

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....	<b>3</b>
THESE SAYINGS OF MINE	
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	<b>6</b>
THE SECRET OF THE BEATITUDES	
<b>CHAPTER 3</b> .....	<b>9</b>
PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE	
<b>CHAPTER 4</b> .....	<b>17</b>
BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS	
<b>CHAPTER 5</b> .....	<b>27</b>
BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART	
<b>CHAPTER 6</b> .....	<b>42</b>
BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL	
<b>CHAPTER 7</b> .....	<b>52</b>
BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS	
<b>CHAPTER 8</b> .....	<b>63</b>
BLESSED ARE THE MEEK	
<b>CHAPTER 9</b> .....	<b>79</b>
BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN	
<b>CHAPTER 10</b> .....	<b>92</b>
BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT	
<b>CHAPTER 11</b> .....	<b>105</b>
BUILD UPON THE ROCK	

# CHAPTER 1

## These Sayings of Mine

### (Authors dramatization)

*Jesus sat back down on the rock where He had begun speaking that morning and said, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built His house on the rock." They knew by His expression and the tone of His voice that this was one of those occasions when Jesus was speaking something He expected them to pay special attention to.*

(Matt. 7:24-29 NKJV) "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: {25} "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. {26} "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: {27} "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." {28} And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, {29} for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

For many years I preached this scripture from the viewpoint that Jesus was telling us to build our lives on doing the entire Word of God. If I would build on the rock of the Bible the storms of life could not overcome me. This is certainly true in principle, but it is not what this particular section of the Bible is teaching. The first rule of Bible interpretation is to always look at the verse in the context that it is presented. This statement about building houses is not an isolated declaration but the conclusion to the sermon Jesus was preaching. Only when we connect this statement to the rest of the sermon will we fully understand what He was trying to express. Jesus said if we build on

“*these sayings* of mine” we will build on the rock. Not just any sayings but the ones contained in His sermon. It is good to know that we should build our lives, businesses, families or ministries on the Word of God, but the impact is even greater when we see that there is something special about *these sayings* in particular. Matthew chapters 5-7 is a life changing message preached to us by Jesus Himself that will enable us to build something that the storms of life can never overcome. The question is whether will we take the time to understand them and apply them to our lives.

I want to say something here about the storms Jesus is referring to. Sometimes we hear good messages on the power of faith and God’s desire to bless us in the affairs of life, and we think that Christians should not be touched by the storms that blow upon other people. This kind of thinking is damaging because it is unscriptural. Jesus put the storm into both pictures. He didn’t say that the man who built on the Word was excused from it. On the contrary the storm beat on his house just as hard as it beat on the foolish man’s house, only the wise man’s stood. Jesus does not promise to shelter you from the storms that life brings. When we think He will, we can get discouraged when the storms come because we think there must be something wrong with our faith. The truth is faith is not to keep you in some utopian existence where life doesn’t happen to you. Faith is designed to give something that will enable you to be an overcomer in the midst of any storm. Life will happen. The storms will come as long as we are on this earth, but the world is looking for a people who can live life *in the storms* and make it out safely. They are looking for a people who can grab hold of whatever life brings and make it work for them instead of allowing it to destroy them. If we build our lives on *these sayings* we can be that people and the world will run to us.

In the rest of this book we are going to examine the particular sayings in the Sermon on the Mount to discover what it is Jesus says to build upon. As we unlock the truths in this message, we will discover how to make every area of our lives, from family to business, work no matter what pressures may come. Past and present failures can be swallowed up in the victory of a life lived in *these sayings*. Stress can become a thing of the past as we rest in the knowledge that no storm can destroy our house. Our churches can be revolutionized by an inflow of life from God and out to the world. This sounds a little like one of those TV. infomercials for somebody's motivational tapes, doesn't it? We are not talking here about the sayings of some entrepreneur who's real method for obtaining *his* dreams is to sell you his tapes on "*Obtaining your Dreams*". All of this will occur as we hear the words of Jesus the master teacher and diligently build our lives according to "*these sayings of mine*".

## CHAPTER 2

### The Secret of the Beatitudes

(Author's dramatization)

*Jesus looked around at the multitudes and then walked thoughtfully up the hillside where he sat down on a rock. His disciples followed Him and sat at His feet. Jesus saw the need in the crowd of people who had followed Him to this place. He turned to His disciples and out of His mouth came some of the most beautiful words they had ever heard.*

(Mat 5:3-10 NKJV) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {4} Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. {5} Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. {6} Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. {7} Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. {8} Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. {9} Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. {10} Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is speaking to his disciples primarily. There was a multitude there to listen, but it was to His disciplined followers that these words were directed. The purpose of this message was to teach them how to be disciples so they might reach the multitudes that had caught His attention. What is a *disciple*? I define it this way: One who can walk in the fullness of both Christian privilege *and* responsibility. These are the sayings that we are to build our life upon. If we do, we will walk in God's blessing as we walk in His character and we will be able to touch the multitudes.

Often we view the beatitudes as poetic but miss their meaning for their beauty. Jesus is not really intending for these words to be entertaining but instead he has summarized in eight statements the essence of discipleship. To build upon them we must understand what they mean. Do we really know what “poor in spirit” means and why those who are in this condition should consider themselves blessed, or why they receive the Kingdom of Heaven? It sounds good but how do we *live* it? Looking at that statement alone people have come up with all kinds of doctrines, most of which contain the “I’m just a worm for Jesus” mentality, or at least variations on that theme. We think, “If I’m supposed to be poor in spirit I should always feel bad about my spiritual condition.” This kind of thinking produces defeated Christians who never seem to be able to grow. The Bible says “let the weak say I am strong,” but most interpretations of “poor in spirit” would seem to require that the strong say I am weak. Meditating on this section of scripture is what led me to the conclusion that I needed more information to understand the beatitudes in a way that I could build upon them. It was as I prayed for insight that I made an interesting discovery.

Let’s look for a moment at verses 11-12 of Matthew 5:

(Mat 5:11-12 NKJV) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. {12} "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I noticed that the beatitudes ended in verse ten with “blessed are you when you are persecuted for righteousness sake”. Verses 11 and 12, however also spoke of being

persecuted for righteousness sake. It was obvious that they were an expansion and an explanation of what verse ten was saying. As I read verses 11 and 12 coupled with verse 10 it became clear to me just what He meant by being persecuted for righteousness sake and why those persecuted are blessed and what it meant for theirs to be the kingdom of heaven. We will explain all this in the next chapter, but the fact that verses 11 and 12 opened up the last beatitude struck me as possibly significant.

Could it be that the rest of the Sermon on the Mount was also be designed as an explanation of the beatitudes? The more I read the more I was convinced this was so. Jesus is a master teacher, and good teachers often “tell you what they are going to tell you, tell you and then tell you what they told you.” This is precisely what Jesus was doing. The beatitudes were in a sense an outline of what the Sermon on the Mount was teaching, and the Sermon on the mount was teaching in light of the beatitudes. Taken together the fullness of their meaning precisely unfolds. The more I understood the Sermon as a *whole*, from the beatitudes to “the house built upon a rock,” the more I understood how to build my life and church upon “*these sayings* of mine.” The more we build our personal lives on these saying the more unshakable they become. The more we build our churches on these sayings the more they will be able to reach the multitudes that need Jesus.

Let’s explore them together!

# CHAPTER 3

## Persecuted for Righteousness Sake

(Mat 5:10 NKJV) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

### (Authors dramatization)

*There was a gravity on His countenance as He looked into their eyes trying to prepare them for the weight of what He was about to explain. It would not be easy for them to accept the reality of certain persecution, but if they could understand and cultivate the right attitude they could walk through anything the enemy would bring against them. Indeed they would be taking steps to being the kind of people the Father needed to fulfill His purpose in the earth.*

(Mat 5:11-12 NKJV) "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. {12} "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

To modern ears it seems impossible that Jesus could mean what He said here. I believe that God desires to bless His children “with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,” and yet here it is out of the mouth of Jesus Himself. We who believe will be persecuted and when we are we should consider ourselves blessed. How is this persecution a blessing? We can come up with religious statements about “suffering for Jesus”, but I don’t believe God is saying we should call ourselves blessed for arbitrary suffering, there must be more to it than that.

First we need to know what kind of persecution Jesus is talking about. To some the word *persecution* conjures up images of being “boiled in oil” for Jesus’ sake. Indeed, there are extreme persecutions that can come against believers. In some parts of the world people *are* dying because of their faith in Jesus. We have a couple in our church who were ministers in Liberia, West Africa which is in the midst of a civil war. They fled to America as refugees and have recently gotten word that a new Moslem rebel faction has taken control of their home region. This faction is burning any home where a Bible is found and actually boiling Christian ministers to death.

Although it could be included, this is not the type of persecution the Lord is emphasizing in this scripture. Verse 11 clearly shows us what He is primarily talking about. “*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*” The truth is that relatively few suffer the kind of persecution my Liberian friends have, but all of us suffer the name calling and ridicule that Jesus describes here. In my own experience I was saved at 14 and filled with the Holy Spirit at 17. Before being filled with the Spirit I was a little like Peter between Gethsemane and the resurrection. When people asked me about Jesus I tended to say, “I don’t know this man.” After being filled with the Spirit I became more like Peter on the day of Pentecost, willing to declare my faith. The result was about the same as well, some got touched and some made fun. They called Peter “drunk”, and they

called me “preacher” and “holy roller”. Any one who publicly stands for Jesus will experience this kind of persecution.

The thing we must recognize is how often fear of ridicule hinders our Christianity. Fear of what people will say keeps us from witnessing. Fear of what people will say keeps us from offering prayer when we hear our co-workers or neighbors express a need. Haven’t you ever had someone come to you on the job or in school or in the store and say, “I hab a terrible head code!”, and you wanted to offer prayer for healing but couldn’t quite get the words out? Sure you have, we all have. In the worst case, fear of what people will say causes us to compromise our holiness by going along with the crowd when we know better. “Peer pressure” is not reserved for teenagers. We all suffer from it to a degree. What can we do about it?

Jesus says we are blessed when persecuted in this way because ours is the Kingdom of heaven. Verse 12 amplifies this idea. “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” There is a truth here that will absolutely set us free from the effects of persecution and the entanglements of the world if we grasp it. Paul understood it very well. In Romans 8:18 he declares, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” You see Paul understood two things that we must settle in our hearts, his citizenship and his future.

When we cultivate an awareness that we are not citizens of this world, ours is the *Kingdom* of heaven, what people say or do to us will not matter. I have had the opportunity to travel over the past few years and the value of citizenship has become very real to me. There are countries in which Americans are not greatly appreciated. Jealousy and propaganda as well as the behavior of some Americans have caused a resentment in people. You may well be treated rudely by some, and royally by others, but either way as long as you have that blue passport with *United States of America* on it you command respect. I know that no matter what they say or do or how bad the conditions may be, I am a citizen of the richest and militarily most powerful nation on earth and I can go back at any time I choose. All the time I am away, I am aware of my citizenship so what I may be going through becomes more bearable because it is temporary.

Paul's experience in Phillipi is a natural example of this that underscores his understanding of the spiritual truth. In Acts chapter 16 Paul and Silas find themselves whipped and thrown in the dungeon for setting a demon possessed girl free. As the story goes, Paul and Silas praised God in the jail and the Lord caused an earthquake to free them ultimately resulting in a whole family's salvation. The part that we want to look at for our study comes next. It seems that although Paul was a Jew and was traveling in Greece, he held *Roman* citizenship. It was illegal to whip and detain a *Roman* citizen in any of Rome's provinces. You see Greece had a government but Rome was the *real* power and the preeminent government. When the governor of Phillipi realized what had

happened he immediately ordered Paul and Silas released. I like Paul's attitude. He demanded that the governor come personally and apologize before he would leave.

We live in a physical world and must obey the physical governments as long as we can do so without transgressing the Word of God, but we are citizens of a higher government. Our true citizenship lies in heaven. The governments of this world may not recognize it but the Kingdom of Heaven remains the real power and preeminent government in the earth. It's not important whether the physical powers that be know it, there will come a day when all doubt will be removed, but it is important that *you* know it. What people say about us does not matter when we cultivate an awareness of our heavenly citizenship. It's also a good idea for us to let the spiritual "principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places" know who we really serve. (Eph. 6:12) That's why Paul made the Phillipian governor come to him in person.

Not only are we less moved by persecution when we are aware of our heavenly citizenship, but we become less attached to our temporary home. Our normal stay in India is three weeks. That's long enough so that you unpack and settle in to some degree. The rooms we occupy become "home" for that time. We have a table, refrigerator and Mister Coffee set up to make it more comfortable, but it is not home. Most of our possessions remain set up in our real home. Our bank accounts have not been

transferred. Our children are safe in America, and our suitcases remain at hand ready to be packed again.

While we are in India we enjoy the people and mind the business that brings us there but our roots, our families and our lives remain in America. I enter into life with the Indian people and enjoy it, but I never become a citizen of the nation of India. I always remain an American.

When a Christian is walking in an awareness of his heavenly citizenship he treats the world like we treat India. He loves the people, goes about the business for which God has placed him here and even sets up a life and enjoys it, but he never becomes a citizen of the world. This world's possessions never become too dear because we know we have a different kind of possession in our real home. Our ambitions are not centered here because we want to make our true homeland and King proud. Our attention and labor are here but we have set our *affections* on things above, not on things on the earth. For we are dead, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. (Col. 3:2-3). His is the Kingdom of Heaven.

The second aspect of this is the reality of our future. Let's look again at Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

I am not a “sweet by and by” preacher. As I heard one brother say, I believe God wants to do something about the “rotten here and now”. Jesus, however, brings into focus that our ability to resist the persecutions and temptations of the present are tied to our awareness of the future. *“Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” Matt. 5:12.* Most of us falter in our Christianity because we can not see beyond our present life. It seems to us that this is all there is and if we don’t get what we want here we never will. Present happiness means everything. Instant gratification has become a preoccupation, especially in America. We simply can’t see beyond the present need or desire. If our present circumstance is unacceptable we can’t seem to function. We see our whole life as destroyed even to the point of wanting to end it all.

As a believer all that *should* change. Our future on the earth is a mere fraction of our real future. Heaven is real. If you are born again you will spend eternity in God’s presence. I Corinthians 15:19 says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” The truth is our hope does not end with this life.

