

Hero of Heroes: Seeing Christ in the Beatitudes by Iain M. Duguid
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selected by Doug Nichols)

Introduction: The Christian Hero

1. Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5-7, the portion of Matthew's gospel that is often called the Sermon on the Mount,... This section of the Bible has sometimes been described as the "manifesto of God's kingdom." In it, Jesus spells out the attitudes that are to shape us as Christians. It is not intended to be a set of rules and regulations with which to measure ourselves and others to see whether we are good enough to be in the kingdom. Rather, as those who have been brought into God's kingdom, it is a call to our hearts and to our minds to be shaped by the reality of who we are as Christians. [Page 2]

2. The Beatitudes. Jesus starts his kingdom manifesto by describing the Christian hero (Matt. 5:1-13). In these verses, which are sometimes called the "Beatitudes" because they all start with the word "Blessed," Jesus paints a word picture of the person we are to envy. That's really what the word "blessed" means: it means that this is the kind of person we are to envy. This is the kind of person we are to be like. [Pages 2-3]

3. Longing to be a Different Kind of Person. Jesus challenges our dreams and desires. He wants us to long to be a different kind of person. He doesn't want us to spend our time wishing that we were rich, beautiful, talented, and influential, but rather that we were poor in spirit, a mourner, meek, hungry and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, and so on. These are the virtues we are to long to see not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of our children. [Pages 3-4]

4. Eight Attitudes. Jesus lays down eight attitudes that we are to have. These are not tasks we can do and then check off on a little list. They are defining characteristics, heart habits that mark the core of our being. These Beatitudes are the "attitudes" we are to "be." However, Jesus doesn't simply describe for us in abstract terms what a Christian hero ought to look like. His description has power because he himself came and lived out all of these attributes for us. He has shown us in living, breathing flesh what we ought to be, and what a faithful Christian should look like. [Page 4]

5. Only By Grace. By grace, all of these virtues are even now attributed to every Christian's account; by grace, all of these attributes will ultimately be evidenced in our own hearts through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Here we may only make small beginnings toward imitating our perfect model, but thanks be to God that he will not give up on us until every one of his people is a perfect reflection of the Christian hero! [Pages 4-5]

Chapter One: The Poor in Spirit

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, (Matt. 5:3)

6. Beyond Our Own Resources. To be poor in spirit means to know that we don't have any resources within ourselves, and therefore we have to look to God for help and to depend on him. [Page 7]

7. Dependence on God and His Word. God wants us to bear fruit for him-much fruit. He wants to answer our prayers. But that can only happen as we remain in intimate touch with Jesus, dependent on God and his Word. Otherwise we will be about as much good as a branch that has fallen off the vine. And dried-up vine wood is not even good for making toothpicks out of. It is good for nothing except the fire. [Page 11]

8. Jesus' Model of Prayer. ...the Scriptures show us that no one was more dedicated to a life of prayer than Jesus. He got up early to pray on numerous occasions (Luke 5:16). He went away by himself to pray before crucial junctures in his ministry: before choosing the twelve disciples (Luke 4:42), the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28), preparing himself for the cross (Luke 22:39-46). In his prayer life, with its expression of total dependence on God, Jesus was a model of what it means to be poor in spirit. [Pages 12-13]

9. An Attitude of Humility. If we were truly poor in spirit, that would be demonstrated in an attitude of humble self-emptying, of willing to be the servant of all for the sake of the gospel. Does God ask me to give up my wealth? It is no more than he has given up for me! Does God ask me to give up my comfort? It is no more than he has given up for me! Does God ask me to give up my reputation? It is no more than he has given up for me! There is no task too lowly he can assign to me. There are no wages too small, no people too ungrateful or undeserving of my help, when I consider that I am to exhibit the same attitude as Jesus. Instead of our natural tendency to want to lord it over others and to win their praise and admiration, we would be content to do the work God assigns us faithfully, whether or not anyone else notices and applauds. [Pages 14-15]

10. Eternal Rewards. Why should we want to be poor in spirit? Jesus tells us the reason: "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." God's kingdom belongs to such people as these. What more reward could we ask for? God declares that he is willing to be our God, to be our king, to be our shepherd. What a privilege! The Bible says that he himself will dwell with his people, and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 21:3-4). No one who is ushered into his presence on that great day will have to ask himself or herself, "Was it all worthwhile? Was it worth the sacrifices and

suffering?" God's presence will more than convince his people that heaven is worth any cost. [Page 15]

Chapter Two: Those Who Mourn

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (Matt. 5:4)

11. Every Silver Lining Has Its Cloud. In his book *The Silver Chair*, C.S. Lewis described a character called Puddleglum, who was a “Marsh Wiggle,” a half frog-like character who was invariably expecting the worst from life. His motto was to recognize that every silver lining has its cloud. [Page 21]

12. Spiritual Attitudes. ...the whole series of attitudes that Jesus is describing here are spiritual, not natural. He is talking about those who are poor in spirit, not those who are simply poor. He will go on and address those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, not those who are simply hungry and thirsty. So the mourning he is talking about is not ordinary mourning but spiritual mourning. [Page 22]

13. Mourning over Our Own Sin. Spiritual mourning starts with mourning over our own sin. [Page 22]

14. Mourning The Cost of Sin. Christians continue every day of their lives to mourn the fact that they are sinners, that their life doesn't match up to God's standard laid down for us in his Word. As they grow in their faith, they will become more and more aware of how deeply sin touches every area of their lives, and they will mourn more for their sin. They come to realize that they are far more sinful than they ever realized, and so they mourn.

The reason why this awareness causes such mourning is that Christians understand what sin cost-and not just sin in general, but specifically what my sin cost. They know that each and every one of their sins was piled up onto Jesus on the cross. My sin was pounding the nails into his hands; my sin was pressing down the crown of thorns onto his head. My sin was driving his sense of utter abandonment by God. When we realize that, then the knowledge that we sin each and every day-through accident, through not doing the things we ought, and through our own deliberate fault-becomes something we weep over. Christians mourn their own sins and the heart attitude of rebellion from which all of those actual sins arise. [Page 23]

15. Hope through the Cross. ...as we mourn over our sin, we must never be plunged into despair by the fact that we do still sin. We mourn but not as those who have no hope. Even though we are sinners, we have great hope precisely because we see our sins in the light of the cross. Jesus' death was designed to pay for my sin, and indeed for every single one of my sins. They have all been taken care of at Mount Calvary once and for all. So, then, Christians neither take their sins too lightly or too

heavily. Rather, they mourn over their sins, seeing them in the context of the cross.
[Page 24]

16. Mourning the Sin of Others. This is what troubles Christians about the lawlessness in society. It is not simply that lawbreaking makes society a less pleasant place for us all to live. Rather, it is that God's law and his name are not honored as they should be. So the psalmist says, "Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed" (Ps. 119:136). Is that how we typically respond to the sins of others? Do we weep for the fact that God's law has been broken and God's honor has been affronted?
[Page 26]

17. A Challenge: Do We Mourn Over Lives Lost to Sin? How often have we mourned like that over the sins of another, mourning not simply for what that behavior has done to us or to others but for the rebellion against God that such sin expresses? We are quick to lament when we are hurt by the sin of another, or when someone we care about is devastated because of sin. Yet how slow we are to lament and mourn any rebellion against God that doesn't touch us personally! We are ready to judge it or to excuse it, depending on our temperament, but not to mourn the tragedy of a life lived with something other than the living God at its center. [Page 27]

18. Making Our Mourning Count. Do we mourn over that missing center in the lives of those without God? Do we mourn over that absence of meaning? If so, does that mourning affect the way we live our life? Are we putting ourselves out and making ourselves uncomfortable, perhaps even foolish, for the sake of those for whom we mourn? Charles Spurgeon put it with graphic power in these terms:

If sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms around their knees, imploring them to stay. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let not one go there unwarned and unprayed for.¹

Blessed indeed are those who mourn. [Page 28]

1. "The Wailing of Risca," *The New Park Street and Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 7 (1961; reprint, Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim, 1969), 11.

