

William Barclay Commentary
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

As we have already seen, Matthew has a careful pattern in his gospel.

In his story of the baptism of Jesus he shows us Jesus realizing that the hour has struck, that the call to action has come, and that Jesus must go forth on his crusade. In his story of the Temptations he shows us Jesus deliberately choosing the method he will use to carry out his task, and deliberately rejecting methods which he knew to be against the will of God. If a man sets his hand to a great task, he needs his helpers, his assistants, his staff. So Matthew goes on to show us Jesus selecting the men who will be his fellow-workers.

But if helpers and assistants are to do their work intelligently and effectively, they must first have instruction. And now, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew shows us Jesus instructing his disciples in the message which was his and which they were to take to men. In Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount this becomes even clearer. In Luke the Sermon on the Mount follows immediately after what we might call the official choosing of the Twelve (Lk.6:13 ff).

For that reason one great scholar called the Sermon on the Mount "The Ordination Address to the Twelve." Just as a young minister has his task set out before him, when he is called to his first charge, so the Twelve received from Jesus their ordination address before they went out to their task. It is for that reason that other scholars have given other titles to the Sermon on the Mount. It has been called "The Compendium of Christ's Doctrine," "The Magna Charta of the Kingdom," "The Manifesto of the King." All are agreed that in the Sermon on the Mount we have the essence of the teaching of Jesus to the inner circle of his chosen men.

THE SUMMARY OF THE FAITH

In actual fact this is even truer than at first sight appears. We speak of the Sermon on the Mount as if it was one single sermon preached on one single occasion. But it is far more than that. There are good and compelling reasons for thinking that the Sermon on the Mount is far more than one sermon, that it is, in fact, a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached.

(i) Anyone who heard it in its present form would be exhausted long before the end. There is far too much in it for one hearing. It is one thing to sit and read it, and to pause and linger as we read; it would be entirely another thing to listen to it for the first time in spoken words. We can read at our own pace and with a certain familiarity with the words; but to hear it in its present form for the first time would be to be dazzled with excess of light long before it was finished.

(ii) There are certain sections of the Sermon on the Mount which emerge, as it were, without warning; they have no connection with what goes before and no connection with what comes after. For instance, Matt. 5:31-32 and Matt. 7:7-11 are quite detached from their context. There is a certain disconnection in the Sermon on the Mount.

(iii) The most important point is this. Both Matthew and Luke give us a version of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew's version there are 107 verses. Of these 107 verses 29 are found all

together in Lk.6:20-49; 47 have no parallel in Luke's version; and 34 are found scattered all over Luke's gospel in different contexts.

For instance, the simile of the salt is in Matt. 5:13 and in Lk.14:34-35; the simile of the lamp is in Matt. 5:15 and in Lk.8:16; the saying that not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away is in Matt. 5:18 and in Lk.16:17. That is to say, passages which are consecutive in Matthew's gospel appear in widely separated chapters in Luke's gospel.

To take another example, the saying about the mote in our brother's eye and the beam in our own is in Matt. 7:1-5 and in Lk.6:37-42; the passage in which Jesus bids men to ask and seek and find is in Matt. 7:7-12 and in Lk.11:9-13.

If we tabulate these things, the matter will become clear:

Matt. 5:13 = Lk.14:34-35 Matt. 5:15 = Lk.8:16 Matt. 5:18 = Lk.16:17 Matt. 7:1-5 = Lk.6:37-42
Matt. 7:7-12 = Lk.11:9-13

Now, as we have seen, Matthew is essentially the teaching gospel; it is Matthew's characteristic that he collects the teaching of Jesus under certain great headings; and it is surely far more likely that Matthew collected Jesus' teaching into one whole pattern, than that Luke took the pattern and broke it up and scattered the pieces all over his gospel. The Sermon on the Mount is not one single sermon which Jesus preached on one definite situation; it is the summary of his consistent teaching to his disciples. It has been suggested that, after Jesus definitely chose the Twelve, he may have taken them away into a quiet place for a week or even a longer period of time, and that, during that space, he taught them all the time, and the Sermon on the Mount is the distillation of that teaching.

MATTHEW'S INTRODUCTION

In point of fact Matthew's introductory sentence goes a long way to make that clear.

"Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them."

In that brief verse there are three clues to the real significance of the Sermon on the Mount.

(i) Jesus began to teach when he had sat down. When a Jewish Rabbi was teaching officially he sat to teach. We still speak of a professor's chair; the Pope still speaks *ex cathedra*, from his seat. Often a Rabbi gave instruction when he was standing or strolling about; that his really official teaching was done when he had taken his seat. So, then, the very intimation that Jesus sat down to teach his disciples is the indication that this teaching is central and official.

(ii) Matthew goes on to say that when he had opened his mouth, he taught them. This phrase he opened his mouth is not simply a decoratively roundabout way of saying he said. In Greek the phrase has a double significance. (a) In Greek it is used of a solemn, grave and dignified utterance. It is used, for instance, of the saying of an oracle. It is the natural preface for a most weighty saying. (b) It is used of a person's utterance when he is really opening his heart and fully pouring out his mind. It is used of intimate teaching with no barriers between. Again the very use

of this phrase indicates that the material in the Sermon on the Mount is no chance piece of teaching. It is the grave and solemn utterance of the central things; it is the opening of Jesus' heart and mind to the men who were to be his right-hand men in his task.

(iii) The King James Version has it that when Jesus had sat down, he opened his mouth and taught them saying. In Greek there are two past tenses of the verb. There is the aorist tense, and the aorist tense expresses one particular action, done and completed in past time. In the sentence, "He shut the gate," shut would be an aorist in Greek because it describes one completed action in past time. There is the imperfect tense, and the imperfect tense describes repeated, continuous, or habitual action in past time. In the sentence, "It was his custom to go to Church every Sunday," in Greek it was his custom to go would be expressed by a single verb in the imperfect tense, because it describes continuous and often-repeated action in the past.

Now the point is that in the Greek of this sentence, which we are studying, the verb taught is not an aorist, but an imperfect and therefore it describes repeated and habitual action, and the translation should be: "This is what he used to teach them." Matthew has said as plainly as Greek will say it that the Sermon on the Mount is not one sermon of Jesus, given at one particular time and on one particular occasion; it is the essence of all that Jesus continuously and habitually taught his disciples.

The Sermon on the Mount is greater even than we think. Matthew in his introduction wishes us to see that it is the official teaching of Jesus; that it is the opening of Jesus' whole mind to his disciples; that it is the summary of the teaching which Jesus habitually gave to his inner circle. The Sermon on the Mount is nothing less than the concentrated memory of many hours of heart to heart communion between the disciples and their Master.

