

Ten Blessings, Part 2 of 3
“Blessed are the Pure in Heart.”

A sermon by Rev. Michael Gladish
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“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

Today we continue the review of the ten blessings, or beatitudes, from the gospel of Matthew that we began last week. For those who missed the first part, it’s on our website and printed copies are available.

So far we have reviewed 4 of the blessings, all of which are couched in somewhat negative terms 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, humility and self-awareness. Now we are ready to review the three blessings that appear beautifully positive even in the literal sense, and next month we will conclude with the last three, which are both challenging and exciting.

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 the 18th Psalm, 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 whole first part of the sermon on the mount – His first recorded formal teaching – He states the known laws of order, and in the parts that follow later 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 feelings of pity for those who are in any sort of misery or need (AC 3063, 5042, 6180, etc.). In particular, we read, it is “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 faith-related temptations.

And 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, 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 when we have such feelings of sadness? Isn’t this just like the question we raised last week 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 and want to relieve or bless *him*. 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 spirit 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 useful, 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 being blessed.

Then again, remember that the Lord’s Providence is nothing but pure mercy towards *all of us*. It’s not His fault if we don’t 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 that can lead us to fulfillment. 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 corre-

sponds to the will or love, but what is *purity* of heart? Where does love get this quality?

The answer of course is that it gets its purity 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 how we 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 stresses like that, and simple in comparison. 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.

Note 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. Now in the third blessing of this 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 daily lives.

But it is one thing to make peace within our own lives, it is something else entirely to do so for others. In this connection most people think of a peacemaker as someone who will go to any lengths to stop an argument (or a war), backing down, compromising, conceding, giving in, appeasing, apologizing – whatever it takes. Not surprisingly, such tactics seldom work except for a very short time because unless a treaty is worked out *on principles* that both parties recognize as true and just, one will continue to feel aggrieved and bear a grudge, while the other will revel in an unjust victory and very soon want more.

Thus a true peacemaker is one who applies the principles of genuine charity according to the doctrine of genuine truth from the Word in any mediating process. If it's a formal or especially a legal matter, it goes without saying that our roles will be defined by the laws that apply, and that we should not step in where we do not belong. But even if we're trying to resolve a dispute be-

tween neighbors or friends we need to be careful to observe the principle of free will, not imposing at all unless someone's health or safety is at stake. And of course, assuming that our help is welcomed, we must still be mindful of how limited our knowledge and insight may be – both in regard to the issues in question and in regard to the truths of the Word. In that sense it will be critical for us to keep ALL the beatitudes in mind as we proceed, returning again and again to the first four lest we jump to conclusions and just make matters worse.

Specifically, we will remember our own poverty of spirit, we will mourn over our own evils and inadequacies, we will approach the dispute with a disposition to be meek, that is, gentle, and we will hunger and thirst NOT for quick resolution or for peace at any price but for justice.

None of this will be easy. Indeed, it may be very nervous-making and a lot of work! And work may seem to be the polar opposite of blessing, especially if it's unpleasant work, or work we wouldn't do if we had a choice. But when we care for others with integrity or purity of heart we cannot rest and we are not at peace unless we at least try to help, and helping ultimately is what makes us and the other parties we deal with feel better. Therefore the Lord said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." When we do this work we find great delight in any contribution we can make toward establishing the order of heaven on earth. And beyond this we are also called "sons of God," or perhaps "children of God" for the reason that we are then "born again," assuming the innocence of children through life according to His Word, and feeling His closeness the way children feel the closeness of a loving father.

In conclusion, we have now reviewed 7 of the ten blessings, or beatitudes. The first four are all about our states of acknowledgment and self-awareness, reminding us that honest introspection and genuine humility are the primary, indispensable qualities that we need to be blessed. Following in order, the three we have covered today take us outside of ourselves to our relationships with others, stressing the progression of will, thought and deed through acts of mercy, integrity and reconciliation based on the knowledge and understanding of the Word.

Notice that the present tense still prevails throughout (even though it is not specifically stated in the original Greek): – "Blessed are the merciful... Blessed are the pure in heart... Blessed are the peacemakers..." The blessing is not something we get later but something the Lord gives us in the moment, as we live according to His Word. It's not a promise, it's a fact.

We will conclude this series at the traditional service on June 13th with a consideration of what it means to be blessed when we are persecuted, and how in such states, contrary to the appearance, we can literally "rejoice and be exceedingly glad" about the greatest blessing of all.

Amen.

Lessons: Revelation 4
 Children's Talk about the Throne Room in Heaven & the Four Living Creatures

 Psalm 37:1-11 & Selections from the Heavenly Doctrines on Mercy

Readings for the Final Lesson

“...the essence of mercy is love. Love itself is converted into mercy and becomes mercy when anyone in need of help is regarded with love or charity. Consequently mercy is the expression of love towards those who are needy and wretched” (AC 3063).

“The reason why 'showing mercy' means the good of love is that all mercy is an expression of love, for one who has love or charity also has mercy; and his love and charity become mercy when his neighbour is poor or in misery and he comes to that neighbor's aid while he is in that condition. This is why 'mercy' means the good of love” (AC 6180).

“It is well known that weeping is an expression of grief and love; it is consequently an expression of mercy since mercy is love that is grieving. Divine love therefore is called mercy because left by itself the human race is in hell; and when a person recognizes within himself that this is the case he prays for mercy. Since in the internal sense 'weeping' also implies mercy, there are many occasions in the Word when Jehovah or the Lord is spoken of as weeping...” (AC 5480).

“The Divine mercy is pure mercy towards the whole human race, to save it; and it is also unceasing towards every man, and is never withdrawn from anyone; so that everyone is saved who can be saved. And yet no one can be saved except by Divine means, which means have been revealed by the Lord, in the Word. The Divine means are what are called Divine truths, which teach how man must live in order to be saved. By these truths the Lord leads man to heaven, and by them He implants in man the life of heaven. This the Lord does with all. But the life of heaven can be implanted in no one unless he abstains from evil, for evil obstructs. So far, therefore, as man abstains from evil, the Lord leads him out of pure mercy by His Divine means, and this from infancy to the end of his life in the world and afterwards to eternity. This is what is meant by the Divine mercy. Hence it is clear that the mercy of the Lord is pure mercy, but not immediate, that is, it does not look to saving all out of mere good pleasure, however they may have lived” (Heaven & Hell #522).