

THE BEATITUDES

By
JAMES M. TOLLE

HAUN PUBLISHING COMPANY
P.O. BOX 3426
PASADENA, TEXAS 77501

COPYRIGHT 1966 BY
JAMES M. TOLLE

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission from the publisher.

COVER DESIGN BY LEWIS PRITCHETT

FOREWORD

I am most optimistic concerning the present trend in the Lord's church. Even though the spirit of materialism still generally prevails, there are encouraging signs of quickened spiritual life, of burning enthusiasm, of a profound sense of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Many are coming to a deep awareness that Christ is the great necessity and the one central hope of poor humanity. They long for a growing understanding of His ethical principles and a greater realization of these principles in their lives. They will not accept any teaching that fails to make life spiritually rich, happy, and meaningful. They seek for the abundance of life to be found in the unsearchable riches of Christ.

I have written this series of lessons on the Beatitudes as a contribution, limited though it may be, to the wonderful Christ-oriented, heavenward trend that is gaining momentum in the church. I pray that those who study these lessons will be challenged to a closer walk with Christ, finding in Him an increasingly greater happiness.

J. M. T.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Lesson</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. The Blessed Life (1)	5
II. The Blessed Life (2)	11
III. The Poor in Spirit (1)	16
IV. The Poor in Spirit (2)	22
V. They That Mourn (1)	28
VI. They That Mourn (2)	33
VII. The Meek	38
VIII. They That Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness	44
IX. The Merciful (1)	50
X. The Merciful (2)	56
XI. The Pure in Heart	62
XII. The Peacemakers	68
XIII. The Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake	74

THE BLESSED LIFE (1)

“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into the mountain: and when he had sat down, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain 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 they that have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you” (Matthew 5:1-12).

Basic Considerations

Matthew states that Jesus *taught* His disciples. The word “taught” in the Greek is in the imperfect tense, which describes repeated action in past time. We thus conclude that what Jesus taught on this memorable occasion is the substance of all that He repeatedly and habitually taught His disciples. It is no exaggeration to say that the Sermon on the Mount is the essence of the Lord’s moral and spiritual teaching and that the Beatitudes are the essence of the essence of this teaching.

It is not true, as some commentators have taught, that Jesus advocated completely new and revolutionary teaching when He delivered the Beatitudes to His disciples. The Lord’s hearers may have thought the Beatitudes to seem strange and unusual because of the empty, formalistic religion that prevailed among the Jews of the time. But the basic principles they express are found in the Old Testament; e.g., Psalms 18:25; 37:11; 40:17.

However, Jesus did give new life, meaning, and significance to these great spiritual principles, presenting them in the context of the kingdom of heaven. Thus the Beatitudes have been variously designated as the charter of the Christian life, the magna charta of Christianity, the central document of the Christian faith, the living law of the new kingdom, and the code for Christian discipleship.

Scholars do not agree as to the number of Beatitudes, whether seven or eight. A reasonable explanation is given by David Brown: “On these

precious Beatitudes, observe that though eight in number, there are but *seven* distinct features of character. The eighth—on the ‘persecuted for righteousness’ sake—denotes merely the possessors of the seven preceding features, on account of which it is that they are persecuted (2 Timothy 3:12). Accordingly, instead of any distinct promise to this class, we have merely a repetition of the first promise. This has been noticed by several critics, who by the *sevenfold* character thus set forth have rightly observed that the *complete* character is meant to be depicted, and by the *sevenfold* blessedness attached to it.”

The word “beatitude” is from the Latin *beatus*, meaning happy or blessed, thus the reason for its use to designate the moral and spiritual virtues taught by Christ that begin with the word “blessed.” In the Bible there are actually a full one hundred beatitudes, or statements that begin with the word “blessed;” e.g., Psalm 1:1; Revelation 22:14. Furthermore, the word “blessed” or “blessing,” or some similar word, occurs six hundred times in the sacred scriptures. The Bible is indeed a book of beatitudes, the heart of them being the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount.

The word “blessed” in the Beatitudes is translated from the Greek *makarios*, which in its older form was *makar*. In its original meaning this term described the blessed, happy state of the gods, as opposed to the state of mortal man. To the early Greeks only the gods were truly *hoi makarioi*, the Blessed Ones. A later use of the word was to describe the state of the blessed dead, those who dwell on the *makaron nesoi*, the islands of the blest, the place where the souls of men are beyond the reach of pain, sorrow, hunger, and distress. The word was also applied to men who are supremely blest, fortunate, prosperous, and wealthy in this world.

In the New Testament *makarios* is used to describe the state of spiritual and moral prosperity and blessedness, the highest possible happiness that men can enjoy in this world. Those who have the attributes described by the Beatitudes are truly blessed, or happy, because their lives are truly committed to the One who is supremely blessed. 1 Timothy 1:11 speaks of “the gospel of the glory of the blessed [*makariou*] God.” In 1 Timothy 6:15 God is spoken of as “the blessed [*makarios*] and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.”

Blessedness in Christ

It is in Jesus Christ that men enjoy the *blessedness* of the *blessed* God. (John 14:6; Ephesians 1:3; 3:14-19). Thus it is only as men surrender their lives to Christ that they can receive the benefits of the *blessed* life given by God, to incorporate the Beatitudes in their character. Herman Cremer says that “in the N. T. *makarios* is quite a religiously qualified conception, expressing the life-joy and satisfaction of the man who does or shall experience God’s favor and salvation, his blessedness altogether apart from his outward condition. . . . It always signifies a happiness

produced by some experience of God's favor, and specially conditioned by the revelation of grace."

Yes, the happiness, or blessedness, of the Beatitudes is altogether apart from man's outward condition since they relate him to the person and blessings of the blessed God. Blessedness consists in standing in the right relation to God, thus realizing the true law of happiness. Only the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, etc., live God-oriented lives and do not depend on outward circumstances for their well-being. Instead of becoming the victims of unpleasant circumstances, through Christ they enjoy the mastery of life. They have listened to the voice of the victorious Christ: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). See John 14:27; Philippians 4:4.

When a person makes Christ his sovereign, thus to make the Beatitudes the warp and woof of his character, he enjoys the security and joy voiced by the Psalmist: "He that trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness shall compass him about. Be glad in Jehovah, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (Psalm 32:10,11).

If true, abiding happiness were a matter of outward circumstances, the apostle Paul should have been one of the most miserable persons who ever lived. His conversion to Christ stripped him of wealth and fame and power. He who had been a trusted emissary of the Sanhedrin, a leading Pharisee, and a notable man of the Jews, became the filth and offscouring of the earth. He became an anathema among his own countrymen. His epistles tell of weariness, of poverty and pain, of contempt and insults, of imprisonment, of stoning and scourging. See Philippians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 11:23-33; 12:10. Yet, few people who ever lived have been happier, more blessed, than Paul—strange as it may seem to the carnally minded. Never once did Paul ever express regret for having accepted Christ as his Saviour, Lord, and Master. In Christ he enjoyed the forgiveness of sins, peace of heart, the smile of God, the hope of glory. In Christ he received the blessed life, entirely independent of the passing, changing circumstances of the world. In Christ he learned the secret of happiness, of Christian contentment, exultantly exclaiming, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:11-13).

Quest for Happiness

"How to be happy" is everybody's question, for happiness is the quest of all mankind. The drunkard is as surely seeking happiness as the sober man. The rich man is as surely seeking happiness as the poor man. The educated man is as surely seeking happiness as the uneducated man.

The criminal is as surely seeking happiness as the law-abiding man. But the tragedy is that most people are seeking happiness through circumstances rather than through character, through self-seeking rather than through surrender to God, through carnal means rather than through spiritual means. At its very best, everything men do apart from God and His will to gain happiness can bring only a temporary state of well-being, eventually adding to their misery and problems.

The person who seeks happiness in promiscuity finds that when the thrill is gone the sense of loneliness and emptiness he sought to alleviate in the illicit sex act becomes more intense than ever.

And how long does the happiness of the narcotic user last? Only as long as the effects of the narcotic last. And then there is the monkey on the back, the pain and frustration that make life an earthly perdition.

And what about the alcoholic, the man who seeks escape from his problems in a bottle? Just how generally happy and blessed is he? Just how rich, full, and satisfying is his life?

And what about the person who seeks happiness in material possessions, which can be taken from him at any time? How much genuine peace, security, and contentment does he really enjoy? Jesus said, "Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Yet, in spite of all that the divine word reveals against the genuinely blessed, happy life being related to material possessions, our affluent society still generally and tenaciously clings to the error that the more we get the happier we'll be. This emphasis in American life on a standard of living rather than on a standard of character in accord with the Beatitudes is a mark of decadence and decay, not of progress and advancement. The highest happiness in this world can never reside in what a person has, but only in what he is. The concept of the abundant life defined in terms of material possessions is as degrading and destroying a concept as the devil has foisted on mankind.

Men have vainly sought happiness in anything and everything but God, and they have only found enjoyment without joy, pleasure without peace.

Unhappiness of Modern Society

It is a gadget-crazy world in which we now live, a world in which man has allowed himself almost to be completely dominated by technical values rather than by human values. Such writers as T. S. Eliot, in *The Waste Land*, have recognized the tragedy of the materialistic trend of society and have strongly protested against the emptiness of modern life and the unhappiness of twentieth century man. John Wilkinson has observed that modern man has made technology "his new god, his new religion." An article that came out in the *Hibbert Journal* a few years ago describes the civilized world today as "living under a cloud . . .

like a neurotic man whose sickness has no name and few definite symptoms beyond general uneasiness and loss of hope.”

Modern society can well be designated as the Society of Anxiety. The physical plagues conquered by man have been replaced by a host of psychological plagues: anxiety, fear, tension, frustration, futility, insecurity, etc. Consumption of sleeping pills and tranquilizers is frightening and increasing as many unhappy souls frantically endeavor to escape from their fears and tensions. Escapism through liquor and dope is becoming more prevalent, with our national liquor bill running well over ten billion dollars yearly. Many others try to escape from their emotional problems by endless pleasure seeking, creature comforts, and the greedy accumulation of material possessions.

Many find themselves overwhelmed by the pressures that bear upon them and have to be hospitalized. Recent statistics prove that mental illness is the nation's number one health problem, that it incapacitates more people than all other health problems combined, and that approximately one out of twelve Americans now living will at some time be hospitalized for mental illness. Over 700,000 Americans are now in mental institutions, and there are more than 250,000 first admissions yearly. There are more than 750,000 chronic alcoholics. Approximately 8,000,000 people manifest definite neurotic tendencies. *And all this misery in the midst of material plenty and advanced technology!* The Society of Anxiety is indeed a valid designation for a society long on material prosperity and short on God.

Christ Versus Materialism

Jesus knew that the concept of true happiness contained in the Beatitudes would seem absurd to the world. Indeed, it was against the false standards of happiness and success of the world that Jesus threw down the Beatitudes as a gauntlet. The world believes that the truly happy man is the one who achieves outward success. It congratulates the man who has made a fortune, who has the praise of his fellows, who lives in a palatial mansion, who drives an expensive automobile, who eats sumptuously every day, who dresses fastidiously and expensively. It congratulates the Rockefellers and Vanderbilts of the world rather than the Pauls and Peters. But Christ congratulates those who have surrendered themselves to Him, whatever the outward circumstance of their lives may be. He congratulates those who have incorporated the Beatitudes in their character.

How really different is the attitude of the church in general concerning the basis of true happiness from that of the world? We glibly, piously talk about avoiding all compromise with error, about keeping the church free from error, about keeping it pure in doctrine and practice; and yet we have allowed the greatest error of all to run rampant in our midst, even the error that the highest happiness of life depends on what we have rather than on what we are. We fight against such *isms* as modern-

ism and sectarianism, and yet we cravenly surrender to materialism without a struggle or murmur. Our pride is not in our relationship to God as those enthusiastic about Christlike living, but in our sumptuous, air-conditioned, plush church buildings and in our numerical strength.

We scrupulously avoid certain practices that have been traditionally labeled as "worldly," and yet we remain incorrigibly worldly, steeped through and through with the spirit of this present evil world. We vociferously claim that following Christ is the way of true happiness and yet belie the claim in our seeking foremost the things of the material world. And isn't it ludicrous, yet exceedingly tragic, how some of the most money-grubbing, greedy, pleasure-mad, carnally-minded people in the church can so blatantly argue in favor of keeping the church free from all error?

Jesus prayed to the Father in behalf of His disciples: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them from the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:15,16). *In the world, but not of the world*—that is the status of the Lord's faithful disciples. Is it your personal status? Do you seek for happiness through worldly means or through spiritual means? Are you seeking the lasting happiness that comes from incorporating the Beatitudes in your character or the superficial, temporary happiness that the transitory world has to offer?

Questions

1. Name and discuss the special designations that have been given the Beatitudes.
2. Why are the moral and spiritual tenets of Jesus that begin with the word "blessed" called the Beatitudes?
3. How was the Greek word *makarios* (*makar*) originally used? What is its meaning in the New Testament?
4. Discuss the necessity of surrender to Christ as the basis for enjoying the *blessedness* of the *blessed* God.
5. Why does true happiness, divine blessedness, not depend on outward circumstances but on character?
6. Discuss the statement, "How to be happy is everybody's question."
7. Do you agree with John Wilkinson that modern man has made technology "his new god, his new religion"? Discuss.
8. Describe man's plight in the Society of Anxiety.
9. What concept does the church generally hold concerning the basis for true happiness? What concept in this matter do you personally hold?

THE BLESSED LIFE (2)

Life without God

The candid testimony of many who have sought happiness through material, carnal means rather than through spiritual means belies the claim that true happiness can be realized without God and His will. No matter how appealing and attractive their lives may seem to some, their testimony eloquently declares how empty life really is without God.

A certain interviewer congratulated Cecil Rhodes, the empire builder of South Africa, on his success. He said, "You ought to be happy." Cecil Rhodes replied, "Happy. Good Lord, no!" He then went on to say that after spending most of his life amassing a fortune, he now found that he had to spend half of it on doctors to keep him out of the grave and the other half on lawyers to keep him out of jail.

A Texas millionaire admitted, "I thought money could buy happiness—I have been terribly disillusioned."

A well-known film actress said on the verge of tears, "I have money, beauty, glamour, and popularity. I should be the happiest woman in the world, but I am miserable. Why?"

A famous Englishman said, "I have lost all desire to live, yet I have everything to live for. What is the matter?"

A famous Grecian dancer of a former era once declared, "I have never been alone but what my hands trembled, my eyes filled with tears, and my heart ached for a peace and happiness I have never found."

One day the lifeless body of a former motion picture star was found in the room of a dilapidated rooming house, surrounded by squalor, filth, and empty liquor bottles. She had died a hopeless alcoholic.

The body of a young man who had enjoyed great material prosperity was found one morning by a chambermaid in a New York hotel, dead with a bullet hole through his head. Before firing the fatal shot he had put on the dresser his last will and testament, written on a sheet of hotel stationery: "I leave to society a bad example. I leave to my friends the memory of a misspent life. I leave to my father and mother all the sorrow they can bear in their old age. I leave to my wife a broken heart, and to my children the name of a drunkard and a suicide. I leave to God a lost soul, who has insulted his mercy."

Life with Christ

What a difference Christ could have made in these lives! Indeed, what a difference He has made in the lives of all those who have turned from the world to Him for the highest possible happiness a human being can have in this world. The glowing happiness that Jesus Christ can bring to a human life is not mere theory, but fact—as every converted person can testify. Yes, the testimony of every converted person is, "I never knew

real happiness until I gave my life to Jesus.” Such a person recognizes the import of the Lord’s statement, “I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” (John 10:10). He knows the meaning of Paul’s utterance, “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4). Living in a world of sin and sorrow, he has caught the radiant spirit of the Lord’s apostles: “As dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:9,10).

A short while ago the writer of this study heard a successful, wealthy business man vividly portray the contrast between his life before and after he was converted to Christ. Before his conversion, he was covetous and a heavy drinker, his marriage was on the verge of ruin, and he was consummately miserable and unhappy. Since his conversion, he has not touched a drop of alcohol, his marriage is rewarding and meaningful, and his life is filled with indescribable happiness. Money is now significant to him only as it is used in the Lord’s work. To use his own words, “I do not carry even five cents over in my business from one year to the next.” His life, his money, his time are all dedicated to Christ, and he has found the greatest gain of all in this life: “godliness with contentment” (1 Timothy 6:6).

Complete Blessedness for All

Everyone who comes to Christ can enjoy the blessedness of the Beatitudes. The ancient Greeks taught that the blessed life was possible only for a very few. It was impossible for slaves, for the poor, and for those who die young. But Christ taught that it is possible for all mankind to enjoy the blessed life: the sick and the healthy, the poor and the rich, the educated and the uneducated. To all mankind He sends forth His tender invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). To all those who surrender their lives to Him, He gives “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). Cf. Acts 10:34.

In the Beatitudes we see a description of what Christ expects of every Christian. These majestic principles are not limited to a few exceptionally endowed individuals. They are meant to become part of the life of every man, woman, boy, and girl who allows Christ to have the control over his life.

Furthermore, Christ expects every Christian to manifest *all* the Beatitudes in his life. It is wrong to assume that the Lord intended for some of the Beatitudes to be found in some Christians, and the other Beatitudes in other Christians. This does not mean, however, that any Christian will ever manifest all the Beatitudes in *perfection* in his life. No Christian is *perfectly* poor in spirit, etc., but each Christian is expected *essentially* to have all the Beatitudes and to continually grow in them. Cf. Hebrews 6:1; 2 Peter 3:18. In fact, when we analyze each Beatitude

carefully, we see that each one cannot exist without the others. A Christian cannot truly be poor in spirit and fail to mourn, he cannot truly mourn without hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc. The Beatitudes represent a perfect whole, and it is only as the Christian strives by God's grace to incorporate all of them in his life that he can be genuinely happy in Christ.

