

Beatitudes Notes – Mourning and Meekness

Blessed are those who mourn...

"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you" The Message

It's one thing to be spiritually poor and acknowledge it, it's another to grieve and mourn over it.

The verb used here is the strongest Greek work for mourning – meaning deep, heartfelt grief. It is also in the continuous tense meaning those who continue to mourn.

The beatitudes are about Christian character – reflecting the character of God. In Luke 13 Jesus grieved over the sins of Jerusalem. Sin is offensive to God primarily because he is holy and it is a rejection of his ways, but also because of the consequences of sin. God is good and what he does is good – his ways are best so sin/our rebellion is ultimately not for our best. Bohnhoeffer describes those who mourn as mourning for "the world, its guilt, its fate and its future". Those who share God's heart and grieve over what grieves God will share in his comfort.

Often we don't recognise the seriousness of our sin and how much it offends God – often taking grace for granted. Our pride prevents us from being honest about our sin as we don't want others to think less of us. We would be ashamed if they really knew what we were like, so often we compare ourselves and pretend we aren't as bad as others by concentrating on things in their lives that we don't do, rather than deal with the root of our sin. Often we think admitting sin will harm our witness – but honest examples of repentance and hope of forgiveness can only strengthen our witness. We are all sinners and our sin only differs in its consequences.

True repentance recognises and confesses sin, doesn't wallow in despair but instead seeks deliverance from the only one who can comfort and forgive – God. Self-pity is about ourselves – disappointment with breaking our own standards. Examples are Cain and Judas. Genuine repentance recognises sin is against God, seeks mercy and the Holy Spirit in order to turn from sin and live again in a way pleasing to God.

Ideas - As you discuss what it means to mourn over sin it may be appropriate to allow time for repentance. There are a couple of visual ways to do this. One is to get people to write out their 'confession'. Get a shredder and shred the 'confessions', as you do so reading out 1 John 1.5-10, Psalm 103, 9-14, Hebrews 4,14-16. Alternatively you could have a basin of water and people could wash their hands as a symbolic sign of repentance.

Mourning over the sin around us. Maybe we aren't aware of what is happening in the world around us. You could go for a walk around the area, asking God to show you signs of brokenness, asking him to break your hearts. You could commit to reading a newspaper once a week and praying through what is happening on the news. You could go to Lisburn Road Police Station and ask them what you as a group of Christians could pray for them, and problems in area. Use resources from Tearfund (on HIV/AIDS), Open Doors – persecuted church, Wycliffe etc

...for they will be comforted

Comfort expresses itself in the assurance of forgiveness and God's love and grace at work in me - 1 John 1:9, of cleansing and hope of a better world to come when we will no longer struggle with sin - Revelation 21:3+4. Self-pity that is not true repentance will leave guilt and regret and is ultimately destructive whereas we can only truly find life when we realise our sin and turn towards God's ways.

It also leads to worship and enlarges our view of God. The more we see of our sinfulness the more we are amazed at God's grace.

God mourns all the sin he sees therefore if we are to share his heart we too will mourn over the sin, injustice, and destruction it brings, that we see around us with the knowledge and comfort that ultimately God's kingdom of justice and peace and sinlessness will come in its fullness.

Blessed are the meek...

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought." The Message

This is similar to poverty of spirit – meekness is not something you do, like mourning, but something you are. When you acknowledge who you are in God's sight then you can live in that freedom, not worried about how others think of you and able to treat them as God treats you. So in a sense poverty of spirit relates to our assessment of ourselves, whereas meekness relates to our relationship with God and others.

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"The man who is truly meek is the one who is amazed that God and man can think of him and treat him as well as they do, this makes him gentle, humble, sensitive and patient in all his dealings with others" Martin Lloyd Jones

"Meekness is a controlled desire to see others interests advanced ahead of your own" – Carson

This encompasses being more concerned about building up our brother/sister than justifying ourselves. Because we are poor in spirit we don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought to so we are able to relate well to others. We are secure in Christ and therefore are concerned about others rights, God's will and his kingdom more than about our rights. Therefore, we will have a growing hunger and thirst to see righteousness and justice exercised.

Jesus was certainly not weak – confronting religious leaders, turning over tables in temple, having the ability to call legions of angels to his aid (Matt 26:53). He wasn't concerned with his rights – Phil 2:6-7, 1Peter 2:23 but his concern was always the glory of the Father, and the Father's will. He knew who he was and what he was here to do and trusted God in that.

...for they will inherit the earth

Meekness brings contentment – a meek person's ego is not so inflated he always wants more but knows he possesses everything in Christ. With this eternal perspective we can afford to be meek.

In knowing we are children of the king and will inherit the coming kingdom we are freed to live kingdom lives knowing our future is secure. Just as to enter the kingdom poverty of spirit is required it is the meek who will inherit the kingdom, the new earth. All of this flies against the norms of our society in which the strong and powerful survive. In God's kingdom those who renounce the ways of the 'earth', are the ones who will inherit it (ruling the 'new earth'), and those who now possess it by power and injustice will lose it (the words of Dietrich Bohnhoeffer, writing in Hitler's Germany).

Psalm 37 describes some of the characteristics of the meek. It begins by trusting God with a deep rooted confidence that God is for us and not against us. Then it commits its way to the Lord in the confidence that he will use his power and mercy to do good for us. Then it waits patiently and quietly for the outcome. And, finally, it does not give way to anger and fretfulness when faced with opposition and set backs.

Definitions of meekness

"Meekness is a defining grace produced by the Spirit in the life of the believer, which characterises their response towards God and man. Towards God it is a spirit of submission to all God's dealings with us, especially those causing sorrow or pain in the settled conviction that in all of these he is working for the good of all who love him. Towards men – bearing patiently with hurtful actions of others and dealing gently with their failures, in assurance that everything is under god's sovereignty and that in ourselves we have no claim to be any stronger than the weakest of our friends or better than the weakest of our enemies" John Blanchard

"Meekness begins when we put our trust in God. Then, because we trust him, we commit our way to him. We roll onto him our anxieties, or frustrations, our plans, our relationships, our jobs, our health. And then we wait patiently for the Lord. We trust his timing and his power and his grace to work things out in the best way for his glory and for our good.

The result of trusting God and rolling of our anxieties onto God and waiting patiently for God is that we don't give way to quick and fretful anger. But instead, like Moses we give place to wrath and hand our cause over to God and let him vindicate us if he chooses. And then, as James says, in this quiet confidence we are slow to speak and quick to listen. We become reasonable and open to correction. Meekness loves to learn. And it counts the blows of a friend as precious. And when it must say a critical word to a person caught in sin or error, it speaks from the deep conviction of its own fallibility and its own susceptibility to sin and its utter dependence on the grace of God.

Meekness begins with God and ends with God. And therefore whenever we see a person like that we give God the glory and the aim of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is fulfilled" John Piper

It will be really helpful, as we try to see the beatitudes as a whole to spend some time summarising where we are so far and praying that God would be growing this character in us, as well as discussing how they all interact, and how we can practically help each other to allow God to shape our characters in these ways.