As we study the Sermon on the Mount, we are going to set at the head of each of the beatitudes the translation of the Revised Standard Version; and then at the end of our study of each beatitude we shall see what the words mean in modern English.

THE SUPREME BLESSEDNESS

Matt. 5:3, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Before we study each of the beatitudes in detail there are two general facts which we must note.

(i) It can be seen that every one of the beatitudes has precisely the same form. As they are commonly printed in our Bibles, each one of them in the King James Version has the word *are* printed in italic, or sloping, type. When a word appears in italics in the King James Version it means that in the Greek, or in the Hebrew, there is no equivalent word, and that that word has had to be added to bring out the meaning of the sentence.

This is to say that in the beatitudes there is no verb, there is no *are*. Why should that be? Jesus did not speak the beatitudes in Greek; he spoke them in Aramaic, which was the kind of Hebrew people spoke in his day. Aramaic and Hebrew have a very common kind of expression, which is

in fact an exclamation and which means, "O the blessedness of . . ." That expression ('ashere (HSN0835) in the Hebrew) is very

common in the Old Testament. For instance, the first Psalm begins in the Hebrew: "O the blessedness of the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly" (Ps.1:1), that is the form in which Jesus first spoke the beatitudes. The beatitudes are not simple statements; they are exclamations: "O the blessedness of the poor in spirit!"

That is most important, for it means that the beatitudes are not pious hopes of what shall be; they are not glowing, but nebulous prophecies of some future bliss; they are congratulations on what is. The blessedness which belongs to the Christian is not a blessedness which is postponed to some future world of glory; it is a blessedness which exists here and now. It is not something into which the Christian will enter; it is something into which he has entered.

True, it will find its fulness and its consummation in the presence of God; but for all that it is a present reality to be enjoyed here and now. The beatitudes in effect say, "O the bliss of being a Christian! O the joy of following Christ! O the sheer happiness of knowing Jesus Christ as Master, Saviour and Lord!" The very form of the beatitudes is the statement of the joyous thrill and the radiant gladness of the Christian life. In face of the beatitudes a gloom-encompassed Christianity is unthinkable.

(ii) The word blessed which is used in each of the beatitudes is a very special word. It is the Greek word makarios (GSN3107). Makarios is the word which specially describes the gods. In Christianity there is a godlike joy.

The meaning of makarios (GSN3107) can best be seen from one particular usage of it. The Greeks always called Cyprus he (GSN3588) makaria (GSN3107) (the feminine form of the adjective), which means The Happy Isle, and they did so because they believed that Cyprus was so lovely, so rich, and so fertile an island that a man would never need to go beyond its coastline to find the perfectly happy life. It had such a climate, such flowers and fruits and trees, such minerals, such natural resources that it contained within itself all the materials for perfect happiness.

Makarios (GSN3107) then describes that joy which has its secret within itself, that joy which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained, that joy which is completely independent of all the chances and the changes of life. The English word happiness gives its own case away. It contains the root hap which means chance. Human happiness is something which is dependent on the chances and the changes of life, something which life may give and which life may also destroy. The Christian blessedness is completely untouchable and unassailable. "No one," said Jesus, "will take your joy from you" (Jn.16:22). The beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain, that joy which sorrow and loss, and pain and grief, are powerless to touch, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away.

The world can win its joys, and the world can equally well lose its joys. A change in fortune, a collapse in health, the failure of a plan, the disappointment of an ambition, even a change in the weather, can take away the fickle joy the world can give. But the Christian has the serene and

untouchable joy which comes from walking for ever in the company and in the presence of Jesus Christ.

The greatness of the beatitudes is that they are not wistful glimpses of some future beauty; they are not even golden promises of some distant glory; they are triumphant shouts of bliss for a permanent joy that nothing in the world can ever take away.

THE BLISS OF THE DESTITUTE Matt. 5:3 (continued)

It seems a surprising way to begin talking about happiness by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." There are two ways in which we can come at the meaning of this word poor.

As we have them the beatitudes are in Greek, and the word that is used for poor is the word *ptochos* (GSN4434). In Greek there are two words for poor. There is the word *penes* (GSN3993). *Penes* describes a man who has to work for his living; it is defined by the Greeks as describing the man who is *autodiakonos*, that is, the man who serves his own needs with his own hands. *Penes* (GSN3993) describes the working man, the man who has nothing superfluous, the man who is not rich, but who is not destitute either. But, as we have seen, it is not *penes* (GSN3993) that is used in this beatitude, it is *ptochos* (GSN4434), which describes absolute and abject poverty. It is connected with the root *ptossein* (GSN4434), which means to crouch or to cower; and it describes the poverty which is beaten to its knees. As it has been said, *penes* (GSN3993) describes the man who has nothing superfluous; *ptochos* (GSN4434) describes the man who has nothing at all. So this beatitude becomes even more surprising. Blessed is the man who is abjectly and completely poverty-stricken. Blessed is the man who is absolutely destitute.

As we have also seen the beatitudes were not originally spoken in Greek, but in Aramaic. Now the Jews had a special way of using the word Poor. In Hebrew the word is *'aniy* (HSN6041) or *'ebyown* (HSN0034). These words in Hebrew underwent a four-stage development of meaning. (i) They began by meaning simply poor. (ii) They went on to mean, because poor, therefore having no influence or power, or help, or prestige. (iii) They went on to mean, because having no influence, therefore down-trodden and oppressed by men. (iv) Finally, they came to describe the man who, because he has no earthly resources whatever, puts his whole trust in God.

So in Hebrew the word poor was used to describe the humble and the helpless man who put his whole trust in God. It is thus that the Psalmist uses the word, when he writes, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps.34:6). It is in fact true that in the Psalms the poor man, in this sense of the term, is the good man who is dear to God. "The hope of the poor shall not perish for ever" (Ps.9:18). God delivers the poor (Ps.35:10). "In thy goodness, O God, thou didst provide for the needy" (Ps.68:10). "He shall defend the cause of the poor of the people" (Ps.72:4). "He raises up the needy out of affliction, and makes their families like flocks" (Ps.107:41). "I will satisfy her poor with bread" (Ps.132:15). In all these cases the poor man is the humble, helpless man who has put his trust in God.

Let us now take the two sides, the Greek and the Aramaic, and put them together. *Ptochos* (GSN4434) describes the man who is absolutely destitute, the man who has nothing at all; *'aniy*

(HSN6041) and 'ebyown (HSN0034) describe the poor, and humble, and helpless man who has put his whole trust in God. Therefore, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" means:

Blessed is the man who has realised his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God.

