

Isaiah 61 is a messianic passage – the very passage that Jesus applied to Himself in Luke 4:16 ff. A number of commentators see a connection between these verses and the Sermon on the Mount (i.e. Matt. 5:3-12; France, 165-166).

Isaiah 61 reads:

1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, (as was evidenced at His baptism when the Spirit descended upon Him)

Because the Lord anointed me

To bring good news to the poor; (cf. Matt. 5:3: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit. . .*”)

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,

To proclaim release to captives

And freedom to prisoners;

2 To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord

And the day of vengeance of our God;

To comfort all who mourn, (cf. Matt. 5:4: “*Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted*”)

3 To grant those who mourn in Zion,

Giving them a garland instead of ashes,

The oil of gladness instead of mourning,

The cloak of praise instead of a disheartened spirit.

So they will be called oaks of righteousness, (cf. Matt. 5:6, 11, 12; “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after*

The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. *righteousness. . .*”)

In this passage we see that there is more than appears on the surface. Isaiah was written to the exiles in Babylon and predicted their return to Israel. The deliverance imagery parallels the Year of Jubilee (“the favorable year of the Lord” – Isa. 61:2; Lev. 25:8-17) when debts were canceled and slaves set free. God promised that He would look upon the poor and the captives, end the exile, and replace their sorrow with joy. However, any reader of the NT sees deeper imagery. The good news the Messiah announces does more than helping the downtrodden; it results in spiritual liberation that sets free those who are imprisoned by sin, and makes them “oaks of righteousness.”

#### **5:4: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

We generally regard mourners as the most unfortunate of people. We see them as people to be pitied, helped, comforted, but not those to be envied as the recipients of God’s mercy. And they are blessed, Jesus says, because they will be comforted. It is this that makes the reference to ordinary mourning as we know it so very difficult. It is not easy to think that Jesus is speaking of those who have suffered bereavement, for example, and saying that they are not really in an unhappy situation because one day they will be consoled. It is much more likely that He is referring to a more fundamental kind of mourning (Morris, 97).

The poor in spirit (5:3) have come to the realization that they have no inward ability to please God. They feel the weight of their sin, their guilt, and their unworthiness. They sense their distance from God and their need of mercy. As a result, they grieve. Mourning over our spiritual condition is a natural

consequence of being poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3). God's mourners live a life of repentance; they lament the corruption of their nature, their many transgressions, and the sin in the world around them. However, they will find comfort when they turn to Christ as the hope of their salvation and the source of their righteousness.

To "be comforted" is a divine passive. God will comfort them. Although they will be comforted in this present life, the verb is a future tense and focuses on the eschatological comfort to come when Jesus returns and the plight of our sinfulness removed. Romans 4:7 says, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered."

The more people grow as Christians, the more they see the stark contrast of their lives to God's holiness. The faithful believer will be constantly aware of his sin and lament over it, as did Job (Job 42:5, 6), David (Ps. 51:1), Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-5), Paul (Ro.7:18-24; 1 Tim. 1:15), Peter (Lk. 5:8), and others. He will also grieve over the sin in the world around him (Matt. 23:37; Isa. 53:3).

- David in Psalm 119:136 said, "My eyes shed streams of tears, because men do not keep thy law."
- Ezekiel heard the faithful "who sighed and groaned over all the abominations that are committed in Jerusalem." (Ezek. 9:4).
- Paul knew of "the many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ." (Phil 3:18)

Those who claim to experience the joy of the kingdom without experiencing its tears mistake the nature of the kingdom (Carson, 133).

It's unfortunate that some Christians laugh when they should mourn. They laugh at the world's crude and immoral jokes though they don't dare repeat them. They watch brutality, violence, and sexual immorality on T.V. as entertainment, though they say that they don't approve of these things. They rejoice when they should be mourning. They laugh when they should be crying (Carson, 133).

### **5:5 Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.**

Meekness in the Bible is difficult to define.

