

THE BEATITUDES

by
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This little booklet is dedicated to the "poor in spirit" who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" and are satisfied by the grace of God which has been revealed in Christ.

Beauty is regarded and loved as much according to its familiarity as according to its intrinsic worth. Thus a mother's friendly form and a child's loving and laughing face. This is even more the case when we can say: my mother, my child. The high places of Scripture attract as much by their nearness to our needs and their wellworn phrases as by their high-sounding diction and well-formed words. We do not seem to hear these to the point of weariness or recite them so often that we tire of their heavenly beauty and heaven-born grace. Their beauty and their grace are even enhanced by their frequent study as by their diligent use and repetition. As we breathe the air and grow rich in the beauty of the Twenty-third Psalm, the very familiarity of the words has a way of recalling our whole former life as a thing of beauty and grace, because He, the Lord of Glory and King of Grace, has deigned to live there. And thus, too, in the case of the Lord's Prayer and the sacred Beatitudes. We take them along into a troubled and troublesome life as a glowing ember to light the way for us, to warm and cheer and brighten our every turn. And why? They are the very Word of God by which we live.†

Much misunderstanding, misinterpretation and disagreement has arisen with regard to the proper place of the Beatitudes in the presentation of the message of salvation. Since they are spoken directly by Christ Himself, we may suppose that they show no fundamental difference in meaning from the clear presentation of the rest of Scripture with reference to the way of salvation through faith in Christ and by grace alone. We may suppose without further ado and study that the Lord on this important occasion of His first recorded preaching and detailed revelation of the human heart with its needs, its faults, its sin and shame, and of God's eternal love and care, would speak a clear language to guide the sinner then and the sinner now. As the body of the Sermon shows clearly what He expects of His children, so the sinner would despair if he did not learn to know what he, the sinner, has a right to expect of Christ: pure and free grace, as only He, the Lord, is able to show it in all its fulness. In other words, we may suppose without further ado that our Lord has stated the Gospel clearly; and only with this as a basis has undertaken to show the clear demands of the Law. It cannot be otherwise. The Bible as a whole as in the specific case has taught us to look for Law and Gospel as an inseparable preaching, the one presupposing the other, the one following upon the other. Is the Sermon on the Mount in conformity to this manner of preaching?

† The beatitudes are so called because each sentence begins with the word *beatus* in the Latin Vulgate translation. They are called makarisms in accordance with the Greek *makarios*, meaning "blessed." They appear early in the Gospel according to Matthew (chap. 5) and in a shortened form in the Gospel according to Luke (chap. 6). It is the form as transmuted by Matthew that concerns us here.

There is undoubtedly a close connection between this Greek word *makarios* and the Semitic root BRK (Hebr.-Arab.)—KRB (Assyr.). Note the meaning of "bless" in all words, and the close proximity to each other of the consonants B and M and R.

Instead interpreters have held the opinion that the Beatitudes present a sort of introduction to the body of the Sermon on the Mount in that the content is essentially a preaching of the Law, or that they present the fruits of faith, or that they are to be considered singly so that the one has no particular connection with the foregoing or the following. In the end the result is a strange confusion, so that a young preacher felt justified when he remarked dejectedly that he had never had the courage to preach sermons with the Beatitudes as a text, although he recognized that here must be a deep meaning even though unclear to him. And thus one student thinks so, another so; and in the end no one is sure either with regard to the sequence, the deeper connection or the exact meaning and place of the Beatitudes.

On the other hand, we must not let the beauty, richness and grace of the Beatitudes escape our notice as if these were immaterial. And the purpose of this treatise is that of tracing them singly and as a whole, to show what their plain meaning is, their reference to our Christian estate and to the preaching of Law and Gospel, that we may learn to love this word of our Lord as the word of Comfort which it is.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven."

The one word "blessed" is enough to prove that this is a gospel promise. The blessedness which God announces and pronounces is the undeserved riches of God. As the word "blessed" implies the fullness of God's grace, so the reward of the activity which man shows is exactly nothing and less than nothing. To Abraham, and before he had the opportunity to earn a reward, God says: "I will bless thee, and make thy name great" —Gen. 12. And to David: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." Ps. 32. Before all else, forgiveness of sin.