If a man has realized his own utter helplessness, and has put his whole trust in God, there will enter into his life two things which are opposite sides of the same thing. He will become completely detached from things, for he will know that things have not got it in them to bring happiness or security; and he will become completely attached to God, for he will know that God alone can bring him help, and hope, and strength. The man who is poor in spirit is the man who has realized that things mean nothing, and that God means everything.

We must be careful not to think that this beatitude calls actual material poverty a good thing. Poverty is not a good thing. Jesus would never have called blessed a state where people live in slums and have not enough to eat, and where health rots because conditions are all against it. That kind of poverty it is the aim of the Christian gospel to remove. The poverty which is blessed is the poverty of spirit, when a man realises his own utter lack of resources to meet life, and finds his help and strength in God.

Jesus says that to such a poverty belongs the Kingdom of Heaven. Why should that be so? If we take the two petitions of the Lord's Prayer and set them together:

Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,

we get the definition: the Kingdom of God is a society where God's will is as perfectly done in earth as it is in heaven. That means that only he who does God's will is a citizen of the Kingdom; and we can only do God's will when we realize our own utter helplessness, our own utter ignorance, our own utter inability to cope with life, and when we put our whole trust in God. Obedience is always founded on trust. The Kingdom of God is the possession of the poor in spirit, because the poor in spirit have realized their own utter helplessness without God, and have learned to trust and obey.

So then, the first beatitude means:

O the bliss of the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God, for thus alone he can render to God that perfect obedience which will make him a citizen of the kingdom of heaven!

THE BLISS OF THE BROKEN HEART

Matt. 5:4, Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

It is first of all to be noted about this beatitude that the Greek word for to mourn, used here, is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved. In the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, it is the word which is used of Jacob's grief when he believed that Joseph, his son, was dead (Gen.37:34). It is defined as the kind of grief which takes such a hold on a man

that it cannot be hid. It is not only the sorrow which brings an ache to the heart; it is the sorrow which brings the unrestrainable tears to the eyes. Here then indeed is an amazing kind of bliss: Blessed is the man who mourns like one mourning for the dead. There are three ways in which this beatitude can be taken.

(i) It can be taken quite literally: Blessed is the man who has endured the bitterest sorrow that life can bring. The Arabs have a proverb: "All sunshine makes a desert." The land on which the sun always shines will soon become an arid place in which no fruit will grow. There are certain things which only the rains will produce; and certain experiences which only sorrow can beget.

Sorrow can do two things for us. It can show us, as nothing else can, the essential kindness of our fellow- men; and it can show us as nothing else can the comfort and the compassion of God. Many and many a man in the hour of his sorrow has discovered his fellow-men and his God as he never did before. When things go well it is possible to live for years on the surface of things; but when sorrow comes a man is driven to the deep things of life, and, if he accepts it aright, a new strength and beauty enter into his soul.

"I walked a mile with Pleasure, She chattered all the way, But left me none the wiser For all she had to say. I walked a mile with Sorrow, And ne'er a word said she, But, oh, the things I learned from her When Sorrow walked with me!"

(ii) Some people have taken this beatitude to mean:

Blessed are those who are desperately sorry for the sorrow and the suffering of this world.

When we were thinking of the first beatitude we saw that it is always right to be detached from things, but it is never right to be detached from people. This world would have been a very much poorer place, if there had not been those who cared intensely about the sorrows and the sufferings of others.

Lord Shaftesbury probably did more for ordinary working men and women and for little children than any social reformer ever did. It all began very simply. When he was a boy at Harrow, he was going along the street one day, and he met a pauper's funeral. The coffin was a shoddy, ill-made box. It was on a hand- barrow. The barrow was being pushed by a quartette of men who were drunk; and as they pushed the barrow along, they were singing ribald songs, and joking and jesting among themselves. As they pushed the barrow up the hill the box, which was the coffin, fell off the barrow and burst open. Some people would have thought the whole business a good joke; some would have turned away in fastidious disgust; some would have shrugged their shoulders and would have felt that it had nothing to do with them, although it might be a pity that such things should happen. The young Shaftesbury saw it and said to himself "When I grow up, I'm going to give my life to see that things like that don't happen." So he dedicated his life to caring for others.

Christianity is caring. This beatitude does mean: Blessed is the man who cares intensely for the sufferings. and for the sorrows, and for the needs of others.

(iii) No doubt both these thoughts are in this beatitude, but its main thought undoubtedly is: Blessed is the man who is desperately sorry for his own sin and his own unworthiness.

As we have seen, the very first word of the message of Jesus was, "Repent!" No man can repent unless he is sorry for his sins. The thing which really changes men is when they suddenly come up against something which opens their eyes to what sin is and to what sin does. A boy or a girl may go his or her own way, and may never think of effects and consequences; and then some day something happens and that boy or girl sees the stricken look in a father's or a mother's eyes; and suddenly sin is seen for what it is.

That is what the Cross does for us. As we look at the Cross, we are bound to say, "That is what sin can do. Sin can take the loveliest life in all the world and smash it on a Cross." One of the great functions of the Cross is to open the eyes of men and women to the horror of sin. And when a man sees sin in all its horror he cannot do anything else but experience intense sorrow for his sin.

Christianity begins with a sense of sin. Blessed is the man who is intensely sorry for his sin, the man who is heart-broken for what his sin has done to God and to Jesus Christ, the man who sees the Cross and who is appalled by the havoc wrought by sin.

It is the man who has that experience who will indeed be comforted; for that experience is what we call penitence, and the broken and the contrite heart God will never despise (Ps.51:17). The way to the joy of forgiveness is through the desperate sorrow of the broken heart.

The real meaning of the second beatitude is:

O the bliss of the man whose heart is broken for the world's suffering and for his own sin, for out of his sorrow he will find the joy of God!

THE BLISS OF THE GOD-CONTROLLED LIFE

Matt. 5:5, Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

In our modern English idiom the word meek is hardly one of the honourable words of life. Nowadays it carries with it an idea of spinelessness, and subservience, and mean-spiritedness. It paints the picture of a submissive and ineffective creature. But it so happens that the word meek--in Greek *praos* (GSN4239)-- was one of the great Greek ethical words.

Aristotle has a great deal to say about the quality of meekness (*praotēs* = GSN4236). It was Aristotle's fixed method to define every virtue as the mean between two extremes. On the one hand there was the extreme of excess; on the other hand there was the extreme of defect; and in between there was the virtue itself, the happy medium. To take an example, on the one extreme there is the spendthrift; on the other extreme there is the miser; and in between there is the generous man.

