

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE KINGDOM

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Tuesday Night Class at NCTM Centre, Coromandel East
Term 3, 2003, Andrew Klynsmith

Contents

- Study 1: An Introduction to the Beatitudes
- Study 2: Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit,
For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven
- Study 3: Blessed Are Those Who Mourn,
For They Shall Be Comforted
- Study 4: Blessed Are The Meek,
For They Will Inherit The Earth
- Study 5: Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst
For Righteousness, For They Will Be Filled
- Study 6: Blessed Are The Merciful,
For They Will Be Shown Mercy
- Study 7: Blessed Are The Pure In Heart
For They Will See God
- Study 8: Blessed Are The Peacemakers
For They Will Be Called Sons Of God
- Study 9: Blessed Are The Persecuted Because Of Righteousness,
For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

Study 1: An Introduction to the Beatitudes

1. An outline of the studies

July 29 – An Introduction to the Beatitudes
August 5th – Blessed are the poor in spirit
August 12th – Blessed as those who mourn
August 19th – Blessed are the meek
August 26th – Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness
September 2nd – Blessed are the merciful
September 9th – Blessed are the pure in heart
September 16th – Blessed are the peacemakers
September 23rd – Blessed are those persecuted for
righteousness' sake

2 The Beatitudes in Matthew

In this series of studies, we will be looking at the Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel account (Matthew 5:1–12.) There are some parallels between this section and Luke 6:17–26, but there are also some differences. These differences give an indication of the different theological purposes that Matthew and Luke have in their use of this material as they paint their portraits of Christ and focus on the significance of Christ and his ministry. It is not my intention to give consideration to these sayings as they appear in Luke in these studies. We will attempt to see them in the light of the portrait of Christ that Matthew gives us.

In Matthew 5:1ff, the Beatitudes form the opening of the great body of teaching we call 'The Sermon on the Mount.' This body of teaching is one of five large blocks of teaching that occur through Matthew's Gospel. This may be outlined as follows¹ :

Chh. 1– 4	Introduction: Genealogy, infancy, baptism, and the beginning of the ministry of Jesus
Chh. 5–7	Teaching 1: The Sermon On The Mount
Chh. 8–9	Jesus' miracles of healing
Ch. 10	Teaching 2: The Mission Charge
Chh. 11–12	The rejection of John and Jesus by the Jews
Ch. 13	Teaching 3: The Parables of the Kingdom
Chh. 14–17	Miracles, controversies, confession and transfiguration
Ch. 18	Teaching 4: The Church
Chh. 19–22	Jesus goes to Jerusalem to teach
Chh. 23–25	Teaching 5: Judgment and the End of the World
Chh. 26–28	The last days, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus

The 'heart' of the Gospel is by this schema seen to be chapter 13, the section in the parables of the kingdom. It certainly marks a hinge point in the Gospel. Prior to this chapter the action is located in Galilee and following the chapter it moves its focus to Judea and Jerusalem. In the chapters prior to this the focus is on Jesus' ministry to the crowds; following chapter 13 the focus is on Jesus' ministry with the Twelve. This centrality of the parable of the kingdoms would mean then that primary in Matthew's painting of

¹ Taken from *The Message of Matthew*, Michael Green (The Bible Speaks Today series, ed. John Stott)

the life of Christ is the reality of the Kingdom of God. Jesus is to be understood primarily as the King of the Kingdom.

When we come to the Sermon on the Mount, the theme of the Kingdom is quite prominent. The matter of entering the kingdom of heaven is a key one in the sermon (5:19,20; 7:21) and we are exhorted in 6:33 to seek God's kingdom and his righteousness above all things. In 6:10 we are taught to pray, 'Your kingdom come. Even within the Beatitudes, the Kingdom is explicitly mentioned twice, in the first (5:2) and 'last'² (5:10) of the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes, book-ended by this reference to possession of the kingdom of heaven³, then can be understood fairly as outlining the blessedness of life in the reality of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is the kingdom of 'my Father who is in heaven' (7:21); it is the Father's kingdom that we pray to come (6:9–10); and it is the Father's righteousness and kingdom we are to seek (6:32–33.)

Life in the Kingdom of God is life lived in the reality and dynamic of God's own Fatherhood. This is the blessedness of kingdom living. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 11:25–30 :-

At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I

² I say 'last' here even though there is another beatitude at 5:11-12. This later one is different from all the others in that it is personally addressed to the hearers (you) rather than generally (they).

³ It was common to avoid using the name of God (which may have been done too casually and disrespectfully) by saying 'heaven' in place of the name.

am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

The truth of the Father is known only through the ministry of the Son, and his revealing of the Father. He reveals to whom he chooses, and those whom he chooses are summoned – the weary, the burdened, not the wise and learned. The truth of God’s Fatherhood is rest, but it is also a taking of a yoke upon us. The yoke we take upon us is the yoke of Jesus the Son; we learn the truth of Fatherhood by coming alongside him and walking with him. This yoke we find is easy, a light burden. Another way of saying this is that life on the kingdom is through participation in Jesus Christ’s own life with the Father. This participation is opened up by the grace of God that has been established in Jesus Christ, through his death for our sins and rising for our justification (as Paul would put it.)

All this leads us to say that the life set out in the Beatitudes is descriptive of (and then prescriptive for) life in the Kingdom. Which is to say, that the Beatitudes set out for us descriptively the truth of Jesus Christ the king. As we look at these words over the next eight weeks it is that which will occupy our hearts and minds primarily. We will consider also how it is that the grace of the Father in Christ brings us to share in all this rich life of the king.

A final consideration. The Sermon on the Mount is given, Moses-like, to be the ‘law’ of the Kingdom. It is the law of the Father. the law of the Father is made known by the Son. The Sermon on the Mount, including the Beatitudes, is not to be understood as abstract ethical principles. The truth of God is given to us in these sayings – that is, the truth of God’s own being and character. All that is said in them may be said of the Son, and may be said of the Father, and may be said of the Spirit. How wonderful that we are called to share in this great glory of God!

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Study 2: Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit, For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

1. Blessedness

The Greek word for ‘blessed’ here used is *makarios*. This is sometimes translated as ‘happy.’ However, the term is richer with religious associations than our English word ‘happy.’ It would at least mean ‘made happy by God.’ Robert Mounce puts it this way: ‘Thus blessed describes a joy that has its secret within itself.’¹

This is saying that the blessedness is found *in* the actual state, and *not as a compensation* for the state. Being poor in spirit, truly mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, living in mercy, having purity of heart, making peace, and suffering because of righteousness are all states of joy, all states in which we ‘have been made happy by God.’

The ‘rewards’ of the beatitudes are not actually ‘added bonuses’ but rather a description of the blessedness of that state – an exposing of the secret within. That is, the second part of each beatitude spells out what is happening as the blessed ones are poor in spirit, mourn, are meek etc.: they are possessing the kingdom, being comforted, inheriting the earth, etc. Another way of putting this is that we must see that the second part of the beatitude is not a subsequent payoff for enduring the first half. We must see that the

¹ *Matthew: New International Biblical Commentary 1*, Robert H. Mounce p.38

blessed states are states that endure for eternity. Poverty of spirit, true mourning, meekness, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peaceableness, and patient enduring belong to the eternal Kingdom, for they belong to the eternal King.

Of course, the fulness and finality of all that will be shown and known only at the end, when the King of the Kingdom returns. But now, by faith and not by sight, that reality breaks through to the children of the Kingdom. As Michael Green says, 'It is as if Jesus is saying that life in the Kingdom with him is life of profound joy, a joy that no person and no circumstance can take away. And this blessedness is not reserved for some nebulous future. It is for now! It is the mark of those who have really surrendered to the King and tasted his grace, although there is a future to rejoice in too.'²

2. The Poor In Spirit

The Greek word for 'poor' (*ptochos*) in this first Beatitude came from a verb which originally meant 'to crouch' or 'to cower.' In Greek culture it particularly referred to the beggar who coweringly asked for alms (see e.g. Acts 3:1-4.), and described a person in extreme poverty. The poor were those who were thrown completely on the charity of others if they were to live at all.

