

“These Sayings of Mine”

*“Whosoever
heareth these
sayings of mine,
and doeth them, I
will liken him unto
a wise man, which
built his house
upon a rock: And
the rain descended,
and the floods
came, and the
winds blew, and
beat upon that
house; and it fell
not: for it was
founded upon
a rock.”*

—*Matthew 7:24,25*

OUR OPENING TEXT IS

part of the concluding words of Jesus to his Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew chapters 5-7. In ending his sermon, the Master compares hearing his sayings, and zealously obeying them, to the work of building upon a rock. Let us examine some of the “sayings,” and the work they should stimulate in us, which we find in this most notable sermon.

At the beginning of Jesus’ sermon we find what has come to be known as the Beatitudes.

(Matt. 5:2-12) Though the word Beatitude is not found in the Scriptures, its meaning, which is “blessedness,” is central to the nine virtues listed by our Lord in these verses. Blessed, the Master says, are the “poor in spirit,” the humble ones, and those who “mourn”

in heartfelt sympathy for the groaning creation. Blessed are the “meek,” who are teachable, and they that “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” whom he will fill with understanding. Blessed are the “merciful,” an expression of the divine quality of love. Blessed are the “pure in heart” and the “peacemakers,” requirements to be God’s children and to see him. Finally, blessed are those who are “persecuted for righteousness’ sake” and whom “men shall revile,” for they will receive a “reward in heaven.”

In verse 13, Jesus’ sayings continue. “Ye are the salt of the earth.” He then warns us against losing our savor, which would make us unprofitable, just as salt would serve no purpose without its distinctive flavor. The savor we possess is not of ourselves, rather it is the truth and its spirit, which come from God. To be the “salt of the earth,” we must be zealous in our study of the truth and in the application of its spirit in our lives. Otherwise, like salt with no flavor, we will be “good for nothing, but to be cast out.”

REFLECTING THE LIGHT OF TRUTH

“Ye are the light of the world,” not to be hidden, but to “shine before men,” that they may see your “good works, and glorify” the Heavenly Father. (vss. 14-16) In this saying of Jesus, we again understand that the light which is to shine from us in the form of good works is not our own. Our righteousness is “as filthy rags,” and could not cause men to glorify God. (Isa. 64:6) The good works which result from letting our light shine are possible because the source of that light is the Heavenly Father. It is the light of divine truth which the Lord has caused to shine into our hearts, and which he bids us to

reflect, through our words and actions, to others.—
II Cor. 4:6; I Pet. 2:9

How wonderfully does this light glorify God. It is the truth of his plan, in which is revealed his infinite wisdom, his almighty power, his righteous justice, and his boundless love. These attributes of the divine character, harmoniously working together, reveal God's glory, and those who see the light of truth behold this glory. "Holding forth the word of life," as Paul states the matter, is one of the divine instructions which we are privileged to follow.—Phil. 2:16

The Lord's sayings concerning the light which we are to reflect present a double lesson to us. We are to render obedience unto them to be both doctrinally informed, but to also be instructed concerning such character qualities as will bring us into full heart harmony with his teachings and example. These are all part of the light of truth, and they all have a bearing on how we serve God and shine as lights to others.

THE LAW MAGNIFIED

In his sayings on the mount, Jesus explained that he did not come to "destroy the law, ... but to fulfil." (Matt. 5:17) He fulfilled it by keeping it perfectly. More importantly, however, he magnified the Law and made it honorable by displaying its righteous principles, summed up in love, in all his words and actions. (Matt. 22:37-40) This "righteousness," Jesus said, must be in us, and unless it exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, he adds, "ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." —Matt. 5:20

The righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was largely that of outward show. They made a great

display of piety to be seen of men, but inwardly they were “full of dead men’s bones.” (Matt. 23:27,28) The righteousness which exceeds this is heart purity and a zeal for God and for his work which does not seek the honor of men. Such righteousness is attained, as Paul states in several places, by keeping the “spirit” of the Law, not the “letter.”—Rom. 2:29; 7:6; II Cor. 3:6

Jesus illustrates the true righteousness of God’s law in his sayings by discussing various circumstances which may come into our lives, and the contrasting methods of properly dealing with them under the old “letter” of the Law versus the “spirit” of the Law. Anger towards our brethren, disagreements, improper desires, marital responsibilities, the making of oaths, and retaliation towards those who wrong us, are matters in which the Master points out how the spirit of the Law far exceeds the mere letter in dealing with such issues.—Matt. 5:21-42

