

THE BEATITUDES NO. 3155

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE PULPIT
IN THE YEAR 1873

*“And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:
and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,
Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
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 the children of God.
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.
Matthew 5:1-12*

[In the year 1873, Mr. Spurgeon delivered what he called “a series of sententious homilies” on the Beatitudes. After an introductory discourse upon the Sermon on the mount and the Beatitudes as a whole, he intended to preach upon each one separately, but either illness or some other special reason prevented him from fully carrying out this purpose. There are, however, four sermons upon the Beatitudes, three of which have already been published—See sermons #422, The Peacemaker; #2103, The Hunger and Thirst Which Are Blessed and #3065, The Third Beatitude—and this one. Mr. Spurgeon’s exposition of each of the Beatitudes and of the whole Sermon on the mount also appears in *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, the volume upon which he was at work at Mentone up to a little while before his “home-call” in 1892.]

ONE enjoys a sermon all the better for knowing something of *the preacher*. It is natural that, like John in Patmos, we should turn to see the voice which spoke with us. Turn here, then, and learn that the Christ of God is the Preacher of the Sermon on the mount. He who delivered the Beatitudes was not only the Prince of preachers, but He was beyond all others qualified to discourse upon *the subject* which He had chosen.

Jesus the Savior was best able to answer the question, “Who are the saved?” Being Himself the ever-blessed Son of God, and the channel of blessings, He was best able to inform us who are indeed the blessed of the Father. As Judge, it will be His office to divide the blessed from the accursed at the last and therefore it is most meet that in Gospel majesty He should declare the principle of that judgment, that all men may be forewarned.

Do not fall into the mistake of supposing that the opening verses of the Sermon on the mount set forth how we are to be saved or you may cause your soul to stumble. You will find the fullest light upon that matter in other parts of our Lord’s teaching, but here He discourses upon the question, “*Who* are the saved?” or “What are the marks and evidences of a work of grace in the soul?” Who should know the saved as well as the Savior does?

The shepherd best discerns his own sheep, and the Lord Himself alone knows infallibly them who are His. We may regard the marks of the blessed ones here given as being the sure witness of truth, for they are given by Him who cannot err, who cannot be deceived, and who, as their Redeemer, knows His own.

The Beatitudes derive much of their weight from the wisdom and glory of Him who pronounced them and therefore, at the outset your attention is called thereto. Lange says that “man is the mouth of

creation, and Jesus is the mouth of humanity.” But we prefer, in this place, to think of Jesus as the mouth of Deity and to receive His every word as gift with infinite power.

The occasion of this sermon is noteworthy. It was delivered when our Lord is described as “seeing the multitudes.” He waited until the congregation around Him had reached its largest size and was most impressed with His miracles—and then He took the tide at its flood, as every wise man should. The sight of a vast concourse of people ought always to move us to pity, for it represents a mass of ignorance, sorrow, sin, and necessity far too great for us to estimate.

The Savior looked upon the people with omniscient eyes which saw all their sad condition. He *saw* the multitudes in an emphatic sense and His soul was stirred within Him at the sight. His was not the transient tear of Xerxes when he thought on the death of his armed myriads, but it was practical sympathy with the hosts of mankind. No one cared for them—they were like sheep without a shepherd, or like shocks of wheat ready to shatter out for want of harvesters to gather them in. Jesus therefore hastened to the rescue.

He notices, no doubt, with pleasure, the eagerness of the crowd to hear—and this drew Him on to speak. A writer quoted in the “*Catena Aurea*” has well said, “Every man in his own trade or profession rejoices when he sees an opportunity of exercising it. The carpenter, if he sees a goodly tree, desires to have it felled, that he may employ his skill on it. And even so the preacher, when he sees a great congregation, his heart rejoices, and he is glad of the occasion to teach.”

If men become negligent of hearing and our audience dwindles down to a handful, it will be a great distress to us if we have to remember that when the many were anxious to hear, we were not diligent to preach to them. He who will not reap when the fields are white unto the harvest, will have only himself to blame if in other seasons he is unable to fill his arms with sheaves. Opportunities should be promptly used whenever the Lord puts them in our way. It is good fishing where there are plenty of fish and when the birds flock around the fowler it is time for him to spread his nets.

