

THE BLESSED ONES PORTRAYED.

– JAN. 23. – MATT. 5:1-12. –

"Ye are the Light of the World." – Matt. 5:14.

THE beatitudes – or the blessed – designate the particular graces necessary to our Lord's followers, if they would receive the blessings which the Father designed they should enjoy through Christ. These constitute the text as it were of our Master's great "Sermon on the Mount." It is supposed to have been delivered from a site known as the Mount of Beatitudes, sloping gradually, about sixty feet in height and situated about seven miles South-west from Capernaum where, as we saw in our last lesson, Jesus had taken up his residence. Strange to say, it was on this very site on July 5th, 1187, that the last remnant of the Crusaders was destroyed, after their army had been defeated by Saladin in the valley below. Those Crusaders claimed to wage their warfare in the interest of the Lord's cause, but had they remembered and properly applied to themselves even remotely the lesson which we are about to consider, spoken by our Lord on this very Mount, they would not have been defeated and exterminated, for they would not have been Crusaders at all. Alas, how many cry, Lord, Lord, and attempt in the Lord's name to do many wonderful works who, neglecting his Word, are not his people and fail to get the blessings now offered.

At this time our Lord's ministry was fully inaugurated: he had collected his first disciples, had performed some miracles, and the multitudes began to follow him, saying truly, "Never man spake like this man." With his disciples nearest to him and the multitudes surrounding, he began his celebrated discourse the text of which we have under consideration.

(1) "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." This first beatitude or blessed state really in some respects

comprehends all the others. Through it the other graces and blessings are accessible. It is the gateway and the main roadway from which all the other avenues of blessing branch off. Some one has said, it is the hallway of the house of blessing, from which all the various rooms or apartments are accessible.

The word *blessed* signifies much more than happy; happiness proceeds usually from outward causes, while one might be blessed while in misery, in pain, not joyous but grievous. The root of the word *blessed* here carries with it the thought of great or honorable: our Lord is describing the characters which from his standpoint and that of the Father are truly great, honorable [R2250 : page 24] characters, which God is pleased to bless and ultimately to reward.

The Greek word here translated *poor* has the significance of utter destitution, extreme poverty. Hence, the thought is that a full appreciation of our own spiritual destitution is essential before we will be ready to receive the measures of divine grace provided for us by the Father in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And not only must this destitution be realized at the beginning of our approach to God, but it is necessary that the same dependence upon divine grace and realization of our own insufficiency shall continue with us all our journey through, if we would finally be acceptable and be granted a share in the Kingdom which God has promised to them that love him. There is nothing in this text to signify earthly poverty and destitution: nevertheless we know from experience, as well as from the Lord's Word, that not many rich or great, but chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith, shall be heirs of the Kingdom. Very evidently moderate poverty is the most favorable condition for us in our present weak and fallen condition: earthly prosperity and riches very frequently tend to choke the new nature and hinder it from bringing forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness – tending rather to a spirit of self-sufficiency, pride, etc. As our Lord Jesus expressed it, "The cares of this life and the *deceitfulness* of riches choke the Word, and it becometh unfruitful." Let us all then in seeking the character which will be

approved of God and accepted to the Kingdom of God's dear Son, seek more and more continually this humility of mind which so far from being boastful and self-sufficient, humbly accepts with gratitude every good and every perfect gift as coming from the Father of Lights.

(2) "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." We apply this in connection with the first blessing; for it is not every one who mourns who will be comforted, but merely the poor in spirit: their mourning will be from the right standpoint and will bring a blessing of heavenly comfort – a realization of sins forgiven, iniquities covered and divine reconciliation and favor. We sometimes sing,

"Why should the children of a King
Go mourning all their days?"

There is a proper thought in the poet's expression: for we need not continue to grieve over our "sins that are past through the forbearance of God," which are "covered" by the merit of the precious blood: nor should our lives be destitute of the "joys of the Lord" and the "songs in the night" which he gives, according as it is written, "He hath put a new song into my mouth, even the loving kindness of our God." But hilarity and boisterous "gayety" are certainly inappropriate to the children of the Great King. Why? Because all such should realize that life is a stern reality, **[R2250 : page 25]** not only to the Christian but to the whole world, "the groaning creation." A sympathy with the sorrows, difficulties and privations of the masses, at home and in heathen lands, no less than a realization of the grandeur of the high calling of the Church in this Gospel age and of the exceeding great and precious things which hinge upon our faithfulness to him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, – these all should be saying to us continually, in the language of the Apostle, Be vigilant! Be sober! Watch! Quit you like men!