In the foregoing verses the Master also tells us that if our “right eye” offends, “pluck it out,” and if our “right hand” offends, “cut it off.” (vss. 29,30) He does not here speak literally, but figuratively, admonishing us to sacrifice every precious earthly thing which might hinder us from serving righteousness, even things that might seem as important to us as our right eye or right hand is to the natural body. It takes those who are truly dedicated to Christ-like character building to obey injunctions of this kind. The flesh urges moderation, rationalizing that Jesus did not mean we should be as radical as his words appear to state. However, we should not listen to such reasoning of the flesh, which “exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.”—II Cor. 10:5

A most challenging saying of Jesus in which he contrasts the old law with the new, is that pertaining to our enemies. He says, “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.” In doing so, he continues, we will be like our Heavenly Father, for he causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall upon the just and upon the unjust. If we love only those who love us, Jesus further adds, we are no better than sinful “publicans.” However, if we display that comprehensive love, which reaches out to bless all mankind, we will be “perfect,” or complete, even as our “Father which is in heaven is perfect.”—Matt. 5:43-48

THE MODEL PRAYER

One of the most important sayings of the Master on the mount is the model prayer which he provided as a pattern for his followers to use throughout the Gospel Age. (Matt 6:9-13) If we have a desire to serve God in an acceptable manner we will joyfully commune with him daily and seek to be guided by this outline of the fundamental principles of Christian prayer. We will delight to address God as “Our Father,” and will recognize the hallowedness of his name. Prominent in our prayers will be the desire to see the world blessed by the setting up of God’s kingdom—“Thy kingdom come”—on earth as it is in heaven. We will not make elaborate requests for ourselves, but ask only for the needful things, both temporal and spiritual—“Give us this day our daily bread.”

Realizing how far short we come in thought, word and deed, and our great need for divine mercy, we will also petition God for his forgiveness. Meanwhile,

we must forgive those who trespass against us, else we cannot expect his compassion toward us. “Lead us not”—that is, abandon us not—in temptation, the Lord teaches us to pray. God does not tempt his people, and will not abandon us when we are tempted of the Adversary. (James 1:13) Rather, he will “deliver us from evil,” and desires that we seek his delivering power and providences through prayer.

HEAVENLY TREASURES

We are not to lay up treasures on earth, but in heaven. (Matt. 6:19-21) This saying of the Master is one of the most exacting and challenging. Earthly treasures are often the source of man’s security, and it requires great faith to realize that our eternal security is to be found in the promises of God. Other scriptures indicate, appropriately so, that reasonable provision is to be made for our temporal needs, and for those dependent upon us. (I Tim. 5:8) However, our interpretation of what is reasonable must be soberly considered, since it might ultimately make a difference between our faithfulness or unfaithfulness in God’s sight.

The “light of the body,” Jesus explained, “is the eye,” and if our eye looks in a singular direction, our entire being “shall be full of light.” (Matt. 6:22) This statement immediately follows the Lord’s admonition to lay up treasure in heaven, and that wherever our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. The “single” eye, therefore, well represents a whole-hearted setting of our affections on things above. This is in contrast to a compromising attitude, an “eye” which tries to focus doubly on heavenly and earthly treasures. A single eye suggests seeking

“first the kingdom of God,” in the assurance that if we do so, all our temporal needs will be “added unto” us. (vss. 31-34) The clearness of our spiritual vision depends upon having this mindset. We cannot “serve two masters,” nor can we serve God and the “mammon” of earthly treasures.—vs. 24

“ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS”

In our opening text, Jesus not only admonishes us to hear his sayings, but he also says we must “do them.” This implies works which will put into practice the words and instructions we have heard from him. The Apostle Paul, writing about Jesus Christ and his true followers, said, “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Titus 2:14) The faithful people of God in every age have been zealous of good works. Those who have professed to be his people, but have been lukewarm toward the things he has asked them to do, are likened to those whom the Lord addressed, saying, “I will spue thee out of my mouth.”—Rev. 3:16

The work of God’s people, which is also his work, during the present age has been the building up of themselves in their “most holy faith,” and their spiritual development as “new creatures” in Christ Jesus. (Jude 1:20; II Cor. 5:17) Paul shows that it is important to build with good materials, and upon a proper foundation. The foundation upon which we build, the apostle explains, is Christ, and we are encouraged to erect an enduring character structure using “gold, silver, precious stones,” which will endure the fiery trials and tests sure to come to us. To build with perishable materials such as “wood,

hay, stubble,” which will be consumed by the trials of life, will cause great loss to us as new creatures. —I Cor. 3:11-15

The Bible provides many illustrations in order that we may comprehend all that is involved in the work we are divinely commissioned to do. One of these is that of a bride making herself ready for marriage. In this picture, the church is the prospective bride, and is preparing herself to be united with the “bridegroom,” who is Christ. (Matt. 25:1-10; II Cor. 11:2) While each individual member of the prospective bride class has a work to do, it is the collective work of all the members that makes the bride complete and ready for the marriage. As each one works, they help, support and encourage the other members of the bride. Thus, they are presented to the bridegroom as “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing: ... holy and without blemish.”—Eph. 5:27

Those who are zealous of good works will understand that they are not taking an easy path in order to serve the Lord, but have entered in “at the strait gate,” and are walking in a “narrow” way. (Luke 13:24; Matt. 7:14) Much effort is required, because it is a way of humility, sacrifice and suffering. It is found only by those who have fully vowed to seek the Lord at the cost of weariness, ridicule, and finally of life itself. “Few there be that find” this way, Jesus says.

