



PART ONE

by Desmond Ford

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is the second greatest sermon.

It does not tell us how to be saved but who are saved.

Christ's Recipe for Lasting Happiness

The greatest sermon ever preached was only seven sentences long. In fact, it was more acted out than spoken out.

It was the sermon of the omnipotent God who acted by apparently doing nothing: he was crucified on a cross.

By the twitch of an eyebrow or sensation of a thought Jesus could have left that cross and destroyed his crucifiers. Instead, he taught the patient love of God toward sinners. Rather than escaping the penalty of sin he endured it—that we might escape it. Jesus endured the cross that we might escape the cross.

Jesus suffered the second death, the agony of separation from God. His cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46) is the cry of the damned. Jesus endured hell qualitatively; an infinite being suffering infinite pain to atone for the sin of the world. Yet, though rejected by heaven and earth, and suspended between the two, he leans forward to invite all people to come to him. That is the greatest sermon ever preached.

The Second Greatest Sermon

We are going to look now at the second greatest sermon, the Sermon on the Mount.

This sermon does not tell us how to be saved. The sermon from the cross

does that: "Jesus, remember me" ... "I tell you the truth today, you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:42-43). That's how to be saved: look at the Crucified, and say, "Lord, remember me."

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, does not tell us how to be saved. It tells us who are saved.

Signs and Marks

What are the evidences, the sign and marks, that someone has found God? The Sermon on the Mount tells you whether you have eternal life or not. Not by whether your behavior matches the Sermon's ideals; no one's behavior does. But by whether the Sermon's ideals are the ideals of your heart. Are the ideals of the Sermon the ideals you hunger and thirst for?

The Sermon on the Mount is not a creed. It's an agenda. It is not telling us what articles of faith to cherish or what we are to believe. It is telling us what to be, and what to do.

This Sermon is Christ's expansion of his preliminary text, "Repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15 RSV).

John the Baptist and Paul

When John the Baptist came, he called all people to repentance, including the religious. Paul was like John. When Paul wrote Romans he said, "Look. See those irreligious

people? They're lost." That is chapter one of Romans. In chapter two he says, "See those religious people? They're lost." Then he said, "See the whole wide world? Every mouth is stopped and the whole world is subject to the judgment of God, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Therefore, by works of the law shall no flesh be declared righteous in his sight."

John the Baptist came to religious people and said, "Repent." Jesus' whole Sermon tells us what it means to repent.

Chinese Boxes

Remember Chinese boxes? One little box is inside a bigger box, which is inside a bigger box. You think you are looking at the smallest box, you open it and there's a smaller box inside.

Like Chinese boxes, the epitome of our Lord's teaching on Christian living is the Sermon on the Mount. The epitome of this great Sermon is the eight blessings of the Beatitudes. The epitome of the Beatitudes is the first one.

The Beatitudes

The Beatitudes are Christ's set of congratulations to the human race—the benediction of heaven.

Where we read "blessed," to the ancient people it read "happy." Happy

are the poor in spirit, Happy are they that mourn, Happy are the meek, Happy are those who hunger and thirst, Happy are the merciful, Happy are the pure in heart, Happy are the peacemakers, Happy are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. These are heaven's congratulations.

The words must have seemed strange and new to the first hearers. The Sermon was so different! There is nothing here to flatter pride, nothing to feed ambitious hopes.

Miniature World

A miniature world gathered about Jesus on the Mount. The Bible tells us there were crowds. "He saw the crowds." (Mt 5:1).

Jesus saw the crowds in an emphatic sense. He saw the people as sinners. He saw them as needy. He saw them as dying. He saw them as unhappy.

Jesus sees us. He sees all of us, and knows the desires of our hearts.

He sees the crowds, not as we see them, but as God alone can see them.

We were made for happiness, and Jesus knows that happiness does not spring from what we have but from what we are. This is the clue to the transformed life. People who are ever trying to add to their possessions will never find joy. Happiness grows out of what we are.