The same contrast is brought out so clearly in the passage before us. It is the contrast which is characteristic of the whole relation between the Law and the Gospel in Scripture: the one shows our worthless deserts, failure, minus quantity: the other reveals the positive, God's gift of grace in Christ. If it were man's earning, we might well read: blessed are the rich in money and goods; or, happy are the rich, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And how many there are who would put this meaning into the words of Christ, letting the word "blessed" mean nothing more than "lucky," "fortunate" or the like.

But the word "blessed" blots out all thought of reward, every hope to earn, every expectation of being paid for work well done. Note again the contrast: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Poor in spirit" contrasted with "kingdom of heaven." The *kingdom* of heaven belongs to the *poor* in spirit. What man cannot reach, because it is too high and lofty and sublime, this is brought near and actually placed in his bosom as a part of what he owns, and that, now, not at some future date, but *now*, in the ever-present eternity.

This blessedness extends to all the poor in spirit, as is evidenced by the plural. There is no difference as though one owns more, the other less of this blessedness. There is no thought of attaining it at some indefinite future time after some condition has been fulfilled. We read plainly: blessed are those who have nothing of which to boast, no riches upon which to depend, nothing to make one feel that he is better than the other. Instead the one has lost every chance to

look down upon the other. He is made to feel that all others are better than he and that he is poverty-stricken indeed. Stripped of all glory, devoid of every good thing, rich in nothing but his sin, he is informed of the surprising news that heaven itself is his, not to own at some future time, but now as a very present possession. The contrast is between a negative and a positive, between earning and owning, between a fancied hope and sure riches. The one, poverty, is a possession which is suffered, the other is a possession gained; the one is a threat, the other an overwhelming gift, breathtaking in its beauty and magnanimous grace.

By changing the words the meaning can be changed. But, by changing the words, the promise may be lost. By changing from Gospel to Law the promise is gone to comfort us no more. But the promises of God are yea and amen; and there is nothing, absolutely nothing, more sure than the promises of the Eternal. Let us remember that this is Gospel in its essence and sure reality. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Thus our Savior teaches us how to preach and teach the Gospel. How blessed are the poor in spirit!

Before we go on, it is well to consider carefully, Who are the poor in spirit and to whom is the promise spoken? There is no doubt. In this, as in the following Beatitudes, Jesus is describing the Christian as he actually appears on earth. In other words, he is already a believer and a child of God. Of no one else could Jesus say that he is *blessed*, since this word and designation properly, i.e. in the sight of God, belongs to the *Christian alone*. For that very reason Jesus speaks of him as poor, not in worldly goods, for then neither Abraham nor Job could be counted in that number. For that reason Jesus adds "in spirit." Not all "poor" are poor in the sense that Jesus uses the word. On the other hand, what a withering condemnation of the self-chosen and hypocritical so-called poverty of money and goods upon which the deluded souls of the Catholic Church have learned to depend for the favor of God! To be poor in spirit is truly a God-given thing. It means to be poor in the sight of God, where money does not count but instead the awful absence of any good thing by which we may please God. There are the poor in spirit whose possessions are the God-accursed sin and shame which they own as the children of hell that they are by nature. And when the Law is preached to them, it is not that they become proud but that they are pressed the more down into the hell of despair and hopelessness—the sorrows of hell encompass them, as the Psalmist declares. They search in vain for rescue or relief. They are poor in this, too, that they find nothing in themselves or in their own so-called good deeds by which they as by a drop of water can cool their tongue and relieve their torture. When God says "poor in spirit," then He means just that: a spirit that has nothing of which to boast, nothing by which to comfort, nothing to offer God in recompense for sin.