Aristotle defines meekness, *praotes* (GSN4236), as the mean between *orgilotes* (see *orge*, GSN3709), which means excessive anger, and *aorgesia*, which means excessive angerlessness. *Praotes* (GSN4236), meekness, as Aristotle saw it, is the happy medium between too much and too little anger. And so the first possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who is always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time.

If we ask what the right time and the wrong time are, we may say as a general rule for life that it is never right to be angry for any insult or injury done to ourselves; that is something that no Christian must ever resent; but that it is often right to be angry at injuries done to other people. Selfish anger is always a sin; selfless anger can be one of the great moral dynamics of the world.

But the word *praus* (GSN4239) has a second standard Greek usage. It is the regular word for an animal which has been domesticated, which has been trained to obey the word of command, which has learned to answer to the reins. It is the word for an animal which has learned to accept control. So the second possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who has every instinct, every impulse, every passion under control. Blessed is the man who is entirely self-controlled.

The moment we have stated that, we see that it needs a change. It is not so much the blessing of the man who is self-controlled, for such complete self-control is beyond human capacity; rather, it is the blessing of the man who is completely God-controlled. For only in his service do we find our perfect freedom, and in doing his will our peace.

But there is still a third possible side from which we may approach this beatitude. The Greeks always contrasted the quality which they called *praotes* (GSN4236), and which the King James Version translates meekness, with the quality which they called *hupselokardia*, which means lofty-heartedness. In *praotes* (GSN4236) there is the true humility which banishes all pride.

Without humility a man cannot learn, for the first step to learning is the realization of our own ignorance. Quintilian, the great Roman teacher of oratory, said of certain of his scholars, "They would no doubt be excellent students, if they were not already convinced of their own knowledge." No one can teach the man who knows it all already. Without humility there can be no such thing as love, for the very beginning of love is a sense of unworthiness. Without humility there can be no true religion. For all true religion begins with a realization of our own weakness and of our need for God. Man reaches only true manhood when he is always conscious that he is the creature and that God is the Creator, and that without God he can do nothing.

Praotes (GSN4236) describes humility, the acceptance of the necessity to learn and of the necessity to be forgiven. It describes man's only proper attitude to God. So then, the third possible translation of this beatitude is:

Blessed is the man who has the humility to know his own ignorance, his own weakness, and his own need.

It is this meekness, Jesus says, which will inherit the earth. It is the fact of history that it has always been the men with this gift of self-control, the men with their passions, and instincts, and impulses under discipline, who have been great. Numbers says of Moses, the greatest leader and the greatest law-giver the world has ever seen: "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Num.12:3). Moses was no milk and water character; he was no spineless creature; he could be blazingly angry; but he was a man whose anger was on the leash, only to be released when the time was right. The writer of Proverbs has it: "He that rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city" (Prov.16:32).

It was the lack of that very quality which ruined Alexander the Great, who, in a fit of uncontrolled temper in the middle of a drunken debauch, hurled a spear at his best friend and killed him. No man can lead others until he has mastered himself; no man can serve others until he has subjected himself; no man can be in control of others until he has learned to control himself. But the man who gives himself into the complete control of God will gain this meekness which will indeed enable him to inherit the earth.

It is clear that this word *praus* (GSN4239) means far more than the English word *meek* now means; it is, in fact, clear that there is no one English word which will translate it, although perhaps the word *gentle* comes nearest to it. The full translation of this third beatitude must read:

O the bliss of the man who is always angry at the right time and never angry at the wrong time, who has every instinct, and impulse, and passion under control because he himself is God-controlled, who has the humility to realise his own ignorance and his own weakness, for such a man is a king among men!

THE BLISS OF THE STARVING SPIRIT

Matt. 5:6, *Blessed* are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Words do not exist in isolation; they exist against a background of experience and of thought; and the meaning of any word is conditioned by the background of the person who speaks it. That is particularly true of this beatitude. It would convey to those who heard it for the first time an impression quite different from the impression which it conveys to us.

The fact is that very few of us in modern conditions of life know what it is to be really hungry or really thirsty. In the ancient world it was very different. A working man's wage was the equivalent of three pence a day, and, even making every allowance for the difference in the purchasing power of money, no man ever got fat on that wage. A working man in Palestine ate meat only once a week, and in Palestine the working man and the day labourer were never far from the border-line of real hunger and actual starvation.

It was still more so in the case of thirst. It was not possible for the vast majority of people to turn a tap and find the clear, cold water pouring into their house. A man might be on a journey, and in the midst of it the hot wind which brought the sand-storm might begin to blow. There was nothing for him to do but to wrap his head in his burnous and turn his back to the wind, and wait, while the swirling sand filled his nostrils and his throat until he was likely to suffocate, and until he was parched with an imperious thirst. In the conditions of modern western life there is no parallel at all to that.

So, then, the hunger which this beatitude describes is no genteel hunger which could be satisfied with a mid-morning snack; the thirst of which it speaks is no thirst which could be slaked with a cup of coffee or an iced drink. It is the hunger of the man who is starving for food, and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks.

Since that is so this beatitude is in reality a question and a challenge. In effect it demands. "How much do you want goodness? Do you want it as much as a starving man wants food, and as much as a man dying of thirst wants water?" How intense is our desire for goodness?

Most people have an instinctive desire for goodness, but that desire is wistful and nebulous rather than sharp and intense; and when the moment of decision comes they are not prepared to make the effort and the sacrifice which real goodness demands. Most people suffer from what Robert Louis Stevenson called "the malady of not wanting." It would obviously make the biggest difference in the world if we desired goodness more than anything else.

When we approach this beatitude from that side it is the most demanding, and indeed the most frightening, of them all. But not only is it the most demanding beatitude; in its own way it is also the most comforting. At the back of it there is the meaning that the man who is blessed is not necessarily the man who achieves this goodness, but the man who longs for it with his whole heart. If blessedness came only to him who achieved, then none would be blessed. But blessedness comes to the man who, in spite of failures and failings, still clutches to him the passionate love of the highest.

H. G. Wells somewhere said, "A man may be a bad musician and yet be passionately in love with music." Robert Louis Stevenson spoke of even those who have sunk to the lowest depths "clutching the remnants of virtue to them in the brothel and on the scaffold." Sir Norman Birkett, the famous lawyer and judge, once, speaking of the criminals with whom he had come in contact in his work, spoke of the inextinguishable something in every man. Goodness, "the implacable hunter," is always at their heels. The worst of men is "condemned to some kind of nobility."

