

The Pursuit of God

Chapter 9

Meekness and Rest

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“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)

The Beatitudes

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
- *Blessed are the gentle (or meek, or humble), for they shall inherit the earth.*
- *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*
- *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*
- *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*
- *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*
- *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- *Blessed are you when people cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

The Anti-beatitudes

- *Blessed are the “masters-of-the-universe” who assume that the whole world revolves around them.*
- *Blessed are the pleasure seekers, the party animals, and the 15-minute-of-fame wannabes.*
- *Blessed are the arrogant, the self-absorbed, and the “my-way-or-the-highway” gang.*
- *Blessed are those whose sport cars display a bumper sticker that says, “He who dies with the most toys wins.”*

- *Blessed are the cruel, the vicious, and the terrorists who devote their best energy to creative destruction.*
- *Blessed are the smut peddlers, the artisans of perversion, and those who deface every good thing they touch.*
- *Blessed are the quarrelsome, the vengeful, and the gangsters always spoiling for a fight.*
- *Blessed are the guilty who never get caught, or if they do, get off on a technicality.*
- *Blessed are the trash-talkers, the bullies, and those who start false rumors. May they strut around, confident in the fact that they are entitled to whatever they can get, and allowed to push their way to the front of the line.*

The Ninth Question

Most of us have read the Beatitudes from Matthew 5 so many times that we forget how radically they differ from what our culture celebrates on page one of the Style section. In fact, sometimes the best way to understand the true obscenity of the world's vices is to take the virtues of God's kingdom and invert them, as I've done above.

Another way to measure the gap between the two sets of values is to see how well they'd sell using current mass marketing strategies. For instance, imagine if I tried to promote a seminar that promised workshops on the following topics: "The Painful Path to Poverty of Spirit" or "The Joy of Mourning" or "Five Excruciating Steps to Becoming A Gentle Person" or "Increasing Your Appetite for Righteousness" or "The Art of Being Merciful" or "The Grueling Obstacle Course to a Pure Spirit" or "Peacemaking in a War Zone" or "Persecution for Dummies." It's a safe bet that not many people would actually show up, let alone pay the ticket price. And that's because what God honors is precisely the opposite of what we honor.

And, it's not just that the kingdom-of-God values are a hard sell; it's that worldly values are so easy to sell, even to Christ-followers. As embarrassing as it is to admit, there are many current programs available to Christians that are nothing more than the world's values baptized in religious language and marketed to believers. Like a bunch of naïve teenagers, desperately seeking the latest spiritual craze, we've become suckers who'll fall for anything. We patiently stand in line to purchase our ticket for the chance to win God's lottery jackpot – "Here's your lifetime supply of miracles! But wait, there's more! You get to go to the bonus round in heaven! Now how much would you pay?" We assume that the promised "abundant life" entitles us to have every one of our dreams and aspirations actualized, as long as we use the secret "christianese" code words.

But Jesus taught that the kingdom of God belongs to those whose interior and exterior are radically different. And this is the theme of the ninth chapter in A.W. Tozer's little classic, *The Pursuit of God*, which he titles: "Meekness and Rest." In review, we've explored the following questions from each of the previous chapters: Chapter 1 – How hard are you following after God? Chapter 2 – How blessed are you in possessing

nothing? Chapter 3 – How much of the veil have you removed? Chapter 4 – How much of God have you apprehended? Chapter 5 – How has the universal presence of God transformed your life? Chapter 6 – What have you heard from God’s speaking voice lately? Chapter 7 – How much has the gaze of your soul improved? Chapter 8 – How is your Creator-creature alignment progressing?

In Chapter 8, Tozer called us to a life of exalting the Creator above all else. He wanted us to move past simply being mesmerized by the infinity of God and to move on toward being captured by the intimacy of God. Now, in Chapter 9 we take the time to consider the companion truth to exalting God – our posture of meekness and rest. Lifting him up requires us to bow down.

Burden and Rest

The virtues expressed in the Beatitudes are not the first things that pop into our minds during unguarded moments. Instead, we find that it is the values of the Anti-beatitudes that mysteriously drop in uninvited. And while culture, education, and religion can effectively camouflage our avarice, cruelty, and greed somewhat, the vices still thrive in the depths of the heart. Listen to our Lord’s assessment of our condition in Mark 7:20-23. He said,

“That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”

No sugarcoating going on here. This statement sounds the death knoll for all attempts at “auto salvation.” The gap between God and us cannot be bridged because the very thing we hope will impress God is the very thing that repulses him. Our hearts constantly spew forth all manner of ungodliness. Go ahead and try. You’ll find that no matter how hard or long you work at it, there is simply no way to change your own heart; it simply will not yield to a do-it-yourself wash job. That is why the Gospel is the only means of salvation. It gives us the most honest assessment of our condition and even goes on to tell us that we are worse than we thought. But then comes the pause, followed by the ever-hopeful assurance that God’s grace is greater than we thought.