Jesus was saying, "Happy are the poor in spirit. Happy are the merciful. Happy are the pure. Happy are the peacemakers." He is saying we are not happy in what we have, but in what we are.

Ordination Sermon

This is an ordination sermon. In symbol, the whole wide world is gathered before the Lord. Yet the twelve disciples make up an inner circle. This Sermon is given at the time of their ordination.

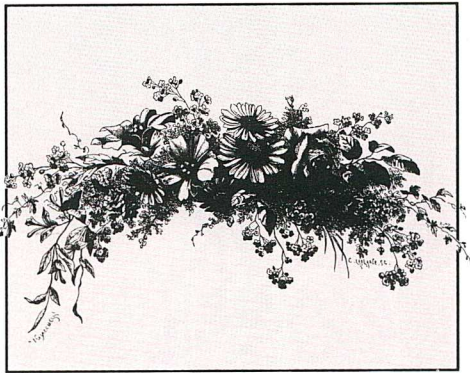
Therefore, this Sermon speaks to all of us who claim to be Christians. We are all sent out as missionaries to an unbelieving world.

The Greatest Utterance

Other than the words from the cross, the Sermon on the Mount is the greatest utterance in all human lan-

guage.

It has been the comforter and the quickener of all ages; it sweetens life by bringing Heaven down to earth. Think how much it has meant to the world to have the ideal, "Whatsoever



ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Mt 7:12 KJV). What that has meant to the world!

The picture of a God who sends rain on the just and the unjust, that causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good—what that has meant to the world! The practical admonition about not worrying about tomorrow, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Mt 6:34 KJV)—what that has meant to the world!

"Yard by yard, life is hard;
Inch by inch, life's a cinch."

We get that from the Sermon on the Mount. Only live a day at a time. "After this manner pray ye: ... Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt 6:9,11 KJV)—not tomorrow's bread, this day's.

This Sermon teaches how the Christian should live. The Christian is to be like God, love like God, forgive like God. The Christian is to be like Christ, trust like Christ. "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone" (Jn 8:29). "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (Jn 19:11). Jesus walked in the consciousness of the presence of his Father. This is how we are to live.

The Eighth Beatitude

The Beatitudes are eight, but really consist of the seven characteristics of the true Christian—with a special benediction given on all the seven. The first seven "blesseds" describe the characteristics whereas the eighth

"blessed" describes what will happen if you have the previous seven.

The Sermon is full of paradoxes. You would expect that when you have described the perfect person—someone pure, merciful, a peacemaker—that such a person would be crowned, elevated, esteemed. But Jesus says, when you are pure, merciful, and a peacemaker, Look out! You are going to be martyred. "Blessed are those who are persecuted" (Mt 5:10)—despised, hated, rejected, maligned.

So what is called the eighth Beatitude is actually only a description of the inevitable destiny of all mature Christians. If you expect the world to love you, it won't. The day will come when he that kills you thinks he is doing God's service. If they treated the Master of the house this way, won't they also treat the servants the same way?

No Worries, Mate

Our Lord did not deceive people when he said, "Come, follow me" (Lk 18:22). He did not say we will have a crown from the start, and no more worries. I was the only traveler on a bus in New Zealand once. I stopped and chatted with the bus driver, and to just about everything I asked him he said, "No worries, mate.... No worries, mate.... No worries, mate." What a lucky guy, I thought. "No worries, mate!"

In a sense, that was good gospel. If you are in Christ, there will be all sorts of things that threaten worry. But our Lord says, "If you live one day at a time—even though you take up a cross, even though you hate the world, even though you have tribulation—if you are in me, you will have peace."

Jesus does not disguise either half of the paradox. He does not tempt us by saying there will be no problems, "No worries, mate." He says you **will** take my cross; every day you **will** die. (We die to selfishness, and our own willfulness.) But he says our cross will become a crown. ❖

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