Not a Natural Tendency

Then, too, we must recognize that the Beatitudes do not represent a natural tendency. No man *naturally* gains the spiritual and moral qualities that make for the blessed life. "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Corinthians 2:14). Repeating a point of emphasis in the preceding lesson, the Beatitudes can become a part of a human life only as that life is converted and committed to Christ. Only as the Holy Spirit dwells in him can he overcome the carnal man and live on a spiritual plane. See Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:10; 3:14-20; Philippians 1:21; 2:13; 1 John 4:9.

There are those who glibly talk about the need of the Christian ethic, but who deny the deity of Christ. They would enjoin on men the Beatitudes as an ethical guide for living, but they reject the power of the One who gave these divine principles. What their blinded eyes fail to see is that the Christian ethic is impossible without the Christian dynamic.

In calling men to the blessedness of the Beatitudes, the church must be certain to call men to the divine Christ and His redemption. The world has had the Christian ethic before it for almost two thousand years, but comparatively little has been done to make it a reality in human life. What the world needs first is Christ Himself, then His spiritual and moral principles. For it is only as Christ becomes real to a person that the Beatitudes will become real to him.

Christian Influence

Although it is true that mankind needs Christ Himself before it needs His ethic, yet, paradoxically, it is the reality of His ethic in the life of His followers which is the greatest influence to attract others to His person and cross. "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh" (2 Corinthians 3:2,3). See Matthew 5:16.

In the final analysis, what makes Christianity attractive to men is not the arguments we make in favor of it, not the pride we express to the world concerning our loyalty to the truth, but rather the divinely given

happiness, peace, and joy we radiate in our lives. No one has any convincing argument to make against a person who has become Christlike through the power of the Holy Spirit, who radiates the light of Christian happiness in a world of spiritual darkness. The most convincing argument in favor of Christianity is the happiness, blessedness, of the Christian life. Such a life is the most powerful rebuke against the selfishness and greed of a world seeking happiness without God. Such a life forcefully declares that man is capable of enjoying a happiness superior to that of a ruminating cow.

In truth, the search of every rational man is for happiness, and when anyone can be convinced through the evidence of a divinely blessed life that Christ does indeed give the highest happiness possible in this world, he will be constrained to accept Christ as his Saviour and Master.

How glibly so many claimant Christians argue in favor of the Christian life being the happiest life of all, and yet how tragically they belie this claim in the life they actually live! Christians are supposed to be the happiest people on earth, and yet many who claim to be loyal followers of Christ are among the most unhappy, miserable creatures to be found anywhere. They are fearful, worried, fretful, and depressed. To come into their presence is an unpleasant experience. They would leave the impression that no life on earth is more miserable and less desirable than the Christian life. They are greater hindrances to the cause of Christ than those in the church who live overtly immoral lives or those who teach false doctrine. May their tribe decrease!

Faith and Prayer

The trust, or faith, in Christ that gives the sinner access to salvation is the same trust that gives him access to divine power for the blessed life. "And that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). Since the blessed life, the life that embraces the Beatitudes, is a life of trust, of dependence on the power that transcends human strength, it is therefore a *prayerful* life. He who would be poor in spirit, who would mourn, etc., must continually get out of the weakness of self into the strength of God by praying without ceasing. Every Christian must keep the lines of communication open with God if he would incorporate the Beatitudes in his character, thus to enjoy the abundance of life in Christ. The great happiness Christ gives us is the peace of God, and this peace is impossible without a rich prayer life (Philippians 4:6).

Self-examination

Before we get into the study of the Beatitudes proper, it is in order that the reader engage in some honest self-examination. Paul commanded, "Try your own selves, whether ye are in the faith; prove your own selves. Or know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you?"

unless indeed ye be reprobate" (2 Corinthians 13:5). Trying and proving yourself to find out whether you are in the faith and whether Christ is in you involves much more than determining your stand concerning doctrinal issues. You can unreservedly accept every doctrinal statement in the New Testament, yet not truly be in the faith nor truly have Christ dwell in you.

Are you genuinely ruled and controlled by Christ? Is He your King, Lord, and Master? Is it your sincere desire to think as He would think, to speak as He would speak, to do as He would do? What is your attitude concerning the Beatitudes? Do you feel that even though at present they are essentially part of your life, you intensely desire to grow in your understanding of them so that you can grow in your living of them? Do you feel that yours is a happy life and that it will be even more happy as the Beatitudes become more and more the moral and spiritual fibre of your character?

Questions

1. Discuss the testimony of those who have learned through bitter experience that real happiness cannot be realized through material, carnal means.
2. What testimony does the person who is genuinely converted give concerning the difference Christ has made in his life?
3. Discuss the statement, "Christ expects every Christian to manifest *all* the Beatitudes in his life."
4. Why do men need Christ Himself before they need His ethic?
5. Why is the happiness of the Christian life so important in influencing sinners to come to Christ?
6. What significance does prayer have in a life that embraces the Beatitudes?

THE POOR IN SPIRIT (1)

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”
(*Matthew 5:3*).

The Greek word for “poor” in this Beatitude is *ptochos* (*ptochoi*), the term that literally portrayed to the ancient Greeks the abjectly poor, not just a person who had nothing superfluous, but one who was virtually destitute. In the gospels it describes the widow whose total possessions amounted to two mites, less than a penny (Mark 12:42-44), the crippled Lazarus who daily begged at the gate of the rich man (Luke 16:20,21), and the vagrants who are to be brought in with the maimed and blind and lame as guests at the king’s banquet (Luke 14:21). It is the word that describes the abject poverty of the Lord’s earthly state, in contrast to the untold riches of His heavenly state (2 Corinthians 8:9).

It is not, however, abject material poverty that Jesus commends in the first Beatitude, but rather the complete poverty of spirit necessary for the possession and enjoyment of the kingdom of heaven. In fact, nowhere does the Lord teach that there is any inherent merit in material poverty, any more than He teaches that there is any inherent merit in material prosperity.

True it is that the materially poor are more likely than the rich to seek the true happiness that comes from God and not to depend on material things for their well-being. In this sense only can poverty be accepted as a more blessed state than prosperity. See Psalm 40:17; Isaiah 41:17; Luke 6:20; James 1:9-11; 2:1-6. But we must recognize that a person’s poverty is not commended per se, but only his attitude or frame of mind that causes him to seek God and His righteousness first in his life. Lazarus did not reach the bosom of father Abraham merely because he was poor, but because he depended on God. The rich man did not go to the torment of Hades merely because he was rich, but because he depended on his riches rather than on God.

Indeed, poverty can be anything but praiseworthy; it can be definitely evil. The man who is poor because of his laziness and indolence is surely not in God’s favor (Proverbs 19:15; 21:25; 24:30-34; Ecclesiastes 10:18). Then, too, a person may deeply resent his poverty, allowing it to create great bitterness of soul and to separate him from God. Also a poor man can be greedy and avaricious, as much so as some who are rich.

We also need to see that prosperity can be anything but blameworthy. In the first two lessons of this study we noted that true, lasting happiness is the result of dependence on God rather than on material things. But in no way do we intend from this conclusion to leave the impression that the material and spiritual are entirely unrelated. It is true that money is mixed with every vice, but it is also mixed with every virtue. It is true that money is used to do the devil’s work, but it is also used to do

the Lord's work. It takes money to care for the orphans and widows, to publish and distribute religious literature, to do missionary work, to print and disseminate the Bible, etc. As long as man lives in this world and continues to serve God, he must secure the material means to sustain his body. It is not the material, physical things of the world that are wrong as such, but the frame of mind that looks to them rather than to God for happiness. It is not money that is evil, but "the love of money" (1 Timothy 6:10).

There are those who become prosperous by diligence and astuteness in their vocation, who possess their wealth as if they possessed it not, who are willing to give it all up at any moment without regret if it is God's will, who can say with Job, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1:21). They truly love the Lord, considering the wealth He has entrusted in their care as part of their Christian stewardship. See Romans 12:11; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 1 Peter 4:10.

The heart of the matter is that whatever one's economic status may be, whether poverty or prosperity, he can never enjoy God-given happiness unless he possesses the poverty in spirit of which our Lord speaks. With this happiness both the poor and rich alike are truly prosperous in the highest sense; without it they are the most destitute of the destitute.

The Root Beatitude

The Beatitude of poverty in spirit is the root from which the other Beatitudes grow. It is that spirit of deep humility that causes a person to recognize his frailties and weaknesses as a fallible human being, that makes him aware of his spiritual needs and thus of his utter dependence on God. It wholeheartedly accepts the statement of Christ: "Apart from me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). When the Christian is thoroughly convinced that in himself alone there is neither the wisdom nor the power to direct his steps toward heaven, he will then continually seek after the will, wisdom, and grace of God, thus to receive the unsearchable riches of Christ. See Jeremiah 10:23.

David Brown observed, "This self-emptying conviction that 'before God we are void of everything,' lies at the foundation of all spiritual excellence, according to the teaching of Scripture. Without it we are inaccessible to the riches of Christ; with it we are in a fitting state of receiving all spiritual supplies."

The scriptures plainly affirm that the righteous God can only bless those who are humble, who sincerely realize their need of Him. "A man's pride shall bring him low; but he that is of a lowly spirit shall obtain honor" (Proverbs 29:23). "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isaiah 57:15). "But

he giveth more grace. Wherefore the scripture saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble . . . Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you" (James 4:6,10).

In discussing the approbation of God as an incentive to humility, A. R. Fausset wrote, "The tree, to grow upwards, must strike its roots downwards; so man to be exalted, must have his mind deep-rooted in humility."

Poverty in spirit is the antithesis of pride. As humility is the basic virtue, so pride is the basic sin. Sixteen centuries ago Augustine wrote, "What could begin this evil will, but pride, that is the beginning of all sin." Pride is the basic sin because it resists spiritual growth. It has been described as "the complete anti-God state of mind." Gerhard noted: "Other sins flee from God: pride alone opposeth itself to God; therefore, God also in turn opposes himself to the proud." Humility is the primary virtue because it possesses the attitude of receptivity which makes for spiritual growth. It is the complete pro-God state of mind.

Relationship to Knowledge

Consider the contrast between pride and humility in their relationship to knowledge. The intellectually proud person allows his learning to go to his head. Since he has the know-it-all attitude, he feels no need for continually seeking the truth. He closes his mind against the light of new truth. He is opinionated and prejudiced. Inflated with an exaggerated sense of self-importance concerning his intellectual attainments, he is unable to intelligently and sympathetically understand the viewpoints of those who disagree with him. He is intellectually stagnant.

Intellectual pride on the part of any Christian can only result in spiritual disaster. The Christian who feels that he has already attained the highest pinnacle of divine knowledge, who tenaciously holds to his religious prejudices, who closes his eyes to new spiritual truth, who cannot intelligently and graciously discuss with another matters on which they differ, is devoid of the disposition for real growth in the knowledge of God's word.

Intellectually humble people, no matter how wide their scholarly attainment may be, recognize how little they really know of the sum total of truth. They feel like Isaac Newton, the great English savant and discoverer of calculus, who wrote toward the end of a long and distinguished career, "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy, playing on the seashore, and diverting myself now and then by finding a smoother pebble or prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay undiscovered before me." The road to scholarly attainment in every realm of knowledge is travelled only by those who possess this spirit of intellectual humility, whose minds are uncluttered by prejudice and open to the light of new truth.

God's holy word insists that the Christian must "grow in the grace

and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). To obey this injunction, he must always recognize the limitations in his knowledge of the immense body of spiritual and moral truth contained in the Bible. In being attuned to truth, he will approach his study of the Bible with an open mind and a heart free from prejudice. His slogan will be, "let God be found true, but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4). Since he recognizes the possibility that he can be wrong, he will never be arrogant in his conclusions as to what the Bible teaches. Thus he can intelligently, lovingly, and willingly discuss with another any matter wherein they differ. It is the exaltation of divine truth that he seeks in his life, not the exaltation of self. With this truth-seeking, truth-exalting attitude, he will constantly grow in the knowledge of God's word.

Relationship to Self and Others

Consider the contrast between humility and pride in their relationship to self and others. Pride is the spirit of self-inflation. The proud person always thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think. Cf. Romans 12:3. Like the scribes and Pharisees he loves to blow his own horn and to be the center of attention wherever he goes (Matthew 23:5,6). He craves recognition, and is hurt when he fails to receive it. The possession of the things and gadgets that money can buy are important to him because they feed his feeling of self-importance. He cannot be content with having less than his neighbors because it is a blow to his pride.

To bolster his egotistical sense of self-esteem, he finds it necessary to minimize, or even deny, the accomplishments of others. In the moral realm this is the spirit of self-righteousness, effectively portrayed in Luke 18:9-12, "And he spake also this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get."

In the Lord's church we see one of the ugliest facets of pride in the attitude of those who take great delight in boasting of their soundness in the faith, of their loyalty to the truth, as if they had a God-given monopoly on truth and righteousness. It is not the mercy and grace of Christ that they glorify, but themselves. It is not important for them to tell the world what Christ has done for them, but rather what they have done for Christ.

The proud person is incapable of establishing warm and meaningful relations with others. Being self-centered, he has himself on his hands for nobody else wants him.

How different humility is from the attitude of self-centeredness! One who is poor in spirit does not think of himself more highly than he

ought to think. This does not mean, however, that he is falsely modest. The truly humble man is never immodest concerning his modesty (after all, there is nothing more blatantly egotistical than boasting about or making a show of one's pretended humility). We must recognize the wide disparity between poverty in spirit and the self-depreciating spirit. It is false humility which finds pleasure in calling oneself a worm, simply as an excuse for doing and being no better. It was not true humility that caused the slothful servant to bury his talent in the ground. "There is no true humility in pretending to be worse than we are, in underrating the gifts God has given us, in declining to take the part for which we are fitted" (James Hastings).

The sincerely humble person knows that however well endowed he may be with intelligence and ability, he is still a fallible human being and not a god. He recognizes his limitations of body, mind, and spirit. He does not need the gadgets that money can buy to maintain a healthy ego strength. He can be content with poverty, if it be the will of God, without any feeling of humiliation. He feels no hurt when recognition is not afforded him. He feels no compulsion to minimize the importance of the accomplishments of others in order to bolster his self-esteem. Instead of fixing his eyes on those points in which he excels others, he fixes them on those in which his neighbor excels him. Not being self-centered and self-inflated, he gets himself off his hands and is able to establish warm and lasting friendships. Thus he finds great joy and satisfaction in his human associations.

The proud in spirit want to be served rather than to serve, but the poor in spirit want to serve rather than to be served. We are commanded, "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5: 5). The Christian who is humble minded toward God will of necessity be humble minded toward his fellow men. Phillips Brooks wrote, "The idea—essential idea—of Christian discipleship is 'service,' because another essential idea of it is 'humility.' . . . Humility is the most striking thing in a man's conversion. He is self-humbled in the conviction of sin; and he is self-humbled in being obliged to accept salvation as a gift of grace. And that humility is the rootage of the new regenerate character. As the new life unfolds, it will soon be evident how it brings a man into tender, sympathetic relations with his fellow men, and inspires him to watch for and meet all opportunities for service. But let the new regenerate life fail to grow; let the old 'self' come back, nourishing the old pride, and inevitably the interest in others declines, and a life of service begins to look mean and humiliating."

Gratitude and Prayer

Because the proud in spirit sense no real need of God and His grace, they feel no gratitude toward Him. But the poor in spirit, realizing their utter dependence on God and cognizant that He is the source of every

good and perfect gift, are ever grateful to Him for the manifold blessings they constantly receive from His bountiful hand.

Since the egocentric Christian has an exaggerated notion concerning his own importance and thus does not feel any real sense of dependence on God, it is inevitable that he will not seek God's help through unceasing, sincere prayer. If he prays at all, he does so only to ease his conscience and not out of any sense of need. In the preceding lesson we noted the importance of prayer in making the Beatitudes possible in the life of the Christian. Now we emphasize that the Beatitudes themselves, especially poverty in spirit, richly contribute to the Christian's prayer life. As the Christian prays to God for a greater humility, so also is his humility a prerequisite for acceptable prayer. Such prayer is a tacit admission of the Christian's weakness and of God's strength, thus of the Christian's constant need of God's care, guidance, and protection. The child of God who is poor in spirit prays unceasingly because he ever realizes that he is utterly dependent upon the grace and power of God for the blessed, happy Christian life. See 2 Chronicles 7:14; 34:27; Hebrews 4:16.

Questions

1. Discuss the meaning of the Greek word *ptochos*.
2. Is there inherent good in poverty and inherent evil in prosperity? Discuss.
3. Why is pride the complete anti-God state of mind and humility the complete pro-God state of mind?
4. What is the contrast between humility and pride in their relationship to knowledge?
5. Give some of the differences between humility and pride in their relationship to self and others.
6. Discuss the contrast between humility and pride in their relationship to gratitude and prayer.

THE POOR IN SPIRIT (2)

Each of the Beatitudes contains a promise as well as an affirmation. After the Lord affirmed the blessedness of the poor in spirit, He promised, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This promise does not pertain to *entering* the kingdom of heaven but to *possessing* it. However, poverty in spirit, or humility, is a necessary prerequisite for entering the kingdom of heaven, as we see in the Lord's declaration, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3). It is plainly evident that no one can be truly converted to Christ, to be delivered out of darkness into the divine kingdom, who does not have humility, who does not realize his need of divine help. But the blessing pronounced by the Lord in the first Beatitude is on the poor in spirit who have already entered the kingdom. They possess the kingdom of heaven because they possess the spiritual riches of its divine King. The kingdom of heaven is not only a spiritual locale, it is also a spiritual condition. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). The divine kingdom is within God's children who are poor in spirit because Christ dwells in them (Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20). They are enriched with the kingdom of heaven because they are enriched with the fullness of Christ, who is the spiritual essence of the kingdom of heaven. See Ephesians 3:14-19; Colossians 2:8-10.

