

Ten Blessings, Part 2 of 2 "Blessed are the Pure in Heart."

A sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish

"Blessed are the merciful...

"Blessed are the pure in heart...

"Blessed are the peacemakers...

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you...

"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven..."

(Matthew 5:7-12)

Today we continue a review of the ten blessings, or beatitudes, from the gospel of Matthew that we began last month. For those who missed the first part, printed copies are available.

So far we have reviewed 5 of the blessings, the first four and the eighth, all of which present a rather negative appearance in the literal sense and yet inwardly or spiritually speaking help us to understand the Lord's incredible presence with us in our states of innocence and humility. Now we are ready to review the three blessings that appear beautifully positive even in the literal sense, and then continue with the last two, which are again challenging. Remember, we have already spoken about those in general "who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Today we consider the more personal conclusion, "Blessed are YOU when they revile and persecute YOU... Rejoice... for great is YOUR reward in heaven."

When the Lord blessed the merciful and the pure in heart, or rather, when He said that they **ARE** blessed, as so often happens He was referring to an Old Testament teaching, in this case one that we see reflected in our lesson from Psalm 18, where David wrote of the Lord,

"With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful;

"With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless;

"With the pure You will show Yourself pure;

"And with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd.

"For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks"

(vv 25-27; see also 2 Samuel 22:26-28)

In fact, all of the ten blessings are reiterations of Old Testament teachings. As the Lord said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). So in this first part of the sermon on the mount - His first recorded formal teaching - He states the laws of order, and in the parts that follow He *explains* them and gives examples of what they really mean. For instance, what is it to be truly merciful? Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven..." (Matt. 5:43-45). So He showed that mercy involves an inner disposition of kindness toward all people, no matter how they may be disposed toward us.

Again, "Blessed are the pure in heart:" Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:27-28). So He taught that it is not enough to love and honour the commandments in outward life, it is also necessary to love and honour them in will, desire, and intention.

The word, mercy, in Scripture, means compassion, and involves the feeling of pity for those who are in any sort of misery or need (AC 3063, 5042, 6180, 9219, etc.). In particular it is said to be "love grieving" (AC 5480), since it is a form of love, and love turns to grief on account of those who suffer, whether the suffering is self-inflicted or imposed by others, whether it is natural or spiritual (as in the case of those who are in spiritual temptations).

The Writings say that the whole government of the Lord's Divine Providence is *nothing but mercy* because it is devoted entirely to lifting people out of their miserable selfish and worldly lives into the joys of heavenly life (see DP 337), and this is work that He must do with every one of us. It follows, then, that if we share His love we will also share His mercy, and make every effort to co-operate with this work - in ourselves and in others. So we will feel His mercy operating in ourselves. We will feel pity, we will feel compassion; we will feel *sorry* for those in need.

But wait. How can we be blessed in such feelings of sadness? Isn't this just like the question we raised last month about the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst, and those who are persecuted? Isn't it *painful* to be aware of other people's misery and distress? Think of anyone you love - wife, husband, son or daughter, a parent, brother, neighbour, friend: if you see that person hurt or sad, sick or disabled, confused, bitter, angry or abused, of course you are going to feel mercy towards that person. But the Lord said, "Blessed are the *merciful*...." Where, we may ask, is *our* blessing in this grief?

Well, first of all, when we reach out to others who are in need, either in heart or in deed, we feel a sense of real use and purpose. We feel a sort of "call" from the Lord that signals His presence within us and even possibly suggests a role for us. It makes us feel important, needed, or at the very least that we have something we could share. Sure, the cynic would say it makes us feel *superior*, and if we have an arrogant or conceited attitude that might be true. But if we have a humble and sincere attitude it just makes us feel *good*, and feeling good is feeling blessed.

Then again, remember that the Lord's Providence is nothing but pure mercy towards all of us. It is not His fault if we do not receive it. But if we open our hearts to others, His love flows in, and fills us with a sense of blessing.

Finally, suppose we act on our feelings of mercy. With the Lord's help the people for whom we feel compassion will benefit and receive a blessing. The old man will smile or laugh; the confused or bitter friend will get some new insight and feel better; the sick or disabled will enjoy something she couldn't have done on her own; the abused or miserable person will feel understood. Since love carries with it the joy of making others happy, this too will be a blessing.

Now before we go on, let's just note that in the first four beatitudes everything is focused on our awareness of our own needs. As we acknowledge these needs and pray to the Lord for help He gives us the wisdom and encouragement we need to be fulfilled. So we are blessed. **Then** we are prepared to receive the next three blessings, which all relate to an attitude that goes **beyond** ourselves in the strength of what we have from the Lord to share.

So it is with mercy. And so it is with the blessing for the pure in heart. We know the heart corresponds to the will or love, but what is *purity* of heart? Where does love get its quality?

The answer of course is that it gets its quality from truth. To purify something is to wash or cleanse it, or in some cases to refine it so that it does not contain extraneous or contaminating elements. To have a pure heart, therefore, is to be sincere, to love without pretense or hypocrisy, and especially to love what is *true*, or to put it another way, to *let the truth guide us in love*.

In order to appreciate the blessing in this we have only to consider what it's like NOT having a pure heart, that is, being conflicted in our motives and intentions, not knowing which way to go or even how we really feel about things. We want to serve the Lord and the neighbour but we also want to please ourselves, and so we vacillate from one attitude or feeling to another and from one course of action to another. Now we're happy and content, an hour later we're upset or angry; one day the world looks rosy, the next day it's a mess. And we can get ourselves into some real messy situations making decisions from good motives one day, not so good another.