One day I was complaining to God about some of the pressures in the ministry and how bad I had it. The Lord spoke clearly in my spirit, “You can take the first ten thousand years of eternity off.” That may sound a little funny but I got the point! Ten thousand years from now what kind of car you had, what kind of house you lived in or whatever trial you’re going through won’t really matter. This attitude is not to make us “so

heavenly minded we're no earthly good." It is not to minimize the very real pain and suffering we sometimes experience, but when you know that you have a future and you know that it is sure and good, it makes the present easier to deal with. Paul knew that whatever was happening today could not compare with what was coming in the future, therefore he could deal with today. We live in the present. We *must* realistically deal with the present, but we must do so in the *light* of eternity.

Our successes here are not the end all and be all. Our failures are not the end all and be all. Our lives here are important but we have a greater life to come. If God never blessed us with healing or prosperity or any other earthly thing, we can be assured that we will never see a day in Hell. Ten thousand years from now that will be much more important than any thing we have, don't have or experience on the earth. If we cultivate an attitude that makes it more important now, we will have a much easier time dealing with the present and keeping all aspects of our earthly life in the proper perspective. We need to begin to build on this rock of Jesus' sayings today.

(Mat 5:10-12 NKJV) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. {11} "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. {12} "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

## CHAPTER 4

### Blessed are the Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

#### (Authors dramatization)

*As Jesus considered his next statements he could not help thinking about the condition of the world the Father sent him to. He alone understood the love nature of God. Most of the world knew nothing of God at all. Many served lifeless idols formed by men's hands and made in man's image. These dead gods demanded human obedience with little or no concern for human well-being. Others worshipped even more grotesque images, physical representations of the demonic rulers that infest the world and dominate human affairs (Eph. 6:12). Since these beings are fueled by hate and fear they became Lords of what they represent to humanity, in some cases demanding the sacrifice of children to satisfy their bloodlust.*

*Even among the Hebrews, God's chosen people, the most religious of them, the Pharisees, understood only the letter of the Father's law. They were rigid and unforgiving, ready to punish any infraction with no hesitation even to the extreme of enjoying stoning their fellow Hebrew to death. The God they portrayed was one of vengeance and judgment only., The heavenly Father Jesus knew was motivated, even in judgment, by his deep love for his creation, his children. It was this God that Jesus would spend his public ministry introducing to the world. It was this Loving Father that his death would reconcile the world*

*to. It was this peace between a God of Love and his creation that Jesus would send his disciples to proclaim.*

(Mat 5:13-16 NKJV) "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. {14} "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. {15} "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. {16} "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

I can think of no greater identity than to be known as a son of God. It is the highest recognition any Christian can aspire to. This being the case we must know what it means to be a peacemaker. Most often we interpret this idea in the light of somehow making peace *between* men. The same sentiment causes us to write songs from Luke 2:14 concerning the birth announcement made by the angelic choir to the shepherds in Bethlehem. We sing of "peace on earth" and declare the Christmas season as a time to promote peace *among* men. The truth, however, is that the angels did not proclaim peace *among* men, they proclaimed "on earth peace, good will *towards* men." The NIV Bible says "on earth peace *to* men on whom his favor rests."

The blessing spoken of here does not come to those who break up fist fights in bars and make the combatants shake hands and make up. It is not for the counselor who brings peace between husband and wife or parents and children. It is not even reserved for the ambassador who ends a costly war through his negotiation. As noble and right as it is to promote peace on earth among men, this promise has nothing at all to do with that

kind of peace. The truth is, the ministry of Jesus will often result in the opposite. Matthew 10:34 says “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”. Jesus desires that men love one another but his ministry sets those who walk in darkness against those who walk in light. Who, then, is Jesus speaking of as peacemakers? If not peace among men than what kind of peace?

In verses 13-16 of Matthew 5 Jesus speaks of men as “salt” and “light”. There have been many good teachings from these verses, yet to be fully understood, one must read them considering verse 9 and the peacemakers Jesus is speaking of. The key verse is verse 16. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” The reason for being salt and light is not to point out the evils of society but that men will see our good deeds and praise the Father. Why would they praise the father? They would praise him because salt and light had made peace not *among* men but *between* God and man. Blessed are those who bring peace between *God* and His *creation*. They will be called the sons of God because sons carry out the Father’s business. God loved the world so much that to bring peace with it He sent Jesus to die on the cross. He still loves the world so He sends *us* to proclaim the peace available to them. (II Cor. 5:16-21)

Bringing peace between God and men must be the motivation upon which our house, both personal and corporate, is built. If it is, we will find no room for ambition or selfishness in what we do. We are simply agents to bring men and God together. Once

we accomplish that, men will be focused on God and not on us. When we witness it will not be to build our own kingdoms or to add another “notch” to our spiritual gun handle. When we share with another believer who may be weaker than we are or who is going through some trial, it will not be to inflate ourselves or, worse yet, to make them dependent on us so that we can have a sense of control. The churches that we build will be vehicles to bring men to a place of peace with God.

First this peace will manifest in salvation and secondarily in true discipleship, as they learn how to follow God and discover the areas of life that, even after salvation, are still at war with God. What a difference it would make in our actions and responses if bringing peace between God and man was majored on in our decisions, in our living and in our church building.

There are two ways that Jesus expects us to bring peace between God and man. We are to be both salt and light to the world. Let’s first look at salt.

Salt has a two fold purpose where food is concerned. Particularly in Bible days, salt was used as a preservative. Since there was no refrigeration, they would store meat in salt to keep it from spoiling. Most teachings I have heard on being salt in the earth focus on the need for the Christian to stand up for righteousness in a sinful world no matter what the cost. Often we are exhorted to more political action with the reasoning that if we are not active politically we are not being “salty” Christians. We must be more outspoken in our jobs and communities against sin even if it angers those we work and

live with. All this is certainly true to a degree. Political action is important as long as we keep it in proper perspective, motivated by the Holy Spirit and carried out in a Christ like attitude. There is no doubt that Christians must stand for righteousness in the midst of a “crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:15), but minding the why will help us better execute the how. Our purpose for being salt is to bring peace. We are not to stand for righteousness, be politically active or do any other “salty” activity just to make the world a better place for us to live in. I have six children. I want them to have a world they can live in as Christians, but self preservation can never be the motivation for Christian action.

The proper motivation for our preservative function as salt is to hold the world and society together long enough so that we may bring peace between God and man to as many as possible. We must stand, we must preach, we must vote, we must run for political office to maintain a society where we can continue to preach the gospel. If we fail to be salty we are worthless but if we are not salt for the right reasons we are just as worthless when it comes to fulfilling God’s real purpose.

This brings me to the second purpose for salt in food, flavoring. My wife usually gives me her “what are you doing” look when I pick up the salt shaker but to me nothing is worse than food without enough salt. Potatoes are tasteless mush without a little salt in them. The funny thing is that if it is not added when they are cooked it seems to take twice as much from the shaker to make them taste right. So it is with our Christianity.

Our motivation should be “cooked” with the salt of making peace between God and man. It should be one of the ingredients that makes it to begin with. Although salt in the wounds of sin will provide healing through irritation, Christianity in society should also provide a pleasing flavor that will draw men to Jesus.

Too much salt in food will make us turn up our nose at what is served. Just the right amount makes even things we might not like more bearable. We should season our communities with love, joy and peace as well as righteousness and holiness. While we may drive some away by the harsher aspects of a “salty” Christianity, others will be drawn to the *good* flavor that we add to the community. A dynamic church in the city should be known as a place that stands for biblical values *and* a place where one can find a people who know the secret of true joy in life and are able and willing to communicate it to those who don't. They should be uncomfortable with their sin in our presence, but somehow drawn to our flavor. Our saltiness should make demons angry and men hungry. Our saltiness should escalate the war against sin but should be an extended olive branch of peace from God to the sinner.

Not only is the Christian, and the church, called to promote peace between God and man by being salt, but Jesus also calls us the *light* of the world. We are to be like a city on a hill. Where I live the countryside is very hilly, but most of our cities are built in the valleys. A city in a valley is hidden until you're almost upon it. There is one city in our area that you approach by driving around a sweeping curve as you are also descending a

steep hill. The road curves to the left and on the right side is one of the Finger Lakes stretching north as far as you can see. At the bottom of the hill and next to the lake is the city. It is truly a beautiful sight particularly at night when the lights of the city are sparkling off the water, but before you start the curving descent there is no hint that there is a city anywhere in the area. You see only farmland and open countryside. Too many times that is what our Christian lives are like. Our city is hidden in a valley until a weary traveler stumbles upon it and then we're willing to give him what he needs. This is not the picture Jesus painted.

I can't recall personally traveling to a city set on a hill, but I have been to central Illinois. That part of the country is noted for its lack of any hills at all. The country side is filled with corn fields as flat as a table as far as you can see. Driving down the interstate any rise at all, a farmhouse or silo, stood out in stark contrast to the flatness of the terrain. A city rising out of the corn can be seen for miles. You know it's there long before you get to it. One can imagine that any hill at all with any kind of city upon it would become a beacon to draw men from every direction to it's light and provision. We are to be like a city set on a hill. Men should know who and where we are so that they will know where to come when they have need.

Jesus gives us another illustration saying a lamp is not lit to be placed under a basket but instead is put on a lamp stand to give light to the house. God did not illuminate us with his word to hide us from society's house but to shed the light of the

gospel upon it. Don't expect to hide away in your job, school or even your family. Don't think that you can be a private Christian so as not to offend or make waves. God expects us to shine so the light of the Gospel within us can lead men to the peace that He is offering them.

Let's look at how this aspect of our being the light of the world promotes peace between God and man. In Ephesians 5:8 Paul uses very similar language to describe the Christian.

(Eph 5:8 NKJV) For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.  
Walk as children of light

In verses 11 and 13 He tells us that our light will *reprove* or *expose* the works of darkness. When we are operating as light in the world the very fact that we are shining will cause the works of darkness to be exposed. When we shine as integrity we expose its lack around us. When we shine the light of honesty, the dishonest man can be seen by all for what he is. Diligence exposes laziness, morality exposes loose living, and Christian character exposes the weak fabric of modern society. There is no need to point fingers or make accusations because the light itself brings about the exposure. We simply have to shine.

There are two reactions we will meet with when we shine to expose the works of darkness. Some will get angry and try to put out the light or run away from it. They want to hold onto the darkness and light is an intrusion upon them. The light never projects

condemnation. In John 3 Jesus made it clear that he was not sent as the light of the world to bring condemnation but reconciliation or peace. The light simply exposes the truth but some love the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19). The conviction that comes is the result of this rejection of the light.

For others the light will expose their need leading them to deliverance and freedom. As they submit to the light and receive the one who brings it to them the light becomes wisdom to lead them out of the condition they are in and into the truth of salvation that they too may become children of light. In both cases the light simply exposes, but the purpose is to bring peace between God and man.

If we want to build on the rock we must never forget the purpose in our shining. In ending this part of His sermon, Jesus states the purpose for the city on the hill and the lamp to light the room, that all men will see our good works and praise the Father. As they praise him they will be drawn to him and when they are drawn into the presence of his love they will receive the free gift of his peace. Let this peace between God and man be at the heart of all our dealings with the world.

I would like to say one last thing about salt and light. It doesn't take any education for salt to be salt. There is no Bible school to teach us to be light. Jesus uses both of these things to illustrate our responsibility in promoting peace between God and man because they are what they are naturally. I believe that's how you and I will be salt and light to the world. We just need to be Christians before the world. I am all for organized

witnessing and training to help us share the gospel, but first we must recognize that we *are* salt and light just because we're Christians. If we don't let what we do flow from that, it will be false. I don't know about you but there is just something irritating about someone who is trying to love me but it isn't real. One thing that the world is looking for is reality and they will be drawn to the church if they find reality in it.

The most effective witness is a real Christian being salt and light naturally to the real people with real needs around him. The problem occurs when we try to hide our light and refuse to let our saltiness touch the needs. Paul said I am not ashamed of the Gospel. Sometimes we think this means we have to turn every conversation to the "four spiritual laws" or some other witnessing formula. It really means that we should be who and what we are whether we are in church or at work. People should know that we are salty long before we mention the name of Jesus. They should see our light before we hand them a tract. If they see the qualities of Christ in our everyday living they will be much more likely to receive the words of our witness and accept the peace with God he offers through us.

Let us add this block to the foundation we are building on. Blessed are the peacemakers who, as salt and light to the world, bring peace between God and man. They will be know as the sons of God because they are about the Father's business.

## CHAPTER 5

### Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

*Jesus knew how this must sound to their ears. They were, after all, still Jews and the Pharisees were the most religious of all the Jews. As far as his disciples understood that also made them the most righteous people on earth. They could not yet grasp how far from the truth this really was. Soon would come the fulfillment of the great prophecy by Jeremiah, "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jeremiad 31:33) The time would come when they would understand how the words he must speak to them could be possible. For now he must just tell them.*

(Mat 5:17-20 NKJV) "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. {18} "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. {19} "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. {20} "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The next saying we must build our lives upon is "Blessed are the pure in heart." If we are to have a house that can stand through the storm it must be built on a pure heart. Nothing less will do for the Christian. If a Christian does not have purity of heart there

will be “cracks in his foundation” through which the enemy will be able to crawl and destroy his witness and weaken his house. What does it mean to be pure in heart?

Jesus begins his explanation by reminding his disciples of the importance of the law. He did not come to do away with the written code of conduct set forth by Moses. At one time or another I think all of us have used the excuse that “God looks at our hearts” to pardon behavior which is unacceptable, inappropriate or just plain sinful. Jesus makes it very clear that this is not being “pure in heart.” He is not talking about doing away with the law but fulfilling its true purpose. The one who is “pure in heart” is the one who will even exceed the Pharisees in righteousness and right behavior.

Christian, it is very important in this age of uncertain morality that the church be a shining example of the righteousness that the law is meant to depict. If we are to build a strong church it must be filled with right living, right speaking and uprightness in every phase of life. We are not excused from the ten commandments, we are simply given an eleventh, “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” We are required to keep them all and do it perfectly. Matthew 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

How are we to accomplish this perfection? Blessed are the pure in *heart*. The Pharisees represented the most religiously righteous people of their day. They kept the law in minute detail but, as we pointed out in the last chapter, they were devoid of love or mercy. They knew every “jot and tittle,” as Jesus described it, but they did not know the

spirit of the law. In their heart they were often bitter and ruthless. They had a zeal to keep the law, but no love for people that the law was meant to serve. Jesus says that we must build on purity of *heart* not purity of keeping the written commandments. His meaning becomes clearer as we continue to read on in his sermon.

(Mat 5:21-22 NKJV) "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' {22} "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

In these verses Jesus begins to contrast the Pharisees' righteousness with the purity of heart he is teaching. The law speaks of murder and gives a consequence. Jesus applies the same consequence, judgment, to one who becomes *angry* without a cause. The law looks at the outward but Jesus is concerned with the inner. If a Christian carries hatred or bitterness in his heart towards his brother, it is as bad as an unbeliever's crime of murder. To speak a curse is worse and to call someone a fool puts you in danger of being sent to hell. We can hardly believe Jesus' words. This can't be so! It is, however, what Jesus said.

