

Divine Blessings

by

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Matthew 5, 1-12

1. And seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:
2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them saying,
3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
12. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Introduction

THIS is a little book of meditations on the blessings of Jesus.

To begin to understand them we need to be poor in spirit: we need to be aware of our sad state and utter dependence on the Lord. These blessings are for spiritual 'babes and sucklings' rather than for the seemingly wise and prudent.

They will hardly be understood by those who seekly worldly prestige, or personal distinction. How can the meek inherit the earth? Or how can those who are reviled and persecuted rejoice and be exceeding glad?

Before any of these blessings can be received there must be room for them. How many of us have room? The inn at Bethlehem had no room for Jesus. To prepare room, and to receive some of these blessings is to enter into a new experience of happiness.

Each chapter is followed by a page of Quotations for meditation and a blank space for the reader's notes.

Jesus

THE BLESSINGS THIS book speaks of come from Jesus, and refer to Him and His kingdom.

His Kingdom is not of this world, neither are the blessings. We begin to understand them as we learn to love Jesus. Only love for Him can properly open our eyes; and only His qualities in our hearts and understandings can receive the blessings. Their first requirement is that we know our spiritual need. Their last is sufficient love for Jesus to enable us to endure reviling and persecution for His sake.

In Galilee it was Jesus whom the multitudes came to see and hear: Jesus who had compassion on them and healed their sick. It is just the same now: it is Jesus whom we all need.

The beatitudes are the beginning of heavenly teaching. They are the actual message of Jesus to the poor and needy, and to folk who are sad and distressed. Jesus brings the good tidings near to people; He tells them the qualities that can really receive the Kingdom of heaven and His comfort.

In the pulpit of a Methodist chapel in the midst of Dartmoor there is a notice for the preacher. It reads: 'Sir, we would see Jesus' (John 12, 21). An urgent reminder and important for speaker and listener. Unless we see Jesus we cannot love Him, and unless we hear His words we will not know how to live.

While reading the beatitudes remember it is Jesus and His love for us, and our need of Him that matters. If we keep this in mind while we read, many a cloud will begin to let the light through.

Jesus is Emmanuel. God with us. He is the beginning and ending, the first and the last. Our Father and our Saviour.

PRAYER

'Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord, even thy salvation, according to thy word' (Psalm 119, 41).

Quotations

'Thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins'
(Matthew 1, 21).

'He that hath seen me', said Jesus 'hath seen the Father' (John 14, 9).

'In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily' (Paul in Colossians 2,
9).

'Learn of me', Jesus said, 'for I am meek and lowly in heart' (Matthew 11,
29).

'O Jesus! is the fountain.
The deep, sweet well of love;
The streams on earth I've tasted
More deep I'll drink above;
There to an ocean fulness
His mercy doth expand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land'.

(A. R. Cousin)

'Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the
sheep' (John 10, 7).

Multitudes

'And seeing the multitudes . . .'

JESUS HAD BEEN preaching and healing throughout Galilee. Everywhere people had brought their sick and diseased ones to Him, and we read that He healed them all. As His fame increased the crowds grew into great multitudes: people coming not only from Galilee but from Decapolis and Judaea and from beyond Jordan.

Jesus looked upon these multitudes of sick and troubled people and went up into a mountain. Here the disciples came to Him, and here He taught them the blessings and doctrine of heaven.

Because this is all a part of the Lord's Word it is spirit and life, it is full of meaning for each of us to-day, and should have a place in our inner spiritual experience.

As our religious life matures Jesus comes to us from within His Word. The literal story opens up and reveals Him in His glory, much as the clouds of the natural world will open and reveal the sunshine after a cloudy day. Then we feel His presence and become conscious of deep and wonderful meanings beneath the surface of the letter of the Word.

The spiritual picture carried by this record of Jesus preaching and healing throughout Galilee represents His preaching and healing among the multitudes of feelings and thoughts that fill our daily lives. These feelings and thoughts, and their resulting activities form the boundary of our spiritual life—the circuit of the soul. The name Galilee means circuit.

It is the desires of our hearts, and the thoughts that fill our minds that really make us what we are. They form the character which lives for ever. It is this that Jesus seeks to save.

