

## **The Beatitudes (2)**

**'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.'**

It is not surprising that people have tended to think of this second Beatitude as having to do with bereavement and sorrow over the loss of someone loved. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted'. At least on the surface this is what the Beatitude seems to be speaking about. But two things in particular, cause us to question this.

One is the fact that the Beatitudes are concerned with characteristics within people which enable heaven to be present with them. They deal with qualities which are to be sought after, cultivated and permanently established in one's life. Humility, meekness, mercy and purity of heart and all of the others are so obviously permanent characteristics. It would be odd indeed if this Beatitude, about those who mourn, was the only exception. In keeping with the other Beatitudes we must feel that some quality within a person is being spoken of. And, as we shall see, it is.

But what also causes us to question the idea that this Beatitude is addressed to those in a situation of bereavement is the implication this must carry that the Lord approves of and encourages, such mourning and sorrow. But does He? Would He have us mourn, and be burdened down with grief over those who are now passed on into the spiritual world? We do not think so. Rather He would have us know the reality of the life after death and the continuity of our lives into the spiritual world. Instead of the sombre thing which death has become He would have us see it otherwise, and in reality there is no cause and we are not being encouraged, to mourn over it.

I go back then to what I said earlier about the Beatitudes as a whole; they treat characteristics which are to be sought after, cultivated and permanently established in one's life. The Lord is speaking here of certain qualities which, when present, bring a real sense of blessedness and which are basic requirements if the kingdom of heaven is to be established within us. It is therefore within the context of this overall thrust of the Beatitudes in general that we seek to understand the meaning of this second Beatitude in particular.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted'. And the mourning which is meant is the grief and sorrow which the Lord would have us feel over the presence of evil in our lives. It is to feel sadness that we tend to so want to manipulate situations to our own advantage; it is a sense of wretchedness which is meant which comes upon us when we realise the extent to which selfish motives have entered into things. Here is what the Beatitude is all about.

An inclination to evils of many kinds is present with everyone of us, and when we look hard enough we can detect the occasions and circumstances in which those evils have been at work. We can see where our selfishness has caused us to do and say certain things. We find that we cherish and dwell upon the wrong kinds of thoughts about people.

We incline not to be merciful and forgiving. If we are objective and honest about it we can see where the love of self has motivated us. And the Lord wills that we should feel a sense of grief and sadness about such things. 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted'

It has been rightly pointed out by others that the word which here is translated 'mourn' is one of the strongest words for mourning in the Greek language. 'It is no gentle, sentimental, twilight sadness, it is a sorrow which is poignant, piercing and intense.' It is then something which is real and genuinely felt which is meant; it is heartfelt distress that evils have been present and active, and we deeply wish they hadn't been. It is something which comes upon us when we squarely face up to the nature of the thoughts and affections which move us from within.

But we can feel grief and sorrow over our evils for two reasons. We can, on the one hand, feel grief and sorrow because our evils are likely to damage our relationships with other people and cause us to be thought badly of. This is one kind. But there is also the sorrow that our evils cause us to be cut off from the Lord; the sorrow that because of them He is unable to be present and conjoined with us; the grief that with such evils active we are only inadequately able to serve our neighbour and be a source of blessing to him.

And this is the sorrow which is being spoken of. We must all learn to shun evils and feel aversion to them not merely because they are offences against other people, but because above all things they are offences against the Lord. Most people, wrote Swedenborg, can from custom and habit learn to shun evils as detrimental to their honour (and standing with people). But if they do not shun evils from a principle of religion those evils remain with them. (*Divine Providence* 117)

There can be no recognition of one's evils; no coming to terms with their presence within our thoughts and affections; no meaningful grief and sorrow over them, apart from self examination and repentance. And this is why this is so strenuously insisted upon. John the Baptist came before the Lord calling people to self examination and repentance. The Lord Himself preached a similar message. And in the Writings of Swedenborg repentance is spoken of as 'the first of the Church'. There can in fact be nothing of enduring spiritual worth within a person without repentance has been seriously engaged in. There can be no discovery of evils within oneself unless there has been a genuine attempt to seek them out. Clearly, no one can feel sorrow or grief over something they are not really aware of. There can be no question but that the Lord commends in this second Beatitude a persons sense of sadness at the presence of evils in their life. But those evils have to be discovered first of all.

Some may feel very little sorrow at the discovery of some evil in themselves and they will have very little desire or inclination to be rid of it. The one is the measure of the other. If there is a deep sense of concern and sadness that evil has intruded in some way so there will be, correspondingly, a deep desire to prevent the reoccurrence of that evil in our lives and to be rid of it for all time.

If the grief is real, the repentance will be profound. We should be shocked by evil, horrified by its appearance, and appalled by its manifestation in our lives, either in thought or behaviour. And if we are not, as is sometimes the case, it is an indication that we are failing to see and appreciate the beauty and wonder of the good which is its opposite. If that is so, it is something we must attend to.

A sense of sorrow over the presence of evil in our lives is something we can expect to experience on countless occasions. Our evils only come to our attention piecemeal. We see one thing one time and another at other times. And it is a mercy that this is so. The Lord allows us to become aware of only that with which we can effectively

cope at any one time. Inevitably our discovery of evils and sense of revulsion and grief will entail conflict as we strive to remove them from our lives. There will be turmoil and upheaval. But in time and if we persevere, calling upon the Lord's strength all the while, a sense of well being and peace will gradually dawn.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted'

It has been truly remarked that 'in this life we are troubled about many things that ought not to disturb us. Usually we worry about everything but the thing which ought to distress us, and that is the selfishness which renders us disharmonious with the good purposes of the Lord.' Here is where we should feel the greatest grief and concern and the deepest sorrow.

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