In the Palestine of Jesus time however, the word had other connotations. It was a Greek word, but it was used to translate two Hebrew words which mean 'poor', 'afflicted', and 'humble' – but which have these meanings in a double sense. There was the meaning of poor that we saw above – those in material need and destitution. However, during Israel's exile in Babylon, there had developed amongst the Jewish captives two classes – the upper

² *The Message of Matthew*, Michael Green (The Bible Speaks Today series, ed. John Stott), pp. 89-90

class consisting largely of priests and nobility who seemed to largely succumb to the culture of their environment; and the lower social order, who were pious and held to the traditional faith of Israel and to the Law. To be pious, righteous, God-fearing was equivalent to being poor, lowly, mean. This can be seen in the Psalms, especially Pss. 10:12; 37:11; 72:4; 147:6. A number of commentators explain this:

'People are meant whose life situation is such that they must expect everything from God, and whose inner state of soul and mind is such that they actually do expect everything from Him.'³

'The poor in spirit ... refers to those who have confidence only in God, ground down as they are by long-standing social and political distress. they have learned to put their trust in Him alone, and to their unspeakable joy they find that the kingdom is God's free gift to them.'⁴

'In Hebrew parlance, the poor were not simply the economically disadvantaged but those who in their need had turned to God for help (Pss. 69:32; Isa. 61:1.)'⁵

The element of beggarliness in its meaning may drive of first of all to think of poverty of spirit in terms of recognising our sinfulness. I think that if we were to stop there, we would have to say that poverty of spirit is something we dispense with when we are finally done with sin. It would even be a sad but necessary condition, but one we hope to be rid of in due course. But that is not at all the sense of saying the poor in spirit are blessed! The recurring theme here is that of trust in God, reliance on God, turning to God and to no other helper. This may not be what we think of when we first think of poverty of spirit.

³ *The Gospel According To Matthew*, H. P. Hamann (Chi Rho Commentary Series) p. 43

⁴ *The Message of Matthew*, Michael Green (The Bible Speaks Today series, ed. John Stott), p. 90

⁵ *Matthew: New International Biblical Commentary 1*, Robert H. Mounce p.38

Jesus himself was a man who lived completely in trust and reliance on his Father. Poverty of spirit is seen in the first temptation (Matt. 4:1–4.) Jesus was put on by the devil to provide for himself by turning stones into bread. His answer to the tempter indicated a determined dependence upon the Father which was itself a declaration of utter trust in the goodness and faithfulness of the Father. Likewise that poverty in spirit is shown in his thanksgiving prayer in Matthew 11:25ff – in all that Jesus accomplished in his ministry, he knew it was accomplished by the gracious action of the Father, and in His good pleasure. His poverty in spirit is seen in his continual recourse to prayer.

In Matthew 6:22–34 we have an exhortation that is well known to us. It is actually an exhortation to live life in dependence upon the Father, trusting His good and kind provision – and so an exhortation to poverty of spirit. Linked with this is the exhortation to seek His kingdom and His righteousness.

3. Poverty Of Poverty Of Spirit

In Matthew 11:29 Jesus calls us to himself and says, ‘Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle⁶ and humble in heart⁷ ...’ To be poor in spirit must mean also then that there is genuine humility. To be poor in spirit is to be of the nature of Philippians 2:3–8 :-

‘[Do] nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting the other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a

⁶ The word here is related to the word in the third beatitude - meek

⁷ This phrase is closely linked in thought to the phrase in the first beatitude - poor in spirit

man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient *even* unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted him, and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven and *things* on earth and *things* under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.’ (ASV.)

In commenting on the phrase ‘the poor in spirit’, Michael Green says, ‘The poor in spirit are happy – not the hard-boiled, who push others around.’ Rather, they are those who seek the good of the other before they seek their own benefit. This is what it means to count others better than yourself. It is to be poor in spirit.

In 1Kings 10 we read of the Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon. The RSV has at the end of v. 5 ‘... there was no more spirit in her’ as it speaks of her reaction to the blessing of God upon Solomon. She had come in all her splendour (v. 2) and with the intention of testing Solomon with hard questions (v. 1) – this is the mark of the person who seeks to be number one in a situation. She had a poverty of poverty of spirit. We similar thing in Revelation 3:14–22 :- the Lord speaks to the church in a strong word of rebuke. The church is not one which is poor in spirit; rather ‘...you say, ÔI am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing...’ to which the Lord has to face them up with the reality :- ‘...not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.’ This is not blessed poverty of spirit; this is pride of spirit which is wretched and poor of any blessing.

4. Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

The blessedness of poverty of spirit is that this is life in the Kingdom of heaven. Philippians 2 shows us that Jesus seeking not his own things but things of others was the expression of His being in very nature, God. So too then those who are poor in spirit are in the true dynamic of the kingdom. God's triumphal reign has reached its goal in them, in that they have become participants in the divine nature.

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Study 3: Blessed Are Those Who Mourn, For They Shall Be Comforted

1. Does Anyone Mourn Today?

Probably today there would be no beatitude less comprehensible in many of our churches than this one. A simple comparison of the song book of the people of God, the Psalms, with the song books of God's people today yields a notable lack in the latter: one third of the psalms could be categorised as laments – songs which give the opportunity for the expression of mourning. We live in a Christian culture which is largely triumphalist and positive; everything is 'up' and we panic over those who are 'down.' Those who are mourning often tell me that they find difficult if not impossible to be part of the regular worship gathering of their congregations because people just don't understand. Others tell me of how coming to church they often just want to weep – a grief or sorrow that comes out of the depths of their situation in life and all that the Lord is doing in it – and so they don't come. I try to assure them that there is no better place to cry than in the fellowship of God's people, but it never seems to convince them! I wonder if we have developed a culture where we do not know any more what it is to mourn. Can we sing with the afflicted man in Psalm 102?:

A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the LORD.

*'Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you.
Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress.*

Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly.
For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers.
My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food.
Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones.
I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins.
I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.
All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my
name as a curse.
For I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears because of
your great wrath,
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.
My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass.'

In an article in the New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, it is noted that in the New Testament there are fewer references to mourning than to its opposite, joy. The writers point out that the ratio of these words associated with sorrow to those associated with rejoicing is roughly 1:4¹. This tells us something about how we are to understand mourning, and saves us from confusing mourning with self-pity and despair. Yet it does not completely negate the reality of mourning and sorrow. This reality of life in the kingdom is that there is blessedness in mourning, and that it is in true mourning that we know the true comfort of God coming to us.

2. Those Who Mourn – God And His People

A number of times in the Scriptures we are given the promise that sorrow and mourning will be turned to joy and dancing:

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. (Psalm 126:5)

The ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isaiah 51:11)

¹ H Haarbeck, H.-G. Link, λυπεω, NIDNTT, Vol. 2, p. 420

Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. (Jeremiah 31:13)

The Revelation of St John ends with the picture of the comfort of God triumphing in all the world:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' (Revelation 21:3-5)

These verses all speak very deeply to us² and they can provide the starting point in our understanding of the blessedness of mourning. We see from them that mourning comes to an end when the fulness of God's saving work is finally and irrevocably established, when the Kingdom comes in all its fulness. Mourning has to do then with the incompleteness of the saving action of God in the current situation. To mourn is to recognise that in the current situation suffering, death, sin, the flesh, the world, the powers and principalities, the devil are active and bringing their misery and menace, their tyranny and terror to bear in the lives of men and women. To mourn is to recognise that in this world God is not honoured, men and women are not free, the subjects of the kingdom are in rebellion against the king, the wrath of God is active in the world and that His judgements are in all the earth. Mourning is the sharing in the grief of God over whatever refuses His Kingdom.

In Genesis 6:5-6 we see this grief of God:

² Although they only do so if we actually face the reality of mourning! Otherwise they seem like an unnecessary extra.

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. (Genesis 6:5,6)

This must not be read as regret or 'second thoughts.' What follows in verse 7 may seem to confirm it as such, as the LORD determines to wipe mankind from the face of the earth. In fact though, the judgment of the flood is a saving action of God, preserving creation so that the great goal of the Kingdom may be reached. Man's wickedness – 'every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time' – was of such an order that creation had no future if this situation was left unremediated. Mankind in the grace and kindness of God was not completely destroyed, as the favour of God rested on Noah. This section points to us very clearly that the grief of God is really His holy determination of love to bring His purpose to its completion against all that opposes His Kingdom.