In the next 15 verses Jesus gives a number of other examples of contrasts between the teachings of the day and His teaching to be pure in heart.. In approaching this part of the sermon on the mount we are going to look at each topic Jesus uses twice. First we will see the contrast between the law as the Pharisees taught it and purity of heart.

Second we will find several keys that Jesus reveals from within the examples that will help enable us to walk in heart purity.

In following up His statements about murder, Jesus, in verses 23-24, deals with the issue of forgiveness.

(Mat 5:23-24 NKJV) "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, {24} "leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

To the one concerned with outward righteousness the religious duties of bringing a gift to the altar would supersede settling a dispute with another person. Jesus says that the gift should be left at the altar and the matter of reconciliation should be settled. This would be like someone in the pew standing up in the middle of the preacher's message and saying, "Hold that thought." , while he went across the church to be reconciled with another member of the congregation. That would offend our religious sensibilities, but it is in line with what Jesus said to do.

In verses 25-26 Jesus tells us to quickly agree with our adversary.

(Mat 5:25-26 NKJV) "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. {26} "Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

How does this relate to being pure in heart? I believe that Jesus' point here must be made in the context of the rest of this section of His sermon. It is better for a Christian to

agree with someone with whom he has a dispute than to hold contention and strife in his heart. A Christian can not win through strife. The end result will be as Jesus describes in verse 26: “Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there (*the debtors prison the judge will throw you in*) till you have paid the last penny.” Even if you are right in your case, the longer you allow strife to continue and the deeper you let it go into your heart the more a loser you will be. It is more important to maintain a pure heart than to be right. This does not mean that a Christian must be everyone’s doormat, but it does mean that we must be careful to discern when a dispute, even with an unbeliever, is becoming strife or bitterness to *us*. The other man may be feeling strife, but when *we* begin to sense that strife or bitterness entering our own heart it’s time to settle the matter. God will always cause the pure hearted Christian to triumph even when it doesn’t look like it initially.

The next example Jesus gives is the matter of adultery in verses 27-30.

(Mat 5:27-30 NKJV) "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' {28} "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. {29} "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. {30} "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

The Pharisees said that one must not *commit* adultery. The outward is what mattered. For the most part we tend to judge in the same manner. Indeed others will judge us by our outward deeds, but Jesus changes the rules entirely. He says if we *look* at

a member of the opposite sex with lust in our heart, than we have already committed adultery.

No other person can judge us for what we think. Jesus is pointing to how we *ourselves* feel about things inwardly, and about how God sees us as He is the one who judges the “intents of our hearts.” (Heb. 4:12) To be pure in heart we must not only *do* right but we must *think* right and *desire* right as well. This thing isn’t getting any easier as we go along.

Jesus’ next statements seem ridiculous but they perfectly make his point. He says if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye leads you to sin, pluck it out. Better to live missing some body parts than to go to hell with everything in place. There are those who take this scripture literally, but I doubt Jesus is endorsing self mutilation as a method of winning the battle with sin. If he was, our churches would have an interesting looking memberships. In truth, neither the hand nor the eye is *causing* the sin. The offending member that must be plucked out is the *thought*.

Verses 31-32 give us the example of divorce.

(Mat 5:31-32 NKJV) "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' {32} "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

To understand these verses a little background is necessary. You see divorce was a major issue in Jesus’ day just as it is now. It may surprise some to find out that their

divorce laws were much more liberal than ours. In that day it was possible to divorce your wife if she burned your toast! This practice arose from an interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house.” Some interpreted this very loosely and others very strictly. To those whose interpretation was loose, almost anything was grounds for divorce. To the strict interpreter only sexual immorality was grounds for divorce. Jesus interpreted Deuteronomy 24:1 strictly.

Adultery strikes at the *heart* of marriage. When two people marry, they enter into covenant and a major part of that covenant is their sexual relationship. Two people who are joined sexually become one flesh. To commit adultery means the spouse has become one flesh with another. This breaks the very heart of the marriage covenant and if it continues and is not repented of, it is grounds for divorce. Again we see the difference between the outward emphasis of the Pharisees and the purity of *heart* being taught by Jesus.

His final statements concerning this area are found in verses 33-37 and involve oaths.

(Mat 5:33-37 NKJV) "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' {34} "But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; {35} "nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. {36} "Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or

black. {37} "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

The Pharisees taught that one should not swear falsely, but should do what he swore to do. Jesus says it is wrong to swear at all. We are not to swear by spiritual things nor physical things since we have no real control over anything. Instead he says, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'" For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." The truth is if we are pure in heart we shouldn't have to swear an oath to be believed. "Yes" from a Christian should be just as binding as any oath from someone else. We should say what we mean and mean what we say. A Christian's words should be a simple reflection of what is in his or her heart. Nothing else should be projected or needed.

Being pure in heart does not mean that we eliminate the written law in the Bible. It does mean that we must apply the law to our thoughts and desires instead of just our actions. It's not enough for the Christian to keep from sinning. He or she must address the *desire* to sin. They must deal with how they think about things and let their right actions flow from this basis. If we are not careful we could feel condemned by Jesus' words because we have all failed at times to be pure in heart. Jesus never teaches anything to condemn. God knows we are "but dust" and knows the weakness of our flesh. The point is that this is what we are to develop. Jesus has given us the picture now we must allow Him and His word to make us like it. How can we do that?

First we must remember that Jesus is really speaking to the born again believer. I realize that the people He was physically addressing were not born again, but Jesus is not just speaking to them. His words were intended much more for us who could understand them by the Spirit. You will remember that we cited the prophecy from Jeremiah 31:33: “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” When you were born again this came to pass in your life. The law of God is already in your heart. It is only your soul and body that resist it. Christian, do not buy into the lie that you can’t stop sinning. It’s not easy but you can overcome the flesh because the laws of God have been written on your *spirit*.

The first step to walking with a pure heart is to believe that you really are born again. II Corinthians 5:17 is true. You really are a new creature, old things really did pass away and all things really are of God. All of this occurred inwardly at salvation. Romans 12:1-2 tells us how to make it an outward reality. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

To walk with a pure heart we must daily remember that our bodies are bought with the price of the blood of Jesus. This is a decision we must make each time we are

confronted with the temptation to be less than pure either in heart or in deed. Second we must renew our minds through the study and meditation of God's word. Space does not permit us to elaborate fully on these two verses, but Jesus places some practical keys in the sermon we are studying that can help.

Each area that Jesus uses to illustrate purity of heart contains a practical key to cultivating that purity in our lives. First of all he says that if we are angry without cause it is like murder for anyone else. James 1:20 says, "for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God." If we are to walk with a pure heart we must never give in to wrath. Everyone gets angry, but Jesus is talking about the anger that comes without any reason and lacks control. This kind of anger simply will not mix with the righteousness of God. When it rises within us there should be an immediate red flag that says, "slow down and pray" because at that moment we are stepping out of heart purity. Key number one is not to give way to unjustified or uncontrolled anger.

Next Jesus deals with forgiveness. Unforgiveness is one of the most devastating problems Christians face. Unforgiveness is like a cancer that eats away at spirituality in every form including the purity of our heart. As long as your heart is dwelling upon the bad things that someone has done to you it can never be pure. You will find yourself thinking thoughts of revenge or anger instead of love and peace. Jesus has no part in either of these, and purity can not be in a heart where they exist. No matter what the hurt or wrong is that is suffered the Christian who is pure in heart must forgive.

What does it mean to forgive? I believe the crux of the matter is to let go of your right to retribution. There are times when trust can not be immediately given back to one who has wronged us, but we must let go of our need to “get back at them” or “see them get theirs.” The truth is that the person you refuse to forgive is most often unaware of your feelings. It doesn’t hurt them at all that you don’t forgive, but it robs you of purity of heart. Mark 11:25 says, “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.” If God can’t forgive you your sins there is no way you will live in purity of heart. Walking in continual forgiveness is the second key.

Key number three is to avoid striving. James 3:16 says, “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” Whenever we allow strife to stay in our lives we are opening the door to all manner of impurity. Romans 12:18 “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” We can not control others but we must control ourselves. We do not have to hold strife in our heart. Let it go. Reject it, it just isn’t worth the consequences in purity.

Key number four is mentioned in Jesus thoughts on adultery. If a hand or eye causes us to sin we are told to *cut it off* or *pluck it out*. However it was neither eye nor hand that caused the sin but the *thought* of adultery in the heart. The conclusion is that we must *pluck out* or *cut off* the thoughts that enter our minds that would compromise our purity. James 1:14-15 tells us how temptation actually works.

(James 1:14-15 NKJV) But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. {15} Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Everyone has thoughts that enter their mind that are not pure. In our society we are bombarded with sexual images and suggestions. Anyone who says they never have an impure thought cross their mind is either deceived or lying. We can't control all of the random thoughts that come to us but we can determine what happens next. The enemy picks an area that tickles some fleshly desire and plants a thought in our mind. That thought *entices* us or draws us towards itself. If we allow the thought to stay we will be drawn into sin either in deed or heart. According to Jesus they are one and the same. The solution is really quite easy. *Pluck out* or *cut off* the thought. The key is to do it immediately. What you do with the very *first* thought is what will determine whether you will be at the altar repenting later. The longer you allow the thought to remain the harder it is to cut it off.

How, than, do we get rid of these unwanted thoughts? First of all I believe our words can be a useful tool. James chapter 3 tells us that the tongue is like a bit in a horse's mouth or a rudder on a ship. When an impure thought comes into your mind, take hold of the rudder and turn the ship. Put God's word in your mouth like a bit and declare *it* instead of the thought. "I declare that my mind is off limits devil, and I cast down that thought of (you fill in the blank) in Jesus name." (II Cor. 10:5) Steer yourself away from the impure thought by declaring Jesus' purity.

Once the thought has been cast down by our words we must fill our minds with something else. Your mind will never remain idle. It will think on something. If we would be pure in heart we must choose what we will think on. Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” *You* must set your mind. No one else can do it for you. Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are *pure*, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy; meditate on these things.” All of these things describe the Word of God. If purity in thought is a problem to you, begin to fill your mind with the Word. Turn to the Bible when the unwanted thoughts come and replace them on purpose with an appropriate verse. It will work for you.

Key number five in Jesus’ example of divorce is a little more subtle. I believe if we are to be pure in heart we must cultivate the proper respect for the sanctity of marriage. Marriage was instituted by God (Genesis 2:24) and is the chosen way for people to live together. Not only does marriage bring sexuality into balance, lessening the temptation to fornication, but it affects other areas of life as well. A Godly marriage and home provide an atmosphere of nurture and expectancy where people can grow through their weaknesses together. The pressures of marriage cultivate commitment and diligence that are needed in our relationship with Jesus. A church with truly unified homes will see greater unity throughout, even among those that are single. In the world

today Satan has mounted an all out attack on marriage and the family because when they are weak it provides an atmosphere where sin can flourish. Honor and respect for marriage helps cultivate purity of heart.

Finally we come to key number 6 which involves the transparency of our words. We must cultivate honesty in what we say if we are to be pure in heart. It is a sad thing to me that neither the world nor the church can accept someone at their word. As a pastor I am constantly being misjudged because someone heard what I said but “knew what I *really* meant.” It just seems impossible for most to believe that a person can mean just what they say. I find this tragic in the church. We must cultivate the ability to simply say what we mean. We shouldn’t “speak between the lines.” If we have a problem with one another we should communicate it directly with kindness. If we care for one another we should be able to say so without cloaking it in mystery. Clear and transparent communication is important in order to avoid suspicions and cultivate purity in the church and her members.

How would your life and the life of your local church change if you were truly pure in heart? The Bible says you would see God. Wow! Does this mean you would have a physical visitation from Jesus? No. Does it mean you will be caught up into the third heavens for an audience with the Father? No. It does mean the pure in heart will see God at work in every area of their lives. Even what Satan would mean for evil will be turned to good for the pure in heart. Romans 8:28 “And we know that all things work

together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” I want to see God at work in my church. I want to see God’s hand in my personal life. I want to be pure in heart.

## CHAPTER 6

### Blessed are the Merciful

(Matt. 5:7) Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

#### (Author's Dramatization)

*Jesus knew how these Hebrew people understood the law. The Law of Moses had become the basis for their entire civilization. The Pharisees in particular had discussed it and analyzed it until its cold rigidity hung over every aspect of their lives like a schoolmaster. They knew exactly what was expected of them and exactly what to do when they fell short of that expectation. Each sin carried a sacrifice and failure to offer up the proper sacrifice meant separation from the nation and covenant of Israel. For some offenses the sacrifice was death. No appeal, no pardon. With all their analysis and endless commentary they were incapable of understanding the Father's true motivation for giving the law in the first place. It wasn't judgment that was at the heart of the law. It was mercy!*

(Matt. 5:38-48 NKJV) "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' {39} "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

Haven't we all heard Jesus' statement about turning the other cheek used to reinforce the notion that Christians are weak door mats who won't stand up for themselves? Aren't We portrayed as holding some impossible to understand conviction which, although admirable, is somewhat silly? I can imagine how it might have sounded

to the ears of the disciples. Remember, these were rough fisherman, formerly dishonest tax collectors, and political revolutionaries, men of action quite willing to be the face *slapper* if the circumstances seemed to warrant it. Can you imagine Peter “turning the other cheek”? In Gethsemeny he cut off an ear without giving it a thought. I’m sure that this idea sounded as foolish to them as it does to most of us considering some of the real life situations that can arise. Are we really supposed to allow ourselves to be “slapped around” and just take it? Is Jesus teaching us a deep spiritual truth about not fighting back? Although I certainly believe that Jesus would not advocate violence to solve our problems, this is not the basic truth he is sharing in this context of scripture. What he says in verse 38, coupled with verse 7, gives the key to the true meaning of verse 39 and the rest of this section.

Jesus is elevating mercy over justice when he tells us to “turn the other cheek”. Justice is perfectly stated in verse 38 by the phrase “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”. There is no clutter or interpretation. The punishment perfectly fits the crime. It is justice in the absolute sense as seen and stated by God. The law contained such justice and that is what had become the foundation of the Pharisee’s belief system. If a woman was caught in adultery she was stoned. There was no appeal or discussion nor should there be. That was the letter of the law. It was understood by all and the consequences must be carried out so that all would be inspired to obey. Jesus, however, understood the real motivation and meaning *behind* the law.