Only the poor in spirit, ever aware of their need of Christ, obey the command, "Seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Only they seek the blessings of the divine kingdom, and so of Christ Himself, because they make it the paramount matter of concern in their lives. "The kingdom of grace is theirs now, in their heart. In their lowliness they have by God's grace put down self from the throne of the heart, and Christ reigneth there alone. They submit themselves to him in deep humility and reverence. The heart that is emptied of self is filled with Christ. The kingdom of glory is theirs by hope, by the sure promise of God. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of the heavenly inheritance. The kingdom of heaven is theirs; for the law of the kingdom is written in their hearts, making them citizens of the heavenly country, loyal subjects of the heavenly King" (B. C. Caffin).

To enhance our understanding of the contrast between poverty in spirit, or the grace of humility, and the sin of pride, we shall consider some examples of each in the remainder of this lesson.

Gideon

"And Jehovah looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee? And he said unto him, Oh, Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family

is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:14,15).

Gideon's confession to God reminds us of the spirit of humility which is characteristic of all the great heroes of the Bible who were mightily used to accomplish God's purposes. Gideon recognizes his personal insufficiency, and at the same time he realizes his utter dependence on God to accomplish the weighty task of leading the Jews to victory over the Midianites (Judges 6:16,17,36; 7:15). Reflecting on the humility of Gideon as an example for Christians, J. T. Hamley said, "In spiritual achievement a man is mighty in proportion to his capacity to receive Divine help, just as a steam-engine is mighty in proportion to its capacity to receive and utilize the largest amount of steam."

Solomon

"In Gibeon Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, . . . O Jehovah my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child; I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give thy servant therefore an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil; for who is able to judge this thy great people?" (1 Kings 3:5-9).

In Solomon's request of Jehovah we see another striking example of the spirit of genuine humility. Solomon recognizes his own littleness and insufficiency in view of the great responsibility he must assume in ruling over God's people. He sees himself not as a mighty king but as a little child, not knowing how to go out or come in. He thus realizes that if he reigns successfully for the welfare of God's people, he must depend on the strength and wisdom of God. Consequently, he prays for an understanding heart. And God answers his prayer by not only granting him the wisdom he requests, but also by giving him great additional blessings (1 Kings 3:10-15).

This anecdote strikingly illustrates the truth that the person who humbles himself in the sight of the Lord will be exalted (James 4:10).

Simon Peter

"But Simon Peter, when he saw it, fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8).

This utterance was made by Simon immediately after he had brought forth in his nets the wonderful draught of fish through the miraculous power of Jesus. In the presence of the mighty and righteous Lord, he keenly and deeply felt his sinful condition, his spiritual insufficiency and destitution. In requesting that the Lord depart from him, he felt unworthy to be in His presence. And it was because of his poverty in spirit that the Lord could use him to great advantage in His work. In response to

Simon's expression of humility, the Lord immediately said to him, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (verse 10).

Paul

". . . the gospel, whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:6-8).

When Paul contemplates the grace, or unmerited favor, of God and the working of His power which made possible his apostleship, as well as his redemption in Christ, he thinks of himself as "less than the least of all saints." This expression strongly marks his deep humility before God. He recognizes that he is what he is as a child of God and a preacher of the gospel because of the unparalleled grace and mercy of God. See 1 Corinthians 15:10. He is poor in spirit and thus able through God's goodness to enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Jesus Christ

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

In the condescension of Christ we see the perfect example of humility. Thus we are exhorted to have the same mind, or attitude, as He. Though He was equal to God, He did not hold on to the prerogatives of His deity but willingly left heaven to come to earth and take on Himself "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). He lived as man, subjected to all the trials and temptations of human life. Though His humility did not include any realization of sin, since he was perfect (Hebrews 4:15), yet in His human state He recognized His utter dependence on God to withstand temptation and to speak only the things of truth and righteousness. He declared, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing, these the Son also doeth in like manner" (John 5:19); "The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works" (John 14:10).

In the Lord's rich prayer life we see the ultimate in His humility, in His complete reliance and dependence on God, summed up by the contrite utterance of His Gethsemane prayer: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). Read John 13:1-16.

Uzziah

"And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up, so

that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against Jehovah his God" (2 Chronicles 26:15,16).

When Uzziah received wide acclaim for his military successes, he became intoxicated with overweening pride and vanity, and he consequently turned away from God. In his self-exaltation he felt no need of God's help nor of submission to His will. As the result of his reliance on self rather than on God, he was smitten with leprosy, to be cut off from the house of Jehovah for the rest of his days (2 Chronicles 26:20,21). Indeed, "pride goeth before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18).

The Lord's Disciples

"In that hour came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And he called to him a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:1-4).

In reading Mark 9:33-35; Luke 9:46-48; 22:24-27, we learn that the disciples actually had disputed among themselves concerning which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Thus the question they asked of Jesus, recorded by Matthew, was indicative of the selfish ambition that prevailed among them. They lacked the poverty in spirit so necessary to possess the kingdom of heaven, to serve God and to enjoy the riches of Christ. With their pride they were unprepared to be ambassadors of Christ and to render humble service to mankind.

Jesus indirectly rebuked them for their pride by pointing them to a little child as a model of humility. As the little child recognizes his dependence on his earthly Father, so must the Lord's disciples recognize their dependence on the heavenly Father. Truly the childlike spirit is the attitude which Jesus commends in the first Beatitude. Commenting on Matthew 18:3,4, David Brown said, "Except ye be converted from the carnal ambition which still rankles in you, into that freedom from all such feelings which ye see in this child, ye have neither part nor lot in the kingdom at all; and he who in this feature has most of the child, is highest there."

Peter

"But Peter answered and said unto him, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. Peter saith unto him, Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee" (Matthew 26:33-35).

The Peter described here hardly seems to be the same person who confessed his sinfulness and requested that the Lord depart from his presence. Peter is now portrayed as being filled with egotistical self-assurance and self-confidence, as failing to recognize the weakness of his

flesh and its proneness to sin. His self-inflation was the effect of his self-centeredness. Had he been God centered, he would have had the necessary strength to withstand the temptation to deny his Lord. But depending on himself alone he gave way to temptation and grievously sinned. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:12,13).

Herod

"And upon a set day Herod arrayed himself in royal apparel, and sat on the throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people shouted, saying, The voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately an angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:21-23).

In failing to reprove the flatterers who deified him, Herod tacitly gave glory to himself rather than to God. He was an extremely vain-glorious person whose wealth and the pomp and splendor of his surroundings had gone to his head so that he sensed no need of the God who made him. Devoid of poverty in spirit, he exulted in his high position as a king. But the all-powerful God, whose help and guidance he had rejected, removed him from his exalted position by causing him to be eaten by worms. "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled" (Matthew 23:12).

The Elder Brother

"And he called to him one of the servants, and inquired what these things might be. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. But he was angry, and would not go in: and his father came out, and entreated him. But he answered and said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of thine; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but when this thy son came, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killest for him the fatted calf" (Luke 15:26-30).

How different from the attitude of the prodigal son was that of the elder brother! The former recognized his moral deficiencies and the need of his father's forgiveness. When he returned home, he humbly threw himself on his father's mercy. But the elder brother felt no need of his father's mercy and help. When he complained about the warm welcome given his prodigal brother, he had not a word to say in appreciation of the blessings he had received through the years from his loving father. All he could speak about was what he had done for his father in serving him and keeping his commandments. He was a self-righteous, self-inflated, envious, petulant, unhappy boor. His attitude was

the complete antithesis of the first Beatitude.

“Observe how self-importance makes a man moody and unhappy. He who is always thinking of his own excellences, renders himself thereby unfit to enjoy the good of others, and is prone to imagine that every token of affection given to another is an insult offered to himself. Hence he is touchy, sensitive, irritable, and envious. There is no surer way to make ourselves miserable than to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. It isolates us from all about us. May God deliver us from this idolatry of self, on whose altar all true nobleness and real happiness are completely immolated” (W. W. Taylor).

Questions

1. How and why do the poor in spirit possess the kingdom of heaven?
2. Why was God able to use Gideon to lead His people in victory over the Midianites?
3. Discuss Solomon's humility in asking Jehovah for an understanding heart.
4. Discuss the description of Christ's humility given in Philippians 2:5-8.
5. Discuss the pride of Uzziah and the Lord's disciples.
6. Why was Peter so confident that he would never deny his Lord?
7. What was the difference in the attitude of the prodigal son and the elder son?
8. Are you poor in spirit?

THEY THAT MOURN (1)

“Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

How flatly this Beatitude contradicts the view generally prevailing in our society! How many people would pronounce a blessing on the mourners, affirming that they live a truly blessed and happy life? If there is any one thing that is undeniably characteristic of our materialistic society, it is the tendency among men in general to shun all mourning and tears. The philosophy of the world urges us to get all the pleasure we can out of life, to seek fun and entertainment as the epitome of happiness. On every hand, commercial enterprises cater to man’s desire for pleasure. Indeed, leisure time and pleasure have become virtually synonymous. Our national yearly expenditure for so-called leisure time activities and entertainment is astronomical. To those who would urge that life is more than skin-deep, that it is primarily a solemn and serious business, the world glibly gives the answer, “Don’t be silly! Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die. Laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone.”

When we see the meaning of the Greek word translated as “they that mourn,” we can even better understand how violently the second Beatitude contradicts the flippant, lightheaded, superficial world spirit. It is *penthountes*, one of the most striking words for mourning in the ancient Greek language, portraying sorrow of the acutest kind. The verb form is *pentheo*, defined by Liddell-Scott as “to bewail, lament, mourn for.” It was the word used to mourn for the dead.

Synonymous in meaning with the word “mourn” is *weep*. The rendering of the second Beatitude in Luke 6:21 is, “Blessed are ye that weep now; for ye shall laugh.” The phrase “ye that weep” is from *klaiontes*, which in the verb form means to “mourn, weep, lament” (Thayer). It literally means to weep audibly, to shed tears, to cry as a child. The word “sobbing” would be a fitting definition. Thus we see that the mourning Jesus speaks of in the second Beatitude is the sorrow that pierces the heart and expresses itself in audible crying, the shedding of tears. It is not merely sentimental sadness, but sorrow that is intense and poignant.

Unblessed Mourners

But we must recognize that mourning, or sorrow, is not a blessed thing as such. Jesus no more advocates mourning per se than He does poverty per se. There are many things for which men feel sorrow, over which they intensely mourn, which in no way please God nor bring His blessings on them. Among those mourners whose sorrow and weeping leave them without God’s approbation and blessings are the following:

1. *The Pessimists Who Continually Whine and Murmur.* Jesus did not say, "Blessed are the morose, the morbid, or the sullen." He pronounced no blessing on the neurotics and psychopaths who seemingly take delight in being miserable themselves and making those around them miserable, who are actually gluttons for wretchedness. These are the self-pitiers who wear their feelings on their sleeve, so to speak, who dramatize their sorrow, who receive an irrational uplift to their ego in attracting attention and enlisting sympathy with their tears.

2. *Those Who Mourn Because of Injured Pride.* The tears a person justifies because of "the principle of the thing" when he has been sinned against actually express his lack of humility, his self-centeredness and self-inflation. The egotist feels no sorrow or sympathy for the wrongdoer, but only for himself because of the injury done him. He feels that every wrong committed against him is a blow to his sense of self-importance. The man who flies into a tearful rage, or goes into a temper tantrum, every time his pride is affronted, is possessed of the devil and not of the Spirit of God.

3. *Those Who Mourn over Material Loss and Frustrated Ambition.* Those who depend on the things and circumstances of the world for their well-being can only feel regret and sorrow when they suffer material loss or frustrated ambition. And in such sorrow they find no comfort at all. However, the humble Christian, whose life is surrendered to Christ, feels no particular sorrow because of any material loss or because his well-laid plans go awry. His life is "hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3); and whether he is prosperous or poor, whether he is reckoned by the world as successful or unsuccessful, he is aware that the only real and significant gain in life is "godliness with contentment" (1 Timothy 6:6).

4. *Those Who Mourn in View of the Effects and Consequences of Their Sins.* Those who mourn over their wrongdoing because of its adversely temporal results do not really hate the evil, but only its effects. They are like the child who cries over the spanking he receives for disobeying his parents, not because he hates his disobedience but because he detests its painful consequence. One who mourns over a headache he suffers following a drunken spree does not hate the drunkenness, but only its painful effect. The man who gives himself to a life of crime, who has no regard for honesty, may weep many tears because of his subsequent incarceration in prison. It is not his dishonesty he hates, but only its unhappy consequence.

2 Corinthians 7:10 affirms that such mourners find no comfort in their sorrow and tears, but eventually death: ". . . the sorrow of the world worketh death." The sorrow described here is that which is worldly oriented, which has to do only with one's worldly, selfish ambitions and aspirations, which does not express any respect for God and His will. "The pain of a diseased body; the eating canker of a discontented mind;

the loss of property or of friends. These and all other kinds of grief which have respect only to the present life are slumped together as 'the sorrow of the world'" (F. W. Robertson).

Blessed Mourners

In considering the kind of mourners Jesus pronounces as blessed, we first notice that their mourning is the natural result of their poverty in spirit, or humility. In fact, the right kind of mourning is the emotional expression of poverty in spirit. The religion of Christ is neither exclusively a set of intellectual convictions nor a bundle of emotional feelings, but a combination of both, the former giving birth to the latter. The sincerely humble man, whose attitude we have designated as pro-God, will inevitably mourn. Notice the aspects of his mourning:

1. *The Blessed Mourner Mourns over His Own Sins.* The intellectual apprehension of our spiritual deficiencies would be of little value to us if we never mourned over them. If the prodigal's son's unhappy plight in the pig pasture had been only intellectually realized, with no feeling of grief or sorrow attached to it, he would never have returned to his father. Many Christians will readily admit that they commit sin, that they are imperfect in themselves, but the attitude they express is, "So what!" Theirs is a coldly intellectual concept of sin. Sin to them is a trivial matter. Consequently, they have no grief or sorrow for their wrongdoing, and so they have no repentance that will bring them to the mercy of God.

"Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10). One who sorrows over his sins with the realization that he has acted contrary to the Father's will, whose sorrow is truly godly, will inevitably repent and seek the benefits of the Father's grace and mercy. It is not just the consequences and effects of his sins that he hates, but the sins themselves. He sees his sins as an affront and insult to the God who made him. Because he intensely hates his sins and mourns over them, he is motivated to turn from them to the forgiveness of God. James 4:8-10 pointedly exhorts erring Christians to mourn over their sins: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you." This exhortation plainly affirms that the humility which causes a person to be exalted by the Lord must be such as causes him to feel deep sorrow concerning his sins.

Long before James exhorted God's erring people to mourn over their sins, the Psalmist declared, "For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin" (Psalm 38:18).

It was mourning over his sins that caused the prophet to cry out, "Woe

is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

The need of mourning over one's sins is expressed in the exhortation God gave Israel: "Yet even now, saith Jehovah, turn ye unto me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God" (Joel 2:12,13).

In Paul's cry for deliverance we see the intensity of deep godly sorrow for sin, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24).

It was mourning over his sins that caused the publican in the Lord's parable to cry out, "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

Peter felt poignant godly sorrow for his denial of the Lord when "he went out, and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75).

Every Christian whom the Lord richly blesses does indeed have the humility that recognizes his spiritual deficiencies and the godly sorrow that causes him to repent and to turn to the mercy of God.

2. The Blessed Mourner Mourns over the Sins of Others. The sincerely humble Christian, who mourns over his own sins, will also mourn over the sins of others. Recognizing the inherent, infinite worth of every human soul, made in the image of God, he feels deep grief concerning the wrongdoing of others because he knows that sin can destroy them eternally. He mourns over their sins because he sees their every transgression of the divine law as dishonoring God and His blessed Son. He feels as the apostle Paul: "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3:18).

Among the severe indictments Paul presented against the church of God in Corinth was their failure to take seriously the sin of the incestuous member: "And ye are puffed up, and did not rather mourn, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:2).

Although our perfect example Jesus Christ had no sins of His own to mourn over, He mourned over the sins of all men. He knew perfectly well the nature of sin, its opposition to God and its power to destroy the human soul. Thus He shed copious tears over the sins of mankind. See Hebrews 4:14,15; 5:1,2.

An example of the Lord's deep sorrow for the sins of men is the grief He expressed over sinful Jerusalem: "And when he drew nigh, he saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41).

Because the Lord took the sins of men seriously and intensely mourned over them, He gave His life to redeem mankind. And it is only when His disciples also take the sins of others seriously and intensely mourn over them that they will diligently work to bring the gospel of salvation to sinners.

3. *The Blessed Mourner Mourns over the Sadness and Suffering of Others.* The selfish spirit of the world is that of callous indifference toward people. It is the attitude of "every man for himself, and the devil takes the hindmost." It is the attitude that prompts a person to say, "The world's pain and suffering is not any of my business; I have enough troubles of my own to be concerned about." This selfish spirit is portrayed by John Galsworthy in *The Patrician*, as he makes Miltown say, "The mob! How I loathe it! I hate its mean stupidities, I hate the sound of its voice, and the look on its face—it's so ugly, it's so little." George Bernard Shaw cynically declared, "I have never had any feeling for the working classes, except a desire to abolish them, and to replace them by sensible people." Carlyle once said, "There are twenty-seven and a half million people in this country—mostly fools."

But the truly humble Christian recognizes the infinite worth of people, and thus he is deeply concerned about their sadness and suffering. He is detached from *things*, but not from *people*. He hates their sins, but he loves *them*. Thus he exposes himself to the world's misery, to "weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15). He visits the home where sickness or death has come. His mourning over the sufferings of others is the actual sharing of their sufferings. He feels afresh what Keats called "the giant agony of the world." As a human being himself, he recognizes his personal involvement in humanity. He agrees with the sentiment of John Donne: "No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . . Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

A religion that is coldly ritualistic, that does not cause its adherents to mourn over the sufferings, trials, and troubles of mankind, is utterly foreign to the religion of Christ.