Thoughts quickly multiply into multitudes. If we love Jesus first they are thoughts of truth; if we love ourselves first they are thoughts of evil.

PRAYER

'O Lord, in the multitude of my thoughts within me, may thy comforts delight my soul' (Psalm 94, 19).

Quotations

'Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil' (Exodus 23, 2).

'Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision' (Joel 3, 14).

'And Jesus commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude' (Matthew 14, 19).

'Who is this Jesus ? Why should He
The city move so mightily ?
A passing stranger, has He skill
To move the multitude at will ?
Again the stirring tones reply:
Jesus of Nazareth passeth by'.
(E. Campbell)

The Mountain

'Jesus went up into a mountain . . .'

THE LORD'S LOVE is like a mountain. It is high above all the things of merely worldly concern. If we make the Lord our chief delight we shall have a spiritual mountain within us.

This natural world is made more beautiful by the mountains, and they serve a great use to all below. We climb their slopes and enjoy the invigorating air, and love the view.

It is much the same with the mountains of the Lord's Word, but these reveal greater wonder and still more majestic scenery. They are composed of the Lord's love and wisdom. To climb them only a little way is to come into new wonder and surprise; and to enjoy visions of delight beyond anything we could imagine. Our lower natural life depends on them in everything.

Jesus going up into a mountain, is really a picture of His presence in a higher sphere, from which He tells us the blessings of His Kingdom. We climb the mountains when we read the Word and seriously try to understand His teaching. We go still higher when we begin to do what we learn. We say 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating', likewise the proof of the wonder of the teaching of Jesus is in the keeping.

If we would like to live on these mountains, rather than in the lowlands we can do so. It means keeping the first great commandment: loving Jesus and receiving His love. It is difficult at first, just as climbing natural mountains is, but the reward is far greater than all the cost.

We can even have a mountain of the Lord in our own hearts. Every bit of love for Him, and every truth of His we live, helps to build a spiritual mountain in our souls.

PRAYER

'O Lord help me to lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help' (Psalm 121,1)

Quotations

'And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills' (Deuteronomy 33, 15).

'O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me to thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles' (Psalm 43, 3).

'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good' (Isaiah 52, 7).

'And after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them' (Mark 9, 2).

'Stay, master, stay upon this heavenly hill:
A little longer let us linger still:
With all the mighty ones of old beside,
Near to the awful Presence still abide:
Before the throne of light we trembling stand,
And catch a glimpse into the spirit-land'.

(S. Greg)

Disciples

'And when Jesus was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth and taught them'.

JESUS sitting on the mountain represents a settled state: the state of His changeless love.

When we have some love for Him it lifts us up above merely selfish things and forms a mountain in our minds where He can rest.

The disciples represent those who want to be led by the Lord, not by themselves. This being so they come to Jesus to listen to His words.

In our minds the disciples are the few affections for His teachings which listen to Him. To do this they lift their eyes up to learn from Him. The more they learn the more they want to follow. Then the better they follow, the better they can help the crowds of feelings and thoughts that fill our worldly life.

In another picture all the truths we learn from the Lord's Word are disciples of Jesus. They all belong to Him and tell of His wonders. They are spiritual mirrors reflecting His love and witnessing for Him.

Long ago Jesus sent His disciples into all the world to preach the gospel to every creature; to-day He sends our few affections for His truth into every part to speak for Him. We are each of us little worlds much like the pattern of the great world without, and into every part of this world of our souls the teaching of Jesus must be proclaimed.

There are many sick and troubled affections, and many doubting anxious thoughts in the world of our minds; and to all of these the Lord sends His message of love, healing, and teaching. All the truths we learn from Him, He teaches us on the holy hills of His Word, and prepares them to be His disciples within us.

PRAYER

'O Lord, send out thy light and thy truth; and let them bring me to thy holy hill' (Psalm 43, 3).

Quotations

'To be the Lord's disciples, is to be led by the Lord and not by self'
(Swedenborg A.C. 10490).

'If ye abide in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed' (John 8, 31).

'After this Jesus poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples'
feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded' (John 13, 5).

'O loving Lord, who art for ever seeking
Men of Thy mind, intent to do Thy will,
Strong in Thy strength, Thy power and love bespeaking.
Faithfull to Thee, through good report and ill'.

