



Christ's Recipe for Lasting Happiness

PART TWO

by Desmond Ford

The Sermon on the Mount is the law of Christ. This law teaches the only acceptable standard for living. This law shows us our failings and leads us to Christ.

“N

ow when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside” (Mt 5:1).

Notice it says a mountain. Not a crypt, not a cabin, not under the sea, but up a mountain, Jesus went. Like Mount Sinai, like Mount Zion, like Mount Calvary. Mountains point to heaven; elevated mountains symbolize a teaching that is heavenly. Thus, Jesus goes up onto a mountain to preach.

“And sat down” (Mt 5:1).

When our Lord pleaded with people he stood, his arms outstretched as on a cross. Every part of his body preached.

Now he is sitting down as a king and describing the citizens of his kingdom.

He is also sitting down as a judge and separating people. “You are either like this, or like that,” he is saying. He sat down and opened his mouth.

In centuries gone by, he had opened the mouths of those who were prophets. He opened the mouths of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Moses, and Miriam. He opened the mouth of John the Baptist. Now Jesus, God in human flesh, opens his mouth and taught them saying, “Blessed.”

Beginning with Blessings

That’s a good word to start with. The last word of the Old Testament is “curse.” Christ’s series of blessings begins where the law leaves us. When we sing “Give Me the Bible” we sing about “law and love combining.” In this Sermon, Christ talks about law and prophets.

In the Old Testament, as in all good religion, you have “precept and promise.” Precept is law; promise is prophets. The main thing that ancient readers saw in the Old Testament was a standard of righteousness. That standard is so great that it could only bring a curse upon them because of their own inadequacy (if they trusted in their own righteousness). The last word of the Old Testament is “curse.” “Else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Mal 4:6).

A few verses before, it says, “Remember the law” (Mal 4:4). When our Lord begins with “Blessed,” he begins where the law just left us.

The Law Demands Love

The law skips us, the law condemns us, the law curses us, **if** we are trusting in it. The law demands that I

should love God with all there is of me and love my neighbor as myself. Who is my neighbor? The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) tells us everyone in need is my neighbor. The law requires a perfect love to God and humanity such as you and I have never evidenced.

We have only had a semi-perfection of love toward one person and one person only. Our mirrors tell us every day who that is. That is the only person we have loved unceasingly and without deviation, regardless of behavior.

Our love of other people depends on how they behave toward us. Not on how they behave, period; but on how they behave toward us. That is the natural heart of the carnal soul, the carnal person. We love according to whether they love us.

The law demands an unselfish love, a preoccupation with God. God is to be central in all our decisions; and next central is our neighbor. This is why the law ends with a curse, because “Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law” (Gal 3:10 NRSV, quoting Deut 27:26).

The Law Leads to Christ

“So the law was put in charge [our schoolmaster, KJV] to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). That’s a beautiful text. The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The schoolmaster cannot save us. Law never forgives, law never runs anything, law has no energy—law just describes me as I am to be.

The New Testament says, “Now, do you see it? No one can ever be made right in God’s sight by doing what the law commands. For the more we know of God’s laws, the clearer it becomes that we aren’t obeying them; his laws serve only to make us see that we are sinners.

“But now God has shown us a different way to heaven—not by ‘being good enough’ and trying to keep his laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the Scriptures told about it long ago). Now God says he will accept and acquit us—declare us ‘not guilty’—if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we can all be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like” (Rom 3:19-22 LB).

What a beautiful paraphrase of those important verses. So, the Beatitudes—the Sermon on the Mount—begin with the word, “blessed.” It says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” because that is our condition when we look at the law. Who can look at God’s law and say, “I have loved enough,” when that law demands infinite love? Who can look at the demands of love, and say, “Wow! I’m great!” when those demands are infinite? You can’t do it. You are poor in spirit when the law is finished with you. The law punches out any illusion that we might be self-sufficient.