19. Only Temporary. Jesus specifically tells us that we will not be among the mourners eternally: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Mourning is a part of the in-betweenness of our present life. We live in between now and eternity; we are part of God's kingdom now, but we also live in a fallen world. We don't fit here, but neither do we fully experience the blessings of the world to come. But one day we will experience the fullness of the world to come, and then all our mourning will be taken away. On that day, we will be comforted. Therefore, we mourn

in the present, but not as those who have no hope. We mourn rather because we have hope, but we do not yet see what we hope for. [Page 29]

20. God Removes All Our Sin. If we indeed know what it is to mourn over our own sin, to hate the things we find ourselves doing, to hate the coldness of heart that we have toward God, to hate the freedom with which we pile transgression upon transgression onto the shoulders of Jesus, then we will long to be comforted by the complete removal of our sin. [Page 30]

21. God Comforts Those Who Mourn Over Sin. Blessed are those who mourn over their own sin; for they will be comforted: in Jesus, the penalty of their sin is paid for and its power over them canceled.

Blessed are those who mourn over the sins of others, for they will be comforted: they will be granted a place in God's kingdom among God's people, where sin will no longer enter.

Blessed are those who mourn over a lost humanity, for they will be comforted: they will see the full multitude of the Lord's people brought into the kingdom. [Page 34]

Chapter Three: The Meek

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Matt. 5:5)

22. The Meek will inherit the Earth ...when Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth," our society is inclined to laugh at him. It is an old joke to revise the saying to, "The meek will inherit the earth-if that's okay with the rest of you." People laugh at that old joke and find it funny precisely because deep down we believe that meekness is weakness and the weak will always be dispossessed by the strong. [Page 37]

23. Being Shaped by the Right Person ... as Christians, we are not to be shaped by what everyone else thinks. We're not even to be shaped by what we are naturally inclined to think. We are to be shaped by the attitudes that Jesus lays down. [Page 38]

24. Meekness Defined. What is meekness? Meekness has been defined as "a humble and gentle attitude to others based on a true estimate of ourselves."¹ In other words, to be meek we have to know who we really are and then live on the basis of that knowledge. [Page 38]

1. See D. M. Lloyd Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:68-70

25. Freedom from Defensiveness. ...it is one thing for me to say about myself, "I'm not very good at getting things organized." But if someone else comes up and

criticizes my organizational abilities, I still feel like responding in kind. I want to say, "Well, you're not so hot yourself." I get defensive. That's not meekness. The meek person is able to receive criticism, without getting defensive. The meek person is able to say, "You're absolutely right. That's an aspect of my life where I really don't do very well. Would you help me improve in this area?" This freedom from defensiveness characterizes the meek not simply when they are shown their character flaws but even when their sin is pointed out to them. [Page 39]

26. Characteristics of a Meek Person. How can we tell if we are meek and not just weak? [...] We can stand up to wrongdoing and face persecution with boldness. Meek people are tough as well as tender. They have tender consciences to their own weaknesses and faults, and they are quick to admit their own mistakes, but they are also able to be tough in facing up to wrong doing. [...] they hunger and thirst after righteousness. They don't bring out the big guns to defend their own rights and reputations but they will pugnaciously defend the rights and reputations of others, no matter what the opposition. [Page 40]

27. The Love of God. Where does this boldness of the meek come from? It too comes from knowing who they really are. For the meek know that even while they are great sinners, they are loved by an even greater God. Although their own sinfulness boggles their minds, so also does the grace of their wonderful God. Although they are far more wicked in their hearts than they ever dared to imagine, they are also far more deeply loved than they ever dared to hope. [Page 40]

28. The One Opinion That Matters. Now most of us, if we're really honest, would have to admit that we are the exact opposite of meekness. We are quick to stand up for our own rights and reputation and eager for every one to think well of us. At the same time, we are slow, very slow, to put ourselves out for the sake of others or for the sake of God's reputation. We'd much rather hear God's name taken in vain than our own.

The meek, though, have boldness combined with humility. They have the willingness to take on any opposition for the sake of God or others, while at the same time being equally willing to put up with any insult or indignity aimed at themselves. The reason they are able to do so is because they have committed their cause to God. This is the real secret of being meek. If we are meek, we don't care what others think of us. We don't even care what we think of ourselves. We only care what God thinks of us. [Pages 41-42]

29. Jesus' Example of Meekness. Jesus was passionate in his pursuit of righteousness, as passionate about protecting God's honor and the rights of others as he was willing to forgo his own rights. He was bold concerning others, yet humble concerning himself. That's meekness. [Page 43]

30. In Pursuit of a Heavenly Land. One of the things that God promised Abraham back in the book of Genesis was that he would give to his descendants a land to be their very own. Indeed, during the course of Israel's history they actually possessed parts of that land for some of the time. But they never possessed it fully. The fullness of the promise always remained tantalizingly out of reach throughout the Old Testament.

Moses could not give the Promised Land to Israel, nor could Joshua. Even David and Solomon could not deliver the fullness of the promise, great though their empires were. This was God's way of showing Israel that the land that they were to be seeking was something more than a literal slice of the earth. They were pursuing a heavenly land, which they could inherit by faith whether or not they owned a large chunk of real estate in the Middle East. [Page 44]

31. The Wrong Direction. The danger for God's people was always that they would become far more attached to the earth than to the "land," more tied to settling down and owning property than to seeking after God. The danger was that they would become self-sufficient and proud, deeply concerned for their own possessions and reputations but not at all concerned for the poor and needy. In fact, the danger was that they would become the very opposite of meek. [Page 44]

32. This World Is Not Our Home. We are very eager to have a rich, comfortable, easy life, surrounded by the good things this world has to offer. But that is not the way it is to be for Christians. Here on earth we have no enduring city; we are looking for the city that is above, the city that is to come (Heb. 13:14). This world is not our home, and this world's judgment on us is not what counts. What counts is God's judgment on us and the inheritance that God has stored up for us. [Page 45]

33. Only through God's Power. ...the meek will not invade the land. They will not overpower the land. They will not overrun the land because of their great might. They will inherit the land. It is God's gift to them, not the fruit of their own efforts. That is the way it was with Israel's possession of the Promised Land. They won the crucial battles not through their own strength but rather through God's. They had to fight the battles, certainly, but they only won when God fought for them. [Pages 45-46]

34. Never in Our Own Strength. We fight the battles against the sin that we still find inside our own hearts, the sin that we mourn over. We fight the battles against our own pride and self-centeredness. We fight the battles against the sin of others. We fight to protect the weak and those who cannot help themselves. But we do so in the name of the Lord Almighty, not in our own strength. We cannot conquer sin in our own strength, nor defeat injustice. Only what God does in and through us will bring about lasting change. We cannot overrun the land; we can only inherit it. [Page 46]

35. Looking Forward to Our Inheritance. We may make progress against sin, but we will not see it eradicated from our hearts. However hard we labor for the rights and needs of others, we know that the poor and oppressed of the world will be with us always. Here we have no enduring city. We still look forward to the city that is to come, even while we do our best to see the kingdom established here and now. Blessed are the meek, who will indeed inherit the land. [Pages 46-47]

Chapter Four: Those Who Hunger for Righteousness

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

36. An Essential. Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they will be filled.” In other words, Jesus is saying that the Christian’s attitude is to be that righteousness is essential, just as essential as our physical need for food and drink. Jesus is calling us to get fanatical about righteousness. [Page 51]

37. The Need for Righteousness. What Jesus is calling us to see is that as well as physical and emotional needs, we also have spiritual needs that are just as real. Our most basic spiritual need is for righteousness. Therefore, we are to envy those who recognize their spiritual need for righteousness and be like them. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. [Page 52]

38. An Act of Worship. For Christians, righteousness is not simply a matter of doing the right thing; it is a matter of doing the right thing as an act of worship to the Creator God who has revealed himself to us in the Bible. [Page 53]

39. The Focus on God. Many people are proud of their morality, and indeed may be living remarkably upright lives. However, outward morality is not what the Bible calls righteousness, because the driving force behind it is not the worship of God. [Page 54]

40. Being Filled with Our Own Righteousness. If we examine our hearts, we will all find that very often our "righteousness thermometer" registers a sudden upward shift in temperature when people are observing us! We too find ourselves disqualified from the category of the righteous not simply when we are being bad, but even when we are being good, because we are being good to our own glory, not God's. If we are filled with our own righteousness, we cannot be hungering for God's righteousness. We too find ourselves disqualified as surely as the Pharisees were. As the prophet Isaiah summed up our condition,

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. (Isa. 64:6) [Page 55]

41. Righteousness from God. God has provided a vast feast of righteousness from which we are invited to eat. As Paul says in the beginning of his letter to the Romans, "In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last" (Rom. 1:17). Through what Jesus Christ has done we can receive righteousness, perfect righteousness, as a free gift. [Page 56]

42. Our Sin in Exchange for God's Righteousness. The heart of the gospel is a great exchange program: all of our sins can be laid on the shoulders of Jesus on the cross, while his perfect righteousness is given to us. Paul further unpacks this great exchange in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This gift of perfect righteousness in exchange for our sins is received by faith, which simply means by placing all of our trust in what God offers us in Jesus. Through that gift of perfect righteousness, our relationship with God is restored. As we trust in the death of Jesus in our place, for our unrighteousness, we are adopted into God's family, remade into God's friends. [Page 56]

43. Real Righteousness. God wants to develop a new righteousness within us that matches the righteousness that comes from outside us. As we trust in him, therefore, he starts to work in our hearts something entirely new: real righteousness. We start to do things to please him. Indeed, we start to do the right things to please him. We start to ask the question more frequently: "What has God said in his Word about this?" or "What does God want me to do in this situation? I'm going to pray and ask him to show me what to do." In short, we start to develop a hunger and thirst for righteousness. [Pages 56-57]

44. A Longing for God's Presence. Richard Baxter once perceptively commented that the difference between Christians and non-Christians didn't lie in their preference for heaven over hell; every right-minded person would hope to avoid the torments of hell. Rather, the fundamental difference between the two categories lay in the fact that Christians would not only rather have heaven than hell, they would rather have heaven than earth. For here on earth, we only experience holiness in part, and we only experience God's presence in part. Those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness will long to be in the place where that hunger is fully satisfied. [Page 58]

45. The Best is Yet to Come. Each of the Beatitudes has left us there, thinking about what heaven will be like and eagerly longing to be there. This is no coincidence. Jesus wants us to be more heavenly minded than we are now and to think more than we customarily do about the kingdom that is to come. Yes, we can have a foretaste of it now. We can experience the pleasure that comes from obedience to God here and now, in some measure. But the best is yet to come. [Page 59]

46. To Be Like Him. Jesus wants us to long with all our hearts to be like him, to live for him here and now, and to be with him for all eternity. [Page 59]

Chapter Five: The Merciful

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. (Matt. 5:7)

47. A Distorted World View. Most people think it is best to be self-confident; Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Most people think it is best to be happy all the time; Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn." Most people think it is best to be strong and self-assertive; Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek." Most people think that righteousness is boring and unimportant; Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness."

Time after time, Jesus is challenging the attitudes of the society in which we live. Time after time, Jesus is challenging us right where we live. [Page 61]

48. Recognition and Forgiveness. . Now being soft is very common in our society. For instance, some people say this about young criminals: "You've just got to understand the awful background they come from. You have to feel their pain. It's not their fault." Indeed, when you are soft, it seems that nothing is ever anybody's fault.

Christians are never soft. They never say that sin doesn't matter. They have a true understanding of the way the world really is. They recognize that sin is people's fault and that serious consequences come when God's law is broken. They see the magnitude of people's debt to God. They try to help others also to see their debt to God. They mourn over sin wherever it occurs, whether their own sin or the sin of others. True mercy recognizes the reality of sin, and the fact that so many of our problems stem from our sinful ways of relating to one another.

But true mercy doesn't stop with a recognition of the reality of sin. True mercy goes on, and with eyes wide open forgives anyway. Christians are to be the most forgiving people. We're not to be soft, but we're not to be hard either. [Page 64]

49. God's Mercy. If we were given a single glimpse of what we would look like if we got what we deserved, it would give us nightmares for the rest of our life. But the good news of the gospel is that we have not got what we deserved. We have been shown mercy. [Page 65]

50. Recognizing the Wrongdoing. Without recognition of the wrongdoing, there could be no mercy. [Page 65]

51. Sin is Our Fault and it Matters. We too could never repay God the debt we owe. We deserved the worst to happen to us, to be paid the wages we had earned,

namely, death (Rom. 6:23). God certainly didn't minimize the wrongness of what we had done. He didn't say, "Oh well, it's not your fault. You really couldn't help it. It doesn't matter." That would not be true. Sin is our fault and it does matter. But at great cost to himself, God showed mercy to us, and so we must show mercy to others. [Pages 65-66]