(W. V. Jenkins)

'If man aspires to reach the throne of God, O'er the dull plains of earth must
lie the road: He who best does his lowly duty here, Shall mount the highest in
a nobler sphere: At God's own feet our spirits seek their rest, And he is
nearest Him who serves Him best'. (S. Greg) 20

The Poor

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

AT FIRST THIS is difficult to understand, and it is quite opposed to the world's view of blessings. What does it mean ?

To be blessed means to be happy, to be poor means to be in need, and 'in spirit' refers to the life that is within us. The Kingdom of Heaven is the state of life here and hereafter, where the Lord's kingship is acknowledged.

The spiritually poor know they have no good feelings of their own, and no truth either. They know they can do nothing without the Lord; and when they pray they say from their hearts 'Thy will be done': thus the kingdom of heaven is theirs. On the other hand, those who are rich in themselves, are full; like the inn at Bethlehem they have no room for the Lord or His Kingdom. The way is blocked by self-satisfaction, the love of importance and distinction.

Happiness is what we all seek, and this teaching of Jesus is the first step to its attainment. It is so because there is no deep lasting happiness except from Him, and nothing can induce us to go to Him but our feeling of utter need. The prodigal 'came to himself when he realised he was completely destitute, and not till then was he able to enjoy His father's love: Read Luke chapter 15.

The blessing is in having the kingdom of heaven; it is not said that we go to it but rather that it becomes ours; which means that we come under the government of the Lord's love and wisdom.

It is by acknowledging, that of ourselves, we are poor in spirit, we are able to receive the blessing: then we are rich, not in ourselves but in the Lord.

PRAYER

'Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy' (Psalm 86, 1).

Quotations

'He is called poor and needy who believes from the heart . . . that of himself he possesses nothing, knows nothing, is not wise, and has no power; and in heaven he is rich and abounds' (Swedenborg A.C. 4459).

'This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles' (Psalm 34, 6).

'I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me' (Psalm 40, 17).

'He that is down needs fear no fall, He that is low, no pride; He that is humble ever shall Have God to be His guide'.
(John Bunyan)

'Hold Thou my hand, so weak I am and helpless,
I dare not take one step without Thine aid;
Hold Thou my hand, for then, O loving Saviour,
No dread of ill shall make my soul afraid'.
(Fanny Crosby)

Mourning

'Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted'.

TO MOURN is to be troubled with grief and sadness: and to be comforted is to receive love and understanding.

It is the same in our religious life but the mourning then has a spiritual quality and is, felt more deeply.

We mourn in spirit in periods of temptation, and when we become conscious of our many mistakes; and think of our worthlessness and lost opportunities. Then in our grief we come to know we need the Lord, for in this no one else can help us: our hearts cry out to Him and He turns our sorrow into joy. Thus comfort comes.

One of the strangest and most wonderful of spiritual experiences is, that we may feel the deepest distress and sorrow and at the same time be conscious of great happiness interiorly. Grief and sorrow soften the hardness of our hearts, and make it possible for the Lord's comforting love to enter.

Sometimes we seem to come into a state of mourning unexpectedly, if however we examine the position we will probably find we have lost our vision, and our happiness in the Lord. Perhaps we have forgotten to read His Word, and have neglected our prayers. Then when trouble comes we remember and again run to Him. This turning to Him brings comfort, for the Lord is nigh unto them of a broken heart.

Spiritual mourning is a sign that we really do want to follow Jesus, otherwise we would not care about His love at all.

Though spiritual mourning is in itself a state of grief and distress, it brings us away from the love of ourselves and nearer to the love of the Lord. Then the more closely we are conjoined to Him the happier we become.

PRAYER

'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions' (Psalm 51, 1).

Quotations

'I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me ? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' (Psalm 42, 9).

'I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow' (Jeremiah 31,13).

'Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy' (John 16, 20).

'Rest of the weary, Joy of the sad,
Hope of the dreary, Light of the glad,
Home of the stranger, Strength to the end,
Refuge from danger, Saviour and friend'.

(J. S. B. Monsell)

'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit' (Psalm 34, 18).

The Meek

'Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth'.

TO BE MEEK is to be gentle: to inherit the earth is to have it in possession. To be spiritually meek is to live from the Lord, to learn of Him, and keep His laws. Moses did this and 'Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth' (Numbers 12, 3).

