

On the Christian Character

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the importance of developing the Christian character, marked by poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and purity of heart, as well as meekness, mercifulness, and peaceableness, and promises great reward in heaven for those who persevere in this character.

Scripture: Matthew 5:3, Romans 12:18, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Galatians 6:9, Philippians 2:5, Philippians 3:20, James 4:10, 1 Peter 3:9, 1 Peter 4:14, 1 John 2:6

Topics: "Christian Character", "Beatitudes"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches on the Christian character as described in the beatitudes by Jesus, highlighting the inward state and outward conduct of true believers, as well as the general reception they receive from the world. True believers are characterized by poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, meekness, mercifulness, and peaceableness. They are promised comfort, blessings, and the heavenly inheritance as they grow in grace and bear the divine image. Despite persecution and reviling from the world, those who embody the Christian character are assured of great rewards in heaven.

Transcript

36. ON THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

The beatitudes with which our Lord begins his sermon on the mount most strikingly show what is the inward state and outward conduct of true believers, as well as the general reception which such characters meet with from the world. Their inward state is described by poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, hungering and thirsting after righteousness and purity of heart. Their outward conduct, by meekness, mercifulness, and peaceableness. Their general reception from an unbelieving world is declared to be persecution, reviling, and slander.

The promises made to the various branches of the Christian character are most encouraging. The poor in spirit, who are humble on account of sin, who are emptied of all self-righteousness, and who feel their constant need of Jesus, are made the happy partakers of every Gospel blessing. Receiving Christ into their hearts by faith, they daily grow in grace, and in a fitness for the heavenly inheritance. The Savior comforts these mourners in Zion, binds up their broken hearts, and gives them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

While hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the good Shepherd leads them into green pastures, and nourishes their souls unto eternal life. They receive the desire of their hearts, even the presence and image of God in their souls. Being justified by faith, they are accepted in the beloved; and, being made the temples of the Holy Spirit, they become vessels unto honor; sanctified for the master's use. Sincerity and uprightness mark their character. Purity of intention, a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness, flowing from that faith which purifies the heart, prepare them for present manifestations of God in Christ, as revealed in the Gospel, and for brighter visions of his glory in the world to come.

With these internal principles and affections, they show forth, by their daily walk and conversation, the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into marvelous light. They are meek in their words and actions. The law of kindness dwells upon their tongue. They are patient; bearing with one another in love. Thus they avoid many troubles which those endure whose spirits are violent, and whose actions are unkind. They glide along the stream of life upon the still waters of meekness and gentleness, while the contentious and petulant are ever struggling with the rough surges of their own creating.

Being firm in purpose, as well as mild in spirit, they cannot always escape the storm; but while they "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints," when duty calls them so to do, they labor to "possess their souls in patience," and strive "in meekness to instruct those who oppose themselves." When they are reviled, they revile not again; when they suffer, they threaten not: but, committing themselves unto him who judges righteously, and who will one day vindicate the cause of his people, they are kept "in perfect peace," and, in the truest sense of the promise, "inherit the earth."

They are merciful, when opportunities offer for the exercise of mercy, whether it be in acts of forgiveness or benevolence. Like their heavenly Father, they delight in mercy. Having been much forgiven, they are ready to forgive much; considering that the greatest possible injury done to themselves, when compared with their offenses against God, is but like the hundred pence to the ten thousand talents. They pray for grace to resemble their beneficent Creator, who makes his sun to arise on the evil and on the good, and who causes his rain to descend on the just and on the unjust.

They love to do good unto all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith; remembering that Gospel precept, "Do not be overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." They love peace; and study, as far as is consistent with the truth of the Gospel and a good conscience, to live peaceably with all men. They delight in pouring the balm of consolation into the troubled breast, and in smoothing the rigors of angry feeling, wherever their influence extends. These are the lineaments of that beautiful character which is formed by the Holy Spirit, and called by our blessed Savior "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world;" preserving it from universal corruption and total darkness.

This character is the great preparative for the enjoyment of heavenly glory; and yet, though beloved of God, this is the character which is despised, persecuted, reviled, and slandered by an unbelieving world. No real Christian, bearing this exalted character, need droop or despond; for he is assured by eternal truth itself that great shall be his reward in heaven. But is this the character of all the Lord's people, without exception? It is. All do not, indeed, attain to the same degree of holy conformity to Jesus, but all must and do bear this divine image; since it is expressly said, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

All true believers possess these inward principles of holiness--all have these outward marks of true discipleship--all have to encounter the world's derision; though, like the good seed in the parable, there

may be in some thirty, in some sixty, and in some a hundred fold. Let none of the children of God, then, startle at the sight of the cross; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Rather let them rejoice, since it is recorded by the pen of inspiration, "if we have died with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him."