The true wonder of man is not that he is a sinner, but that even in his sin he is haunted by goodness, that even in the mud he can never wholly forget the stars. David had always wished to build the Temple of God; he never achieved that ambition; it was denied and forbidden him; but God said to him, "You did well that it was in your heart" (1Kgs.8:18). In his mercy God judges us, not only by our achievements, but also by our dreams. Even if a man never attains goodness, if to the end of the day he is still hungering and thirsting for it, he is not shut out from blessedness.

There is one further point in this beatitude, a point which only emerges in the Greek. It is a rule of Greek grammar that verbs of hungering and thirsting are followed by the genitive case. The genitive case is the case which, in English, is expressed by the word of, of the man is the genitive case. The genitive which follows verbs of hungering and thirsting in Greek is called the partitive genitive, that is the genitive of the part. The idea is this. The Greek said, "I hunger for of bread." It was some bread he desired, a part of the bread, not the whole loaf. The Greek said, "I thirst for of water." It was some water he desired. a drink of water, not all the water in the tank.

But in this beatitude, most unusually, righteousness is in the direct accusative, and not in the normal genitive. Now, when verbs of hungering and thirsting in Greek take the accusative instead of the genitive, the meaning is that the hunger and the thirst is for the whole thing. To say I hunger for bread in the accusative means, I want the whole loaf. To say I thirst for water in the accusative means, I want the whole pitcher. There the correct translation is:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for the whole of righteousness, for complete righteousness.

That is in fact what people seldom do. They are content with a part of righteousness. A man, for instance, may be a good man in the sense that, however hard one tried, one could not pin a moral fault on to him. His honesty, his morality, his respectability are beyond question; but it may be that no one could go to that man and weep out a sorry story on his breast; he would freeze, if one tried to do so. There can be a goodness which is accompanied with a hardness, a censoriousness, a lack of sympathy. Such a goodness is a partial goodness.

On the other hand a man may have all kinds of faults; he may drink, and swear, and gamble, and lose his temper; and yet, if any one is in trouble, he would give him the last penny out of his pocket and the very coat off his back. Again that is a partial goodness.

This beatitude says, it is not enough to be satisfied with a partial goodness. Blessed is the man who hungers and thirsts for the goodness which is total. Neither an icy faultlessness nor a faulty warm-heartedness is enough.

So, then, the translation of the fourth beatitude could run:

O the bliss of the man who longs for total righteousness as a starving man longs for food, and a man perishing of thirst longs for water, for that man will be truly satisfied!

THE BLISS OF PERFECT SYMPATHY

Matt. 5:7, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Even as it stands this is surely a great saying; and it is the statement of a principle which runs all through the New Testament. The New Testament is insistent that to be forgiven we must be forgiving. As James had it: "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy" (Jas.2:13). Jesus finishes the story of the unforgiving debtor with the warning: "So also my heavenly Father will do to everyone of you; if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt. 18:35). The Lord's Prayer is followed by the two verses which explain and underline the petition, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors". "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:12,14,15). It is the consistent teaching of the New Testament that indeed only the merciful shall receive mercy.

But there is even more to this beatitude than that. The Greek word for merciful is *eleemon* (GSN1655). But, as we have repeatedly seen, the Greek of the New Testament as we possess it goes back to an original Hebrew and Aramaic. The Hebrew word for mercy is *cheched* (HSN2617); and it is an untranslatable word. It does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term; it does not mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. *Cheched* (HSN2617), mercy, means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with his eyes, think things with his mind, and feel things with his feelings.

Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; clearly this demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will. It denotes a sympathy which is not given, as it were, from outside, but which comes from a deliberate identification with the other person, until we see things as he sees them, and feel things as he feels them. This is sympathy in the literal sense of the word. Sympathy is derived from two Greek words, sun (GSN4862) which means together with, and paschein (GSN3958) which means to experience or to suffer. Sympathy means experiencing things together with the other person, literally going through what he is going through.

This is precisely what many people do not even try to do. Most people are so concerned with their own feelings that they are not much concerned with the feelings of anyone else. When they are sorry for someone, it is, as it were, from the outside; they do not make the deliberate effort to get inside the other person's mind and heart, until they see and feel things as he sees and feels them.

If we did make this deliberate attempt, and if we did achieve this identification with the other person, it would obviously make a very great difference.

(i) It would save us from being kind in the wrong way. There is one outstanding example of insensitive and mistaken kindness in the New Testament. It is in the story of Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary at Bethany (Lk. 10:38-42). When Jesus paid that visit, the Cross was only a few days ahead. All that he wanted was an opportunity for so short a time to rest and to relax, and to lay down the terrible tension of living.

Martha loved Jesus; he was her most honoured guest; and because she loved him she would provide the best meal the house could supply. She bustled and scurried here and there with the clatter of dishes and the clash of pans; and every moment was torture to the tense nerves of Jesus. All he wanted was quiet.

Martha meant to be kind, but she could hardly have been more cruel. But Mary understood that Jesus wished only for peace. So often when we wish to be kind the kindness has to be given in our way, and the other person has to put up with it whether he likes it or not. Our kindness would be doubly kind, and would be saved from much quite unintentional unkindness, if we would only make the effort to get inside the other person.

(ii) It would make forgiveness, and it would make tolerance ever so much easier. There is one principle in life which we often forget--there is always a reason why a person thinks and acts as he does, and if we knew that reason, it would be so much easier to understand and to sympathize and to forgive. If a person thinks, as we see it, mistakenly, he may have come through experiences, he may have a heritage which has made him think as he does. If a person is irritable and discourteous, he may be worried or he may be in pain. If a person treats us badly, it may be because there is some idea in his mind which is quite mistaken.

Truly, as the French proverb has it, "To know all is to forgive all," but we will never know all until we make the deliberate attempt to get inside the other person's mind and heart.

(iii) In the last analysis, is not that what God did in Jesus Christ? In Jesus Christ, in the most literal sense, God got inside the skin of men. He came as a man; he came seeing things with

men's eyes, feeling things with men's feelings, thinking things with men's minds. God knows what life is like, because God came right inside life.

Queen Victoria was a close friend of Principal and Mrs. Tulloch of St. Andrews. Prince Albert died and Victoria was left alone. Just at the same time Principal Tulloch died and Mrs. Tulloch was left alone. All unannounced Queen Victoria came to call on Mrs. Tulloch when she was resting on a couch in her room.

When the Queen was announced Mrs. Tulloch struggled to rise quickly from the couch and to curtsy. The Queen stepped forward: "My dear," she said, "don't rise. I am not coming to you today as the queen to a subject, but as one woman who has lost her husband to another."