Meekness is a result of spiritual need and comes from the submission of our wills to the Lord's will, and it allows heavenly qualities to enter the common things of daily life. The blessing to the poor in spirit is the kingdom of heaven, but to the meek it is the inheritance of the earth: the earth of external life.

The meek man inherits, or possesses, all the faculties of his outer life: they serve him in all that he does. But if man allows his inheritance to pass over to the control of selfish appetites, he becomes their servant. Then he becomes unhappy.

The meek do not struggle for money, power or social position. They are not proud nor self-assertive; nor are they envious of the success of others. Because they are meek they are submissive before the Lord and love to be guided by His commandments. By this guidance the meek man's external life is conjoined with his internal life, thus his heaven within, inherits his earth without.

Merely worldly wealth and pleasures soon end in melancholy emptiness: none though so hardly won can be taken with us. Yet we cannot avoid taking our character, and if that is not gentle how will we find happiness in heaven ?

Meekness is not weakness but strength, a heavenly quality enjoying sweet content and great happiness. The Lord guides the meek in judgement and continually increases their joy.

PRAYER

'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word. Teach me good judgement . . . for I have believed thy commandments' (Psalm 119, 65-66).

Quotations

'The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way'
(Psalm 25, 9).

'The Lord taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with
salvation' (Psalm 149, 4).

'The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord' (Isaiah 29, 19).

'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart' (Matthew 11, 29).

'As helpless as a child who clings
Fast to his father's arms,
And casts his weakness on the strength
That keeps him safe from harm:
So I my Father, cling to Thee,
And thus I every hour
Would link my earthly feebleness
To Thine almighty power'.

(J. D. Burns)

Hunger and Thirst

'Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled'.

FIRST WE ARE poor in spirit, then we mourn and become meek. Thus we reach a lowly state in which we can learn of the Lord, and learning of Him makes us hungry and thirsty for His righteousness.

Hunger and thirst are a provision of providence. Without them we would not feel need for food; and without food our bodies could not replace the energy they are continually using up.

It is similar on the spiritual plane. To love the Lord with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves requires spiritual energy; for it is a life filled with useful service and intense happiness and it must have spiritual food. 'O taste and see that the Lord is good', then you will want more of the Lord's love and truth, and these qualities joined together in life's activities are the righteousness resulting.

The more keenly we love rightly and think truly in all our hands find to do, the more keen for spiritual food our appetite becomes. It is this appetite that opens the door for reception and so we are filled. As we receive we are able to give to others love and thought in many kinds of useful service, and the more we give the more we receive. Listen to Jesus: 'Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over' (Luke 6, 38).

How could we be more blessed ? For 'the work of righteousness shall be peace: and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever' (Isaiah 32, 17). Now we can cast our burdens on the Lord and always trust in Him. Our cup runs over, not with any worth of our own, but with the righteousness of the Lord.

PRAYER

'Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord' (Psalm 118, 19).

Quotations

'Hungering denotes desiring good from affection, because bread in the internal sense is the good of love and charity . . . thirsting denotes desiring truth from affection" (Swedenborg A.C. 4958).

'He hath filled the hungry with good things', and the rich he hath sent empty away' (Luke 1, 53).

'Jesus saith unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me shall never thirst' (John 6, 35).

'Hearken diligently unto me, and eat that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness' (Isaiah 55, 2).

'Thou art the Bread of Life,
O Lord, to me,
Thy holy word the truth
That saveth me'.
(A. Groves)

The Merciful

'Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy'.

MERCY IS COMPASSION for those in distress; it comes from love, and in love returns to the giver.

Mercy shown to others in spiritual distress is of a deeper quality. It longs to alleviate the unhappiness of those who have missed their way: those who have lost hope, and their vision of the Lord. It wants to excuse faults, and patiently tries to understand and find a way for the sufferer to return to a life of happiness.

But though mercy is gentle and tireless in its compassion, it can only actually help by means of the Lord's commandments. Mercy seeks to remove, not only the suffering but also its cause: and the only effective medicine is truth. Over and over again we read in the Word of mercy and truth. It is mercy and truth that meet together, and righteousness and peace that kiss each other. There can be no true mercy without truth: each depends on the other.

The commandments are truth, and they are merciful because by keeping them we are released from the evils of self-love. It is self-love that lies behind all our miseries.

How can we become merciful? First of all we must practice the teachings of Jesus ourselves. The first of the commandments must be our constant guide: before anything else our love must seek Jesus, and then our neighbour. As we hunger and thirst for the righteousness of these principles our conduct to our neighbour will become increasingly merciful.

We shall find ourselves longing to ease and help sufferers. We shall remember how wonderfully and mercifully we ourselves have been led all along the way: and patiently cared for in our trials.

If we sincerely and lovingly try to be merciful in our dealings with others, we will find mercy to be our own reward.

PRAYER

'God be merciful to me a sinner' (Luke 18, 13).

Quotations

'Mercy itself and good itself can never condemn anyone; but it is the man, who, because he rejects good, condemns himself (Swedenborg A.C. 2335).

'Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart' (Proverbs 3, 3).

'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with the Lord thy God' (Micah 6, 8).

'In loving kindness Jesus came,
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame
By truth He lifted me'.

'Great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell' (Psalm 86, 13).

Pure in Heart

'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God'.

jesus is not speaking of the physical heart, for the eyes of the body are made to see only natural things: they cannot see God.

The eyes that see God are the eyes of the spirit: the eyes of the soul's understanding; but even these cannot see Him unless the heart is pure. And the heart at first is impure from the love of self: its eyes can only see self in everything they view. To change this it is necessary to change the love of self for the love of God. Not easy but possible, because we have the Lord's teachings to show us the way.

As we follow the Lord's teachings our vision changes; we find we are looking to what is eternal, instead of seeing only what is temporary. The light that enables us to see is now coming from the Lord, instead of from ourselves. We are being born again, and the heart of our new birth is love for Jesus: this heart is pure because it is really His love in us, from which we see God.

Now we read His Word with new eyes, because the light we have is the light of life. Every truth is seen as a spiritual mirror reflecting His love and His wisdom.

To see anything in the natural world we need light from the natural sun, and to see anything spiritual in the Lord's Word we need light from the spiritual sun which is the Lord's love. His love is the sun of heaven and the sun of our souls.

The angels of little children always see the face of the Father in heaven because they are innocent. We are innocent—pure in heart—in so far as we love the Lord and follow His ways.

PRAYER

'Create in me a clean heart, O God' (Psalm 51, 10).

Quotations

'With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward' (Psalm 18, 26).

'The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes' (Psalm 19, 8).

'The commandments concerning purification of the heart are all things in general and particular of Divine order; so far as man lives in those commandments, he lives in Divine order . . .' (Swedenborg A.C. 2634).

'Cleanse me, O cleanse me
From every stain;
Near me, O near me
Ever remain
Jesus, my Saviour,
Never depart,
Make Thy pure temple
Here in my heart'.
(New Church Hymn Book)

Peacemakers

'Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God'.

WHO ARE PEACEMAKERS? There is much difference between pacifiers and makers of peace. Are you a maker of peace ?

Spiritually a peacemaker is one who looks to the Lord, learns of Him and applies His laws to life. Where God's laws direct our loving and thinking we cannot think only of ourselves: all unrest and contention come from self-seeking and worldly affections. In the prophet Isaiah we read 'O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river' (48, 18). And in the Psalms 'Great peace have they who love thy law; and nothing shall offend them' (119, 165). To be willing to love the Lord's regulations of life is, perhaps, the first step to becoming a peacemaker: for there can be no real peace outside of divine order.

To be a peacemaker is not to pacify the enemies of evil and falsity within us, but to suffer the Lord to remove them: which He does as we keep His laws. Evil men may be pacifists, but only those who love divine laws can be peacemakers.

Once peace is established within us we can become real peacemakers in the world about us. Others will see we love God and the common good. They will see we do not seek distinction above our fellows, and that we are not fretted by worldly ambitions. God's peace in our hearts will be a centre of cheerful kindness where ever we go.

Peace is God's gift: we cannot make it ourselves; nevertheless we can be peacemakers by using the stones of God's commandments and building them into the foundations of our lives.

Where men love God and their neighbour peacemaking flourishes, and happiness abounds. Such are the children of God.

PRAYER

Hear me O Lord: 'Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments' (Psalm 119, 73).

Quotations

'The work of righteousness shall be peace' (Isaiah 32, 17).

'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked' (Isaiah 57, 21).

'Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed ?
To do the will of Jesus, this is rest'.

(Bickersteth)

'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth
give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid' (John
14, 27).

'Heavenly peace flows in, when the lusts arising from the love of self and of
the world are taken away ... for these infest the interiors of man and cause
him at length to place rest in restlessness ... so long as man is in such evils he
cannot know what peace is' (Swedenborg A.C. 5662).

Persecution

'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven'.

WHAT WE LOVE most of all becomes our life. And what we love we think about continuously.

At first it is natural for us to love ourselves. But from this love comes misery and unhappiness, while to love righteousness is to have the kingdom of heaven.

We are blessed when we are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, because it means we are really turning from self to the Lord. Self-love is so deeply entrenched within that we can never be free from it without temptation and conflict, in a word by persecution.

Self-love is subtle and cunning like the serpent, and like the serpent it can destroy our Eden. To remove it we must see and recognise it; and to this end the Lord allows temptation and persecution. Every aspiration we have for righteousness is opposed by self-love's false arguments. Again and again it attacks, and again and again it must be resisted until it is cast out. Like the children of Israel our road lies through the wilderness: it is the only way from self to God—from hell to heaven. Like them we may often look back and cry for the flesh pots of Egypt. But God gave them the commandments, and following them they at last reached the promised land.

Do you want to become a form of self-love ? Do you want to indulge in pleasures that will die on you, and at last bring you to destruction? Of course not! Then think of this blessing to those persecuted for righteousness sake: they are happy because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Heaven within first, then without; and its life is the love of God.

PRAYER

'Great are thy tender mercies, O Lord: quicken me according to thy judgments. Many are my persecutors and mine enemies, yet do I not decline from thy testimonies' (Psalm 119, 156-157).

Quotations

'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (John 16, 33).

'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent' (Revelation 3, 19).

'When man, from the Lord, overcomes in temptation, he is drawn out of hell, and is elevated into heaven; hence it is that through temptations, or combats against evils, man becomes spiritual, thus an angel' (Swedenborg L. 33).

'When we seek relief
From a long-felt grief,
When oppressed by new temptations,
Lord increase and perfect patience:
Show us that bright shore
Where we weep no more'.

(Zinzendorf)

'Man's virtue must not be judged by great occasions, but by his ordinary life' (Pascal).

Reviled and Persecuted

'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil, against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.'

HOW CAN WE rejoice when we are reviled, persecuted, and falsely accused ? We cannot unless we know that the reason and consequences outweigh the suffering. And they do! It is for the sake of the Lord who is saving us from self-love and its endless persecution; and who is giving us instead, great love in heaven now, and for ever.

Self-love is the reviler. It has no room for the Lord: it is utterly opposed to His will and His commandments. It rises up against the kingdom of heaven within us, to revile and persecute: 'Eat, drink and be merry' it says. Tempting us to make our own standards of good and evil.

This self-love has a whole family of evil affections, reasons and thoughts. It brings them all to its aid to overthrow our newborn aspirations and love for Jesus. Every argument and false idea it can find, it ranges against us, as the Egyptians did against the children of Israel, before they let them go.

In all this we can rejoice because it is evidence that we are now loving the Lord and that He is freeing us from bondage.

By the prophets before us who were persecuted, are represented all the warnings and good promptings that came to us along the way. They came before our decision to serve the Lord. We did not want to be bothered: we called them 'kill-joys': they were opposed to our selfish life. But now we can see the Promised Land, and even though temptations come, inwardly we rejoice.

PRAYER

'O Lord attend unto my cry: for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors: for they are stronger than I' (Psalm 142, 6).

Quotations

'O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me' (Psalm 7, 1).

'Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings' (Isaiah 51, 7).

'Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you' (Matthew 5, 44).

'The chief priests mocking said ... He saved others; Himself He cannot save' (Mark 15, 31)

'Affliction denotes temptations, both external and internal, the external being persecutions from the world, and the internal being persecutions from the devil' (Swedenborg A.C. 1846).