



*“Behold,  
I show you the thing  
which your soul longs for!”*

THIRTEEN DISCOURSES ON THE  
**SERMON ON  
THE MOUNT**  
**JOHN WESLEY**

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SERMON ON  
THE MOUNT

JOHN WESLEY

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All Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible,  
King James Version, Cambridge, 1796.

Printed in the United States of America

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-62824-091-7

Mobi ISBN: 978-1-62824-092-4

ePub ISBN: 978-1-62824-093-1

uPDF ISBN: 978-1-62824-094-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014935051

Cover design by NikaBrik Design  
Page design by PerfectType, Nashville

SEEDBED PUBLISHING  
Franklin, Tennessee  
seedbed.com  
SOWING FOR A GREAT AWAKENING

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## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

### THE JOHN WESLEY COLLECTION

John Wesley's profound legacy and impact on world Christianity during and since his lifetime can be viewed through a number of lenses. The revival that arose under his leadership changed the social and political structure of eighteenth-century England as the poor and lost found hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than in revolution against the crown. The influence of Wesley's Spirit-inspired teaching continued unabated as the Methodist movement spread scriptural holiness across the American continent and lands far beyond.

Wesley's influence as a publisher, if considered separately from all other of his extensive accomplishments, represents an astonishing record in its own right. Wesley lived in a time when Gutenberg's invention of movable type, which had immediately preceded Luther's reformation, had coalesced into specialized printing trades in London. Typefounders and printeries were becoming established and were offering exciting new pathways for the spread of the gospel through inexpensive printed text.

Perhaps more than any other figure of his day, Wesley embraced this new technology and issued sermons, tracts, commentaries, abridgments, biographies, and a host of other

items that he considered relevant to the spiritual growth of maturing Christians.

Wesley was vitally driven by the reality of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. His teaching on entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is the capstone of his legacy. He worked tirelessly to abridge and republish seminal works by historical figures of previous generations, reaching as far back as the apostolic fathers of the first-century church. He constantly curated voices that communicated the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing believers into the fullness of salvation and lives of holy love.

These writings resourced the early Methodists in their quest to spread the gospel by providing the intellectual and spiritual moorings for the messengers of the movement. Seedbed believes these writings are as relevant to our context today as they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Consequently, we consider it a sacred calling to join with those who are recapturing John Wesley's publishing vision for the twenty-first century.

With great joy we present The John Wesley Collection. In the years ahead Seedbed will reissue selections from this vast collection, which includes his fifty-volume Christian Library, some 150 sermons, countless items from his journals and letters, as well as innumerable tracts, hymns, poems, and other publications, most of which have been out of circulation for decades, if not centuries.

The John Wesley Collection is Seedbed's offering to the ongoing Wesleyan tradition, providing rare insight into the heartbeat of a movement whose greatest days are yet to come.

We encourage you to enter these texts with determination. Readers who persevere will soon find themselves accustomed to the winsome tenor and tempo of Wesley's voice and vernacular.

Seedbed's editors are constantly examining this extensive collection of more than 250 years of vital spiritual writing by

the Wesleys and successive generations to find the most relevant and helpful messages that will speak to today's body of believers. We commend this old-new publishing work to you as one ready to be transformed by the latent power of these ancient truths. It is our prayer that these timeless words will add fuel to the fire of an awakening ready to ignite once again across the world.

*Sola sanctus caritas! Amen.*

Andrew Miller  
Seedbed Publishing

## INTRODUCTION

*This is the religion we long to see established in the world, a religion of love and joy and peace, having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits.*

—John Wesley

*An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*

In the cacophony of voices seeking to define Christianity in today's society, no more apt words have been penned than these from John Wesley. Our faith goes beyond rule-following externals and engages the deepest matters of the heart. We *feel* the love of God and joy in the Holy Ghost. But because we feel them in our hearts, we *produce*. Our witness has impact in the rough-and-tumble “daily-ness” of work, business, politics, relationships, and community. “Heart” thus extends far beyond pious feelings or romantic notions of communion with God.

Few Christian leaders understood this dual problem as clearly as John Wesley. He battled in his day two common yet powerful misunderstandings of full, gospel salvation that afflict our times as well. We could call the first a kind of “do the best you can” morality, which is a version of “works righteousness” or legalism that we may decry, but to which we often succumb. It goes by the following: “If you believe in God and try to be

a good person in all your dealings, then that is all you need to worry about.” But, of course, in adopting this stance we usually measure ourselves against ourselves and come out looking pretty good to ourselves.

The other problem Wesley battled goes under the old-fashioned term “antinomianism,” which may be summarized by a statement like, “Jesus paid it all. I’m required to do nothing but believe in him.” This point of view so emphasizes God’s grace that any hint that we might actually have to do something in order to be fully Christian gets shouted down as “works righteousness.” It also tends to get people so focused on the condition for getting to heaven that they pay scant attention to discipleship in this world. The Christian life becomes a matter of coping rather than serving.

