

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Humble, hungry and happy

Presented by Bob Smith

If you belong to my generation you will remember that great hit-song by the Platters, whose lyrics go like this: *'Oh, yes I'm the great pretender - Pretending that I'm doing well - My need is such I pretend too much - I'm lonely but no one can tell ----- Yes I'm the great pretender - Just laughin' and gay like a clown - I seem to be what I'm not, you see - I'm wearing my heart like a crown.'*

For most of us, the biggest struggles we have in life come not from outside of us, but from within. We present an image of ourselves that is out of kilter with what we actually feel about ourselves. The result is that we frequently find ourselves bewildered by the angst we feel, that seems to have no connection with the outward reality we present. Coming to terms with this disparity is essential to psychological growth. Understanding what to do about it is essential to spiritual growth.

* * *

In the opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus tells us to stop pretending and accept the reality of our inner turmoil and sense of spiritual alienation: A contemporary rendering of these verses says: *'You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God. You're blessed when you feel you've lost what's most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.'*

Jesus then goes on to say: *'You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.'* The more traditional rendering of that verse is: *'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.'*

These days, we don't resonate to the word *meek*. We think of *meekness* as *weakness*. It conjures up images of whimpishness. But, as William Barclay points out, the word in the original Greek text was *praus*, which, to the Greeks, indicated something quite different. To them it meant a self disciplined person who never becomes angry when he ought not, nor fails to be angry when he ought.

So, for example, the Bible describes Moses as *'the meekest man on earth.'* Yet Moses was no whimp. He confronted Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth, time and again in order to rescue his people. For forty years, as they wandered through the desert, he led them in the face of opposing armies, starvation and thirst, bickerings and rebellions, right up to the borders of the promised land. He was *meek* in that original sense of the word, *self disciplined*, no pretence, secure in who he was and what God wanted him to do.

And when we speak of Jesus as being meek, we are speaking of the very fullness of those qualities that were there in Moses; a truth that is beautifully expressed in the hymn *Meekness and Majesty*...reminding us to *'Bow down and worship for this is your God.'* Like Moses, but even more so, Jesus was *self disciplined*, no pretence, secure in who he was and what God wanted him to do.

A word closely associated with *meekness* is the word *humility*. The Bible constantly reminds us that this is the quality that marks a truly Godly person. Jesus said, *'Whoever humbles himself...is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'* The prophet Micah said, *'He has shown you what is good. Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.'* The book of James says, *'Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up.'*

So what does all this say to us in our struggles between the way we present ourselves outwardly, compared with how we feel about ourselves inwardly? Well, Jesus said: *'You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less...That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.'* It's the blessedness that comes from no longer having to put on a show. It's the contentment that comes from being at peace with yourself, knowing that you are the person God made you to be and if He says you're OK then you are OK.

* * *

'You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less...' Jesus said. Then he added this: *'You're blessed when your greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy you fully.'* Or, as the traditional version puts it: *'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.'*

However, it's important to note what Jesus actually says in this verse. He does not say *'Blessed are those who are righteous,'* for the simple fact is that none of us are completely righteous. The people he pronounces a blessing on are those know only too well that they are not righteous, but desperately wish that they were. Thomas a Kempis summed it up well when he said, *Man sees the deed, but God sees the intention.'*

There's a story I love to tell about my youngest daughter when she was about five years old and wanted to buy me an ice-cream, one hot summer day, instead of me buying one for her. I, of course, was delighted and watched her run off to the Mr. Whippy van with her pocket money in her hand, exchanging the coins for a large cone, and then carefully holding it as she started to walk back.

But the ice-cream began to drip down the side of the cone, so she gave it a lick. Then it dripped down the other side, so she gave that a lick too. And so it went on until she eventually covered the hundred metres to where I was waiting. What I finally received was much less of an ice-cream than both of us had anticipated; but it didn't matter. I knew that her intention was good, even though circumstances and her own weakness for ice-cream resulted in a somewhat reduced performance.

And if a human father feels that, How much more does our Heavenly Father look into the depth of hearts and see the intention that is there, even though our human weakness may lessen our performance. *'You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less...'* Jesus said. And, *'You're blessed when your greatest desire is to do what God requires...'* Being honest with ourselves about ourselves and our intentions is one of the keys to real spiritual growth.

But there's another dimension of blessing in what Jesus said about *'hungering and thirsting for God.'* One of the great facts of life is that the amount of satisfaction we get from anything depends on how much we desire it. Jesus deliberately used the analogy of physical hunger and thirst because we all know by experience that our enjoyment of a meal and a drink is in due proportion to our hunger and thirst.

So it is in the spiritual life too. The more you want to be close to God the more you will be close to God. *'You shall seek me and you shall find me when you search for me with all your heart,'* was what God said to the prophet Jeremiah. It's what God says to us, too.

* * *

Jesus said: *'You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought. And 'You're blessed when your greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy you fully.'* Of all the great longings of the human heart the greatest is for that deep inner contentment and peace that makes us feel at one with the Cosmos and at home within our own restless hearts.

C.S. Lewis summed it up very well when he said:

Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know what they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning can really satisfy...the fact that the best of life's pleasures are really only half pleasures, compared to the imagined ideal, is God's way of giving us a taste of what heaven is like, a thirst for our true home.

The Old Testament provides us with a powerful parable of this in the account of the people of Israel's journey through the wilderness to the *Promised Land*. There never was a generation in the annals of the Bible quite so blessed as that one. They saw the sea part before them, water provided from a rock, and manna appear each day. They saw the presence of God in the pillar of cloud and fire that went before them – all of these beckoning them to their promised land. Yet only two of them ever got to see it. The rest died on the way.

The reason, according to the Book of Hebrews, was that their desire to get there was compromised by their desire to hold onto what they had left behind in Egypt. In other words, their desire for what they had left behind, paltry though it was, was greater than their hunger for God and what He promised.

There is in all of us a hunger for that deep, inner spiritual satisfaction that is our *Promised Land*, our heart's true home. But whether or not we find it depends on how much we want it. Satisfaction comes through hungering; finding comes through seeking. The tragedy for so many of us is that even though we know what we need spiritually, we allow our spiritual appetites to be dulled by junk that never really satisfies, but just keeps us from what our hearts really yearn for.

We belong to the discontented generations that have been brainwashed by the modern advertising industry, whose major purpose is to make us continually feel discontented and attempt to fill our inner emptiness by what we can purchase; even though we know it's just more of the same; like trying to slake our thirst by drinking sea water.

Meanwhile, the still small voice of God within us keeps bringing Jesus' words back to us: *'You're blessed when your greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy you fully.'* If only we'd pay attention.

* * *

'Oh, yes I'm the great pretender - Pretending that I'm doing well - My need is such I pretend too much - I'm lonely but no one can tell.' Those lines from the Platters' famous hit- song really do speak to our human condition. But in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us to stop pretending, accept the reality of our inner turmoil and open our lives to the one for whom we were created.

'You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God. You're blessed when you feel you've lost what's most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. 'You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought. You're blessed when your greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy you fully.'

Peace comes when we stop pretending to be what we aren't and start accepting what Christ can be in us.