Sin has distorted all of creation, particularly us human creatures. As Augustine put it, “We are all bent in the wrong direction.” If you place a straight rod into water it looks as though it is bent, doesn’t it? The water distorts the image. So too is the human condition and we cannot straighten it out. As Tozer tells us, “Pride, arrogance, resentfulness, evil imaginings, malice and greed are the source of more human pain than all the diseases that have ever afflicted mortal flesh.” I believe he’s right. Even the physical pain we experience is the by-product of the matrix of choices we or others have made, whether

done intentionally or inadvertently. In short, sin has touched everything and everyone in creation, and placed a monstrous burden upon us and within us.

Into this world of defilement, brokenness, and burden comes the God-man. And in Matthew 11 we find Jesus teaching and praying, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children.” Here, he is reminding us of the necessity to approach God’s truth with childlike wonder, with an awe and innocence characteristic of radical trust in the living God. A child is one who instinctively trusts his or her father.

The Lord continues, “Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal him.” That is, no one can really know the Father unless I, the Son, choose to reveal him.

Finally, comes the familiar invitation, “Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

Tozer points out the dramatic contrast between our *burden* and the *rest* Jesus offers. He writes,

“The burden is not a local one, peculiar to those first hearers, but one which is borne by the whole human race. It consists not of political oppression or poverty or hard work. It is far deeper than that. It is felt by the rich as well as the poor, for it is something from which wealth and idleness can never deliver us.

The burden borne by mankind is a heavy and a crushing thing. The word Jesus used means ‘a load carried or toil borne to the point of exhaustion.’ Rest is simply release from that burden. It is not something we do; it is what comes to us when we cease to do. His own meekness, that is the rest.”

The Burden of Pride

Tozer highlights three kinds of interior burdens, each one capable of attacking the heart and mind, and eventually the body. The first is the burden of *pride*. The burden of pride chains you to the labor of self-love, which is hard labor on behalf of the little god named *self*. This god requires your unconditional loyalty and devotion. He forces you to remain vigilant at all times, forever sensitive to someone speaking slightly about you, always scanning the room for someone who doesn’t consider you “our kind of people.” This god has a very touchy honor that must be shielded from the opinions of others at all times.

But, as Christians, were never meant to bear this burden. Jesus calls us into his rest, and meekness and humility is his method. The humble person doesn't really care who is greater. They long ago decided that to be esteemed by the world is not worth the effort. They now define themselves as children of God, members of the body of Christ, and living stones in the Temple of God. In referring to such a person, Tozer says,

“He develops toward himself a kindly sense of humor and learns to say, ‘Oh, so you have been overlooked? They have placed someone else before you? They have whispered that you are pretty small stuff after all? And now you feel hurt because the world is saying about you the very same things you have been saying about yourself? Only yesterday you were telling God that you were nothing, a mere worm of the dust. Where is your consistency? Come on, humble yourself and cease to care what men think.’”

He reminds us to stop taking ourselves so seriously because there is One who has already taken us seriously. How seriously? The doctrine of grace humbles us without degrading us and elevates us without inflating us: in ourselves – nothing; in God – everything. God gives us an accurate audit of our spiritual poverty and then imputes to us his spiritual wealth. Our new standing is immune from the machinations and falsehoods of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We know *who* we are and we know *whose* we are.

The Burden of Pretense

The second burden is the burden of *pretense*. The burden of pretense superglues our face to the mask of self-importance and hides the inner ugliness of the *self*. At the core it is the fear of having people find out just how impoverished we really are. It “gnaws like rodents within [the] heart.” That image accurately depicts the ceaseless fear of someday coming across a person more cultured, educated, or wealthy and being unmasked as a pretender.

Tozer warns, “Let no one smile this off. These burdens are real, and little by little they kill the victims of this evil and unnatural way of life.” And so, to all the victims of this heavy burden Jesus says, “Ye . . . [must] become as little children” (Matthew 18:13). The image of the child is most apropos. Tozer explains,

“For little children do not compare; they receive direct enjoyment from what they have without relating it to something else or someone else. Only as they get older and sin begins to stir within their hearts do jealousy and envy appear. Then they are unable to enjoy what they have if someone else has something larger and better. At that early age does the galling burden come down upon their tender souls, and it never leaves them till Jesus sets them free.”

The simple way a child welcomes whatever gift is given soon gives way to the childish schemes by which we comparison-shop for what we want. But in our frenzy we forget

that all the price tags are wrong. In fact, if you invert them you're actually closer to the true worth. That which the world declares to be priceless turns out to be worthless. And that which God declares to be priceless is treated by the world as worthless.