We can see that these problems are two sides of the same coin. Both are extremely common and both fall alarmingly short of the life God empowers and expects of us. This is precisely why meditating on these discourses on the Sermon on the Mount prove to be a salutary exercise.

First published in 1746 in a collection called *Sermons on Several Occasions* (*SOSO*), the discourses take care of the second of two major concerns Wesley was keen to address, those in response to the problems described above. The first twenty sermons in *SOSO* lay down fundamental evangelical themes: repentance, justifying faith, salvation by faith alone, the new birth, and the witness of the Spirit as our assurance of salvation. We know that we are saved by God’s grace alone, without any actions on our part that merit God’s love. We love God simply and only because God loves us and gave his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. This divine activity alone makes our salvation possible. This is familiar territory.

The next thirteen discourses move us into what has become—in our day—largely unexamined territory, but no

less essential. Wesley teaches us that, having experienced peace with God through Christ and having entered this new life, we undergo lifelong transformation. Since through grace we belong to Christ, we face and overcome any attitude, desire, or behavior that does not reflect Christ. Or, to say it more positively, we find that as we obey the Word of the Lord, God restores the divine image in us and we become fruit-bearing witnesses to the kingdom in every dimension of our lives. This part of the Christian life is by no means a second-tier option. It is, as Wesley said, “indispensably necessary to salvation” as much as justification by faith through grace alone!

Therefore, as you meditate through these expositions, keep in mind four critical markers laid down in the first discourse. Remember the *identity* of the Speaker. Jesus is, Wesley avers, “the [divine] Lord, our Governor, whose kingdom is from everlasting . . . the Great Lawgiver, who can well enforce all his laws.” Jesus speaks with the authority of God. We do well to remember.

Second, listen to *what* the Lord teaches: “the *way* to heaven . . . the royal *way* which leads to the kingdom.” Notice the term “way.” Believers know well the first step, the means by which we enter the kingdom (see above), yet give insufficient notice to the daily sojourn, the holy living that bears witness to the kingdom. The way is not an easy one, for the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life. Disciples radiate joy, but joy born of effort, habit, yes, even struggle.

Third, Wesley reminds us that these words are for all who are willing to learn from Jesus. It may seem obvious, but it needs to be said: this point implicates us today. The Sermon on the Mount is for *us*, for all who desire to walk with Christ.

Finally, Wesley considers the *how* of Jesus’ teaching. Christ lays down the “whole plan of his religion,” Wesley says, in a way not found anywhere else in scripture. The “eight particulars” of

the Beatitudes reveal the “sum of all true religion.” The take-away? We are *happy* in this life because, by embodying Jesus’ teachings summarized in Matthew 5–7, we are *holy* in this life.

Wesley’s thirteen discourses divide into the following three sections.

### *The Sum of True Religion (Discourses 1–5)*

John Wesley was convinced that the fount, foundation, and framework for Christian discipleship situates in the “affections” and “holy tempers.” We need to reclaim these terms, and the Beatitudes illumine them. Simply put, affections are Spirit-prompted desires (appetites), and holy tempers are the Spirit-shaped attitudes and dispositions that emerge as we practice discipleship.

Practicing the Christian life therefore calls for self-reflection and awareness. It starts with poverty of spirit, which, Wesley says, is the “general foundation whereon the whole fabric of Christianity may be built.” In this ground the affections can bear fruit. Poverty of spirit replaces arrogant self-sufficiency. Holy mourning (which is not mere sadness or moroseness) supplants thoughtless levity. Meekness takes the place of rage, impatience, and discontent. Exhibiting mercy reveals the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, a love that extends to all, including enemies. In these holy tempers we see the transforming power of Christ at work in believers.

### *The Necessity of Right Intention (Discourses 6–9)*

In the second set of discourses, Wesley expounds on the requisite singularity of purpose needed to govern our actions. We do not rest and we do not settle for anything less, until Christ reigns supreme in our affections and makes himself known through our actions (no one can serve two masters). As students of Wesley know so well, his problem with people

who practiced only the outward behaviors while remaining untouched in their hearts were no better off spiritually than open pagans. We need not fatalistically accept mixed motives as a given for the Christian life. God's grace continues to work until Christ rules alone.

Purity of intention flows from right affections, and so, in this second section, Wesley explains how affection and intention organically relate. "The eye is the intention: what the eye is to the body, the intention is to the soul. As one guides all the motions of the body, so does the other those of the soul." The "eye" fixed on God is full of light. The "eye" fixed on self-preoccupations is full of confusion and sin.