Does our Saviour actually speak of these when he says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?" Or does Christ speak to delude us? He seems to make matters worse by adding the promise: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Note the Greek *autoi* and *autón*.) Is there merit in our poverty and sin that we can earn a reward by means of them? Nay, this is the language of Scripture, and that is altogether different from the language of men. That is the language of utter surprise, of unsparing humiliation, but of honest appraisal. Of what can "poor" man boast? And yet, there is the gift—and possibly there is no better way of bringing the truth to light but by way of contrast. And so the Gospel reads: *for sin, instead of sin, forgiveness and grace. For poverty, the grace and riches of heaven.*

There is no appeal from this promise of Christ to reason, as there can be no reasonable

interpretation of this passage. To us it would appear that where there is a reward, there must be labor clearly stated. And does not the passage say that heaven belongs to “the poor in spirit”? In other words, heaven is of the poor, not of the rich in spirit. If we fulfill that certain condition of being poor in spirit, then we may attain and secure and own heaven. And even though there is a great disproportion between the set condition and the agreed reward, between the labor and the pay, between the stipulated requirement and the stated remuneration, the element and idea of *quid pro quo*, of something for something else and thus eventually of labor and reward, even of being something in order to gain something else, is clearly presupposed as a basis in the bargain.

But it is not a bargain. It is well that we discover in time that this is a gospel promise, a reward of grace, an unmerited gift. This is a reflection of the prodigal’s return and of the salvation of the robber on the cross. The publican was in truth “poor in spirit.” The robber heard the promise: “today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

As the poverty is real and the sin is real, so the promise, too, is real: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” And as we cannot fathom the disproportion, so we cannot fathom the reality of the blessing. Heaven is above us, beyond us, always more than our every conception in this way or that; but the promise remains true and steadfast. Whether the mind of one explains heaven in this fashion or that, heaven always remains as the realm of God’s existence, as the revelation of the beauty and grace of God, as the home of God’s perfect love and life. No man who is bound up with this life can understand or form a conception of heaven; for it is of a different sort and nature from the life on earth. And yet, the one is the image of the other as God created man in the image of God. But as heaven is higher than earth, so heaven, being of God, will be discerned only when we are “of God,” i.e. belong to God, children of God, born and nurtured of God, heaven-born.

And so the solution remains and is clear: By the teaching of the whole Bible as well as by the contrasting expressions here it is made clear that the attempt to discover anything of merit in the words “the poor in spirit” must fail utterly. But we note that the natural order of words is “the poor in spirit are blessed because (in that) the kingdom of heaven is theirs—from which it is clear that, as important as the words “the poor in spirit” are, the word “blessed” is even more so: “for” as the result of the blessing of God the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor. In other words, as much as the unbelieving world may despise the Christian, as much as the Christian may despise himself and deplore his own fate of being such a “poor” one, and as much as God Himself seems to verify the truth of this description of the Christian, yet the Christian is blessed by God and given the Kingdom of Heaven as an eternal possession. How blessed it is to be found as a Christian though poor in the sight of men and of God!

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

Mourning cannot be forced or demanded. It is a natural, spontaneous expression of grief. In other words, it is not necessary to add the words: “in spirit.” Mourning is of the spirit; otherwise it is not mourning. It is not a matter of tears as of the eyes. It is not a matter of the mouth, as if sobbing can be of the sound simply. Grief as well as the sob cannot be separated from the feeling and emotions of the heart, if grief be real.

Note how inseparably poverty and grief are joined together: poverty is an inevitable condition of the soul as the result of sin; grief and mourning are the accompaniment of that lack, even as the tear and the sob. Poverty and mourning are companions together, the one feeling what the other is; and as the sinner is sick, mortally wounded, even “dead in trespasses and sins,” so the mourning is there to declare that sickness and that death, the unhappy and sorrowing procession of the dead.

“Blessed are they that mourn” – and we see as in one the company of the sinners as they wend their way along the pathway of life, sorrowing and anguished, under the heel of despair as they contemplate the hopelessness of their lost condition. Can there be any earning of favor or of a prize by mourning, do you suppose? The earning comes by way of a sharp contrast: “they shall be comforted.” That word is not from self; by way of that same contrast, it is from God.

