that the church would not be burdened.

So, Paul realized that there were among widows those who were truly needy and those who were not really that needy because they had relatives who could take care of them. But the poor, the sense in which it is used here, the word that is used by Jesus here, the poor in spirit, refers to those who are completely destitute, those who could not work for themselves, those who have no possessions, those who have no relatives, no friends to

fall back on. They are simply alone and their entire survival depends on begging.

They are the beggars. And some have even said, you could actually translate this, blessed are the beggars in spirit. Growing up, reading the Bible as I did, especially the Sermon on the Mount, I remember reading when I was, I think, 11 or 12, I read Billy Graham in one of his books.

He said that he knew a man who testified that he read the Sermon on the Mount every day and got something new out of it every time. And as a youth, much influenced by that suggestion, I decided I would do the same. I would read the Sermon on the Mount every day.

I did, for a long time. Had most of it memorized before I was probably 13 or 14. But I wouldn't say I got something new out of it every day.

This was before I was filled with the Spirit. A lot of it was opaque to me. I couldn't quite make out what was going on there.

But I know that this very first line in the Sermon on the Mount used to puzzle me. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Now, if it had just been like it was in Luke, blessed are the poor, I could understand that.

I could understand that Jesus would be saying people who are physically poor might be blessed because they might be rich in some other sense, in some spiritual sense. After all, I knew that James said that God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith. So, I mean, people who are poor in money can be rich in another sense, in a spiritual sense, in faith.

And I thought, well, okay, so the blessed ones would be not necessarily those who are rich people. They might even be poor people, but they would be rich in spirit. Maybe poor in finances, but rich in spirit, in spiritual things.

And yet that's the opposite of what Jesus said. Jesus said blessed are the poor in spirit, those who are lacking in spiritual things. And that just didn't seem right to me.

It just seems like the opposite of what he should say. And since that time, of course, I've read the Sermon on the Mount many times, and had much opportunity to read widely in the Bible and outside the Bible, and I guess what's come clear to me, it was not clear at the time, is that if a person is a beggar in spirit, it means that they possess, and they know they possess, nothing spiritually. But they are simply persons with an open hand.

They are people who depend 100% on the generosity of another. That's what a beggar is. He does not contribute anything to his own survival.

He survives because of the contributions of other parties. And he is 100% a pensioner on

the grace and the mercy of other people. A beggar is.

Now, a beggar in spirit is one who in the spiritual sense is like that. And no doubt, Jesus had in mind, as he looked at his disciples and described them as poor in spirit, the contrast, the glaring contrast between them and the religious people of his own time, and particularly the paragons of Jewish religiosity, the Pharisees. Now, the Pharisees were anything but beggars in spirit.

They believed themselves to be spiritually opulent, spiritually well-to-do. They believed that they were the ones who had a lot of spiritual capital, and that God certainly, they had a lot to give to God. I mean, they had, they were, by their good works and by their legal observance and following the traditions of the elders, they had a lot to offer to God.

Now, the tax collectors and the fishermen and the ordinary peasant-type people that Jesus called, they didn't have any illusions about having a lot to offer God. They didn't keep the traditions of the elders as faithfully as the Pharisees did, and almost no one did as faithfully as the Pharisees did. And in many cases, they probably weren't even that regular in their ordinary religious observance.

Fishermen, there might have been times, who knows, they might not have always kept the Sabbath, they might not have always kept totally kosher. It's hard to know, it's hard to know. But they were not people who had illusions of being spiritual giants.

And they knew, when Peter first saw Jesus do a miracle, which was on the occasion that Jesus had preached from Peter's boat, the story is told in Luke 5, and after the crowds were sent away, and Peter and Jesus were out in the boat, Jesus said, put your net in the water to get it to Texas Station. Peter said, well, Lord, we've been fishing all night, haven't caught a thing, but if you insist, we'll do it. And so he did, and of course the net came up, flooded with fish, just full of fish.

And Peter, realizing he'd just witnessed a miracle, fell down on his face before Jesus and said, depart from me, Lord, I'm a sinful man. He didn't, like a slick agent, say, hey, Jesus, I see you've got some talent here, and you've come to the right place. I happen to know how to market a guy like you, and you really can benefit from association with a guy like me.

We can make some money together on this deal. I mean, I'm just, you know, we're pretty well matched. I always did, I thought everything you said was pretty right on, and I think it's pretty much the way I've always thought about things, too, when you're preaching.

I just couldn't help but think how we ought to make a great team, you know. I mean, Peter just said, you better leave me. You better depart from me.

I don't have anything to offer you except embarrassment if you associate with someone like me. If you would associate with the likes of me, it would simply destroy your

reputation, Jesus. I'm a sinful man.

You better leave. And that is a man who didn't have any spiritual capital to boast of and didn't think he did, unlike the Pharisees, who thought they did. And so we see the beggars in spirit are those who simply don't have any confidence in themselves and they do not believe that they have anything to offer.

It's strictly, you know, mercy. It's strictly the grace of God that they depend upon. There's a parable that Jesus told in the 18th chapter of Luke that best, I think, describes this parable, or this beatitude.

I think of all the parables, this one is the best illustration of the beatitude of being a beggar in spirit. Luke 18, it says in verse 9, He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and they despised others. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers. Even if this tax collector, I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Now notice what this is.

This parable was told with a jab, it says, at people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. They trusted in themselves. A beggar cannot trust in himself.

If a beggar said, I'm sorry, I won't take any money from you, I insist on taking care of myself, but he had no way of earning any money, he'd die. He's not too proud to accept money. It may be shameful, but he's gotten over it.