When Jesus says not to resist an evil person this goes against perfect justice. Evil deserves resisting! Repayment must be made in like kind! Why would you offer an evil person a second cheek to slap? Justice demands that his be slapped in return. An eye must be repaid with an eye. The reason to offer the other cheek is *mercy*. The law was never meant to portray justice alone, but was instituted because of mercy.

You see, God had established a blood covenant with Abraham and to break a blood covenant always means death. Every act of sin by a Hebrew effectively broke that covenant for him individually. God gave alternatives to his death in the form of animal sacrifices to delay justice until the ultimate sacrifice, Jesus' death on the cross, could fulfill justice for all men.

Not only did the sacrifices instituted by the law "push" judgment ahead until Christ, but the rules and regulations within it defined what it took to keep the law. God set down his requirements and the sacrifices necessary should they not be kept. This was an act of God's mercy not an attempt to limit Israel's freedom. Just as mercy was at the heart of God's dealing with Israel, mercy must also be at the heart of our dealings with men. How does mercy relate to turning the other cheek?

Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words defines mercy as implying one who has a need coming to one with the ability to meet that need. In Hebrews 4:16 we are exhorted to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain *mercy* and find grace to help in time of need." We have a need and God has the ability to meet that

need. Therefore we obtain *mercy*. Vine's definition also implies the *willingness* on the part of the one to whom we come to meet this need. The key here is the need.

I like to think of mercy as the ability to look past an action and see the need. Why turn the other cheek? Because we don't respond to the slap but the need behind the slap. I think Jesus chose His words carefully here. A slap in the face implies much more than physical pain. Most of the time an open hand slap does not cause extreme damage. The thing about being slapped in the face is that it is both intimidating and humiliating. It is usually meant as an insult. In the past when a man slapped another in the face it was a challenge to a duel. Everyone understood the implications. There is just something about a slap in the face that strikes our emotions and will almost surely spark a response.

<sup>1</sup>Most adults don't experience many literal slaps in the face, but we do suffer verbal ones. We can often feel that people's actions are "slapping us in the face." This is a major problem in the church. People feel slighted by the pastor or a brother and they begin to think about it until they are so angry they retaliate with a "slap" of their own. Many a church split has started this way. In the world our witness is ruined because someone "slaps us in the face" and our reaction of hurt or anger eliminates any possibility of sharing the Gospel. Children live in bondage because both literal and emotional "slaps in the face" by mother or father make it difficult for them to relate to others and particularly to God. There is really something about this Slapping and turning

---

<sup>1</sup>Of course a noted exception is in the case of spousal abuse.

the other cheek. If we could get by the slaps we would be doing something significant when it came to walking in mercy.

What is the significance of turning the other cheek? It is not an admonition to take abuse because Jesus is not really talking about a physical beating. He is talking about the humiliation. He teaches us that instead of the normal reaction we should be willing to subject ourselves to more of the same. Why? Because we are to look past our humiliation and the person's words or actions to the need that has caused it.. Would our churches and personal lives change if we could do this? Would people in the work place be more likely to see God in us if we could do this? We are not saying to excuse bad behavior. Indeed you may well need to confront the behavior but not *react* to it. There is a tremendous difference between the two.

We tend to react to things like slaps. Jesus says we should take the time to try and find out the cause. You may get slapped again, but in the end you will be more likely to understand the cause of the behavior. Instead of *reacting* to the behavior you will act so as to deal with the cause. This applies to ministering to people in need and to our relationships in the church, at work, and at home. How might things change if we were to adopt this lifestyle?

When our co-worker releases a tirade of curses within earshot we would not become offended because we were subjected to his foul language. (Most of you had just as bad a mouth before you were saved. It's not as if you've never heard those words

before.) Instead we would be moved by the need behind the anger and pray or share as the Spirit leads. When a spouse says the wrong thing we would stop and see their point of view instead of reacting to the sting. When a brother or sister does or says something offensive we would be more likely to make allowances and understand instead of becoming alienated from them until they have the decency to apologize. When a sinner comes to our church and dares to actually act unsaved, we would be inclined to reach out to the need and not respond to the behavior. All of this is mercy in action.

Jesus continues to expand this idea in the next two verses.

(Matt. 5:40-41 {40}) “If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. {41} “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. {42} “Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

Why give someone who sues you for your shirt your coat as well? Because you see past the act to the need. If someone *compels* you to go one mile why go another voluntarily? Because you see past the attitude to the need behind it. Give to him who would ask and don't withhold from him who would borrow because you see past the inconvenience and recognize the need. It is easy to see why Jesus calls this one of the “sayings” we should build our lives and churches upon. It would radically change almost all of our responses to people.

I would like to inject a personal illustration. There was a certain person in our church that was particularly difficult to deal with. My wife and I gave her a great deal of

our time.. When we would talk to her she would usually do better, but it seemed that she would come to the same again and again. She began to get distant from us and uninvolved in the life of the church. I heard that, due to her state of mind, she had begun to be critical both of the church and of us. I will admit that it was very frustrating to me. Sometimes we wanted to tell her to shape up or ship out. There were times when we did give her hard choices and say difficult words, but through it all God gave us the grace to see past the frustrations and wrong actions to the needs that were causing them. We didn't always *understand* the need but we tried to be sensitive to it and work with it anyway.

We might have been justified in giving up or forcing the issue and causing her to leave. There is a definite time and place for such extreme measures, but I do not believe they should be applied impulsively. In this case mercy dictated that we work with her through the need. Praise God that we did for today she is a growing, beautiful Christian woman and a blessing to the church.

Let us consider Jesus' conclusion of this section on mercy.

(Matt.) 5:43-48 {43} "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' {44} "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, {45} "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. {46} "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? {47} "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? {48} "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

In these verses Jesus sets the standard of mercy that every church and every individual believer must aspire to reach. Loving those who love us is simply not enough. We must extend the love of God to those who hate us and use us. Why? Because God sends rain on both the just and the unjust. Why does He do it? Because they both need rain and He has the ability to give it. Jesus is not really talking about rain. The whole world needs Jesus and we are the only ones on the face of the earth who can introduce Him to them. God's mercy saw past the sin and blasphemy to the need. Ours must do the same for both the just, believers, and the unjust, the world. In this, Jesus said, we must be as perfect as our Father is. If He said it we can be. We *must* be!

I believe active mercy would create an atmosphere where people could grow and develop through their shortcomings without fear of harshness or rejection. I believe active mercy will temper discipline so that it is designed to train and strengthen rather than punish. Thank God that he doesn't deal with us on the basis of pure justice but justice tempered by great mercy. Let us be like Him.

As we close this chapter on mercy consider the promise connected to the merciful in verse 7. It says the merciful will obtain mercy. Of all the promises in the beatitudes, I think this may be the most beneficial to our everyday living. If there is one thing other than the Word of God I have tried to cultivate in my ministry it is to consider the place of others. I did not understand it as such, but I was cultivating mercy.

I am willing to go a long way with people. As a person in authority I am often in the position to make judgments and administer discipline. I try to be slow to do so. I

give the person as much encouragement and space to repent as I can. I allow great leeway in how I want things to be done. It doesn't have to be *my* way in most cases so long as the job is done. I allow plenty of room for honest mistakes since I have learned so much through my own. I draw the line only when the individual or the flock might be in danger. I try never to make a judgment based on my personal preference or convenience.

This has, quite accidentally on my part, provided the same for me from God. I have always wondered why I have been so blessed. We have had our share of challenges in the ministry and even a few hurts, but overall my family and I have been greatly blessed. I know that I have not gotten what I deserve on the basis of justice. I have been a partaker of great mercy from the Lord.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall *obtain* mercy.” For all the mistakes I have made, some which hurt people, I sometimes think I should have been removed from the ministry. The times that I haven't used my time wisely during the week, God should not have anointed my preaching. Those days when I did have a bad attitude should have stopped my ministry in its tracks and yet it continues to go on and even increase. “Blessed are the merciful for they shall *obtain* mercy.”

God is always predisposed to show us mercy, but when we choose to be merciful it sets into motion a spiritual principle that will assure that God looks past our actions and sees our need. This doesn't mean we can live any way we want and God will just bless

us. He will always meet our *need*. Sometimes our need will not be what we want. He might even have to bring discipline. What God will *not* do to the merciful is deal with them on the basis of what their actions alone deserve. I think all of us could use that!

I have cultivated mercy quite by mistake and it has paid great dividends in both my life and the effectiveness of my ministry. Now that I know the principle, I intend to cultivate mercy to an even greater degree so I will always have mercy flowing in my life. Take a look at your life and your reactions to others. How about your unsaved friends and coworkers. How about government officials. (Uh oh.) How about your church family. How about the pastor and leadership of your church. How about your spouse, children or parents. How much does mercy reign in your relationships. How much have you built your life or your church on these sayings of Jesus concerning mercy. To that degree you shall obtain the same. Think about it.

## CHAPTER 7

### Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Matt. 5:6 (NKJV) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

#### (Authors dramatization)

*One thing Jesus knew he could always depend upon from the Pharisees was a good show. The way they entered a room declared, "We are the holy ones." Their clothes were to make anyone envious. They were doctors of the Law, ready to use that position and knowledge to dominate the common people in any way they could. They were particularly adept at the word "Sinner," holding out the "s" to convey the maximum of disdain. How unlike the kingdom of God they were. Jesus wondered if they would be surprised to know the Father's real opinion of them. Somehow he thought they would probably try to argue the case. There was something much more lasting than recognition for which men must learn to hunger and thirst.*

(Matt. 6:1-4 NKJV) "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. {2} "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. {3} "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, {4} "that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

When Jesus was preaching this message it is obvious that the Pharisees were never far from his mind. They were committed to the law of Moses, that was sure, but they were also very desirous of being seen as important by men. Their worth was based in their position in the community and the respect they obtained from one another. As Pharisees they already commanded the respect of the common people. It was amongst themselves that they really sought to be seen as someone of substance. Unfortunately that is too often the way in the church. In many circles the talk is of who has the most people or the largest offerings. There is a competition that has nothing to do with our mission for Jesus. Too much of the world's definition of success has crept into the church.

I know one brother who was having some meetings in his small church. There was another church of the same denomination not far from him that was much larger. The pastor of the smaller church had no piano player and the pastor of the larger church had 3. When asked to help this little church with their revival, the pastor of the big work flatly refused. To him it was like a business helping the competition. How sad! How unlike the heart of Jesus and how confusing to the world!

It reminds me of a cartoon one minister I know drew. The picture is of a particular man on the top of a hill overlooking a church. This man, obviously a pastor, has a missile launcher pointed at the church in the valley. The caption reads, "I *will* have the biggest church in town!" Funny but too close to the truth.

This "hunger and thirst for the recognition of men" is not limited to the pulpit or church leaders. All of us need to be appreciated and approved by someone. The problem comes when we begin to allow that to be our prime motivation. If it is, we cannot rejoice

when a brother is honored or given position. We see him as having more recognition and approval than we do. There are times we even compete in our evangelism. “How many have you won this year, brother. You know *I’ve* won 10 to the Lord single handed.” There is something wrong here. Jesus said to hunger and thirst for *righteousness*.

What is *righteousness*? According to Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words it is the sum total of all God's requirements. II Corinthians 5:21 tells us of the work of righteousness on the cross. “*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*” What a tremendous reality for the believer. Jesus never committed sin but was *made* to be sin for us. We never committed any righteousness but we were *made* the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Putting Vines’ definition and this scripture together we can see that in salvation Jesus fulfilled all of God’s requirements for right standing with himself and credited it to us. When anyone receives Jesus, according to the courts of heaven he is a new creature and completely right with God. We are justified by faith. It’s “just as if I’d never sinned” to use a play on the word.

(Rom 5:1 NKJV) Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

This kind of righteousness requires nothing on our part except that we receive Jesus as personal lord and savior. Our sin was too great for us to obtain our own righteousness. We simply could not pay the price. According to Is. 64:6 all of our human righteousness is but “filthy rags”. Why, then, would Jesus exhort us to hunger and thirst for righteousness. If it is an accomplished fact at salvation, how can we hunger and thirst for it. The answer lies in understanding that there is a *legal* or *positional* reality and there is also a *vital* reality that involves manifesting the legal truth in our daily lives. I Peter 2:24

says “by His stripes you *were* healed.” That is a legal reality. Jesus bore your sickness and carried it on the cross. Is. 53 clearly makes physical healing a part of salvation in Christ, and yet you may still be sick. It takes faith to appropriate the blessing and make it a *vital* reality. It is the same with righteousness.

When we receive Jesus as Lord we are made right with God legally. The “sum total” of His requirements are legally fulfilled. This does not, however, exclude us from *vitally* manifesting that righteousness in our daily lives. We are required to live according to that righteousness, that is ours legally by the work of Christ on the Cross. Another definition of righteousness is to do the will of God and do it the *right* way. Now let us tie this all in with what Jesus is teaching in Matthew chapter six.

In this section of his sermon Jesus uses three areas of our spiritual walk to illustrate His point. The first we have already quoted. Let’s take a look at the second and third.

(Matt. 6:5-7 NKJV) "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. {6} "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. {7} "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (Matt. 6:16-18 NKJV) "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. {17} "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, {18} "so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

We certainly can learn about fasting, prayer, and giving from his statements. However, I want to focus on the fact that he is exhorting us to do none of them for recognition. This was so typical of the Pharisees. When they fasted, they made sure

everyone knew about it. When they prayed they preferred to do so publicly and with flowing, impressive words. When they gave it was with a great display so that men would know how generous they really were. Fasting, praying and giving are all good things, spiritual things. They were doing the right things but not for the right reasons.

If we hunger and thirst for righteousness in our daily living we *will* fast, pray and give. We won't care if anyone knows or not. We will only care that we are fulfilling God's requirements. We want to please God and be effective in ministering to others. We want to do the right things and do them God's way. We listen to those that have been given to teach us and we apply those teachings to our lives. Recognition is immaterial to us so no job is too small for our attention or so big we become exalted above measure. We are hungering and thirsting for *righteousness*.

I want to comment on Jesus' use of the terms to hunger and thirst. In America we really don't know what that means. Most of us never really hunger for food. We are never really "dying" of thirst. Our church has a softball team that plays in a church league. I was an athlete in high school so when I am home I play on the team. In the hot summer weather my body wants to continually remind me that I am 40 now. Sometimes I come off the field and do my best to drain the whole water jug. At that point it seems a drink is the most important and pressing thing in my life.