In this vein our prayers, Wesley says, "are the proper test of our desires." Hence, Christ teaches us to pray in a way that trains us to seek the kingdom supremely. Again, we see the need for reflection and self-awareness. How do we pray? What do we spend time and energy pursuing?

### *Hindrances to Faithful Discipleship (Discourses 10–13)*

With the holy tempers described in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5) and with singleness of purpose guiding our actions (Matt. 6), Wesley turns to some common stumbling blocks to holiness of heart and life (Matt. 7). One of the most commonly committed errors and most fatal hindrances is that of judging others. We see the speck in another's eye and mistake it for the beam distorting our vision.

The reason we succumb so easily to these stumbling blocks? To come full circle, we lack poverty of spirit. Pride and self-will are the "parent sins" of a wide range of assumptions that lead us into the broad way of destruction. And by the way, ignorance is not an excuse. We are responsible to know enough of the Christian life so as not to be fooled by those proclaiming the easy and broad way. As Wesley said repeatedly, to use grace

as a rationale for refusing to walk the narrow way of holiness is the highest folly. Our hearts become known by the fruit of our lives. The broad way is easy precisely because it is broad. The narrow way—universal holiness—is difficult, but filled with joyful life in Christ.

## Keep Track of the Whole

All through his exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, John Wesley points to the organic wholeness of desires, dispositions, and actions in following Christ. Here we see “kingdom living” in its fullness, for we see Christ describing the character that he himself embodies and calls us to take up as well. This approach to discipleship is “the whole package,” to borrow a phrase from the sports world. Remember the twin problems mentioned at the beginning of this introduction. Resist the temptation to reduce, to oversimplify. Read without haste. Read in the spirit of the affections described in these pages. And may our Lord bless you with the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Stephen Rankin  
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THIRTEEN DISCOURSES ON THE  
SERMON ON  
THE MOUNT

## DISCOURSE ONE

# THE INWARD KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

*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.*

—Matthew 5:1-4

## Introduction

1. Our Lord had now “gone about all Galilee” (Matt. 4:23), beginning at the time “when John was cast into prison” (Matt. 4:12), not only “teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom,” but likewise “healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.” It was a natural consequence of this, that “there followed him great multitudes from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from

Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from the region beyond Jordan” (Matt. 4:25). “And seeing the multitudes,” whom no synagogue could contain, even had there been any at hand, “he went up into a mountain,” where there was room for all that came unto him, from every quarter. “And when he was set,” as the manner of the Jews was, “his disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth” (an expression denoting the beginning of a solemn discourse), “and taught them, saying . . .”

2. Let us observe who it is that is here speaking, that we may take heed how we hear. It is the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of all; who, as such, has a right to dispose of all his creatures; the Lord our Governor, whose kingdom is from everlasting, and rules over all; the great Lawgiver, who can well enforce all his laws, being “able to save and to destroy,” yea, to punish with “everlasting destruction from his presence and from the glory of his power.” It is the eternal Wisdom of the Father, who knows whereof we are made, and understands our inmost frame; who knows how we stand related to God, to one another, to every creature which God has made, and, consequently, how to adapt every law he prescribes, to all the circumstances wherein he has placed us.

It is he who is “loving unto every man, whose mercy is over all his works”; the God of love, who, having emptied himself of his eternal glory, is come forth from his Father to declare his will to the children of men, and then goes again to the Father; who is sent of God “to open the eyes of the blind, and to give light to them that sit in darkness.” It is the great Prophet of the Lord, concerning whom God had solemnly declared long ago, “Whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deut. 18:19); or, as the apostle expresses it, “Every soul which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:23).

3. And what is it which he is teaching? The Son of God, who came from heaven, is here showing us the way to heaven; to the place which he has prepared for us; the glory he had before the world began. He is teaching us the true way to life everlasting; the royal way which leads to the kingdom; and the only true way, for there is none besides; all other paths lead to destruction. From the character of the Speaker, we are well assured that he has declared the full and perfect will of God. He has uttered not one tittle too much—nothing more than he had received of the Father; nor too little—he has not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God; much less has he uttered anything wrong, anything contrary to the will of him that sent him. All his words are true and right concerning all things, and shall stand fast for ever and ever.

And we may easily remark, that in explaining and confirming these faithful and true sayings, he takes care to refute not only the mistakes of the scribes and Pharisees, which then were the false comments whereby the Jewish teachers of that age had perverted the word of God, but all the practical mistakes that are inconsistent with salvation, which should ever arise in the Christian Church; all the comments whereby the Christian teachers (so called) of any age or nation should pervert the word of God, and teach unwary souls to seek death in the error of their life.