Questions

1. How does the second Beatitude flatly contradict the view prevailing in our materialistic society?
2. What kind of mourning is depicted by the Greek word *penthountes* (*pentheo*)?
3. Discuss the mourners whose sorrow and weeping leave them without God's approbation and blessings.
4. Why does the humble Christian mourn over his sins? What is the nature of the contrast between the sorrow of the world and godly sorrow?
5. Why does the humble Christian mourn over the sins of others?
6. Discuss the selfish spirit of the world and its callous indifference toward people. Why does the humble Christian mourn over the sadness and suffering of others?

THEY THAT MOURN (2)

In the preceding lesson, we considered the Lord's mourning over the sins of mankind. Not only is He our perfect example in this, but also in the grief and sorrow He felt because of the sadness and suffering of men. Repeatedly it is said of Him in the gospels that He was "moved with compassion;" e. g., Matthew 9:36, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd." See Mark 1:40,41; 6:34; 8:2. The word for compassion in these passages is *splagchnizomai*, which is the strongest term for compassion in the Greek language. *Splagchna* are the bowels, symbolic to the ancients of love and purity; thus *splagchnizomai* means to be moved to the very depths of one's being by the suffering of others.

In taking upon Himself a body of flesh in the Incarnation, Jesus identified Himself with all mankind. He was moved with compassion, stirred to the very depths of His being at the sight of pain, sorrow, and suffering. He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). He took upon Himself the human form in order to become the universal burden bearer. The pain of others was His pain; their sorrow was His sorrow; their tears were His tears. "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases" (Matthew 8:17).

A striking illustration of His deep feeling for the sorrow of mankind is presented in John 11:33-35, "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping who came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept."

Jesus was indeed a blessed mourner, whose sorrow over the sin, suffering, and sadness of humanity ever points us to the perfect humility He expressed in coming to this sin-cursed, troubled world to bless and serve mankind.

Our society tends to frown upon sentimentality expressed in crying. Tears are considered effeminate. The boys in our families are reared to suppress their tears, to consider them as unmanly. In actuality, however, tears can be anything but unmanly. They can show strongest in the strong. It is manly to feel deep compassion for sad and suffering men, to weep in sympathy for troubled lives. No one who ever lived was more manly than Jesus of Nazareth. He was all strength, all man—*real man!* And this *man* among men, the Son of man, shed hot, scalding tears over the sin and suffering of mankind. His tears were never banal or mawkish, but always expressive of the One who courageously and lovingly identified Himself with the world's agony. God give us more men like the Son of man!

Paradox of the Second Beatitude

How can one who mourns be happy? It would seem that speaking of mourners being happy is a contradiction of terms. Are not mourning and crying the very opposite of happiness? If we answer this question affirmatively, we falsely assume that the highest happiness of life is mere comfort or the absence of pain. But life was not given us by the Creator merely for our comfort. The happiness of Christianity is not ease and luxury. It is not the opposite of mourning or in spite of mourning; it is because of mourning and through mourning. It is sorrow accepted in contrite love. Those who mourn as humble, loving Christians, who share the suffering of others and grieve over their sins and troubles, enter the secret of true happiness; others are barred from the door.

Paul expressed the paradox of the second Beatitude in 2 Corinthians 7:4, "I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our affliction."

They Shall Be Comforted

The key to the happiness of mourning is found in the word "comforted": "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be *comforted*." The comfort here designated is that which comes from God. Christian mourners are blessed because their lives are God oriented, because they receive the comfort of His sustaining, elevating grace: "And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

The Greek word for comfort in the second Beatitude is the passive of the verb *parakaleo*. As it is variously used in the New Testament, it means "to call to one's side, summon" (Acts 28:20), "to admonish, exhort" (Luke 3:13), "to console, encourage, and strengthen" (2 Corinthians 2:7), "to refresh, cheer" (Acts 20:12). All of these definitions are involved in the meaning of the comfort that the blessed mourners receive from God. The blessed mourners do indeed call for and summon God to their side. They are indeed exhorted by Him to richer living and greater happiness. They are indeed consoled, encouraged, and strengthened by Him. They are indeed refreshed and cheered by Him. The God of mercy does indeed "bind up the broken-hearted" (Isaiah 61:1). He is indeed "nigh unto them that are of a broken heart" (Psalm 34:18).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, even so our comfort also aboundeth through Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

The basis for the comfort God gives the blessed mourners is the care

He has for them. "Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7). He is the God of all comfort because He is the God of all love, infinitely cherishing His children. The very thought that He cares for us in our mourning and tears is cause alone for great rejoicing.

Effects of God's Comfort

The comfort promised in the second Beatitude is not mere theory but profound reality in the experience of every faithful Christian. We shall now examine some concrete effects of God's comfort in the Christian's life.

1. *The Ennobling of Character.* The tears we shed over the evil and suffering of men because of our compassion for them bring us into closer union with Christ. To feel sorrow for the things Christ felt sorrow, to cry over the things He cried, can only make us more like Him. There is cause for great happiness in a life that is constantly striving to transform itself into the likeness of Christ. See Philippians 2:1-5. If we desire the abundant life that Christ gives to those of Christian character (John 10:10; 1 Peter 3:8-12), we must surely enter into "the fellowship of his sufferings" (Philippians 3:10).

2. *Comfort from Others.* Those who mourn over the sorrows of others out of Christian sympathy are rewarded by finding comforters in their own sorrows. They reap as they have sown. Those whose pain and suffering they have shared bring to them the warmth and joy of love responding to love. It is undeniably axiomatic that he who would be loved must be loving, he who would receive compassion must be compassionate, he who would receive sympathy must be sympathetic. Cf. 2 Corinthians 9:12-14.

3. *The Joy in Alleviating Sin and Suffering.* God also blesses the Christian mourner through the results of his labors to alleviate the sin and suffering of humanity. Those who mourn over the sins of others will pray earnestly and work diligently for their conversion. They will receive great comfort and joy in the increase God gives through their efforts. Cf. Luke 15:3-10. Those who mourn for suffering mankind will lend their support to the eradication of disease, want, and hunger (Matthew 25:34-40; Galatians 6:2,9,10). They will rejoice and find comfort in the good they do for others, for it is certainly true that the virtue of doing good has its own reward in the joy of bringing good cheer to others.

4. *Divine Forgiveness.* Those who mourn and sorrow over their own sins will repent to receive the forgiving power of God's grace through the merits of Christ (2 Corinthians 7:10). There is no greater elation or joy in this world than the realization of being reconciled to God and having a clean conscience. To those suffering under the burden of sin Jesus extends the invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). To His faithful followers He declares, “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

We are deeply touched by Isaiah’s moving experience in seeing his mourning over his sins turned into the joy of God’s forgiveness: “Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin forgiven” (Isaiah 6:5-7).

The Psalmist pronounced a blessing on one whose sins are divinely forgiven: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom Jehovah imputeth not iniquity” (Psalm 32:1,2).

5. *The Comfort of Heaven.* It is in heaven that the Christian mourner will be comforted in the fullest sense, when all pain, sorrow, and tears have been removed. When the heavenly morning arrives, the Christian’s troubles are over forever. “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). In heaven will be the final harvest of joy from the tears the faithful Christian has sown. “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:5,6). In heaven the Christian will receive from God “a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isaiah 61:3).

Since no sin nor trouble can ever touch the eternally redeemed soul in the incorruptible state of heaven, the cause for mourning and tears will be nonexistent. He will then enjoy the *perfect* happiness of heaven, a happiness infinitely greater than the highest happiness God gives to His own in this present world.

Even now we can rejoice in the living hope of the perfect happiness we shall receive in heaven. Every tear shed now for the cause of truth and righteousness is an affirmation of the joy that is waiting for us in the afterworld. The affliction we bring upon ourselves in mourning over our sins and the sins and sufferings of others, makes us ever mindful of the perfect happiness that will be ours in the eternal realm of joy and peace.

“I will turn your mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow” (Jeremiah 31:13).

“Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one taketh away from you” (John 16:22).

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto foun-

tains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:16,17).

"God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3,4).

P. C. Barker's observation concerning the comfort the Christian mourner receives from God is an appropriate conclusion to this lesson: "There is a particular 'comfort' attached to it—that, though painful at present, it is useful; and that when its main uses are gained, itself is lost in 'comfort.' To the believer in Christ mourning cannot be unalloyed, for it knows its present sacred advantages, and he believes its early termination. 'Blessed are the mourners: for they shall be comforted.' Comforted, indeed, now by many a sanctified use and fruit of affliction, and by *the* sanctified assurance that ere long, nay, right early, God shall abolish it, and shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. So it is no mere *end* to which mourning comes; it is not the mere extinction of nature; it is the doing of God's own hand, moved by his own kind heart. This Beatitude is good as a rainbow covenant between heaven and earth, for souls and their inner skies. Whether any Christian sorrow more or less, he may now, with this Beatitude of sorrow, 'rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.'"

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the Greek word *splagchnizomai*?
2. Discuss the compassion of Jesus.
3. Why are the tears of the blessed mourner anything but weak and effeminate?
4. Discuss the paradox, or seeming contradiction, of the happiness and mourning of the second Beatitude.
5. What are the various meanings of *parakaleo*, the Greek word for comfort, and how are they related to the blessed mourners?
6. What is the basis for the comfort God gives the blessed mourners?
7. How does mourning ennoble character?
8. Discuss the comfort the blessed mourners receive from others and the joy they receive in alleviating sin and suffering.
9. What is the relationship between the blessed mourners' sorrow for their sins and the divine forgiveness they receive through the merits of Christ?
10. Discuss the fullness of comfort and the perfect happiness that the blessed mourners will have in heaven.
11. Are you a blessed mourner?

THE MEEK

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

This Beatitude is closely related to the second Beatitude, but it is not a repetition. Meekness flows naturally from poverty in spirit, or humility. Trench observed that “it is only the humble heart which is also meek.”

The Greek word rendered as meek in this Beatitude is *praus* (*praos*), found four times in the New Testament: Matthew 5:5; 11:29; 21:5; 1 Peter 3:4. The cognate noun *prautes* occurs eleven times in the New Testament. *Praus* is defined as “mild, soft, meek, gentle” (Liddell-Scott), “gentle, mild, meek” (Thayer), “gentle, meek” (Abbott-Smith).

We notice that the definitions common to the foregoing lexicons are gentle and meek. The New English Bible translates *praus* in Matthew 5:4 as “a gentle spirit.” Cf. Titus 3:1,2. The gentleness of Christian meekness, however, is entirely different from that of the conventional idea of meekness. The world tends to think of a meek person as a flabby, spineless, milk toast creature who is subservient to a fault, who is devoid of manly vigor and courage. We often speak of such a person as being meek as a mouse. We never speak of a meek *big* man, but always of a meek *little* man. In the oily, bowing, scraping Uriah Heep, Charles Dickens created a character that typifies the popular concept of meekness. But the gentleness of Christian meekness is not that of weakness but of strength. It is a truly heroic quality, as we shall stress in the development of this lesson.

However, we must recognize that such meekness is not a natural quality. What we refer to as meekness may only be timidity or shyness. But Christian meekness is of the grace of God, part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23), and not something that we are born with or obtain through environmental influences. Moses was described as “very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3), but he was not meek by nature. He was anything but meek when he slew an Egyptian in anger. It took the power of God to make him truly meek.

Peter was not meek by nature. He was certainly not meek when he cut off the ear of one of the guards who came to take Jesus into custody. He was certainly not meek when he cursed on hearing the accusation that he was one of Jesus’ followers. Yet by the power of the Spirit he became one of the meekest of men, a real Christian gentleman, an ardent exponent of the meek and lowly Christ.

James and John, the sons of thunder, were anything but meek when they requested that the Lord destroy a Samaritan village with fire. It took the grace of God through the power of the Spirit to turn them into gentle apostles of Christ.

Christian meekness is twofold, both toward God and man. "This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men" (Trench). What is the nature of this meekness, or gentleness, as it relates the Christian both to God and man?

Meekness toward God

Meekness relates the Christian to God because it is the spirit of submissiveness, or yieldedness. The meek person, who is truly humble, who weeps and mourns over his deficiencies and sins, who has surrendered his life to God to receive the riches of His grace and power, yields himself to God in a gentle, mild spirit. He is not aggressive toward God nor demanding of Him. He lays no claims on deserving God's goodness. He puts his trust in God and obeys Him. Having once yielded his life to the will of the devil, to sin, he now yields his life to the will of God, to righteousness. "For as ye presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification" (Romans 6:19). His spirit of submissiveness, or yieldedness, is the same as expressed by Paul in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."

The meek Christian accepts God's dealings with him as always for his good. Even in his afflictions he blesses God. He can say in the words of suffering Job, "Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1:21). His attitude is the same as expressed by Mary, the mother of Jesus: "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:37).

The word *praus* was sometimes used to describe the taming of wild animals. It thus can describe that which is under control. The faithful Christian is one who is God tamed. Just as the wild animal has been captured and broken in, to be controlled by its master, so also the Christian, formerly in the wild, untamed state of sin, has become controlled by God, fit for the Master's use.

What God does in the spiritual realm is similar to what the scientist does in the physical realm. The scientist takes a rushing, turbulent river and controls its power so that homes can be illuminated and industry can be given energy to run its machinery. The Lord does not do away with the energy of the meek Christ; He simply redirects it. For example, He does not do away with the Christian's temper, but He puts it under His control so that it will not be the means of sin, of injury to others, but the means of glorifying God and serving mankind. A Christian without a temper at all would be as useless to God as a Christian without a God-tamed temper. Cf. Romans 12:1.

Meekness toward Man

"Put them in mind to be in subjection to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready unto every good work, to speak evil of no man,

not to be contentious, to be gentle, *showing meekness toward all men*" (Titus 3:1,2). When we show meekness toward *all men*, we deal with them gently, with gracious consideration. We do not show respect of persons; every man is treated with the same courtesy and gentleness. We treat our enemies as courteously as our friends. We treat our economic, social, or educational inferiors as courteously as our peers and superiors.

However, we must not conclude that meekness toward men is mere apathy, that it implies insensibility to wrong. See Acts 17:16. The Greek philosopher Aristotle dealt repeatedly in his writings with the man who is described as *praus*, having the quality of *praotes*, or meekness. He describes *praotes* as "the observance of the mean in relation to anger." It is the happy medium between extreme anger and extreme angerless. The individual who is *praus* "feels anger on the right grounds, against the right persons, in the right manner, at the right moment, and for the right length of time." The word of God cautions Christians: "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26,27).

The meek Christian feels anger concerning *wrongdoing*, but he does not allow it to degenerate into hatred and cause him to sin against *wrongdoers*. He does not run roughshod over them or in any way become inconsiderate of their feelings. He is not contentious, quarrelsome, or overbearing in his dealings with them. Concerning the wrong committed against him personally, he takes it patiently. "If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20). No matter what the injury done him by another, the meek Christian manifests the spirit of Christlike forbearance and longsuffering. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1,2). See Colossians 3:12,13. Aristotle said, "To *praotes* [meekness] belongs the ability to bear reproaches and slights with moderation . . . to be free from bitterness and contentiousness, having tranquility and stability of spirit."

The meek Christian, who mourns over the sins of others, sees every man in sin as a precious human soul, urgently and desperately needing the forgiveness of God, and he recognizes that only by treating him with gentleness can he be effective in leading him to the Saviour. "Brethren, even if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). "And the Lord's servant must not strive, but be gentle towards all, apt to teach, forbearing, in meekness correcting them that oppose themselves; if peradventure God may give them repentance unto the knowledge of the truth, and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him unto his will" (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

In the foregoing discussion concerning the nature of meekness as it relates the Christian both to God and to man, we see that the third Beatitude describes a quality that is anything but weak, insipid, or flabby. Christian meekness is strong and courageous. It takes moral strength and courage to be submissive to God and His will. It takes moral strength and courage to be angry at the sight of sin, and yet to treat the sinner with gentleness and gracious consideration. It takes moral strength and courage to be patient and forbearing toward our enemies. It takes moral strength and courage to deal with every human being, regardless of his station in life, in the spirit of Christian gentleness. *Christian meekness is the essence of moral strength and courage.*

Example of Christ

We see the moral strength and courage of meekness perfectly exemplified in Jesus Christ, who described Himself as "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). The meek and lowly Jesus did indeed feel strong indignation concerning the sins of men (Matthew 21:12,13; Mark 10:14), but He had the perfect moral strength to keep His anger from turning into hatred for the sinners. He never lost sight of the need of every sinner for divine forgiveness. His severity in dealing with the more flagrant cases of rebellion against the will of God in no way contradicted the fact that in seeking after their conversion He bore "gently with the ignorant and erring" (Hebrews 5:2). The displeasure He manifested toward the individual because of his sins in no way denied the love He had for him as a precious human soul, made in the image of God.

The meekness of the Lord was dynamic and courageous in His refusal to retaliate for the injuries done Him by others. Even when suffering the excruciating pain of Calvary and the insults of the onlookers, He kept His perfect composure: ". . . who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not" (1 Peter 2:23). In His prayer of forgiveness for His enemies, He also manifested the strength and courage of His meekness (Luke 23:34). The pagan governor Pilate was amazed by the calm courage of the Lord's meekness (Matthew 27:14).

