

Blessed Are They

“Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.”

*—Matthew 5:1,2,
New International
Version*

WHEN JESUS APPEARED

to his disciples for the last time before returning to the heavenly courts, he said to them, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and

unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) In II Corinthians 5:20 the Apostle Paul describes the followers of Jesus as “ambassadors for Christ,” and explains that there has been given to them “the ministry of reconciliation.” (vs. 18) Later, John the Revelator testified concerning those who would give their lives in service and sacrifice “for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.”—Rev. 20:4

From these and other scriptures, it is evident that the faithful followers of Jesus are looked upon by him as his representatives in the earth. With reference to this, Jesus instructed his followers: “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ... Let your light so shine

before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—
Matt. 5:14,16

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, of which the foregoing text is a part, seems designed to set forth in considerable detail the righteous standards of conduct to which Christians are expected to hold. In verses 3-12 of Matthew chapter 5, which contain what are often described as the Beatitudes, we find a summary of the entire sermon. There is very little in the Sermon on the Mount dealing with the doctrinal features of God's plan of salvation, but, as we have suggested, its subject matter concerns mostly the way of life and the heart condition of those who, in their faithful ambassadorship, will be the proclaimers of these doctrines.

In a small way the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day temporarily occupied this position, although they had already lost the favor of God. Because a new age was dawning in which an entirely different work would be carried out, Jesus deemed it important to instruct those who would be his representatives in the new way of life so beautifully set forth in his Sermon on the Mount.

POOR IN SPIRIT

The first beatitude reads, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:3) Being poor in spirit is not related to poverty along material lines. One might be destitute of the ordinary comforts of life and yet not be poor in spirit at all. On the other hand, one might be wealthy according to the standards of this world and yet be poor in spirit. We are poor in spirit when

we recognizes our undone condition as a member of the sin-cursed and dying human race. The thought is expressed very well in the question that is usually asked one who is about to be baptized. That question is whether or not there is a recognition on the part of the candidate that he is a sinner, and that apart from Christ he has no standing with the Lord.—Rom. 3:10,23; John 15:5; Acts 4:12

A recognition of this basic fact, upon which we are brought into the divine family through Christ, must continue with us throughout our entire life. It is not enough that we express it once at the time of our baptism in water, but it should be one of the guiding principles of our Christian walk. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Only those who recognize their poverty of spirit apart from God can have hope of participating as a joint-heir with Jesus in the kingdom of heaven.

THE MOURNERS

The second beatitude reads, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” (Matt. 5:4) Taking this statement literally, it is not true. There are millions of people who mourn that are not comforted. Even followers of Jesus frequently encounter situations which cause them to mourn, and they continue to mourn—at least for a time. Paul speaks of rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep, so even those who do not have immediate cause for mourning themselves, weep because of the difficulties encountered by their brethren in Christ.—Rom. 12:15

The mourning here referred to by Jesus is, in fact, our expression of sympathy toward those who

are suffering affliction. In this Jesus is our greatest example. We think of the time when his friend Lazarus became ill and died. He returned to Bethany and mingled with those who were mourning. (John 11:1-33) Realizing the heartbroken condition of those present, and that scenes of this nature were taking place every day and would continue to do so until his kingdom was established, Jesus' own heart was touched, and in the shortest verse of the Bible we read, "Jesus wept."—vs. 35

However, Jesus did more than just weep. He used the occasion to do something that must have truly comforted the hearts of Martha and Mary, and all the friends of Lazarus. He awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death. Can we doubt that in this situation Jesus' own heart was comforted? The fact that he could and did help those who were sad must have done much to remove the Master's own tears in this situation of mourning.

What a noble example of mourning for others we have in Jesus! If we take this example to heart we will want to do all we can to comfort others. Indeed, this is a part of the commission of the Holy Spirit—not only to Jesus, but to all his followers. We are to "bind up the brokenhearted," and to "comfort all that mourn." (Isa. 61:1,2) This work of comforting is accomplished through the proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom. There is no more effective way of removing sorrow from the hearts of those whose families have been visited by that great enemy, Death, than to assure them of the future blessings of the kingdom—health and life; even the blessing of the resurrection of the dead.—Isa. 33:24; Rev. 21:4; Acts 24:15; I Cor. 15:21,22

In doing this we find that we are made glad, because the sorrows of the moment are superseded by the joy that has come into our own hearts through the effort we have thus made to sympathize with and comfort others. This is the thought set forth in Proverbs 11:25. The *English Standard Version* reads: “Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.”

THE MEEK

The third beatitude is, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5) To be meek is to be mild, gentle, teachable, in particular concerning the things of God as revealed in his Word. It is especially important to be teachable, because we need to know the Lord’s will as clearly as possible in order that we may do it. The thought is set forth by Paul when, in writing to Timothy he said, “Study and do your best to present yourself to God approved, a workman who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling and skillfully teaching the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15, *Amplified Bible*) Our striving to rightly handle and use God’s Word is in order that we may be workmen who have his approval.

An important aspect of being meek and teachable as it relates to rightly handling the Word of Truth is the realization that as followers of Christ at the present time we are not promised a home on earth. We will not “inherit the earth” in that sense, but the earth is our present field of service. In a limited sense we enter into this field of service now by preaching and giving witness to the Gospel throughout the earth. (Matt. 24:14; 28:19) Herein lies the importance of meekness—teachableness.

Otherwise we might find ourselves in the position of the scribes and Pharisees who, lacking meekness, instructed others in the wrong thing rather than serving as true ambassadors to help reconcile the people to God.