Besides, all who are earnestly striving for the victory over self, and the world, and sin, are sure to make a sufficient number of failures along the way to insure them considerable experience in mourning for

these deflections, – if their hearts are in the right attitude toward the Lord. Gracious indeed is the promise to such, "They shall be comforted." Our Lord does comfort such with the assurance that he notes their tears as well as their efforts in opposition to sin, and that he is thus preparing them through present experiences and the development of character for the Kingdom.

(3) "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Nothing can be more evident than the fact that this promise also waits for the establishment of the Kingdom, for its full fruition. Certainly the meek are not in this age favored with the ownership or control of any considerable proportion of the earth's surface. Rather it is the arrogant, the proud, the domineering, the selfish and pushing who chiefly inherit the earth at the present time – under the rule of "The Prince of the power of the air, who now worketh in the hearts of the children of disobedience." Very evidently this blessing also belongs to those who inherit the first blessing – those poor in spirit who shall be heirs of the Kingdom. The Kingdom class – Christ Jesus and his Church, his body, will inherit the earth – purchased, as well as man, by the great sacrifice finished at Calvary. And when this Kingdom class shall inherit the earth, it will not be to oppress mankind, but on the contrary for their elevation, restitution and blessing. This is in harmony with the Heavenly Father's promise, – "I will give thee the heathen for thy *inheritance*; and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession."

But the time for this inheritance has not yet come. It will be introduced as soon as the last member of the elect Church has been fitted and prepared for the inheritance by the development of the graces of character here portrayed by our Lord. Yes, blessed are the meek – all who shall be accounted worthy of a share in the Kingdom and in its inheritance must be meek, teachable, humble, for "Jehovah resisteth the proud but showeth his favor to the humble." – James 4:6.

(4) "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." To whom is this blessed promise applicable? Surely to none other than "the elect," the Church, referred to preceding as "the poor in spirit," "the meek." These, and these alone at the present time, are hungering and thirsting for truth and righteousness, in respect to the divine revelation on every subject and affair of life. Others may have a little hunger for truth, but they are soon satisfied; – especially when they find the truth unpopular and that, however sweet to the taste, it afterward brings bitter gripings of persecution and ostracism under present unfavorable world-conditions. To a considerable number honesty and righteousness are the *best policy*, to a limited degree, – so far as public opinion sustains them; but a righteousness and honesty and love of the truth at the *cost of persecution*, at the cost of having men "separate you from their company," is only hungered and thirsted after by the "little flock" – the overcomers. "They shall be filled." They will be filled to the full by and by, very shortly, in the "change" of the "first resurrection," when this mortal condition shall be exchanged for immortality; when this animal body shall give place to a perfect spirit-body. Then partial knowledge and partial attainment of righteousness shall be superseded by a full, complete knowledge, then "we shall know, even as we are known." But even *now* this class enjoys much larger measures of knowledge of the truth and experiences in the blessings of righteousness than are possible to any other class.

(5) "Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy." Human mercy, sympathy, pity, compassion, are but reflections of the divine character: these qualities may be found in the natural man, but not infrequently when so found they are traceable to some extent to pride, selfishness, ostentation, show. The mercy, pity and sympathy which would exercise themselves irrespective of human knowledge and approval, and irrespective of divine reward, are not frequently met with except in the "poor in spirit, heirs of the Kingdom." And all who are of this class *must* be merciful, pitiful, loving: their own relationship with the Lord and all their hopes respecting the Kingdom

to come depend upon their being merciful; for only the merciful shall obtain mercy, and those who pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth," are instructed to pray at the same time for the forgiveness of their trespasses (only) as they also forgive the trespasses of others, their fellow-creatures.

(6) "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." We are to distinguish sharply between purity of heart, will, intention and *absolute purity* of [R2250 : page 26] every word and act of life; for the one is possible while the other is impossible, so long as we have our present mortal bodies and are surrounded by present unfavorable conditions. The standard set before us in this very sermon however is a standard not only for the heart but for all the conduct of life, "Be ye *perfect* even as your Father in heaven is perfect." By this standard we are to measure ourselves, and that continually, and not with one another; and to this standard we are to seek to bring the conduct of our lives and the meditation of our hearts. But only our wills (hearts) have yet been transformed and renewed and purified: our present imperfect earthen vessels in which we have this treasure will not be "changed" or renewed until the resurrection. Then, and not until then, will we be *perfect* in the divine likeness, but now nothing short of purity of heart, will, intention, can be acceptable to God and bring the blessing here promised.