He's a shameful person. He's a humble person. He's humiliated, but that's how he has to survive.

He's got to beg. He's got nothing to offer. Jesus directed this parable against the opposite type of person, of the beggar, but the one who thought he was the giver, the one who provided for himself in terms of righteousness.

I can provide. I can fast twice a week. I can pay tithes of all that I have.

I can abstain from these scandalous sins such as this tax collector is no doubt involved in. And I can therefore enrich God with my loyalty to him. I can enrich God and enhance his movement by my participation.

And that is the Pharisee in the parable, of course. The other man was what? What was he? Well, he was a beggar. He didn't say, God, you know, I'll tell you what, just give me a little time, I'll do better.

I'm going to turn over a new leaf today, and I was just planning to start paying my tithes as of this week. You know, he said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Now, I'm not saying that God doesn't require people to repent of their sin and to determine that they're going to turn to righteousness and follow God to be saved, but of course, no one can possibly do that without the grace of God.

What I mean is that no one can walk the way that Christians are to walk without God's enablement, without the Holy Spirit. And, you know, it's rather interesting that Jesus would begin the Sermon on the Mount, of all discourses, with this business about being a beggar in spirit, because you don't have to read very far into the Sermon on the Mount to realize that you come short, and that there's nothing for it but to trust in God, or else you'll never measure up. That this, if you can do this in your own strength, or if you think you can, you will likely live with the delusion that you're more righteous than you are, like the Pharisees.

But as you read the Sermon on the Mount through, or as the original listeners listened to it, certainly it was to their advantage to know that it is the beggars, the ones who don't have all of it together, the ones who can't perform, the ones who don't have anything to offer that would enhance God's movement. It's those who have the kingdom, because when you read of what you must be, you realize, I don't have what it takes to be that. I don't have it in me.

Just like the beggar doesn't have it in his pouch to supply what he needs for survival, we don't have it in us to provide righteousness, the righteousness that God requires. But of course, the man who said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner, we read that he went down to his house justified, rather than the other, Jesus said. He went home justified.

He was not righteous, but he needed righteousness. But he didn't have any. But he went home declared righteous.

That's what justified means. God declared him righteous. Because he declared himself unrighteous.

Because he said, I don't have anything. I need your mercy. He's just a penitent on the mercy of a generous God.

That is the attitude, and the only attitude, that will elicit mercy from God. A person who comes telling God, you know, I haven't blown as bad as this person has, but I probably need a little bit of forgiveness for a few things, and doesn't realize that even whatever goodness you may have exhibited in this day's activities, you have received. What do

you have that you've not received, Paul said.

And if you've received it, why do you glory as if you received it not? 1 Corinthians 4, 7. And everything you have is a gift from God. Your ability to get up in the morning, your ability to speak civilly to somebody who irritates you, everything about you that could be called virtuous is a gift from God. You must choose to walk in the street, you must choose to repent of sin, but once you have made that choice, you need God every moment of every day to fulfill his purposes, and you live with your hand out continually.

You're continually begging, but always receiving. Jesus said later on in the Sermon on the Mount, if you look at chapter 7, which is the last chapter of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, verse 7, Jesus said, This is generally quoted as about prayer in general, but I think it's about prayer in a specific way. Because the parallel to it, in Luke, actually he doesn't say, how much more will your Heavenly Father give good things, those who ask him, but how much more will your Heavenly Father give what? The Holy Spirit to those who ask him.

Jesus is talking about asking for the spiritual things. I'm not saying there's no place for asking for our daily bread. Jesus teaches in the previous chapter, Matthew 6, that we are to pray for our daily bread.

But I think this particular promise that everyone who asks receives, and everyone who knocks, the door is open to them, that's a sweeping statement. Have you ever prayed for something and didn't get it? Let's be honest, yes you have. Well, what's wrong? I thought everyone who asks, everyone who knocks is going to get it.

Well, it depends on the context where he's talking about. In view of Luke's parallel, where he says that the Holy Father will give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him, it seems clear that what he's talking about here is begging for the spiritual things that you lack. Begging for grace, begging for mercy, begging for power.

These are the good things that the Heavenly Father will give to those who ask him. He'll give other good things too, tangible things too, but I think in the context of Jesus' statement, here he's talking about being a spiritual beggar. Ask and you'll receive.

Knock. Seek. And you will.

That is a promise. I do know of people who've asked God for material things, and for certain circumstances to change and things like that, whose prayers were denied them. I'm one of them.

I've had some of my prayers denied. And I, that's just as well. God knows what's best.

But I've never known anyone who cried out to God for mercy who was denied that request. And therefore I think that Jesus there in Matthew 7, verses 7 through 11, is

somewhat amplified on what it means to be a beggar in spirit. Those are the ones who receive the kingdom.

Theirs is the kingdom. Because they are beggars, they don't claim to be anything more. Now in the parable in Luke 18, about the Pharisee and the publican, it's interesting that Jesus' summary comment after the story closes, and he's no longer talking about those men, but just talking, giving the message of the parable.

He says in Luke 18, 14, I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Now, humbling oneself is what that tax collector did in the parable. Exalting himself is what the Pharisee did.

Therefore, if we say that the tax collector was an excellent example of a beggar, a poor in spirit person, then we'd have to say that being poor in spirit means humbling yourself. That's what Jesus summarizes, he who humbles himself. So the first beatitude is about humility.

It's about being humble. Having a humble opinion of yourself. The Bible speaks frequently about the blessing of having a low opinion of yourself.