That is just what God did; he came to men, not as the remote, detached, isolated, majestic God; but as a man. The supreme instance of mercy, checked (HSN1617), is the coming of God in Jesus Christ.

It is only those who show this mercy who will receive it. This is true on the human side, for it is the great truth of life that in other people we see the reflection of ourselves. If we are detached and disinterested in them, they will be detached and disinterested in us. If they see that we care, their hearts will respond in caring. It is supremely true on the divine side, for he who shows this mercy has become nothing less than like God.

So the translation of the fifth beatitude might read:

O the bliss of the man who gets right inside other people, until he can see with their eyes, think with their thoughts, feel with their feelings, for he who does that will find others do the same for him, and will know that that is what God in Jesus Christ has done!

THE BLISS OF THE CLEAN HEART

Matt. 5:8, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Here is the beatitude which demands that every man who reads it should stop, and think, and examine himself.

The Greek word for pure is *katharos* (GSN2513), and it has a variety of usages, all of which have something to add to the meaning of this beatitude for the Christian life.

(i) Originally it simply meant clean, and could, for instance, be used of soiled clothes which have been washed clean.

(ii) It is regularly used for corn which has been winnowed or sifted and cleansed of all chaff. In the same way it is used of an army which has been purged of all discontented, cowardly, unwilling and inefficient soldiers, and which is a force composed solely of first-class fighting men.

(iii) It very commonly appears in company with another Greek adjective--*akiratos*. *Akiratos* can be used of milk or wine which is unadulterated with water, or of metal which has in it no tinge of alloy.

So, then, the basic meaning of katharos (GSN2513) is unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed. That is why this beatitude is so demanding a beatitude. It could be translated:

Blessed is the man whose motives are always entirely unmixed, for that man shall see God.

It is very seldom indeed that we do even our finest actions from absolutely unmixed motives. If we give generously and liberally to some good cause, it may well be that there lingers in the depths of our hearts some contentment in basking in the sunshine of our own self-approval, some pleasure in the praise and thanks and credit which we will receive. If we do some fine thing, which demands some sacrifice from us, it may well be that we are not altogether free from the feeling that men will see something heroic in us and that we may regard ourselves as martyrs. Even a preacher at his most sincere is not altogether free from the danger of self-satisfaction in having preached a good sermon. Was it not John Bunyan who was once told by someone that he had preached well that day, and who answered sadly, "The devil already told me that as I was coming down the pulpit steps"?

This beatitude demands from us the most exacting self-examination. Is our work done from motives of service or from motives of pay? Is our service given from selfless motives or from motives of self- display? Is the work we do in Church done for Christ or for our own prestige! Is our church-going an attempt to meet God or a fulfilling of an habitual and conventional respectability? Are even our prayer and our Bible reading engaged upon with the sincere desire to company with God or because it gives us a pleasant feeling of superiority to do these things? Is our religion a thing in which we are conscious of nothing so much as the need of God within our hearts, or a thing in which we have comfortable thoughts of our own piety? To examine one's own motives is a daunting and a shaming thing, for there are few things in this world that even the best of us do with completely unmixed motives.

Jesus went on to say that only the pure in heart will see God. It is one of the simple facts of life that we see only what we are able to see; and that is true not only in the physical sense, it is also true in every other possible sense.

If the ordinary person goes out on a night of stars, he sees only a host of pinpoints of light in the sky; he sees what he is fit to see. But in that same sky the astronomer will call the stars and the planets by their names, and will move amongst them as his friends; and from that same sky the navigator could find the means to bring his ship across the trackless seas to the desired haven.

The ordinary person can walk along a country road, and see by the hedgerows nothing but a tangle of weeds and wild flowers and grasses. The trained botanist would see this and that, and call it by name and know its use; and he might even see something of infinite value and rarity because he had eyes to see.

Put two men into a room filled with ancient pictures. A man with no knowledge and no skill could not tell an old master from a worthless daub, whereas a trained art critic might well discern a picture worth thousands of pounds in a collection which someone else might dismiss as junk.

There are people with filthy minds who can see in any situation material for a prurient snigger and a soiled jest. In every sphere of life we see what we are able to see.

So, says Jesus, it is only the pure in heart who shall see God. It is a warning thing to remember that, as by God's grace we keep our hearts clean, or as by human lust we soil them, we are either fitting or unfitting ourselves some day to see God.

So, then, this sixth beatitude might read:

O the bliss of the man whose motives are absolutely pure, for that man will some day be able to see God!

THE BLISS OF BRINGING MEN TOGETHER

Matt. 5:9, *Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

We must begin our study of this beatitude by investigating certain matters of meaning in it.

(i) First, there is the word peace. In Greek, the word is *eirene* (GSN1515), and in Hebrew it is *shalom* (HSN7965). In Hebrew peace is never only a negative state; it never means only the absence of trouble; in Hebrew peace always means everything which makes for a man's highest good. In the east when one man says to another, *Salaam*--which is the same word--he does not mean that he wishes for the other man only the absence of evil things; he wishes for him the presence of all good things. In the Bible peace means not only freedom from all trouble; it means enjoyment of all good.

(ii) Second, it must carefully be noted what the beatitude is saying. The blessing is on the peace-makers, not necessarily on the peace-lovers. It very often happens that if a man loves peace in the wrong way, he succeeds in making trouble and not peace. We may, for instance, allow a threatening and dangerous situation to develop, and our defence is that for peace's sake we do not want to take any action. There is many a person who thinks that he is loving peace, when in fact he is piling up trouble for the future, because he refuses to face the situation and to take the action which the situation demands. The peace which the Bible calls blessed does not come from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them. What this beatitude demands is not the passive acceptance of things because we are afraid of the trouble of doing anything about them, but the active facing of things, and the making of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle.

(iii) The King James Version says that the peace-makers shall be called the children of God; the Greek more literally is that the peace-makers will be called the sons (*huioi*, GSN5207) of God. This is a typical Hebrew way of expression. Hebrew is not rich in adjectives, and often when Hebrew wishes to describe something, it uses, not an adjective, but the phrase son of... plus an abstract noun. Hence a man may be called a son of peace instead of a peaceful man. Barnabas is called a son of consolation instead of a consoling and comforting man. This beatitude says: Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God; what it means is: Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be doing a God-like work. The man who makes peace is engaged on the very work which the God of peace is doing (Rom.15:33; 2Cor.13:11; 1Th.5:23; Heb.13:20).

The meaning of this beatitude has been sought along three main lines.