With that in mind, imagine someone who is dying of thirst or hunger. At that point nothing would matter. We see the pictures of famine ridden lands. Those people don't worry about who is getting more recognition. They don't care about a better job, bigger house or nicer car. Their whole being is consumed with one thing and only one thing. Every day is spent in search of enough food and water to last another day. Nothing else

matters. There is no other motivation. They are hungering and thirsting. Jesus said to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Bigger, more, and better is so much a part of our society. Fame is a god that we worship through the idol in our living rooms. If a person is famous, he or she must somehow be better than the rest of us. We seek our own kind of fame by looking for recognition within whatever circle we travel. For Christians this usually means the church. Who has the most important position? What title can I acquire? Is there some “up front” ministry I can fill. Since the pastor is the most famous of all, let me get “in” with him. The opposite might also be true. I may be critical of him so I will feel more important. Jesus said hunger and thirst for *righteousness*.

Besides worship of the “fame god,” there is another common factor that produces a hunger for recognition. Many people do not feel accepted in themselves so they seek approval to gain the acceptance of others. To fully explore this idea would take another book, but suffice it to say that the need for approval and acceptance often is our motivation for Christian service. We do need approval and fulfillment in our lives, but Jesus said to hunger and thirst for *righteousness*.

Jesus is not teaching us to be happy living unfulfilled lives. He is not requiring that we never experience the approval of those important to us. I knew some people who took verse 18 and used it to say that if anyone knows you are fasting you won’t get God’s reward. They would almost rather lie than admit they were fasting. Somehow I don’t think that is what Jesus had in mind. Let’s look again at verse 6 of chapter 5.

(Mat 5:6 NKJV) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

Jesus is requiring this of us because he knows it is the only way we can be *filled*. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is the only way for a Christian to be *fulfilled*. Money will not do it. Things won't either. Neither will recognition, position or even fame. I recently heard an interview with a very rich and powerful man. He gained his wealth by his own hard work, not inheritance. During the interview he was asked if the money he had acquired had made him happy. His answer was very interesting to me. He said, "Anyone who thinks money will make them happy doesn't have money." How revealing!

Fulfilling the will of God and doing it his way is the only thing that will lead us to our individual purpose for existence. This scripture gives us the promise that if we hunger and thirst for righteousness we *will* be satisfied. It is the only way. In each of the areas Jesus uses as examples he says that for one who seeks recognition, it is the only reward he will receive. One who seeks righteousness may get some recognition, but that is not his reward. The Bible says he receives a reward from God and he receives it openly. I for one would rather have anything that comes from God than whatever the world has to offer. I assure you that no matter how good the worldly reward looks, God's reward will be better.

I purposely left out the Lord's prayer as I quoted the scriptures for this chapter. I want to inject it here.

(Matt. 6:8-15 NKJV) "Therefore do not be like them (the pharisees). For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. {9} "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. {10} Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. {11} Give us this day our daily bread. {12} And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. {13} And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. {14} "For if you forgive men their

trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. {15} "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

This prayer provides us with a wonderful outline of the right attitude for life and service. Listen to how he speaks of God: "Hallowed be *Your* name, *Your* kingdom come, *Your* will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Sometimes I think we pray, "Hallow *my* name with recognition. Let *my* kingdom come so that I will have authority over others. Let *my* will be done in heaven the way I want it to be on earth." Loses something doesn't it?

What does he pray for himself and those with him? "Please, Lord if we could have our daily bread. Please forgive us as we forgive others. Please keep us from sin. One more thing, have your way in our lives." How often do our prayers sound more like, "I have all I need but you must not love me because you won't give me what I want. Deal with my wife Lord, because she really has some sins that need repenting of. While you're at it Lord, you need to deal with brother Smith because he offended me. About that sin I have been committing, I haven't quite overcome it yet so I guess when you want me to stop you'll do something about it. One more thing, Lord, you've been putting alot of pressure on me about church and you know I just don't want to do the things they are asking me to. Please straighten out the pastor for me. Thanks. Gotta go. Bye!"

This short prayer can be used to check out all of our motivations. Am I seeking fame for God's name or mine? Am I concerned with His kingdom or mine? Do I want his will or my own? Am I thankful for what God has provided or am I continually wanting more? Is my heart repentant, looking to purify myself from my own sin or am I callous to how my sin affects the Lord? Do I forgive others readily or do I hold a grudge? Jesus says we will not be forgiven by God if we don't forgive others. Do I have a desire

to keep myself from sin reflected in my prayers, or am I unwilling to take responsibility for my own actions. Finally do I want God to have His way completely in my life or am I more concerned with what *I* want? Which do you think reflects a hunger and thirst for righteousness and which a desire for recognition?

You may be thinking, “I just don’t feel that kind of hunger. How can I possibly walk in it?” As with many spiritual things we need to see cultivated in our lives, the place to start is to be willing to change. Faith is not based on what we feel but on the Word of God. The Bible says we should hunger and thirst for righteousness. Decide to obey the word. Putting the beatitude together with the teaching in the sermon reveals that when we are motivated by recognition we are not hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Examine yourself and see just why you are doing the things you are. If you see recognition as a motivation, repent. Go to your pastor and ask for prayer. Decide to be resolute about cultivating the right motivation. For some this will mean laying down certain things until the motivation is right. If that’s what your leadership thinks is best, do it! You will not regret it. For some it will mean an adjustment in thinking and for others it may uncover a need for some godly counsel. You might want to look for some of the unglamorous jobs in the church and do them as an exercise in motivation. Whatever it takes for you to begin, do it. Remember, you have a promise that says you will be filled. You will have an open reward.

One thing I have found very helpful is the right role models. God has brought some of the finest senior men and women alive today into my life. These people could have gone the route of fame but choose not to. They are more concerned with building the

kingdom than building a ministry. They are willing to take time with people no matter how big or small their church or ministry might be. They don't look for opportunities to be with the "right" people or go through the "right" doors. They hunger and thirst for righteousness and on so doing have tremendous impact in the body of Christ. Most of you may never hear of them, but they are my heroes in the faith and I am working on following their example. When I examine my life against theirs it helps me discern my own wrong motivations.

This is not to say that all well known ministries are just out for fame. The truth is most of them have gotten recognition by following these very principles. The problem may rest more with us and how we perceive them. There is nothing wrong with following a well known ministry and learning from them, just be sure of why. Don't follow their fame follow their spirit and the Word of God they teach. Just remember that you may not really know them. I Thess. 5:12 exhorts us to know those who are over us in the Lord and Hebrews 13:7 says we should follow their faith. You can only know so much about the faith of the TV preacher, the tape preacher, or the author.

Learn from the well known but don't neglect the pastor God has placed over you. Get to know the ministry with whom they are in relationship. Take a look at some of the more mature saints right there in your own church. You can follow their faith. You can see their family. You can tell if what they preach is working and you may find some real examples of hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Begin today to place the building block of this saying in the foundation of your life and ministry.

(Matt. 5:6 NKJV) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled

## CHAPTER 8

### Blessed are the Meek

(Matt. 5:5 NKJV) Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

*As he continued his message, Jesus thought of the world in which these men and women were living. The Roman empire ruled with an iron hand, crushing the identities of the people it conquered and destroying all who stood in their path. The weak were scorned and considered unworthy to live. To the peoples' ears, what he taught them next would seem to insure their disappearance from the earth. The truth, however, is that this teaching would outlast Rome and all other human kingdoms. Those who could understand would find a victory in daily living that Rome could never win with its mightiest armies.*

To most people the word *meek* is synonymous with *weak*. To be meek means one must lay down and take any abuse that comes along. A meek person is seen as one who can not stand up for himself. Our society does not consider meekness a fault but it's not a virtue either. Meekness is nice, it's a shame more people can't be that way but the truth is its just impractical. In the movies and on television the hero is the one who protects the meek. He or she may be of dubious character but they are still the hero. At best the meek are portrayed as victims and at worst they are seen as fools. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek" he had neither picture in mind.

What does it mean to be meek? A good definition would imply a mildness of disposition based on a knowledge of the true power available to provide for any need. Moses was called by God the meekest of all men. Did this mean he was unwilling or unable to stand up for himself and his people. I hardly think Pharaoh would agree. God was referring to the fact that Moses never had to put on a display or demonstrate who he really was. Moses was never “showy” or arrogant. He never had to promote or protect “self.” He was not afraid of being “lost in the shuffle” if he didn’t make some noise. He was not self assertive. He was meek.

Moses was none of these things because of weakness. He was all of these things because of his awareness that it was God who had called him and it was the power of God that was backing what he did. If you are convinced of that, there is no need to assert self. We find a wonderful example of this meekness in the story of Miriam and Aaron’s accusations concerning Moses’ choice of a wife.

(Num 12:1-10 NKJV) Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. {2} So they said, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” And the LORD heard it. {3} (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) {4} Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!” So the three came out. {5} Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. {6} Then He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. {7} Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. {8} I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?” {9} So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed. {10} And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly

Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.

Aaron and Miriam had spent many years by Moses' side as he led the people, but they did not agree with his choice of a wife. As the saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt" and these two were more familiar with Moses than anyone else in the congregation. Maybe it was this familiarity that opened the door to their actions or maybe it was just ambition, but in any case they challenged Moses over this issue. Moses' reaction is a demonstration of Bible meekness. He never defended himself. When Aaron and Miriam declared that God spoke through them as well as through him, Moses did not argue the matter. He never pointed out that God, at the burning bush, had called Aaron Moses' prophet not His own. The culture of the day would allow him to challenge Miriam's right to speak because she was a woman, but he did not.. In this whole incident Moses says nothing, but instead places himself in God's hands.

This is meekness. On the outside it might have looked as if Moses was just taking it. I can almost see him as Miriam and Aaron come before the congregation. He might have looked a little distracted. His eyes might have wandered over the congregation, remembering the fate of those who had worshipped the golden calf at Sinai. I believe his heart would have been saddened as he heard the words of his brother and sister. Not so much because those closest to him had challenged his integrity but because meekness is born of a knowledge of one's true position with God. I am sure he was afraid for their lives. When asked to defend himself, I believe he would have had no words to say.

Finally God calls the three of them to the tabernacle. He manifests himself in the pillar of cloud and calls Miriam and Aaron forward. They are sure God is about to condone their actions. Moses has technically done something wrong by marrying an outsider. Instead He condemns them and defends Moses as one with whom God speaks “face to face.” Judgment falls on Miriam as the “ring leader” and Moses, true to the nature of meekness, prays for her deliverance. I think it is interesting that even after Moses prays for her, God requires that she remain leprous seven days as a sign to the congregation of her rebellion. Had Moses defended himself he would never have been so harsh, but God is the defender of the meek. Since God is for the meek, who can be against them (Romans 8:21).

Applying this line of thinking to the sermon on the mount, we can easily find out to whom Jesus is referring when he speaks of the meek. Let us look at the first verses in this section of his sermon.

(Matthew 6:19-21 NKJV) “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; {20} “but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. {21} “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In verse 19 of chapter 6 He begins to teach about the relationship between our hearts and our treasure. He exhorts His listeners to avoid laying up treasures on earth but to lay up heavenly treasures instead. The quality of the heavenly is seen as much more enduring and rewarding than the earthly.

I think it is important to note here that Jesus is not saying we should empty our savings accounts, sell the stocks, liquidate all assets and give them to the poor. He did say that to the “rich young ruler” in Luke chapter 18, but that was to address a specific need. Indeed the rich young ruler lacked the very thing we are discussing, meekness. The teaching here is much more about the heart than about the treasure. In Mark 4 Jesus, teaching on the thorny ground, speaks of the deceitfulness of riches. I Tim. 6:17 tells us how they deceive.

(1 Tim 6:17 NKJV) Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

You see the problem is that riches are uncertain. Moths and thieves can take them away. Rust will eventually catch up with that new car. Whatever you obtain will eventually be consumed, lost, or stolen and then you will have to get more in order to stay satisfied. The value of what we have can change overnight. During the collapse that led to the great depression, many found out how uncertain riches really are. If we trust in riches we will be disappointed.

What, then, is Jesus saying? The emphasis here is upon what we depend on to take care of our needs. If we are laying up treasures on earth, our heart is depending on those things and not God. This is the direct opposite of meekness that trusts in God not self. We cited the rich young ruler a little earlier in the chapter. You may remember that he came to Jesus seeking what he lacked in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. When

Jesus told him he needed to keep the commandments his reply was that he was already doing that. His problem was his self-sufficiency. He was rich, powerful and self-righteousness. Jesus required that he give all he had to the poor because that would take away the thing that made him self-sufficient. Without his money and wealth he would have to learn to trust God. He was forced into meekness which is what he really lacked.

In the sermon on the mount Jesus is applying the same principle to all of us when He tells us to lay up treasures in heaven. He sums this whole thought up by pointing out that your heart will be where your treasure is. If you are depending on earthly treasures to meet your needs your heart will be focused on those treasures. Since you are self-sufficient, your heart will be on you and your ability to accumulate wealth. If you are meek you will hide even your earthly treasures in heaven by giving God free access to them. If He asks you to give it you will do so freely since it is not yours but His. In this way your heart will be focused on Him and his provision and you will be walking in meekness instead of self-sufficiency.

In the next 3 verses it seems that Jesus is injecting unrelated statements. It would do us well to remember that Jesus never jumps from one subject to another and than back to the first again. If a statement seems unrelated we must change our interpretation until we see how it flows with the rest of the thought. Let's examine verses 22-24.

(Mat 6:22-24 NKJV) “The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. {23} “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is

that darkness! {24} “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (*wealth*).

In the previous verses, Jesus is contrasting meekness and self-sufficiency by instruction as to where we should lay up treasure. Verse 24 goes back to the same thought by reminding us that we can not serve two masters, both God and wealth. Clearly it is not *having* wealth but *servicing* wealth that keeps us from meekness. What does the eye have to do with all this? I believe that Jesus is teaching us that how we view life can be a key to what master we are serving. If our view of life is centered on wealth we are serving wealth. We usually apply this scripture to the rich, but we should understand that one does not have to *have* wealth to serve it.

Ask yourself what position wealth, whether in the form of money or things, has in your view of life. Ask yourself also how important obtaining financial security is in the way you see success. Finally, what role does wealth play in your decision making. How you *honestly* answer these questions will tell you if you are serving God or wealth.

If your worth is influenced by what kind of house you live in or car you drive you are serving wealth. This applies whether you drive a nice car or not. Whether you live in a big house or a small apartment. It is not what you have that is important but how you see yourself in relation to what you have. If you feel that the most important thing in life is financial security, you will serve financial security. You will sacrifice other things to obtain it, including the kingdom of God. It's not that you cannot have financial security,

but how you *see* it that determines whom you are serving. Finally, if the most important factor in the life decisions you make is how it will affect your wealth, you are serving mammon and not God. Finances should be one factor you consider, but they should not be the main factor. The meek will serve God first and foremost. He will not serve money because he knows that wealth is not his source nor does wealth own him. He has been purchased by God and in meekness will trust Him with his life and the decisions that affect it.