And I won't get off onto a tangent since we've talked about these things in other series on other occasions, but it seems obvious that the current fascination with self-esteem and self-worth that the Church is enamored with, as well as the world, but the Church got it from the world. It's not amazing that the world's enamored with it, but that the Church would follow suit, it's fairly amazing. But that is entirely inappropriate.

High self-esteem is never advocated in Scripture. And if anything, it is suggested that it is a deterrent to enter the Kingdom of God. If it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God, it is at least partially hard for him to do so because he is self-sufficient.

A rich man is more self-sufficient than a beggar. And it is that very self-reliance, that self-sufficiency, that sense of self-satisfaction, that assessment of self, that I can take care of myself, I can handle this, I don't need any handouts from anybody. It's that self-appraisal that makes it so difficult to enter the Kingdom of God.

The poor and the beggars and the poor do not have a high opinion of themselves. And Paul said many things, as did Jesus, to make it clear that a high self-esteem is never what one is called for. In Romans chapter 12 and verse 3, I believe it is, Paul said, For I say through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Do you have a measure of faith? That was dealt to you. You're a beggar. It was given to you.

You had to choose to receive it. You had to choose to embrace faith as a mentality, as opposed to obstinate disbelief. But your believing is something that God gives you.

He doesn't create it in you without your permission, but he brings it to life in you when you choose it. It's like the man who said to Jesus, Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief. And Jesus did.

Or the disciples said, increase our faith. And he did. He does.

If you have something spiritual to boast of, it would have to be in your faith. And yet it is, we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. That is something, the only thing to boast in is in God himself.

It says of Christians in general, in 1 Corinthians 1, 1 Corinthians 1, 26, For you see your calling, brethren, there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world that put to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world that put to shame the things which are mighty.

And the base things of the world and the things which are despised, God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are. That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

That, as it is written, he who glories, let him glory in the Lord. This is not self-esteem, this is glorying in the Lord. In Philippians 2, verse 3, Philippians 2, verse 3, Paul said, Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind.

Let each esteem others better than himself. It's self-esteem, low self-esteem. Esteem others better than yourself.

Let each of you look not only for his own interest, but also for the interest of others. Let this mind be in you, which also is in Christ Jesus. Who being in the form of God, did not consider Robert to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and coming in the likeness of men.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted him. Just like Jesus said, whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

Jesus humbled himself more than any man, and has been exalted more than any man. And so Jesus is speaking to his disciples who were not... He selected these men to be the leaders of essentially a spiritual movement, a religious movement. He's a rabbi, that's what everyone's calling him.

I mean, some people, they wanted him to kind of throw off the rabbi robe and put on the kingly robe, but he never moved from rabbi to king in their perception. He was always just like one of the rabbis going around teaching about the things of God, rather than a political rabble-rouser, which they might have hoped he would be. And the disciples probably looked at each other and looked at themselves and thought, what are we doing in this movement? We're not religious guys.

We're not... I mean, we're nothing special. I mean, why didn't he pick these Pharisees? They're religious every moment of every day. Why didn't he go for some of these really religious guys to lead his movement? And Jesus looks at them and says, it's because you are beggars.

And they are not. They don't know that they are poor. And you don't think that you are rich.

And you don't think you have anything. And you don't, in fact, and don't ever change your mind about that. You don't have anything except what you receive.

But having received it, don't feel great about yourself. You didn't receive it from yourself. You received it like a beggar receives it from the hand of a generous donor.

And so also, spiritually, that is how we are to understand it. A low self-opinion, especially in terms of our thoughts of our spiritual merits, making comparisons of ourselves with others on spiritual scales and so forth, our own assessment of ourselves should always be low, even if you might think, well, but isn't that kind of pretending? I mean, if I really am kind of spiritual, I mean, I do read my Bible more than some people do, and I do pray more than some people do, and I witness a lot more than some people do, and I have a lot more spiritual inclinations than a lot of people I know, isn't it kind of being phony to act like I'm a spiritual poor person, when in fact I'm really better off spiritually than a lot of people around me? Well, you might be better off, but the whole idea is that unless you realize that you're better off because you're a beggar, who happens to have run across a very generous donor, and having received, you don't really have anything to feel good about yourself for, only appreciation toward the donor. Receiving a generous gift that you know you don't deserve is humbling.

Receiving a compliment that you know you don't deserve is humbling. I don't know if you've known that by experience as much as I have, because I receive many compliments, and I know how little I deserve them. And it's humbling.

Some people get puffed up when they get compliments. I get kind of ashamed, you know, because I think if they only knew me as well as I know me, they wouldn't think that. And it's humbling, really.

And so the person who has received much grace is not made more self-confident or

made more pleased with himself about it, or more arrogant about it. The person who receives much grace is humbled by the show of grace. Why me? Why would I receive this special favor that this person next door hasn't received? I don't understand it.

I'm totally undeserving. And this is not something that we need to teach ourselves to say because that's the religious thing to say. The Pharisee lived at a time where he hadn't been instructed how to talk humble.

He was a Jew, not a Christian. In his religion, they didn't have someone telling him, don't boast about your fasting and your tithing and so forth. Jesus came along and made it clear that that's not the right attitude to have.

Ever since then, Christians have learned how to talk humble. But they haven't necessarily learned how to be humble, just how to talk humble. And to say, aw shucks, I'm nothing at all, but to really think I'm a great deal, is not what we're talking about here.

We're talking about a down deep in the deepest part of your heart and in your gut, knowing that you're a piece of scum. And that's all you are. And that left to yourself for one minute without the grace of God, you'd probably be a derelict.

