

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER NINE

MATTHEW 5:3-12

IN considering the first two verses of this chapter, we dwelt upon the fact that the ultimate purpose in the mind of the King was that of bringing the multitudes into the Kingdom of God; but that in order to do so it was necessary for Him to gather round Him a nucleus of such as were actually submitted to His Kingship, in order to unfold to them the meaning of that Kingdom by an enunciation of its laws.

Perhaps the best name for this enunciation is that given to it by Dr. Oswald Dykes, "*The Manifesto of the King*." That exactly expresses the truth concerning the nature of this great utterance of law.

In these opening Beatitudes, the King revealed the truth concerning the essential nature of His Kingdom, as He made plain this one, simple, and all-inclusive fact, that the Kingdom of Heaven has first of all to do with character.

How strange these words of Jesus must have sounded in the ears of His disciples, if, peradventure, they were expecting Him to give them a Manifesto of the Kingdom.

They had heard the herald say, "**The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Repent.**" They had heard Jesus say, "**Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand,**" but in all probability so far they only looked upon Him as another teacher, preparing the way, and leading them on toward the coming King.

But, supposing for a single moment, that they understood the fact that He was indeed God's anointed King, and supposing that in their submission to Him there was an intelligent submission to the Kingdom of God, focused, and manifested, and demonstrated in a Person; then if they had climbed that mountain to listen to Him as King, they must have been strangely startled with His first words.

There is not a word in these Beatitudes which appears to have anything to do with a kingdom, according to popular conceptions of what kingdoms are, and in what the greatness of kingdoms consists. Human ideas of a kingdom gather round thoughts of race power, of military prowess, of material pomp. Even to-day we hear people, largely void of the Christian spirit, boasting of such things, imagining that greatness consists in armaments.

Our ideals of a kingdom are still somehow strangely mixed with trust in military prowess. But they are false ideals if we understand the deep meaning of righteousness. We still think of pomp, and glitter, and tinsel, as signs of greatness. Our ideas of a kingdom are still very much what they were in olden days. Slowly, very slowly, there is dawning on the common consciousness of man the conception that national greatness is the greatness of character.

This, however, forms the first stage in the teaching of the Manifesto of God's great King. Both in His Person, and in His teaching, He ignored popular conceptions concerning the ideas of government, and, by ignoring, denied them.

When He ascended the mountain it was with no fanfare of trumpets, with no pomp, and no pageantry. This King, sublime in the simplicity of His Manhood, ascended a mountain, gathered around Him a few loyal souls, who did not perfectly understand Him, and taught them that nothing is of greater importance than the making of character. Thus He taught them; and the first things He said were the fundamental things of the Kingdom; but there is not a word about race power, or military prowess, or material pomp, from beginning to end. Let us, then, consider the words; and in doing so, we will attempt first of all to indicate the general principles; and then we will endeavor to see the particular revelation of character granted.

In looking at the general principles, we notice the first word that fell from the lips of the King when He commenced the enunciation of the laws of the Kingdom:

“Blessed”

This word reveals God's will for man, and so reveals the purpose of the King in the establishment of His Kingdom. How strange a thing, and yet how gracious a thing it is! The word in the language of that day is translated in our Authorized Version as **“blessed”** forty-three times, and as **“happy”** six times.

There is no doubt that the finer and fuller word is **“blessed,”** always providing we understand it in its true meaning, as indicating *a consciousness and a condition, rather than as referring to bestowment from without.* It is true that the blessing is bestowed, but the word **“blessed”** here, refers to a condition, and therefore to a consciousness. The word **“happy”** more easily suggests the simple thought of the Greek word in its common use. **“Blessed”** is correct if we understand it in the sense in which we use it of God in the phrase **“The glorious Gospel of the blessed God.”** Yet that word, with equal accuracy, and perhaps with a fine sense of its deepest meaning, it is the Gospel of the glory of our *happy* God.”

“Blessed” is therefore a condition - such a condition as to create a consciousness, which is the consciousness of a perfect peace, and a perfect joy, and a perfect rest. All these things are included in the condition of Happiness!

That is God's will for man. That is the Divine intention for human life. Sorrow and sighing are to flee away; He will wipe away all tears. Happiness and joy are never to flee away; He will never banish merriment and laughter.

So, a happy word is the first word of the Manifesto. It is a word full of sunshine, thrilling with music, brimming over with just what man is seeking after in a thousand false ways. The Manifesto is not formal and documentary. It does not begin "Whereas," but speaks of happiness. That was the first word of the King as He sat upon the mountain, surrounded by His disciples. But ah! His own heart was unhappy, wrung with a great anguish, moved with an infinite compassion. But why His sorrow, why His unhappiness, why the melting, moving, thrilling compassion? Because He saw all the tragedy of human sorrow. From the center of that sorrow He spoke of being happy; and thus revealed the Divine purpose for men.

Then we notice that happiness is declared by the King to depend, not on doing, not on possessing, but on being.