The prophets frequently speak from the heartache of God for His world and His people when they are in their sins and under His judgments. Jeremiah 8:4–17 speaks of the ferocity of His judgment on a people who cling to their idolatry and refuse to hear His word. It is a devastating passage. It is immediately followed by 8:18–9:3 in which the Lord laments over this terrible situation of His people. It is almost as the Lord wrestles with Himself in His judgment as He considers the people in their pitiable state (Ô...we are not saved...'), a state in which they lie because of their sins and His judgments. He cannot forbear from bringing His judgments. Still His judgments are on the people of His love, the ones He has chosen to be His own, and so by their judgment crushing, mourning, horror comes on Him:

Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people? Oh, that my head

were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. (Jeremiah 8:21–9:1)

His lamenting for balm and a physician to heal their terrible wounds is in fact the declaration of His intention to act Himself to provide balm which will heal the wounds of all people.³

The prophets were participants in the mourning and sorrow of God. True mourning is actually a desire for the fulness of salvation to come to a person or situation, redeeming it from all the misery of sin and into the truth of God Himself. We see time and again the men and women of God interceding for the people of God in the situation of judgment. Moses stands out so clearly in all this. *Mourning is right at the heart of true intercession.* This is because it is a participation in the heart of God Himself. See Romans 8:18–27.

3. Sent To Bind Up The Brokenhearted

In Isaiah 61:1–3, the prophet gave an outline of the ministry of the coming one:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendour. (Isaiah 61:1–3)

(There are so many parallels in this passage to the beatitudes.) The whole of Christ's ministry can be seen as the proclamation of the year of the Lord's favour, His day of vengeance. Another way of

³ For a similar passage, see Hosea 11:1-11

saying this is that Christ came for the full establishment of all the purpose of God in creation, for the establishment fully and finally of the Kingdom of God and the putting down of all that opposes that Kingdom. Right at the start of his ministry, we are told that Jesus ‘...went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)’ His ministry was then for the comforting of those who mourn, for the binding up of the brokenhearted.

In his ministry we see his mourning over the misery and the pitiable state of humanity in bondage through sin to the fear of death and the tyranny of Satan. His weeping at the graveside of Lazarus (John 11:35) was not merely pathetic and impotent sorrow at the death of his friend – it could not be that at all for he deliberately acted in such a way that he would not be there until Lazarus died (John 11:1–6.) His sorrow was related to what he saw around him at that graveside – the weeping of Mary and all the Jews who came with her (John 11:33). This cowering and despair at the face of death was so dehumanising and degrading that Jesus was ‘deeply moved in spirit and troubled.’ His mourning here was linked with spiritual outrage – outrage that people could be so enslaved, especially when he who had been sent by the Father, he who was the resurrection and the life of all who believe, was standing there with them.

The mourning of Christ is always linked to his outrage and anger. A number of times he pronounces woes over a situation – e.g. Matthew 11:20–24 as he laments the lack of faith in Bethsaida and Korazin, and Matthew 23 where he laments over the sin and hardness of the Pharisees. So also the cleansing of the Temple (Matthew 21:12–13; John 2:12–17.) These occasions are not blind rages. The lament ‘Woe to you...’ is a phrase used in funeral

mourning in the ancient world. This is the anger of love, the same holy love as seen in Jeremiah.

Jesus lamented over Jerusalem as he entered immediately prior to his arrest and crucifixion. Matthew places it in the context of the woes to the Pharisees:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. (Matthew 23:37,38)

He is just about to the great place of sorrow – the cross. There he would become the man of sorrows and upon him would come all the sorrow of the world. That is, as Christ bore in himself the sins of the world and bore the wrath of God on that sin, all that causes mourning was being borne by him:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4–6)

And by his wounds we are healed. The mourning that belongs to the kingdom is essentially a *moral* mourning; it is the sorrow that comes in a situation that is not simply sad, but wrong, unholy, impure, immoral. The healing of the wounds of the world is not a light matter, a mere matter of restructuring and re-educating; it is a matter of holy love triumphing through judgment over all that is evil. In his being wounded Christ has accomplished all this. At the cross all the brokenhearted are bound up. At the cross the whole purpose of the Father for His creation is established and secured once and for ever.

4. Comfort, Comfort My People

The people who mourn will be comforted. They will know that the truth of the kingdom is secure and that nothing can stop its coming in fulness. The Holy Spirit is the Comforter. At the Cross Jesus opened a fountain from which flows a river, streams of living water which flow out to those who believe in order that it may then flow from them (John 7:37–39.) In all the mourning of the kingdom, there is the strong dynamic of hope – ‘...we ourselves, who have the first-fruit of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we await eagerly our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.’ Hence, our mourning is not the mourning of despair. We are sure that the saving purposes of God will come to fruit in the new creation. Our mourning is not the snivelling and whimpering of fear like those beside the grave of Lazarus. We don’t grieve as they do who have no hope (1Thess. 4:13). Every day the comfort of God breaks in on us by the ministry of the Spirit. He intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express – and so we are joined in the determination of God for the fulness of kingdom. Then, comfort will be full in sight – no more mourning; now comfort is rich and sustaining and full in faith.

When Peace Like A River (It Is Well)

When peace like a river
attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea-billows
roll,
Whatever my lot, Thou hast
taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well (It is well)
With my soul (With my soul)
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet,
though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my
helpless estate
And hath shed His own blood
for my soul.

Horatio G. Spafford

For me be it Christ, be it
Christ hence to live!
If Jordan above me shall roll,

No pang shall be mine, for in
death as in life
Thou wilt prosper Thy peace
to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for
Thy coming we wait;
The sky, not the grave is our
goal.
Oh, trump of the angel! O
voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope! Blessed rest
of my soul!

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Study 4: Blessed Are The Meek, For They Will Inherit The Earth

1. Meekness

The Greek word for 'meek' used here – *πραεις* – has a fairly wide range of meaning.¹ It ranges from 'poor and afflicted' to 'humble' to 'gentle and considerate.'² It is a word that is closely linked to another word of similar meaning, *επιεικης*. Of these two words, Bauder says, 'Both concepts are opposed to unbridled anger, harshness, brutality and self-expression.'³ I found this last statement quite startling in that it directly confronts that which is part and parcel of living in the twenty first century, psychologised Western world. We live in an age where self-expression and self-assertion (regardless of the cost of those around us) are the great virtues: it is seen as dysfunctional or repressive to not have these characteristics. As with all the beatitudes, we find that meekness is not a dreamy and sentimental virtue easily accepted by all! Rather, to live in the truth of the beatitudes puts us on a collision course with the world around us. To live in the beatitudes is to stand in the conflict of the clash of the kingdoms. As someone has said, 'If you think meekness is weakness, trying being meek for a week!'

¹ A good treatment of the topic of gentleness comes in Geoffrey Bingham's fine booklet, *The Spirit's Harvest* which deals with the Spirit's gracious and glorious harvest in the lives of God's people.

² The Greek word *πραεις* is derived from an Old Gothic word *fryon*, which has links to the English word *friend*.

³ W. Bauder, 'Humility, Meekness', NIDNTT Vol. 2, pp. 256-264

2. The Meekness of God

In the servant song of Isaiah 42, the Lord speaks of the ministry of the One He is sending to accomplish His mission:

'Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.
He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;
he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth.
In his law the islands will put their hope.' Isaiah 42:1-4

This Servant is one who is fully identified with the Lord who sends him. The Lord upholds him – i.e. grips him tight – and the Lord's soul delight in him. This servant is '...the Lord's man for the job and the Lord's man for himself.'⁴ The Spirit of the Lord is put upon him – so he lives in the personal presence and action of the Lord. This all means that the manner and conduct of the servant is consonant with and declaratory of the truth of the Lord who sent him. We find in this prophecy that the manner and conduct of the servant is that of gentleness which extends in two directions. Firstly – 'not crying aloud' shows meekness as being self-effacing (not self-expressing!) and not making oneself the centre of attention. Secondly – 'a bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out' tells of him dealing so gently with poor and broken. *This tells us of the gentleness of God who sent him.* To take Bauder's quote from above, this means that there is nothing of unbridled anger, harshness, brutality or self-expression within God.

