

The Sermon on the Mount

A study given by Andreas Dura, Sabbath, November 12, 2011

Welcome to our study this morning. Today we want to read from *The Sermon on the Mount* together:

Matthew 5

¹ And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

² Then 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 those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

That's all I want to read.

Who Was It For?

The first question we can ask is: Who was Jesus addressing with these words? *The Sermon on the Mount* is one of Jesus' most well-known talks. In it, He explained His mission and proclaimed the foundation of the entire church for as long as it had existed. The fact that He was pointing to something already existing, and not making up anything new, becomes clear with His words,

Matthew 5

¹⁷ I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.

The Sermon on the Mount reveals the foundation of God's kingdom for all time—since ancient times through today, right until the end, and throughout all eternity.

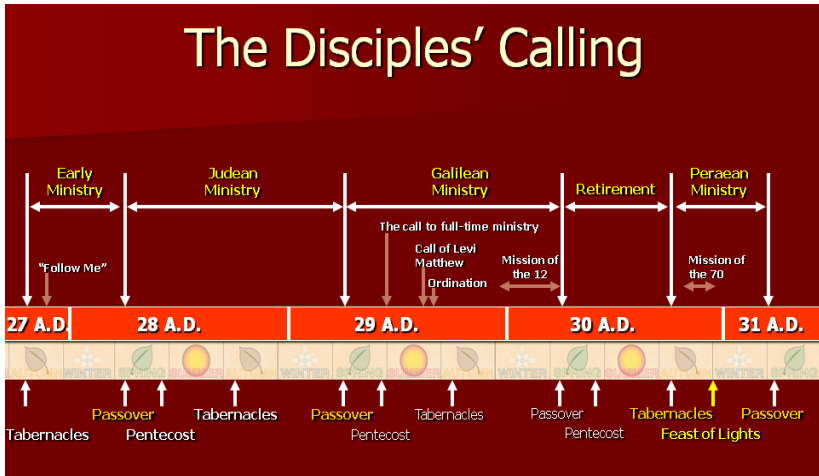
Jesus gave this sermon, first and foremost, for His disciples. This may seem strange to us because we read that “seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain.” His disciples were not the multitudes. The multitudes consisted of many different people, and a lot of them just wanted to hear Him because they were curious. But the disciples were the object of Jesus' special training.

I've prepared a diagram which shows an overview of Jesus'

life, especially in relation to his disciples.

At the bottom is a timeline of the years 27 to 31 A.D. These were the years of Jesus' public ministry.

Below the timeline we can see the various feasts marked, which help us determine what took place before and afterwards.



As you know, there were three special Jewish feasts during Jesus' time. These were:

- Passover
- Pentecost, and
- The Feast of Tabernacles

The Passover was a reminder of Israel's deliverance from Egypt.

Pentecost may seem to be more connected with the early Christian church, but it was also an important festival for the Jews.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a memorial of Israel's entry into Canaan; and for the church of the New Testament, it was an anticipation of their entry into the heavenly Canaan.

Jesus' ministry can be divided into various periods:

1. The first is His early ministry, which also included the marriage feast at Cana.
2. Following this is His Judean ministry, in which He cleansed the temple for the first time and stood before the Sanhedrin.
3. Next is His ministry in Galilee, of which we find the most reports in the Gospels. I've included particular events on this timeline which I would like to look at with you in a moment.
4. At the end came Jesus' final ministries. In His retirement ministry, He went to heathen regions including Syrophenicia and other areas where He was not well-known and not so many people followed Him. During this period He mainly focused on teaching the disciples.
5. The last is His ministry in Perea, although He was also in Judea during this time. That was when He cleansed the temple again, rode into Jerusalem, and was finally crucified.

Apart from the final events of His life, most reports of Jesus' activities are from the period of His ministry in Galilee. During this ministry Jesus did a lot for His disciples.

The first thing He did was to call them. He had already told them, one by one, "Follow Me!" long before that. They did follow Him, but they still pursued their occupation when there was an opportunity.

Then there came a time when Jesus told them that He wanted them completely. This was when Peter cast the net and Jesus promised, "I will make you fishers of men."

It was not until after this that Jesus called Levi Matthew. Then, having called all twelve, He took them with Him onto a mountain and laid His hands on them. In this way He consecrated them for His ministry.

Far more than just the twelve followed Jesus during that time, but it was those twelve whom He took with Him onto a mountain and ordained for full-time ministry. Shortly after

this event He went down from the mountain and many other people joined Him. It was then that He ascended another mountain and gave His Sermon on the Mount.