What more glorious gospel? Instead of the reward of death, there is life. Instead of sorrow there is the comfort of Christ, heavenly and pointing to heaven. Note the future, “shall be comforted,” a future which He holds in His eternal hand as an ever present reality. By Scripture He reminds us of His substitutionary suffering and death for the sins of all mankind to take away our grief and wipe away our tears. It is He, the Great Succorer Who has come with this as His purpose, to comfort. Note well, these words have no meaning apart from Christ. In these words, “they shall be comforted,” the whole gospel of the Christian religion is laid bare. We may wonder at this that the same Jesus Who speaks and promises comfort says nothing about where that comfort is to be found, And yet, He stands before them and us as the source and embodiment of all true comfort. Without Him there is no comfort, true, lasting, real. Where He is, there grief takes its flight and there is peace. The enmity of sin is no more; the sorrow of sin is gone; the warfare and strife of sin is banished, the suffering and pain are wiped away, the guilt of sin is paid – all that implies sorrow on account of, as a result of, in the companionship and association with sin, the unhappiness, the hurt, the anguish, all, *all* has been removed to be replaced by comfort as the gift of Him Who knows no pretended or false or sham words by which to deceive.

These are sacred words whose content cannot be stretched beyond their true meaning. The words permit only a sense that is in conformity to and in harmony with the comfort which has been spoken so clearly in the rest of Scripture, that comfort which has been brought and wrought for all by Christ. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” Isaiah 40.

And when the sinner cries for more comfort against more, ever more sin, then remember, the comfort of Christ always goes beyond; it is never weary or spent. As Christ’s “for all” means just what it says, thus the glory of this promise is equally full: “they shall be comforted.”

This Jesus Who comforts is not unknown. He it is Who, standing in their midst, has already accepted the challenge of His office as the Lamb of God. As such He walked the pages of the Old Testament. He comforted our first parents, Adam and Eve, when they had sinned. He comforted Abel when he depended on that same Lamb of God, Who already then had come

by prophecy in the burnt offering. He comforted Abraham and Isaac, who were actually given to see how God miraculously substituted the Lamb of burnt offering for guilty Isaac and thus held before the believing eyes of a sinful people the wondrous promise and comfort of God. The course of the whole Old Testament became as a long wait for the fulfillment of the promise of God. The promise was spoken by one plain prophecy after the other, by type, by command, by gospel comfort—until Isaiah by the Spirit could say in astonishment of faith: “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Chap. 53).

It is this prophecy John the Baptist echoes when he says: “Behold the Lamb of God,” and it is the dedication to His solemn office the same servant of God announces at the Baptism of Jesus. And this Jesus goes forth delivered into the cruel hands of those who should slay Him as the payment for the sins of all. Here He stands having come into the world by the gracious decree of God Himself, ready and willing to comfort all who mourn. Here is the wiping away of tears and the lifting of eyes to the hills of salvation indeed.

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

“The meek” are those who realize their own unworthy state and are not proud. As riches and pride consort together, so poverty and meekness walk hand in hand, the one to make the other rich. The meek are the poor who know their own poverty and the mourners who realize the cause of their own sorrow. They are the sinners who know their sin and yet do not despair; for in the midst of their meekness they find hope which is of God.

Is meekness, then, something of which to boast? By no means. Meekness is rather as a confession of one’s own unworthiness. Meekness seeks instead the company of the poverty and the grief just mentioned. But not as if the one degrades the other and debases the other. The one exalts the other and “exults” the other, Poor—mourn—meek: the one rejoices in the companionship of the other, but so that the one does not feel ashamed of the other or feel sorry for the other.

There is a striking Christian progression in these thoughts: “poor,” because the sinner realizes his sin; “mourns,” because the hurt of sin is there; “meek,” because the sinner has nothing of which to boast. But instead of letting each follow the other in a descending scale, the one hallows the other, helps to deepen the significance of the other, broadens the conception and dignifies the picture, until he who is poor and mourns and is meek stands before us as the one whom Christ loves so much that He gave His life that he might live.

“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” There is the like and unexpected

contrast, taking us utterly by surprise, the surprise of the gospel. For what can be more unexpected than a reward where there is no earning? pay where there is no labor? "Meek" spells a condition and not a work and therefore brings a gift rather than a remuneration. So the "blessed" which introduces each sentence and saying is as a kind father who, forgetting that his child has disappointed him grievously, covers the pain with the healing "balm of Gilead," the blood of His dear Son, and, remembering His Son, grants the blessing where there otherwise is none. Therefore, too, He describes the gift as an "inheritance" and not as a reward.