This will undoubtedly not be how many see God or how many read the revelation of God in the Scriptures. It is essential that we

⁴ Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* p.320

know that there is not one whit of self-serving action within the Godhead.

3. The Meekness of God in Man

The harvest of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) includes gentleness. This harvest is the result of the Spirit bringing home to the human heart all the action and accomplishment of Christ in His cross, resurrection and ascension. As what has been done for us in Christ is implanted in us by the Spirit, we are reconciled to the Father and so come to share in the meekness of the Godhead. Meekness is related to the action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and so is essentially linked to hope. The person (and the community) who lives in hope is characterised by a gentleness towards those who are broken, and by a refusal to assert his or her own position and rights in a situation.

This beatitude concerning meekness is taken almost word for word from Psalm 37:11. In this psalm of David, he meditates upon the how he should be responding to the reality of evil and wickedness in the world. throughout the Psalm two themes are counterpointed – (1) that God will judge the wicked in His good time, and (2) that those who belong to the Lord are known by Him and cared for by Him. The whole Psalm is a call to trust the Lord, and to not fret about the seeming success of wickedness. Verses 8–9 especially spells this out:

‘Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.’

Six times there is the promise of inheriting the land: –

v. 9: ‘For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.’

v. 11: ‘But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.’

v. 22: ‘...those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off.’

v. 27 ‘Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land for ever.’

v. 29 ‘...the righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it for ever.’

and v. 34 ‘Wait for the LORD and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.’

These six statements help us to see something of the meaning of meekness, by placing it in parallel with: hoping in the Lord, being in the blessing of the Lord, doing right and not evil, being righteous, and waiting for the Lord, patiently keeping His way. In Numbers 12:3 we are told that Moses was a very humble (= meek) man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. This is told us as a side comment on a passage which tells of resentment towards Moses from Miriam and Aaron. Their resentment is couched in pious sounding terms – they are offended that Moses has taken a foreign wife (12.:1) – but in fact the driving motivation is to be recognised (12:2). Their approach is not meek. Moses’ meekness is shown in his waiting for the Lord to bring His judgments – not judging the matter himself – and by his kindly intercession for Miriam when she came under the judgment of the Lord (12:13). Later in Numbers 20, in the second striking of the rock to produce water, Moses failed to exhibit the meekness of God. His impatience and frustration with the people led him to reprimand them and to strike the rock when the Lord had commanded him simply to speak to the rock (20:8). This failure in meekness brought Moses himself under the judgment of God.

3. Unbridled Anger, Harshness, Brutality And Self-Expression Brought To The Cross

There was nothing of meekness in the crowd that brought Christ to arrest and crucifixion. Sanitised as we are, by familiarity which fails to consider thoroughly, to the events of the Cross, we may have not really seen the harshness and brutality of the mob in its treatment of Christ. If we do come to see this, we must see it from within, and not simply from without. We must recognise ourselves in that blood-lusting mob, and see in their excavating cruelty and brutality our own dynamics of sin. At the cross of Christ, the whole human race was present as crucifiers – but also as those who were born in the body of the crucified.

In the midst of this mob, Christ himself remained the meek Lord – not crying out, not raising his voice aloud.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

This prophecy was clearly in the minds of the writers of the Gospels as they spoke of Christ's arrest, trial and crucifixion. Peter speaks of it too in his first letter:

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.' When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:21-25)

It is this meek action of Christ which opens up the possibility of meekness for a sinful, harsh, brutal, self-centred human race. If there had not been meekness in Christ at the Cross, there could

have been no saving effect in his action there. He would have turned aside when taunted by the crowds to save himself.

4. Inheriting The Whole Earth

The meek will inherit the earth. Inheritance is not for the graspers or the takers – it must be received: there is no possibility of inheritance outside of meekness. This must mean also that in the end the whole earth will be filled with meekness! Undoubtedly this seems the opposite to what we see now, where the pushy get the goods! The question in the face of push and shove must be – 'How do I respond? Do I push and shove back? Or do I entrust myself to him who judges justly?'

Such meekness is the fruit of the Spirit, and so is the fruit of hope. Regarding our future inheritance, the Spirit has been given as a down payment, a pledge and assurance of what is coming (Ephesians 1:13b-14.) We are to constantly live in the revelation and power of all that Spirit shows us – he is meek, not raising his own voice, but constantly pointing us to the Father and the Son, constantly showing us the great depths of the Cross. Let us be aglow with and walk in step with the Spirit of God.

Tuesday Night Class at NCTM Centre, Coromandel East
Term 3, 2003, Andrew Klynsmith

Study 5: Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst For Righteousness, For They Will Be Filled

1. The Righteousness For Which We Hunger And Thirst¹

The Hebrew word translated 'righteous' in the Old Testament is *qydu* which has a its root idea 'being straight or right'. Throughout the Old Testament we see the God of Israel revealed as a God of righteousness:

'Far be it from you to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Genesis 18:25)

'He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.' (Deuteronomy 32:4)

'The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.' (Daniel 9:14)

These all indicate that God's righteousness is active – righteousness is something that God does. God's righteousness is His doing right in every situation, His active determination that wrong and evil shall not prevail, and that what is good and true and

¹ Much of this section has come from 'Righteousness', D. W. Diehl, *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell pp. 952-953

holy shall do so. Thus the righteousness of God is revealed in His punishment of the wicked and disobedient:

'O righteous God, who searches minds and hearts, bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure.

My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart.

God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day. If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows.

He who is pregnant with evil and conceives trouble gives birth to disillusionment. He who digs a hole and scoops it out falls into the pit he has made. The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.

I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High.' (Psalm 7:9-17)

This Psalm highlights another, more emphatic element to God's righteousness – His saving of His people through these judgments. Throughout the Old Testament, righteousness is closely related to God's salvation, mercy, and loving-kindness – see Pss. 85:9-10; 98:2-3; 40:10; Isa. 45:8; 51:5; Jer. 9:24.

The Greek word for righteous, *δικαιος*, in Classical Greek referred to that which is in accord with law or social norm. God's righteousness is another way of speaking of the law of His own holy nature. It is the 'social norm of the Trinity.' Goodness or 'straightness' is to be defined by the character of God Himself (not defined from outside God and then used to measure God.)

In a couple of places the Lord's righteousness is declared to be unique:

‘They will say of me, ‘In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength.’ All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.’ (Isaiah 45:24)

‘I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD; I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.’ (Psalms 71:16)

It would be true to say that only the Lord is righteous. ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.’ Yet the testimony and command of the Old Testament is that there are people who are righteous.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 says:

‘This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes.’

Micah 6:8 proclaims:

‘He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’

In creating us in His own image, after His likeness, God has made us to share in His righteousness. Human righteousness is that which is straight or right as God is straight; human righteousness is that which is in accord with the law of God Himself, with the social norm of the life of the Trinity. Such righteousness is never self-derived or achieved; as Micah says it is in walking humbly with your God.

2. Hungering And Thirsting

To hunger and thirst for righteousness must mean that if a choice came between eating and drinking on the one hand, and living in the righteousness of God on the other, we would choose righteousness. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means we place it above every other matter in life. It has a claim on us

greater than any other claim. Michael Green points out that there is a desperation, a fire about this hungering and thirsting that is marked by a peculiarity in the Greek at this point. Matthew uses an unusual form which he sees as stressing that the hungry ones desire the whole thing, not merely a part. ‘The phrase captures wholeheartedness. If we have a passionate desire to be right with God and stay that way, He is going to meet that desire to the full, and we are going to be happy.’²

The Psalmists speak of hungering and thirsting for God:

‘As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?’ (Psalms 42:1,2)

‘O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you. On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night. Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.’ (Psalms 63:1–8)

To hunger and thirst for righteousness means first and foremost to hunger and thirst for God Himself. It is to love Him with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. And it is to long to see His saving purposes worked out in history and to see His judgments finish all that is of the evil one.