We don't know exactly which mountain Jesus was on when He gave this sermon. It was a mountain in Galilee, beside the Lake of Gennesaret. Back then there was another mountain, Gerizim, known as the mount of blessing, where Joshua had proclaimed blessings and curses depending on whether Israel was obedient or not. But the unknown mountain is the actual Mount of Blessing, for it was here that Jesus spoke the beatitudes.

The multitude who came to Jesus when He descended from the mountain with His disciples included many people from distant places. There were people from Galilee too, since Jesus was in Galilee at that moment. But there were also people from farther away. We read elsewhere that:

Mark 3

⁷ ...Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea.

⁸ And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him.

These people came from everywhere. This report isn't actually referring to *The Sermon on the Mount*, but it simply shows how many people were following Jesus during that time. They had to come on foot, and from far away at that. Today we might compare it to traveling from all parts of Europe.

Tyre and Sidon were well-known trade centers where there weren't many Jews. Nonetheless people came from even as far as that. They also came from Judea, where there were many Jews; Idumea, on the other side of the Dead Sea; and from Galilee. They all came, with their various thoughts and backgrounds, expecting something.

A Proclamation of the Kingdom

What was it that they were expecting? There was tension in the air. They were expecting Jesus to finally declare Himself to be the Messiah, who would do something special and set up a new kingdom. They expected Him to be a prophet with special power, like Elijah, who called down fire from heaven.

The disciples were expecting something special too, since they had just been ordained. Jesus had just told them that He was giving them a special task, which they understood to mean a special position. “Something has to happen now!” they thought. “If He’s giving us a special position, that must mean He will set up His kingdom soon.” They were expecting the same thing as everyone else.

All the people had heard about how Jesus cleansed the temple. They heard how He drove out the merchants, who trembled in fear. They heard about how, after that, He healed many people in the temple. And some had come now because they wanted to have healing too. They were flocking to Jesus from all the surrounding regions, expectantly.

Then came the great surprise.

Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Let’s read Jesus’ words again:

Matthew 5

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This opening statement was a complete shock, both for the disciples as well as for the others. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven which I’m coming to set up”...? Obviously—and this becomes very clear when we read on—Jesus was not talking about a worldly kingdom, but a spiritual one. “Blessed are the poor in spirit!”

To understand just how offensive these words were to people’s expectations back then, we have to look a little at their attitude. Jesus lays it open to us in a parable found in Luke. In

fact, this was an event which had really happened, but Jesus used it as a parable to teach a lesson.

Luke 18

⁹ Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

¹⁰ Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

We should not think that the Pharisee was the least bit ashamed to make a statement like this. On the contrary, he said it with total conviction and full of pride.

Today when we hear people giving speeches that put them in the foreground and focus on all their achievements, how do we evaluate their statements? When we look at them from a completely different perspective, we feel ashamed and embarrassed for those who present themselves in such a way!

Let’s assume I stood up here in front of you all and said:

“I thank God that I’m not like the other students I know—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this visitor here!”

How would you feel? You would be horrified! You would be embarrassed for me, wouldn’t you? And I should be even more ashamed for having said it.

But people back then weren’t ashamed at all. On the contrary, they rejoiced and boasted, saying, “That’s just how it is!” So Jesus wasn’t putting the Pharisee down when He related this incident. He was simply showing an attitude with which the people actually agreed. “That’s right,” they would have thought, “That’s how it is.” This was their mindset.

For these people, hearing the words “Blessed are the poor” must have been unthinkable.

Matthew 5

³ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of

heaven.

Obviously the Pharisee didn't feel spiritually poor. Instead, he thought he was rich, satisfied, and in need of nothing. But Jesus said, "Blessed are those who are spiritually poor!"

By the words "poor in spirit," Jesus was referring to the attitude people have when they are aware of their sin. We see clearly that the tax collector had this attitude. Let's read about him.

Luke 18

¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Here Jesus is saying the same thing as in *The Sermon on the Mount*. But again, His purpose was to show the tax collector's attitude. The man stood far away, refusing to raise his eyes to heaven, and beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

This attitude shows awareness of sin and of separation from God. He was standing at a distance, and this distance was not just physical. He felt that he was far away and that he did not belong because he was not worthy. The Pharisee, in contrast, thought that he did belong because of all his good works. The attitude of the tax collector and his awareness of sin is what Jesus was emphasizing to His hearers.