How We Look Before the Law

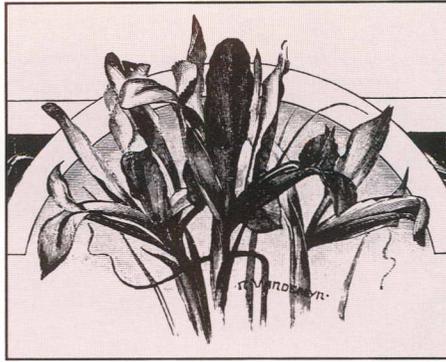
The first four Beatitudes show us as we are after we have looked at the law:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”—
Gone is self-sufficiency.

“Blessed are they that mourn”—
Gone is self-satisfaction.

“Blessed are the meek”—
Gone is self-will.

“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness”—



Gone is self-righteousness.

The first four Beatitudes describe the situation that occurs when you are converted. The Beatitudes are the Christian’s biography. When you are converted, this is your story. Every believer’s story.

To come to God, I must be stripped of my self-sufficiency. The blessed poor in spirit know they do not have in themselves what the righteous law demands. **I don’t have it.** All that is mine is—my own sin! I have nothing that is unstained or unspotted. My righteousness is as filthy rags. No thought is as good as it should be. I am a moral leper.

Mother Theresa said, “Make sure when anyone is in your presence that they will be better and stronger.” That is the law; a beautiful idea. But do we fulfill it? Of course not. Any honest person looking at the demands of God is stripped of self-sufficiency; then stripped of self-satisfaction. They mourn over their transgressions, then are stripped of their self-assertion. They become meek and then are stripped of their self-righteousness.

Sorrow Is to Lead us to Christ

Notice that in this Sermon our Lord manifests tremendous courage. He takes the abounding trouble of our world that causes us to despair, and calls it “blessed.” Jesus says that is how we are to read our trials.

There is an overshadowing pall in this world for all of us. We are frail, weak, mortal, selfish, sinful, guilty, and prone to all sorts of trouble. Buddha told a woman who had lost her child, “Take a bowl and go to every home in the village; and say to every house, ‘If you have not lost a father, mother, husband, wife, son or daughter, slave

or servant, put a peppercorn in my bowl.’” The woman went to every house in the village, and came back to Buddha. She did not have one peppercorn in her bowl, “You see,” said Buddha, “everybody loses; everybody has pain.”

Buddhism says, “Sorrow is the great evil of life; religion is meant to teach you how to bear sorrow.” Christ sweeps all that away. He says that is mistaken, that is a misreading of trial. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, they that mourn.” Jesus is saying that sorrows will strand you on the Rock of Ages. That is the purpose of sorrow.

Jesus has the courage to say that if we will treat our troubles rightly, they will result in blessing; for trouble punctures the illusion that I am sufficient. Every trouble is a mini-death, every sickness is a mini-death, every fear is a mini-death, every problem is like being brought up on a trial run before the judgment of God.

All human philosophy says sorrow is the great trouble of the earth. Jesus says sorrow is the great opportunity. Sorrow can empty your hands of dirt, so God can fill them with jewels. Sorrow can divorce you quickly from the carnal, worldly, temporal, and the evil.

We are very much like those tiny creatures attracted by the light. The world has many glowing lights: wealth, fame, possessions, power, sex. They can burn us, they can scorch us. If we use them other than how God says to use them—they can destroy us. God, in mercy, empties our hands of tinsel and garbage that he might put something better there.

The courage of Christ is that he says “Thank You” for the storms.

Curses Can Be Blessings

Is your life shadowed with a great darkness? God is there. “The night also is thine [God’s]” (Ps 74:16). “Moses approached the thick darkness where God was” (Ex 20:21).

Remember when the three Hebrews were thrown into the burning, fiery furnace? Daniel wrote that King Nebuchadnezzar said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods” (Dan 3:25). When these Hebrews were

thrown into the fire, the only things they lost were their bonds. They were thrown in bound, and the fires burned away the bonds, and ropes and chains. Soon they were up walking.

Christ has the temerity to say, "Blessed are you if you have problems." Christ teaches us to say "Thank God" for all the things we think are imponderable weights, insufferable dilemmas, and overwhelming troubles!

All the things we think are curses are blessings because security is mortals' greatest danger, our greatest enemy. It would not be good for us to be impervious to trouble and trial. To have no trouble or difficulty would make us think we are gods, rather than creatures. We would think we're something special rather than sinners in need of forgiveness who become special only when we accept the gospel.