But can the expression "inherit the earth" possibly signify or include the heavenly? The sinner could not be satisfied with less. We are reminded in this connection of the passage: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." 1 Pet. 1:3-4. All promises regarding the spiritual include this present but reach up into heaven, make rich in heaven and on earth, comfort in heaven as well as on earth.

Up to this point the Beatitudes describe the Christian as viewed by the Law and the Gospel: "poor" because of sin, and yet "blessed" by the Gospel and owning the Kingdom of God: "mournful" because of his lost condition, and yet comforted by the sure mercy of God; "meek" in view of this verdict of the Law, but made rich by the same strange and opposite lovingkindness of God in the Gospel. This whole attitude and contrary reward of God becomes the more surprising and mysterious the farther we proceed in the contemplation of the Beatitudes of Jesus. It is the same strange contrast as we find in the opposing expressions Law and Gospel, sin and grace; the same contrast as we find in Rom. 3:23-24: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Man's deserving; God's mercy.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

Again the word "blessed" almost frightens us with its marked emphasis. However, we must not be surprised either by Christ's description of the Christian or by the contrast so like that of the foregoing beatitudes.

"Blessed" again covers the whole range of good things that God has to give His children. Nothing is withheld, nothing missed. "Hunger" and "thirst" are spiritual, the hunger and thirst after righteousness, the perfect fulfillment of God's demands as expressed in the Law of God. That righteousness must be a perfect righteousness, even as God Himself is perfect, as this same Sermon on the Mount puts it in another connection: "Be ye therefore perfect even as your father in heaven is perfect." Anything short of that is not righteousness and cannot be called so. There is no righteousness which is part righteousness and part unrighteousness.

Therefore Christ uses the expression "hunger and thirst after," for it is unattainable by our own "reason and strength." And yet, the very expression "hunger and thirst" implies a significant change, for this appetite is no small thing in itself. This appetite is an evidence of the change that has come with the advent of the Gospel. The Law is cruel in that it in the end not

only judges all attempts at fulfilling its demands as imperfect and as failures, but kills and murders all desire and living "appetite" for the holy life which pleases God. Where that hunger and thirst have returned, there is life in the fervent desire to attain that which pleases God. Where that life is, even though it consists only in the desire and yearning to embrace the perfection which God loves, and to love the righteousness which Christ points out, and hopes for the possession of that for which he now hungers and thirsts, there is *faith*, the "evidence of things not seen." And faith is that divine activity which in itself is the gift of God.

Let us not despise faith, for it is the key to every blessing of God. Faith is in itself proof that the Holy Spirit has touched the heart with life-giving force. The heavenly seed has been planted in the human heart, and with heaven-born eagerness a hunger and thirst have set in to bless that same heart. Where man had been "dead in trespasses and sins," God has awakened hatred of sin and love of righteousness which is of the Gospel.

A stone or piece of iron has no "hunger and thirst." Therefore food and drink are as nothing to them. Hunger and thirst are evidences of life. But life has its source in God and only in Him. Spiritual hunger and thirst are a proof of spiritual life, a life that only God can create. Thus we begin to realize how blessed that man is in whom God has wrought faith; for that faith has made a separation between man who is "dead in trespasses and sins," who is lost, condemned, banished from God and His favor, and him who, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, shined upon by the Sun of Righteousness, touched by Him Who is Light and Life, has risen to new life in Christ, his Redeemer. In his heart the Seed of God's Word has been planted to bring forth fruit unto everlasting life. That is the promise of Very God. For when Christ says "be filled," He reserves nothing of that which satisfies that hunger and thirst of which He speaks. It is a fulness that signifies and brings eternal life.

Again, let us not despise faith, for it holds in its hand great things. "Thy faith hath saved thee," records Luke (7:30). We are "justified by faith," Rom. 3:28. Our faith is "counted for righteousness," Rom. 4:5. By faith "we have access into this grace wherein we stand," Rom. 5:2. "By faith ye stand," 2 Cor. 1:24. "We walk by faith," 2 Cor. 5:7. "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me," Gal. 2:20 "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus," Gal. 3:26. "By grace are ye saved through faith," Eph. 2:8. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," Heb. 11:6.