(i) It has been suggested that, since shalom (HSN7965) means everything which makes for a man's highest good, this beatitude means: Blessed are those who make this world a better place for all men to live in. Abraham Lincoln once said: "Die when I may, I would like it to be said of me, that I always pulled up a weed and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow." This then would be the beatitude of those who have lifted the world a little further on.

(ii) Most of the early scholars of the Church took this beatitude in a purely spiritual sense, and held that it meant: Blessed is the man who makes peace in his own heart and in his own soul. In every one of us there is an inner conflict between good and evil; we are always tugged in two directions at once; every man is at least to some extent a walking civil war. Happy indeed is the man who has won through to inner peace, in which the inner warfare is over, and his whole heart is given to God.

(iii) But there is another meaning for this word peace. It is a meaning on which the Jewish Rabbis loved to dwell, and it is almost certainly the meaning which Jesus had in his mind. The Jewish Rabbis held that the highest task which a man can perform is to establish right relationships between man and man. That is what Jesus means.

There are people who are always storm-centers of trouble and bitterness and strife. Wherever they are they are either involved in quarrels themselves or the cause of quarrels between others. They are trouble-makers. There are people like that in almost every society and every Church, and such people are doing the devil's own work. On the other hand--thank God--there are people in whose presence bitterness cannot live, people who bridge the gulfs, and heal the breaches, and sweeten the bitteresses. Such people are doing a godlike work, for it is the great purpose of God to bring peace between men and himself, and between man and man. The man who divides men is doing the devil's work; the man who unites men is doing God's work.

So, then, this beatitude might read:

O the bliss of those who produce right relationships between man and man, for they are doing a godlike work!

THE BLISS OF THE SUFFERER FOR CHRIST

Matt. 5:10-12, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.*"

One of the outstanding qualities of Jesus was his sheer honesty. He never left men in any doubt what would happen to them if they chose to follow him. He was clear that he had come "not to make life easy, but to make men great."

It is hard for us to realise what the first Christians had to suffer. Every department of their life was disrupted.

(i) Their Christianity might well disrupt their work. Suppose a man was a stone-mason. That seems a harmless enough occupation. But suppose his firm received a contract to build a temple to one of the heathen gods, what was that man to do? Suppose a man was a tailor, and suppose his firm was asked to produce robes for the heathen priests, what was that man to do? In a situation such as that in which the early Christians found themselves there was hardly any job in which a man might not find a conflict between his business interests and his loyalty to Jesus Christ.

The Church was in no doubt where a man's duty lay. More than a hundred years after this a man came to Tertullian with this very problem. He told of his business difficulties. He ended by saying, "What can I do? I must live!" "Must you?" said Tertullian. If it came to a choice between a loyalty and a living, the real Christian never hesitated to choose loyalty.

(ii) Their Christianity would certainly disrupt their social life. In the ancient world most feasts were held in the temple of some god. In very few sacrifices was the whole animal burned upon the altar. It might be that only a few hairs from the forehead of the beast were burned as a symbolic sacrifice. Part of the meat went to the priests as their perquisite; and part of the meat was returned to the worshipper. With his share he made a feast for his friends and his relations. One of the gods most commonly worshipped was Serapis. And when the invitations to the feast went out, they would read:

"I invite you to dine with me at the table of our Lord Serapis."

Could a Christian share in a feast held in the temple of a heathen god? Even an ordinary meal in an ordinary house began with a libation, a cup of wine, poured out in honour of the gods. It was like grace before meat. Could a Christian become a sharer in a heathen act of worship like that? Again the Christian answer was clear. The Christian must cut himself off from his fellows rather than by his presence give approval to such a thing. A man had to be prepared to be lonely in order to be a Christian.

(iii) Worst of all, their Christianity was liable to disrupt their home life. It happened again and again that one member of a family became a Christian while the others did not. A wife might become a Christian while her husband did not. A son or a daughter might become a Christian while the rest of the family did not. Immediately there was a split in the family. Often the door was shut for ever in the face of the one who had accepted Christ.

Christianity often came to send, not peace, but a sword which divided families in two. It was literally true that a man might have to love Christ more than he loved father or mother, wife, or brother or sister. Christianity often involved in those days a choice between a man's nearest and dearest and Jesus Christ.

Still further, the penalties which a Christian had to suffer were terrible beyond description. All the world knows of the Christians who were flung to the lions or burned at the stake; but these were kindly deaths. Nero wrapped the Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his

hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies; eyes were tom out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ.

We may well ask why the Romans persecuted the Christians. It seems an extraordinary thing that anyone living a Christian life should seem a fit victim for persecution and death. There were two reasons.

(i) There were certain slanders which were spread abroad about the Christians, slanders for which the Jews were in no small measure responsible. (a) The Christians were accused of cannibalism. The words of the Last Supper--"This is my body." "This cup is the New Testament in my blood"--were taken and twisted into a story that the Christians sacrificed a child and ate the flesh. (b) The Christians were accused of immoral practices, and their meetings were said to be orgies of lust. The Christian weekly meeting was called the Agape (GSN0026), the Love Feast; and the name was grossly misinterpreted. Christians greeted each other with the kiss of peace; and the kiss of peace became a ground on which to build the slanderous accusations. (c) The Christians were accused of being incendiaries. It is true that they spoke of the coming end of the world, and they clothed their message in the apocalyptic pictures of the end of the world in flames. Their slanderers took these words and twisted them into threats of political and revolutionary incendiarism. (d) The Christians were accused of tampering with family relationships. Christianity did in fact split families as we have seen; and so Christianity was represented as something which divided man and wife, and disrupted the home. There were slanders enough waiting to be invented by malicious-minded men.

(ii) But the great ground of persecution was in fact political. Let us think of the situation. The Roman Empire included almost the whole known world, from Britain to the Euphrates, and from Germany to North Africa. How could that vast amalgam of peoples be somehow welded into one? Where could a unifying principle be found? At first it was found in the worship of the goddess Roma, the spirit of Rome. This was a worship which the provincial peoples were happy to give, for Rome had brought them peace and good government, and civil order and justice. The roads were cleared of brigands and the seas of pirates; the despots and tyrants had been banished by impartial Roman justice. The provincial was very willing to sacrifice to the spirit of the Empire which had done so much for him.