We see a vivid portrayal of the Lord's strong and courageous meekness in the prophetic description of Him in Isaiah 53:7, "He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

They Shall Inherit the Earth

The meek are happy, or blessed, because of the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that "they shall inherit the earth." Of course, the meek, who are God controlled and God tamed, will inherit the new earth spoken of in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1; but the promise of the third Beatitude is the blessing that comes to the meek in this present

world. This Beatitude is virtually a direct quotation of Psalm 37:11, "But the meek shall inherit the land." This promise primarily pertains to the abundant blessings of God that the Jews who were meek enjoyed in their earthly home of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. And it is true that only Christ's followers who are meek can "inherit the earth," to enjoy the abundant blessings of God in this life. Laying no claims on God for deserving His blessings, they receive all His blessings.

The spirit of the world is diametrically opposed to the third Beatitude. The world stands against meekness because it believes that only those of an aggressive, self-assertive spirit can enjoy the best this life has to offer. David Hume said, "Nothing carries man through the world like a true, genuine, natural impudence."

But just how much real happiness did such aggressors as Napoleon and Hitler enjoy? They certainly possessed extensive earthly wealth, land, and power; but they were the poorest of the poor when it came to the true riches of life. Napoleon spent the last years of his life in vain regret on the lonely island of St. Helena, and Hitler died a miserable suicide on beholding the complete shattering of his earthly dreams in the defeat of the third Reich. The German philosopher Nietzsche preached the doctrine of aggression as the means to the mastery of life, but he ended his days hopelessly insane. The Napoleons, Hitlers, and Nietzsches of the world most emphatically declare the folly of the self-assertive worldly spirit:

The meek do indeed inherit the earth. They do indeed receive the best that human beings are able to enjoy in this present world. "For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or things present, or things to come; all things are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). Undoubtedly, all worthwhile things of this world are the possession of the meek. They may not legally own a square inch of land, but they recognize that the entire earth is Jehovah's and that all its beauty and grandeur is theirs to enjoy.

Among the rich blessings God makes possible for the meek to enjoy in this world are the best men have to give: love and friendship; for only those of a gentle spirit can win the hearts of others. The blessed meek possess what John Milton called "the invisible might of meekness." The aggressor may win the outward allegiance of people by the force of arms, but he can never win their hearts nor gain their affections.

Those of a gentle spirit are able to enjoy the best that others have to offer because they are able to give the best to others. In the long run, those who can firmly hold the hearts of others are those who are able to hold their own hearts, who maintain a healthy self-respect. Those of a gentle spirit have mastered their anger and passion. They are always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth

his spirit, than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32). To have mastery of oneself is to possess the power which makes life truly great, for only when a man has mastered himself is he able to master the hearts of others.

"In meekness only are we the inheritors of the earth. Meekness only makes the spiritual retina pure to receive God's things as they are, mingling with them neither imperfection nor impurity of its own. To inherit the earth is to grow more alive to the presence in it and in all its parts, of Him who is the life of men. Which is more the possessor of the world—he who has a thousand houses, or he who, without one house to call his own, has ten in which his knock at the door would rouse instant jubilation? Which is the richer, the man who, his large money spent, would have no refuge; or he for whose necessity a hundred would sacrifice comfort? Which of the two possessed the earth, King Agrippa or the tent-maker Paul? Which is the real possessor of a book, the man who has its original and every following edition, and shows, to many an admiring and envying visitor, now this, now that, in binding characteristic, with possessor-pride, or the man who cherishes one little, hollow-backed, coverless, untitled, bethumbed copy, which he takes with him in his solitary walks and broods over in his silent chamber, always finding in it some beauty of excellence or aid he had not found before, which is to him in truth as a live companion?" (George MacDonald).

Questions

1. What definitions of *praus* are common to the various Greek lexicons?
2. What does the world tend to think of the meek person?
3. Discuss the idea that Christian meekness is not a natural quality, but that it is of the grace of God and part of the fruit of the Spirit.
4. What is the nature of meekness as it relates the Christian to God?
5. How does the Christian manifest meekness toward all men? Explain why meekness toward others is not mere apathy or insensibility to wrong.
6. Discuss the moral strength and courage of meekness. How was such meekness manifested in the life of Christ?
7. How do the blessed meek inherit the earth?
8. Are you a meek person?

THEY THAT HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

This Beatitude is predicated on the basis that man needs more than food and drink for his body; he preeminently needs food and drink for his soul. That is what Jesus meant when He said, “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4); “Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him the Father, even God, hath sealed” (John 6:27).

Unlike the animal, whose needs are only physical and temporal, man needs sustenance for his immortal spiritual being, which is made in the image of God. He cannot enjoy the highest happiness of life on a diet limited to physical food and drink. His soul can never subsist on the gadgets, knickknacks, and trappings of the world. He needs the food and drink which will bring him the happiness that only his higher nature is capable of enjoying. He needs communion and fellowship with God in Christ.

Significance of Hunger and Thirst

The significance of hunger and thirst, either in the physical or spiritual realm, is quite obvious. First, we note that they are signs of life. Only living things hunger and thirst. As soon as a child comes forth from his mother’s body, he instinctively has a strong desire for nourishment. He does not have to be begged and coaxed to reach for his mother’s breast or the bottle of milk; the instinctive urge to sustain his life does it for him. And it is a sure sign of spiritual life for one to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Only those who are spiritually dead, who are entirely unaware of their need of God, have no craving at all for the things of the spirit.

Then, too, we note that hunger and thirst, what we call a good appetite, are the signs of a normal, healthy life. The loss of appetite is always a red flag that warns us of impending danger, that tells us there is something wrong with our health. Normal, healthy souls desire spiritual food and drink just as normal, healthy bodies desire physical food and drink. David’s utterance well expresses their feeling: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1); “O God, thou art my God; earnestly will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is” (Psalm 63:1).

Ardent Craving for Righteousness

The hunger and thirst pronounced blessed by Jesus in the fourth Beatitude are indeed signs of a healthy spiritual life, but they cannot merely be compared to the routine desire for food and drink that people have who eat three square meals daily, who have never keenly felt that eating and drinking are particularly significant in regard to life and death. They involve the sense of extreme urgency and immediacy regarding one's need of soul sustenance. They involve the longing of the soul for righteousness as a starving man longs for food and as a man dying of thirst longs for water. The Greek word for hunger is *peinontes* (*peinao*), meaning "to be hungry, suffer hunger, to be famished, to crave after" (Liddell-Scott), "to be hungry, to be needy, to desire earnestly, to long for" (Berry), "to be hungry, to be needy, to crave ardently, to seek with earnest desire" (Thayer). The Greek word for thirst is *dipsontes* (*dipsao*), meaning "to thirst, to thirst after, long earnestly" (Liddell-Scott), "to thirst after, to desire earnestly" (Berry), "to suffer thirst, suffer from thirst, figuratively, those are said to *thirst* who painfully feel their want of, and eagerly long for those things by which the soul is refreshed, supported, strengthened" (Thayer).

Those who have never felt the gnawing pains of physical *hunger* and *thirst* cannot understand the spiritual application of these words as deeply as those who have lived on the verge of death from lack of food and drink. Few who will read this book have ever known what it is to be painfully hungry and thirsty, so that the lack of food and drink poses a definite threat of death. But those of ancient Palestine who were acquainted with the Beatitudes well knew the import of the Lord's reference to hunger and thirst. They knew the import of His words because they knew the meaning of deep hunger and thirst in the privation they faced many days of their lives. In Palestine during Jesus' time the typical wage for the laborer was about fifteen cents a day. Families were hardly fed sumptuously on such a wage, and if a laborer missed a day's employment, which often happened, actual hunger invaded his home. Eating meat was a rarity in the typical Palestinian family. The hunger they often faced was such as threatened life, that could not be satisfied with a mere snack. And they also knew what it meant to *suffer* thirst, to be *parched*. We live in a land where water is virtually available everywhere, where turning a tap brings a copious flow of water. But not so in ancient Palestine. In many areas it was "a dry and weary land," as described in Psalm 63:1. Wells and streams could be far and few between, and many knew what it was to face impending death from thirst.

Thus we can see that when Jesus speaks of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, He confronts us with a powerful challenge, as if to say, "Do you long for righteousness as a starving man desires food and as a man dying of thirst desires water?" What is your personal answer to this question?

Some Emphatic Lessons

Notice some emphatic lessons the fourth Beatitude presents the child of God:

1. *It Lays Down the Exacting, Uncompromising Nature of the Christian Life.* This Beatitude insists that the Christian life is not for the faint of heart, for the easygoing, for those who are merely intellectually interested in Christ and His way; it is only for those who long for righteousness as a matter of life and death. It is for those who so ardently long for the things that will sustain their spiritual lives that they "seek first his kingdom, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). It is for those who are willing to follow Christ to the extent that they will give Him unconditional, unreserved first place in their lives, who will renounce anything and everything that would stand between them and their Lord.

In the novel *Quo Vadis*, a description is made of the pagan Vinicius, who heard the apostle Peter preach the gospel. As he listened he came to realize that if he gained the highest happiness of life he would have to make Christ the most significant reality in his life. "He felt that, if he wished to follow that teaching, he would have to place on a burning pile all his thoughts, habits and character, his whole nature up to that moment, burn them into ashes, and then fill himself with a life altogether different and an entirely new soul." The Christian who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is ever aware of the need of continually filling himself with the new life of Christ and of maintaining a new soul before Him.

2. *By Implication It Presents the Basic Cause of Failure in the Christian Life.* This basic cause is that Christians who fail to live for Christ do not really want the righteousness He promises in the fourth Beatitude. Seeking after righteousness is the inevitable result of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. If a person intensely *desires* something that is available to him, he will just as intensely *seek* after it. But those Christians whose lives are virtually spiritually empty, who do not submit themselves unconditionally to Christ and His will, are self-satisfied and just really do not want the food and drink that sustain and strengthen spiritual life. To put it plainly, they are without motivation to live for Christ.

We can here see the connection between the fourth Beatitude and the preceding Beatitudes. Only those who are poor in spirit, who mourn over their spiritual deficiencies, who have the meekness of submissiveness toward God and gentleness toward man, will really hunger and thirst after righteousness with the intense desire to be spiritually filled.

Meaning of Righteousness

We have not as yet defined the word "righteousness," the object of the Christian's spiritual hunger and thirst. This word in the Greek is *dikaiosune*. It is the same word used in the last Beatitude, "Blessed

are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matthew 5:10). As it is used in this passage and in the fourth Beatitude, it means "integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness of thinking, feeling and acting" (Thayer). The faithful Christian, who received the righteousness, or justification, of Christ when he surrendered his life to Him, now ardently longs for a righteous life, a life of moral and spiritual rectitude, a life of holiness before God. Cf. Proverbs 21:21; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:14.

However, the righteousness of holy, upright living comes from the same source as the righteousness that reckons the sinner as free from the guilt of sin, and that source is Christ. Only through Christ does the grace of God make possible the riches of godly, holy living. "And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). The power of fruit bearing is in the vine and not in the branches. Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; so neither can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4,5). Cf. 1 John 3:24; Galatians 5:22,23.

The presence of holiness and the presence of Christ in the Christian are virtually synonymous since the Christian's basic purpose is to reproduce the life of Christ in his life. We can see, then, that to hunger and thirst after righteousness is actually to hunger and thirst after Christ Himself. He Himself is the bread of life—food and drink to make for spiritual growth. He said, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate of the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which cometh down out of heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (John 6:48-51). Cf. John 4:10-14; Revelation 22:17.

It is only as the Christian is Christ oriented, as he depends on Christ, the living bread, that he can receive food for the soul that is creative of moral and spiritual rectitude. Thus he who aspires to righteousness by a frontal attack, by his own strength alone, is doomed to failure.

Total Righteousness

The intense hunger and thirst after righteousness depicted in the fourth Beatitude is the ardent longing for *total* righteousness, for the completeness of Christ and His Spirit. The grammatical construction definitely affirms this. "In Greek writers *peinao* and *dipsao* are regularly followed by the genitive. Here by the accusative; for the desire is after the whole object and not after a part of it. There is but one righteousness worthy of the name, and for this and all that it includes, both in standing before God and in relation to men, the soul longs" (A. Lukyn Williams).

The Christian who is poor in spirit, who mourns over his sins, and who is meek, will inevitably desire all of righteousness. Jesus sets the perfection of God as the standard for His disciples to reach after, and it is for this standard that the faithful Christian longs: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). The Christ-centered, Christ-oriented Christian longs not only for the negative righteousness involved in abstaining from the sins of immorality, such as drunkenness, fornication, profanity, etc., but he also desires the positive righteousness of love, benevolence, kindness, etc. He wants to be a *whole* Christian, to pattern his life completely after the life of Christ. Cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

They Shall Be Filled

The happiness of the fourth Beatitude is in the fulfillment of the promise that they who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. Filled with what? The very thing for which they long: *righteousness*. The Greek word for "filled" is *chortazesthai* (*chortazo*). Originally it was used to describe the gorging and fattening of animals with fodder. In regard to men, it describes the filling of a person to the point of full and complete satisfaction. See Isaiah 55:2. However, the fullness of righteousness, of spiritual and moral satisfaction, that the faithful Christian receives from God does not remove his hunger and thirst after righteousness. Paradoxically, the righteousness the Christian receives in Christ as the result of his spiritual hunger and thirst is of itself productive of higher hunger and thirst. The more the Christian receives from Christ, the more he wants from Christ; and the more he wants from Christ, the more he receives from Christ. Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Ever filled and ever seeking, what they have they still desire,
Still enjoying whilst aspiring, in their joy they still aspire.

"It is a state of heart and attitude of soul that He is blessing here—the mood of increasing aspiration after goodness. And He takes the most familiar cravings to illustrate the desire. The peculiarity of the hunger and thirst which He blesses is that they must remain hunger and thirst always. He does not say, 'Blessed are they that have hungered and thirsted,' but 'Blessed are they who are still hungering and thirsting' . . . Christ cannot mean that the sacred craving shall be appeased in the sense that all aspirations shall come to an end, and the longing which is so blessed shall never be filled again. Satiety is not to be the outcome of man's holy endeavors: for the extinction of his craving for righteousness would be the worst calamity that could befall him" (Canon Duckworth).

Those who continually hunger and thirst after righteousness, who prayerfully seek to fill their lives with decency, honor, and goodness, can depend on the sure promise of the loving Lord that He will fill

them with what they so ardently desire. "We may hunger and thirst after many things, and never gain them; if we do gain them, they often become mere ashes in our mouth, and vanity and vexation of spirit. But they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, after Christ, cannot fail to attain the object of that longing desire; for the word of Christ is pledged, 'They shall be filled'" (B. C. Caffin).

The author of every good and perfect gift will not send His spiritually hungry and thirsty children away empty handed. He loves them with an infinite love, and He will not allow them to perish for lack of spiritual nourishment. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, who, if his son shall ask for a loaf, will give him a stone; or if he shall ask for a fish, will give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7-11).

Questions

1. Discuss the importance of nourishment, food and drink, for the soul.
2. What are hunger and thirst, whether physical or spiritual, signs of?
3. Define the Greek words *peinontes* (*peinao*) and *dipsontes* (*dipsao*), especially noting their meaning in the fourth Beatitude. What did these words mean to the ancient Palestinians who were acquainted with the Beatitudes?
4. Discuss some of the emphatic lessons which the fourth Beatitude presents the child of God.
5. What is the connection between the fourth Beatitude and the three preceding Beatitudes?
6. How is the word *dikaiousune*, righteousness, used in the fourth Beatitude? How do Christians obtain this righteousness?
7. How much righteousness does the faithful Christian hunger and thirst after?
8. How is it possible for a Christian to be filled with righteousness and still hunger and thirst after righteousness?
9. Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness?

THE MERCIFUL (1)

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

This Beatitude solely relates man to man since only human beings can be the recipients of mercy. Many consider it to be the most appealing and winsome of all the Beatitudes.

The word “merciful” in the Greek is *eleemon*, from *eleos*, meaning “mercy, pity, especially on account of misery” (Berry), “mercy, kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them” (Thayer). In examining these definitions, we note that mercy is primarily a state of mind, or attitude, toward men. The difference between it and love is that the latter has as its object men because they are *men*, human beings, whatever their state may be—whether prosperity or poverty, health or sickness, righteousness or sin—whereas the former has as its object men because of their suffering and affliction. Love is the attitude of good will toward men per se, and mercy is the attitude of good will toward men because of their imperfections of body, mind, and soul, with the desire to bring them relief.

The Latin derivation of the word “mercy” throws light on its meaning: *misericordia*, from *miserans*, pitying, and *cor*, the heart; or *miseria cordis*, pain of heart. That is exactly what mercy is in the primary sense, *pain of heart*, because of the realization of the distressed condition of men. One of the words used to define mercy is compassion, from *com*, with, and *passus*, suffer; hence, to suffer with. A merciful person suffers with those who suffer. He identifies himself with them as if their distress were in reality his distress. “Mercy is to count another’s misery or want as one’s own, and to be sad at all another’s grief as one’s own” (Remigius).

Mercy As Action

But in the fullest sense mercy is more than feeling, it is also action. It is not only the feeling of pain concerning the pain of others, with the desire to relieve their distress, but it is also the fulfillment of this desire in the active service rendered them. No one is truly merciful who stops at pity for afflicted, suffering men. Mercy is *actualized* outgoing good will, and only those who express their pity and compassion in action are the merciful upon whom Christ pronounces His blessing.

The good Samaritan in the Lord’s parable, recorded in the tenth chapter of Luke, “was moved with compassion” when he saw the man who had been left half dead by robbers on the Jericho road. But his compassionate feeling alone for the man could not save his life and relieve him of his distress. In his *work* of mercy in lending a helping hand to his distressed, suffering fellow man, he showed himself to be truly merciful. This was the valid observation made by the lawyer in his

conversation with Jesus when he declared that the good Samaritan "showed mercy on him."

The man who brought his epileptic son to Jesus desired more than the Lord's compassion, or pity, when he said, "Lord, have mercy on my son" (Matthew 17:15). He wanted action, the healing touch of the Master to relieve his son's misery.