MORE SAYINGS OF THE MASTER

In Matthew chapter 7 we find several more important sayings of the Master. He begins, “Judge not, that ye be not judged.” (vs. 1) To do so might well represent a hypocritical attitude on our part. We will likely feel, mistakenly so, that others’

faults loom large, while ours are only minor. On the contrary, Jesus says we are not to “cast out the mote,” or small speck, from our brother’s eye, but to “cast out the beam,” or large log, from our own eye. (vss. 3-5) Paul said we should do nothing whereby our “brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.”—Rom. 14:21

Jesus also provides this encouraging saying: “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.” (Matt. 7:7,8) We, as fallen human beings, know how important it is to give good gifts to our children. How much more, the Lord says, will our loving Heavenly Father “give good things to them that ask him.”—vs. 11

We are to “beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing.” However, the Master adds, “ye shall know them by their fruits,” that is, their actions. (vss. 16,20) Jesus adds a final warning in his sayings on the mount, saying that a mere profession of love for him, or of works done in his name, is not sufficient. Some may do this, and receive the reply, “I never knew you.” This is a heart-searching saying for all of us. Only those who “doeth the will of my Father,” Jesus says, “shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (vss. 21-23) Indeed, throughout the entire Sermon on the Mount, Jesus outlines one detail after another of the divine will, and finishes the sermon by saying that only those who keep “these sayings” will enter the kingdom. Their spiritual house will stand because they have built upon a rock.—vss. 24-27

SAYINGS OF THE APOSTLES

After Pentecost, the apostles added more details of the divine will. Their sayings are in full harmony with the words of Jesus. The Apostle Paul encourages us to engage in the work of transformation, by the “renewing” of our minds, and to “work out” our “salvation.” (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 2:12) In doing this, however, Paul assures us that God is also working in us “to will and do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13) The task is too great for us to accomplish alone, so we are glad to be assured that God supervises this work. He also provides the indwelling of his Spirit, which gives us zeal, courage, and guidance needed to carry out our part.

The Apostle Peter says, “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end,” words which suggest a long and arduous undertaking. (I Pet. 1:13) When Nehemiah and his co-laborers were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, they did not so much as take off their clothes at night. They had to be continually ready to meet the enemy, and at the same time carry on with the work. (Neh. 4:15-23) Such is our position today. Our adversary, the devil, is seeking to devour us, and while we resist him by being “steadfast in the faith,” we must continue the work of building the walls of our salvation.—I Pet. 5:8,9

Moreover, the sayings which we are to keep also include the privileges of being “ambassadors for Christ” and proclaiming the “gospel of the kingdom.” (II Cor. 5:20; Matt. 24:14) Faithfulness in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ does not interfere with the work of applying the other sayings of Jesus. Rather, it augments that work, for the more we tell the Truth to others, the greater will be its power in our own lives.

THE GREAT OBJECTIVE

The work of God in us now is in preparation for what he has promised to do in the next age, namely, the blessing of all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:18) We are being trained to be part of that “seed” which will administer these blessings. (Gal. 3:29) What greater future purpose can such training have than to be fitted to administer God’s law to the poor groaning creation in their “day of visitation.” (I Pet. 2:12) How wonderfully divine wisdom is displayed in the arrangements he has made for our preparations to be “kings and priests unto God.”—Rev. 1:6

While the Gospel Age work of preparing the church to live and reign with Christ a thousand years is nearing completion, we are highly honored with the privilege of still being engaged, even at this hour, in building upon the rock of Christ and heeding his sayings. Yet, more than ever before, the enemies of the Lord, the Truth, and his people, are endeavoring to attract us away from our spiritual vocation. All sorts of temptations—to rest from our work, to be misled by erroneous thoughts or speculative interpretations—are being presented.

In response to such opposition, however, may we always have the courage to be as Nehemiah and his faithful coworkers. They “had a mind to work,” and said to their enemies, “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down ... to you.” Most importantly, they realized that “this work was wrought of our God.” (Neh. 4:6; 6:3,16) Ours is the work of keeping “these sayings” of the Master, and doing them faithfully, even unto death. Thus might we hear the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”—Matt. 25:21 ■