As there is no greater gift than the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, so there is no greater possession than the faith which takes hold of this mercy of God. For faith, though a creation of God, is still the possession of the Christian, whereby all that faith holds and owns becomes his to make him eternally rich. Without faith, the poverty remains; with faith, the blessing remains. What riches faith brings!

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

The faith of the Christian is an active thing, producing not wealth of goods or cattle but the fruits of faith, which are these: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23). Faith is a living thing and must be active; it lives unto God and pleases God. It is unselfish, looking unto the other's needs and welfare. It looks with pity on the other's ills and offers help. It loves, remembering God's love toward him.

Mercy is rooted in God's mercy. It forgives, because God has forgiven him. Mercy cannot be forced. It is freely given, even as God has been merciful. Mercy is coupled with goodness (Ps. 23:6) and again with truth (Ps. 95:10). As such it is an attribute of God. When used of God, mercy is the equivalent of lovingkindness (Rev. Vers.) Where God dwells, there is the Mercy-seat, because He dispenses mercy there, even as He says: "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Matt. 9:13. As God deals graciously with us, so He blesses those who are merciful to others.

But mercy, being free, must not, dare not contradict its own nature. It does not seek a reward, cannot be repaid. If it is not free, it is not mercy. One cannot buy mercy as if we can bargain in this wise: I'll forgive you if you will forgive me. Where mercy is involved, the period must be placed thus: I forgive. The Christian being overwhelmed by the lovingkindness and free forgiveness and mercy of God in Christ, as a living tree, bears the inevitable fruit of mercy. His very nature is transformed. ("If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" – 2 Cor. 5:17). Where there was no mercy, now there is mercy and all the friends and companions, the brothers and sisters, the whole holy family of virtues, among whom love is first and foremost.

A mirror is a remarkable thing. It reflects whatever is placed before it, and that, in its exact shape and size and coloring—but not in its true direction. The image is reversed. Furthermore, the image is not lasting; it remains as long as the object is there before it. If the object is taken away, the image is gone. Thus the image of Christ. So long as He is there in our lives, His image, too, is there to beautify and to bless. In fact, we are not true to our purpose as Christians unless our lives reflect His life, our virtues reflect His virtues. But let us remember, the reflection is true only to a point. The only direction an image has is in the reverse. Only in so far as we reflect Him can our image have any direction. The mercy, truth, love, kindness that we may show forth are the mercy, truth, love and kindness which is of Him; but take Him out of our lives, and that same mercy, truth, love and kindness become as a cold and selfish and proud thing utterly devoid of the love which is warm and life-giving. Oh, the emptiness of the mercy which is without Christ!

We do well to do battle against the conclusion that Jesus in these Beatitudes intends to teach anything that in any way militates against the teaching of the rest of Scripture that we cannot in any wise earn our salvation by any sort of good deeds, good conduct or good intentions. The Word of God is too plain and clear to make any such interpretation possible—though it may seem very plausible and attractive to man as he is by nature. The word "for," repeated here so often, may seem to be a stumbling block, however, and may seem to imply a ground or reason for making a stated quality or nature a reason for an inevitable conclusion. Must we, after all, read: If the Christian is merciful, God will show his mercy in turn?

However, it is not necessary to look beyond this very text to avoid that shoal. It is evident that the word "blessed" has the fullness of meaning of this word, and as Christian hearers and readers we refuse to give up one jot or tittle of the treasury of good things that God has stored up in this Gospel promise. Instead, let us be careful how we read the sacred words. As in each of the several Beatitudes we must also here read with the proper accent, and that accent is in every case on the word "blessed."

In accordance with the explanation established under Beatitude I, the thought of these five Beatitudes is briefly this: these believing disciples of Christ, poor in spirit, sinners all and condemned, are in God's sight counted as blessed, and that by grace, and by promise they own heaven itself. They mourn their sins and the effects of sin; but in the sight of God they are blessed and shall be comforted. They are meek, are known by God and men as such; they frankly and honestly admit their lost condition; but they are blessed by God and shall by grace inherit the earth. They hunger and thirst after righteousness and by their love show their allegiance to the Lord's cause, and they are blessed in that their hunger and thirst shall be satisfied. They show that their faith is living and active in that they are merciful; but this very activity of faith is a blessing of God which by promise here shall be continued.