Outside of this hungering and thirsting for God’s own righteousness, humanity still has appetite – the Scriptures speak of man craving. There are the cravings of the sinful nature (Eph. 2:3) which issue in

² Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew*, The Bible Speaks Today, p. 90

desires and thoughts that enslave us, leading us on into darkness. This is under the vicious ruling of the devil, who is at work in this disobedience and unrighteousness, just as the Father is at work in true righteousness. This craving of the flesh is linked by John to the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. None of it is from the Father. none of it has a future – it will pass away under God’s righteous judgment. Paul quotes Psalm 59:7–8 in Romans 3:15f which speaks of the eagerness of the human race to shed blood. In 2Timothy 3:1–5 he gives a terrible expose of this diverted hungering and thirsting, this diverted ‘loving’:

‘But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.’ (2 Timothy 3:1–5)

Yet for all this, men and women are hungry and thirsty. A writer once observed that we can never get enough of what we don’t really want. We were created for God and nothing short of Him and His righteousness satisfies. Only the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled.

3. Jesus Hungering And Thirsting

When Jesus came to be baptised by John, John protested as he recognised the greatness of Christ and his own sinfulness. Jesus reassured him that it was proper to do as Jesus had requested:

‘Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.’ Then John consented.’ (Matthew 3:15)

Right at the start of Jesus’ public ministry is this statement of the matter deepest in his heart – the fulfilling of righteousness, the accomplishing of the Father’s will.

Immediately following the baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert and there he fasted forty days and nights – ‘and he was hungry.’ Tempted by the devil to provide for himself food, he reiterated the great matter of his heart – ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4).’ The temptation was an attempt to have him hunger or thirst for something other than the will of God, the righteousness of God. Jesus lived in the constant filling from the Father as he lived in constant hungering and thirsting for the Father’s righteousness.

At the garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–44), Jesus prayed earnestly for the doing of the Father’s will. However we understand that prayer, what is clear is that over all things his desire was the accomplishment of the Father’s will. He was hungry and thirsty to do the righteousness of God.

In the action of the Cross, Jesus entered into the emptiness and dryness of humanity not hungering and thirsting for the living God as he bore the sins of the world. This is an unseen and unseeable element of the cross – it can come home only by the revelation of the Spirit through the word; it can never actually be portrayed. when it comes home then, it comes home in a moral way, at the level of the conscience and not at the level of our sympathy.

His cry, ‘I thirst!’ (John 19:28) came after the deep agony of desolation from which he had cried out the cry of dereliction, the cry of those for whom there can be no more filling from God, the cry of those for whom there can only be ever-hunger, eternal thirst. His thirsty cry came, ‘knowing that all was now completed.’ In going to the depths of man’s sin and bearing the fulness of God’s judgment on sin, he had expended all his resources. He had established righteousness – in showing God to be both righteous

and the one who makes righteous those who have faith in Christ. He had given all and had nothing left to give to the Father other than his thirsting for Him and His righteousness. But there is really finally nothing else to give.

Jesus promises those who are hungry and thirsty that he will fill them (John 4:13–14; 6:35; 7:37–38.) This he said of the Spirit (John 7:39) who was to be given after he was glorified. Until the false hungering, the non-hungering for God and His righteousness was dealt with by his death and resurrection, no filling could take place. It is through the Spirit's revealing of the truth of the Gospel, the dynamic and power of the Cross of Christ that a people hungry and thirsty for righteousness are created. And such people are filled, for the Father comes to them and draws them into His righteousness.

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Study 6: Blessed Are The Merciful, For They Will Be Shown Mercy

1. The Wonderful Mercy Of God

Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord is revealed as a God of great mercy. Perhaps the high point of this revelation is in Exodus 32 to 34 during the terrible occasion of God's people's turning to idolatry with the golden calf, while Moses was on the mountain receiving the law of God for the life and worship of the people. Faced with the Lord's burning anger towards His people, Moses acted as intercessor for them. He pleaded with the Lord to not abandon His people but to remain with them and be their guide to the promised land (33:12–17). On the Lord's promise to be present with them, Moses asked for a guarantee – the revelation of God's own glory (33:18) to which the Lord replied:

'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.' (Exodus 33:19,20)

The revelation of God's glory would be a revelation of His goodness, consisting of Moses coming to know the sovereignty and freedom of the Lord's mercy.

When the revelation came, this is what happened:

Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, **'The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'**

Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped. 'O Lord, if I have found favour in your eyes,' he said, 'then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.' (Exodus 34:5-9)

The revelation of the glory of God here comes as the proclamation of the Lord's name to Moses. It is most significant that the revelation was not visible but verbal – knowing the glory of God is not a matter of sight, but of hearing His own proclaimed self-revelation. Right at the heart of God – this is what is conveyed in the giving of His name and the opening of His glory – is the truth of mercy. The phrase 'abounding in love and faithfulness' is literally 'multiple in (*chesed*) (steadfast love, loving-kindness) and (*'emeth*) (truth, faithfulness.)' It is (*chesed*) which is translated most frequently as 'mercy' in the Old Testament.

In his commentary on Matthew¹, Hamann says this:

'The merciful are loving and kind especially in situations where justice puts others in their power, or 'at their mercy' as the phrase goes. Mercy is shown when justice is waived, when one does not insist on one's rights but is willing to forgo them because of the disadvantage or unhappiness or trouble of various kinds which insistence upon rights would bring to others.'

In Deuteronomy 4:30-31 we read:

¹ H. P. Hamann, The Gospel According To Matthew, p.46

When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, then in later days you will return to the LORD your God and obey him. For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath.

There the mercy of God is seen in that the Lord will not abandon His people, nor destroy them, for that would be to forget His covenant with their forefathers. This is mercy in the misery that comes as judgment upon a situation of rebellion against the Lord (see vv. 25-29.) Later in Deuteronomy (7:2) we read that the Israelites are to have no mercy on the inhabitants of the land but to utterly destroy them. When mercy comes, judgment is forgone and a deserved destruction is averted (see also Nehemiah 9:29-31.) This mercy is seen in Deuteronomy 4 above to be from the covenant faithfulness of God – that is, it is free and from His own character and being, not from any sense of imposition or having His hand forced.

David well recognised the mercy of God when he was under judgment for the taking of the census (2Sam. 24:1-17.) He was offered three options for the judgment and had to make choice (v. 13). His response was to cast himself on the God of all mercy and to leave the matter in His hand:

David said to Gad, 'I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.' (2 Samuel 24:14)

There was with David a great sense of the mercy of God – which must have come from his own experience of the Lord's ongoing kindness and mercy to him. Throughout the Psalms, and David's psalms in particular, the mercy of God is a recurring and rich theme. Psalm 25 is a strong example:

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul; in you I trust, O my God.
Do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
No one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame,
but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths;
guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and
my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O LORD, your great mercy
and love, for they are from of old.
Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.

Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his
ways.
He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.
All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep
the demands of his covenant.
For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is
great.
Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the
way chosen for him.
He will spend his days in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit
the land.

The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant
known to them.
My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from
the snare.
Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.
The troubles of my heart have multiplied; free me from my anguish.

Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.
See how my enemies have increased and how fiercely they hate me!
Guard my life and rescue me; let me not be put to shame, for I take
refuge in you.
May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope is in you.
Redeem Israel, O God, from all their troubles!

The working of God's mercy is manifold in this psalm. The first work of mercy is the forgiveness of sins. There is rescue from the penalty and judgment and misery of sins. There is the teaching and leading of the rescued and humbled one. There is rescue from the enemies that seek to ensnare and shame the rescued one. Putting all this together, we see that the mercy of God works to redeem us from sin in its totality – freeing us from its penalty, its pollution, and its power. It works to reassure us of our reconciliation with the Father (v.16) and grants us access to Him.

2. I Desire Mercy And Not Sacrifice

We are made in the image of the Lord, the God of all mercy. Micah tells us (6:8):

'He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'

In Matthew 23:23 Jesus rounded on the hypocritical teachers of the law and the Pharisees who religiously observed the minutiae of the law with regard to the tithing of spices but who neglected the weightier matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. When speaking of the weightier matters of the law, Jesus surely meant that these matters of justice, mercy and faithfulness were of the truth of God's own character and being, of the law of God Himself. A 'weighty' matter in Hebrew thinking was a matter of glory (*kabod*). Justice, mercy and faithfulness are seen in the revealing of God's glory in Exodus 34.

Twice in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus uses Hosea 6:6 as a rebuke and corrective to those who opposed his ministry:

For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hos. 6:6)

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?' On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' (Matthew 9:9-13)

At that time Jesus went through the cornfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some ears of corn and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, 'Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.' He answered, 'Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread – which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.' (Matthew 12:1-8)

Showing mercy is linked in Hosea with acknowledgement of God. For all their religious fastidiousness, the Pharisees were actually turning their backs to God, not acknowledging Him. Particularly here, to acknowledge Him would mean to be in the flow of His mercy to those who were in need – either the sinners in need of grace or the disciples in need of food. The Pharisaical approach led to condemnation (12:7) – whereas we have seen that mercy seeks to avoid destruction.

3. The Making Of The Merciful At The Cross

When we consider the Pharisees we may well run the risk of being Pharisees ourselves – 'Thank God that I am not like the self-righteous Pharisee! They really deserve the condemnation that Jesus gives them!' There is something very unmerciful at the heart of all sinful human beings. Just as to be merciful is to acknowledge God, so to not be merciful is to not acknowledge God. But as love for God and love for the neighbour belong together, it means too that the unmerciful person does not acknowledge the neighbour. Proverbs 21:10 – 'The wicked man craves evil; his neighbour gets no mercy from him.'

In Luke 7:36-50, the sinful woman who came to see Jesus at Simon's house acknowledged him in a way that Simon did not. She provided all that Simon had neglected to provide, but which even just in plain terms of politeness of a host he should have done – water to wash his feet, a greeting kiss and refreshing oil. Simon had a condemning mindset towards the woman – she could not be acknowledged either – his thoughts about her were to himself; he thought clearly Jesus should have ignored her and left her in the shadows too. Jesus' question to him was a penetrating one – 'Do you see this woman?' The unmerciful do not recognise even their unmercy for they overlook those whom they write off. Simon's problem, that he loved little, was rooted in a greater problem – he was forgiven little. He had no need for mercy himself (or so he thought) and so there was no room in him for the expression of mercy.

At the beginning of Luke's Gospel, in Zechariah's song of praise, the mercy of God echoes and re-echoes:

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who

hate us – **to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant**, the oath he swore to our father Abraham: to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, **because of the tender mercy of our God**, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace. (Luke 1:68–79)

The whole of the ministry of Christ is the ministry of mercy. This culminates in the events and action of the cross and resurrection. At the Cross, the failure of mercy in the history of the race which is the failure to acknowledge the glory of God is met by mercy beyond degree. Unfailing, overflowing, conquering mercy flows out of the heart of the Father there towards hard and brutal humanity:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, **God, who is rich in mercy**, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1–7)

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love

of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but **because of his mercy**. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3–7)

It is only by the bringing home of all this to the human heart by the Spirit that mercy breaks out in us. And this is what happens – the people of God are the community of mercy. Jude speaks of the ongoing outflow of mercy to us God's people, and the outflow through us to others:

Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. (Jude 1:21–23)

We have been brought into the wisdom from above (James 3:17) which is always pure, then peace loving, considerate, submissive, **full of mercy** and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

We are warned by James to live in the mercy of God, knowing that judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful (James 2:13). Such a person must have resisted the mercy of God coming consistently and freely to him in Christ – much as did the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21–35). Such mercy is exercised in free and full and flowing forgiveness to the brethren. Such is the nature of God's mercy to us in Christ.

Tuesday Night Class at NCTM Centre, Coromandel East
Term 3, 2003, Andrew Klynsmith

Study 7: Blessed Are The Pure In Heart For They Will See God

1. What Is Purity?

The meaning of purity of heart is described by various commentators as follows:

‘Pure means ‘unalloyed, unadulterated.’ If we train ourselves by an open heart of undivided loyalty to gaze upon the Lord, we shall one day be able to appreciate the supreme vision of the unutterably beautiful one in all his glory. Double vision reduces our capacity to focus, and mars the joy of the vision of God.’ (Michael Green)

‘The central idea is that of sincerity, single-mindedness, frankness. The pure in heart are marked by simplicity of word and action; there is no duplicity suspected or seen.’ (H. P. Hamann)

‘The primary reference is not to sexual purity, although that is mentioned in 5:28, but to single-mindedness, to be freed from the ‘tyranny of the divided self.’ (Robert Mounce)

Their combined opinion is that the key thought in the phrase ‘pure in heart’ is that of undivided, single-minded faithfulness to the Lord.

The word translated ‘pure’ here is καθαρος which in Classical Greek has the basic idea of being clean as opposed to being dirty in a physical sense. This Greek word is used to translate a range of

Hebrew words in the Old Testament which cover the range of meanings of ‘ritually pure’, ‘pure, innocent’ and ‘bright, clean, pure.’ In the New Testament, ‘pure’ is used parallel with a number of other words:

‘But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.’ (James 3:17)

‘Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.’ (Philippians 4:8)

‘Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.’ (2 Timothy 2:22)

‘Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.’ (Hebrews 7:26)

‘...so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe’ (Philippians 2:15)

‘So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.’ (2 Peter 3:14)

‘An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.’ (Titus 1:6,7)

‘...to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.’ (Titus 2:5)

‘...so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ...’ (Philippians 1:10)

‘Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.’ (1 Timothy 5:22)

‘Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.’ (James 1:27)

This presents a large and richer picture for us the nature of purity than that suggested by the commentators quoted above. Purity of heart includes the sense of steadfast and unshaken devotion that they point to, but is wider than that.

It is important to note especially in these verses that purity is not a static, uninvolved, aloof state of being. It is linked to actions of mercy and to living peaceably and with integrity with those around us. Purity and blamelessness are linked in various places. The elders in the church are to be blameless, and this is exegeted in Titus 1:7 in a series of negatives which all deal with interpersonal relationship issues – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not violent, not greedy for gain, not given to drunkenness. In Titus 2:5 we read that the purity of the women in the church is linked to their self-control – again a matter of relational integrity. In 1 Timothy 3:11, the elder women are to be women who are not gossips, but rather are temperate (= self-controlled.) (NB – In Titus 2:6 the young men are also urged to be self-controlled.) Purity is a very practical and dynamic matter.

Now, whilst purity is dynamic and relational, it is important to note that in being so it maintains itself from implication in and involvement with sin. In this sense the pure person is set apart from sinners, and careful not to share in the sins of others. The pure are called to shine like stars in a crooked and depraved generation. To be pure is to be dynamically holy in this life. Purity

is thus a *moral* category, and is linked with holiness a number of times.

As we read the verses above, what we may see there is a portrait of Jesus Christ. (Certainly Hebrews 7:26 speaks specifically of Christ, and whilst the other verses are exhortatory to us as the people of God; in that exhortation we are being called to the life that is ours in the kingdom, the life that is ours in the king.) A reading of the Gospels to substantiate this is overwhelming in the evidence that it provides, as well as exhilarating in the picture of Christ that we then see – the truly pure man!

2. All A Man's Ways Seem Innocent To Him

This picture of purity is exquisite to the pure. Undoubtedly to the person outside the purity of God, true purity is something unclean and unacceptable. Rather what is impure is called pure, and what is pure is called impure. This is of necessity the case, for the revelation of purity must be unbearable to the human spirit which is not in the reality of purity. The Proverbs tell us twice about the assessment by humanity of our inherent purity:

‘...those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth’ (Proverbs 30:12)

‘All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD.’ (Proverbs 16:2)

And yet for all his self-approval and self-esteem, a person is not his own judge. Purity is not measured by us, but by Him who is pure. The Pharisees had a high self-estimation of their purity, but of them Jesus said,

‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on

the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.’ (Matthew 23:27,28)

The preoccupation of the world with beauty is a substitute for the missed purity for which the human spirit is made, as it is made to resonate with the whole truth of God Himself. There may well be purity without external beauty. that was true of the servant in Isaiah 53, who had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him (v. 2), but who is righteous (v. 11). But outside of purity, beauty becomes gaudy. The picture contrast in the Revelation of the bride (19:6–8; 21:2; 21:9–27) and the whore (17:1–6) takes into the truth of this reality. Of the bride–city we are told that nothing impure will ever enter it.