But for the person who has a pure heart, that is, a whole heart and singleness of purpose in following the Lord, life is free of stress like that and relatively simple. It's not easy; no one ever said it would be easy, but it's more straightforward. Such a person loves the truth because it is the truth, and so receives the truth more easily than others, and understands it. Therefore the Lord says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see *God*." To "see God" is to understand how He works; it is to "see" His truth.

Now notice that in blessing the merciful the Lord promised happiness to those in real charity or love for others. In blessing the pure in heart He promised understanding to those who love the truth and try sincerely to live according to it. In the third blessing of that series - the seventh blessing overall - He promises happiness to the peacemakers, and peacemakers are those who work to combine their love and wisdom together in the uses of life so that there can be spiritual rest.

The Writings have a great deal to say about peace, as does the Word of the Old and New Testaments. But the essential truth in all the teaching is that peace comes to those who do what the Lord teaches. "There is

no peace, says my God,' 'for the wicked'" (Isa. 57:21). Therefore to "make peace" is to make this effort: to combine the forces of love and wisdom as we receive them from the Lord to do what is right in our external lives.

For the one who really cares about others, who seeks to understand the truth that he may actually help others, the achievement of this goal is a blessing in itself. So the Lord said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." For they enjoy this work and take great delight in any contribution they can make toward establishing the order of heaven on earth. But beyond this they are also called "sons of God" because they are "born again" through life according to His truth, and they feel His closeness the way children feel the closeness of a loving father.

Let's review. So far, from the beginning, and this time in order, we have discussed the blessings for the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (or justice), the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers. The sequence is beautiful - and important! The first four in the series address our attitudes about ourselves, the next three in general our attitudes toward others.

Now we return to the final blessing we discussed last month, the 8th blessing, on those who are persecuted for righteousness' (or justice's) sake. As we noted, the kingdom of heaven is theirs because it rests in the good and truth they have and in the effort they make to live according to it. They are persecuted because evil hates good and fights against it everywhere, but they are saved from any spiritual harm from evil because the Lord is with them, in them, fighting for them to maintain the order of heaven. It is hard to believe at first that we could be blessed in a state of temptation (which is spiritual persecution), but the Writings tell us that the Lord is actually closer to us at such times than at any other times, defending us, protecting us, preserving our freedom.

So in the last two blessings the Lord takes up this all-important point and drives it home in a terrific climax. In a sense the series is already complete - in the abstract: Blessed are those who recognize and acknowledge their needs. Blessed are those who love and care for others. Blessed are those who love the truth and love sincerely to be guided by it. Blessed are those who work to apply that good and truth together in the uses of life. Blessed are those who are persecuted, for

they have something precious from the Lord to be attacked. But the Lord is with them, and He will protect them. So what does He say next?

"Blessed are YOU when they revile and persecute YOU, and say *all manner* of evil against YOU - *falsely* - for My sake." This is the ninth blessing. Think of it. The most bitter Psalms in the Old Testament are the ones where David complains about the lies and slanders of his enemies against him. We know how difficult it is to be accused and condemned for things we *have* done wrong; how much more difficult is it to face the lies and deceptions of those who wrongly accuse! And yet this is TYPICAL of the evil spirits who are with us every day. They insinuate their *own* evil thoughts and intentions into our minds and then turn right around and blame *us* for them! How wrong! How cruel! And how vital therefore it is for us to know that the Lord is still with us, fighting for us, helping us maintain our equilibrium.

Notice the phrasing in this blessing, by the way: "Blessed are you *when* they revile and persecute you...." That is the key. They may do it but they cannot do it unless the Lord is with you to provide the balance. Nor would they care otherwise, for it really is the Lord's own good and truth that they attack in you. So the blessing is real; without it we would simply dive headlong into hell. But because we have it, though it may be an unconscious thing, we can grow in our enjoyment of it day by day. We *are* blessed when the hells attack; the hells attack us when we're blessed.

And so we come to the tenth blessing. Some don't even see it as a blessing because the literal word isn't there. But remember, blessing is happiness. The Lord has now described all the qualities that provide for real happiness; He has also urged us to recognize these spiritual qualities in anyone who may suffer outwardly on account of them. Finally, He has addressed each one of us directly, anticipating His words in John as He predicted His own crucifixion: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; *not as the world gives do I give to you*. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (14:27). So you *are* blessed when they revile and persecute you..." Again, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (16:33).

Now the Lord concludes with a tremendous personal exhortation in the imperative voice: (YOU, don't just be happy,) "Rejoice and be

exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

What possible comparison is there between worldly and eternal blessings! How poor and simple and ultimately disappointing are the joys of selfishness compared to the delights of knowing the Lord and doing what He says! And this *is* heaven: knowing the Lord, seeing how He works, being confident in His providence, feeling His love and acknowledging His presence from day to day as we relate all the things that we experience in this world to His eternal plan. Of course we are not *in* heaven every day; we are a mixed bag of good and evil as long as we live on this earth. But we can have heaven in *us* any day that we choose, for it is not "out there" somewhere far away and difficult to get to, it is here, now, in the thoughts and feelings that one famous preacher once called the "be happy attitudes."

Persecution may come, indeed we know it *will* come, "for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Prophets represent prophetic truths, teachings we need to know in order to find our way to heaven. These truths WILL be challenged, as they always have been. But like Elisha, surrounded as he was with horses and chariots of fire (2 Kings 6), as long as we remain confident and true to His Word we are never left alone. The Lord's love and mercy are all around us; His wisdom and the understanding of His Word protect us. He will address the challenge.

So "Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad!" This is what it's all about: eternal values, unchanging principles, the delights of real love, real wisdom and real fulfilling usefulness to others. This is the experience of heaven, and the reward, the blessing of it is great indeed.

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 5:1-12, Psalm 18:1-17, Arcana Coelestia 8403