The place from which these blessings were delivered is next worthy of notice. “Seeing the multitudes, he went up *into a mountain*.” Whether or no the chosen mountain was that which is now known as the Horns of Hattim, is not a point which it falls in our way to contest—that He ascended an elevation is enough for our purpose. Of course this would be mainly because of the accommodation which the open hillside would afford to the people, and the readiness with which, upon some jutting crag, the preacher might sit down and be both heard and seen.

But we believe the chosen place of meeting had also its instruction. Exalted doctrine might well be symbolized by an ascent to the mount—at any rate, let every minister feel that he should ascend in spirit when he is about to descant upon the lofty themes of the Gospel. A doctrine which could not be hidden and which would produce a church comparable to a city set on a hill, fitly began to be proclaimed from a conspicuous place. A crypt or cavern would have been out of all character for a message which is to be published upon the housetops and preached to every creature under heaven.

Besides, mountains have always been associated with distinct eras in the history of the people of God. Mount Sinai is sacred to the law and mount Zion symbolical of the church. Calvary was also in due time to be connected with redemption and the mount of Olives with the ascension of our risen Lord. It was meet, therefore, that the opening of the Redeemer’s ministry should be connected with a mount such as “the hill of the Beatitudes.”

It was from a mountain that God proclaimed the law, it is on a mountain that Jesus expounds it. Thank God, it was not a mount around which bounds had to be placed—it was not the mount which burned with fire, from which Israel retired in fear. It was, doubtless, a mount all carpeted with grass and dainty with fair flowers—upon whose side the olive and fig flourished in abundance, save where the rocks pushed upward through the sod, and eagerly invited their Lord to honor them by making them His pulpit and throne.

May I not add that Jesus was in deep sympathy with nature and therefore delighted in an audience chamber whose floor was grass and whose roof was the blue sky? The open space was in keeping with

His large heart, the breezes were akin to His free spirit, and the world around was full of symbols and parables in accord with the truths He taught.

Better than long-drawn aisle, or tier on tier of crowded gallery, was that grand hillside meeting place. Would God we more often heard sermons amid soul-inspiring scenery! Surely preacher and hearer would be equally benefited by the change from the house made with hands to the God-made temple of nature.

There was instruction in *the posture* of the preacher. “*When he was set,*” He commenced to speak. We do not think that either weariness or the length of the discourse suggested His sitting down. He frequently stood when He preached at considerable length. We incline to the belief that, when He became a pleader with the sons of men, He stood with uplifted hands, eloquent from head to foot—entreating, beseeching, and exhorting with every member of His body, as well as every faculty of His mind.

But now that He was, as it were, a Judge awarding the blessings of the kingdom, or a King on His throne, separating His true subjects from aliens and foreigners, He sat down. As an authoritative Teacher, He officially occupied the chair of doctrine and spoke *ex cathedra*, as men say, as a Solomon acting as the master of assemblies, or a Daniel come to judgment.

He sat as a refiner and His word was as a fire. His posture is not accounted for by the fact that it was the Oriental custom for the teacher to sit and the pupil to stand, for our Lord was something more than a didactic teacher—He was a Preacher, a Prophet, a Pleader—and consequently, He adopted other attitudes when fulfilling those offices. But on this occasion He sat in His place as Rabbi of the church, the authoritative Legislator of the kingdom of heaven, the Monarch in the midst of His people. Come hither, then, and listen to the King in Jeshurun, the Divine Lawgiver, delivering not the ten commands, but the seven, or if you will, the nine Beatitudes of His blessed kingdom.

It is then added, to indicate *the style* of His delivery, that “*He opened his mouth.*” And certain cavilers of shallow wit have asked, “How could He teach without opening His mouth?” To which the reply is that He very frequently taught, and taught much, without saying a word, since His whole life was teaching, and His miracles and deeds of love were the lessons of a master instructor. It is not superfluous to say that “He opened his mouth, and taught them,” for He had taught them often when His mouth was closed.