And thus our salvation, our mercy, our day-by-day forgiveness, all that makes a demand on the mercy of God is made to rest securely on Christ, His suffering *for us*, His death *for us*, His perfect life *for us*. Only that will save, only that will forgive, only that will earn the mercy of God and give assurance that it is enough. Only God's mercy in Christ fully satisfies. His cry "It is finished" covers all my sin.

As a self-evident thing, with no thought of merit and reward for merit, such a Christian by God's blessing brings forth the fruits of faith. He is merciful to others, even as his Father in Heaven has been merciful to him. But is a thank-offering like a call for a reward? Far be it! It is like the lowly apple which declares that the tree is living and which praises God Who made it so.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Pure—the very word condemns us all. And when Jesus adds "in heart" we know that He who sees all has already looked into these stark and dark recesses which we have tried so frantically to hide, not only from our fellowmen but from God Himself. But the words stand, and as if God reserves His blessing for the "pure in heart." Is not the natural and inevitable corollary the self-evident: damned are the impure in heart, for they shall not see God?

Thus reason would get in the way of the Word of God and the promise of God. How we need to learn and re-learn to read! For if we learn to read with the right accent, the Gospel here, too, would shine in all its glory. "Blessed are the pure" means just what the words say: God has blessed and will bless those who by faith have been purified, and the promise of God is: "they shall see God." And let us be brave to crave the full meaning: they shall see God bodily, i.e. in the resurrection of the body. Marvel if you will, at the startling glory of the promise of God! As we learn to see the Son by faith, so we shall also learn to "see" the Father according to the promise: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" —Joh. 14:9.

Again the reward of grace in this case as in the foregoing comprehends all the good things of God. As impurity shuts out from the presence and sight of God in His holiness and justice and righteousness, so purity admits the believer into that purity and holiness which is God. The promise of God brings that purity as the most precious gift it is, and that in its fullness. Sin is moral and spiritual impurity, and its end is hell. Spiritual impurity is the contamination of Satan, and it partakes of the nature of hell. The removal of sin spells the removal of all that divides and separates from heaven. And the salvation that Christ has

prepared and made ready means just that: the washing of regeneration of which the Bible speaks, Tit. 3:5: "According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." This is not only negative; it is the positive restoring of purity, it is the "renewing of the Holy Ghost," so that the same passage can say: "according to his mercy he saved us." Thus God wants us to contemplate our deliverance, the impure having become pure, the damned having been saved and delivered out of hell into heaven. It is the same Jesus, after all, Who has taught us to see all of this in the light of the Gospel promise: "they shall see God."

For this is the very purpose for which He came. He knows that we are impure and He knows how impure we are. But His mission on earth was none other than just that: to make the impure pure, the sinners saints, the unclean clean, to raise the spiritually dead that they might live in Christ and unto Christ. We cannot and must not and will not forget that work of Christ which lends meaning to His whole coming in the flesh: to redeem me and all sinners. But what is redemption other than cleansing from sin, purifying the impure, offering His holy life as a sufficient ransom for all? As the Scripture says: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." 1 Tim. 2:5-6.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Then we who were filled with dread at the very sound of the word "pure" learn who Jesus has reference to when He says "pure." They are those who by faith have received the forgiveness of sins, the washing which the Son promises, the cleansing which makes us pure in the sight of God. Who will dare to speak here of earning and reward, of his own purity of body or mind or heart, of hands or eyes or mouth, of thought or wish or ambition, as if we, you, I, anyone in the world of men, could attain to the perfection that Jesus implies here? By His promise, free, full, ever present, He, the Eternal Son, has given us all forgiveness, made us fully clean, as the Lamb of God has by His blood wiped out every guilty stain. God discovers not even the semblance of sin, for that "for us" has settled every accusing account.

