

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Excerpts from a Sermon on “Depending on the Lord”
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The Sermon on the Mount took place early in the Lord’s ministry. He had just begun traveling around in Galilee and Judea, teaching in the synagogues, and healing diseases. Even though He hadn’t been at it long, already the Lord’s fame had spread throughout the land. So when He ascended that mountain, a multitude—gathered from Galilee and Decapolis in the north, from Jerusalem and the surrounding area of Judea, and from the cities and villages across the Jordan—followed Him.

Let’s focus on the Lord walking up that mountain, followed by all these people, and reflect on what His goal was. We know that the Lord’s mission in all He does is to get as many people to heaven as possible. As we are told in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church in the book on *Divine Providence*, “The Divine Providence of the Lord has for its end a heaven from the human race” (heading to nos. 27-45). We also know that while the Lord was in this world, everything He did arose from His love for the salvation of all people (see *Arcana Coelestia* 1789). Perhaps the Lord also had in mind a section from Isaiah which proclaims His mission on earth as follows: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound...” (*Isaiah* 61:1).

In our limited way, we might picture the Lord thinking within Himself, “What can I tell these people which will allow them to accept Me as their God? How am I going to be able to lead them closer to heaven?” With these thoughts springing from His Divine love for all people, Jesus ascended that mountain, sat down, and began to teach. And out of His mouth flowed the familiar words of the Sermon on the Mount—powerful and rich statements which He knew these people needed to hear.

He talked to them about meekness and mercy and forgiveness—inner qualities instead of just the external facts of how they lived their lives. He taught them about deeper levels of meaning in the commandments He had given them before, like what it means to murder someone by means of anger, or how we can sometimes commit adultery in our minds by failing to control lustful thoughts. He talked to them about praying, teaching them the Lord’s prayer. In general, the message in the Sermon on the Mount, indeed, the whole of what He was trying to accomplish with His life on earth, was to teach people how to figuratively follow Him to heaven, as they had literally followed Him up the mountain that day.

The first part of the Sermon on the Mount is called the Ten Blessings. These are powerful statements about the attitudes we need to develop in our lives (or allow the Lord to cultivate in us) to permit ourselves to be led by Him. The Lord delivered His messages in a masterful way. He challenged people in the very words He chose. Some of the things He said seem counter-intuitive. Are poverty, meekness, and the extreme sadness pictured by someone mourning the death of a loved one things to strive for? Should we really rejoice in being persecuted? Where is the blessing in these things?

It doesn't seem that these things bring blessing or happiness at all. At least not until we realize that the Lord was teaching people what kinds of attitudes they need to enable Him to lead them to heaven. Mourning over the evil we see in this world, in the lives of people we love, and in ourselves, shows a level of understanding of what is true and of what will genuinely bring happiness. Willingness to stand up strongly for what we believe, even if it's not popular, is a healthy quality! These are attitudes with which the Lord can work. They may not always be pleasant, but they will bring the lasting happiness, the blessedness of eternal life, which He longs to give us.

The Lord came on earth to make Himself more approachable—to show us His desire to serve, lead and bless, to show where He longs to lead us, and how to get there. He came to make sure we knew who it was we are to acknowledge, so that we can freely choose to be poor in spirit, that is, to depend on Him for our guidance. He yearns to preach good tidings to the poor—to those who will accept what He says. He longs to heal the brokenhearted—to help us face the sometimes crushing blows of life, as when someone close to us dies. And He strives to “proclaim liberty” to those of us who are captive.

We all fall captive to negative states at times, to lustful thoughts, to self pity, and lack of regard for others. He wants to show us those patterns of behavior, and the blessedness of choosing a different way. He wants to comfort us when we mourn. He knows there will be many things—large and small which cause us sadness—friends who make bad choices, our own insensitivity to another person's needs, corruption in the world around us—and He promises to help us with all these things. But He can only do it if we place our trust in Him. Only then can He give us the calmness, the patience, the wisdom, the endurance to handle whatever life places before us.

We can receive more of these blessings from Him, the more often we turn to Him and ask for His guidance. With this principle firmly rooted in our lives, the Lord will be able to lead us to that greatest of all blessings, “the kingdom of heaven.”