Besides that, teachers are to be frequently met with who seldom open their mouths—they hiss the everlasting Gospel through their teeth, or mumble it within their mouths as if they had never been commanded to, “cry aloud, and spare not.” Jesus Christ spoke like a man in earnest. He enunciated clearly and spoke loudly. He lifted up His voice like a trumpet and published salvation far and wide—like a man who had something to say which He desired His audience to hear and feel.

Oh, that the very manner and voice of those who preach the Gospel were such as to bespeak their zeal for God and their love for souls! So should it be, but it is not so in all cases. When a man grows terribly in earnest while speaking, his mouth appears to be enlarged in sympathy with his heart—this characteristic has been observed in vehement political orators—and the messengers of God should blush if no such impeachment can be laid at their door.

“He opened his mouth, and taught them”—have we not here a further hint that, as He had from the earliest days opened the mouths of His holy prophets, so now He opens His own mouth to inaugurate a yet fuller revelation? If Moses spake, who made Moses’ mouth? If David sang, who opened David’s lips that he might show forth the praises of God?

Who opened the mouths of the prophets? Was it not the Lord by His Spirit? Is it not therefore well said that now He opened His own mouth and spake directly as the incarnate God to the children of men? Now, by His own inherent power and inspiration, He began to speak, not through the mouth of Isaiah, or of Jeremiah, but by His own mouth. Now was a spring of wisdom to be unsealed from which all generations should drink rejoicingly. Now would the most majestic and yet most simple of all discourses be heard by mankind.

The opening of the fount which flowed from the desert rock was not one half as full of joy to men. Let our prayer be, “Lord, as You have opened Your mouth, do Thou open our hearts,” for when the Redeemer’s mouth is open with blessings—and our hearts are open with desires—a glorious filling with all the fullness of God will be the result, and then also shall our mouths be opened to show forth our Redeemer’s praise.

Let us now consider the Beatitudes, themselves, trusting that, by the help of God’s Spirit, we may perceive their wealth of holy meaning. No words in the compass of Sacred Writ are more precious or more freighted with solemn meaning.

The first word of our Lord’s great standard sermon is “Blessed.” You have not failed to notice that the last word of the Old Testament is “*curse*,” and it is suggestive that the opening sermon of our Lord’s ministry commences with the word “Blessed.” Nor did He begin in that manner and then change His strain immediately, for nine times did that charming word fall from His lips in rapid succession.

It has been well said that Christ’s teaching might be summed up in two words, “Believe” and “Blessed.” Mark tells us that He preached, saying, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” And Matthew in this passage informs us that He came saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” All His teaching was meant to bless the sons of men, for “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.”

*“His hand no thunder bears,
No terror clothes His brow,
No bolts to drive our guilty souls
To fiercer flames below.”*

His lips, like a honeycomb, drop sweetness, promises and blessings are overflowings of His mouth. “Grace is poured *into* thy lips,” said the psalmist, and consequently grace poured *from* His lips. He was blessed forever and He continued to distribute blessings throughout the whole of His life, till, “as he blessed them, he was taken up into heaven.” The law had two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim—one for blessing and another for cursing—but the Lord Jesus blesses evermore—and curses not.

The Beatitudes before us, which relate to character, are seven. The eighth is a benediction upon the persons described in the seven Beatitudes when their excellence has provoked the hostility of the wicked, and therefore it may be regarded as a confirming and summing up of the seven blessings which precede it. Setting that aside, then, as a summary, we regard the Beatitudes as seven and will speak of them as such.

The whole seven describe a perfect character and make up a perfect benediction. Each blessing is separately precious, ay, more precious than much fine gold. But we do well to regard them as a whole, for as a whole they were spoken, and from that point of view they are a wonderfully perfect chain of seven priceless links put together with such consummate art as only our heavenly Bezaleel, the Lord Jesus, ever possessed. No such instruction in the art of blessedness can be found anywhere else.