Or a prostitute or who knows what. You know, I mean, God receives all the glory because you have brought nothing of value to the relationship with him. You see, the Calvinist emphasizes, as I've been emphasizing here, that it's all of grace.

And that it's, you know, God must have all the glory. So, the Calvinist is uncomfortable with Arminian ideas, such as mine actually, which, you know, my view is that you do choose. You do make a choice to repent.

You do make a choice to believe. But they are afraid that by admitting this much, that you're giving some degree of credit for your salvation to yourself, because you made a choice to repent. You made a choice to believe.

And therefore, you're taking some of the credit. And that's the thing that makes the Calvinist the most uncomfortable about anything other than strict Calvinism, is that they're afraid it gives man the glory. Because they want to say, well, God gives all the glory, and the only way he can get all the glory is if you didn't even make any choices.

Because if you made a choice, let's just say, let's say we allow the Arminian idea, you made your choice to repent, but the person sitting next to you at the evangelist meeting didn't make that choice. That means you're better than him, because you made a wiser and better choice than he made. So you're giving yourself credit for being a better person than that person.

So the only way to avoid getting credit, they say, is to make God make all the choices. Of

course, as you know, the problem with that view is the only system that really, truly gives God all the choices not only gives him all the glory for salvation, but all the blame for the lost, all the blame for sin, too. You can't have God making all the choices, and he only gets the benefit for the good choices and doesn't take the responsibility and the blame for the bad ones.

And that's not necessary. To say that we extend our hand, we say, yes, I recognize that I'm destitute, and I recognize that what I need is what God is offering. And faith is not a virtuous act.

Faith is not something that earns you salvation. Faith is an outstretched hand with the palm up, saying, yes, I know I'm in need. I'm desperate.

I'm destitute. That's not something of which you boast. Does the beggar boast about his great ability to provide for himself because he had his cup out all day long, and someone put a few coins in it? Or even if someone put a million dollars in it? If he's really a beggar, he knows that he didn't do anything to become enriched except to have his cup out there.

And putting his cup out isn't a boasting act. It's a humble act. It's an act of admission that I need something that I don't have.

That's the poor, the beggar in spirit. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Let's look at the second beatitude.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. It's been pointed out by some who have written on the beatitudes that there could be something of a progression intended in them. I'm not sure if that's intended or not.

Some say, well, you know, when you're a beggar in spirit, then you move on from there to being, you mourn over your sin, and then as a result of having mourned, you're now a meek person, and that contributes to your hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on. I don't think it works out as neatly. I don't think there's an eight-point progression here that can be followed as neatly as some authors like to make it, but I do think these things are connected to each other, and some of them follow quite logically after the previous ones, or after some of the earlier ones.

Mourning here could be from any number of causes, but Jesus probably doesn't mean every cause. There is some mourning that is plain selfish, and there is some mourning that is godly. In fact, Paul even points that out.

There's a sorrow of God, and there's a sorrow of the world. The sorrow of God, a godly sorrow, leads to repentance, but a sorrow of the world leads to death. Paul said that in 2 Corinthians 7. 2 Corinthians 7, verses 9 and 10, Paul said, Now I rejoice not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance.

For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death. There is a sorrow that is not helpful.

There is such a thing as wallowing in self-pity, or having the sorrow of self-disillusionment or self-disappointment. And there's all kinds of things that can make you sorry. You can be sorry because your circumstances are bad, or because you lost something of value to you, or that you're disappointed with yourself.

Who knows? I mean, the world is a sorry place, and there's many things to be sorrowful about, but not all of that sorrow is blessed. And I think that there must be a particular mourning that is in mind here. And I think it is.

The mourning... There may be two possibilities. One is mourning over sin. Mourning and grieving because you've offended God.

This, then, would be essentially the same as repentance. Horror and spirit would be being humble. Mourning would be repenting.

And I think that that must be what Jesus is referring to. And, you know, James... I don't know if I pointed this out. I didn't point it out yesterday.

James is the one epistle in the New Testament that depends more heavily than any other on the Sermon on the Mount. Though it is a short epistle, it has a multitude of references to the Sermon on the Mountain. I counted them up once.

I have a list of them here. I think there's about 20 of them or more. Maybe more.

There's at least... Let me see what I got here. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7... I'll just count them up. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20... About 25.

Almost 25 allusions or references to the Sermon on the Mount in the short book of James. And so I would say that James' book is very much a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount and an application of it. And that may help us to understand the meaning of some things in the Sermon on the Mount that would be otherwise obscure because James gives us what appears to be like a commentary on it.

And in James chapter 4, verse 7 through 10, James says, Therefore submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts.

Remember, blessed are the pure in heart. You double-minded. Lament and mourn, blessed are you who mourn, and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves, blessed are the poor in spirit, in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up. There's at

least three Beatitudes in this short paragraph in James.

that are alluded to here. There is, purify your hearts, because Jesus said, blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God. And this is in connection to drawing near to God.

Draw near to God. Purify your hearts. There is a reference, or an allusion to being poor in spirit.

Humble yourselves, in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up. And there's reference to mourning. Lament and mourn and weep.

But what is this mourning and weeping? It is weeping over sin because it's cleanse your hands, you sinners. I believe this has to do with repentance. Mourning over sin.

Being grieved about sin. And being grieved about sin, even that can be sorrow of the world and not godly sorrow. Being sorry for sin can sometimes not even lead to repentance.