When the publican cried out, "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13), he desired more than God's pity toward him because of his plight and misery in sin; above all he desired God's mercy in action, the forgiveness of his sins.

When the ten lepers cried out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us" (Luke 17:3), they desired the compassion of Jesus which would be actualized in healing them of their disease.

The Lord's feeling of compassion for distressed men was always expressed in granting them succor, and so must we follow His example. Cf. Matthew 9:35-38.

However, before considering some of the ways in which we can be merciful to men, we must recognize that mercy at its very best is more than actualized outgoing good will; it is *personalized*, actualized outgoing good will. It is not only good will toward people in general, but also toward the individual person. There are those who have a sentimental feeling toward men in the abstract who are virtually complete failures in their concrete, personal relationships. It is quite possible to feel pity for suffering mankind in general and yet to feel that those distressed persons with whom we come in contact daily are nuisances, even to feel contempt for them.

To personally involve oneself with suffering people is much more demanding than to mail a check to some worthy cause. Some Christians liberally support charitable works in such an impersonal manner in order to justify their failure to personally contact the sick, suffering, and distressed people around them. The outgoing good will of the Christian must be extended to his suffering next door neighbor as well as to those needy persons he will never personally meet. The Christian who tries to escape from the reality of suffering, even though he may save his conscience by making impersonal donations to charity, is much more spiritually kin to Buddha than to Christ. Buddha sought to escape from misery and wretchedness, but Jesus entered the haunts of suffering and woe to grapple with them and to alleviate the misery of the actual persons who were their victims. During His earthly sojourn He was by no means devoid of pity for the sum total of the world's distressed people, even for those whom He never personally contacted. But His mercy was always most strikingly and effectively portrayed in His personal association with distressed people, in the helping hand He extended to each needy person who sought His help. He loves not only suffering humanity in general, but also in particular; and so must His followers imitate Him.

There can be no limit to the mercy the Christian is to extend to men. It is *unlimited* good that he is to strive for in relieving their suffering and want. The total righteousness after which the faithful Christian hungers and thirsts includes every act and word that can benefit his fellow man. But we must insist here that true mercy accomplishes only *good*, that it is always actuated by principle, that it always is in harmony with justice. A kind of pity, or leniency, that would exclude justice can only result in evil. What often poses as a kindly act may in reality be anything but conducive to good. The judge who grants leniency to a hardened, impenitent criminal, releasing him from custody, only makes a mockery of law and order. To grant leniency to our children every time they disobey us is simply to encourage them in their disobedience. To feed a hungry man who refuses to work, even though he is well able to support himself, is only to encourage him in his indolence. See 2 Thessalonians 3:10. To forgive a person the evil he has done us while he remains impenitent is only to encourage him in his evil-doing; thus Jesus predicates our forgiveness of others on their repentance (Luke 17:3).

It behooves every Christian to consider seriously his acts of pity in the light of their consequences, to be as certain as possible that they are conducive to good rather than to evil. He must have zeal for justice as well as for mercy. He must not forget that Christian mercy always fulfills the demands of justice and thus is never contrary to it. He must never confuse soft heartedness with soft headedness.

How do we *actualize* our mercy toward men? What are the ways in which we can be merciful to them, thus obeying such injunctions as Galatians 6:2,10, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. . . . So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith"?

Prayer

All men are subjected to temptation and suffering; thus all men stand in need of the help and mercy of God. When we have compassion for them, keenly feeling their sorrows and burdens as if they were our own, we will make intercession to God for them, seeking through prayer the mercy they need above all other mercy, the mercy of the loving heavenly Father. Thus the basic ministry of Christian mercy is prayer. "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men" (1 Timothy 2:1). See Matthew 5:43-45; Ephesians 6:18; Romans 10:1; 15:30; 3 John 2.

Caring for Physical Needs

There are claimant followers of Christ who insist that the sole responsibility of the church is to minister to men's spiritual needs. They use the term "social gospel" as an epithet to ridicule any movement

in the church that is directed at alleviating the suffering of the hungry, naked, and sick people of the world. They fail to realize that the gospel of Christ is social in its nature, that it does indeed relate itself to the society of men. True, its basic meaning pertains to the spiritual needs of men; it is glad tidings concerning salvation in Christ. But the saving power it brings to a human life will result in a life of mercy, a life devoted to meeting the needs of the *whole* man, both physical and spiritual. What kind of influence would we have in leading a man to Christ who is on the verge of starvation, suffering from the gnawing pains of hunger, if we overlook his need of food? See Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:9.

He who came to seek and to save the lost was not unaware of the physical wants and sufferings of men. Did He not feed the multitudes as well as preach to them (Matthew 15:32-38)? Did he not heal the sick (Matthew 4:23)? Yes, the mercy of the Lord toward men embraced their bodies as well as their souls. And He who is our perfect example of mercy teaches us to alleviate the physical wants and suffering of men, to be concerned also for their bodies as well as their souls. See Matthew 25:34-46; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17,18.

Caring for Spiritual Needs

Above all, Christian mercy reaches out to care for the needs of men's souls, which are of infinitely more value and importance than their bodies.

We are merciful when we seek to lead men to salvation, whether they be erring disciples of Christ or alien sinners, using our opportunities to reach them with the gospel of Christ (Galatians 6:1,6; James 5:19,20).

We are merciful when we labor to bring about the repentance of those who have sinned against us personally, consequently to forgive them when they repent (Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3,4).

We are merciful when we encourage our fellow Christians to progress and grow in their devotion to Christ and to withstand temptation (1 Corinthians 11:1; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24). Since none are perfect, all Christians suffer from some spiritual want; thus it is Christian mercy to encourage them to a greater measure of holiness and righteousness.

Refraining from Cruelty

Since the spirit of mercy is that of compassion toward men in their sufferings and wants with the desire to do them good and only *good*, we readily recognize that all forms of cruelty are diametrically opposed to mercy. The purpose of mercy is not to inflict pain but to relieve it, not to harm but to heal. And it should be remembered that cruel words as well as cruel acts are contrary to the Beatitude of mercy. Words sometimes lacerate more deeply than stripes. See Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6; James 3:8-10. The merciful Christian will always abstain

from any word or act that is calculated to injure or degrade another.

What made the fifth Beatitude sound so drastic and revolutionary to the Lord's contemporaries was the general cruelty of the age in which they lived. The Romans despised pity, and the Stoics regarded compassion as a vice even though they might offer succor. Human life was cheaply regarded, the penalties for crime were unduly severe, and no entertainment was considered more appealing than the cruel gladiator contests or human beings being torn to pieces by wild animals.

Slaves were often treated with great severity. Juvenal wrote of masters who "delight in the sound of cruel flogging, thinking it sweeter than the siren's song," who "revel in clanging chains," and who are never happier "until they have summoned a torturer and can brand someone with a red hot iron for stealing a couple of towels." In one of his essays on agriculture, Cato offered the advice: "When you take possession of a farm, look over the livestock and hold a sale. Sell your oil, if the price is satisfactory, and sell the surplus of your wine and grain. Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle and sheep, wool, hides, and old wagons, old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is superfluous."

The cruelty of the ancient world was strikingly exemplified in its treatment of unwanted children. In 1 B. C., Hilarion wrote to his wife Alis, "Hilarion to his wife Alis, warmest greetings . . . I want you to know we are still in Alexandria. Don't worry if, when they all go home, I stay on in Alexandria. I beg and intreat you, take care of the little child; and, as soon as we get our pay, I will send it up to you. If—good luck to you!—you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, throw it out." Stobaeus said, "The poor man raises his sons, but the daughters, if one is poor, we expose." Aristotle laid down the rule, "Let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared." Seneca wrote, "Mad dogs we knock on the head; the fierce and savage oxen we slay; sickly sheep we put to the knife to keep them from infecting the flock; unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal. It is not anger but reason which separates the harmful from the sound." How different from the callousness of the pagan world is a society that has known the mercy of Christ!

It is evident that Christ meant for the mercy of His followers to be a radiant light in a world of darkness, but history reveals that some of the most fiendish acts of cruelty ever imposed on men have been the work of deeply religious men who believed they rendered acceptable service to the Lord Jesus Christ in causing others to suffer. How paradoxical it is that those who should be the most merciful of men are often the most merciless of men!

The Catholic persecution of Protestants was done, in the main, out of a warped sense of loyalty to Christ. For example, during the first year of the reign of King Philip of Spain, Spanish soldiers burned or

tortured tens of thousands of the inhabitants of Holland. When the Duke of Alva arrived in the Netherlands in 1567, the atrocities became even more fiendish. On one occasion alone five hundred were burned *en masse*. Hundreds of persons were put to death after being cruelly tortured.

Under the rule of Charles V, more than ten thousand persons were put to death for heresy in the Netherlands. His imperial edict of 1533 condemning all heretics in Brussels resulted in fully fifty thousand inhabitants being tortured and killed. Some were buried alive and others were burned alive. We could go on and on listing other Catholic atrocities done with the desire to serve Christ.

Not to be outdone, many Protestants took great delight in serving their Lord by treating Catholics with great cruelty. For example, when the French Huguenots took Dieppe in 1562, they brought great misery upon the Catholics of the city. Priests were dragged to death tied to the tails of horses. Others were buried in the ground with their heads exposed, and the Protestants amused themselves by rolling bowling balls at the heads which served as nine-pins. Later as Chasseneuil, one Friar Loys Fayard had his hands forced into boiling oil, and boiling oil was poured into his mouth and ears. In Rivieres, priests and other Catholics were hung by their feet and had their tongues or eyes torn out and roasted.

Dietrich Sonoy, governor of a portion of Holland and a staunch Protestant, caused Catholics taken into his custody to be singed head to foot with burning torches and their feet flayed, following a series of fearful tortures, and then to have their hearts taken out of their living bodies and thrown into their faces.

We shudder at the thought of such cruelty being manifested by men who avowed loyalty to the merciful Christ, but how really different from them are those claimant disciples of Christ who inflict mental anguish on others by their harsh judgments, slander, gossip, backbiting, and revengeful, unforgiving spirit? Today we may not hang witches or consign heretics to the rack, but we can be just as cruel in the verbal abuse we heap upon those who disagree with us in religious matters.

Questions

1. What is the meaning of the Greek word *eleemon* (*eleos*)?
2. What distinction can we make, if any, between love and mercy?
3. Discuss the concept of Christian mercy as actualized outgoing good will.
4. What is the significance of mercy as *personalized*, actualized outgoing good will?
5. Discuss the mercy of Christ.
6. Why must Christian mercy be in harmony with justice?
7. Discuss the ways in which we actualize our mercy toward men.

THE MERCIFUL (2)

A religious life that excludes justice and mercy is spiritually and morally empty, no matter how doctrinally sound it may be. The Jews of old who omitted the practice of justice and mercy from their lives thought they could receive God's blessings by approaching Him with their sacrifices. How wrong they were! "Wherewith shall I come before Jehovah, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? will Jehovah be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He that showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:6-8). See Psalm 82:3,4; Hosea 12:6; Zechariah 7:9,10.

To the coldly formalistic and ritualistic Pharisees, who excluded mercy from their religion, Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah: "But go ye and learn what this meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13). Later He said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith: but these ye ought to have done, and not to have left the other undone. Ye blind guides, that strain out the gnat, and swallow the camel" (Matthew 23:23,24).

It is a travesty on Christianity for those who avow loyalty to Christ to treat doctrinal soundness as all important and mercy as of little or no importance. The church is suffering from a sad state of affairs when it quickly castigates any member who even remotely shows any sign of weakening on a doctrinal point, although basically he may be a kind, tender hearted, merciful, benevolent person, and yet grants full fellowship to some boorish, unkind, inconsiderate, embittered, unmerciful member who blatantly boasts of his loyal stand for the truth.

Religion without mercy, no matter how technically sound it may be, is hell oriented, not heaven oriented. No Christian can maintain a living, saving faith in Christ who excludes mercy from his life. Such a life can only lead to hell. In the judgment Jesus will say to the unmerciful, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these

least, ye did it not unto me. And these shall go away in eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:41-46).

Importance of Divine Mercy

In order to truly realize our responsibility to be merciful to others, we must be cognizant of the perfect mercy of the loving heavenly Father. “But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us” (Ephesians 2:4). It is His mercy that saved us. “Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5). It is His mercy we receive at the throne of grace. “Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). It is His mercy that gives us a living hope of the heavenly inheritance. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3,4).

It is evident that the mercy pronounced blessed by Jesus in the fifth Beatitude can only be expressed by souls that have experienced the marvelous mercy of God. Only they who have experienced divine mercy in the forgiveness of their sins, in help received at the throne of grace, in the living hope of the incorruptible heavenly inheritance, are able to extend mercy to others. Indeed, it is on the basis that we have received God’s mercy that He appeals to us to grant mercy to others: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). The next verse exhorts, “Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children.” Only as we have experienced and continue to receive God’s mercy are we able to imitate Him in being merciful to others.

Every Christian who would extend mercy to others must continually ponder over the riches of God’s mercy that made for his exalted position as a child of God, free from the bondage and guilt of sin. He must always recognize that the divine mercy which made possible his salvation in Christ is not merely a sentiment, but God’s *actualized* outgoing good will expressed in the giving of His Son to die for him and the rest of sinful mankind: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). He must never forget the actualized outgoing good will of the divine Son, who willingly submitted himself to His Father’s will in dying on the cross (John 10:17,18). He must ever remember that the debt to God which he incurred in his sins was beyond his power to pay, and that, therefore, only by God’s mercy were his sins forgiven in the blood of Calvary. He must also ever remember that it is God’s mercy continually given him that makes possible victorious living in Christ. When he so contemplates the

meaning of God's mercy in his life, he will be powerfully motivated to grant mercy to his fellow men.

Being full of the Holy Spirit and having experienced the riches of God's mercy, the first Christian martyr Stephen was able to grant mercy to others. Even in the face of death, as the stones of his persecutors were crushing the life from his body, he eloquently expressed the spirit of Christlike mercy in his prayer: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" (Acts 7:60). Adam Clarke observed, "What an extent of benevolence! And in what a beautiful light does this place the spirit of the Christian religion. Christ had given what some have supposed to be an impossible command, *Love your enemies; pray for them that despitefully use and persecute you.* And Stephen shows here, in his own person, how practicable the grace of His master had made this sublime precept."

The servant who had been forgiven ten thousand talents (approximately ten million dollars) by his merciful master, as described in the Lord's parable of Matthew 18:23-34, refused to grant mercy to his debtor who owed him only one hundred shillings (approximately seventeen dollars). The reason for his lack of mercy is obvious: he failed to lovingly appreciate and remember the magnitude of the mercy which forgave him such an enormous debt that he could not possibly have ever repaid it. If his master's mercy had warmed his heart, he willingly and gladly would have granted mercy to his debtor. *And every failure of a Christian to grant mercy to others reveals his failure to understand, appreciate, and remember the mercy he has received from God.* When he is unmerciful to others, he tacitly counts the mercy of God a worthless thing and avows that the death of Christ on the cross was in vain.

They Shall Obtain Mercy

Not only is the mercy of the fifth Beatitude the result of the mercy the Christian has received from God, but it also is the guarantee that he continually shall be the recipient of mercy: "Blessed are the merciful: for *they shall obtain mercy.*" Trench makes the valid conclusion: "According to the view given in Scripture, the Christian stands in a middle point, between a mercy received and a mercy yet needed. Sometimes the first is urged upon him as an argument for showing mercy (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32), and sometimes the last (Luke 6:37; James 5:9). And thus, while he is ever to look back on the mercy received as the source and motive of the mercy which he shows, he also looks forward to the mercy which he needs, and which he is assured that the merciful—according to what Bengel beautifully calls 'the gracious requital of the kingdom of God'—shall receive, as a new provocation of its abundant exercise."

The Christian does indeed need mercy, and it is only as he is merciful that he receives mercy. Praying to God, David said, "With the merciful thou wilt show thyself merciful" (Psalm 18:25). It is the law of life, plainly expressed in the scriptures, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that

shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). If we sow mercy, we will reap mercy; if we sow mercilessness, we shall reap mercilessness. As we treat men, so also will God treat us. "Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry, but shall not be heard" (Proverbs 21:13). "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you" (Matthew 7:2). "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14,15). "For judgment is without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy: mercy glorieth against judgment" (James 2:13).

The matter is plain: refuse to do good to others, and God will withhold good from you; be unmerciful in your judgment of others, and God will be unmerciful in His judgment of you; refuse to forgive others their trespasses against you, and God will refuse to forgive the sins you have committed against Him. But do good to others, and God will do good to you; be merciful in your judgment of others, and God will be merciful in His judgment of you; forgive others their trespasses against you, and God will forgive your trespasses against Him.

The unmerciful servant failed to receive mercy from his master because he refused to extend mercy to his debtor. He was taken to task by his master: "Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me: shouldst not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormenters, till he should pay all that was due" (Matthew 18:32-34). In the next verse Jesus makes the solemn, serious observation, "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."

But happy is the thought that "mercy glorieth against judgment" (James 2:13). Both in this life and in the day of judgment, the merciful Christian can face his God without fear. He is the continual recipient of mercy in this present world, and in the world to come he will hear the great King say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Matthew 25:34-36).

Concerning the Christian's need of divine mercy, B. C. Caffin wrote, "We all need the mercy of our God. What would the best of us be without his tender pity. We look back upon our lives; we see a waste of sin, of hardness, of unloving ingratitude. God pitied us, God called us. We heard the voice of Jesus, 'Come unto me.' We came in awe, in contrition, in trembling hope; we found rest for our souls. He pitied us. We need that sacred pity still for our daily lives and shortcomings; and oh! We shall need it in the hour of death and in the day of judgment."

The eloquent description of the blessing of mercy made by Shakespeare is a sober reminder that those who would enjoy the riches of God's mercy must be merciful to others.

The quality of mercy is not strained;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed;
It blesseth him who gives, and him who takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown
It is an attribute of God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's,
When mercy seasons justice.—
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.—
Why, all the souls that are, were forfeit once:
And he who might the 'vantage best have took
Found out the remedy. How would you be
If He who is the top of judgment should
But judge you as you are? O! think on that;
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made.
How shall thou hope of mercy, rend'ring none?

The merciful not only obtain mercy from God, but also from men. When we take revenge on those who have sinned against us, we invite their retaliation; but when we grant them mercy, we invite their love. It is much easier to be forgiving of the forgiving than of the unforgiving. It is much easier to be merciful to the merciful than to the unmerciful.

Time and time again history has substantiated the conclusion that mercilessness tends to beget mercilessness. The merciless persecution of Protestants by Catholics when they had the political power brought about severe and cruel retaliation when the Protestants gained the political ascendancy. The Romans cruelly mistreated their barbarian neighbors, and when the latter conquered Rome they showed no mercy to their enemies. The imperial Russian government was merciless in its treatment of the peasants, and when the latter came into power through the Revolution of 1917, they showed no mercy to their former oppressors.

Happiness of the Merciful

Blessed and happy indeed are the merciful! They who recognize their spiritual poverty, who mourn over their sins and the sins of others, who are meek, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, cannot keep from dealing with others in the same merciful spirit God deals with them. They find happiness in the very act of dispensing the blessing of mercy, for in this act they walk in God's sunlight. They find happiness in the mercy they obtain from others because they have spent themselves for others. They find happiness in the living hope that they will receive

the fullness of God's mercy in the day of judgment, mercy that will grant them an eternal home in heaven. Yea, verily, "blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

"Mercifulness is a quality of the whole nature; a certain soft, sweet, tender, gentle, gracious atmosphere in which the whole man lives and breathes; in which he continually acts toward injury and wrong; and under its warm and sunny rays injury and wrong melt away day by day, like icebergs that come floating down the tropical stream. And those are blest who have it. They live in a soft sunshine of their own making, and in it all the simple charities of life, which are like to common flowers that adorn and make sweet the woods and fields, flourish until the whole world rejoices in the life of those who live by mercy. And their speech is delightful as the songs of birds, and their daily acts like the soft murmur of such streams as gently flow through meadows. In all this inward beauty of soul they are blessed indeed, for mercy blesses him who gives it" (S. A. Brooke).

Questions

1. Discuss the moral and spiritual emptiness of a religion that is long on doctrinal soundness and short on mercy. Why is such a religion hell oriented rather than heaven oriented?
2. What are the blessings the Christian has received through divine mercy, and why must he continually and gratefully be aware of these blessings if he would be merciful to others? Why did the unmerciful servant refuse to grant mercy to his debtor?
3. Discuss the Christian's continual need of divine mercy and how he must be merciful to others in order to receive this mercy.
4. Discuss the need of being merciful in order to obtain mercy from others.
5. Give some historical examples which substantiate the conclusion that mercilessness tends to beget mercilessness.
6. Discuss the blessedness of mercy.
7. Are you a truly merciful person?

THE PURE IN HEART

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

The “heart” designated in this Beatitude involves that part of man which comprehends his mind, will, and emotions. The word “pure” is from the Greek *katharos*. This word is used twenty-eight times in the New Testament. It is defined as “*clean, pure, unsoiled*, Matt. 23.26; 27.59; met. *clean from guilt, guiltless, innocent*, Ac. 18.6; 20.26; *sincere, unfeigned, upright, virtuous, void of evil*, Matt. 5.8; John 15.3; *clean ceremonially*, Lu. 11.41” (Harper). We note that the ideas of physical, ceremonial, and moral purity, or cleanness, are contained in the various New Testament uses of this word.

What was considered religious purity among the Jews of Jesus’ time was almost exclusively ceremonial or ritualistic. The heart had nothing to do with it at all. If a man kept the external ceremonies and rituals, he was considered pure, or orthodox, even though his heart might be filled with pride, bitterness, hate, envy, jealousy, and such like. It was against this false concept of purity in religion that Jesus presented the sixth Beatitude. In it He affirmed once and for all that no matter how strict men might be in their observance of the externals of religion, they are not truly pure unless their hearts are right before God.

Jesus said to the Pharisees and scribes who were meticulous in their observance of religious ceremonies and rituals, “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy of you, saying, This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:7,8); “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full from extortion and excess . . . for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:25,27,28).

Before we are quick to point a finger of scorn at the scribes and Pharisees because of their erroneous concept of purity, we need to take a good, hard look at our own concept of purity. It is entirely possible for us to consider religious purity exclusively in terms of church going, Bible reading, praying, and the like, and yet fail to see that all these activities, even though ordained of God, are meaningless without purity of heart.

Referring again to Harper’s definition of the word *katharos*, we note that as it used in Matthew 5:8, the sixth Beatitude, it means “sincere, unfeigned, upright, void of evil.” This definition affirms two dominant meanings: *moral cleanness* and *singleness, or sincerity of motive*.

Moral Cleanness

Moral living is always the result of moral thinking, and immoral living is always the result of immoral thinking. Thus Solomon said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Jesus taught, ". . . for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things: and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matthew 12:34,35); "But the things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings" (Matthew 15:18,19). Cf. Matthew 5:27,28; 1 John 3:15.

Singleness of Motive

Getting back to the word *katharos*, we find that in its ordinary use in the Greek-speaking world it always denoted something without alloy, unmixed, single—like unmixed milk and unalloyed silver. So the pure in heart are those who have singleness of motive, whose hearts are attuned to God, who want to follow Him, please Him, and do His will without reservation and in full sincerity. Because of their single, unswerving devotion to God, their hearts are morally clean. "A substance is called pure when it is without admixture, when it is one thing, and not two or more. Pure gold is gold without alloy. Purity of heart means that single eye to the glory of God which aims, whether at home or abroad, to be well-pleasing unto Him, works heartily unto the Lord and not unto man, and craves no other recognition than the promised recompense from the Lord's own hand" (W. J. Woods). Cf. 1 Timothy 1:5; 3:9; 2 Timothy 2:22.

It was in favor of singleness of motive in following Him and in preparing for heaven that Jesus taught, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also. The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. . . . No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:20-24).

Christians who are impure in heart are doubleminded, lacking the singleness of purpose that would exalt Christ in their lives. To them the divine word directs the command, "Purify your hearts, ye doubleminded" (James 4:8).

A Converted Heart

One cannot have a heart of moral purity and of singleness of motive in the service of God unless he has a *converted* heart, a heart that has

been cleansed from the guilt of sin through faith in the Sin-offering Jesus Christ and His blood. “. . . cleansing their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9). “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14). “Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience . . .” (Hebrews 10:22).

A God-enthroned Heart

The pure in heart pronounced blessed by Jesus have enthroned God in their hearts. The presence of God in any heart is the very negation of everything evil and insincere. It is the power and grace of God that frees the sinner's heart from the guilt of sin, and it is also the power and grace of God that keep the converted heart pure. Jesus' heart was perfectly pure because it was filled with the divine presence. And the Christian's heart will also be pure as he allows God to dwell in it.

E. L. Hill wrote, “There is no true purity of heart apart from the absolute enthronement of God in the affections. It is not the absence of unholy affections, it is the presence of holy and surpassing earnest love, that makes us really pure. His presence there, and it alone, can rob temptation of its charm, dispel all carnal longings, throw back the fierce onset of ancient and besetting sins, and make the heart utterly holy.”

They Shall See God

Jesus promises in the sixth Beatitude that the pure in heart shall see God. No greater privilege can be enjoyed by any human being than to come into the presence of God. In the ancient Orient, the sovereign of a nation was highly revered. To “see the king's face” stood for a greatly coveted honor. The disgraced Absalom, after residing in the capitol for two years without being received at his father's palace, made the petition, “Now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me” (2 Samuel 14:32). The Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, “Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, that stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom” (1 Kings 10:8). The seven chief princes of the kingdom of Ahasuerus were they “who saw the king's face” (Esther 1:14). But however great was the desire of men to see an earthly potentate, their desire to see the living God was infinitely greater. Moses pleaded, “Show me, I pray thee, thy glory” (Exodus 33:18). The Psalmist exclaimed, “As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with beholding thy form” (Psalm 17:15). See Psalms 41:12; 63:2; 140:13.

The affirmation of the sixth Beatitude is that the pure in heart shall enjoy the great blessing of seeing God in this life as well as in the next. “‘For they shall see God.’ Of what time is this said? Of the sight of Him in the world beyond the grave, the Beatific vision? We must not exclude this meaning. Yet we shall be going against the spirit of all

the Beatitudes if we make that the only meaning. The blessings promised throughout are not merely future blessings, but present: 'Blessed are . . .' They are the graces, beauties, dignities, of the kingdom of heaven; and the kingdom of heaven is not future only, but present. The Beatific vision itself is to begin on earth. 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God,' not only by-and-by, but even now" (E. C. Wickham).

But it is not with their physical eyes that the pure in heart see God. God's answer to Moses' request to behold His glory was, "There shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). John 1:18 declares, "No man hath seen God at any time." How then do the pure in heart see God? They see him with the eyes of the heart. Yes, the heart has eyes. Paul speaks of "having the eyes of your heart enlightened" (Ephesians 1:18). The heart has the capacity to see that which the physical eyes cannot see. The physical eyes can see things, but only the heart can see the meaning of things. And what the pure in heart are able to see, the impure in heart are utterly incapable of seeing. The divine word declares, "Now the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man" (1 Corinthians 2:14,15). See Matthew 13:13-16.

What a man sees in life is not only what is in front of his eyes, but what also is in his heart. The man who knows nothing about astronomy, who has no interest in this particular subject, looks into the heavens at night and sees only a mass of lights. He cannot name any star or constellation. But the man who is deeply interested in astronomy and has devoted much time to its study, sees in the heavens stars and constellations which he calls by name and considers as familiar friends. A doctor can see in a sick person what one who is medically uninformed cannot possibly see. An artist can behold beauty and truth in a skillfully wrought painting which are unintelligible and meaningless to the man who knows nothing about art. One can see in a bosom friend whom he has intimately known for many years what others are entirely incapable of seeing.

And so it is that the character of the heart, its knowledge and interests, determines what it sees. "To the pure," said Paul, "all things are pure: but to them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess that they know God; but by their works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:15,16).

The impure in heart, who live wicked lives, do not know God, and thus it is impossible for them to behold Him who is all pure and all holy. "Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither knoweth him" (1 John 3:6). "He that doeth evil hath not seen God" (3 John 11). Cf. Isaiah 59:2. They see only that which they know and are interested in. Thus to them nothing is pure. The liar does not know truth, thus he cannot

see truth in others. The unholy person does not know sanctity, thus he cannot see sanctity in others. The braggart does not know humility, thus he cannot see humility in others.

But the pure in heart, who live godly lives, truly know God. Thus they abide in His presence and see Him with the heavenly illuminated eyes of their hearts. They recognize, understand, and accept whatever is pure in life. See Philippians 1:9-11. Notice the ways in which the pure in heart see God:

1. *They see God in Physical Creation.* It is true that even those who are not converted to Christ can behold the living witness of God's being and power in the physical world. Cf. Romans 1:20. But to the pure in heart, who have given their lives to Christ, the physical handiwork of God is invested with a superior luster. They can ecstatically exclaim, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). They see God in nature with the best possible mental mood because their hearts have been enlightened by His grace and goodness. They see not only the *Creator's* handiwork, but also the *Father's* handiwork, so that they can lovingly say, "This is my Father's world."

2. *They See God in His Manifold Blessings.* The pure in heart realize that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning" (James 1:17). They see in every God-given gift, whether physical or spiritual, the benevolent hand of Him that gives it. They see God's presence and power in His providential guidance, even though it may involve suffering and persecution. Cf. Romans 8:28-39; Hebrews 13:5,6. Seeing the love of God, they see the God who is perfect love. Seeing the goodness of God, they see the God who is perfect goodness.

3. *They See God in the Christ Who Dwells in Them.* Jesus said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). The pure in heart have seen the Father because they have seen His only begotten Son, the Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave them salvation and who dwells in them through the Holy Spirit. They see God in the good works they do, for they know that it is only His grace through the power of the indwelling Christ that makes possible fruit bearing to His glory. See John 15:1-5; 2 Corinthians 9:8.

From Imperfect to Perfect Vision

The *pure* in heart pronounced blessed in the sixth Beatitude are not the *perfect* in heart. Only the Son of man was this. But the pure in heart are those whose hearts are essentially in tune with the love, grace, goodness, and will of God. Thus in this life they are able to see God essentially, even though imperfectly, as they behold His manifestations in physical creation and as they recognize the blessings and power they

receive from Him through the indwelling Christ. And finally in heaven, "when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:54), they shall see the Father perfectly when they behold Him face to face.

"Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And every one that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:2,3). "And they shall see his face; and his name shall be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4). See Hebrews 12:14.

Happiness of the Pure in Heart

Happy are the pure in heart because their hearts are illuminated by the light of love, trust, sincerity, and moral cleanness. Happy are the pure in heart because they seek to please God and to keep Him enthroned in their hearts. Happy are the pure in heart because they continually bask in the sunshine of God's love and behold Him in his abundant blessings, care, and guidance. Happy are the pure in heart because they enjoy the living hope of beholding God in heaven.

Concerning the exceeding blessedness, or happiness, of the pure in heart, James Hastings wrote, "Holiness has in itself the elements of happiness. It frees us from a thousand sources of pain, the inward strife of the heart itself, the condemning voice of conscience, the fret and worry of anxious worldly care, the bitterness of passion, anger, envy, jealousy, discontent, and a thousand thorns that spring in the soil of the natural heart—these roots are all removed and the 'peace of God, which passeth all understanding,' keeps the heart and mind, and makes life a heaven below."

Questions

1. Define the word "heart" as it is used in the sixth Beatitude.
2. What is the meaning of the Greek word *katharos*?
3. Contrast the concept of religious purity held by the scribes and Pharisees with that of the sixth Beatitude.
4. Discuss purity of heart as it involves moral cleanness and singleness of motive.
5. What is the significance of the converted, God-enthroned heart?
6. Discuss the difference between what is seen by the pure in heart and the impure in heart.
7. How is it determined what the eyes of the heart see? Illustrate.
8. Discuss thoroughly the ways in which the pure in heart see God.
9. Discuss the happiness of the pure in heart.
10. Are you pure in heart?

THE PEACEMAKERS

“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God”
(Matthew 5:9).

One of the great and prominent themes of the New Testament is peace. The Greek word for peace is *eirene*, occurring in every book and eighty-eight times in all. Every Pauline epistle begins with the wish that peace may be upon its readers, and many of the New Testament letters close with a benediction of peace. When the time was near for Jesus to depart from His disciples, He promised them no material bequest, but the infinitely important spiritual bequest: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27). He further said to His disciples, “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

No man can enjoy any greater blessing in this world than peace, and he can render no greater service than in the capacity of a peacemaker. And remember that the peacemaker is a *peacemaker*, a maker of peace, and not just a peace lover, a peace hoper, or a peace eulogizer. There are those who consider themselves men of peace, who eulogize the merits of peace, but who do nothing positive to bring about peace. Indeed, they assume that “peace just comes” or that conflict among men naturally tends to work itself out. The peacemaker, however, is the man who is prepared to suffer for the cause of peace. He knows that it is easier to fan the coals of conflict than to establish peace. But he is willing to face difficulty, trouble, and unpopularity in order to make peace. The peace of which the seventh Beatitude speaks is not the spurious peace of avoiding the issue, but it is the peace that comes from facing the issue no matter what the risks may be.

The peace that Christians are to make is not merely negative in its meaning, describing only the cessation of strife. A husband and wife may abstain from all bickering and quarreling, and yet live with each other in an atmosphere of smouldering hatred, which is anything but a state of peace. The cold war between the United States and Russia does not involve open hostility or strife; yet it can hardly be described as a state of genuine peace, of good will and mutual respect.

The Hebrew equivalent of *eirene* is *shalom*. It describes not only the absence of strife and conflict, but also the presence of serenity, prosperity, and happiness. It further describes right personal relationships among men: friendship and fellowship. Thus the peacemaker labors not only to remove strife and conflict from among men, but also to establish good will and happiness.

A Divided World

At the time Jesus delivered the Beatitudes to His disciples, the world was sadly divided; conflict and hatred between men of different races, nationalities, and religions was commonplace.

There was the division between Gentile and Jew. When the Jew offered his usual morning prayer, he thanked God that he was not made a Gentile, a slave or a woman. He especially held in contempt the Samaritans, who were a mixture of Gentile and Jew. When making a trip from Judaea to Galilee, he would take the long way through Perea to avoid passing through Samaria. The Greeks believed that there was a natural division between them and the barbarians. Such philosophers as Plato taught that the barbarians were the natural enemies of the Greeks. The Greek boys were trained from the earliest age possible to hate everyone who was not a Greek.

In our present day we see on every hand the tragedy of hatred and bitterness adding fuel to the fire of human conflict. There is still prevalent in the world a devilish tendency in men to look with suspicion on any person who is different, so that our world is torn asunder by hate and fear. Everyone who appeals to angered prejudice in order to nurture the suspicions and animosities that create conflict between men of different colors, nationalities, races, languages, etc., is working for the devil; but everyone who works to create understanding, sympathy, harmony, and love among all men is working for God, who gave His only begotten Son to establish peace and good will among men.

In our own nation, even among people of the same race, language, economic status, etc., we see the tragedy of human conflict. For example, the disgraceful, rising divorce rate spells out the tragedy of men and women who have failed to find true peace and harmony within the bonds of matrimony. The growing rate of juvenile delinquency in our society is also indicative of homes that are devoid of peace. The peacemakers labor to make peace in family life, to establish in their homes that marital and filial harmony which is so essential in maintaining strong moral fiber in our society. Augustine said of his mother Monica that "she showed herself such a peacemaker, that hearing on both sides most bitter things . . . she never would disclose aught of the one unto the other, but what might tend to their reconciliation." Every Christian husband, wife, son, and daughter should diligently labor to make peace in the home.

There is no greater tragedy of conflict and separation among men than the divisions to be found in the church of the Lord. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 3:3. What a sad spectacle it is to see people who have accepted the same Jesus Christ as their Saviour and the same God as their Father, who enjoy a common salvation, torn asunder by bitterness, rancor, and unbrotherliness, separated by a thousand and one differences, so to speak. Every Christian should feel deep shame

concerning this scandalous condition and should diligently work in love, understanding, patience, and sympathy to break down every barrier that separates brother from brother in the precious family of God.

There are those in the church, however, who accentuate the differences rather than the similarities between them and their brethren, who treat with contempt every brother who differs with them, who shut the door to honorable dialogue between conflicting ideas and concepts in the body of Christ. No matter how plausible their arguments may seem to justify their unbrotherly spirit, they are on the devil's side and not on God's side.

Peace with God

Man's greatest realization of peace is to be found in a right relationship to God, which is the only basis for real and lasting peace among men. It is sin that separates men from the God of peace; the sinful state is thus the negation of genuine peace. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isaiah 57:21). The greatest work to be accomplished in peacemaking, then, is to influence men to make peace with their God. This most worthy work is accomplished as Jesus Christ and His salvation are proclaimed to sinners, with the plea that they put their trust in and surrender their lives to the Saviour, whose mission to this world was indeed a *peace* mission to reconcile sinful mankind to God. "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation. We are ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

"For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens. And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death" (Colossians 1:19-22).

The work of bringing men to God is indeed the basic responsibility of the peacemaker. The Christian who shuns this responsibility cannot possibly receive the blessing promised in the seventh Beatitude. "The duty of the peacemaker combines the attempt to reconcile men to God, through the peace-speaking blood of the cross, with the effort to heal the breach of friendship which has been made among individuals. This of all labours is the most noble and Divine. We overlook the most essential part of making peace if we confine our endeavors to the

composing of difference among men, while we pass by multitudes around us who are contending with their Maker" (J. E. Good).

In reconciling men to God through the cross, Christ simultaneously reconciles them to each other. In giving them peace with God, He gives them peace with each other. "But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and he came and preached peace to you that were afar off, and peace to them that are nigh: for through him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father. So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:13-19). Cf. 1 Peter 1:22.

Who is capable of being a peacemaker? Only he who has found peace within himself and with his God. This means a converted person, one who has unconditionally surrendered himself to Christ and thus by God's grace has subdued the warring elements of his own heart, to resolve the conflict between his lower and higher nature. In his interpretation of the seventh Beatitude, Clement of Alexandria observed that the Lord promises to bless "those who have stilled the incredible battle which goes on in their own souls." Augustine declared that the Lord blesses those "who have composed and subjected to reason all the notions of their minds, and who have tamed their carnal desires."

There is no more obvious reality than the conflict between body and soul that rages in an unconverted person. But one who has given himself to Christ has "crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof" (Galatians 5:24). He has substituted Christ for self as the power to control his life, so that he now can say, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). And thus the inner battle has been stopped in the control of the divine Master. He now enjoys the peace that can only be found in Christ and His Spirit. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). Having become a peace receiver, the convert to Christ now becomes a peace diffuser. Possessing a peaceable and conciliatory disposition, he makes for peace from his peace-filled, peace-loving heart.

They Shall Be Called Sons of God

The reward the peacemakers receive is God's acknowledgment of them as His sons because in this aspect they are most like their heavenly Father and His Son, the Prince of peace. Matthew 5:43-45 furnishes a

splendid commentary on the promise of the seventh Beatitude: "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; *that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven*: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." Those who seek to be at peace with their enemies by loving and praying for them are sons of God because they are like the divine Father who loves and blesses all mankind.

In the New Testament, God is often called the God of peace (Romans 15:13; 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Hebrews 13:20; *et al*). No man can be His true son who does not bear the likeness of His peace. The work of peace is divinely ordained. The God of peace gave His only begotten Son to bring lasting peace to men. The conclusion, then, is inevitable that only those who cooperate with God and Christ in the work of peace are sons of the heavenly Father. See 1 Peter 3:11.

While the Lord calls the peacemakers sons of God, the world often heaps upon them the worst kind of verbal abuse. The man who refuses to be goaded into a fight, who refuses to "stand up for his rights" when he is assaulted by another, but rather turns the other cheek, may be called a coward or yellow. The man who labors for peace among the nations may be called a wild-eyed dreamer, an egghead, or unpatriotic. The man who diligently labors to bring others to Christ so that they can enjoy peace with God may be called a religious fanatic. But no matter what the world may call the peacemakers, the Lord still calls them sons of God, and only the name he gives them shall finally stand.

"The peacemakers shall be specially owned by God, so full of His own life and Spirit; as the Divinest souls on earth; as thus likest to God in heart, in feeling. They are the sons of God. There is no greater proof of sonship to God than brotherhood to man. The true children of God are all marked on the brow, and the love that maketh peace is their divine stamp. The great God is ceaselessly playing the peacemaker. And peacemakers being children of God, the promise proves that they will be *owned as such*. There are strange endorsements that come to gracious lives even now. Their words carry strange weight, as if oracles of God. And yet there is something more than this. In 'that day' the peacemakers, more than penitents, higher than servants, shall be owned as sons, with the richest, most endeared, and delightful of all welcomes, as sons of God, heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ, fittest of all souls for His highest heavenly work and service" (Richard Glover).

Happiness of the Peacemakers

Every peacemaker experiences the reality of the blessing Jesus pronounces in the seventh Beatitude as he finds great happiness within himself. The virtue of peacemaking brings its own reward. Who are truly happy: the irritable, the conceited, those who are always ready

to stir up strife and get into a squabble; or the gentle, the kindly, the friendly, those who love peace and who zealously labor to make peace in their family, among their neighbors and friends, who out of love for Christ and the souls of men labor to bring sinners to the God of peace?

“Be at peace one with another” (Mark 9:50).

“So then let us follow after things which make for peace” (Romans 14:19).

“Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:13).

“Follow after peace with all men” (Hebrews 12:14).

“And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for them that make peace” (James 3:18).

Questions

1. Discuss the significance and importance of peace in New Testament teaching.
2. What is the difference between a peacemaker, or *maker* of peace, and a person who is only a peace lover, a peace hoper, or a peace eulogizer?
3. What is the positive nature of the peace that Christians are to make?
4. Discuss the tragedy of human conflict and a divided world, giving especial attention to conflict and division in the church.
5. Why is influencing men to make peace with their God the greatest work to be accomplished in peacemaking? Discuss thoroughly.
6. Who is capable of being a peacemaker?
7. Why are peacemakers called sons of God?
8. How does the peacemaker experience the reality of the blessing, or happiness, that Jesus pronounces in the seventh Beatitude?
9. Are you a peacemaker?

THE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

"Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

We now come to the eighth, or supplementary, Beatitude. The preceding seven Beatitudes describe the characteristics of the saint, whereas the last Beatitude represents the treatment the saint may expect from the world because of these characteristics.

It is the unalterable decree of God that His faithful children shall suffer persecution: "That no man be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that hereunto we are appointed" (1 Thessalonians 3:3); "Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). During his earthly sojourn, the Lord plainly prophesied that His followers would be persecuted (Mark 13:9; Luke 21:16,17; John 15:18-21; *et al*).

When we consider God's decree and Christ's predictions concerning persecution, it is obvious that those in the church who are not persecuted, who enjoy the favor of all men, are not living godly lives and are disloyal to Christ. Jesus pronounced a curse on them: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

Confirmation of History

God's decree that His children shall be persecuted has been confirmed throughout the history of Christianity, and the Lord's predictions concerning such persecution have come to pass as He said. Since the earliest days of the church, valiant Christian men and women have been thrown in prison and put to the sword, the fire, the lion, and the torture. Not long after the establishment of the church, persecution broke out when Peter and John were hailed before the Sanhedrin and threatened with punishment (Acts 4:1-22). Later all the apostles were brought before the council and given a flogging (Acts 5:17-42). Shortly after, the first Christian martyr Stephen was stoned to death by an angry mob of Jews (Acts 7:54-60). Then "there arose on that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). The primitive church continued to face persecution. Paul speaks of the persecution he personally suffered: ". . . in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned . . ." (2 Corinthians 11:23-25).

During later Roman times, the savagery of the persecution of Christians was appalling. Some were shut up in a sack with snakes and thrown into the sea. Others were crucified, or hanged on trees and beaten with rods until their bowels gushed out, while salt was rubbed into their wounds. During the persecution ordered by Diocletian, many Christians were wrenched from limb to limb. Others were thrown to beasts, broken on the wheel, torn to pieces by wild horses, tortured with scrapers and claws and pinchers, burned with molten lead, and put to other fiendish tortures.

At its mildest, the persecution directed against loyal Christians has been in the form of reproach and slander. Although Christians are not physically persecuted today in many nations of the world as they were in previous eras, they still endure the cold looks, the nicknames, the taunts, the social ostracism. The eighth Beatitude is not out of place in our time. Faithful Christians still suffer persecution.

Why Persecution?

The Lord pronounces His blessing on those who are persecuted for "righteousness' sake." It is paradoxical that the means the faithful Christian has of influencing sinners to come to Christ can also be the means of arousing their animosity. See Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:9-12. Why is it, then, that the Christian's righteousness can bring persecution upon him? The scriptures plainly and emphatically answer this question: "Men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reprov'd" (John 3:19,20); "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19); "There is one man [said wicked Ahab to good Jehoshaphat] by whom we may inquire of Jehovah: but I hate him; for he never prophesieth good concerning me, but always evil" (2 Chronicles 18:7).

It is the very difference between the holy life of the faithful Christian and the unholy life of the stubbornly persistent sinner that causes the latter to persecute the former. The Christian ethic itself was a rebuke to the sinful way of life during the early days of the church, and so also it is today. Peter says that the heathen could not understand why Christians did not engage in their way of living, and persistently sinful men feel the same today. "They think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:4). Sinful men of every age who have been rebuked by the godly lives of Christians have felt the necessity of persecuting and slandering them in order to justify their own way of living. They cannot stand the light that exposes their evil, so they feel under constraint to put out the light.

We can see how the first seven Beatitudes run contrary to the spirit of the evil world, thus provoking the enmity and opposition of evil

men. Poverty in spirit runs counter to human pride; the spirit of mourning concerning one's deficiencies and shortcomings before God is resented by the callous, indifferent, self-satisfied world; a meek and quiet spirit is regarded as cowardly weakness; the craving for righteousness rebukes the cravings of the carnal man; the merciful spirit rebukes the hardheartedness of the world; purity of heart contrasts painfully with the unclean hearts of worldly men; and the peacemakers cannot be endured by the persistently contentious and quarrelsome. Thus do the possessors of righteousness come to be persecuted.

Those who love the darkness rather than the light, who persecute the light bearers, are not all outside the body of Christ. As the prophets of old were persecuted by many of their fellow Jews, as Paul was persecuted by many of his fellow Christians, so faithful Christian today are persecuted by members of the Lord's church who cannot stand the righteousness that exposes their selfishness and spiritual lethargy. And so to justify themselves they feel under constraint to ridicule and slander the Christians whose righteousness is a rebuke to their ungodly lives.

Being persecuted for "righteousness' sake" is equivalent to being persecuted for "Christ's sake." The righteousness of the Christian is made possible by his relationship to Christ; thus he is persecuted for his Christlike life because it reflects the life of Christ. He is persecuted for the name of Christ because he gladly confesses that worthy name in the face of all opposition. Cf. Matthew 10:32,33. Christ suffered persecution for the sake of righteousness, and so also must all who have identified themselves with Him. Jesus said, "If the world hateth you, ye know that it hath hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me" (John 15:18-21). See Matthew 10:24,25; 16:24; Luke 21:17; Acts 9:16; 1 Peter 2:21-23; 4:12,13.

It is entirely possible for Christians to be persecuted for reasons other than for righteousness' or Christ's sake. The eighth Beatitude is indirectly a rebuke for any and all such persecution. "For what glory is it, if, when ye sin, and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently?" (1 Peter 2:20). "If ye are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are ye; because the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God resteth upon you. For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer, or as a meddler in other men's matters: but if a man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name" (1 Peter 4:14-16).

Those in the church who assume a martyr complex, who have a chip-on-the-shoulder attitude in their morbid seeking after persecution, who

are offensive to others in their manner of discussing religious matters, may earn persecution, but not for the sake of Christ. Boorish, unkind, inconsiderate, tactless preachers who speak the truth in hatred rather than in love, often cry "foul" when they are criticized for their ungodly tactics. They would justify themselves by affirming that their critics cannot stand the truth. How mistaken they are! It is not the *truth* that has been offensive, but the *speakers* of the truth. They will find no solace in Christ for the criticism they receive.

Rejoicing in Persecution

The Lord speaks words of good cheer to all Christians who are persecuted for His sake: "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad." We note here how the eighth Beatitude, as well as the other Beatitudes, is contrary to the worldly spirit. The world says that blessed are those who live in ease and comfort, not those who are persecuted. The world cannot remotely comprehend how those who are reproached, reviled, slandered, and otherwise persecuted, can possibly rejoice and be exceeding glad. But the promise Jesus makes concerning the great joy that accompanies persecution for His sake is as sure as all His other promises.

"How few things to be had on earth, or even to be begun on earth, do warrant such energy of joy; and how utterly adverse to the verdict of the world from this of Jesus Christ! But the grounds of this joy are real, and they look far, far on; they command a prospect bounded by no earthly horizon. And the bright joy and exceeding gladness will do much to revive the soul, vexed, humbled, worn by the evil speech of the world. This contrast and the effect of it can hardly have been undesigned in the merciful calculation of the Lord and Master of souls" (P. C. Barker).

Why does the Christian who is persecuted for righteousness' sake rejoice? He rejoices because he enjoys the blessings of the kingdom of heaven, which are equivalent to the blessings of Christ Himself, who is the spiritual substance or essence of the divine kingdom. "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*." Cf. Matthew 5:3; 2 Corinthians 12:9,10. He rejoices because he realizes that persecution for righteousness's sake, or for Christ's sake, is proof of his faith in Him and of being accepted by Him. "They therefore departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the Name" (Acts 5:41). ". . . in nothing affrighted by the adversaries: which is for them an evident token of perdition, but of your salvation, and that from God; because to you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer in his behalf" (Philippians 1:28,29).

The persecution the faithful Christian endures for the sake of Christ is in fact the finest compliment that can be given him. We persecute a person because we take him seriously, considering him as a real threat

to us. No one will persecute a person whom he feels to be inept and ineffective. Men like Paul were persecuted because their sincerity, zeal, and righteousness plainly threatened the way of life of Christ's enemies. Can it be that the alleged Christianity of so many church members is so tepid that the wicked do not persecute it, but simply ignore it? A time-serving, compromising, lukewarm Christian will never be persecuted because he poses no threat to those who are opposed to Christ and His teaching. To be persecuted for the sake of Christ is indeed to be complimented as a real Christian, and thus grounds for rejoicing.

Then, too, the Christian rejoices because he recognizes that being persecuted for righteousness' sake places him in the glorious company of all those who have also been so persecuted: ". . . for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you." See 1 Kings 18:17; 2 Chronicles 16:10; Jeremiah 37:13-15; Daniel 6:13-18; Amos 7:10-13. It is a source of great joy and gladness for the Christian to know that he is a true successor of the prophets, his predecessors in faithfulness to God (James 5:10), and that he is a spiritual compatriot of the happy band of God's noblemen.

Above all, the Christian rejoices in being persecuted for righteousness' sake because he has a living hope of the perfect joy of heaven: ". . . for great is your reward in heaven." Jesus declared, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38). The Lord places the matter squarely before us. If we choose to save our skin, to avoid discomfiture and trouble by disassociating ourselves from Christ and His will, then we will be eternally lost. But if we identify our lives with Christ and His righteousness, being willing to lose them for His sake in facing whatever persecution comes our way, then we will gain them in eternal life. Cf. 2 Corinthians 1:7.

The promise of the heavenly reward to those who suffer with Christ is further revealed in the divine word: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to usward" (Romans 8:16-18). See 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

The apostle Paul expressed great confidence that his fidelity to the Lord in the face of persecution would not be forgotten in the last day: "For which cause I suffer also these things: yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

The eighth Beatitude tacitly tells us that the *natural* outcome of Christ's way of life is eternal life in heaven. It cannot be otherwise.

Those who are persecuted for the sake of Christ have given themselves to Him without reservation. Their adherence to the will of Christ in making the Beatitudes the warp and woof of their lives is expressive of their faith in Him, of their utter dependence on Him. Thus the Beatitudes end in heaven because faith ends in heaven. And faith ends in heaven because it has as its object the One who saves eternally, Jesus Christ the Saviour.

The happy life described in the Beatitudes is a life of faith in Jesus Christ, pointing the Christian to the perfect happiness of heaven. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:3-9).

Questions

1. What is the relationship of the eighth Beatitude to the preceding Beatitudes?
2. What does the unalterable decree of God and the predictions of Christ say concerning the persecution of faithful Christians?
3. Discuss the persecution of Christians from the earliest days of the church to our present time.
4. Why are faithful Christians persecuted? Discuss thoroughly.
5. Why is being persecuted for "righteousness' sake" equivalent to being persecuted for "Christ's sake"?
6. Discuss the persecution of Christians for reasons other than for righteousness' sake.
7. What are the grounds for the rejoicing and gladness of the Christian who is persecuted for the sake of Christ?
8. What persecution do you suffer for righteousness' sake?