52. Following God's Example in Showing Mercy. Jesus knew that sin mattered. It mattered intensely, intensely enough for God to have to become man and die if it was to be paid for. He knew we didn't deserve him to rescue us like that. But he did. He showed us mercy. And as those who have been shown mercy, now we must show mercy to others. [Pages 66-67]

53. Sharing the Lord's Supper as a Reminder. Our hearts are only moved to mercy to the extent that we remember and ponder the depths and richness of God's mercy. That is why it is good for us to share the Lord's Supper together regularly. As we see the broken bread, we are reminded of his body broken for us; as we share in the cup, we remember his blood shed to cover our sins. As we remember his mercy to us, we are moved to mercy toward others. Indeed, that is why many churches have historically taken an offering for ministries of mercy at their celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Such diaconal offerings are a tangible way of responding to the mercy shown to us so that the same mercy may similarly be shown to others. [Page 68]

54. Responding to the Needs of the World. Responding to people's practical needs will often be a costly business, in both money and time. But however great the cost, Christians who remember the mercy of God will be eager to respond to the needs of the world through an expression of that same mercy. [Page 68]

55. Being Open to Helping Those in Need. We are not to say no to people's needs for help because of selfishness. We are not to say no because these people don't deserve our help. We are not to say no to the need because these people are ungrateful and will never thank us for it. For if we are Christians, we know that that's no excuse. We too were ungrateful and undeserving and unthankful when God sent Jesus to die for us.

Now that is not to say that we can never say no when someone asks us for help. Sometimes, the most loving thing we can do for someone is to say no. Sometimes people need us to say no so that they will become more independent and learn to do things on their own. A handout may simply increase their dependence on others or shelter them from the consequences of their sin in such a way that they are encouraged to continue in their sin.

Further, sometimes we need to say no because of our obligation to others, perhaps to our family or to our friends. There are times when we need to balance carefully our

various responsibilities to people. But “no” is not to be our normal posture. Christians are those who delight to say “Yes” because they remember God’s “Yes” to them in Jesus. [Pages 69-70]

56. God's Gift to Us. The good news of the gospel is that mercy is there for us. Jesus doesn't say to us, "Be merciful and earn your way into the kingdom." Jesus says, "Be merciful and know that there is mercy available for you too. In me, there is forgiveness to cover all of the wrong things you have done, be they few or many." What is more, it is a real forgiveness, based on a real dealing with those sins on the cross by Jesus. There is a real restored relationship with God, no matter what we have done or will do. That's mercy. [Page 72]

57. Experiencing the Depth of His Mercy. The only way to approach God is through his mercy. Those who come seeking it will find God's mercy is there in abundance, rich and full and deep and free. Those who know the depth of this mercy, will show similar mercy to others, helping the undeserving and forgiving without limit. [Page 72]

Chapter Six: The Pure in Heart

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matt. 5:8)

58. Making a Choice. We can't have it both ways. We can't be easy and comfortable with the world and easy and comfortable with God. Either our uncompromising purity will make us uncomfortable with the sin that surrounds us, and somewhat uncomfortable companions for those around us who want to be left alone in their sin, or alternatively our compromise will make us uncomfortable in God's presence. We have to choose whose esteem is more precious to us and then live in pursuit of that favor. [Page 78]

59. Being Precise in Our Pursuit of Purity. When one of the old Puritans was being urged to compromise and questioned as to why he had to be so precise in his observation of biblical standards, he responded simply, "I serve a precise God." If we serve a God who is holy and who values holiness-his and ours-above all things, then we too will want to be precise in our pursuit of purity. [Page 78]

60. Finding Purity and Righteousness Through Jesus. Jesus is the perfect substitute. His purity is complete, inside and out. He has lived the perfect life here on earth for us. What is more, now he stands at the Father's right hand interceding for us. In Jesus, we have been given the purity of heart we need. That's what the Christian message is all about: finding our purity, our righteousness, in what Jesus has done, not in what we do. [Page 81]

61. Knowing God Through His Word. Something happens when the Christian reads God's Word. There we meet with God himself. This is the other crucial function of the Bible. It is not only the place where we read what God requires of us, but it is the place where we come face to face with God. In the Bible, we find out what he is like and meet him for ourselves. We experience the greatness of his love for his undeserving people, as we read of all that he did for Israel in Old Testament times. We see our own need for a Savior and the impossibility of any system based on human merit. [Page 83]