Rarely would we equate worry with a lack of meekness, but in these next verses Jesus places worry in the midst of this section of His sermon.

(Matthew 6:25-31 NKJV) “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? {26} “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? {27} “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? (28) “So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; {29} “and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. {30} “Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? {31} “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’(32) “For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. {33} “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. {34} “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

As I have meditated on this I believe He is giving us a key to help identify a lack of meekness in our lives. If I am worried it is because I am not looking past my own ability to the ability of God. If I am meek in the sense we have been discussing, I have nothing

to worry about. I already know that I am not self-sufficient. In fact I am not supposed to be. In meekness I trust and serve God and expect Him to make the difference. The fact that we are worried means we think we *can* take care of the affairs of life, but we don't know *how*. If God is the one we trust, we can cast the care or worry on Him because we know He cares for us (I Peter 5:6-7.)

Let me say here that this should not be taken as condemnation by everyone who has some area they are worried about. The truth is that the nature of our society breeds worry. It is hard for anyone to escape worry of some kind. The purpose, rather, is that we recognize worry for what it is so that we can properly deal with it by the Word. Jesus said here that we should not worry. There must be some way to escape it or He is asking something we can not do.

He tells us to consider the birds of the air and the grass of the field. If God takes care of them, He will certainly take care of you. They don't worry because they are ignorant of the possibility that they will not be provided for. We should not allow worry to take hold of our heart and mind because we trust God's care for us. Jesus did not lie. We really are more valuable to God than many birds or flowers no matter what some may think. We need to meditate on this when worry tries to attack our minds. It's not just a nice thought, it's a promise. Every time I see a bird I should be reminded that God is at work taking care of me. I don't have to take the burden. I yield in meekness to his goodness. In the light of this reality Jesus calls anything else a lack of faith.

Next, Jesus informs us that worry can not add anything to your height. What could that possibly have to do with anything. This is an extreme statement designed to make an obvious point. Worry simply doesn't work. No matter how long and hard you do it, it will never produce anything resembling fruitful results. What it will do is make it impossible to believe God. Faith is seeing and believing the answer or solution from the Word of God. Worry is seeing the failure happening as a result of the circumstance in the world. The two can not occupy the same mind. Faith will work. Worry will not.

How, in the face of modern life with all it's pressures, can we eliminate worry from our minds? Consider the lilies. Think on what God has done. As you meditate on His provision for things that mean less to Him than you do, worry will fade away. God loves me. I don't have any idea how He could meet this need but if He takes care of the birds, He will take care of me. If He clothes the flowers surely a new suit isn't any problem. To some people this way of thinking seems naive. In a sense, the meek are naive. They just trust. We certainly must still use wisdom and take care of the business of living in the world, but we must do it in meekness, considering the absolute surety of God's provision.

I believe that we can also conclude, both from this text and many others, that we should consider what God has done in our past as well. How many times has he met your needs? In the midst of the battle it is hard to remember that, but to forget it is to short change our loving Heavenly Father. We need to be grateful for what God *has* done

instead of upset and worried about what He has yet to do. The more we meditate on God's past goodness the less time we will have for worry.

The devil will inevitably say, "This time it's different." The meek recognize no difference in circumstance because they are focused on the consistency of the Lord. Satan will usually find something to condemn you with in order to convince you that you are not worthy to have your need met. The meek knows that the meeting of his need is not dependent on *his* worthiness but on the righteousness of God. God may deal with him to change the things that are causing the lack, but He will meet his need while he is making the change. I have found that abundance flows when I grow by correcting a problem, but my needs are met as long as I trust Him in meekness believing He will take care of me.

I can remember when we began the purchase and renovation of our current facility. When we started negotiations we were a church of about 60 adult members. The purchase price for 64 acres and the building that was about 1/3 finished was \$120,000. We expected the renovation to be between \$30,000 and \$50,000. This was a wonderful bargain except for the fact that we only had \$19,000 at the time. I had no idea how we would get the rest but I knew it was God to move in this direction.

Earlier that year we had received a prophetic word that our bank account would never have excess but that when we went to it, it would never run dry. We proceeded just as if we had money. In the beginning I made bold statements of faith and assured the

people they would see what God could do. Shortly into the process, about the time the bank stopped laughing, I began to feel the pressure. We were committed but there was no way to get the money we needed. Worry was a very real possibility. As a matter of fact, the temptation to it was a constant companion! I had a real choice. Believe the thoughts of failure or, in meekness accept the Word of the Lord.

I want you to know that was one of the most difficult battles I have faced. I paced the floor declaring God's promise with worry thoughts trying to invade my mind. I continued to make bold statements of faith to the congregation with failure screaming in my ears. I was not being a hypocrite, I was choosing to reject the temptation to worry by replacing it with the Word of God. To make a very long story short God moved wonderfully. We moved into our new 64 acre 8100 square foot facility with only \$50,000 dollars of bank debt and \$200 dollars a month more payment than our 1500 square foot rented building with no property. It was a true miracle, but it was won by choosing the meekness of trusting God's provision over the self-sufficient spirit of worry. This really does work.

Jesus gives us another key to conquering worry when he exhorts us to seek first the Kingdom of God. The world spends its time seeking to obtain the necessities of this life. God is not ignorant that you need them. In fact He is quite pleased to give them to you but He cannot as long as worry crowds out the trust meekness requires. The answer is to busy yourself with the kingdom and let Him take care of your needs.

“That’s fine for you,” you might say. “You’re a preacher but I have to make a living in the world.” That doesn’t mean you are excused from the business of the Kingdom of God. Every believer is called to walk worthy of his calling (Eph. 4:1.) That *must* mean every believer is called. You should approach your worldly work with the understanding that your real calling is to build the Kingdom. If you can do that, you will find getting up each day a joy instead of a drudge. You will expect God to meet you and lead you through the day. You will see your faithfulness at work as a testimony that is drawing not only your fellow workers but even your boss closer to God. You become as involved as you can in the work of your local church. There you will find true fulfillment as you fill your place in the local assembly. As you do these things the size of your paycheck won’t seem so important. Obtaining more and more things will take a back seat to the work of the kingdom. Your mind will be on the things of God and you will, in meekness, be able to trust him to add the rest to you. Worry has a hard time staying in the mind of a busy believer. With faith replacing worry you will find God true to His Word.

That last paragraph is a mouthful isn’t it? Don’t expect all that to change at once. It would be unrealistic to think you will get up tomorrow morning and the kingdom of God will suddenly be the most important thing on your mind. You have taken years to practice worrying and it won’t go away overnight. This paragraph does give you a direction to proceed in that will gradually eliminate worry. You can deliberately

accelerate your thinking and living along these lines when times of stress make worry a bigger than normal problem. This certainly will not be an easy solution, but I believe it is a solution that will work because Jesus said it would!

Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Why can meekness work in a world where high pressure living seems to be the norm? Because we have a promise that the meek will inherit the earth. One might conclude this to mean some time in the next life we will be rewarded for our suffering here. I don't believe that fits with the rest of the teaching. He is talking about our needs being met *here*. He is talking about seeking the Kingdom of God *here*. He is talking about inheriting the *earth*. I believe if He meant the new earth He would have said it. I am convinced that the meek will eventually inherit the blessing of God right here.

The path along which meekness leads you will look like destruction because you will have to let go of your own striving. The world will often look like it's running roughshod over you, but keep in mind that Jesus' greatest victory was won through the cross. It certainly looked as if meekness didn't pay off but in the end He was the winner. I believe it is the same with us. Often it will look like the wise thing to stand up for self. Moses might have thought so. It will often seem necessary to compromise integrity and the principles of God's Word in order to succeed in the world, but don't you do it. The meek *will* inherit the earth. We have God's promise. It may take longer. It may look

like foolishness, but we will inherit the earth. We will always end up the winner. I have seen it work over and over for the past sixteen years of my life and it will work for you.

Let me close this chapter by sharing another example from my own experience. We were working with a church in a city other than the one we pastor in now. The pastor and I had both worked with another brother during the days of “charismatic meetings”. For many years we had very successful meetings that we steadfastly declared were not a church. We wanted to be a place where anyone would feel comfortable, but we became a place where people could come and never make a commitment. There came a point in time when we finally accepted the need to establish a local church. Shortly after doing so the man who had been the leader of the ministry moved on to other things and this other brother and myself were left to share leadership. As it worked out, he was to lead the church and I was to lead the outreach ministry.

I was still very young and only beginning to understand the call on my life, but even then it was pretty evident that I wasn’t an evangelist. I had the Sunday night meetings and he had the Sunday morning meetings. I was responsible for outreach to the community and he was responsible for pastoring the church. The problem was that we both began to establish people. People began to be loyal to either me or him but most were not loyal to both. As you can imagine this became a real nightmare. Instead of being a church and an outreach working together, it was two churches trying to occupy

the same space. Now that I know more about myself I can understand that there was no way this could work but we were very ignorant and idealistic in those days.

The result was, after I had gone to this brother and we had prayed together for weeks I decided to move out of the building we both occupied and start a separate church. In the months to come most of my ministry friends turned away from me because it looked on the outside as if I just could not submit. I did not defend myself in any way except to say that we were doing what we honestly believed God was leading us to do.

Without going into details that are not important, the church that we started in that time is still there and has prospered. We moved on and have prospered beyond anything we could imagine. In many ways we were wrong due to our ignorance. In many ways we were falsely accused, but we chose the path of meekness, and the result was that God defended us by his power and presence. In the end we did inherit our part of the earth.

I encourage you to put the building block of meekness to work in your life and see what God will do. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

## CHAPTER 9

### Blessed are Those Who Mourn

(Matt. 5:4 NKJV) Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

*(Authors dramatization)*

*The crowd gathered before Jesus was quite a sight to behold. People had followed him to this mountain side from every walk of life imaginable. What a tremendous diversity God had created in the human race. Each one was unique before the Father with his or her own gifts and callings. Their differences had such potential for strength and yet He saw something else among them. Jesus could see strife and hear arguing. Some were pushing to get closer to him. Others were even knocking down the weaker in an attempt to have their own need met. Selfishness, He knew, was even among His own disciples. They quibbled about who was the greatest, who was closest to Jesus and a thousand other petty things. Only Jesus could understand how this grieved the heart of God.*

*The Father had created all of these people and held the same infinite love and care for each of them. Their differences were meant to blend together like the colors in the rainbow, each beautiful in its own right but more so as they flow together. When one child hurts another, the Father is hurt. When there is fighting, envy, strife, and unforgiveness, it tears at His heart. They were meant to be one, both with God and each other. To make this oneness possible, Jesus knew He was going to have to pay a great price.*

As I came to this point in the study I began to ask myself if the basic premise of the link between the beatitudes and the sermon was correct. I am not in favor of manipulating the Word of God to make a point. It seemed, however, that all of the other elements flowed together so well that this rule must somehow apply to “blessed are those who mourn”.

There is no doubt that we can find valid truth in the fact that any believer in a situation where grief and mourning are present will find comfort and blessing. In my own life I can remember the time when I lost my dad. The hand of God was right there with comfort and in that I was certainly blessed. However as I looked at the next section of the sermon on the mount, I could find nothing in any way related to this type of mourning and comfort.

I found the key when I began to understand the nature of the mourning Jesus is referring to here. In Daniel 10:2 we see this same word concerning a time of fasting and prayer in Daniel’s life.

(Dan 10:2 NKJV) In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks.

In the 14th verse of the same chapter we find that he was praying to know what would happen to God’s people in the 'latter' days. In Joel 2:15-17 we again see this type of mourning.

(Joel 2:15-17 NKJV) Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; {16} Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room. {17} Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, Weep between the porch and the altar; Let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD, And do not give Your heritage to reproach, That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Although the word “mourn” is not used here, the picture is certainly of people mourning in prayer. I believe that they are responding to God’s own mourning concerning His people. Daniel was praying for the future of Israel. Joel is prophesying about the condition of God’s people in His day. I think it is safe to say that the principle Jesus is teaching in the beatitudes is similar. God is mourning today over the lost who face an eternity of separation from Him. He is mourning over His own people who are given to selfishness and judgment. He is mourning for the unity and growth of His family. Blessed are those who mourn with Him. Who allow themselves to be moved to the degree that they will repent and begin to make the changes necessary to see God’s people become what He desires they be. They themselves will be comforted.

As we examine these verses it becomes very clear that to mourn with God over his people requires that we stop judging.

(Matt. 7:1-2 NKJV) "Judge not, that you be not judged. {2} "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

If unity is to come to God’s family, irresponsible judgment must cease. It is necessary that we be clear on Jesus’ meaning here. There is a time when we must evaluate whether a person is walking according to the Word of God and what our response should be if he is not. This is not what Jesus is talking about in this verse. The definition of the Greek word here is to “distinguish, that is to decide (mentally or judicially); by implication to try, condemn, punish, avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, judge, go to (sue at the) law, ordain, call in question, or sentence.” (Strongs Exhaustive Concordance)

That just about says it all where judging one another is concerned! We pass judgment on the things we don't like. We condemn, which implies the establishment of guilt. We then set the sentence, cutting the person off from ourselves and as many others as we can "enlighten" as to our brothers' sin. We draw our conclusions, make our decrees and wash our hands of one of God's own saying: "Isn't it a shame they just can't be like us?" And all the time the Father mourns over the state of His family.

Jesus clearly tells us the solution in the next three verses.

(Matt. 7:3-5) {3} "And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? {4} "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? {5} "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

The problem with judging others is that there is so much wrong with us. The most difficult thing for all of us to do is accurately see ourselves as God sees us. If we could see ourselves as he does then we would never again be inclined to judge someone else's weakness. Now this is not to say that we should walk around feeling like no good old worms. It's just that we are all human and we all fall short of the Glory of God. (Rom. 3:23) We easily see the faults and doctrinal shortcomings in others but we fail to see them in ourselves. One minister said we judge others by their actions and ourselves by our intent. This is so true and it is the very thing that leads to judging in the body of Christ.

What if a person *is* wrong. What if they are doing something that needs warning or that we must stay away from. The scripture here says first take the *beam* out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the *sliver* out of your brother's eye. A beam here would be like a telephone pole. A sliver is a tiny piece of wood that might get stuck

under your skin. Compared to a beam a sliver isn't very big. Isn't it so that we always see the other person's shortcoming as bigger than our own. We think if Brother Smith or sister Jones would just straighten out it would be all right. "You know we really need to pray for the pastor because his weak leadership is holding me back from really being a good Christian." Jesus implies that we should reverse our view.

