

The Story of Two Mountains

From the Beatitudes to Calvary

Fr. Bill McCarthy, MSA
My Father's House

There is a close relationship between two mountains mentioned in Scripture that is similar to the relationship found between the first and second acts of a two-act drama. For Jesus, who climbed the Mount of Beatitudes to preach the Sermon on the Mount, also had to climb the Mount of Calvary to fully practice what He preached.

The Sermon on the Mount always includes crucifixion. Anyone who puts the Beatitudes into practice must both die to self and be crucified by the world. Humility, meekness, purity of heart, love and forgiveness always involve a death to the self.

The day that Jesus taught the Beatitudes He signed his own death warrant. For He realized that one way to make enemies and to challenge the spirit of the world was to come against it. The world has a spirit as each age has a spirit. There are certain unanalyzed assumptions which govern the conduct of our world in general and our country in particular. Anyone who challenges these worldly maxims, such as "You live only once", "Get as much out of life as you can", "Who will ever know about it?", "What is sex for if not for pleasure" is bound to make himself unpopular. For in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord speaks strongly against *riches, revenge, worldly laughter, getting even, popularity, unbridled sex, armed might, and soft comfort*. He turned them upside down.

To those who say, "You cannot be happy unless you are rich," He said, "Woe to the rich and blessed are the poor in spirit."

To those who say, "Don't let them get away with it," Jesus taught, "Blessed are the meek."

To those who say, "Laugh and the world laughs with you," Jesus said, "Blessed are they who mourn."

To those who say, "If nature gave you sex instincts, you ought to give them free expression otherwise you will become frustrated," Jesus says "Blessed are the pure of heart."

To those who say, "Seek to be popular and well known," Jesus says, "Blessed are you who men revile and persecute and speak all manner of evil against you falsely because of me."

To those who say, "In time of peace, prepare for war" and "We support our troops." He says, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Jesus scorns the clichés around which headlines, movies and novels are written. He proposes to burn what the world worships; to conquer errant sex instincts instead of allowing them to make slaves of men and women; and to tame economic conquests instead of making happiness consist of an abundance of things external to the soul. Jesus scorns all false beatitudes which makes happiness depend upon self expression, license, or having a good time--the "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die" philosophy-- because they will not bring us perfect peace, true love or real happiness. Instead, He warns that they will bring mental disorders, unhappiness, false hopes, fears and anxieties.

A Message For Our Time

There are some who try to explain away the Beatitudes by saying that the culture of Jesus' time colored His teachings so that His words do not really apply to us. Yet Jesus was not a creature of His time nor of any time. Before Abraham came to be He said, "I am." He suited His teaching to no age and, therefore, became a model for all ages. He never used a phrase that depended on the social order in which He lived. His gospel was not easy then nor is it today. As He said, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not a letter nor the tinniest part of a letter will be done away with until it all comes true" (Mt 5:18).

You Have Heard What I Say

The key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount was the way in which Jesus used these two expressions: first, *you have heard*; second, *what I say*.

When He said, *You have heard*, He reached back to what human ears had heard for centuries and still hear from worldly people -- all those rules, codes, and precepts which are only half measures between instinct and reason, between present custom and pious ideals. When He said, *You have heard*, He included the Mosaic Law, Buddha with his eight-fold way, Confucius with his rules of being a gentleman, Aristotle with his natural happiness, the broadness of the Hindus, and all the liberals of our day who like to call it a New Age religion. Concerning all these compromises, Jesus said, *You have heard*.

You have heard it said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Moses said it, pagan tribes suggested it and primitive peoples respected it. But then came Jesus' terrible "but". "But I tell you, whoever casts his eye on a woman so as to lust after her has already committed adultery in his own heart." Our Lord went right to the heart of the matter -- to the soul, and laid hold of the incipient desire by branding even the desire for sin as a sin. If it was wrong for the body, it was wrong for the soul. And He would say today, "Away with your hygiene which prides to keep hands clean after they have stolen, and bodies free from disease after they have been impure." He did not wait for the evil tree to bear evil fruits. He taught against preventing the very sowing of the evil seed.

We do not have to wait until our hidden sins get hold of us as neuroses and compulsions. We can cut them off at their source. Jesus taught that when a man married a woman he married body, soul and spirit - the whole person. If you get tired of the body, he was not to thrust her away for another since he was responsible for her soul and spirit, as well. So He thundered, "You have heard." And with that expression He summarized the jargon of

every decaying civilization. You have heard, "get a divorce. God does not expect you to live without happiness." But then came the "but". "But what I tell you is this; if a man divorces his wife ... he involves her in adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Mt 5:32).

The soul is worth more than the body and its thrills, worth more than the universe, itself. Jesus aimed to keep men and women pure. "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mk 10:9). He meant, *no man* -- no judge, no nation, no court, no democracy.

The Times, They Are A Changin'

The pop song tells us that, *The times, they are a changin'*. But Jesus taught that there were Ten Commandments and Eight Beatitudes for everyone, everywhere and always. They were meant to be God's heaven-sent pattern for holiness and happiness. He taught that selfishness, greed, impurity, pride, theft, bribery, and political corruption all came from the soul of man. His teaching was, *cut it off and cut it out*. "If your right eye is your undoing, tear it out and fling it away. It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to be thrown into hell. If your right hand is your undoing, cut it off and fling it away, it's better for you to lose one part of your body than for the whole of it to be thrown into hell" (Mt 5:29-30). Men will cut off their legs and arms to save their bodies from gangrene, but here our Lord transferred circumcision of the flesh to circumcision of the heart and advocated letting out the life blood of lust rather than be separated from the love of God.

No Hatred Or Revenge or Violence

To those who advocated revenge, hatred or violence, expressed in those sayings, *Get even, Sue him, and Don't be a fool*, He would say, "You have learned that you were told an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Mt 5:38). Then comes the awful "but". "But what I tell you is this, do not set yourself against a man who wrongs you. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn and offer him your left. If someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let him have your coat as well. If a man in authority makes you go one mile, go with him two" (Mt 5:38-41).

Why?

Why the low road of humility, forgiveness and meekness? Precisely because humility leads to glory. They tell the story of Mother Teresa who was begging from a Moslem for famished young girls. The Moslem was reported to have spit in her face. Very humbly, Mother Teresa said, "That's for me and I deserve it, but please help my girls." With that, the Moslem leader got down on his knees, asked her forgiveness, and became one of her greatest supporters. St. Paul said it this way, "Let that mindset be in you which is also in Christ Jesus. Even though He was God, He did not see that itself as something to be clung to. He emptied himself taking the form of a servant, was born in low human estate, became obedient, obedient unto death, death on the cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

Humility melts even arrogant hearts. Why turn the other cheek? Because violence can only beget violence and hatred can only beget hatred. Humility, forgiveness and love

beget humility, forgiveness and love. With the turning of the other cheek, we allow this hatred to die within us. And what is passed on is love. This is what Jesus did. He absorbed all the violence and hatred and took it to the cross.

The Christian law of love is that the innocent shall suffer for the guilty. Mahatma Ghandi, after reading Mark's Gospel, stated to his fellow countrymen in their fight against the oppression of the English, "My brothers, there are many causes, including this one, for which I am willing to die. There is no cause, especially this one, for which I am willing to kill." In that statement he proved that the adversary can be conquered by superior moral power because such love prevents the infection of the wound of hate. To write a letter of kindness to a man who has insulted you...to offer gifts to the man who would steal from you...never to answer back with hatred to the man who lies, these are the hard things which Jesus came to teach. And they are no more suited to His time than to ours. They suit only the heroes, the great men and women, the saints who will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

The Sermon on the Mount is at so much variance with what our American culture is teaching today. But make no mistake about it, the practice of the Beatitudes will lead you to Calvary. The Mount of Beatitudes will always lead to the Mount of Calvary. Because Jesus says, "Come follow me."

My Father's House
P.O. Box 22
Moodus, CT 06469
860/873-1571