

Matthew 5:1-2

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

The beginning, then, of this sermon is introduced as follows: **"And when He saw the great multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came to Him: and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying."**

If it is asked what the "mountain" means, it may well be understood as meaning the greater principles of righteousness; for there were lesser ones which were given to the Jews. Yet it is one God who, through His holy prophets and servants, according to a thoroughly arranged distribution of times, gave the lesser teachings and principles to a people who as yet required to be bound by fear; and who, through His Son, gave the greater ones to a people who had now become suitable to set free by love. Moreover, when the lesser are given to the lesser, and the greater to the greater, they are given by Him who alone knows how to present to the human race the medicine suited to the occasion. Nor is it surprising that the greater principles are given for the kingdom of heaven, and the lesser for an earthly kingdom, by that one and the same God, who made heaven and earth. With respect, therefore, to that righteousness which is the greater, it is said through the prophet, "Your righteousness is like the mountains of God:" and this may well mean that the one Master alone fit to teach matters of so great importance teaches on a mountain.

Then He teaches sitting, as suits the dignity of the instructor; and His disciples come to Him, in order that they might be nearer in body for hearing His words, as they also approached in spirit to fulfill His teachings. "And He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying." The situation before us, perhaps gracefully indicates that the sermon will be somewhat longer than usual, unless, it also means, that now He is said to have opened His own mouth, whereas under the old law He was accustomed to open the mouths of the prophets.

Matthew 5: 3-4

Blessed [are] the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed [are] those who mourn, For they shall be comforted".

What, then, does He say? "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We read in Scripture concerning the striving after worldly things, "All is vanity and grasping for the wind" but grasping for the wind means arrogance and pride: and rightly, inasmuch as the wind also is called spirit. And hence it is written, "Fire, hail, snow, ice, spirit of tempest." But, indeed, who does not know that the proud are spoken of as puffed up, as if swelled out with wind? And hence also that expression of the apostle, "Knowledge puffs up, but charity enlightens." And "the poor in spirit" are rightly understood here, as meaning the humble and God-fearing, i.e. those who have not the spirit which puffs up. Nor ought blessedness to begin at any other point whatever, if indeed it is to attain unto the highest wisdom; "but the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" for, on the other hand also, "pride" is entitled "the beginning of all sin." Let the proud, therefore, seek after and love the kingdoms of the earth; but "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Mourning is sorrow arising from the loss of things held dear; but those who are converted to God lose those things which they were accustomed to embrace as dear in this world: for they do not rejoice in those things in which they formerly rejoiced; and until the love of eternal things be in them, they are wounded by some measure of grief. Therefore they will be comforted by the Holy Spirit, who on this account chiefly is called the Paraclete, i.e. the Comforter, in order that, while losing the worldly joy, they may enjoy to the full that which is eternal.

Matthew 5: 5-6

Blessed [are] the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed [are] those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall by inheritance possess the earth:" that earth, I suppose, of which it is said in the Psalm, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." For it signifies a certain firmness and stability of the perpetual inheritance, where the soul, by means of a good disposition, rests, as it were, in its own place, just as the body rests on the earth, and is nourished from it with its own food, as the body from the earth. This is the very rest and life of the saints. Then, the meek are those who yield to acts of wickedness, and do not resist evil, but overcome evil with good. Let those, then, who are not meek quarrel and fight for earthly and worldly things; but "blessed are the meek, for they shall by inheritance possess the earth," from which they cannot be driven out.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Now He calls those parties, lovers of a true and indestructible good. They will therefore be filled with that food of which the Lord Himself says, "My meat is to do the will of my Father," which is righteousness; and with that water, of which whoever "drinks," as he also says, it "shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."

Matthew 5: 7-8

7 Blessed [are] the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.
8 Blessed [are] the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." He says that they are blessed who relieve the miserable, for it is paid back to them in such a way that they are freed from misery.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." How foolish, therefore, are those who seek God with these outward eyes, since He is seen with the heart! as it is written elsewhere, "And in singleness of heart seek Him." For that is a pure heart which is a single heart: and just as this light cannot be seen, except with pure eyes; so neither is God seen, unless that is pure by which He can be seen.

Matthew 5: 9

9 Blessed [are] the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." It is the perfection of peace, where nothing offers opposition; and the children of God are peacemakers, because nothing resists God, and surely children ought to have the likeness of their father. Now, they are peacemakers in themselves who, by bringing in order all the motions of their soul, and subjecting them to reason--i.e. to the mind and spirit--and by having their carnal lusts thoroughly subdued, become a kingdom of God: in which all things are so arranged, that that which is chief and pre-eminent in man rules without resistance over the other elements, which are common to us with the beasts; and that very element which is pre-eminent in man, i.e. mind and reason, is brought under subjection to something better still, which is the truth itself, the only-begotten Son of God. For a man is not able to rule over things which are inferior, unless he subjects himself to what is superior. And this is the peace which is given on earth to men of goodwill; this the life of the fully developed and perfect wise man. From a kingdom of this sort brought to a condition of thorough peace and order, the prince of this world is cast out, who rules where there is perversity and disorder. When this peace has been inwardly established and confirmed, whatever persecutions he who has been east out shall stir up from without, he only increases the glory which is according to God; being unable to shake anything in that edifice, but by the failure of his machinations making it to be known with how great strength it has been built from within outwardly. Hence there follows: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."