The learned have collected two hundred and eighty-eight different opinions of the ancients with regard to happiness—and there is not one which hits the mark. But our Lord has, in a few telling sentences, told us all about it without using a solitary redundant word, or allowing the slightest omission. The seven golden sentences are perfect as a whole and each one occupies its appropriate place. Together they are a ladder of light—and each one is a step of purest sunshine.

Observe carefully and you will see that *each one rises above those which precede it*. The first Beatitude is by no means so elevated as the third, nor the third as the seventh. There is a great advance from the poor in spirit to the pure in heart and the peacemaker. I have said that they rise, but it would be quite as correct to say that *they descend*, for from the human point of view they do so—to mourn is a step below and yet above being poor in spirit. And the peacemaker, while the highest form of Christian, will find himself often called upon to take the lowest place for peace’s sake.

“The seven Beatitudes mark deepening *humiliation* and growing *exaltation*.” In proportion as men rise in the reception of the divine blessing, they sink in their own esteem—and count it their honor to do the humblest works.

Not only do the Beatitudes rise one above another, but *they spring out of each other*, as if each one depended upon all that went before. Each growth feeds a higher growth and the seventh is the product of all the other six. The two blessings which we shall have first to consider have this relation. “Blessed are they that mourn” grows out of “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Why do they mourn? They mourn because they are “poor in spirit.” “Blessed are the meek” is a benediction which no man reaches till he has felt his spiritual poverty, and mourned over it. “Blessed are the merciful” follows upon the blessing of the meek, because men do not acquire the forgiving, sympathetic, merciful spirit until they have been made meek by the experience of the first two benedictions.

This same rising and outgrowth may be seen in the whole seven. The stones are laid one upon the other in fair colors and polished after the similitude of a palace—they are the natural sequel and completion of each other—even as were the seven days of the world’s first week.

Mark, also, in this ladder of light, that though each step is above the other and each step springs out of the other, yet *each one is perfect in itself* and contains within itself a priceless and complete blessing. The very lowest of the blessed, namely, the poor in spirit, have their peculiar benediction and indeed it is one of such an order that it is used in the summing up of all the rest.

“Theirs is the kingdom of heaven” is both the first and the eighth benediction. The highest characters, namely, the peacemakers, who are called the children of God, are not said to be more than blessed—they doubtless enjoy more of the blessedness, but they do not in the covenant provision possess more.

Note, also, with delight, that *the blessing is in every case in the present tense*—a happiness to be now enjoyed and delighted in. It is not “Blessed *shall* be,” but “Blessed *are*.” There is not one step in the whole divine experience of the believer—not one link in the wonderful chain of grace—in which there is a withdrawal of the divine smile or an absence of real happiness. Blessed is the first moment of the Christian life on earth—and blessed is the last. Blessed is the spark which trembles in the flax and blessed is the flame which ascends to heaven in a holy ecstasy. Blessed is the bruised reed and blessed is that tree of the Lord, which is full of sap, the cedar of Lebanon, which the Lord has planted. Blessed is the babe in grace and blessed is the perfect man in Christ Jesus. As the Lord’s mercy endures forever, even so shall our blessedness.

We must not fail to notice that in the seven Beatitudes, *the blessing of each one is appropriate to the character*. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” is appropriately connected with enrichment in the possession of a kingdom more glorious than all the thrones of earth. It is also most appropriate that those who mourn should be comforted. That the meek, who renounce all self-aggrandizement, should enjoy most of life and so should inherit the earth. It is divinely fit that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness should be filled—and that those who show mercy to others should obtain it themselves. Who but the pure in heart should see the infinitely pure and holy God? And who but the peacemakers should be called the children of the God of peace?

Yet the careful eye perceives that *each benediction*, though appropriate, is worded *paradoxically*. Jeremy Taylor says, “They are so many paradoxes and impossibilities reduced to reason.” This is clearly seen in the first Beatitude, for the poor in spirit are said to possess a kingdom, and it is equally vivid in the collection as a whole, for it treats of happiness—and yet poverty leads the van, and persecution brings up the rear.