But this worship of Roma took a further step. There was one man who personified the Empire, one man in whom Roma might be felt to be incarnated, and that was the Emperor; and so the Emperor came to be regarded as a god, and divine honours came to be paid to him, and temples were raised to his divinity. The Roman government did not begin this worship; at first, in fact, it did all it could to discourage it. Claudius, the Emperor, said that he deprecated divine honours being paid to any human being. But as the years went on the Roman government saw in this Emperor-worship the one thing which could unify the vast Empire of Rome; here was the one centre on which they all could come together. So, in the end, the worship of the Emperor

became, not voluntary, but compulsory. Once a year a man had to go and burn a pinch of incense to the godhead of Caesar and say, "Caesar is Lord." And that is precisely what the Christians refused to do. For them Jesus Christ was the Lord, and to no man would they give that title which belonged to Christ.

It can be seen at once that Caesar-worship was far more a test of political loyalty than anything else. In actual fact when a man had burned his pinch of incense he received a certificate, a libellus, to say that he had done so, and then he could go and worship any god he liked, so long as his worship did not interfere with public order and decency. The Christians refused to conform. Confronted with the choice, "Caesar or Christ?" they uncompromisingly chose Christ. They utterly refused to compromise. The result was that, however good a man, however fine a citizen a Christian was, he was automatically an outlaw. In the vast Empire Rome could not afford pockets of disloyalty, and that is exactly what every Christian congregation appeared to the Roman authorities to be. A poet has spoken of

"The panting, huddled flock whose crime was Christ."

The only crime of the Christian was that he set Christ above Caesar; and for that supreme loyalty the Christians died in their thousands, and faced torture for the sake of the lonely supremacy of Jesus Christ.

THE BLISS OF THE BLOOD-STAINED WAY

Matt. 5:10-12 (continued)

When we see how persecution arose, we are in a position to see the real glory of the martyr's way. It may seem an extraordinary thing to talk about the bliss of the persecuted; but for him who had eyes to see beyond the immediate present, and a mind to understand the greatness of the issues involved, there must have been a glory in that blood-stained way.

(i) To have to suffer persecution was an opportunity to show one's loyalty to Jesus Christ. One of the most famous of all the martyrs was Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna. The mob dragged him to the tribunal of the Roman magistrate. He was given the inevitable choice--sacrifice to the godhead of Caesar or die. "Eighty and six years," came the immortal reply, "have I served Christ, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" So they brought him to the stake, and he prayed his last prayer: "O Lord God Almighty, the Father of thy well-beloved and ever-blessed son, by whom we have received the knowledge of thee ... I thank thee that thou hast graciously thought me worthy of this day and of this hour." Here was the supreme opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty to Jesus Christ.

In the First World War Rupert Brooke, the poet, was one of those who died too young. Before he went out to the battle he wrote:

"Now God be thanked who has matched us with his hour."

There are so many of us who have never in our lives made anything like a real sacrifice for Jesus Christ. The moment when Christianity seems likely to cost us something is the moment when it is open to us to demonstrate our loyalty to Jesus Christ in a way that all the world can see.

(ii) To have to suffer persecution is, as Jesus himself said, the way to walk the same road as the prophets, and the saints, and the martyrs have walked. To suffer for the right is to gain a share in a great succession. The man who has to suffer something for his faith can throw back his head and say,

"Brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod."

(iii) To have to suffer persecution is to share in the great occasion. There is always something thrilling in even being present on the great occasion, in being there when something memorable and crucial is happening. There is an even greater thrill in having a share, however small, in the actual action. That is the feeling about which Shakespeare wrote so unforgettably in Henry the Fifth in the words he put into Henry's mouth before the battle of Agincourt:

"He that shall live this day and see old age, Will yearly on the vigil feast his friends, And say, 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispian': Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars, And say, 'These wounds I had on Crispin's day.' And gentlemen in England now abed Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here, And hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

When a man is called on to suffer something for his Christianity that is always a crucial moment; it is the great occasion; it is the clash between the world and Christ; it is a moment in the drama of eternity. To have a share in such a moment is not a penalty but a glory. "Rejoice at such a moment," says Jesus, "and be glad." The word for be glad is from the verb *agalliaisthai* (GSN0021) which has been derived from two Greek words which mean to leap exceedingly. It is the joy which leaps for joy. As it has been put, it is the joy of the climber who has reached the summit, and who leaps for joy that the mountain path is conquered.

(iv) To suffer persecution is to make things easier for those who are to follow. Today we enjoy the blessing of liberty because men in the past were willing to buy it for us at the cost of blood, and sweat, and tears. They made it easier for us, and by a steadfast and immovable witness for Christ we may make it easier for others who are still to come.

In the great Boulder Dam scheme in America men lost their lives in that project which was to turn a dust-bowl into fertile land. When the scheme was completed, the names of those who had died were put on a tablet and the tablet was put into the great wall of the dam, and on it there was the inscription. "These died that the desert might rejoice and blossom as the rose."

The man who fights his battle for Christ will always make things easier for those who follow after. For them there will be one less struggle to be encountered on the way.

(v) Still further, no man ever suffers persecution alone; if a man is called upon to bear material loss, the failure of friends, slander, loneliness, even the death of love, for his principles, he will not be left alone. Christ will be nearer to him than at any other time.

The old story in Daniel tells how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were thrown into the furnace heated seven times hot because of their refusal to move from their loyalty to God. The courtiers watched. "Did we not cast three men, bound, into the fire?" they asked. The reply was that it was indeed so. Then came the astonished answer, "But I see four men, loose, walking in

the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods" (Dn.3:19-25).

As Browning had it in Christmas Eve and Easter Day:

"I was born sickly, poor and mean, A slave; no misery could screen The holders of the pearl of price From Caesar's envy; therefore twice I fought with beasts, and three times saw My children suffer by his law; At last my own release was earned; I was some time in being burned, But at the close a Hand came through The fire above my head, and drew My soul to Christ, whom now I see. Sergius, a brother, writes for me This testimony on the wall-- For me, I have forgot it all."

When a man has to suffer something for his faith, that is the way to the closest possible companionship with Christ.

There remains only one question to ask--why is this persecution so inevitable? It is inevitable because the Church, when it really is the Church, is bound to be the conscience of the nation and the conscience of society. Where there is good the Church must praise; where there is evil, the Church must condemn--and inevitably men will try to silence the troublesome voice of conscience. It is not the duty of the individual Christian habitually to find fault, to criticise, to condemn, but it may well be that his every action is a silent condemnation of the unchristian lives of others, and he will not escape their hatred.

It is not likely that death awaits us because of our loyalty--to the Christian faith. But insult awaits the man who insists on Christian honour. Mockery awaits the man who practises Christian love and Christian forgiveness. Actual persecution may well await the Christian in industry who insists on doing an honest day's work. Christ still needs his witnesses; he needs those who are prepared, not so much to die for him, as to live for him. The Christian struggle and the Christian glory still exist.