Having been purified and cleansed by the blood of Christ, it is a self-evident thing that the Christian gives evidence of his faith by himself being merciful. How can he hide this victory of the Spirit in his life? And so the life purpose of the believer becomes this, as he is reborn as a child of God, that he show by purity of heart, mind, body, by purity of intent and thought, of ambition and striving that the whole person is a bud that gives promise of the full bloom of heaven. What can be higher reward than this: "They shall see God"?

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

Three words, but they make the difference between life and death, happiness and hell: blessed – peacemakers – children of God. The central thought is that peacemakers are blessed; but how can there be any blessedness apart from that heavenly company of saints described here, the peacemakers, the children of God?

It is not as though any separation from the foregoing description of the Christian is possible; for the "poor in spirit," they who "mourn" their sinful condition, "the meek," those who long for the righteousness of Christ, those whose sins are forgiven, those who in love are merciful toward their fellows, those who are pure in heart, these all have only one aim and

purpose in life: to bring their newfound peace to their fellowmen. The task is plain as the newborn desire is urgent: God Who in Christ has manifested forth His boundless mercy sends us forth into a warring world with the message of the same loving forgiveness, as the children of God to spread happiness wherever we go.

Of Christ Himself the prophet says: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." Is. 61:1-3. Of Jesus in the flesh Matthew says: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (4:17). And again: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom." (v. 23).

What is more natural and self-evident than this that the Christian in all things follow the example of Christ, and as a thank-offering to Him also in this do as He bids: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" – Rom. 10:15; Is. 52:7. And Paul, the disciple of Christ, can boast: "We preach Christ crucified." And again: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." Acts 13:38.

There is no grander title than this, no greater mission, no happier cause. It is a calling so important that none exceeds it, for the eternal happiness of all men is dependent on this. It is a work so dignified that no one is worthy, unless God Himself touches our unworthiness and by His grace covers it with His Own worthiness.

Of a sudden the whole world is transformed before our very eyes. A world steeped in sin, iniquity, corruption and the rottenness of death is called forth by the message of life to new life and by the glad tidings of peace to the bright light of God's Own truth. In this glorious work the children of God shall own a part! What blessedness is theirs! "And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:15-16.

Let our eyes of faith feast day by day on this vision of the Church of God. Though invisible to the natural eye, that Church is beautifully portrayed here as the children of God, who are surely counted every one. For each is numbered among the elect and given his task to do in the household of God. They are called to be peacemakers in the true and real sense: peacemakers between God and men, peacemakers between man and man, all by the glorious Gospel of a Risen Saviour.

Thus the Beatitudes reach a worthy climax: "they shall be called the children of God." There is our origin as well as our goal, our task and our help to do that task, our song and our harp on the way, our food and our drink – all from and of God, all heavenly and from heaven. Here the CHILDREN OF GOD; there the SONS OF GOD. Can there be any worthier goal and title than this?

To sum up:

In the Beatitudes Jesus appears as the Master Painter, Who with bold strokes and consummate skill has given us a most striking reproduction of the Christian as he appears before God and the Church: He is poor, because of the presence of sin; he mourns because of the power of sin; he is meek because of the humiliating filth of sin; but he has in the same moment a living hope despite sin; he possesses a merciful heart that is clean before God, because it has been washed clean by the blood of Christ, and he strives daily to live as an example of purity before his fellows; he is called by God Himself a “child of God” and given the high calling of being the helpmeet of God as a peacemaker before God and men. As such a child of God he owns the blessings of heaven and earth, the favor of God, and the assurance that no man or devil can hurt nor harm him against the will of the Father.

SOLI DEO GLORIA.

In the next following verses our loving Saviour pictures the stern future of this Church of God and each member of the same. It shall suffer persecution, be reviled, be spoken against for Christ's sake though falsely, even as the prophets of old: but in the sight of God they shall be the salt of the earth, for by their words and deeds they help to preserve the world from destruction; they shall be the light of the world, for by their word and works they shall help the world to find the way to God and their heavenly inheritance.

And on the way we meet these words without fear and gladly, even thankfully: “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” – Matt. 5:48. As believers in Christ we walk with the blessing of Very God is our sacred possession, sins forgiven and owning the mercy of God.

Again: SOLI DEO GLORIA.