What quickly became clear to Jesus' audience was that He was proclaiming a spiritual kingdom, not an outward, material kingdom. It was this that they had not expected. This spiritual kingdom is described repeatedly throughout God's word. Let's turn to a statement from Paul:

Colossians 1

¹² ...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

God has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has called us to be part of a community that is not recognized in this world—a community that isn't even visible, perhaps. Jesus was calling the people to the same thing when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." That is why many people did not welcome His message. It was directed towards those who beat their breast like the tax collector, for such people were truly invited.

This reminds me of an advertisement I once saw. Some countries want to attract a lot of visitors because this gives them an advantage. The United Kingdom made an advertising clip where a voice says, "You're invited!" If anything from that ad stays in your mind, it's that voice, "You're invited!" This is just what Jesus wanted to say too. If nothing else, He wanted this one phrase to remain in their minds: "You're invited!"

Let's read this invitation as it is given in the Old Testament:

Isaiah 45

²² Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

²³ I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.

²⁴ He shall say, "Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength." To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him.

²⁵ In the Lord all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory.

The words, "...that to Me every knee shall bow," are not an authoritarian command such as human beings might issue. Jesus isn't telling us to bow whether we want to or not. No; even all those who withstand Him will come to Him. Those who are still resisting now will come. In other words, what God uses is the power of love and the attraction of His example. "Look to Me, and be saved." You're invited.

God doesn't take His invitation back, either. The apostle

Paul clearly expresses this in *Romans* 9 to 11. Let's read some verses from chapter 10.

Romans 10

¹ Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Paul is describing the same spiritual kingdom as Jesus did when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are those who do not establish their own righteousness," says Paul, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Let's read this verse from a newer translation:

Romans 10

³ For they have not recognized how they can find God's approval...

In other words, they looked for God's approval and simply didn't find it.

...and are still trying to stand before Him by their own achievements. This is why they reject the gift God wants to give them.

[directly translated from the German *Hoffnung fuer alle*. See also the English *God's Word* translation]

I thought this was a very interesting translation, and it conveys the meaning of the words well. Let's go through it step by step and compare the two versions.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness...

This means they did not recognize God's righteousness. They looked for His approval, but didn't find the righteousness that is accepted by Him. They didn't find His approval.

...and seeking to establish their own righteousness...

So they continued trying to find approval through their own achievements and works.

...have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

This is translated as

...they refuse the gift God wants to give them.

God wants to give it to them. “You’re invited!” But they reject it. That was the problem of many who came to hear Jesus. It was partly even the disciples’ problem. This is why Jesus had to give *The Sermon on the Mount*.

Blessed are Those Who Mourn

Let’s go back to *Matthew 5* now and read the next verse:

Matthew 5

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“For they shall be comforted” means the same thing as “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Those who mourn will be especially comforted by the knowledge that they are indeed a part of the heavenly kingdom.

But what does it mean to mourn? Jesus gives mourning a very deep significance, and His meaning includes a progression. Mourning means three things:

1. The first meaning of “Blessed are those who mourn” is the right kind of mourning for sin. It means being crushed and saddened at what you have done, what you were, and the influence you exerted on others. “Blessed are those who mourn about their sins.”

Often we ask ourselves how such mourning can come about. Normally people aren’t sad about what they’ve done. On the contrary, they are proud of it. But Jesus creates real sadness for sin in us when we look at Him and recognize who He is. Let’s read this:

John 12

³² And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.

This is the process by which true mourning comes about. Jesus is lifted up, which means we look at Him, His life, His character, and His love. This makes us see ourselves in contrast, and we become sad about ourselves. The first step to mourning is for us to see Jesus; and when we see Him, true sadness springs up in our hearts. “Blessed are those who mourn about sin.”

Being sad about our own sins is an unpleasant experience. God reveals our sins to us by showing us the contrast between His character and ours. By so doing He shows us what we really are; but He does not do this to embarrass us. He doesn't want us to get red in the face, crawl off into some dark corner, and stay there. That isn't His purpose in revealing our sins to us. Instead, this revelation is a necessary precondition for Him to be able to deliver us from our sins. It's as simple as that.

So when God reveals our sins, He does so for one reason alone, and that is to free us from them. This is what people often don't understand, which is why they are quite afraid of such a revelation. They think the whole point is to expose and embarrass them, to make them look stupid in front of everyone else. But that's not the point at all. The point is for us to be freed from our burdens.