My problems are like telephone poles because they are a much bigger hindrance to me than my brother's "splinter" sized problem. It's not others that hold me back it is myself. When I see that, I don't deal with my brother from the perspective of my good but his. I don't attempt to remove the splinter out of selfishness but out of a real desire to help my brother and bring him deliverance. This is a very different thing than what the definition of *judge* implies.

He also says that once we remove the beam, we will see clearly to remove the splinter. I think we should be quick to take a look at ourselves before we even begin to approach our brother. Take a little inventory of your attitudes. Could it be that the brother isn't really doing anything wrong but has just touched a weakness in your own life? Are you too rigid or too prone to anger or too anything else and that's the real problem? Could it be that there is a beam in your eye that keeps you from seeing the truth? Before you decide it is your duty to confront another member of the Body of Christ, be sure of yourself. Ask advice of a leader in the church. If you can correct your part you might have a chance of helping your brother with his part.

Finally be sure of what the Bible says. We have no right to expect someone to uphold our expectations and preferences. We do have a responsibility to stand for the Word of God. If we have no scriptural basis to approach a person we should not

approach them at all. If they are violating the Word, make sure you are keeping it before you point out their error. We would do well to listen to the words of Paul in his letter to the Galatians.

(Gal. 6:1 NKJV) Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

We sometimes have to point out a fault but we must do so in gentleness not arrogance. We must do so to restore and not to condemn. We must do so considering our own weakness and faults or we will fall into temptation ourselves. Our judging and the resulting division in the body will be more wrong than that man's sin. If we do follow these principles and someone falls under the discipline of the church it will be clear to the whole church and will not result in disunity but in a greater unity of those who remain.

If a brother's fault is not one that would require separation from the church, but is something you can not condone, don't fellowship over what you can't accept but do fellowship over what you can. Don't allow the thing to divide you since you know that you also have things that have yet to be perfected. Don't take on the sin, but don't reject the person. You are both members one of another and you can find common ground.

Lets move on to the next verse.

(Matt. 7:6 NKJV) "Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

This is one of those verses that seems to be stuck here with no connection to anything else Jesus is saying. The common interpretation is not to share deep spiritual things with the world because they cannot understand them and will only "trample them

under foot.” This is true enough but it has nothing to do with the context of Jesus’ message. He is still talking about avoiding judgment.

I believe the principle here is quite clear when understood in this context. If a person will not listen to your “pearls” of wisdom when you share them graciously he certainly won’t if you try to argue with him. We all have areas of conviction concerning holiness and pearls of revelation that are important to us. Most of the time these things are not vital to the fundamentals of salvation but are important parts of our personal Christianity. The problem is that when we argue these points with those who for some reason cannot see our position, it leads to contention and strife. You will never argue someone into a spiritual revelation. There are times when we just need to keep quiet about certain things. I can remember some tremendous debates about the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the 1970’s. None of them produced much except hurt feelings and division.

We all have things that we hold as absolute truth that others would disagree with. We have to know when to share them and when not to. Live what you believe but don’t feel you have to defend it to those who will not agree. If God wants you to share with them, He will make the way in peace not in strife. If they will not accept what you have to say, don’t keep casting it before them. It will make them angry, you angry and the Lord will mourn the division. It’s just not worth it.

We must also realize that we are caught in the trap of judging when we argue interpretations of the Bible. To have grounds for an argument you must judge yourself right and your brother wrong. Although that might be the case, we can not be so closed that we will not consider our brother’s point of view. It is arrogant to think that any of us

has the whole truth on any subject. To argue means that you are convinced you do. Better to let the subject alone and continue to consider the matter than to argue the point. Your brother is a Christian as well. He might be deceived, but he also might be seeing another side of the truth. Just because he is unreasonable, don't you be. Let me illustrate this from my own life.

Some years ago God moved me into relationship with a group of people who were not from the stream I was flowing in at the time. This particular stream tends to be very adamant about what they believe and tends to feel that they have a bit more revelation than most everyone else. I was no exception to this, but I had come to a point in my life where I needed the input of some fathers in the faith in order to grow past where I was. I don't believe you just pick fathers. I think God places them in your life if you are willing to receive them. God picked one for me from a group that I thought I disagreed with. The problem was that I fell in love with the people before I realized there might be some areas of contention. I had no choice but to stay with them and learn.

There is a ministers' conference that this particular father in the faith has held once a year for many years, and in 1988 we found ourselves there for the first time. There were brethren from all kinds of backgrounds at this conference. There were many opinions expressed during the times of fellowship after the meetings. In the past when I heard something that disagreed with my doctrinal line, I was quick to defend what I believed and those who taught it to me. In this conference I heard many such things. I could tell by the tone of some voices that to bring up certain names would gender a reaction that would be less than loving on their part. It would have been easy for me to judge them for having a bad attitude and justify my own heated defense. However God spoke very clearly to my heart, "Just keep your mouth shut and listen."

It was not important for me to defend my point of view. If I had I would have caused strife and division and probably would have missed the great things God has done in my life since that time. I still feel my point of view is stronger and more accurate than that of some of those with whom I took exception. For me to press my opinion would be casting pearls before swine. Not that *they* are swine, but Jesus is teaching a principle. They would not be inclined to appreciate what I had to say because for whatever reason their perspective is different from mine. Should I turn away from them? Should I judge them as less spiritually enlightened than I am? Of course not. I just choose not to talk about it with them. I do not respond to their statement even if I think it is wrong. As long as we agree on the important points of salvation we can stay in fellowship and in peace.

As time went on, I found out that in some things I was wrong or immature in *my* perspective and I learned from my brothers. If I had argued my pearls or my holiness with them, I might never have experienced that growth. There are some people I still don't bring up certain topics with and there are others that I have grown strong enough in relationship with that we can discuss our differences. We sometimes still agree to disagree, but we are greatly enriched by the process of debate. When ministry gets together my pastor says, "Just leave any controversial doctrines at the door and let's have fellowship." If we do that, we will find judgment and strife on the decrease and unity, fellowship, and understanding on the increase. Truth can defend itself and revelation will rise to the surface if the love of God prevails in our relationships instead of the need to prove we are right.

Let us continue.

(Matt. 7:7-11 NKJV) ". {8} "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. {9} "Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? {10} "Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? {11} "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

As we consider these verses, again, let's remember the context. Until verse 13 Jesus is addressing the mourning that comes over strife and division. He points out the source of this division as the tendency for judgment in the body of Christ. How, then, does prayer fit into this context? Paul tells us in James 4:1-2

(James 4:1-2 NKJV) Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? {2} You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

Why do we tend to judge one another? Isn't it because we are afraid that we will somehow be less than our brother if we don't challenge what we feel is wrong. It seems quite clear here in James. Wars and fights come because of the lust of the flesh. There are things we want and we feel we have to fight for them. Because of this we judge one another. We feel threatened by one another and strife and division result. None of this is necessary if we realize that we only have to ask for the things we desire.

Jesus tells us to ask, and it will be given to us; seek, and we will find; knock, and it will be opened to us. *Everyone* who asks receives. *Everyone* who seeks finds. *Everyone* who knocks finds an open door. Do you see the emphasis. No one is left out. All we have to do is ask. We have a perfect Father who is not somehow less willing to give us the good things we need than we are as earthly parents. We are not competing for the favor of an earthly father with limited resources. Our heavenly father has more than enough to meet every need of every child. No one has to fear being left out or left behind

for God will not give a poor substitute. He will see to it that you receive the real thing. Bread not a stone, fish not a scorpion. What a wonderful security if we can receive it.

That, however, tends to be the problem. I have found that it is very difficult for most people to really believe these verses. They just can't seem to trust God with their lives. They can't quite rest in the assurance of His goodness. If you can't trust Him, you will have to look out for yourself. I have sought God long and hard for an answer to this problem and the only one I have found is that we must simply begin somewhere, sometime to trust God. The way to learn how, is to do it.

It's kind of like jumping into the deep end of the pool. You can be told how to swim, but in the end you just have to flail around until you discover that you really can do it. Trust is the same way. At first you may step in slowly and cautiously. You will be uncertain and a little afraid. You will want to start out in shallow water so that you can stand up if it doesn't work. You find out quickly that it has to be a certain depth, probably deeper than you are comfortable with, before you can actually swim. Your first attempts will not be pretty. You will probably beat the water and make a lot of waves, but eventually you will notice that you are not sinking. You will discover that you are actually making some headway and eventually that environment that seemed so foreign will become a place of enjoyment. Maybe it's time for you to jump into some deeper waters of trust in God. Don't be afraid. He really is there.

Those who do learn the lesson of real trust in God are free to fellowship with others and not be threatened. When you are secure that God loves and will take care of you, you don't have to judge anyone. You are free to let them be wrong if necessary. You have asked and know that God will answer. You are secure that God is working in your life.

You have no need to prove yourself or your opinion. You are free to risk loving the one you disagree with because you know that you will not be lessened if you accept him. After all God is your Father, you have placed your life in his hands and he will see to it that you are well taken care of. No fights, no wars, no murder of character. Just sweet fellowship in the family of God. Praise the Lord!

Finally verse 12.

(Matt. 7:12 NKJV) **Therefore**, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The bold type is mine to remind us that this statement is the culmination of what he has said to this point. He is summing up and closing this particular idea. Judgment will cease and strife will end if we will simply treat others the way we want to be treated ourselves. If we will consider the position and the feelings of others, there will be less contention among us. This sums up all of the Law and the Prophets. Wow. That's quite a statement to make. If Jesus had not said it, I would not believe it. I am praying that the next time any of us judges, this scripture will rise up like a red flag in our thinking. If it does we will be on the way to a new era in the Body of Christ.

(Matt. 5:4 NKJV) Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Remember that these are the building blocks upon which the foundation of our spiritual house must rest. We must make this an everyday part of our motivation in dealing with our brethren. It is not something we can take or leave if we want a house that will withstand the storms. We must mourn over that which God mourns and true mourning involves repentance. For those who take up this mourning there will be great comfort. The comfort of knowing that you are contributing to the restoration of the Church Jesus died to establish. Your house will be full of peace and even when your

brother disagrees or attacks you, you will have the comfort of God. You will know the provision of the Heavenly Father and your house will stand.

## CHAPTER 10

### Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

(Mat 5:3 NKJV) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

#### (Authors dramatization)

*In coming to the close of His message, Jesus marveled at how humanity could understand life in such a different way than He did. To them God was a distant ruler giving them laws to live by but not directly involved in their personal lives. This made it difficult for them to understand how to fulfill what He would teach them next.*

*He knew God, and life, in a very different way. He understood life to be lived in utter dependence on the daily touch of the Father's hand. He said what He heard His Father say. He did what He saw His Father do. He needed the presence of God as He needed food. Prayer was as vital to Him as air to breathe. They could not know this, and so could not fully understand what he would say to them. The day would come, after His ministry on earth was done, when it would be available to them. Still only a relative few would see it and enter in. This saddened Him more than the suffering He faced.*

The poor in spirit and the meek are closely related. In both cases there is a turning away from dependence on flesh and a recognition that God is the source of all things. There is, I believe, an important difference between the two. Whereas meekness is turning away from self-sufficiency, the idea of being poor in spirit is to recognize one's

utter need for God. It is not that we are to walk around feeling we have no worth but it is knowing that all of our worth comes from Him and not self. I need Him in my ministry. I need Him in my relationships. I need Him to overcome sin. I need Him in every aspect of my life or I can not succeed. This should not be seen as at odds with the teachings of a confident faith and an overcoming Christianity. I *am* more than a conqueror, but it is through Him. I *can* overcome the world, but it is because He is greater in me than Satan is in the world. I *can* do all things, but it is through Christ who strengthens me.

On the surface no Christian would disagree with me, but this is far from a surface idea. This is something that must be felt at the depth of our heart. It is something that I can not really explain. If you have not come to this place you may well accept what I say and believe you have it, but in reality have no idea what it really means. I pray that the anointing will break the yoke and lead all of us into a deeper experience of being “poor in spirit.”

I believe that being “poor in spirit” is the same as “being broken” before God. There was a time when this phrase irritated me. I was a faith man. I was confident in God and I believed that I needed to be built up not broken down. I could not reconcile the scriptures like those I alluded to above with this word “broken”. That, of course, is until it happened to me.

I began in the ministry and found the teachings on a positive faith in God at the same time. I spent the first five years of full-time ministry working under another brother. Shortly before my 30th birthday I found myself in charge of the ministry for which I had been working. When I took over I was confident I could do the job. I said all the right things, and honestly gave glory to God for the fruit, but there was a part of me

that felt being in charge was long overdue. Many people liked my preaching and teaching. They shared how much they got out of what I had to say. I was a strong leader who knew where he was going and expected to get there. I was a man of faith who would take hold of the Word of God and change whatever situation opposed the purpose of God in our ministry. I was a spiritual legend in the making - at least in my own eyes.

In truth it was not quite that bad. I really did know that all good things came from God and that God was the source and the one due all Glory. I knew it in my mind and believed it in my heart but underneath I also believed in myself and the wisdom of God's choosing me. I do not think I was arrogant per se, but I was not broken.

The nature of my ministry at that time was one that focused on principle and teachings more than on people. I had little patience for those who could not see what I saw and no ability to see other points of view. I felt for people deeply but my solutions were entirely in what the Word said. I did not *feel* what it meant. I did not feel God's compassion and longing for people. In a real way I understood the letter of the Word but not the spirit of it. This is not to compromise the absolute truth of the Word of God. This is not to say that one should not stand on what it says. It is just that there is a dimension of Christianity that must be felt to be known. Experienced to be understood. I did not have that element. There were those who tried to tell me this but for the life of me I could not understand it. It made no sense to me until February of 1988.

I had started a church in the city where I was living and everything began quite well. My gifts were strong enough to get things going and begin to draw a following. We were a church with a vision, good teaching, and a measure of the presence of God in our services. For a while this intangible element that I lacked was not a factor. After

some time, however, it began to show in my dealing with those who were working close to me. My leadership, which I thought was so strong, began to be suspect. Increasingly I did not seem to know what to do. I leaned on others to help me and when they could not, things began to break down. I had come face to face with my inadequacy, but I did not readily see it as that. If only the others would get in line it would all be fine. They would not and the time came when I had to leave or I would have surely died and the ministry with me.

It was at this time, as I contemplated leaving, that I come into relationship with the man who is now my pastor. I was praying about my options and was advised by a friend to go and visit this brother. He was very gracious and shared with me about the conference they held every winter.; the same conference I alluded to earlier in this book. I had decided to travel full-time and he said this would be a good place to meet other ministers from around the country. I now know that he and the Holy Spirit had a much different idea.