Happy, indeed, are they who most resemble the Savior, and suffer the most cheerfully for his sake. I learn from these beatitudes, that all the graces which our divine Redeemer pronounces blessed, meet, like the radii of a circle, in one common center--the heart of the true believer. These graces do not form so many distinct characters, but unitedly they form one character--the child of God. Some of God's children have shone brighter in one grace, and some in another; but each possesses the whole.

Abraham is exhibited to us as a pattern for faith; Job, for patience; Joseph, for purity; Moses, for meekness; Samuel, for integrity; David, for contrition and spiritual-mindedness; Daniel, for devotion; Peter, for zeal; John, for tenderness; Paul, for contempt of the world, and delight in the cross: yet all were filled with love; all were clothed with humility; for humility and love are the characteristic features of genuine excellence. The angels are humble; as standing before the throne of God, they veil their faces with their wings.

The glorified saints are humble; when high in bliss, they cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, exclaiming, "Worthy is the Lamb." But, Oh amazing thought! even the great Jehovah, who humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven and earth, condescended to empty himself of all but love, and, in infinite compassion, to take upon him the nature of man, and to bleed upon the accursed tree! And for whom did he die? For his rebellious creatures, whom he could in a moment have annihilated, and whose place he could have supplied by myriads of holy beings.

This almighty Savior, who inhabits eternity, even now condescends to dwell in the humble and contrite heart, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. Oh for faith to contemplate this great sight! Oh for a heart to feel the power of this grace, and to taste the sweetness of this redeeming love! Lord! come with all your full salvation to my soul, that all my powers may be wholly consecrated unto you. Here I behold humility exhibited in its divinest form.

Shall we, then, boast of our humility, and extol the lowly bendings of a sinful worm? Ah! how little do our most abased feelings deserve the name of humility, when contrasted with the inconceivable abasement of the Eternal Word, when he was made flesh and dwelt among us! Look and gaze, Oh my soul, on your condescending Savior, until you are laid prostrate in the dust of humiliation at the foot of the cross; and there drink deep into that spirit which will assimilate you to the Friend of sinners, and prepare you for the bliss of heaven.

Oh how should I loathe myself! He, so humble; and I, so proud: He, so pure; and I, so polluted! The thirsty traveler sees a cistern at a distance, and labors hard to reach it; but when he comes with longing desire to quench his thirst, he finds it broken. Thus earth disappoints all who trust in its supplies. It is a broken cistern. I look for its refreshing streams, but find none. Where, then, must I turn? To the Fountain of living waters. Jesus is this fountain of life and glory.

To him I would now hasten. In him I shall ever find a never-failing stream of grace and comfort. He can delight and refresh my soul; and, coming unto him by faith, I shall never be disappointed. From these considerations I learn, that to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness is the highest wisdom of man; for, while so doing, all other needful things shall be added unto me. I also learn, that Jesus has made

an inseparable connection between the precepts and promises of the Gospel, between the character and the privileges of his people.

If I am renewed in the spirit of my mind, and thus made humble, contrite, meek, spiritually-minded, pure, and peaceable, I shall enjoy his presence and love while journeying through this valley of tears, and his everlasting glory in the world above. Then why should the souls of the faithful be "discouraged because of the hardness of the way," seeing that the way of the cross is the way to the crown? The world may light up its fires; friends may betray us to death; Satan may roar like a lion; the flesh may cry out for indulgence, and tempt us to yield to our foes: yet, if Jesus be the God of our hearts, he will raise us above every temptation; he will strengthen us for every assault; and, at length, make us more than conquerors, to the praise and glory of his grace.

Oh! love without compare, Oh! love beyond degree; That he, whom cherubim adore, Should bleed and die for me! For me, a wretch so vile, For me, a rebel worm, His love its sacred power displayed, In its divinest form. It is Jesus died to save, It is Jesus lives to bless; On high he dwells--the sinner's friend, The Lord, our righteousness. Then, Oh my soul, rejoice, Extol your Savior's name; Make mention of his dying love, And celebrate his fame. He claims your heart, your love; He claims you for his own; Oh cast yourself in willing bonds Before his heavenly throne.

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