Once we understand this, we will also be able to grasp the fact that the sadness God gives us for our sins is a healing sadness and not a destructive sadness. This sadness will restore us, not make us sick.

That is the first meaning of “Blessed are those who mourn.”

2. In using those words, Jesus also addresses people who are mourning over loss and misfortune. When you lose a loved one, you naturally become sad, particularly if you had a good relationship with that person. Losing a close companion is one of the hardest experiences anyone could ever go through.

Jesus was also referring to other losses we experience, such

as the loss of material goods, or even the loss of health. These losses also cause us sadness and suffering, and we should not think that as Christians, we won't feel sadness when we suffer such losses. Christians are not stoics who distance themselves from emotion. A Christian will experience sadness over personal loss and misfortune, and Jesus addresses this when He says that those who mourn are blessed.

Again we want to consider the question: Why does God allow these things to happen? This is the same in principle as when our sins are revealed to us. It makes us sad, and we are afraid of being sad because we don't want to be disgraced. But this feeling of sadness is only to help us become free from our burden, and the same is true of sadness over loss and misfortune. We need to understand that when God allows these things to come upon us, there is a purpose in it all. It's important for us to understand this.

God doesn't enjoy it when we are sad. He doesn't find pleasure in our suffering. I want to emphasize that He doesn't create or cause misfortune. He allows it. There is a difference. And He allows it for a particular purpose.

We would like to read two texts that reveal God's purpose. He Himself states His purpose:

Lamentations 3

³³ For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

That means that He has no pleasure in our suffering. He takes pleasure only in the relief of our suffering. Nonetheless, He allows affliction. Why? Because it fulfills His purpose.

Hebrews 12

¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

His purpose is explained—that we may be partakers of His holiness.

Paul here makes a comparison between God and parents.

Since our parents had a good purpose in chastening us—as Jesus often said—how much better must God’s intentions be! Their intentions couldn’t ever possibly be as good as God’s. When God allows loss, misfortune, and things that make us sad, His purpose is far higher.

That purpose is described numerous times in the Bible.

Revelation 3

¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

God has a loving purpose behind His decisions. This loving purpose can be seen in Job’s life, and Job suffered much loss and sadness.

Job 5

¹⁷ Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.

¹⁸ For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole.

¹⁹ He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you.

What is God’s purpose when we suffer an injury? The answer is plainly given here. It is to make us whole, or to heal us, as it says in some Bible versions.

Now you might ask, “Is that really the purpose?” Yes it is! We may know this for ourselves and pass it on to others. When we are hurt, there is a purpose in it, and the purpose is to heal us. It is to restore us.

Some people don’t see just how sick they really are. And this is where mourning because of sin and mourning because of other things, such as sickness, the loss of material goods, or the loss of a loved one, are related. Often it is necessary for us to suffer some sort of loss before we develop a longing for healing and actually experience that healing. The suffering opens our eyes to how sick we really are.

Again I want to say that God does not create these losses. He allows them. At the same time He is the one who actively

heals. That is His work.

What is the best way for me to explain this point? People find this particularly hard to grasp and accept.

The best way I can explain it is through the example of a person who is addicted or dependent upon something, like an alcoholic who continually insists that he doesn't have a problem. He just continues on and on in his course and thinks he is all right, and no one can convince him that he's got to stop because of the damage he is doing to himself. No one can convince him because he thinks he doesn't have a problem. Are you familiar with this scenario? It's typical and occurs often.

However, when the alcoholic actually experiences the results of his habit, when he loses his ability to function, he begins to long for freedom and expresses a desire to quit. This is the time when you can help him by showing him the cause of his problem and leading him to get rid of it. His suffering, as bad as it may be, is sometimes the only means of convincing him that he needs help.

God allows sadness over misfortune and loss so that we can realize how sick we really are and allow Him to eliminate the cause of our problem. That is His reason.

Again, the purpose behind it is to heal us. This is God's purpose in every case of sickness and suffering, and His word reveals this repeatedly.

1 John 5

⁴ For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world: our faith.

The purpose is always to heal, and in this verse, "overcome" can be understood as meaning "healed." Healing is always God's way.

3. But there is a third reason for mourning, and that is mourning in sympathy with others. You could say that this is the noblest reason for mourning.