At this conference as the speaker brought a series on Godliness, and as he taught I experienced being broken before God. I was brought face to face with failure. It was my fault not everyone else's. The problem was that I had not been convinced of my utter need of God. I knew I needed him, but this was different. I was convinced of it now. It was deep in my heart. I needed him. No matter how strong my gifts might be, I needed him. Even if I was called, I needed him. It was a revelation that came with many tears. It seemed God was putting his finger on every inadequacy in my life but I did not mind. It was a beautiful pain that brought deliverance, not from a demon but from self. I found myself leaving poor in spirit but enriched beyond belief.

I now see those four days as a defining moment in my life and yet I still can not really say what happened to me. I was more confident than ever and yet not in myself. I still believed that I would be successful, but not because of my gifts. I still believed and stood on the Word of God, but now it was not because of a formula, but because I knew my need of the One who *said* the Word. In knowing my need of Him, I also knew He would always be there for me. If He did not abandon me in my arrogance and failure, He never would. What a freedom this produced to succeed.

We will now look at the corresponding section of Jesus' magnificent sermon.

(Mat 7:13-14 NKJV) "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. {14} "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Here the Lord begins to point out the difficulty and unpopularity of the lifestyle that leads to being poor in spirit. The problem with living God's way is that there are no shortcuts. For the most part we in American society are committed to the road of least resistance. We depend more and more on labor saving devices, and fast food. We make entertainment and leisure a god. Personal comfort is more important to us than any kind of sacrifice. It seems indicative that the thing we work and save for is the ability to stop working as early in life as possible and still have enough money to satisfy our desire for diversion. I think we all might need to re-evaluate the word *work*.

God did not create man to be unproductive. Man is happiest when he is doing not just being. When he is conquering, not just spending time. God placed man in the Garden of Eden and told him to *keep* it. This implied to work and protect it from the evil one. Our current leisure mentality is part of what is attacking our society. It is

diminishing our productivity and causing us to settle for mediocrity in every area of life. When we consider that to be poor in spirit is to be broken before God, it is obvious that in our society it is indeed a little traveled road.

The wide gate is taken by those who trust in their talents. They want the promises of the Word of God but have never come face to face with the God of the promises. They are saved and may indeed love God, but they lack the intangible something that will set them apart and make them truly successful.

Those who go in by the wide gate are susceptible to compromise. They may argue that we need to stay in touch with the times. This is not a totally false idea as what would reach people in the past may not be effective today. It is also true that we need to be in tune with the move of God for today and not pine about what God did in the past. The problem comes when we start to question those things that are timeless. Holiness fits any era. Right living never goes out of style with God. Integrity and principle will always be the way to do the business of the Kingdom of God. Those that take the easy way will invariably find opportunity to compromise these standards in the name of success. They will find that there is no such success in the kingdom.

The road to success in the world can be to undercut, advertise, and get *in* with the right people. Step on whomever you can as long as it means you get to the top. Take whatever is given to you and don't ask any questions. Make money and it's acquisition your primary goal in life, keeping both family and friends in a secondary position. Look out for number one and you will be successful.

The road to success in God's kingdom, whether public or private is much different and much more narrow. To be successful you must be faithful over the long haul. You

must be loyal to those with whom you have relationship. Your integrity must be unquestioned. You must give attention and priority to your family. You must be willing to objectively look at yourself and allow God to make the changes necessary.

You must spend time with God and His word. You must be willing to give service in the house of the Lord. The most successful among us must be the servant of all. You must come to the place where you recognize that there is no area of life, not ministry, not relationship, not the overcoming of sin, that you can successfully negotiate without daily help from God Himself. This is a narrow road and even among those who are born again few seem to be willing to find it.

I know people who have been saved for years. Their lives are fine to a point but they never really enter into the fullness of God. They never seem to want to be involved in the work of God. They are very busy in the world but they never really come to a place of understanding what God has for them. They are Christians but they never rise above mediocre. Some become successful financially or positionally but there will always be some area of lack, be it marriage, family or just general unhappiness. They never fulfill *God's* purpose in their lives. For a Christian nothing could be sadder.

(Mat 7:15-20 NKJV) "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. {16} "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? {17} "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. {18} "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. {19} "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. {20} "Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

As Jesus continues, we begin to see a downward progression here. Those who are not poor in spirit, who do not enter the narrow gate will to some extent be "false prophets". Jesus is teaching us here to be cautious about whom we trust. Not everyone

who seems to have a successful ministry has gained their success from God. We tend to look at size or fame as a mark that God is with someone. Certainly, He may well be, but there are those among us who gained their size and fame by means that had nothing to do with the blessing or anointing of God.

In using the term “ravenous wolves” we tend to think Jesus is talking about those who are not truly saved, and I am sure this is part of what he means. I think there can be wolves among us who are saved but deceived as to the working of God’s kingdom. Indeed I think that we need to examine the fruit of anyone that we follow. We need to ask about integrity and attitudes not just about gifts and talents. We need to ask if the person practices what he teaches or just uses the Word to gain control over others. What kind of development is there in the lives of those who follow him. How is his humility, his kindness, his servanthood? These things tell more about a person than the size of the church or the number of TV stations or even the number of miracles in his ministry, but they are usually overlooked.

In verses 16-20 Jesus points out that it is impossible for a bad tree to bear good fruit. No matter what it may look like on the surface, if the tree is bad the fruit will be bad. It may be big fruit but it will be rotten inside. It may be small fruit but it will still be rotten. We must remember that smallness is no guarantee of a “poor in spirit” leader either. The key is the *quality* not the quantity of the fruit. It is also the quality of the private life not the public life that counts.

It seems extreme to call anyone who may actually be saved a wolf in sheep’s clothing, but I think we have to understand the nature of the problems that occur when people are not poor in spirit. These people become false prophets because they depend

on self not on God. They have a personal agenda and will develop organizations and machinery to promote that agenda. They will project a point of view instead of the Word of God. This is dangerous and causes many in the Body of Christ to fall. Being “poor in spirit” is not an option for leaders in the Church and we must not be afraid do request that those we follow have these characteristics.

So far we have been discussing leaders in the church, but I believe this scripture is really speaking to all of us. As I think about it I have to wonder how often I promote an opinion or point of view over the Word. I have to examine the fruit in my own life. If I am producing bad fruit I must conclude that there is a problem with the tree. It does no good to look around and find something else or *someone* else to blame. Jesus gives us a key to help and not hurt us. That key is to judge my tree by my fruit. If indeed I have a “tree” problem I must examine that area in my life and see if I am really poor in spirit. Am I depending on my gifts, my money, my personality, my intellect or any other natural thing or am I depending on God? Am I aware that I can never overcome without God’s help?

To the degree that we do not depend on God for help we will have bad fruit. What is the fruit of how I affect those around me? Are they closer or farther away from God because of my influence? What about my family? Do I love and promote my spouse or is he or she viewed as just part of the furniture, or worse, as a hindrance? Am I looking to serve them or always expecting them to serve me? The same goes for my children. Are they growing in God because of my example or is my parenting making it more difficult for them to receive the Fatherhood of God in their lives?

What about my private life? How is my language when no one else can hear? Do I compromise my integrity? Is the fruit of a repentant heart in my life? Virtue can be defined as a lifestyle that leads one away from sin. Am I virtuous? None of these are easy questions but they are some of what we must ask if we are to allow God to bring us to the place of being truly poor in spirit. Jesus said we would know them, meaning false prophets, by their fruit. I submit that sometimes "*them*" can mean *me*. We must examine our own fruit and ask God to help us be truly poor in spirit.

The progression continues with Jesus' next words.

(Matt. 7:21-23 NKJV) "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. {22} "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' {23} "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

It is interesting to note here how Jesus teaches that it is not the one who cries "Lord, Lord" but he who does the will of God that will enter the kingdom of Heaven. He then points out that casting out demons and working wonders in His name is not considered doing His *will*. We might add preaching, teaching and evangelism to the list. The message is clear that doing the will of God is not just determined by your actions but what heart those actions proceed from. Jesus says to these workers, "I never knew you, depart from me you who practice lawlessness." The Amplified Bible says, "You who ignore my commands." They did the works he commanded but did not know *Him*. Therefore they could never really keep his commands.

The man or woman who does not have that sense of need for God often does the right things. He will give his talent and resources to do the work of the Lord but he will

not have that basic understanding of why these works are done. His or her motivations will be out of line with the *heart* of God therefore he will not really be doing the *will* of God. The believer who is truly “poor in spirit” will have both his actions and his motivations in proper perspective. He will use his gifts and abilities to their full extent, but he will realize at the core of his being that without God all will be for nothing. An outstanding example of this is Moses and his dealings with the children of Israel.

(Ex. 33:14-18 NKJV) And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." {15} Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. {16} "For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth." {17} So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name." {18} And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

The people of Israel had become so rebellious that God simply could not risk the manifestation of His presence being in the midst of them. Because of Moses' intercession God was going to allow the people to go into the promised land. He fully intended to give them victory with divine intervention but the manifestation of His presence would not be with them. In essence *He* would not be with them. This situation is intolerable to Moses.

He says, “God how will I take them up without you.” It seems clear to me that since God had said they should go they would be successful. They had the Word on it and for most of us that would be enough. Moses was, however, profoundly poor in spirit. “How”, he asks, “will the rest of the world know we are different just by our success? They will only know that we are God’s people if we have both success *and* God’s presence. He wanted to succeed for the right reasons and in the right way. Anything less would be nothing more than what the world could have. Without God’s presence Israel

and the nations Israel would defeat could say it was because of Israel's strength or Moses' leadership that they had victory. Moses wanted the world to know what he was convinced of in his own heart. Without God neither Israel nor Moses was anything. To me his words are both poignant and powerful. "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here."

For most of us success is enough. For the "poor in spirit" it is not. The poor in spirit says, "If I can't have your presence than don't make me prosper, don't heal me, don't bless me. Give me your presence in my life above everything else." This was the heart of Moses. In the end God grants Moses' desire. We must learn that becoming poor in spirit and rejecting blessing in favor of the presence and approval of God Himself will always result in ultimate success. Israel would have the promised land and the presence of God as well. The poor in spirit will have the blessings of God as he grows in the ways of God.

Moses makes one more request that is, to me, a mark of the poor in spirit. "Please, show me Your glory." The poor in spirit want to see the glory of God. God once asked a minister, "Are you willing to change the world and have no one know it?" What a question! Do you want to see God's glory or your own? Which is more important, God's glory or your need met? Would you rather have a manifestation of the glory of God or prosperity? Are you and I truly poor in spirit? I cannot answer for you.

(Mat 5:3 NKJV) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Did you notice that the reward for the poor in spirit is the same as that for those persecuted for righteousness sake? In both cases "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Those that are persecuted for righteousness sake are blessed by knowing their heavenly

citizenship. Those that are poor in spirit are able to live in that citizenship. They are truly able to partake of the benefits of the kingdom of Heaven. They are able to walk in the fullness of the blessings of God because they are aware of their need for God.

As I have already stated, this is a very difficult idea to communicate to those who do not yet possess this quality. By saying this I do not mean to imply that I have “arrived” at being fully poor in spirit. I have a long way to go and there are many areas in which I am nothing of the kind. What I do have is a beginning of this experience in my life. I have come face to face with my own failure. I have used my gifts and callings only to find them insufficient in themselves. I have begun to be convinced of my utter need for God in every area of life.

Let us continue to examine our fruit and our motives so that we may grow in this truth. Let us continue to make sure that we are not just crying “Lord, Lord” but are really doing the will of God by doing our work God’s way. Let us continue to be wary of the wide road of compromise that will always lead to destruction. Let us make this saying of Jesus a major building block in our house of faith.

# CHAPTER 11

## Build Upon the Rock

(Mat 7:24-29 NKJV) "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: {25} "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. {26} "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: {27} "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." {28} And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, {29} for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

As we come to the end of this study of Jesus' most famous sermon, it should be noted that what I have shared is by no means meant to be the sum total of knowledge on this topic. There are other teachings that I have heard which bring different things to light. When Jesus teaches there is always more to it than any one individual can expound upon. We should evaluate all teachings on the basis of the Word and as one brother said, "Eat the hay and spit out the stubble." I have certainly tried not to include any stubble, but humanity being what it is I am sure there is some. Feel free to spit it out if you find it.

I do know that the *principles* set down in this book are scripturally accurate and I am convinced are an accurate representation of the sayings Jesus is referring to as he closes His message in the above section of scripture. If we are going to grow and be successful through the inevitable storms of life, our houses must be built on these sayings in particular. As we have finished looking at them, it is important for you to read these three chapters again for yourself. See if these building blocks are in place in your

foundation. If they are not, and I am sure we all could use some work, take one at a time and make the changes necessary to get them there. Remember, you can never change everything all at once but start at the beginning and do not stop until you reach the end.

As I pointed out in the first chapter, we have a tremendous promise at our disposal if we live according to these sayings. *Our house will not fall!* Storms will come because they come to everyone, but the house built on the rock will not fall. Sometimes it may be hard to see how some of these things relate to our house standing in a storm but they do. It is a promise from the mouth of Jesus. Build on these sayings and nothing can cause your house, personal or corporate, to fall.

Let me take a moment and summarize using a chart.

(Mat 5:3 NKJV) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Those who through an experience of being "broken" before God, are in their deepest being convinced of their need for him. They will walk in the fullness of the benefits of the Kingdom of God
(Mat 5:4 NKJV) Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.	Blessed are those who mourn for the condition of the Body of Christ and are willing to come to repentance to change it
(Mat 5:5 NKJV) Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.	Those who are not self-sufficient or self assertive, but who simply depend on God and His goodness. They will ultimately see success even in this life.
(Mat 5:6 NKJV) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.	Those who hunger for God's purposes and not for recognition. They will be filled with doing God's will for the right reasons and in the right way
(Mat 5:7 NKJV) Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.	Those who look beyond the behavior of a person, especially the sinner, and see the need. They will see God do the same for them.

(Mat 5:8 NKJV) Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.	Those who go beyond the outward holiness of the Pharisees and do what's right after a pure <i>heart</i> . They shall see God moving in and involved with their lives.
(Mat 5:9 NKJV) Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.	Not those who make peace <i>among</i> men but those who give themselves to make peace <i>between</i> God and man. They receive the highest honor of being called the sons of God because they are active in the Father's business.
(Mat 5:10 NKJV) Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven	Those who understand that whatever happens in this present world is only temporary and therefore can be endured. They draw on the reality of their heavenly citizenship and it's power.

May each of us truly search our hearts and make these wonderful sayings of Jesus a part of our everyday motivation. This takes reading and meditation on these truths until the mirror of God's Word produces the necessary changes in our lives to conform us to "these sayings of Mine."