

It seems that Jesus is quoting Psalm 37:11 where the meek are promised that they will inherit 'the land'-- that is, the land promised to Abraham, the land of Israel in which they were now living. Even though wicked men, including the Romans, had disinherited them or seized their property, the meek will-- in God's time-- possess their inheritance. The land *will* be theirs.

So, at one level, it seems that Jesus is saying that freedom for the Jewish people from their Roman oppressors would not be achieved by violent military action but that, according to the Old Testament promise, God would vindicate those who wait upon him. Their dependence on him would be rewarded. And yet, as we look back through history, we do not see a literal fulfillment of this promise.

7. As a Christian, how do you understand the fulfillment of this Beatitude will come about? What is our inheritance as Christians?
8. How does your own character compare with Jesus' description of 'the meek'?

Righteousness

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

9. What do you think Jesus is referring to in this Beatitude? What is the kind of righteousness that one ought to hunger and thirst for?
10. What will satisfy such a hunger and thirst?
11. How might you cultivate this hunger and thirst in your own life?

Get together with the person that you shared with at the beginning of this study and pray for your own growth in these areas in the coming week.

2 The Blessed Life

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7

The Blessed Life

At the beginning of your study this week, **read Matthew 5:1-10**. These are the verses we considered last week and this study will also immerse ourselves in these same verses again today.

Our previous study introduced the Beatitudes as the way to live the 'Blessed Life' in the Kingdom of Heaven. We live this way now in anticipation of our future in the final Kingdom.

At the end of last week, in response to the first Beatitude, we posed the question, "How will you seek to cultivate 'poverty of spirit' in your own character? Who and what will help you?" Before you begin this study, take time in groups of 2 and 3 to discuss how this went for you.

Mourning, Meekness and Righteousness

Do any of these characteristics sound desirable in our Australian culture today? No, I didn't think so either! Yet, according to Jesus;

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

In order to understand Jesus' words well, as we did last study, we will try to put ourselves in the place of the disciples seated on the mountain with Jesus. Only when we have entered their world, we will be able to accurately apply Jesus words in our own.

Mourning

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

The promise of the second Beatitude-- that those who mourn will be comforted-- is one of the strangest in the Bible. What did it mean to the people of Jesus' day 'to mourn'? And how will such mourners be comforted?

In Luke 2 we read about some mourners, but not the kind that hang around funeral parlours. When Joseph and Mary take their baby son Jesus up to Jerusalem to be circumcised, they encounter two people at the temple.

Luke 2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him... **36** There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, **37** and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. **38** Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

We will see that Simeon and Anna are, in many ways, classic examples of what Jesus means by 'those who mourn'. For the disciples listening to Jesus preach on the mountain side, steeped in the Old Testament and the history of their people, one single event would be the focus of Jewish mourning. That event is the exile to Babylon.

In 587BC King Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, finally destroying it and its temple and then carrying off the brightest and best of her inhabitants to Babylon. It was a national catastrophe.

[optional] **Read Lamentations 1:1-2:5.** This is a response to this tragedy. What words and phrases does the author use to describe the emotional reactions to what has happened? What is the reason given for Israel's disgrace? What do the prophets now look forward to in Isaiah 40:1-5, Isaiah 60:1-7 and Jeremiah 31:1-14?

Israel was restored from Babylon, at least partially. Many exiles did return and Jerusalem and her temple were rebuilt (see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). However, the glowing expectations of the prophets were not met. Israel continued to suffer under foreign overlords-- first Persia, then Greece, and then (in New Testament times) Rome.

In Jesus' time there were still those, like Simeon and Anna, who mourned for the sorry state of Israel, and longed for God's comfort and redemption.

1. How does this background frame our understanding of the meaning of 'those who mourn' for Jesus' first Jewish disciples? What kind of consolation would they have been anticipating (refer to Lk 2:25,38 again)?

In our times, we commonly interpret 'comfort for mourners' to mean 'warm, reassuring feelings for sad people.' But given the Old Testament background that we have been considering, we can see that Jesus is promising something far more significant. He is saying that God is about to fulfil the promise that all Israel has been waiting for-- the promise of comfort in the Kingdom of Heaven. God's name had been disgraced by his people's sin and rebellion-- a source of godly sorrow-- but now consolation was arriving in God's kingdom.

For the people of Jesus' day, there were many other possible sources of 'comfort'. Siding with the Romans did offer an easier life, even with the possibility of material security and comfort. However, this meant abandoning hope in God ever delivering his people. Mourning is therefore predicated on entrusting oneself to God.

2. We have considered the national shame, which would have been the primary cause of 'mourning' for those listening to Jesus' sermon on the mount. What might be other sources of shame for which Christians might mourn?
3. What is the place of this 'godly mourning' in the life of a Christian?

Meekness

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

4. What do you think it means to be 'meek'? Is this 'meekness' a positive characteristic today?
5. Psalm 37 gives us some helpful background to a biblical view of meekness. Looking at Ps 37:1-11, what is a right response when evil apparently triumphs over good? What will God do for the meek? What would you say the overall message of Psalm 37 has to say to 'meek'?
6. What do you think Jesus has in mind as an inheritance for the meek-- that is, what is 'the earth' that the meek shall inherit? [You might like to consider your answer here in view of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven]