

OUR LORD'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

NO. I. MATT. 5, 6, 7.

This sermon of our Lord is characteristic of the great Teacher who spake as never man spake. It is wonderful alike for its simplicity, its clearness, its depth and its comprehensiveness. It is entirely devoid of anything like oratory; for evidently its object was to instruct, rather than to play upon the emotions of his hearers. Indeed, it is specially noticeable in all our Lord's public ministry that his methods of teaching were calculated to keep reason on the throne, and not to permit it to be overpowered by an unduly wrought emotional nature. In this his methods are in marked contrast with many of those in vogue to-day. We note also that his words were simple and easy to be understood, and that they appealed strongly both to the judgment and to the heart.

The sermon was addressed, not to a promiscuous congregation of saints and sinners, but to his earnest and faithful disciples who had left all to follow him – who had forsaken business and business prospects and home and friends and reputation, and who, in lieu thereof, had cheerfully accepted the reproaches that fell upon the Master, as well as the necessary toils and privations incident to such a life. Consequently its teachings apply, not to the world, nor to mere professors of Christianity, but only to those consecrated souls who have likewise left all to follow the Master whithersoever he goeth. The occasion was one of those seasons when, wearied with exhaustive labor, he withdrew from the multitudes who sought his healing touch and anxiously listened for the wonderful words that proceeded out of his mouth – "And seeing the multitudes [and being too weary to minister to them] he went up into a mountain, and having sat down, his disciples came up" (verse 1), and he opened his mouth and taught them.

THE BEATITUDES.

A comparison of verse 3 with Luke 6:20 seems to indicate that the parenthetic phrase, "in spirit," was Matthew's comment, and not our Lord's exact words, which, according to Luke, were "Blessed are ye *poor*; for yours is the kingdom of heaven." The reference we therefore regard as applying to those who follow their Lord, who, though he was rich, for our sakes became *poor*, that we through his *poverty* might be made rich. Blessed are such poor ones – those who become poor in any sense of the word, whether financially or socially or otherwise, by sacrificing themselves for the blessing of others. True, we may have very little to sacrifice, but nevertheless, blessed are all the sacrificers.

The comforting words of verse 4 remind us of a similar expression of our Lord – John 16:20 – "Verily, verily, I say unto you that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." (See also 2 Cor. 1:7; Isa. 61:2,3.) It is those in Zion who *mourn* over and *lament* the mighty power of evil in the high places both of church and of state, and who, setting themselves in opposition to it, incur the reproaches both of the world and of lukewarm, nominal Christians. Blessed are all who so mourn; for in due time they shall be comforted in receiving the reward of the righteous and in beholding the final triumph of righteousness and truth.

Verses 5,10,11. The blessed *meek* ones of verse 5, who shall inherit the earth, are the same class who, according to verses 10,11, are bold and courageous enough to withstand evil and error and to champion righteousness and truth: they are meek in the true sense in submitting themselves fully to the Lord, and bold in defence of his truth and his way, even the endurance of persecution for righteousness' sake. Blessed are all such meek, persecuted and falsely accused ones; for they shall inherit the

earth: theirs is the kingdom of heaven. By and by they shall reign with Christ in his throne. Rejoice, all ye, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

Verse 6 promises the satisfying portion of truth and righteousness in due time to all *that hunger and thirst after righteousness*. Verse 7 [R1493 : page 26] promises a *merciful judgment* to all those who exercise the same, and is thus the strongest incentive toward as lenient judgment of our fellow-men as circumstances will permit.

Verse 8. "Blessed are the *pure in heart*; for they shall see [Greek, *horao*, discern] God." [R1494 : page 26] To be pure in heart is to have pure, sincere motives and desires. Those so disposed come to the divine revelation with reverence and meekness; and such, and such only, are prepared to see the breadth and scope of the wonderful plan of God, and how far it transcends the narrowness of human theological creeds and philosophies. Having no films of prejudice or vain philosophy before their eyes, and no clouds between themselves and God, with delight they discover in his wondrous plan of the ages the worthy lines of his truly glorious character – his wisdom, justice, love and power.

Verse 9. God is pleased to own the *peacemakers* as his children. These are they who have first themselves found peace with God through faith in the precious blood of Christ, and who thereafter devote their energies toward bringing others into this blessed rest of faith and peace with God, and who further seek to show by word and example how a heart at peace with God always seeks peace with fellow-men under all circumstances where the sacrifice of the principles of righteousness are not involved. All such peace-makers are the blessed sons and heirs of God.

Thus, first of all, the great Teacher bids us rejoice in counting over our blessings, showing us that even here in this wilderness

state our table is indeed bountifully spread and our cup runneth over with blessings.

THE CHURCH, THE SALT OF THE EARTH AND THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Verse 13. "Ye are the *salt* of the earth," etc. The virtue of salt is its power to season and to preserve from decay and putrefaction, which power the true disciples of the Lord are here said to exercise over the masses of mankind in general. This, however, is not because we have this power in and of ourselves: it is the spirit of the truth, the spirit of Christ in us through the knowledge of the truth and obedience to it, transforming the old creature into the new creature in Christ.

According to these words of our Lord, it is by the influence of such persons, directly and indirectly, that the world has been kept from sinking to greater depths of ignorance and sin. When the spiritual life of the Church has ebbed low, the world has always suffered in consequence. For example, remember the dark ages and then the opposite effect of what is known as the Great Reformation. When spirituality revived in the hearts of God's people, the whole world began to wake up, and to receive some droppings of the shower of blessing. In the lives of God's people men see the moral distance between virtue and vice, and reason of a coming judgment when each will receive the reward that is meet, and they are thereby either shamed or persuaded to better and nobler lives.

But the possibility of losing this savor of truth and righteousness is also intimated: that is, we may retain the outward forms of godliness and lose its real power, its spirit or disposition, and thus become false representatives of the truth – hypocrites. And in such a case the question is an apt and suggestive one: "If the salt have lost its savor wherewith shall it be salted?" Or in other words, If the truth have lost its power over us, to what other

power shall we look for the savor of the spirit of truth? "Sanctify them through thy truth," was the Lord's prayer, and if the truth ceases to avail for our sanctification and we turn from it, the implication is that nothing else will do it. And those who utterly repudiate its power are thenceforth "good for nothing," and their end is destruction. See also Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26,27.

Verse 14. "Ye are the *light* of the world," etc. The whole world walks in the valley of the shadow of death, and the Lord's disciples alone have the light of life, the blessed truth of redemption and full restitution – the good tidings of great joy for all people. "Let your light shine," says the Master. Let it dispel the nightmare which haunts so many minds – of a fiendish and all-powerful God whose purpose [R1494 : page 27] is to torment eternally nearly all of his intelligent creation. Let the light chase this and every other superstition back to the dark source whence it came. Do not hide your light, but set it forth prominently and keep it trimmed and burning, that its gracious beams may reach as far as possible through the gloom of ignorance and superstition. And, thank God, the time is coming, and is now not far distant, when all the light-bearers shall be exalted to power and great glory; for it is written, "*Then* shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." And when this heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, is thus set upon a hill [in the kingdom] it cannot longer be hidden; but its glory shall lighten the whole world. Praise the Lord for his mercy and grace!

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