Driving deep in the secret place of the human heart is the existential and suppressed knowledge of defilement. Defilement is a word hardly used today in Christian vocabulary yet one which occurs and recurs through the Scriptures. To be defiled is to lose your essential integrity, your purposeful reality as a person. In the Old Testament, God’s people may defile themselves through various forms of prohibited sexual relationships and perversions (Lev. 18), witchcraft and occultism (Lev. 19:31), idolatry (Lev. 20:3), prostitution (Lev. 21:9), adultery (Num. 5). Yet defilement is not simply of oneself – it is an infectious and destructive force. Isaiah 24:4–5 says to us:

‘The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant.’ (Isaiah 24:4,5)

No wonder, when he faced the refusal of Israel to face the truth of its defilement and impurity the Lord spoke through Jeremiah:

‘Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve you!’ Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute. I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn

against me into a corrupt, wild vine? Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,’ declares the Sovereign LORD. ‘How can you say, ‘I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals’?’ (Jeremiah 2:20–23a)

3. The End Of Innocence, And its Beginning

Given the delusion of innocence and purity in the human heart, it is truly an extraordinary event when a person recognises his or her impurity and uncleanness. In Isaiah 6 we read of one such person, and in Luke 5 of another:

‘In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’’ (Isaiah 6:1–7)

‘One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding round him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.’ Simon answered, ‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the

nets.' When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.' (Luke 5:1-11)

The end of the innocence of Isaiah and Peter came with the revelation of the glory and the holiness of God. For Isaiah this came with the vision of the Lord and the worship of Him by the angels. The revelation was with the purpose of making him one who could receive grace. As an impure person he was a candidate for the purifying work of the altar of God. For Peter the abundant kindness of the Lord ship of Christ undid his proud and independent heart and showed him to be the sinner that he was. Again, this end of innocence was with a view to bringing him to full purity. He left the situation following Jesus.

4. A Mission Of Purification

Jesus Christ came with a mission of purification. Malachi prophesied his coming and said:

'But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.' (Malachi 3:2-4)

As Zechariah prophesied before the birth of his son John, he spoke of the ministry of the coming one who was to fulfil the Lord's

saving plan, that his purpose was '...to enable us to serve the Lord with out fear, holy and righteousness in his sight, all the days of our life.' (Luke 1:74-75)

We see in the ministry of Jesus that he drove out unclean spirits (e.g. Matt. 10:1) and that he healed lepers of their uncleanness. He made very clear to the Pharisees though that uncleanness was as much a matter of the heart as was cleanness and purity. The external things such as food and soil do not make a person unclean – it is the reality of sin in the heart that infects outwards (Matt. 15:1-20).

To deal with a world of impurity, Christ went to the cross. In order to purify for himself a people to be his bride, Christ in his love for the church, gave himself up to death for her, and so by his dying – in which he took her to himself, bearing her in his body – he washed her (Eph. 5:25-27). this act did away with all impurity and soiling of sin. The holy action of the cross fully dealt with impurity and all its effect. the writer to Hebrews tells us that the sacrifice of Christ effects what the old sacrificial system could never come lose to. It could never take away sins (10:4), but Christ has offered a sacrifice by which we have been made holy once and for all (10:10). The shed blood of Christ is the effective agent in purification (Heb. 9:14.)

Once and for all we have been cleansed. In Christ we have a pure heart, through the forgiveness of our sins (2Peter 1:9). The reality of cleansing has come through the gift of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-8).

Song 326 – It Does Not Yet Appear

Tuesday Night Class at NCTM Centre, Coromandel East
Term 3, 2003, Andrew Klynsmith

Study 8: Blessed Are The Peacemakers For They Will Be Called Sons Of God

1. Grace And Peace To You From God Our Father

The letters of the New Testament have a great similarity in their opening greetings:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:7, 1Cor. 1:3, 2Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Eph. 1:2, Php. 1:2, 2Thess. 1:2, Phm. 3)

To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. (Col. 1:2)

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. (1Thess. 1:1)

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Tim. 1:2)

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour. (Titus 1:4)

To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. (Jude 1:1-2)

...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1Pet. 1:2)

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2Pet. 1:2)

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. (2John 3)

I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name. (3John 14)

Far from being a formulaic and clichéd way of speaking, the writers of these letters were getting to the very heart of God's action when they repeatedly prayed for grace and peace to be the gift that the church knew coming from God the Father through Jesus Christ. Grace and peace is what it's all about!

The goal of grace is peace. Paul says in Romans 5:1-2a:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. (Romans 5:1-2)

Peace is not simply an inner state of tranquility and harmony – although it may well involve this aspect secondarily – but rather primarily peace is understood as full, true and free relating with God through Jesus Christ. It is the fruit of the justifying grace of God which has come in Christ and in which we trust. Paul had the lesson of the Old Testament sacrificial system to help come to see this. The sacrificial system was moving towards a goal which was more than the forgiveness of sins, as wonderful and great as that was. The whole point of forgiveness was not just to save God's

people from wrath and destruction – the forgiveness that the atoning sacrifices established always had as its goal reconciliation with God. The great finale of the sacrificial system was the fellowship offering. (See Lev. 3, 4 and 7 especially for the regulation of this sacrifice.) This offering was to be eaten by the offerer in the holy precinct of the tabernacle or temple. It was an expression of atonement – i.e. at-one-ness – both with God Himself, and also with God’s people who were with the offerer.

Peace is from God the Father, and is through Jesus Christ. That is, there is no peace outside of reconciliation with God as Father. The matters of peace and adoption are closely linked. Only the children of God can know peace and do peace. In John 14:27, Jesus says:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

That command to not let your hearts be troubled was given also right at the start of chapter 14, and all that is in between these two occurrences tells us just how it is that the Christ will give peace. We will look at that in just a moment but first must consider a serious matter.

2. Peace Over A Pit

Isaiah tells us:

‘There is no peace,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked.’ (Isa. 48:22)

‘There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’ (Isa. 57:21)

The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace. (Isa. 59:8)

The wicked do not know peace and do not pursue peace. Those who walk with them do not know peace for the wicked cannot be

peacemakers or peace-givers. Paul says (quoting Psalm 36:1) of the whole human race, Jew and Gentile alike, ‘The way of peace they do not know.’ (Rom. 3:17)

Faced with the great realities of sin and division, of alienation from God and from each other, the human race has gone into denial. Peace is of enormous importance in our world. How many would not have jobs if we gave up on all our conflict resolution strategies and approaches! All around us are those who say, ‘Peace! Peace!’ where in fact there is no peace and peace cannot come. Jeremiah faced the same denial and unreality in his day:

They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. (Jer. 6:14, 8:11)

Perhaps in Luke 12:13ff, the person in the crowd who called out asking Jesus to arbitrate between him and his brother over a matter of inheritance had this too easy view of making peace. ‘Sort out the rights here and all will be well.’ Perhaps he had no interest in peace at all, but only in getting his bit. Justice without mercy is perhaps the amongst the most destructive forces in the world’s history. Jesus could see that what lay in the heart of this man could not make for peace and he had to warn him and the crowd also:

Then he said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’ (Luke 12:15)

‘.... This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.’ (Luke 12:21)

3. Peace From A Cross

Jesus spoke of giving true peace in John 14, not the fickle, failing peace that world gives. This peace which would settle all troubled hearts would come from trusting in God and in Christ (14:1). He

told them that the Father has a home with room for all, and Jesus was going to prepare a welcome for us (14:2–4). Thomas didn't understand him. (14:5) Jesus made very clear that he had come to be the way to the father – that is the way to peace. There was no way to be reconciled with the Father other than by what he was about to do (14:6–7). As the fruit of all he was going to do in the cross, the other Counsellor, the Holy Spirit would be given by the Father (14:16). On the day he would come to God's people they would know that Jesus is in the Father, they are in him, and he in them. those who love Christ would be loved by the Father and by Christ and know Christ with them (14:18–24) That is, the Holy Spirit would bring home the peace of God.