But one day, there will be a universal accounting and the true prices will be revealed. Real worth will come into its own; real treasure will be finally unearthed. Paraphrasing Jonathan Edwards, "The wisest thing a person can do is to treat things according to their true value." This means that we assess all things according to God's standard, not the world's. In the mean time, we find rest for our souls as we rest in him.

The Burden of Artificiality

The third burden is the burden of *artificiality*. The burden of artificiality forces us to play a character in a carnival of self-deceit, hoping that the audience never awakens to the fact that underneath the costume and makeup is only an empty *self*. We strive to never flub a line, never miss a cue, and never, never slip out of character. The entire advertising industry is built upon artificiality – the art of convincing people that appearance is everything. But what the world has raised to an art form, each individual experiences as a burden – a burden that gets heavier as time goes on.

To make matters worse, our culture encourages and celebrates artificiality without qualification. You can never go too far. Nobody cares any longer if those body parts are fake or if this designer outfit is a knock-off or if that diploma is mail order. It's all about appearing to have more, even if you really don't have anything. It's about being on top, even if there really is no top. And there's nothing new here. The artificial fruit fooled Eve. The artificial intimacy duped Samson. And the artificial reputation lured Ananias and Sapphira. The only thing that's new is how trendy artificiality has become.

At its core, artificiality is aspiration with God removed. The noble quality of aspiration: a dislike for being stuck, an impatience for mediocrity, a dissatisfaction with business-as-usual, or, as Paul proclaims in Philippians 3:14, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." But when you remove God from this praiseworthy virtue, you are left with an empty shell – all hype, no hope.

As Tozer says,

"Artificiality is one curse that will drop away the moment we kneel at Jesus' feet and surrender ourselves to his meekness. Then we will not care what people think of us so long as God is pleased. Then what we are will be everything, what we appear will take its place far down the scale of interest for us. Apart from sin we have nothing of which to be ashamed."

The Easy Yoke and the Light Burden

Our world is bent low from weight of these triple burdens. And there is only one way to release the load and find rest for our souls, and that is via the meekness of Christ. Return again to Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” Augustine echoes this truth on the first page of his book *Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.” He crisply states that life apart from God mandates that we must shoulder these heavy burdens all by ourselves.

Jesus invites us to drop our burdens and, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” By being yoked to Christ we discover two things. First, that he is the one who has already removed our burden of sin, bearing it on the cross. And secondly, that he also invites us to off-load our burden of self, exchanging it for the gentle weight of humility. Meekness is our calling, rest is our reward.

As Tozer concludes,

“The rest he offers is the rest of meekness, the blessed relief which comes when we accept ourselves for what we are and cease to pretend. It will take some courage at first, but the needed grace will come as we learn that we are sharing this new and easy yoke with the strong Son of God himself. He calls it “My yoke,” and he walks at one end while we walk at the other.”

Letting go of our burdens requires us to elevate the unseen above the seen, the invisible above the visible, the “not-yet” above the “right now.” 1 John 3:1-3 puts it this way:

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that, when he appears, we will be like him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

Revelation 22:12-13 delivers this promise from our Lord: “Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” With all that is on the line, the loss or gain of eternal rewards, it is unwise to ignore a way of life that our heavenly Father calls blessed. As Maximus told his soldiers before battle in the movie *Gladiator*, “What we do in life echoes in eternity.”

The Personal Beatitudes

Perhaps the following list will prompt you to write out your own personal Beatitudes.

- I'm most blessed when I live each moment as though I'm in desperate need of God's grace, for in that moment I increase my ownership in the kingdom of God.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment, making no claim on anything or anyone, for in that moment God lays claim to more of my heart.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment in the quiet pose of a servant, for in that moment I behave like an heir apparent.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment with a voracious appetite for pleasing God, for in that moment my soul is content.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment forgetting about blame and focusing on love, for in that moment I'm aware that God is doing the same for me.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment with a holy, blame-free heart, for in that moment I get a fresh glimpse of God himself.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment looking for ways to knock down barriers and build bridges, for in that moment my Father goes around bragging about our relationship.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment mimicking my Lord's behavior in suffering without cause, for in that moment heaven gets a little closer and a little clearer.
- I'm most blessed when I live each moment willingly absorbing every stinging curse hurled at me, simply because I freely admit to knowing God. It gives me another opportunity to be joyful, knowing that my heavenly Father is paying attention and will someday make it all worthwhile.

Your Prayer

Make this closing prayer by Tozer the prayer of your heart:

“Lord, make me child-like, deliver me from the urge to compete for another place, prestige or position. I would be simple and artless as a little child. Deliver me from pose and pretense. Forgive me for thinking of myself and help me to forget myself and find my true peace in beholding thee. That Thou mayest answer this prayer, I humble myself before thee. Lay upon me thy easy yoke of self-forgetfulness that through it I may find rest. Amen.”