4. And hence we are naturally led to observe, whom it is that he is here teaching. Not the apostles alone; if so, he had no need to have gone up into the mountain. A room in the house of Matthew, or any of his disciples, would have contained the Twelve. Nor does it in anywise appear that the disciples who came unto him were the Twelve only. Οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ, without any force put upon the expression, may be understood of *all who desired to learn of him*. But to put this out of all question, to make it undeniably plain that where it is said, “He opened his

mouth and taught them," the word *them* includes all the multitudes who went up with him into the mountain, we need only observe the concluding verses of the seventh chapter: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, οἱ ὄχλοι, *the multitudes*, were astonished at his doctrine," or teaching; "for he taught them," the multitudes, "as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29).

Nor was it only those multitudes who were with him on the mount, to whom he now taught the way of salvation; but all the children of men; the whole race of mankind; the children that were yet unborn; all the generations to come, even to the end of the world, who should ever hear the words of this life.

5. And this all men allow, with regard to some parts of the ensuing discourse. No man, for instance, denies that what is said of poverty of spirit relates to all mankind. But many have supposed, that other parts concerned only the apostles, or the first Christians, or the ministers of Christ; and were never designed for the generality of men, who, consequently, have nothing at all to do with them.

But may we not justly inquire, who told them this, that some parts of this discourse concerned only the apostles, or the Christians of the apostolic age, or the ministers of Christ? Bare assertions are not a sufficient proof to establish a point of so great importance. Has then our Lord himself taught us that some parts of his discourse do not concern all mankind? Without doubt, had it been so, he would have told us; he could not have omitted so necessary an information. But has he told us so? Where? In the discourse itself? No, here is not the least intimation of it. Has he said so elsewhere in any other of his discourses? Not one word so much as glancing this way can we find in anything he ever spoke, either to the multitudes, or to his disciples. Has any one of the apostles, or other inspired writers, left such an instruction upon record? No such thing.

No assertion of this kind is to be found in all the oracles of God. Who then are the men who are so much wiser than God—wise so far above that [which] is written?

6. Perhaps they will say that the reason of the thing requires such a restriction to be made. If it does, it must be on one of these two accounts; because, without such a restriction, the discourse would either be apparently absurd, or would contradict some other scripture. But this is not the case. It will plainly appear, when we come to examine the several particulars, that there is no absurdity at all in applying all which our Lord has here delivered to all mankind. Neither will it infer any contradiction to anything else he has delivered, nor to any other scripture whatever. Nay, it will farther appear that either all the parts of this discourse are to be applied to men in general, or no part; seeing they are all connected together, all joined as the stones in an arch, of which you cannot take one away, without destroying the whole fabric.

7. We may, lastly, observe, how our Lord teaches here. And surely, as at all times, so particularly at this, he speaks “as never man spoke.” Not as the holy men of old; although they also spoke “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Not as Peter, or James, or John, or Paul: they were indeed wise master-builders in his Church; but still in this, in the degrees of heavenly wisdom, the servant is not as his Lord. No, nor even as himself at any other time, or on any other occasion. It does not appear that it was ever his design, at any other time or place, to lay down at once the whole plan of his religion; to give us a full prospect of Christianity; to describe at large the nature of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. Particular branches of this he has indeed described, on a thousand different occasions; but never, besides here, did he give, of set purpose, a general view of the whole. Nay, we have nothing else of this kind in all the Bible; unless one should

except that short sketch of holiness delivered by God in those Ten Words or Commandments to Moses, on Mount Sinai. But even here how wide a difference is there between one and the other! "Even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excels" (2 Cor. 3:10).

8. Above all, with what amazing love does the Son of God here reveal his Father's will to man! He does not bring us again "to the mount that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest." He does not speak as when he "thundered out of heaven"; when the Highest "gave his thunder, hail-stones, and coals of fire." He now addresses us with his still, small voice—"blessed," or happy, "are the poor in spirit." Happy are the mourners, the meek, those that hunger after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart. Happy in the end, and in the way; happy in this life, and in life everlasting! As if he had said, "Who is he that lusts to live, and would fain see good days? Behold, I show you the thing which your soul longs for! See the way you have so long sought in vain; the way of pleasantness; the path to calm, joyous peace, to heaven below and heaven above!"

9. At the same time, with what authority does he teach! Well might they say, "Not as the scribes." Observe the manner (but it cannot be expressed in words), the air, with which he speaks! Not as Moses, the servant of God; not as Abraham, his friend; not as any of the prophets; nor as any of the sons of men. It is something more than human; more than can agree to any created being. It speaks the Creator of all! A God, a God appears! Yea, O ΩΝ, the Being of beings, JEHOVAH, the self-existent, the Supreme, the God who is over all, blessed for ever!