62. Taking Up Our Cross. To take up our cross and follow Jesus means nothing less than to be willing to die for the one who gave his life for us.[Page 85]

63. Longing to be like Jesus. Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God." The idea will always seem nonsense to many, perhaps most people. They are much more concerned with how their friends see them than whether they will see God. But Christians are different. Christians are passionately in love with the God who has so loved them first. They are irresistibly drawn to the One who demonstrated his love in sending Jesus to fulfill at such great personal cost all of the rich promises made throughout the Bible. They long therefore to be personally pure, with a purity that increasingly matches the purity of Jesus, which has already been credited to their account. They long to see God and thereby to be completely transformed into his likeness. Blessed indeed are the pure in heart. [Pages 85-86]

Chapter Seven: The Peacemakers

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. (Matt. 5:9)

64. Living in Harmony With God's Laws. In the Bible, peace is much more than the absence of conflict in our lives. In the Bible, peace involves right relationships with all those around us. Peace requires right relationships with both God and people. Peace is living together as a community in total harmony with God's laws. [Page 88]

65. Finding Real Peace. We are not so much peacemakers as selfish comfort-seekers. Making peace, real peace, the kind of peace the Bible describes, goes thoroughly against the grain for all of us. [Page 88]

66. God's Example of Making Peace. The first reason Christians are to be peacemakers is that God first made peace with us. Immediately, this reality moves us a step beyond where most people are. Unlike those who seek peace because they think it will make their lives more comfortable or because they stand to benefit from peace in some way, the Christian's impulse comes from the outside. The Christian's first motivation toward making peace springs not from self-interest but from something that has happened to her or him. God first made peace with us, so we also go out and make peace with others. [Page 89]

67. Making Peace With Others. God's goal in redemption is not confined to making peace between ourselves and him. What he has done for us is intended to affect radically the way we act toward one another. By reconciling people first of all with himself, by taking people who were his enemies and making them into his friends, God has at the same time turned them from being enemies to one another into friends to one another. Even longstanding divisions, such as the wall between Jew and Gentile, are torn down through the redemptive work of Christ. Notice the pattern here: God first made peace with us; then, in so doing, he turns us into peacemakers and sends us out to make peace with others. [Page 90]

68. Helping Others to Find God's Peace. ...being a peacemaker involves doing our utmost to bring others into the same relationship of peace that we are now in toward God. [Page 92]

69. Being Peacemakers. We need to tell [others] about the peace we have found with God and about the difference God has made in our lives. We need to invite them along to visit church or to come to a Bible study. We must pray for them. We need to ask God to work in their hearts and bring them also to the point where they too will have peace with God. This is certainly not an easy task. It's not an assignment calculated to make us comfortable and popular. Not everyone will thank us for our interest in their peace. But Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are the comfortable." He says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." [Page 92]

70. Taking a Stand for the Truth. The same Jesus who told us to turn the other cheek also threw the moneychangers out of the temple. There will be times when, as Paul recognized, it is not possible to live at peace with those around us. The purity of the church and the honor and reputation of God may sometimes require us to make a stand for truth. However, our general reputation should not be as troublemakers, but as peacemakers. [Page 95]

71. Being Imitators of God. Christians are those with whom God has made peace through the power of the cross. They have been adopted into God's family. The result of that change is that they now go out and seek to bring others into God's peace and into peace with themselves. In so doing, they are imitating God, showing the family likeness, so that they will be called sons of God and will appreciate the privilege of peace with God all the more. They will not necessarily be called "the sons of God" by others; people may use quite different words to describe us. But that's not what counts! It is what God calls us that counts and in Christ he has declared us to be his children. [Page 97]

72. The Work Has Just Begun. But we are not able to relax and kick back now because the legal change in our status has been made. Rather, we are to strive with every fiber of our being to become what we have been declared to be.