Where the Blessings Begin

"Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3)

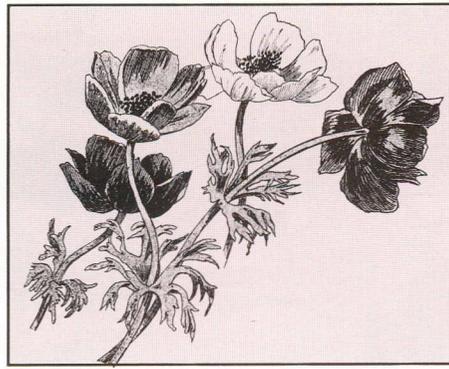
Observe the word, "spirit." This is the hallmark of the new dispensation.

True religion is the union of the heart with God. It is not being a member of a denomination, or simply being baptized. All these things may come into it, but they are not the essence of true religion. True religion is the spirit, the heart, the mind.

Jesus is saying in this verse, "Blessed are those who feel their need." Isn't it great that the blessings begin there? Here is the ladder of life from earth to heaven, and Jesus does not begin with "Blessed are the pure in heart." We would be shot down, dear friends, right there.

The pure in heart is not just talking about sexual purity. It means absolute sincerity. The pure in heart will one thing: the will of God. Absolute sincerity in giving God his place, that's what it means to be pure in heart. Pure gold does not have any ore in it, or mixture of dirt. So a pure heart is one that is not mixed up with worldliness, selfishness, self-will, impurity, or wrong ambition. A pure heart gives God his place, places absolute concentration on God.

Suppose the Beatitudes had begun, "Blessed are the pure in spirit." I'd have



shut the book, "No good to me," I'd have said. I'm glad the blessings do not start there. The blessings begin, "Blessed are the poor." I can say, "Lord, I can buy that."

As a boy, I loved the Labor Day procession in tropical North Queensland. All the barefoot ragamuffins would be down in the front row. Here were all the crowds, and we were on the front row. Why? Because there was always a car that went by first throwing out frankfurters to the crowd. All us boys were there grabbing them. Anything for free.

The Gospel Is Free

The gospel is for free. Thus we might know the things that are freely given us of God. It has to be that way if we are dealing with something infinite. How could any finite creature buy the gospel if it has to do with infinite living forever ... and ever ... and ever?

Think of the mighty Himalayas. Think of a bird that, once every million years, comes and takes away a grain of sand from those mountains. How long will it take that bird, coming once every million years to take just a grain, to get rid of the Himalayas? That's just the start of eternity!

If God is going to give us something as infinite as eternity, how could we finite creatures ever earn it? It has to be free. The good news of the gospel is that all the good things we want are free.

Two Gifts

We want forgiveness of sin. Many people are sick because they are guilty. They are sick because of things they have done. They need to learn about the cross. The done has been undone. Many can't sing, can't rejoice, because

they feel bad about what they have done, about how they have treated loved ones, or ones they should have loved. But the gospel takes away guilt. "People will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy" (Mt 12:31 NRSV). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9). "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (Jn 6:37). How wonderful!

Here are the infinite gifts: the gifts of forgiveness, the gifts of righteousness. This is the righteousness of God, not of humanity. I can't manage with the righteousness of man. My ideals are much, much higher than I ever reach. Paul's confession is mine every day, every conscious hour, "Wretched man that I am." There isn't a believer who does not experience falling short continually.

Whoever says as they should say? Whoever thinks as they should think? Whoever does as they should do? None of us. Browning said,

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,

Or what's a heaven for?

But the law condemns me. So God offers me the infinite righteousness of his Christ, a righteousness I cannot earn. It's all free, and it starts with blessed poverty, "Blessed are the poor." It's not the poverty of Uriah Heep, who went about in *David Copperfield*, saying, "I'm a very 'umble person." It's the honest awareness of the fact that, wrapped up in myself, I'm a very small package.

There are two texts I love. One says, "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:22-23). The other, "There is no difference ... the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him" (Rom 10:12).

The ABC of Salvation

Salvation is so simple. Just A-B-C. A is for, "All have sinned" (Rom 3:23). B is for, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). C is for, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). A-B-C. It's as simple as that. ❖