The promised inheritance of the earth by the footstep followers of Jesus spoken of in this beatitude is truly a large one. It applies principally to the future, when the church will be living and reigning with Christ for the blessing of all mankind. (Rev. 20:4,6) None but those who possess the quality of meekness at the present time will enter into that glorious future inheritance. What we do today in bearing witness to the Truth is preparing us for the future time when, together with Jesus, we will have the privilege of causing the knowledge of the Lord to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

HUNGERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The fourth beatitude reads, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6) There is no misunderstanding the expression “hunger and thirst.” There is nothing hypocritical about being hungry and thirsty, and it is this genuine desire for righteousness that Jesus is talking about.

In one of Jesus’ judgments pronounced upon the scribes and Pharisees of his day, he notes their desire to quibble over details rather than having a true thirst after God and his righteousness. We quote: “Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?”—Matt. 23:16-19

This is simply describing the custom of Jesus' day in the relationship of the scribes and Pharisees to the people. It indicates their willingness to make proverbial mountains out of mole hills in order to reveal their supposedly great wisdom. This was not pleasing to the Lord. They did not indicate a true desire to know and to do his will; and they did not “hunger and thirst” after righteousness.

Let us not think that there is no danger today for any of us to be led into a situation of this kind. When we attend a Bible study, what is the real motive of our hearts? In what we say at those meetings, and the questions that we ask, are we truly seeking to be filled with the righteousness of God, or merely attempting to show others how much knowledge we have, or how well we can discuss minute details?

Are we truly hungering for righteousness, not only in our meetings, but in our fellowship and association with fellow Christians generally? These are questions of which the beatitude concerning hungering and thirsting might well remind us, as we pursue our efforts at getting better acquainted not only with the particulars of God's plan, but with God himself, as he reveals himself through his plan.

THE MERCIFUL

The fifth beatitude, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy,” is fundamental among God’s requirements of all his people. (Matt. 5:7) So important is it that Jesus incorporated it in his model prayer: “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Then he adds: “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.”—Matt. 6:12,14,15

How much we need the mercy of God! There is not a day that passes in which we do not come short of the complete doing of his will. If we did not obtain mercy from him, we would soon be outside of his favor entirely. Thus let us endeavor to exercise mercy; and this includes mercy toward those who truly transgress against us, not mercy toward misunderstandings. Where there is merely a misunderstanding there is no call for mercy, because those misunderstandings can and should be cleared up. However, when we experience the efforts of another really to injure us, then we need to exercise the quality of mercy. God does not misunderstand us. Let us remember that we actually transgress against him, and yet he forgives and shows mercy. We should endeavor to be like God in our exercise of mercy toward our own debtors.

HEART PURITY

The sixth beatitude is, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) Purity of heart is well illustrated in another one of Jesus’ judgments upon the scribes and Pharisees. He

said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."—Matt. 23:25,26

The thought here clearly is inward purity rather than an outward profession of purity. Jesus said that those who are pure in heart shall see God. There is a sense in which the Christian sees God at the present time—that is, through the glorious Truth of his Word which reveals the attributes of his character: wisdom, justice, love, and power. (II Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:17-19) In a still fuller sense, however, those who are faithful in doing his will now, especially along the lines of heart purity, shall have the inestimable privilege of being with him, of beholding his glory throughout all the ages of eternity. What a blessing indeed this will be!

PEACEMAKERS

The seventh beatitude is, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Matt. 5:9) There are two senses in which all of God's people should endeavor to be peacemakers. We should endeavor to radiate the quality of peace and good will wherever we go, among all with whom we come in contact. We know that there are those in the world who are of a contrary disposition. They are known to be troublemakers almost anywhere they go.

We are not to be like this. We are to be peacemakers, even at the cost of being misunderstood and perhaps misrepresented. We are to be of such a

disposition that our brethren in Christ will know that whenever we associate with them there will radiate from us the spirit of peace, of good will, of kindness; for surely this was true of Jesus, and we are to be like him. He said to his disciples and to us, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”—John 14:27

We are to be peacemakers also in the sense of being ministers of reconciliation through our witnessing to the Gospel of Christ, which is “the power of God unto salvation.” (Rom. 1:16) To the extent that the Lord blesses our efforts there may be one here and one there who will be brought into harmony with God—into the state of peace with him—because they have accepted the provision he has made through Christ, and have dedicated themselves to the doing of his will. Paul wrote, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”—Rom. 5:1

All those who qualify for a position of joint heirship with Jesus in his kingdom will be called the children of God. (Rom. 8:16,17) The statements of these beatitudes do not mean that the rewards promised are limited to one who adheres to a certain beatitude. All of the poor in spirit shall enter into the heavenly kingdom, shall be comforted, shall inherit the earth, shall be filled, shall obtain mercy, shall see God, and shall be called the children of God, and all such will receive that promised reward in heaven.

PERSECUTED

The eighth and final beatitude reads, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’

sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall 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 which were before you.”—Matt. 5:10-12

Persecution in its various forms has been the common lot of all the true followers of the Master. It is an evidence of the enmity of the seed of the serpent against the seed of the woman. (Gen. 3:13-15) To whatever extent we are persecuted—not for our own faults, but for righteousness’ sake—we have great cause for thankfulness, because it means that we are in the mainstream of experiences which the Scriptures outline will be theirs who walk in the Christian way of sacrifice.

The prophets of old, because of their faithfulness to the Lord, were also persecuted, Jesus says in this beatitude. We can rejoice that we are sharing with them in their experiences. Since it is “through much tribulation” that we will “enter into the kingdom of God,” whatever of persecution may come upon us will be one of the witnesses of the Spirit that we are the children of God. (Acts 14:22; II Tim. 3:12) It will thus be manifest that the Lord is dealing with us, and finally, if we continue faithful, will exalt us to live and reign with Christ, for the blessing of all the families of the earth in his Messianic kingdom.—Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8 ■