

There was a survey taken a few years ago that showed that 85% of all drivers in America consider themselves “above-average” drivers. 85%! Of course, there’s no way this can be true. By definition, only about 49% can be above average, everyone else is either below average or just average. The truth is when it comes to driving, as well as, some other things in life, we like to see ourselves as better than average. And if we are better than others, we get the feeling we’re doing a good enough job at whatever it is we’re doing.

This crosses over into faith and religion too. Today’s Gospel lesson is a prime example. It’s a part of Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount commonly called the Beatitudes. Unfortunately, the Beatitudes have often been misunderstood to have a message that goes something like this: “If I do these things well enough, then I will be happy. If I’m **good enough** at these things, then I will be blessed.” It’s a human standard of measure: “If I’m better than average at this, then I’m in good shape.” But does this kind of self-measuring measure up in God’s eyes? Let’s take a look at the Beatitudes, to see if we are **good enough** at keeping them. Just a short sampling should do the job.

In verse five Jesus proclaims, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” In many places, the Bible makes it clear that all believers in Christ will be the ones to enjoy eternal life with a new heaven and a new earth; and Jesus declares here that those believers are meek. So, what exactly does it mean to be **meek**? Although the words do rhyme, let’s be careful not to confuse being “meek” with being “weak.” Meekness is power under control. A person who is meek uses his power, authority, position, and skills in service to others, not in service to himself.

So... are you meek **enough**? Do you use your power, your position, your God-given talents in service to others? For example, how well do you treat your family? Do you live like a servant to them, considering their matters to be more important than you own? Is there ever a time that you lose your temper or want some time just for yourself? Are you a meek-**enough** servant in your home? Meekness has to do with how you handle your resources. Do you use what you have in service to others? Could you give away **more**? Do you really need to buy such nice things for yourself? Could you live with **less than** you do? Do you help as much as you **can**?

I could go on and ask more and more questions along these lines. But when such an examination continues, the response of our sinful nature is, "Sure I could be meeker, but I'm meek **enough!** At least to my satisfaction," or "I'm comfortable with my level of meekness toward others." But here's the thing: Jesus says, "Blessed are the **meek.**" He doesn't say, "Blessed are those who think they're meek **enough.**" When God calls for meekness, He calls for **perfect** meekness; it's not **your** measure that matters, but the measure of the Almighty, holy God. To believe that we are meek enough, according to God's standards, is actually absolute arrogance and pride- the very opposite of meekness!

Just one more beatitude ought to do it- or do us **in.** Jesus declares in verse 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." To one day **see God** is a privilege of the faithful, who have no thoughts of lust or covetousness. It means you are perfectly satisfied with the things that you have, perfectly trusting in God no matter what trials come your way.

You're not affected by prejudice. You would never indulge in gossip or carry a grudge. Now, I don't know about you, but I don't know of anyone- Christian or non-Christian, who claims to have a heart that is absolutely pure; it's impossible. That's why the Old Adam comes up with this enticing line: "I'm only human, after all, and I could be a lot dirtier than I am- because I **know** people who are a lot dirtier than me!" But listen again to this Beatitude: "Blessed are the pure in heart." Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are the **purier** in heart." If we believe that we are pure in heart- or even pure **enough** in heart, we give proof enough that our hearts are far from pure.

Remember I said the common misunderstanding of the Beatitudes is to say that "If you do these things, then you will be blessed and happy." This is a very misleading teaching, because you must do these things **perfectly**, all the time, to earn the blessing and enjoy the happiness. Once you examine what these Beatitudes require, you are far more likely to cry, "Enough of the Beatitudes! They promise me blessing if I do them, but I can't do them. Enough of the Beatitudes! They're **more** than I can do."

And if **that's** what you cry out, (either out loud or in your heart), then blessed **are** you. Blessed are **you** because, by the grace of God and the working of the Holy Spirit, you have made an honest confession of sin. You've examined yourself by the powerful mirror of God's holy Law, and you have come to the conclusion that you can't live up to it. If it's up to you to be meek or pure in heart or any of the other beatitudes, have no hope. You now agree with the Law of God that you can do nothing to please Him or **earn** your salvation. You

are now prepared to hear about the One who has saved you, Who showers these blessings upon you.

And although we cannot fulfill the requirements of these Beatitudes, by no means should we ignore or reject them. For one thing, we **need** to know about our sin so we can confess it to God. For another, these Beatitudes give us the opportunity to rejoice in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

**He** has kept these Beatitudes **perfectly**. What's more, He has kept them perfectly **for us** so that we can rejoice to be set free to do them out of love for God and fellow people and not out of duty.

Let's take another look at just these two Beatitudes we've examined, but now in a much different light, the light of the **Gospel!** "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Remember, meekness is power under control, used in service to others. Jesus did not use His omnipotent power to benefit Himself, but in service to others- He cured diseases, multiplied bread and fish, and cast out demons. When He was beaten and spat upon by sinners, He did not destroy them with a word-which He could have done; meekly, the all-powerful Son of God allowed Himself to be crucified. He has been meek enough, so that you might be delivered to the new heaven and the new earth.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Speaking about Jesus, Hebrews 4: 15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one has been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet was without sin." Jesus was perfectly pure in heart. Why? The next verse in Hebrews tells us that **because** He was without sin, we can go before God's throne of grace with confidence. Jesus has been pure in heart enough so that you're able to see God in glory forever.

Do you see? When we realized what we had to do to fulfill the Beatitudes, we had to admit we couldn't do it- not even close. "Enough of the Beatitudes! We just can't do them." They only showed us how deep and dark our sin is- how terrible our failures are. But look at the Beatitudes and Christ: Now you see your salvation! He has fulfilled the Beatitudes enough- He has done these things perfectly, and He has done them for **you**. The great exchange has taken place: Jesus has taken away your sins at the cross- He has suffered God's wrath for your failures to be meek, to be pure in heart, and all the rest. And He's given you the credit for His obedience- for **His** keeping of the Beatitudes. Because He's done this, God the Father looks upon you and says, "I see no sin in you, because My Son has taken it all away. Now, for His sake, when I look at you, I see one who is meek, one who is pure in heart, one who is holy. **Yours** is the kingdom of heaven."

Because of God's abundant grace and amazing mercy we're now led by the Holy Spirit to do the things that please Him. Not because we **have** to or to try to prove ourselves better than others but solely out of God-given love and freedom. And when we fall short of doing what God wants us to do we know we have a Savior God who forgives us and helps us to stay strong and to grow in our faith in Him.

We don't have to worry about being good enough to keep the Beatitudes. Only Jesus can do that and He did. All for you so that you can truly be blessed now and for eternity! Amen!