Because some sins bring upon them, bring upon the sinner, temporal consequences that are very unpleasant and for which they can easily see a connection. Oh, I did this and this happened to me and boy, was I ever stupid of me to do that. And boy, I wish I hadn't done that.

And man, I'll never want to do that again. That was really, really dumb and I'm hurting for it now. I mean, there are people who are sorry for their sins.

The jails are full of them. Real sorry. But not very repentant in most cases.

And you can see that by the fact that when they're released from prison they go out and repeat the crimes. They didn't repent. Not all sorrow, even over sin, leads to repentance.

But true repentance results from being grieved and mourning over one's lost relationship with God. Mourning, blessed are those who mourn, mourning is usually something you do when you lose a loved one. When someone dies, they hire mourners to come in and mourn at funerals.

In the Old Testament, when someone died, their widow would mourn, or their family would mourn for them for a while. There was a time of mourning. You mourn because something has died.

Someone precious to you, valuable to you. That's what mourning is about. And what has died because of our sin is our relationship with God.

You know there are many, many people whose relationship with God is non-existent or dead, but they couldn't care less. It's not precious to them. They don't care about it.

It doesn't bring them any sorrow. They, it's not even something they'd want if they could have it back. Even if they could have it at no cost, they probably wouldn't even want it back.

But of course, at the cost, it's not even a matter of interest to them. There are people who don't care at all about God. There's no fear of God before their eyes.

And therefore, the fact that their relationship with God is one that is dead is no occasion of grief to them or of mourning. They just put it out of their minds if they ever thought of it in the first place and go out and numb themselves with activities and stuff. But there are those who are simply not able to ignore it, not able to slough it off.

They know, they're reminded every time they sin, every time their conscience smites them, they're reminded that there is a great gulf fixed between them and God, that they are not able to pass over. And if that is an occasion of mourning to them, then that's a good sign. They will be comforted.

Only those who are mourning over this lost relationship with God through sin will ever be comforted by finding a restoration of that relationship. A person who is alienated from God and doesn't care will never be anything other than alienated from God. But those who are mourning, those who are sensing, craving, that later comes up, hungry and thirsting for righteousness, and they are satisfied, those who are mourning over the loss of righteousness, they should be comforted.

There's a tremendous interconnection between all of these beatitudes. That's what he's talking about. Now, interestingly here, it says, they shall be comforted.

There is a mourning that he could be referring to beyond what I've suggested, and that is mourning because, maybe because they do take a stand for God. There is pain and suffering that comes. That's another form of mourning that Christians experience.

But the comfort of God is to be had in it. The Apostle Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians 1, where he says in verse 3, Blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy which is the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort which we ourselves are comforted of God. Now, God comforts us in all our tribulation.

And he says, Blessed is God who comforts us in our afflictions. Why doesn't he say, well, I mean, it's one thing God can comfort me in my affliction. How about if he just keeps me out of it in the first place? I mean, isn't God in charge of this universe? Why did God allow affliction to come upon me? Paul doesn't ask those kind of questions.

People do a lot, but Paul didn't. You know, why me? Why did this bad thing happen to me? Why am I suffering? Paul's more amazed at the fact that when I'm afflicted that God comforts me. And he rejoices in that because the comfort of God is a delightful thing.

And the sinner who is afflicted in soul, or the saint who is afflicted physically because of his stand for God and is persecuted, experiences in either case the comfort of God, which is so sweet and so desirable that it's even nicer than having not suffered in the first place. It's an advantage to have suffered and known the comfort of God. You know, they always say it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

I'm not so sure about that. That may be true. I mean, love is a good thing.

That could be a true statement. It's a worldly statement. But I would say it's better to have been afflicted and been comforted than never have been afflicted at all.

Many people just say, well, God, I'll tell you what. You don't need the comfort. Just keep the afflictions off.

But the affliction is part of life. And God's comfort is part of life for the Christian. And the ones who are afflicted and mourn because of that, for righteousness' sake, there is a comfort for them, too.

Though I think that Jesus' primary meaning here is those who are mourning because they are repentant over sin or they're grieving over the loss of their relationship with God that they don't have. Maybe they've never known it. Or maybe they have and have fallen away.

Or maybe they've known it but little and they know it enough to feel the loss of it. Then there is the third beatitude. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Now, what Jesus said here is not in any sense original with him, at least not during his earthly life. Of course, he's the Word even in the Old Testament, so he said it back in the Old Testament, too. But Jesus is here repeating something written by David in Psalm 37.

In Psalm 37, verse 11, it simply says, The meek shall inherit the earth. So Jesus is simply taking a psalm. The meek shall inherit the earth.

He says, Blessed are you, meek, you'll inherit the earth. That's not original. He's just turning a psalm, a statement in the psalm around into a beatitude.

If the meek shall inherit the earth, then that's a blessing. They're blessed to be meek. Well, what does it mean to be meek and what does it mean to inherit the earth? Well, meekness.

Unfortunately, some of the modern translations of the Bible have retranslated the Greek word for meek in some passages differently. So it's, if you simply, if you get a Strong's Concordance and look up the word meek, of course, the Strong's Concordance uses the King James Version and you'll find many references to the word meek. But if you look up those references in a modern translation, often the word meek will not appear in them.

Sometimes gentle is a more common modern translation. It used to be when I used the King James alone in my teaching that I could just give a Bible study on meekness and turn all these passages, and all these passages that mention meekness, now that I use the new King James and turn people, the word meek isn't even in the passage, gentle is. It's the same Greek word.

Meek and gentle are alternate English translations of the same Greek word. And so a meek person is a person who is gentle. But not gentle merely in terms of disposition or of temperament.