Recently we looked at the life of Nehemiah. You probably

remember that Nehemiah was in tears—not because of any personal loss or sickness, but because Jerusalem wasn't being rebuilt as planned. The conditions were all there. The king had made a decree, but no progress was being made. The people had become discouraged because of obstacles to their progress, and they weren't organized. They weren't in the right frame of mind to do the work. Nehemiah became so sad about this matter that the king noticed something was wrong with him—even though Nehemiah had tried to hide his feelings. He couldn't hide them completely. His sadness was just too heavy.

That was sadness about suffering that others were going through.

I would also like to remind us of the prophet Daniel, whose prayer is recorded in chapter 9. You probably know from the book of *Daniel* that this man was someone truly loyal to God from the very beginning. Nonetheless, he experienced deep sadness because of the sins of his people and their forefathers. He was also sad that his people were still in captivity.

This was a sympathetic sadness that was truly selfless, and such sadness is what Jesus gives. He gives sorrow that is selfless in the highest sense.

Why does God allow this? Why does He let us see all these awful things and then give us sympathy? Sympathy is also a gift from God. We might be as cold as ice and not care about each other. We might look upon the losses others suffer and think, "That is their problem. There is nothing there for me to be sad about." If that were the case, we would have fewer problems to deal with. Constantly experiencing sympathy for others is a lot of effort. My own problems are enough, and if I can barely deal with those, I don't need more problems from others.

Isn't that how people think? But some people can't help themselves. They are constantly sad about the sins and sufferings of others.

God allows this, and He has given us sympathy because He Himself has sympathy. He too feels just as sad over the sufferings of others as if He were suffering as well. If that weren't the case, He wouldn't have sent Jesus into the world.

John 3

¹⁶ God so loved the world—[God so sympathized with the world]—that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Jesus is proof that God feels with us in our sorrow; that He sorrows too. “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

The promise, “they shall be comforted,” reveals the purpose of this sorrow. We will be comforted if we sympathize with others in their suffering.

If our sadness just remained sadness, if Jesus thought it was good for us simply to be sad, then we would be the unhappiest people in the world. We would always go around with sad faces. And if we felt perpetually sad, then something would be wrong.

That's not what God wants. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. We will be comforted in view of our own sins because Jesus forgives us. We will be comforted in view of our own personal losses too, and Job is a very good example of this. God comforted Him, just as He will comfort us for every loss we suffer. We will also be comforted in view of our sympathy with the sufferings of others. For this reason it is profitable, so to speak, to go through mourning. It pays in the end.

Let's read what Paul says about this because Paul really longed to experience this sorrow:

Philippians 3

¹⁰ ...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

¹¹ If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the

dead.

Paul might have expressed it this way: “I want to mourn so that I can be comforted.” But he expresses it in a different way, and in a way that is very interesting. “...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.”

Because God mourns over our sins, Paul also wanted to experience this mourning. He wanted to get to know God. He wanted to participate with Him in His sufferings. He wanted to experience what God does. That is what he was saying. Why? Because he would be comforted.

God Himself is comforted. The resurrection shows that quite plainly. And Paul was looking for this same comfort.

We would like to read two other texts which reveal this plainly.

Hebrews 2

¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

The reason why Jesus experienced this sorrow, this sympathy, is because He could thereby comfort others. God allows us to suffer so that we too can comfort others. The comfort which comforts us can be given to others to comfort them. When we experience help in overcoming temptation, we then become able to help others overcome.

Another text is:

2 Corinthians 1

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort;

⁴ Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The thought is expressed well in these verses. We suffer so that we can be comforted and thus, in turn, become able to comfort others. We might be suffering because of our own sins, our own misfortune, or our sympathy with others in

their sorrows; but the reason for any and all of this suffering is so that we can comfort others.

Behind all of this is a deep thought which is more than I can reveal in this short study, and perhaps more than I could reveal at all.

We are called to be disciples just as the disciples of old were called. They expected a spectacular sermon from Christ. What do we expect? “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

The very depth of this sorrow itself is a particular treasure for us, for God calls us out of this depth to a level of comfort that we could otherwise never experience.

Let’s remember that effort is put only into valuable stones that are worth polishing. Gems are ground and polished. No one puts effort into worthless rocks. Only material of value is worked on, and those whom God wants to use to bless others are such material.

This statement, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,” was given particularly to the disciples. It was actually for them that *The Sermon on the Mount* was given. The multitudes were not excluded, however. They too received a great blessing. They too were invited to become disciples, even though many of them did not understand that. But we can understand it.

God has a purpose. He wants to make us co-workers with Him. He wants to give us fellowship with Him in His sufferings so that we can comfort others just as He does. That is His purpose, and I wish this blessing upon us all.