The going away that he spoke of would take him from them – to a cross where the wounds of God's people would be fully and finally healed (not easily, carelessly, lazily like the promises of the idealists of our age who refuse to engage the moral dimensions of peace.) Isaiah prophesied this:

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa 53:5)

At the cross, Jesus did not simply stretch himself over our sins, covering them. Rather, he plunged into the depths of the pit of sin. He became sin for us, and received in his own body the penalty of our sin. He has made peace – between us and the Father, and flowing from that peace between all the children of God.

For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in

the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (Col. 1:19–23)

4. Making Peace – Proclaiming Peace

The peacemakers are the children of God, reconciled to the Father by the grace and mercy that has come through our Lord Jesus Christ. In John 20:19–22 Jesus met the disciples after the resurrection and said:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (John 20:19–22)

Just as he came and gave peace, so those who are reconciled to the Father through him are called into peace ministry.

Peace has been made by Christ in his death and resurrection. When we speak of our being peacemakers, we must not see ourselves as the ones who establish peace in a situation. The word for peacemakers – εἰρηνοποιοί – could also be translated as peace-doers. We are those who have been brought into peace by God and who now live in that peace in the world, and who by the power of the Spirit bring peace into a situation of disorder, unreconciliation and so on.

Primarily this is by the proclamation of the Gospel of peace. By proclamation of the Gospel, we do not make the peace but declare that great act by which God has made peace, and as we speak in the power of the Spirit, men and women are brought into the peace of God.

Within the life of God's peace, we are to live in the peace of God that has been given to us. There are a number of exhortations towards this:

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, 'Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.' (1Pet. 3:8-12)

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:13-18)

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Rom. 12:18)

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Rom. 14:19)

Tuesday Night Class at NCTM Centre, Coromandel East
Term 3, 2003, Andrew Klynsmith

Study 9: Blessed Are The Persecuted Because Of Righteousness, For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

1. Persecuted Because Of The Kingdom

The letters of the New Testament have a great similarity in their opening greetings:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:7, 1Cor. 1:3, 2Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Eph. 1:2, Php. 1:2, 2Thess. 1:2, Phm. 3)

To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. (Col. 1:2)

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. (1Thess. 1:1)

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1 Tim. 1:2)

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour. (Titus 1:4)

To those who have been called, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance. (Jude 1:1-2)

...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (1Pet. 1:2)

Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. (2Pet. 1:2)

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love. (2John 3)

I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name. (3John 14)

Far from being a formulaic and clichéd way of speaking, the writers of these letters were getting to the very heart of God's action when they repeatedly prayed for grace and peace to be the gift that the church knew coming from God the Father through Jesus Christ. Grace and peace is what it's all about!

The goal of grace is peace. Paul says in Romans 5:1-2a:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. (Romans 5:1-2)

Peace is not simply an inner state of tranquility and harmony – although it may well involve this aspect secondarily – but rather primarily peace is understood as full, true and free relating with God through Jesus Christ. It is the fruit of the justifying grace of God which has come in Christ and in which we trust. Paul had the lesson of the Old Testament sacrificial system to help come to see this. The sacrificial system was moving towards a goal which was more than the forgiveness of sins, as wonderful and great as that was. The whole point of forgiveness was not just to save God's

people from wrath and destruction – the forgiveness that the atoning sacrifices established always had as its goal reconciliation with God. The great finale of the sacrificial system was the fellowship offering. (See Lev. 3, 4 and 7 especially for the regulation of this sacrifice.) This offering was to be eaten by the offerer in the holy precinct of the tabernacle or temple. It was an expression of atonement – i.e. at-one-ness – both with God Himself, and also with God's people who were with the offerer.

Peace is from God the Father, and is through Jesus Christ. That is, there is no peace outside of reconciliation with God as Father. The matters of peace and adoption are closely linked. Only the children of God can know peace and do peace. In John 14:27, Jesus says:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

That command to not let your hearts be troubled was given also right at the start of chapter 14, and all that is in between these two occurrences tells us just how it is that the Christ will give peace. We will look at that in just a moment but first must consider a serious matter.

2. Peace Over A Pit

Isaiah tells us:

'There is no peace,' says the LORD, 'for the wicked.' (Isa. 48:22)

'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked.' (Isa. 57:21)

The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace. (Isa. 59:8)

The wicked do not know peace and do not pursue peace. Those who walk with them do not know peace for the wicked cannot be

peacemakers or peace-givers. Paul says (quoting Psalm 36:1) of the whole human race, Jew and Gentile alike, 'The way of peace they do not know.' (Rom. 3:17)

Faced with the great realities of sin and division, of alienation from God and from each other, the human race has gone into denial. Peace is of enormous importance in our world. How many would not have jobs if we gave up on all our conflict resolution strategies and approaches! All around us are those who say, 'Peace! Peace!' where in fact there is no peace and peace cannot come. Jeremiah faced the same denial and unreality in his day:

They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. (Jer. 6:14, 8:11)

Perhaps in Luke 12:13ff, the person in the crowd who called out asking Jesus to arbitrate between him and his brother over a matter of inheritance had this too easy view of making peace. 'Sort out the rights here and all will be well.' Perhaps he had no interest in peace at all, but only in getting his bit. Justice without mercy is perhaps the amongst the most destructive forces in the world's history. Jesus could see that what lay in the heart of this man could not make for peace and he had to warn him and the crowd also:

Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.' (Luke 12:15)

'... This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.' (Luke 12:21)

3. Peace From A Cross

Jesus spoke of giving true peace in John 14, not the fickle, failing peace that world gives. This peace which would settle all troubled hearts would come from trusting in God and in Christ (14:1). He told them that the Father has a home with room for all, and Jesus

was going to prepare a welcome for us (14:2-4). Thomas didn't understand him. (14:5) Jesus made very clear that he had come to be the way to the father – that is the way to peace. There was no way to be reconciled with the Father other than by what he was about to do (14:6-7). As the fruit of all he was going to do in the cross, the other Counsellor, the Holy Spirit would be given by the Father (14:16). On the day he would come to God's people they would know that Jesus is in the Father, they are in him, and he in them. those who love Christ would be loved by the Father and by Christ and know Christ with them (14:18-24) That is, the Holy Spirit would bring home the peace of God.

The going away that he spoke of would take him from them – to a cross where the wounds of God's people would be fully and finally healed (not easily, carelessly, lazily like the promises of the idealists of our age who refuse to engage the moral dimensions of peace.) Isaiah prophesied this:

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa 53:5)

At the cross, Jesus did not simply stretch himself over our sins, covering them. Rather, he plunged into the depths of the pit of sin. He became sin for us, and received in his own body the penalty of our sin. He has made peace – between us and the Father, and flowing from that peace between all the children of God.

For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been

proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (Col. 1:19–23)

4. Making Peace – Proclaiming Peace

The peacemakers are the children of God, reconciled to the Father by the grace and mercy that has come through our Lord Jesus Christ. In John 20:19–22 Jesus met the disciples after the resurrection and said:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ (John 20:19–22)

Just as he came and gave peace, so those who are reconciled to the Father through him are called into peace ministry.

Peace has been made by Christ in his death and resurrection. When we speak of our being peacemakers, we must not see ourselves as the ones who establish peace in a situation. The word for peacemakers – εἰρηνοποιοί – could also be translated as peace-doers. We are those who have been brought into peace by God and who now live in that peace in the world, and who by the power of the Spirit bring peace into a situation of disorder, unreconciliation and so on.

Primarily this is by the proclamation of the Gospel of peace. By proclamation of the Gospel, we do not make the peace but declare that great act by which God has made peace, and as we speak in the power of the Spirit, men and women are brought into the peace of God.

Within the life of God’s peace, we are to live in the peace of God that has been given to us. There are a number of exhortations towards this:

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, ‘Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’ (1Pet. 3:8–12)

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:13–18)

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Rom. 12:18)

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Rom. 14:19)