Have I been crucified with Christ? Then the life I live now, I must live entirely by faith in the Son of God (Gal. 2:20). Has God adopted you into his family? Then show the family likeness you profess: let peace flow out from you on all sides. Has God given you the purity of Jesus, freely credited to your eternal account? Then work to become purer in thought and deed, fixing your mind on whatever is true and noble and lovely. Has God shown you mercy? Then show mercy similarly to others. Has God given you a righteousness that is not your own? Then strive with all your being to live a life of matching righteousness by God's grace. [Pages 97-98]

Chapter Eight: Those who are Persecuted

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt. 5:10-12)

73. Suffering for Christ. It is being persecuted *for the sake of righteousness* that Jesus particularly holds up as precious, not having people beating up on us for no reason at all. Thus, when he expands on this beatitude in verses 11 and 12, it is those who have people insult them, persecute them, and falsely say all kinds of evil against them *because of Jesus* who are blessed. In other words, the people we should envy and want to be like are those who suffer because of their commitment to Jesus. [Pages 102-103]

74. The World's Values. The world is interested in studying the habits of effective people, not those of holy people. One of the world's "Ten Commandments" is this: "Thou mayest do whatever thou likest in pursuit of thine own comfort and happiness- and blessed art thou if it succeeds." So our magazines and TV programs are filled with lifestyles of the rich and famous, not with lifestyles of the totally committed and holy. If you must have a religion, the world just requires you to make sure that you find one that "works for you," fulfilling your needs and desires, whatever shape those aspirations take. [Page 103]

75. Being Willing To Suffer For Christ's Sake. ...persecution exposes the true nature of our faith. Where do we find out if we are Christians at all or merely cheap imitations? We find out in the fire of suffering for our faith. That's what the apostle Peter says:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire may be

proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

It's in the furnace that the stuff of which we are made is put to the test and demonstrated to be real-or false. [Page 104-105]

76. Put to the Test. ...Jesus says it is possible to be a fake Christian [Matt. 13:20-22]. It is possible to look on the surface like a real Christian just as iron pyrites looks like gold-but when the test comes, be exposed as a fraud. What, though, is the test that shows up the reality or otherwise of our faith? The furnace that puts our faith to the test is suffering and persecution. Indeed, if we manage to live our whole life without suffering or persecution, people will never really be able to tell if our faith is a reality in our hearts or merely the right words on our lips. [Page 106]

77. Expect Persecution When You Stand Against the World. If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. (John 15:18-20).

To the extent to which our lives measure up to the standard set by Jesus, to that same extent we can expect to be persecuted. If we belong to the world—or if we act as if we belong to the world—then no one will single us out for attention. If we swim with the stream, we will never feel the force of the current. But when we try to stand up against the current, we can expect to feel the full weight of the stream against us. [Pages 109-110]

78. An Act of Our Love for God. As we are faithful under persecution, it is made clear that we are serving God not for anything we want to extract from him but simply out of love and gratitude for what he has done for us. It is one thing to say that we are entirely motivated in our service of God by love and gratitude for the gospel-and we should say that, loud and clear, just like a husband and wife should say "I love you" to one another often. But persecution and difficulty is where the rubber meets the road; these are the moments that demonstrate the reality underneath the words. [Page 111]

79. Being Like Jesus. ... it is when we are suffering persecution for the faith that we are most like Jesus. Paul's stated desire Philippians 3:10 is this:

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. [Pages 111-112]

80. Sharing in Christ's Suffering. Christ's sufferings were unique in their atoning significance and power, but he calls us also to "take up our cross" and thereby share in the humiliation and pain that was poured on him for our sake and for the sake of the gospel. [Page 112]

81. Yes, Lord, Yes. As we end this book, we return to where we started in a sense, with the statement, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That's where Jesus begins and ends the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3, 10). There is the searching question that we have to answer: Do we want the kingdom of heaven? Do we want it more than we want anything else in the whole world? Do we want it more than we want our pride, more than our self-centeredness, more than our comfort, more than the cherished sins that we love so much, more than our desire for revenge, more than our ability to fit in?

If we are Christians, then the answer will be Yes! Yes, I love you, Lord, more than anything else. Yes, I want to be with you more than I want anything else. Yes, I want to see Jesus and to be filled with a purity and holiness that matches his purity and holiness. He is the true Christian hero. He is the one whose obedience and perfection have been credited to my account and enable me to be adopted into God's family, and whose obedience and perfection are to be progressively worked out through the work of the Spirit in my life. He is the one whose life I am to model my own after, no matter what the cost. By his grace, I too may be registered as a citizen of his kingdom. If I have that, then there is nothing else I need. [Pages 113-114]