- *It is gentleness and the self-control it entails* (Carson, 133).
- *It is to patiently endure personal insults and injury.*
- *It is to be free from thinking you are more important than you really are.* It is a humble and gentle attitude toward others which is determined by a true estimate of ourselves (Stott, 43).
- *It is a desire to see others' interests advance ahead of your own.* Abraham exemplified meekness in his dealings with his nephew, Lot (Gen. 13:1-11).
- *It is the opposite of vengeance or violence.*

"The meek are those who quietly submit themselves to God, to His word and to His rod, who follow His directions, and comply with His designs. . . [they are] rarely and hardly provoked, but quickly and easily

pacified; and who would rather forgive twenty injuries than revenge one, having the rule of their own spirits” (Henry).

In the OT, Joseph is a good example of what it means to be meek. Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery in Egypt. However, Joseph rose to power second only to Pharaoh. In such a high position he could have easily avenged the wrong done to him by his brothers. But instead, he only acted in kindness toward them (Gen. 45:4-10; 50:15-21). This too is meekness.

It is comparatively easy for us to be honest with God and acknowledge that we are sinners in His sight, but it is difficult to have others call us a sinner. Instinctively we resent it. We all prefer to condemn ourselves than having someone else condemn us. We are often not prepared to allow others to think or say the same things about us that we just acknowledged before God as true. There is a basic hypocrisy here; there always is when meekness is absent (Stott, 43).

The meek - not the tyrannical and harsh - will inherit the earth (Carson, 133).

It is almost certain that this beatitude is a quotation from Psalm 37:11 that says, "The meek shall possess the land. . ." In Psalm 37:11 the land is the land of Canaan promised to Abraham. However, as we read on in the OT, we find the land promised to God's people takes on greater proportions. In Psalm 2:8 it embraces the whole earth under Messiah's rule (Psa. 72:8; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10) but then grows to include a new heaven and earth (Isa. 66:22; Rev. 21:1). Thus, Jesus' words, "the meek shall inherit the earth," is a reference to the promise of inheriting the new world that God will create; a world where God Himself will dwell among us (Rev 21:3-4).

### **5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled.**

The words "hunger and thirst" vividly express desire (Ps. 42:2; 63:1; Carson, 134). Spiritual hunger should be the characteristic of all of God's people. Christians are not like unbelievers who have set their desires on the things of the world. They seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

Righteousness can have two different meanings. In a legal context, it is being in a right standing with God. When we believed, we were justified; that is, we were declared righteous. The penalty for sin has been paid and we stand in a right relationship to the law of God. However, in Matthew, righteousness refers to us conforming our lives to the will of God (especially in the Sermon on the Mount -5:6, 10, 20; 6:1, 33). The person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is the one who desires to do what is right before God. Righteousness becomes the most desirable thing in the world. Such a person will understand his need of righteousness. There will be a freedom from trying to get satisfaction from external things (1 Jn.2:15-17). There will be a love for the things of God and the Word of God. (Psa. 119:2, 14-16, 18, 20, 24, 33-40, 103, 127, 136, 148; 42:1 63:1). Jesus is saying that in order to enter the Kingdom of God, one should consider righteousness as important as food and drink.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. Once more there is an analogy between the physical and spiritual. Both physical hunger and spiritual hunger seek to be satisfied. Christ promises

to satisfy our spiritual hunger. Yet we must understand that in this life our hunger will never be fully satisfied, nor will our thirst be fully quenched. Even the promise of Jesus that he who drinks of the water that He gives “will never thirst again” is only fulfilled as long as we keep on drinking. Not till we reach eternity will we hunger and thirst no more for it is there that our Shepherd will lead us to springs of living water (Stott, 45).

There is probably no greater way to progress in Christian living than to have a healthy spiritual appetite. It’s not enough to mourn over past sin (Matt. 5:3); we must hunger for future righteousness.

Probably not many truly hunger and thirst after righteousness. Many Christians sincerely want the Holy Spirit's power, true happiness, or a blessing from God. But how many hunger and thirst for righteousness? The other things aren't bad, but they are not as basic as righteousness (Carson, 134).

Looking back, we see that the first four beatitudes reveal a progression. Each one leads to the next and presupposes the one that has gone before it. To be poor in spirit is to realize our spiritual bankruptcy. When we recognize this, we will mourn. However, what is the use of recognizing our sin, mourning over it, and then leaving it there? It must lead to a hunger for righteousness (Stott, 46).