Poverty is the opposite of riches and yet how rich are those who possess a kingdom! And persecution is supposed to destroy enjoyment and yet it is here made a subject of rejoicing. See the sacred art of Him who spake as never man spake. He can at the same time make His words both simple and paradoxical—and thereby win our attention and instruct our intellects. Such a preacher deserves the most thoughtful of hearers.

The whole of the seven Beatitudes composing this celestial ascent to the house of the Lord conduct believers to an elevated table-land upon which they dwell alone and are not reckoned among the people. Their holy separation from the world brings upon them persecution for righteousness' sake, but in this they do not lose their happiness, but rather have it increased to them and confirmed by the double repetition of the benediction.

The hatred of man does not deprive the saint of the love of God—even revilers contribute to his blessedness. Who among us will be ashamed of the cross which must attend such a crown of lovingkindness and tender mercies? Whatever the curses of man may involve, they are so small a drawback to the consciousness of being blessed in a sevenfold manner by the Lord, that they are not worthy to be compared with the grace which is already revealed in us.

Here we pause for this present, and shall, by God's help, consider one of the Beatitudes in our next homily.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 5:1-30

Verses 1-2. *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,*

Our Savior soon gathered a congregation. The multitudes perceived in Him a love to them and a willingness to impart blessing to them, and therefore they gathered about Him. He chose the mountain and the open air for the delivery of this great discourse—and we should be glad to find such a place for our assemblies—but in this variable climate we cannot often do so.

“And when he was set.” The Preacher sat and the people stood. We might make a helpful change if we were sometimes to adopt a similar plan now. I am afraid that ease of posture may contribute to the creation of slumber of heart in the hearers. There, Christ sat, and “his disciples came unto him.” They formed the inner circle that was ever nearest to Him and to them He imparted His choicest secrets. But He also spoke to the multitude, and therefore it is said that, “he opened his mouth,” as well He might when there were such great truths to proceed from it and so vast a crowd to hear them. “He opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,”

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

This is a gracious beginning to our Savior's discourse, “Blessed are the poor.” None ever considered the poor as Jesus did, but here He is speaking of a poverty of spirit, a lowliness of heart, an absence of self-esteem. Where that kind of spirit is found, it is sweet poverty. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

4. *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

There is a blessing which often goes with mourning itself, but when the sorrow is of a spiritual sort—mourning for sin—then is it blest indeed.

*“Lord, let me weep for nought but sin,
And after none but Thee;
And then I would—oh, that I might—
A constant mourner be!”*

5. *Blessed are the meek:*

The quiet-spirited, the gentle, the self-sacrificing,

5. *For they shall inherit the earth.*

It looks as if they would be pushed out of the world, but they shall not be, “for they shall inherit the earth.” The wolves devour the sheep, yet there are more sheep in the world than there are wolves, and the sheep continue to multiply, and to feed in green pastures.

6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness:*

Pining to be holy, longing to serve God, anxious to spread every righteous principle—blessed are they.

6-7. *For they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful:*

Those who are kind, generous, sympathetic, ready to forgive those who have wronged them—blessed are they.

7-8. *For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart:*

It is a most blessed attainment to have such a longing for purity as to love everything that is chaste and holy, and to abhor everything that is questionable and unhallowed. Blessed are the pure in heart:

8. *For they shall see God.*

There is a wonderful connection between hearts and eyes. A man who has the stains of filth on his soul cannot see God. But they who are purified in heart are purified in vision, too, “they shall see God.”

9. *Blessed are the peacemakers:*

Those who always end a quarrel if they can. Those who lay themselves out to prevent discord,

9-10. *For they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

They share the kingdom of heaven with the poor in spirit. They are often evil spoken of, they have sometimes to suffer the spoiling of their goods—many of them have laid down their lives for Christ’s sake. But they are truly blessed, for “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

11. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

Mind, it must be said falsely, and it must be for Christ’s sake, if you are to be blessed. But there is no blessing in having evil spoken of you truthfully, or in having it spoken of you falsely because of some bitterness in your own spirit.

12. *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

You are in the true prophetic succession, if you cheerfully bear reproach of this kind for Christ’s sake—you prove that you have the stamp and seal of those who are in the service of God.