In whom do we find the new hearts, renewed hearts, cleansed hearts, pure hearts? Surely, in none except those who are called, chosen and faithful, – the poor in spirit class, the meek, the "little flock," heirs of the Kingdom.

(7) "Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God." None will be accounted worthy to be called *children of God* who shall not have developed peace-loving dispositions. The anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife and generally quarrelsome disposition, which to some extent is inherited through the fall by every member of the race, must be recognized as belonging to "the works of

the flesh and of [R2251 : page 26] the devil, and must be resisted in *heart* fully, and in *outward conduct* as fully as possible. Peaceableness must supplant quarrelsomeness in all those who would hope to share the Kingdom and be recognized as children of God. "So far as lieth in you live peaceably with all men." This of course does not mean peace at any price, otherwise our Lord, the apostles and the faithful body of Christ throughout this age might not have suffered, or at least might have endured very much less suffering for righteousness' sake. Hence, the significance of our Lord's statement, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; in me ye shall have *peace*."

But surely, as we should be at peace with the Lord, so we should desire and strive and expect to be at peace with all who love the Lord, who have his spirit, and who are seeking to walk in the same way toward the Heavenly Kingdom. "Live in peace [among yourselves]" (2 Cor. 13:11), is the injunction of the Apostle to the Church. There is a great lesson in these words for all who are seeking to be heirs of the Kingdom and to inherit these blessings which our Lord enumerates. With perverse natural dispositions it may require considerable time and practice to learn to know and choose and love the path which leads to peace among God's people. This path is love; – love which thinketh no evil, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, but beareth all things, endureth all things, hopeth all things. And to be a peace-maker one must first be a peace-lover himself: to attempt to make peace without first having the spirit of love ourselves is to blunder, and will surely result in failure. Those who, wherever they go, make for peace, righteousness, love and mercy, in meekness, thereby prove themselves to be children of God.

(8) "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." This blessing also applies only to "the faithful in Christ Jesus." The elements of character which constitute righteousness, and imply harmony with God and heirship to the Kingdom which he has promised, have already been stated in the seven propositions preceding; and now our Lord calls attention to the

fact that with all these graces and elements of righteousness, far above the standard of the world, this class would nevertheless be persecuted and suffer; because of these very elements of character which he approves. This is because the world in general throughout this age will be so blinded to the truth, and so in harmony with sin, that righteousness will be hated in proportion as sin is loved. But in order to be heirs of the Kingdom we must not only love righteousness, meekness, purity of heart, humility of spirit, etc., but must be ready and willing to endure persecution in support of these heavenly principles.

The great Apostle, Paul, declared, "*All* that will [in this present time] live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. 3:12.) Hence, the implication is that we must have all of the foregoing seven characteristics so deeply imbedded in our characters that we will endure the persecutions which they will bring, unflinchingly. Such the Lord elsewhere terms overcomers, saying, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." So then, to have a share in the Kingdom implies a share in the persecutions which the Kingdom class will endure faithfully. The same thought is amplified in the two succeeding verses, which inform us that we should not only be ready to endure persecution, but, rightly informed, will realize that the more we endure along proper lines the more cause we will have for rejoicing in heart, however sorrowful our outward conditions and circumstances may at times be.

Nor does the Lord leave us to suppose that the only persecutions to be endured are those of physical culture; he specifies that some of these persecutions, the endurance of which will be acceptable with him as **[R2251 : page 27]** proofs of our love for him, his kingdom and its rules of righteousness, are "revilings," "false-witnesses" and "all manner of evil" misstatements, because we are his, loyal to his Word and cause. Let us remember also that as the persecutions, misstatements, slanders, revilings, misrepresentations, against the early Church came not so much from the world as from those who

professed to be God's people, Israel according to the flesh, *so now* we must expect that persecutions will come from professing Christians, who are not in heart-harmony with the Lord, and his Word, and the rules of righteousness which our Master laid down.

These same rules of course apply in a modified degree to the whole world, in proportion as they have these traits of character: even in uncircumcised hearts, and even tho they be only outwardly practiced and for effect, nevertheless to that degree do blessings attend. And we may reasonably suppose that when the Kingdom class, the Church, shall be exalted with their Lord and head, to share his Millennial Kingdom, and to bless the world of mankind with a righteous government, and to bring all to a knowledge of the Lord and of the truth, – then practically these same rules will apply to all who then will be on probation for divine approval and eternal life. Now however, during this Gospel age, these lessons are fully applicable to the elect Church, the "little flock," to whom *only* it is the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom.
