

# The Kingdom of Heaven Is Within Us

## First in a Series on the Ten Blessings

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*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*

(Matthew 5:3-6)

When we think of blessings we do not usually think of sadness, difficulty or want. We usually think of happiness, peace and plenty. Indeed the word *blessing* means happiness and suggests that we have everything we need.

Why, then, does the Lord seem to say the opposite in the Sermon on the Mount? Why does He say that the people who are poor in spirit are blessed—not “*will be* blessed” but *are* blessed? Why does He say that the kingdom of heaven is theirs—not “*will be* theirs,” but *is* theirs? How can we *be blessed* even while we are “poor in spirit?” We could ask the same questions about those who mourn, those who are meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. How can you be happy under these circumstances?

### The First Blessing

The answer rests in the fuller, deeper meaning of the Lord’s words. To be poor in spirit does not mean to be self-deprecating or to have no self-esteem. It is simply a state of self-awareness and self-acknowledgment—in effect, it is a state of knowing how little we know in relation to how much there is to know. This isn’t a sad state; it’s an exciting state, full of hope and promise, full of the anticipation of learning and growing, and, among other things, never being bored because we know that the Lord always has more marvelous things to show and teach us—forever!

*Spirit*, in this first blessing specifically refers to the understanding. It is the same as the word for wind or breath, which has to do with “inspiration” [breathing in]. On the spiritual level we are “inspired” when we get a new insight or idea, when we suddenly understand something that has perhaps eluded us in the past. We are then filled with anticipation and delight. But what if we already feel “rich in spirit?” What if we think we know all that we need to know in any given area? Will we be open to new ideas? Will we be receptive? This is the situation the Lord referred to when He said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24). There is nothing wrong with natural wealth; that was not the point. The Lord was stressing the importance of intellectual humility.

Those who have this quality—who are poor in spirit—are blessed, for “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Note the present tense. A kingdom is ruled by a king, who governs by means of laws. So in the spiritual sense a king represents the truths (or falsities) by which we live in society. And his kingdom is the whole realm of life and thought based on those principles. Therefore we possess the “kingdom of *heaven*” when we acknowledge our need and willingness to learn what the Lord teaches us in His Word—His laws. This is not a future promise; it is a fact.

## The Second Blessing

The second blessing the Lord mentioned is for those who mourn. Again, this seems like a contradiction. How can you be sad and happy at the same time? Because it seems impossible, many people have supposed that the Lord was simply talking about delayed gratification: mourn now, be happy later. Suffer now, get your blessing later. From this perspective it might seem like we're *supposed* to be miserable in this world, or that there's something wrong with us if we enjoy our earthly life. But this is not what is said. Rather, those who mourn *are* blessed, and, what's more, "they *will be* comforted."

Now, mourning is grieving, usually over some deep loss. It wells up from within and has more to do with feelings than with thoughts. It, too, is a state of real awareness and acknowledgment of what we want but often can't have. In fact, it is the acknowledgment of our self-will. And since we never have everything we want for ourselves it is obvious that when we get in touch with these feelings we are going to be sad.

Psychologists are right when they say we have to get in touch with our feelings. And they are right when they say we shouldn't suppress or deny these feelings. If we're bitter and resentful the first step in healing is to admit it—then we can face it and with the Lord's help do something about it. But if we have a conscience based on an understanding of the truth we will realize as part of this process not only that we can't ever have everything we want, but furthermore that this would not be right, or good for us. And so our grief, our mourning, can take on an additional quality of sadness that we want things we shouldn't have.

Where is the blessing in this? The blessing is that this acknowledgment heightens our awareness of the Lord's love and mercy. In fact, without it there can be no awareness of the Lord's love and mercy, thus, by definition, no blessing, all of which comes from Him. In the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church we read that "Those who give no thought to the evils in themselves, that is, who do not examine themselves and afterwards refrain from evils, cannot but be ignorant of what evil is and then love it from its delight. For he who does not know evil loves it, and he who neglects to think about it is continually in it" (*Divine Providence* 101:2). You cannot be blessed when you are unaware of the evil in your life.

On the other hand, when you are aware of it—and feel grief on account of it—not only can you begin to appreciate the Lord's mercy in continuing to love you and care for you in spite of these evils, you also put yourself in the position of being willing to receive His help. This is where the promise of comfort comes in. There is a teaching in John about the Holy Spirit, which the Lord calls "the Comforter" (John 14:16). In the New King James translation this is called "the Helper," and the word used is the same as a verb meaning "to help." That word is *paraclete*, or in its verb form *paracalleo*, meaning to call alongside. This is the word used in the blessings for "comfort" in the phrase, "they shall be comforted." Literally, they shall be helped. The Lord will walk by their side.

Briefly stated, then, the second of the ten blessings means that happy are those who acknowledge their evils, for they shall get help! And they'll get it because they want it. For there is no lack of help offered by the Lord at any time in our lives, but most of the time we resist it because we don't think we need it. Therefore, "Blessed are those who mourn."

### **The Third Blessing**

The third blessing that the Lord promised is for the meek. Now we often think of meekness in a derisive sense, as representing weakness or even cowardice—“He stood by meekly while his friend was attacked.” But this is not what the Lord meant in His teaching about blessing. The word that is here translated “meek” really means “gentle”, and it suggests a spiritual softness associated with patience and kindness, not at all with weakness or tolerance of evil. It is indeed weak to tolerate evil, but the truly meek, that is, those who are truly kind, will not tolerate evil, especially in their own lives. They labor constantly and courageously to act from charity in all that they do, shunning evils as sins against the Lord and doing what is right and good because it is right and good.

The teaching that the meek will inherit the earth is a direct quotation from the Old Testament (see Psalm 37:11), where the Hebrew version of the word *meek* means the same thing, with perhaps the added idea of humility and a willingness to suffer if necessary rather than inflict suffering on others. Of course, the Lord Himself gave the supreme example of this quality when He permitted His crucifixion—not because He couldn’t prevent it but because He knew that it was necessary for the process of His glorification to be completed. So we can follow in His steps, not so much by resisting the evils that are outside of us in others, but by resisting and indeed aggressively fighting against the evils that we find in ourselves—evils of jealousy, greed, hatred, lust and the love of domineering, to name a few examples.

The Lord plainly says that when we do this we *are* blessed. The blessing is in the doing. But as with those who mourn there is an additional promise, “for they *shall* inherit the earth.” Those of us who are familiar with the study of correspondences from the Heavenly Doctrine know that “the earth” does not mean the planet in a worldly sense, but *our* world, the world of our own experience, the world of our minds. And surely we can all see that when we exercise the disciplines of genuine charity we do take control of our spiritual lives, we do inherit the “promised land” of love and wisdom from the Lord.

Before we go on to the fourth blessing, let’s notice that the first three form a beautiful trilogy. The first relates to the understanding, as we recognize our need to learn and receive the spirit of truth. The second relates to the will, as we recognize the evils in our hearts and willingly receive the Lord’s help in overcoming them. The third now relates to the way we behave, in that we act from charity, not from weakness but with gentleness and kindness toward others as we fight against the evils in our own lives.

### **The Fourth Blessing**

The fourth blessing that the Lord promised was for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for, He said, “they shall be filled.” Hunger relates to food and thirst to drink. Again, they are both cravings and they relate to an awareness or acknowledgment of need.

Now the food that nourishes our spirits is the goodness of love; the drink is the knowledge of truth. And if we’re hungry and thirsty we are aware of our need for these essential things. But the blessing specifically stresses the hunger and thirst for *righteousness*, which, like meekness, has to do with the way we live. Now the word *righteousness* should probably be translated “justice.” “Righteousness” conveys a heavy sense of doing what is strictly right, strictly according to the

truth, but that isn't what the Lord meant in this blessing. Rather He was referring to those who long for the goodness of life, that is, a life in which decisions are made on the basis of what is good for people, not just on the basis of truth alone, which would be truth separated from good.

This teaching, therefore, follows in order after the one about meekness. For if meekness has to do with the quality of one's own life, the longing for justice has to do with life in general—not only that we should be treated well by others, but that others should be treated well, also. When you look at the evil and the falsity and the hurt in your community, you naturally long for justice. And when you feel a lack of integrity in your spiritual community the longing goes even deeper.

But those who hunger and thirst for justice are blessed. Like those who mourn, they are blessed in the recognition of what is good. They are fortunate to know about it, and they are happy to have the longing for it. True, the lack of it makes them sad, but the blessing isn't in the lack, it's in the longing. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled." Sooner or later, one way or another, their longing will be satisfied. For whether they are given the truth in this world or not, whether they are shown what is genuinely good in this world or not, if they long for it they will receive it as soon as it can be provided—which in many cases happens after death in the spiritual world. And that is not so sad, for the purpose of life in this world—which is so short—is to prepare for life in the next—which lasts forever.

### **Conclusion**

Bad things happen. And there are bad things within each of us. But when we see them and acknowledge them, we are taking the first steps toward genuine happiness and peace, indeed toward the spiritual wealth and prosperity that is the blessing of heaven. The beatitudes not only tell us what to do first (in acknowledging our needs), they assure us of the Lord's active presence in that work so that we can feel His love and wisdom as we do it. "The kingdom of God," Jesus said in Luke, "does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

The first four beatitudes are 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 attitudes that go beyond ourselves, in the strength of what we have to share from the Lord. In Part II of this series, we will review the next three beautiful blessings about the merciful, the pure in heart and the peacemakers. For now, let us reflect on the fact that all these blessings relate to internal, spiritual states, and that all of the ones we have reviewed today relate especially to states of acknowledgment or self-awareness.

Amen.

Lessons: Matthew 5:1-12; Psalm 30; *Divine Providence* 53