- **"Blessed are the poor."**
- **"Blessed are they that mourn."**
- **"Blessed are the meek."**
- **"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst."**
- **"Blessed are the merciful."**
- **"Blessed are the pure in heart."**
- **"Blessed are the peacemakers."**

Not a single word about doing or possessing. It is what a man is that matters. An evangelical value runs through these "Blesseds;" for the King declared happiness for such as, through sin, lack true happiness.

"The poor in spirit."

Apart from the King's Beatitude, this is the description of a condition which popular conception looks upon as unhappy. "**Poor**" is a word which does not suggest happiness. "**Poor**" means lack, lack means sorrow; and yet the King said, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit.**"

That is the recognition of a lack, but it is also a recognition of something that supplies the lack; and so sounding through the Manifesto we hear the music of the great evangel. There was in the mind of the King the consciousness of a great need, a great provision, and the possibility of a great result.

Once again, notice the peculiar form of the Beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven," "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted," and so throughout.

"Blessed are . . . for." Character creates conditions which result in happiness.

Take the first, by way of illustration. Poverty of spirit results in realization of the Kingdom of God. That is happiness. Jesus does not say that the Kingdom shall be given to the man that is poor in spirit. He does not say that if a man is poor in spirit, He will give him the Kingdom to make him happy. The poor in spirit is happy because he has the Kingdom of God.

The happiness of the Kingdom is a natural sequence, not an arbitrary reward.

The King does not bestow gifts to make men happy. He creates a condition within the man, which enables him to find happiness everywhere. He does not create happiness by new surroundings. He creates new surroundings by happiness. He takes a man and makes him happy by reason of his character, and then immediately this man puts his hand on everything that lies about him, changing his environment by himself being changed. Happiness begins within the man, never without.

There are thousands of illustrations of this to-day. Someone stands outside certain circumstances of life, saying; Oh, if only I were in those circumstances I would be happy. The King does not begin there.

“**Blessed**” is a condition consequent upon character. Happiness has its root, not in outward circumstances, but in inward condition of character. But in order that these things may be more clearly revealed, let us pass to a particular examination of the particular character in the Kingdom which the King revealed.

First, let us take the characteristics, remembering that a characteristic is always a smaller matter than a character. Character is the sum and substance of characteristics. It is very difficult to describe a character. Character may defy our perfect analysis. It does not defy the perfect analysis of the King. He thus described the characteristics.

Poor in spirit; they that mourn; the meek; they that hunger and thirst; the merciful; the pure in heart; the peacemakers. These are the characteristics that go to make the perfect character, upon which the Kingdom of God is to be based.

There are two sets of characteristics in the seven Beatitudes.

The eighth, which is a double Beatitude, has to do with the process and not with the character. But in the first seven you have a set of four which are passive, and a set of three which are active.

The poor in spirit; the mourners; the meek; they that hunger and thirst; these are the passive characteristics of the character. Merciful; pure and pure here means infinitely more than clean, it means undivided, wholehearted peacemakers; these are the active qualities in character.

Let us consider the passive characteristics.

“**Poor in spirit.**”

It means truly subject. The man who is poor in spirit is the man who is willing to be governed. The man who is not poor in spirit is rebellious, troublesome, creating discord within the Kingdom. This is the first thing. It is very simple! It is very sublime!

- If this life of mine is willing to be ruled, it is ruled.
- If this life of mine is willing to be governed, it is governed.

If I will but take this life of mine and surrender it wholly to the King, the King will take charge of it and administer it, and I shall be in myself, when everyone else is excluded, a Kingdom of God; and I shall be in myself, when all others are included, a part of the Kingdom of God.

“Poor in spirit” - theirs is the Kingdom of God.

We never know the breadth and beauty and beneficence of God’s humanity by looking at it from without. The poor in spirit are those in whom the pride of the will, and the pride of the intellect, and the pride of the heart, are alike bent to the royalty of the King. We obtain the Kingdom when we submit in poverty of spirit to the King.

But again, **“They that mourn.”**

And here the evangelistic value is at once manifest. The first matter is initial. The man poor in spirit is so because he has learned his own incompetence, his own unworthiness; because he is conscious of his own failure, conscious that he cannot of himself take hold upon all the ideals that are being represented to him by the King.

This man mourns over his own sin, over his own failure. This is the mourning intended. Jesus says, **“They shall be comforted.”**

The great word **“comforted”** is related to the word that Jesus used when He promised the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Comforter disannuls orphanage, takes hold of a man in his sorrow and assuages it, heals it.

The poor in spirit, submitting to the Throne, and to the government of the King, is troubled immediately; he mourns over sin, and incompetence, and failure. That soul is comforted with the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the very life and soul of the Kingdom.

“Blessed are the meek”

The meek are those who are obedient to the rule of the King; meekness is the submissive spirit, the spirit of true humility, which is unconscious of humility; the spirit that rejoices in the Kingdom already established, on account of the comfort already given, and waits for orders, and does not obtrude itself.

As we read these words, **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,”** we seem to hear those other words, **“Come unto Me . . . for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”**

The men, poor in spirit, mourning over failure, comforted by the One great Comforter, are meek; and **“they shall inherit the earth,”** for they have partaken of the very spirit of the King Himself.

And yet again. **“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness.”**

This seems to be a retrogression, a going back. But it is a progression, a going forward. Who is the man that hungers and thirsts after righteousness but the man who himself is meek and possesses the earth, who has mourned and has been comforted, who is poor in spirit and has submitted to rule?

What is hunger and thirst after righteousness? It is Divine discontent with everything unlike God. Do not make this a small and narrow personal experience. It is that, but it is infinitely more. It is the passion for the setting up of the Kingdom of God amongst men. It is the thing that makes you - if you are a Christly soul - hot, and restless, and angry, and discontented, in the presence of all the maladministration of the affairs of men, which results in the ruin and sorrow of men on every hand.

“They which do hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . shall be filled,” they shall feel satisfied, there shall come to such all that for which they hunger and thirst.

Perchance not to-day, perchance not to-morrow;

“The fog’s on the world to-day,
It will be on the world to-morrow;
Not all the strength of the sun
Can drive his bright spears thorough.

“Yesterday and to-day
Have been heavy with care and sorrow;
I should faint if I did not see
The day that is after to-morrow.

“The cause of the peoples I serve
To-day, in impatience and sorrow,
Once more is defeated but yet,
‘Twill be won the day after to-morrow.

“And for me with spirit elate,
The mire and the fog I press thorough;
For heaven shines under the cloud
Of the day that is after to-morrow.”

These, then, are the passive characteristics of the character of the Kingdom; poverty of spirit, which submits to government and possesses the Kingdom; mourning over declension, which is comforted with the great comfort of God; meekness which is unconscious humility and willingness to submit, which possesses the earth; hunger and thirst after righteousness a great passion for the Kingdom of God, which is filled in hope and at last shall be filled in actual realization.

Then immediately the characteristics pass from the passive into the active.

“The merciful.”

That is, those who give and those who serve. It is the activity of life toward the suffering.
“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

“Pure in heart.”

And here, as has been already noticed, we have more than cleanness; we have wholeness, the undivided heart, the heart that is utterly and absolutely loyal. This is the expression toward the King of the mercifulness described. **“They shall see God.”**

And this again merges into yet another description **“The peacemakers.”**

This is the propagative character, the man who, being all the rest, therefore brings peace wherever he comes. And the great word concerning the peacemakers is, **“They shall be called the children of God,”** for in that they manifest the nature of the Father and the likeness of the Father more than in anything else making peace among the sons of men.

This description of character is a growth. Poverty of spirit issues in mourning for sin, and the twofold primary condition is answered by the Kingdom bestowed, and comfort given. Then meekness of spirit is submission to the will of God. Hunger and thirst evidence passion for the will of God, and the twofold answer to those who have submitted to His will in meekness is a present contentment. **“They shall inherit the earth;”** and to those in whom there burns the passion for the final setting up of His Kingdom, and the accomplishment of His will, there is a promise of the ultimate satisfaction **“They shall be filled.”**

Then upon the basis of that growth there follow the virtues of Christian life.

- Mercifulness indicating service;
- Purity of heart indicating the inward condition;
- Peacemaking indicating the effect produced on others.

Then crowning all, there is the great Beatitude which illuminates the process of pain, and suffering, and persecution, through which men pass into this great character. This is not merely a growth, it is a unity. We can take any one of the rewards and use it after any one of the conditions, and find no lack of harmony.

We may say:

- **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall be comforted.”** It is perfectly true.
- **“Blessed are the merciful, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”** That is equally correct.
- **“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall inherit the earth.”** That is a great philosophy.
- **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall be satisfied.”** That is equally true.

We may transpose all these answers of happiness to all these conditions. The King gave us an analysis of one character rather than a description of different characters.

All these virtues and values are to be found in the one type of character which lies at the foundation of this Kingdom.

And yet that must not be misunderstood, for there is a great sequence. Experimentally no man enters into any of these, save in the order indicated.

- First, the poverty of spirit, which ends rebellion, and, submissive to the King, kisses His sceptre;
- Then the mourning that follows;
- Then the meekness that ensues;
- Then the passion that flames;
- Then the service that is merciful;
- Then the purity of heart that enables a man to see God; and
- Then the great, sweet, strong, influence of peace, and man becomes a peacemaker.

The proportion in which men realize this character is the proportion in which they realize happiness. But the realization of such character in the midst of all the conditions of worldly life which are contradictory to that character, will stir up opposition. How correct a picture of worldly life we have in this passage if before each promise or blessing the word not were added! Theirs is not the Kingdom of Heaven; they are not comforted; they shall not inherit the earth; they shall be hungry and thirsty, yet they shall not be filled; their hearts are corrupt, they cannot see God.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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