13. *Ye are the salt of the earth:*

Followers of Christ, “ye are the salt of the earth.” You help to preserve it and to subdue the corruption that is in it.

13. *But if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?*

A professing Christian with no grace in him—a religious man whose very religion is dead—what is the good of him? And he is in a hopeless condition. You can salt meat, but you cannot salt salt.

13. *It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

There are people who believe that you can be children of God today and children of the devil tomorrow—then again children of God the next day and children of the devil again the day after. But believe me, it is not so. If the work of grace be really wrought of God in your soul, it will last through your whole life. And if it does not so last, that proves that it is not the work of God.

God does not put His hand to this work a second time. There is no regeneration twice over—you can be born again—but you cannot be born again, and again, and again as some teach. There is no note in Scripture of that kind. Hence I do rejoice that regeneration, once truly wrought of the Spirit of God, is an incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever. But beware, professor, lest you should be like salt that has lost its savor and that therefore is good for nothing.

14. *Ye are the light of the world.* [See sermon #1109, The Light of The World]

Christ never contemplated the production of secret Christians—Christians whose virtues would never be displayed—pilgrims who would travel to heaven by night and never be seen by their fellow pilgrims or anyone else.

14-15. *A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle [See sermon #1594, The Candle] and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light unto all that are in the house.*

Christians ought to be seen and they ought to let their light be seen. They should never even attempt to conceal it. If you are a lamp, you have no right to be under a bushel, or under a bed—your place is on the lamp stand where your light can be seen.

16. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Not that they may glorify you, but that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven.

17-18. *Think not that I have come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.* [There is a very remarkable sermon by Mr. Spurgeon, on verse 18, which he had re-issued in book form for widespread circulation, “The Perpetuity of the Law of God,” sermon #1660]

No cross of a “t” and no dot of an “i” shall be taken from God’s law. Its requirements will always be the same—immutably fixed and never to be abated by so little as “one jot or one tittle.”

19-20. *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees,*

Who seemed to have reached the very highest degree of it—indeed, they thought they went rather over the mark than under it—but Christ says to His disciples, “Unless your righteousness goes beyond that,”

20. *Ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

These are solemn words of warning. God grant that we may have a righteousness which exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, a righteousness inwrought by the Spirit of God, a righteousness of the heart and of the life!

(As the foregoing exposition only goes as far as verse twenty, the remainder is taken from *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, C. H. Spurgeon’s “Popular Exposition of the Gospel according to Matthew.”)

21. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:*

Antiquity is often pleaded as an authority, but our King makes short work of “them of old time.” He begins with one of their alterations of His Father’s law. They added to the saved oracles. The first part of the saying which our Lord quoted was divine, but it was dragged down to a low level by the addition about the human court and the murderer’s liability to appear there. It thus became rather a proverb among men than an Inspired utterance from the mouth of God.

Its meaning, as God spake it, had a far wider range than when the offense was restrained to actual killing, such as could be brought before a human judgment seat. To narrow a command is measurably to annul it. We may not do this even with antiquity for our warrant. Better the whole truth newly stated than an old falsehood in ancient language.

22. *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

Murder lies within anger, for we wish harm to the object of our wrath, or even wish that he did not exist—and this is to kill him in desire. Anger “without a cause” is forbidden by the commandment which says, “Thou shalt not kill,” for unjust anger is killing in intent. Such anger without cause brings us under higher judgment than that of Jewish police courts.

God takes cognizance of the emotions from which acts of hate may spring and calls us to account as much for the angry feeling as for the murderous deed. Words also come under the same condemnation—a man shall be judged for what he “shall say to his brother.” To call a man, *Raca*, or a worthless fellow, is to kill him in his reputation. And to say to him, “*Thou fool*,” is to kill him as to the noblest characteristics of a man.

Hence all this comes under such censure as men distribute in their councils. Yea, under what is far worse—the punishment awarded by the highest court of the universe, which dooms men to “hell fire.” Thus our Lord and King restores the law of God to its true force and warns us that it denounces not only the overt act of killing, but every thought, feeling, and word which would tend to injure a brother or annihilate him by contempt.