10. This divine discourse, delivered in the most excellent method, every subsequent part illustrating those that precede, is commonly, and not improperly, divided into three principal branches: the first, contained in the fifth; the second, in the

sixth; and the third, in the seventh chapter. In the first, the sum of all true religion is laid down in eight particulars, which are explained, and guarded against the false glosses of man, in the following parts of the fifth chapter. In the second are rules for that right intention which we are to preserve in all our outward actions, unmixed with worldly desires, or anxious cares for even the necessaries of life. In the third are cautions against the main hindrances of religion, closed with an application of the whole.

## I. Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit

1. Our Lord, first, lays down the sum of all true religion in eight particulars, which he explains, and guards against the false glosses of men, to the end of the fifth chapter.

### *The Foundation of All*

Some have supposed that he designed, in these, to point out the several stages of the Christian course; the steps which a Christian successively takes in his journey to the promised land; others, that all the particulars here set down belong at all times to every Christian. And why may we not allow both the one and the other? What inconsistency is there between them? It is undoubtedly true, that both poverty of spirit, and every other temper which is here mentioned, are at all times found, in a greater or less degree, in every real Christian. And it is equally true that real Christianity always begins in poverty of spirit, and goes on in the order here set down, till the "man of God is made perfect." We begin at the lowest of these gifts of God, yet so as not to relinquish this, when we are called of God to come up higher. But "whereunto we have already attained, we hold fast," while we press on to what is yet before, to the highest blessings of God in Christ Jesus.

2. The foundation of all is poverty of spirit. Here, therefore, our Lord begins: "Blessed," says he, "are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It may not improbably be supposed that our Lord looked on those who were round about him, and, observing that not many rich were there, but rather the poor of the world, took occasion from thence to make a transition from temporal to spiritual things. "Blessed," says he (or happy—so the word should be rendered, both in this and the following verses), "are the poor in spirit." He does not say they that are poor, as to outward circumstances—it being not impossible, that some of these may be as far from happiness as a monarch upon his throne; but "the poor in spirit"—they who, whatever their outward circumstances are, have that disposition of heart which is the first step to all real, substantial happiness, either in this world, or that which is to come.

*The Poor in Spirit Are Not Those Who Love Poverty*

3. Some have judged, that by the poor in spirit here, are meant those who love poverty; those who are free from covetousness, from the love of money; who fear, rather than desire, riches. Perhaps they have been induced so to judge, by wholly confining their thoughts to the very term; or by considering that weighty observation of St. Paul, that "the love of money is the root of all evil." And hence many have wholly divested themselves, not only of riches, but of all worldly goods. Hence also the vows of voluntary poverty seem to have arisen in the Romish Church; it being supposed, that so eminent a degree of this fundamental grace must be a large step toward the "kingdom of heaven."

But these do not seem to have observed, first, that the expression of St. Paul must be understood with some restriction; otherwise it is not true; for the love of money is not the root, the sole root, of all evil. There are a thousand other roots

of evil in the world, as sad experience daily shows. His meaning can only be, it is the root of very many evils; perhaps of more than any single vice besides.

Secondly, that this sense of the expression "poor in spirit," will by no means suit our Lord's present design, which is to lay a general foundation whereon the whole fabric of Christianity may be built; a design which would be in no wise answered by guarding against one particular vice: so that, if even this were supposed to be one part of his meaning, it could not possibly be the whole

Thirdly, that it cannot be supposed to be any part of his meaning, unless we charge him with manifest tautology: seeing, if poverty of spirit were only freedom from covetousness, from the love of money, or the desire of riches, it would coincide with what he afterwards mentions, it would be only a branch of purity of heart.

#### *The Poor in Spirit Are the Humble*

4. Who then are "the poor in spirit"? Without question, the humble; they who know themselves; who are convinced of sin; those to whom God has given that first repentance, which is previous to faith in Christ.

One of these can no longer say, "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing"; as now knowing, that he is "wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked." He is convinced that he is spiritually poor indeed; having no spiritual good abiding in him. "In me," says he, "dwelleth no good thing," but whatsoever is evil and abominable. He has a deep sense of the loathsome leprosy of sin, which he brought with him from his mother's womb, which overspreads his whole soul, and totally corrupts every power and faculty thereof.

He sees more and more of the evil tempers which spring from that evil root; the pride and haughtiness of spirit, the

constant bias to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; the vanity, the thirst after the esteem or honor that cometh from men, the hatred or envy, the jealousy or revenge, the anger, malice, or bitterness; the inbred enmity both against God and man, which appears in ten thousand shapes; the love of the world, the self-will, the foolish and hurtful desires, which cleave to his inmost soul. He is conscious how deeply he has offended by his tongue; if not by profane, immodest, untrue, or unkind words, yet by discourse which was not "good to the use of edifying," not "meet to minister grace to the hearers"; which, consequently, was all corrupt in God's account, and grievous to his Holy Spirit. His evil works are now likewise ever in his sight: if he tells them, they are more than he is able to express. He may as well think to number the drops of rain, the sands of the sea, or the days of eternity.