There are some people who are quiet by nature. There are people who move slowly and deliberately and who are delicate in the way they handle things and so forth. And there are other people who are louder and more, you know, less that way, you know.

It doesn't mean both persons can't be equally meek. When we talk about a person who's gentle, we might be talking about how they handle things with their hands. They handle them gently.

But I think that a gentle person in the sense of virtuous gentleness is one who handles other people gently. And what I mean by that, of course, is you handle people's feelings, you handle their personhood, you handle their rights, you handle their preferences. You don't run roughshod over people.

A meek person, it is generally observed, is the opposite of a self-assertive person. Meekness and self-assertiveness are kind of opposite terms. The person who's pushing to have his way is the opposite of meek.

The person who defers to others will yield to others is a meek person. Not because he's weak. And hardly anyone ever teaches about meekness without making this point.

Meekness and weakness are not the same thing. And I guess the point has been made because we think of a meek person sometimes as somebody who just doesn't have any backbone, somebody who's not a very strong person. But Jesus described himself as gentle and meek.

He said, I'm humble and meek, and you must take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Moses, the most powerful leader in the Old Testament, is said to have been the meekest man on the face of the earth. Well, how can you be strong and meek too? Well, the fact of the matter is you can't be meek unless you're strong, biblically.

If you are simply a cowardly, retiring, reticent kind of person, shy, you're not meek. That's just a temperamental, that might even be, you know, based on something, the opposite of virtuous. There might be some, something blameworthy in some of that.

A lack of courage, lack of faith, or something may be involved. Or maybe just total self-

consciousness. Self-consciousness, you know, trying to please man.

A lot of people defer all the time to other people because they just want to please people because they're insecure, and they get their security out of thinking that people accept them. I mean, there are all kinds of ways in which a person who behaves in what looks like a meek way may not be a virtuous person at all. They may be entirely selfish or otherwise sinful.

Or simply weak personality that behaves in a meek manner. But Jesus was not weak, Moses was not weak, and yet both of them are said to be eminent in meekness. Meekness is, some people have said, strength under control.

That if somebody wants something and you want, you know, you're with a group of people and somebody wants to do something you don't want to do, and you have an entirely different set of preferences, but no conviction about it, just a set of preferences, then you give them their way. Not because you need their approval, but because you're strong enough to sacrifice your own way and to, you know, you don't need to have your way all the time. A meek person is one who, if he's struck on one cheek, is strong enough to turn the other cheek rather than strike back.

He holds his temper. He deals gently with other people. That's what, meekness is gentleness.

But as I say, it's not gentleness in the sense that, you know, people are very delicate in their handling of flowers or of, you know, of babies or something like that, but it has to do more with how you deal with people's feelings. If you're willing to give up your rights in order to let somebody else have their way, that is what meekness essentially is. Now, some people say, well, if you're meek, if you don't stand up for your rights, then you'll just be walked on.

I mean, you'd just be a doormat. And no one's supposed to be a doormat, right? I've often been, I've often heard that we're not, the Bible doesn't anywhere say that you have to be a doormat. I'd have to affirm that.

I've never found a verse in the Bible that says you have to be a doormat. But I have found verses in the Bible that say you need to turn the other cheek, give to him that asks you, if someone wants to take you to court, give them what they want and more. If they compel you to go one mile, which is the maximum they can, go two.

That sounds a little bit doormat-like, I guess, if we're using doormat to mean somebody who lets others trample upon them and trample on their rights, but that's very much like what I see Jesus doing. Jesus didn't come to please himself. Now, pleasing other people is sometimes right and it's sometimes wrong.

In one sense, it can be very wrong. If you're pleasing people at the expense of your

convictions because you have no guts and you have no backbone to stand up for what you know is right, that is wrong. You're a man pleaser.

You're seeking approval from man rather than God. Paul made it very clear that he is not that kind of a man pleaser in any way, shape, or form. In Galatians 1.10 he said, Do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? But if I still pleased men, I would not be the servant of Christ.

He said. And it's true. You can't serve two masters.

You can't serve Christ and serve every man's whims as well. Paul's gospel and the things he demanded in his message didn't please everybody. He could have toned it down to please more people, been more popular.

He said he couldn't be a servant of Christ then. You can't be dominated by a desire to please people. Your ultimate desire must be that of pleasing God.

However, it does please God for you to seek to please others more than yourself. It does not please God for you to seek to please others more than to please God. And that's what Paul is saying is wrong.

Am I seeking to please men or God? Well, I've got to please God and I don't have to please men in that sense. But if it's between me and them, then it's pleasing to God for me to please others rather than myself. Paul says that in Romans 15.

Romans 15 verses 1 through 3. Paul says, We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good leading to edification. For even Christ did not please himself.

Now notice this. He's talking about meekness. He's talking about dealing gently with other people.

Please your neighbor. Let your neighbor have his way. Sometimes.

If it's just between you getting your way and him getting his, your vote should always be for his way. But that's not weak. He says those of us who are strong need to do this.

We should be strong enough to defer. We should be strong enough to yield. Strong enough, mature enough to not insist on having our way.

That's what meekness involves. Now Jesus said the meek are blessed because they shall inherit the earth. Now there's several things about that to note.

One is that the earth might be translated land or earth. The word *gay* in the Greek can mean either one. And in the Old Testament that he's quoting, he's quoting of course Psalm 37 verse, what was it, 11? It says *Eretz*, the Hebrew *Eretz* can be translated land

or earth.

So the meek shall inherit the land or the earth could be the translation. It's not clear exactly which Jesus has in mind here. Jesus might mean the land of Israel.

But that doesn't seem to be likely since he knew that 7 AD was coming up and no one's going to be inheriting that land. The earth, unless he meant the land in a spiritual sense, he might mean that the meek shall inherit the spiritual promised land, which would be the kingdom of heaven. But he might have meant the earth too.

He might have meant the planet earth. There is going to be a new heaven and a new earth and we will be reigning with him forever on that earth. And that might be what he has in mind.

There's more than one way he might have meant it. But one thing that's interesting is the irony of the statement itself, that the meek inherit the earth. Because there have been many who want to inherit the earth, but they've been anything but meek about it.

Napoleon, Attila the Hun, Adolf Hitler, you know, these people wanted to inherit the earth, they wanted to take possession of it for themselves, but the methods that they employed were militaristic methods, aggressive, assertive methods, anything but meekness. And they have not succeeded. Some have succeeded over a portion of the earth or for a period of time, but these people pass away and the earth is not theirs any longer.

Ultimately, the earth will pass to the possession of those who have not pushed for it, who have not insisted on it for themselves, those who have not asserted themselves. And you might say, well, how can this be? It seems like if you don't stand up for yourself, no one will stand up for you. I'm sure that some of you had parents that told you that.

It's one of those lessons parents sometimes teach their children. If you don't stand up for your own rights, there's no one else going to stand up for them for you. You've got to stand up for your rights.

Well, that's not really biblically true. Even Christian parents have been known to give that bad advice, but it's not biblically true. It says in Isaiah 11, speaking of Jesus, in Isaiah 11, 4, With righteousness he shall judge the poor, that means vindicate, pass judgment in their favor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

Jesus passes judgment in favor of the poor and the meek of the earth. So if someone says, but if you're meek, no one will stand up for you if you don't stand up for yourself. Wrong.

Jesus will pass judgment in favor of the meek. He will stand up for you. Let me show you something in 1 Peter.

In 1 Peter 4, verse 19, it says, Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in doing good as to a faithful creator. Now this is an application of what Peter says a little earlier about Jesus in chapter 2. 1 Peter 2, it says of Jesus in verse 23 and 24, well, just 23 will do. 1 Peter 2, 23, who when he was reviled did not revile in return.

When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he committed himself to him who judges righteously. Now notice Jesus was meek. He could have called 12 legions of angels and they would have delivered him or he could have just kept saying I am and knocking people over every time they came at him.

There's no way that he could have been taken against his will. He meekly deferred to the plans of his enemies because of course he knew them to be the plans of his father. And therefore, when he was reviled, he didn't revile back.

When he suffered, he didn't make threats. But he did commit himself to God who judges righteously. In other words, he in meekness by doing the right thing, he left himself in God's hands, knowing that God would judge his case.

God would vindicate him. And that's what Peter says in 1 Peter 4, 19, we should do. Those who suffer according to the will of God should commit their souls to him in doing good.

That is, don't stop doing good just because you suffer for it. You keep doing good and just by doing so, you commit your case into God's hands. If someone strikes you on one cheek, there's two ways you can handle that situation.

You can defend yourself by striking back or you can not defend yourself. You can turn the other cheek and leave your defense in God's hands. And of course, we know which one Jesus commanded.

And what is said of turning the other cheek applies to many, many other different situations of conflict that are not anywhere near as physical, but where it's a matter of rights and preferences and demands and so forth. Until a person learns to be meek, they do not have a Christ-like spirit and they do not qualify for inheriting the earth. You see, you're told by the world that if you don't assert yourself and defend your rights and so forth, that you will lose what you have coming to you.

But Jesus said that if you are meek, you will gain the earth. You'll gain what there is to gain, not lose it by being meek. And this is why Jesus had to tell us it's the opposite of what the world thinks.

It's certainly the opposite of what we would have imagined. Let me quickly take the fourth beatitude and we'll get a break there and take the other four next time. Jesus said in verse 6, Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be

filled.

Or, some translations say, they shall be satisfied. Now, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. Apparently, that kind of a hunger is one that God is pleased to fulfill.

It should be pointed out that everybody hungers and thirsts for something. People are motivated by cravings of one kind or another. The craving to be loved, the craving to be recognized, the craving to be secure, the craving to possess.

These are cravings that all people have. I mean, they don't all have the same wants. But these are the common things that people hunger and thirst for.

Hunger and thirst is one of the strongest cravings that the biological system knows. Of course, sexual craving is strong too, but it's not as strong as hunger and thirst. You can live your whole life without sex, even if you desire it.

The time comes, if you go long enough without food or water, that it becomes a raging, obsessive craving, or else you'll die. And your body is made to tell you that. Your body is made to crave those things when you need them, so that you'll know, and you'll satisfy those cravings and won't die.

This hunger and thirst is the strongest craving that Jesus could use to illustrate what he has in mind here. All people are motivated by cravings for something. All people have dominant desires as well as lesser desires.

We're made up of various kinds of desires. For example, most people would like to have more self-gratification than they allow themselves. But they have something that's more dominant, and that's the desire to be respectable or to avoid going to jail or something else, which is something that might be impacted if they would gratify themselves all they want to.

On one hand, there's the desire to have something that you don't own. On the other hand, there's the desire to stay out of jail. And for most people, the desire to stay out of jail is a stronger craving than the desire to possess something they can't obtain, and therefore they don't end up becoming robbers.

Because there are conflicting desires in all people, and the dominant desire is the one that dictates your behavior. And other desires are subjugated to the dominant desires. This is what character is.

Good character is simply the subjugation of baser desires to higher desires. Now, Jesus describes a class of people whose highest desire, whose highest craving is to be righteous before God. And righteousness has a variety of uses in Scripture.

Of course, it has to do with an actual form of behavior. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, it says in 1 John, even as he is righteous. But righteousness also speaks of a standing with God, that a person stands in right relationship with God without any offense held toward him by God.

That person viewed as righteous or justified. The person who desires to be justified with God, the person who wants to be right with God, and wants to do those things that are pleasing to God, that wants to be a righteous person. Not so much because of having a reputation for being righteous, like the Pharisees had, but to really possess true righteousness.

A desire for true righteousness is a desire for God, because a man cannot come near God without true righteousness, and a man doesn't have any need for true righteousness unless he's concerned about his relationship with God. If he's only concerned about his reputation with man, he can have fake righteousness, like the Pharisees. He can pretend, he can be a hypocrite.

He can appear to be righteous, and that's all he needs to do. He doesn't have to make the sacrifice of being really righteous unless he is concerned about God. And those who hunger and thirst, who have this driving obsession to be right with God, to have God have nothing against them, to be living in a way that pleases God, and have no barriers between them and God, if this is the dominant desire in a person's life, that person is fortunate, is blessed, because that is a dominant desire that God is pleased to fulfill.

You know, a person may have the driving desire in his life maybe for money, and he may obtain a fair amount of money. People who desire it strongly enough and have the opportunities usually end up getting a lot. And that person may indeed get so much that he'll be satisfied with the amount he's gotten.

But there's no guarantee that he will. Because, A, if his desires have a lot of money, he may never have as much money as he hopes to have. Or, if he does, he may at that point wish to have more.

You never know. There's no guarantee that you'll ever be satisfied if your hunger and thirst is to be rich. If your hunger and thirst is to have hedonistic pleasures all the time, a constant diet of sex and food and drink and whatever else is satisfying to the flesh, some people have access to that.

I don't know if they're ever satisfied. But maybe, I mean, there's a possibility that some people could be in such a state, someone like Solomon, that whatever they craved, it was right there. I mean, they could satisfy every desire, every moment, their hedonistic desires.

But that doesn't happen with everyone. Not everyone can be satisfied with that kind of

desire. If your desire is for hedonistic pleasure, if your desire is for money, if your desire is for reputation or for something like that, if that's what drives you, you may be satisfied, but there's no guarantee.

Most people driven by such things are not, even those who obtain them. And Solomon's a good example, right, in Ecclesiastes. He tried everything.

He had everything. He got everything he looked for, and nothing was withheld from him. He says, everything my eyes desired, I did not withhold from them.

The richest man in the world. And yet, he said it's all like striving after the wind, it's all vanity. He was not satisfied.

Now, I'm not going to be so simplistic as to say that sinners can't ever reach a degree of a subjective sense of satisfaction. I imagine there are sinners out there, I don't know enough to know for sure, and I don't know what's in their hearts, but I'm just going to allow this, because some would claim that this is true, that some sinners out there probably find a degree of satisfaction in life, in what they've attained, whether it's their affluence or their health or their marriage or their pleasures, whatever. But the satisfaction they have, of course, is not permanent, because it's not going to last into eternity.

But even if you do find some satisfied sinners, most sinners are not satisfied. And the reason that a person is ever unsatisfied is because he's craving something that he cannot obtain. But Jesus said those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied, which simply means that they are craving something that they never have to worry that they will not be able to obtain.

Because when a person has made righteousness his chief objective, God will impute him righteous, and he will have it. If a person makes his right relationship with God his chief goal, he will have it. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you as well.

Satisfaction comes not from seeking all the things that we think will satisfy us, but from seeking the right thing, and then God gives us the other things as well. Just like Solomon, he chose wisdom earlier in his life when he was wiser. He chose wisdom, and God said, You didn't ask for very many selfish things, so I'm going to give you what you asked for and what you didn't ask for.

Jesus said it's like that with us. If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, the other things that are necessary will be added as well. And a person who has set his desire and hunger and thirsting after righteousness will never have to be unsatisfied.

If your craving that drives you in life is for anything other than the righteousness of God, there will be times when you're unsatisfied, and you may be indeed permanently

unsatisfied, never satisfied. But a person whose whole desire is to be right with God, and that is their obsessive, raging thirst, is to be right with God, that person will always be satisfied. Because the very desire to be right with God above all things is righteousness.

All people are starving for righteousness, all people need it, but not all are aware of it, and not all are hungry for it, not all feel a hunger for it. Starvation or absence of righteousness, the need for it is universal, but the hunger for it is not. And in the Psalms we read David saying things like, you know, I thirst for God, I thirst for the living God, when shall I come and appear before God? Or as a deer pants for the water brook, so pants my heart for God, my soul for God.

Psalms 41 verses 1 through 4, no I'm sorry, Psalm 42 verses 1 through 2, excuse me, it's one of those places, and Psalm 63 verses 1 through 5, you are a fortunate person if the thing that you set your desires on is a thing that will never be denied you. You are an unfortunate person if you've set your desires on those things which can be withheld from you, or may be withheld from you, even if there is the prospect that you may obtain them. As long as there is the prospect that you may not, it's a risky proposition.

But if you hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus guarantees that you will be satisfied, you'll be filled. And therefore Christians are, if they are truly hungry enough for that, not after the things of the world, are the most satisfied people, and satisfied in God, the way that he wants it to be. We have four more of these to cover, but not time today to cover them, so we'll take them in our next session.