23-24. *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

The Pharisee would urge as a cover for his malice that he brought a sacrifice to make atonement, but our Lord will have forgiveness rendered to our brother first, and then the offering presented. We ought to worship God thoughtfully, and if in the course of that thought we *remember that our brother hath ought against us*, we must stop.

If we have wronged another, we are to pause, cease from the worship, and hasten to seek reconciliation. We easily remember if we have anything against our brother, but now the memory is to be turned the other way. Only when we have remembered our wrong doing, and made reconciliation, can we hope for acceptance with the Lord.

The rule is—first peace with man and then acceptance with God. The holy must be traversed to reach the Holiest of all. Peace being made with our brother, then let us conclude our service towards our Father—and we shall do so with lighter heart and truer zeal.

I would anxiously desire to be at peace with all men before I attempt to worship God, lest I present to God the sacrifice of fools.

25-26. *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

In all disagreements be eager for peace. Leave off strife before you begin.

In law-suits, seek speedy and peaceful settlements. Often in our Lord’s days, this was the most gainful way and usually it is so now. Better lose your rights than get into the hands of those who will only fleece you in the name of justice and hold you fast so long as a semblance of a demand can stand against you, or another penny can be extracted from you.

In a country where “justice” meant robbery, it was wisdom to be robbed and to make no complaint. Even in our own country, a lean settlement is better than a fat law-suit. Many go into the court to get wool, but come out closely shorn. Carry on no angry suits in courts, but make peace with the utmost promptitude.

27-28 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

In this case our King again sets aside the glosses of men upon the commands of God and makes the law to be seen in its vast spiritual breadth. Whereas tradition had confined the prohibition to an overt act of unchastity, the King shows that it forbade the unclean desires of the heart. Here the divine law is shown to refer not only to the act of criminal conversation, but even to the desire, imagination, or passion which would suggest such an infamy.

What a King is ours, who stretches His sceptre over the realm of our inward lusts! How sovereignly He puts it, “*But I say unto you*”! Who but a divine being has authority to speak in this fashion? His word is law. So it ought to be, seeing He touches vice at the fountainhead and forbids uncleanness in the heart. If sin were not allowed in the mind, it would never be made manifest in the body.

This, therefore, is a very effectual way of dealing with the evil. But how searching, how condemning! Irregular looks, unchaste desires, and strong passions are of the very essence of adultery—and who can claim a life-long freedom from them? Yet these are the things which defile a man. Lord, purge them out of my nature and make me pure within!

29. *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

That which is the cause of sin is to be given up as well as the sin itself. It is not sinful to have an eye, or to cultivate keen perception—but if the eye of speculative knowledge leads us to offend by intellectual sin, it becomes the cause of evil and must be mortified. Anything, however harmless, which leads me to do, or think, or feel wrongly, I am to get rid of as much as if it were in itself an evil. Though to have done with it would involve deprivation, yet must it be dispensed with, since even a serious loss in one direction is far better than the losing of the whole man. Better a blind saint than a quick-sighted sinner.

If abstaining from alcohol caused weakness of body, it would be better to be weak than to be strong and fall into drunkenness. Since vain speculations and reasoning land men in unbelief, we will have none of them. To “*be cast into hell*” is too great a risk to run, merely to indulge the evil eye of lust or curiosity.

30. *And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

The cause of offense may be rather active as the hand than intellectual as the eye, but we had better be hindered in our work than drawn aside into temptation. The most dexterous hand must not be spared if it encourages us in doing evil. It is not because a certain thing may make us clever and successful that we are to allow it—if it should prove to be the frequent cause of our falling into sin—we must have done with it and place ourselves at a disadvantage for our life-work rather than ruin our whole being by sin.

Holiness is to be our first object—everything else must take a very secondary place. Right eyes and right hands are no longer right if they lead us wrong. Even hands and eyes must go that we may not offend our God by them. Yet, let no man read this literally and therefore mutilate his body, as some foolish fanatics have done. The real meaning is clear enough.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.