5. His guilt is now also before his face: he knows the punishment he has deserved, were it only on account of his carnal mind, the entire, universal corruption of his nature; how much more, on account of all his evil desires and thoughts, of all his sinful words and actions! He cannot doubt for a moment, but the least of these deserves the damnation of hell—"the worm that dieth not, and the fire that never shall be quenched." Above all, the guilt of "not believing on the name of the only-begotten Son of God" lies heavy upon him. How, says he, shall I escape, who "neglect so great salvation!" "He that believes not is condemned already," and "the wrath of God abides on him."

6. But what shall he give in exchange for his soul, which is forfeited to the just vengeance of God? "Wherewithal shall he come before the Lord?" How shall he pay him that he owes? Were he from this moment to perform the most perfect obedience to every command of God, this would make no amends for a single sin, for any one act of past disobedience; seeing he owes God all the service he is able to perform, from this

moment to all eternity: could he pay this, it would make no manner of amends for what he ought to have done before. He sees himself therefore utterly helpless with regard to atoning for his past sins; utterly unable to make any amends to God, to pay any ransom for his own soul.

But if God would forgive him all that is past, on this one condition, that he should sin no more; that for the time to come he should entirely and constantly obey all his commands; he well knows that this would profit him nothing, being a condition he could never perform. He knows and feels that he is not able to obey even the outward commands of God; seeing these cannot be obeyed while his heart remains in its natural sinfulness and corruption; inasmuch as an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit. But he cannot cleanse a sinful heart; with men this is impossible: so that he is utterly at a loss even how to begin walking in the path of God's commandments. He knows not how to get one step forward in the way. Encompassed with sin, and sorrow, and fear, and finding no way to escape, he can only cry out, "Lord, save, or I perish!"

7. Poverty of spirit then, as it implies the first step we take in running the race which is set before us, is a just sense of our inward and outward sins, and of our guilt and helplessness. This some have monstrously styled, "the virtue of humility"; thus teaching us to be proud of knowing we deserve damnation! But our Lord's expression is quite of another kind; conveying no idea to the hearer, but that of mere want, of naked sin, of helpless guilt and misery.

### *The Poor in Spirit Are the Helpless*

8. The great apostle, where he endeavors to bring sinners to God, speaks in a manner just answerable to this. "The wrath of God," says he, "is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18ff); a charge

which he immediately fixes on the heathen world, and thereby proves they are under the wrath of God. He next shows that the Jews were no better than they, and were therefore under the same condemnation; and all this, not in order to their attaining “the noble virtue of humility,” but “that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God.”

He proceeds to show that they were helpless as well as guilty, which is the plain purport of all those expressions: “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified”—“But now the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, without the law, is manifested”—“We conclude, that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law”—expressions all tending to the same point, even to “hide pride from man”; to humble him to the dust, without teaching him to reflect upon his humility as a virtue; to inspire him with that full, piercing conviction of his utter sinfulness, guilt, and helplessness, which casts the sinner, stripped of all, lost and undone, on his strong Helper, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

9. One cannot but observe here that Christianity begins just where heathen morality ends; poverty of spirit, conviction of sin, the renouncing ourselves, the not having our own righteousness (the very first point in the religion of Jesus Christ), leaving all pagan religion behind. This was ever hid from the wise men of this world; insomuch that the whole Roman language, even with all the improvements of the Augustan age, does not afford so much as a name for humility (the word from whence we borrow this, as is well known, bearing in Latin a quite different meaning); no, nor was one found in all the copious language of Greece, till it was made by the great apostle.

10. O that we may feel what they were not able to express! Sinner, awake! Know thyself! Know and feel, that you were “shapen in wickedness,” and that “in sin did your mother conceive you”; and that you yourself have been heaping up sin

upon sin, ever since you could discern good from evil! Sink under the mighty hand of God, as guilty of death eternal; and cast off, renounce, abhor, all imagination of ever being able to help yourself! Be it all your hope to be washed in his blood, and renewed by his almighty Spirit, who himself "bare all our sins in his own body on the tree!" So shall you witness, "Happy are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

*For Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven*

11. This is that kingdom of heaven, or of God, which is within us; even "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." And what is "righteousness," but the life of God in the soul; the mind which was in Christ Jesus; the image of God stamped upon the heart, now renewed after the likeness of him that created it? What is it but the love of God, because he first loved us, and the love of all mankind for his sake?

And what is this "peace," the peace of God, but that calm serenity of soul, that sweet repose in the blood of Jesus, which leaves no doubt of our acceptance in him; which excludes all fear, but the loving filial fear of offending our Father which is in heaven?

This inward kingdom implies also "joy in the Holy Ghost"; who seals upon our hearts "the redemption which is in Jesus," the righteousness of Christ imputed to us "for the remission of the sins that are past"; who gives us now "the earnest of our inheritance," of the crown which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give at that day. And well may this be termed, "the kingdom of heaven"; seeing it is heaven already opened in the soul; the first springing up of those rivers of pleasure which flow at God's right hand for evermore.

12. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Whosoever you are, to whom God has given to be "poor in spirit," to feel yourself lost, you have a right thereto, through the gracious promise of

him who cannot lie. It is purchased for you by the blood of the Lamb. It is very nigh: you are on the brink of heaven! Another step, and you enter into the kingdom of righteousness, and peace, and joy!

Are you all sin? "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!" All unholy? See your "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous!" Are you unable to atone for the least of your sins? "He is the propitiation for" all your "sins." Now believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and all your sins are blotted out! Are you totally unclean in soul and body? Here is the "fountain for sin and uncleanness!" "Arise, and wash away your sins!" Stagger no more at the promise through unbelief! Give glory to God! Dare to believe! Now cry out, from the ground of thy heart,

Yes, I yield, I yield at last,  
Listen to thy speaking blood;  
Me with all my sins, I cast  
On my atoning God.

13. Then you learn of him to be "lowly of heart." And this is the true, genuine, Christian humility, which flows from a sense of the love of God, reconciled to us in Christ Jesus. Poverty of spirit, in this meaning of the word, begins where a sense of guilt and of the wrath of God ends; and is a continual sense of our total dependence on him, for every good thought, or word, or work; of our utter inability to all good, unless he "water us every moment"; and an abhorrence of the praise of men, knowing that all praise is due unto God only. With this is joined a loving shame, a tender humiliation before God, even for the sins which we know he has forgiven us, and for the sin which still remains in our hearts, although we know it is not imputed to our condemnation. Nevertheless, the conviction we feel of inbred sin is deeper and deeper every day.

The more we grow in grace, the more do we see of the desperate wickedness of our heart. The more we advance in the knowledge and love of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ (as great a mystery as this may appear to those who know not the power of God unto salvation), the more do we discern of our alienation from God, of the enmity that is in our carnal mind, and the necessity of our being entirely renewed in righteousness and true holiness.

## II. Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

1. It is true, he has scarce any conception of this who now begins to know the inward kingdom of heaven. "In his prosperity he says, I shall never be moved; you, Lord, have made my hill so strong." Sin is so utterly bruised beneath his feet, that he can scarce believe it remains in him. Even temptation is silenced, and speaks not again: it cannot approach, but stands afar off. He is borne aloft in the chariots of joy and love: he soars, "as upon the wings of an eagle." But our Lord well knew that this triumphant state does not often continue long. He therefore presently subjoins, "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

### *Mourning Not Worldly Troubles*

2. Not that we can imagine this promise belongs to those who mourn only on some worldly account; who are in sorrow and heaviness merely on account of some worldly trouble or disappointment, such as the loss of their reputation or friends, or the impairing of their fortune. As little title to it have they who are afflicting themselves, through fear of some temporal evil; or who pine away with anxious care, or that desire of earthly things which "maketh the heart sick." Let us not think these "shall receive anything from the Lord": he is not in all

their thoughts. Therefore it is that they thus “walk in a vain shadow, and disquiet themselves in vain.” “And this shall you have of my hand,” says the Lord, “you shall lie down in sorrow.”

### *Mourning for an Absent God*

3. The mourners of whom our Lord here speaks are those that mourn on quite another account: they that mourn after God; after him in whom they did “rejoice with joy unspeakable,” when he gave them to “taste the good,” the pardoning “word, and the powers of the world to come.” But he now “hides his face, and they are troubled.” They cannot see him through the dark cloud. But they see temptation and sin, which they fondly supposed were gone never to return, arising again, following after them amain, and holding them in on every side. It is not strange if their soul is now disquieted within them, and trouble and heaviness take hold upon them. Nor will their great enemy fail to improve the occasion, to ask, “Where is now your God? Where is now the blessedness whereof you spoke? The beginning of the kingdom of heaven? Yea, has God said, ‘Your sins are forgiven you’? Surely God has not said it. It was only a dream, a mere delusion, a creature of your own imagination. If your sins are forgiven, why are you thus? Can a pardoned sinner be thus unholy?”

And, if then, instead of immediately crying to God, they reason with him that is wiser than they, they will be in heaviness indeed, in sorrow of heart, in anguish not to be expressed. Nay even when God shines again upon the soul, and takes away all doubt of his past mercy, still he that is weak in faith may be tempted and troubled on account of what is to come; especially when inward sin revives, and thrusts sore at him that he may fall. Then may he again cry out,

I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun  
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore!  
Lest I should make shipwreck of the faith,  
and my last state be worse than the first:  
Lest all my bread of life should fail,  
And I sink down unchanged to hell!

*Recovering the Joy of His Countenance*

4. Sure it is that this "affliction," for the present, "is not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it bringeth forth peaceable fruit unto them that are exercised thereby." Blessed, therefore, are they that thus mourn, if they "tarry the Lord's leisure," and suffer not themselves to be turned out of the way, by the miserable comforters of the world; if they resolutely reject all the comforts of sin, of folly, and vanity; all the idle diversions and amusements of the world; all the pleasures which "perish in the using," and which only tend to benumb and stupefy the soul, that it may neither be sensible of itself nor God.

Blessed are they who "follow on to know the Lord," and steadily refuse all other comfort. They shall be comforted by the consolations of his Spirit; by a fresh manifestation of his love; by such a witness of his accepting them in the Beloved, as shall never more be taken away from them. This "full assurance of faith" swallows up all doubt, as well as all tormenting fear; God now giving them a sure hope of an enduring substance, and "strong consolation through grace." Without disputing whether it be possible for any of those to "fall away, who were once enlightened and made partakers of the Holy Ghost," it suffices them to say, by the power now resting upon them, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor things present nor

things to come, nor height nor depth, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

5. This whole process, both of mourning for an absent God, and recovering the joy of his countenance, seems to be shadowed out in what our Lord spoke to his apostles the night before his passion: "Do you inquire of that I said, A little while, and you shall not see me: and again, a little while, and you shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, that you shall weep and lament"; namely, when you do not see me; "but the world shall rejoice"; shall triumph over you, as though your hope were now come to an end. "And you shall be sorrowful," through doubt, through fear, through temptation, through vehement desire; "but your sorrow shall be turned into joy," by the return of him whom your soul loves.

"A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come. But as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And you now have sorrow"; you mourn and cannot be comforted; "but I will see you again; and your heart shall rejoice," with calm, inward joy, "and your joy no man takes from you" (John 16:19-22).

### *Mourning for the Sins of Mankind*

6. But although this mourning is at an end, is lost in holy joy, by the return of the Comforter, yet is there another, and a blessed mourning it is, which abides in the children of God. They still mourn for the sins and miseries of mankind: they "weep with them that weep." They weep for them that weep not for themselves, for the sinners against their own souls. They mourn for the weakness and unfaithfulness of those that are, in some measure, saved from their sins. "Who is weak, and they are not weak? Who is offended, and they burn not?" They

are grieved for the dishonor continually done to the Majesty of heaven and earth.

At all times they have an awful sense of this, which brings a deep seriousness upon their spirit; a seriousness which is not a little increased, since the eyes of their understanding were opened, by their continually seeing the vast ocean of eternity, without a bottom or a shore, which has already swallowed up millions of millions of men, and is gaping to devour them that yet remain. They see here the house of God eternal in the heavens; there, hell and destruction without a covering; and thence feel the importance of every moment, which just appears, and is gone for ever!

*Foolishness to the World, Wisdom of God*

7. But all this wisdom of God is foolishness with the world. The whole affair of mourning and poverty of spirit is with them stupidity and dullness. Nay, it is well if they pass so favorable a judgment upon it; if they do not vote it to be mere moping and melancholy, if not downright lunacy and distraction. And it is no wonder at all that this judgment should be passed by those who know not God. Suppose, as two persons were walking together, one should suddenly stop, and with the strongest signs of fear and amazement, cry out, "On what a precipice do we stand! See, we are on the point of being dashed in pieces! Another step, and we fall into that huge abyss! Stop! I will not go on for all the world!" When the other, who seemed, to himself at least, equally sharp-sighted, looked forward and saw nothing of all this, what would he think of his companion, but that he was beside himself; that his head was out of order; that much religion (if he was not guilty of "much learning") had certainly made him mad!

8. But let not the children of God, "the mourners in Zion," be moved by any of these things. You, whose eyes are

enlightened, be not troubled by those who walk on still in darkness. You do not walk on in a vain shadow: God and eternity are real things. Heaven and hell are in very deed open before you; and you are on the edge of the great gulf. It has already swallowed up more than words can express; nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues; and still yawns to devour, whether they see it or no, the giddy, miserable children of men. O cry aloud! Spare not! Lift up your voice to him who grasps both time and eternity, both for yourselves and your brethren, that you may be counted worthy to escape the destruction that comes as a whirlwind; that you may be brought safe through all the waves and storms into the haven where you would be! Weep for yourselves, till he wipes away the tears from your eyes. And even then, weep for the miseries that come upon the earth, till the Lord of all shall put a period to misery and sin, shall wipe away the tears from all faces, and "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea."