

THE SERMON
ON THE MOUNT
ACCORDING TO
VEDANTA

By
SWAMI
PRABHAVANANDA

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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT
ACCORDING TO VEDANTA

*by Swami Prabhavananda
and Christopher Isherwood*

HOW TO KNOW GOD
(The Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali)

*by Swami Prabhavananda
with the assistance of Frederick Manchester*

THE SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

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FOREWORD

A BOOK on the Sermon on the Mount, which is the very heart of the Christian teaching, should be no novelty in a Christian community. But when that book is written by a Hindu swami, a follower of Vedanta and the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, a book, moreover, not only interpreting, but extolling the Sermon as though it were a scripture of his own, that certainly is, to say the least, unusual.

Beautiful as this interpretation is in itself, it is presented by Swami Prabhavananda not as a far-off, scarcely attainable ideal, which is the way most occidentals read the Sermon, but as a practical programme of daily living and conduct. So clear is the Swami's reading of this great scripture, that many a Christian by means of it will discover a simpler approach to the teaching of his Master, more direct than any he had found heretofore.

Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine and that the chief, the only real goal of human life is to unfold and manifest that Divinity. To us the Sermon is a counsel of perfection. To the Vedantist, whose sole aim is God-realization, that is nothing strange. The sannyasin of the Ramakrishna Order, to which Swami Prabhavananda belongs, follows the way of perfection every day of his life. Every day in his meditation he prays that he may overcome the sense of ego, that he may abstain from fault-finding and criticism of others, and that he may acquire love and sympathy for all. The Vedantist cannot sit down to meditate until he clears his mind of all hatreds and resentments. The literature of the Ramakrishna Order, as for instance the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the writings of Swami Vivekananda, and that priceless little book by Swami Prabhavananda, *The Eternal Companion*, all are filled with teachings similar to those of the Sermon and other parts of our Bible.

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In the book of Exodus we read that when Moses came down from the mount, 'Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone'. Swami Prabhavananda in this volume tells of seeing one of his elders, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, so transfigured. A light emanated from his whole body. Not only did Swami Prabhavananda see it, but crowds of people in a temple lane where it occurred, fell back in amazement and made way as the illumined holy man walked in complete absorption in the thought of God.

Phenomena of that order are not confined to scriptures dating hundreds and thousands of years back. They can and do occur today. Religion is a continuing fact in human life. The prescriptions of the Sermon on the Mount can be and are lived today. It depends upon the spirit in which they are accepted. Swami Prabhavananda and his fellow-Vedantists accept them realistically. That is probably the reason that people of various creeds and Christian sects, who come to the lectures on Vedanta, often find that their own creed appears suddenly brighter and more luminous, and their understanding of it attains a deeper penetration.

Vedanta, briefly, comes to the West not to supplant any religion, but to bring a more tangible spirituality to those who seek it. Its goal is not to proselytize, but to help man realize the divinity within him. In that it claims, not without reason, to be the most practical of religious philosophies. And that practicality is what Swami Prabhavananda successfully conveys in his remarkably fine and lucid interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount.

HENRY JAMES FORMAN

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S.P.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS book is based on lectures I have given on the Sermon on the Mount. The lectures have been revised and expanded to cover teachings not previously commented upon. To me, the Sermon on the Mount represents the essence of Christ's gospel; and it is printed here in its entirety, as it is set down, so that Christ's words may be read in sequence and the unity of his message may be clearly seen.

I am not a Christian, I am not a theologian, I have not read the Bible interpretations of the great Christian scholars. I have studied the New Testament as I have studied the scriptures of my own religion, Vedanta. Vedanta, which evolved from the Vedas, the most ancient of Hindu scriptures, teaches that all religions are true inasmuch as they lead to one and the same goal—God-realization. My religion therefore accepts and reveres all the great prophets, spiritual teachers, and aspects of the Godhead worshipped in different faiths, considering them to be manifestations of one underlying truth.

As a young monk, I dwelt in close association with most of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the founder of the order to which I belong. These holy men lived in the consciousness of God and taught us the methods by which one may reach the ultimate and blessed state of mystic union—samadhi, as it is called in Vedanta. From what I have seen in these holy men, and from whatever understanding I have gained sitting at their feet, I have tried to approach the teachings of Christ. This is why I have often turned to the words of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples to help explain the truths of the Sermon on the Mount.

One of these disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was my master, Swami Brahmananda. Although he was not a student of the Bible, from his own spiritual experience he taught in much the same way as Christ did, and often used almost the same

words. My master had seen Christ in spiritual vision, and celebrated Christmas every year by offering special worship to Jesus, a custom which has been observed in all the monasteries of the Ramakrishna Order to the present day. On these occasions fruit, bread, and cake are offered in our Hindu way. Often there is a lecture on Christ; or the story of the Nativity or the Sermon on the Mount is read.

One of these Christmas celebrations, the first I ever attended, had great bearing on what Christ means to me. It took place in 1914 at Belur Math near Calcutta, where the headquarters of our order are situated. I had joined the monastery just a few days before. On Christmas Eve, we gathered before an altar on which a picture of the Madonna and Child had been placed. One of the senior monks performed worship with offerings of flowers, incense, and food. Many of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples attended the service, among them my master, who was the president of our order. While we were seated in silence, my master said: 'Meditate on Christ within, and feel his living presence.' An intense spiritual atmosphere pervaded the worship hall. Our minds were lifted up, and we felt ourselves transported into another consciousness. For the first time I realized that Christ was as much our own as Krishna, Buddha, and other great illumined teachers whom we revered. As a Hindu, I was taught from childhood to respect all religious ideals, to recognize the same divine inspiration in all the different faiths. Thus Christ as a manifest expression of divinity I could never have considered foreign. But for a living and personal experience of him I needed the tangible heightening of consciousness resulting from the worship on that memorable Christmas Eve.

An intimate spiritual connection between Christ and my monastic order has existed for many years, beginning with its founder, Sri Ramakrishna, who was accorded divine worship

during his lifetime and since his passing away in 1886 has received growing recognition in India as an incarnation of God. Of the many saints and illumined teachers in the history of Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna expressed in his life to a greater degree than any other teacher the idea of religious universality and harmony. Not only did he undergo the disciplines of divergent sects within Hinduism but those of Mohammedanism and Christianity as well. Through each religious path he achieved the supreme realization of God, and thus was able to proclaim with the authority of direct experience: 'So many religions, so many paths to reach one and the same goal.'

It was about 1874 that Sri Ramakrishna interested himself actively in Christianity. A devotee who used to visit the Master at the Dakshineswar temple garden near Calcutta would explain the Bible to him in Bengali. One day, while Sri Ramakrishna was seated in the drawing-room of another devotee's home, he saw a picture of the Madonna and Child. Absorbed in contemplation of this picture, he saw it suddenly become living and effulgent. An ecstatic love for Christ filled Sri Ramakrishna's heart, and a vision came to him of a Christian church in which devotees were burning incense and lighting candles before Jesus. For three days Sri Ramakrishna lived under the spell of this experience. On the fourth day, while he was walking in a grove at Dakshineswar, he saw a person of serene countenance approaching with his gaze fixed on him. From the inmost recesses of Sri Ramakrishna's heart came the realization, 'This is Jesus, who poured out his heart's blood for the redemption of mankind. This is none other than Christ, the embodiment of love.' The Son of Man then embraced Sri Ramakrishna and entered into him, and Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi, the state of transcendental consciousness. Thus was Sri Ramakrishna convinced of Christ's divinity.

Shortly after Sri Ramakrishna's death, nine of his young disciples gathered on a winter night before a sacred fire to take their vows of formal renunciation—henceforth they were to serve God as monks. Their leader, the future Swami Vivekananda, told his brothers the story of Jesus' life, asking them to become Christs themselves, to pledge themselves to aid in the redemption of the world, and to deny themselves as Jesus had done. Later, the monks discovered that this evening had been the Christian Christmas Eve—a very propitious occasion for their vows.

Thus, since the early days of our order, Christ has been honoured and revered by our swamis as one of the greatest of illumined teachers. Many of our monks quote Christ's words to explain and illustrate spiritual truths, perceiving an essential unity between his message and the message of our Hindu seers and sages. Like Krishna and Buddha, Christ did not preach a mere ethical or social gospel but an uncompromisingly spiritual one. He declared that God can be seen, that divine perfection can be achieved. In order that men might attain this supreme goal of existence, he taught the renunciation of worldliness, the contemplation of God, and the purification of the heart through the love of God. These simple and profound truths, stated repeatedly in the Sermon on the Mount, constitute its underlying theme, as I shall try to show in the pages to follow.

July, 1963.

SWAMI PRABHAVANANDA

CHAPTER I

The Beatitudes

MATTHEW 5:1-12

BEFORE the time came for Jesus to give his Sermon on the Mount, he travelled all over Galilee preaching. 'And his fame went throughout all Syria,' as St Matthew said. The news spread of an extraordinary teacher, and crowds gathered to see him—as they have done for thousands of years in the Orient and still do at the approach of a God-man. They journeyed 'from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan'. And Jesus taught the multitudes according to their capacity; but his Sermon, which contains his highest teachings, he reserved for his disciples, for the ones who were spiritually ready. He took them to a hillside where they would not be interrupted by those who wanted less than his supreme truth.

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, . . .

Every spiritual teacher, whether he is a divine incarnation or an illumined soul, has two sets of teachings—one for the multitude, the other for his disciples. The elephant has two sets of teeth: the tusks with which he defends himself from external difficulties and the teeth with which he eats. The spiritual teacher prepares the way for his message with broad lessons—with his tusks, as it were. The inner truth of religion he reveals only to his intimate disciples. For religion is something which can actually be transmitted. A truly illumined

teacher can transmit to us the power which unfolds the divine consciousness latent within us. But the field must be fertile and the soil ready before the seed can be sown.

When crowds came on Sundays to visit Sri Ramakrishna, the most widely revered mystic of modern India, he would speak to them in a general way which benefited them. But when his intimate disciples gathered around him, as I was told by one of them, he would make sure that he was not overheard while giving them the sacred truths of religion. Not that the truths themselves are secret—they are recorded, and anyone can read them. But what he gave to these disciples was more than verbal teachings. In a divine mood he would uplift their consciousness.

Christ taught in the same way. He did not give the Sermon on the Mount to the multitudes, but to his disciples, whose hearts were prepared to receive it. The multitudes are not yet able to understand the truth of God. They do not really want it. My master, Swami Brahmananda, used to say: 'How many are ready? Yes, many people come to us. We have the treasure to give them. But they only want potatoes, onions, and egg-plants!'

Any one of us who sincerely wants the treasure, who seeks the truth, can benefit from the message given in the Sermon on the Mount and can become a disciple. Christ, as we shall see in our study of his Sermon, speaks of the conditions of discipleship which we must fulfil—for which we must prepare ourselves. He teaches the ways and means to attain to the purification of our hearts, so that the truth of God may be fully revealed within us.

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

In this first beatitude, Christ speaks of the chief characteristic which the disciple must have before he is ready to accept what the illumined teacher has to offer him. He must be poor in spirit; in other words, he must be humble. If a man has

pride in learning, wealth, beauty, or lineage, or has preconceived ideas of what spiritual life is and how he should be taught, his mind is not receptive to higher teachings. In the Bhagavad-Gita, the gospel of the Hindus, we read:

‘Those illumined souls who have realized the Truth will instruct you in the knowledge of Brahman [the transcendent aspect of God] if you will prostrate yourself before them, question them, and serve them as a disciple.’

According to an Indian tale, a man came to a teacher and asked to be made a disciple. The teacher, with his spiritual insight, realized that the man was not ready to be taught. So he inquired: ‘Do you know what you have to do in order to be a disciple?’ The man said he did not, and asked the teacher to tell him. ‘Well,’ said the teacher, ‘you have to fetch water, gather fuel, cook, and do many hours of heavy work. You also have to study. Are you willing to do all that?’

The man said: ‘Now I know what the disciple has to do. Tell me please, what does the teacher do?’

‘Oh, the teacher sits and gives spiritual instructions in his quiet way.’

‘Ah, I see!’ said the man. ‘In that case, I don’t want to be a disciple. Why don’t you make me a teacher?’

We all want to be teachers. But before we become teachers we must learn to be disciples. We must learn to be humble.

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

As long as we think that we are rich in worldly goods or in knowledge, we cannot make spiritual progress. When we feel that we are poor in spirit, when we grieve that we have not realized the truth of God, then only will we be comforted. No doubt we all mourn—but for what? For the loss of worldly pleasures and possessions. But that is not the kind of mourning of which Christ speaks. The mourning which Christ calls ‘blessed’ is very rare, because it arises from a sense of spiritual

loss, spiritual loneliness. It is a mourning which necessarily comes before God comforts us. Most of us are quite satisfied with the surface life we are leading. In the back of our minds perhaps we are aware that we lack something, but still we cling to the hope that this lack can be filled by the sense objects of this world.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'People weep rivers of tears because a son is not born or because they cannot get riches. But who sheds even one teardrop because he has not seen God?' This false sense of values is the result of our ignorance. Regarding the nature of this ignorance, the Indian philosopher Shankara said that the subject, the knower (Self or Spirit), is as opposed to the object, the known (non-Self or matter), as light is opposed to darkness. Yet through the influence of maya, the inexplicable power of ignorance, the subject and object have become mixed, so that man habitually identifies the Self with the non-Self. It is very easy to understand intellectually that the true Self is different from the body, just as we are different from the clothes we wear. Yet when the body is diseased, we say: 'I am sick.' Intellectually we can understand that the true Self is different from the mind. Yet when a wave of happiness or suffering arises, we say: 'I am happy,' or 'I am miserable.' Also, we identify ourselves with our relatives and friends: anything happening to them seems to be happening to us. We identify ourselves with our possessions. If we lose our wealth, we feel as if we had lost ourselves. This ignorance is common to all mankind. It can only be removed by the direct knowledge of God. When we begin to feel a spiritual lack within ourselves, when we begin to mourn as Christ wished us to mourn, when we shed even one tear for God, then we prepare the way for the comfort of that divine knowledge.

The kind of mourning that Christ called blessed is expressed in the *Imitation of Christ*:

'O Lord God, when shall I be made one with thee and be molten into thy love, so that I wholly forget myself? Be thou

in me, and I in thee; and grant that we may so abide, always together in one.'

We must come to this stage, when we feel that nothing can give us peace except the vision of God. Then God draws man's mind to himself as a magnet draws a needle, and comfort comes.

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

Ignorance and delusion are characteristic of the unregenerate mind. This ignorance is confirmed and buttressed by our sense of ego—our idea that we are separate from one another and from God. Egotism must be overcome if the mind is to be freed from delusion. Therefore—blessed are the meek. But why does Christ say that they shall inherit the earth? At first sight, this seems difficult to understand. Among the yoga aphorisms of Patanjali (yoga means union with God, also the path to that union) there is one aphorism which corresponds to this beatitude: 'The man who is confirmed in non-stealing becomes the master of all riches.' What is meant by 'non-stealing'? It means that we must give up the egotistic delusion that we can possess things, that anything can belong exclusively to us as individuals. We may think: 'But we are good people. We do not steal anything! Whatever we have, we have worked for and earned. It belongs to us by right.' But the truth is that nothing at all belongs to us. Everything belongs to God. When we regard anything in this universe as ours, we are appropriating God's possession.

What then is meekness? It is to live in self-surrender to God, free from the sense of 'me' and 'mine'. This does not mean that we should get rid of wealth, family, and friends; but we should get rid of the idea that they belong to us. They belong to God. We should think of ourselves as God's servants to whose care he has entrusted his creatures and possessions. As soon as we understand this truth and give up our deluded in-

dividual claims, we find that in the truest sense everything belongs to us after all.

Conquerors who try to become masters of the world by force of arms never inherit anything except worry, trouble, and headaches. Misers who accumulate huge wealth are only chained to their gold, they never really possess it. But the man who has given up his sense of attachment experiences the advantages which possessions afford without the misery which possessiveness brings.

Many people dislike this saying of Christ's because they think that the meek can never achieve anything. They think that no happiness is to be had in life unless one is aggressive. When they are told to give up the ego, to be meek, they are afraid that they will lose everything. But they are wrong. In the words of Swami Brahmananda :

'People who live in the senses think that they are enjoying life. What do they know about enjoyment? Only those who are filled with divine bliss really enjoy life.'

But arguments will not prove this truth. You have to experience it; then only will you be convinced.

If a spiritual aspirant sincerely follows Christ's teaching of meekness, he will find it very practical. He will find that anger and resentment can be conquered by gentleness and love. The Chinese mystic Lao Tzu expressed this truth by saying :

'Of the soft and weak things in the world, none is weaker than water. But in overcoming that which is firm and strong, nothing can equal it. That which is soft conquers the hard. Rigidity and hardness are companions of death. Softness and tenderness are companions of life.'

By sincerely giving up the ego to God, by being meek, we will gain everything. We will inherit the earth.

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

What is the righteousness for which Christ wants us to hunger and thirst? It is the righteousness which in a number of passages in the Old Testament is practically synonymous with salvation—in other words, with deliverance from evil, and union with God. This righteousness therefore is not what we ordinarily think of as moral virtues or good qualities, not relative good as opposed to evil or relative virtue as opposed to vice, but absolute righteousness, absolute goodness. The hunger and thirst after the righteousness of which Christ speaks is a hunger and thirst after God himself.

It has already been pointed out that most of us do not really want God. If we analyse ourselves, we shall find that our interest in God is not nearly as strong as our interest in all kinds of worldly objects. But even a slight desire to know the divine reality is a beginning that can lead us higher. We must start with self-effort. We must struggle to develop love for the Lord by practising recollectedness of him, by prayer, worship, and meditation. As we practise these spiritual disciplines, our slight desire to realize him will become intensified until it is a raging hunger and a burning thirst.

To those who asked him how to realize God, Sri Rama-krishna would say :

'Cry to him with a yearning heart, and then you will see him. After the rosy light of dawn out comes the sun; likewise, longing is followed by the vision of God. He will reveal himself to you if you love him with the combined force of these three attachments: the attachment of a miser to his wealth, that of a mother to her new-born child, and that of a chaste wife to her husband. Intense longing is the surest way to God-vision.'

We must learn to direct all our thoughts and all our energy consciously towards God. One gigantic thought-wave must be raised in the mind, engulfing all the cravings and passions

which distract us from the spiritual goal. When the mind thus becomes one-pointed and concentrated upon God, we shall be filled with righteousness.

There is a story of a disciple who asked his teacher, 'Sir, how can I realize God?'

'Come along,' said the teacher, 'I will show you.'

He took the disciple to a lake, and both plunged in. Suddenly the teacher reached over and pressed the disciple's head under water. A few moments later he released him and asked: 'Well, how did you feel?'

'Oh, I was dying for a breath of air!' gasped the disciple.

Then the teacher said: 'When you feel that intensely for God, you won't have to wait long for his vision.'

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

One of the yoga aphorisms of Patanjali, the father of Hindu psychology, corresponds to this beatitude:

'Undisturbed calmness of the mind is attained by cultivating friendliness towards the happy, mercy and compassion for the unhappy, delight in the virtuous, and indifference towards the wicked.'

To be merciful is one of the conditions necessary before we can receive the truth of God. Envy, jealousy, hatred—these are some of the universal weaknesses inborn in man. They are linked with our ego-sense which stems from ignorance. How are we to overcome them? By raising an opposite wave of thought. When somebody is happy, we should not be jealous of him; we should try to realize our friendship and unity and be happy with him. When somebody is unhappy, we should not be glad; we should feel sympathy and be merciful. When a man is good, do not be envious. When he is bad, do not hate him. Be indifferent to the wicked. Any thought of hate, even so-called 'righteous hatred' of evil, will raise a wave of hatred and evil in our own minds, increasing our ignorance and rest-

lessness. We cannot think of the Lord or love him until this thought-wave has subsided. If we want to find God, we have to become God-like in mercy.

My master used to say: 'What is the difference between man and God? Man, if you hurt him but once, will forget all your previous kindnesses to him and remember the one time you failed. But if you forget God and sin against him hundreds of times, still he will forgive all your faults and remember the few times that you sincerely prayed to him. Sin exists only in man's eyes; God does not look to man's sins.'

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

In every religion we find two basic principles: the ideal to be realized and the method of realization. Every scripture of the world has proclaimed the truth that God exists and that the purpose of man's life is to know him. Every great spiritual teacher has taught that man must realize God and be reborn in spirit. In the Sermon on the Mount the attainment of this ideal is expressed as perfection in God: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.' And the method of realization which Christ teaches is the purification of the heart which leads to that perfection.

What is this purity which we must have before God reveals himself to us? We all know of people whom we would describe as pure in an ethical sense, but they have not seen God. What is the reason? Ethical life, the steady practice of moral virtues, is needed as a preparation for spiritual life and therefore is a fundamental teaching in every religion. But it does not enable us to see God. It is like the foundation of a house; it is not the superstructure.

What is the test of purity? Try to think of God now, this very moment. What do you find? The thought of his presence passes through your mind, perhaps like a flash. Then many distractions begin. You are thinking of everything else in the universe but God. These distractions show that the mind is still impure, and therefore not ready to receive the vision of

the more good shall go from me . . . Cleanse your heart of malice and cherish no hatred, not even against your enemies; but embrace all living beings with kindness.'

These teachers agree that if we lack forgiveness, if we hold thoughts of anger or hatred, we will cause misery for ourselves as well as for others. They advise us to raise opposite waves of thought—thoughts of love and compassion—so that we will be at peace with the world and ourselves.

Why is it so difficult for most of us to follow the teaching of forgiveness? Because when someone cherishes ill will towards us we react by feeling hurt. And what is hurt the most? The ego. Forgiveness is perhaps the greatest of all virtues; because if we can truly forgive men their trespasses we rise above the ego, which obstructs our vision of God.

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face;

That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

A traditional Hindu saying warns: 'Beware of these: the man who wears a sacred leaf on his ear, one who is secretive and does not talk at all, one who cannot keep a secret and talks too much, a woman with a double veil, and the water of a pond which is covered with scum.' In other words, beware of things which are other than they seem. A man who makes a show of religion has no religion at all. If a man sincerely yearns for God-vision, he will be rewarded by his Father 'which seeth in secret', by the Lord who dwells in his inmost heart. Such a man, finding religion inside, will be too humble to display it outside: he keeps it sacred within himself.

Furthermore, spirituality and sadness do not go together.

Yoga Psychology explains that the practice of religious disciplines purifies the mind. And the purified mind—as we read in one of Patanjali's aphorisms—loses all lethargy and moroseness (tamas) and becomes established in cheerfulness (sattva). Commenting on this aphorism, Swami Vivekananda said:

'The first sign that you are becoming religious is that you are becoming cheerful. When a man is gloomy, that may be dyspepsia, but it is not religion. A pleasurable feeling is the nature of sattva. Everything is pleasurable to the sattvic man, and when this experience comes, know that you are progressing in yoga. . . . To the yogi, everything is bliss, every human face that he sees brings cheerfulness to him. That is a sign of a virtuous man. Misery is caused by sin and by no other cause. What business have you with clouded faces? . . . If you have a clouded face, do not go out that day, shut yourself up in your room. What right have you to carry this disease out into the world?'

God is love and bliss—the very opposite of sadness. A man who keeps his mind in God will be flooded with joy. Thus we read in a monastic breviary: 'Joyful let us drink the sober drunkenness of the Spirit!'

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Here Jesus is repeating what we have heard already, that one of the most important conditions for successfully starting to live the spiritual life is to have right discrimination—discrimination between the eternal and the non-eternal. The more this faculty is cultivated, the more we lose our thirst for the

ephemeral treasures of the objective world and turn towards the infinite and eternal treasures of heaven. The philosopher Spinoza defined this spiritual discrimination as follows:

'For the things which men, to judge by their actions, deem the highest good, are riches, fame, or sensual pleasure. Of these, the last is followed by satiety and repentance, the other two are never satiated; the more we have, the more we want; while the love of fame compels us to order our lives by the opinions of others. But if a thing is not loved, no quarrels will arise concerning it, no sadness will be felt if it perishes, no envy if another has it, in short, no disturbances of the mind. All these spring from the love of that which passes away. But the love of a thing eternal and infinite fills the mind wholly with joy, and is unmingled with sadness. Therefore it is greatly to be desired, and to be sought with all our strength.'

The purpose of life, in the words of the Upanishads, is 'to attain abiding bliss in the midst of the fleeting pleasures of life'. And that abiding bliss is the bliss of God. To be merged in the consciousness of God is to enter into his kingdom.

Many of us understand intellectually that the purpose of life is to realize God and that worldly pleasures exist only for the moment. Yet our hearts do not respond, because we have formed the habit of finding pleasure in sense objects. Now we have to create the new habit of finding joy in God. Brother Lawrence said :

'In order to know God, we must often think of him; and when we come to love him, we shall then also think of him often : for our heart will be with our treasure.'

In other words, once we have decided that we want treasures in heaven, and not treasures upon earth, we must learn to fix our hearts in God. No matter how often we may show weakness and forget to practise recollectedness, we shall reach the goal in the end as long as we keep up the attempt. A little

baby tries to walk: as one watches him falling down continually, it seems incredible that he will ever succeed. But he picks himself up, again and again, because the urge within him is so strong; and in the end he can walk upright without faltering. Similarly, there is no failure in the spiritual life, as long as we do not give up the struggle. And we shall never give it up once we have become firmly convinced in heart and mind that God is our only treasure.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

In order for us to fix our hearts in the eternal and to renounce the ephemeral objects of the world, our eyes must be 'single'. We must not run after this or that object, but must concentrate with one-pointed devotion upon God. For the attainment of illumination, says the Gita,

'the will is directed singly towards one ideal. When a man lacks this discrimination, his will wanders in all directions, after innumerable aims.'

As long as a man lacks spiritual discrimination his 'whole body shall be full of darkness'. He continues to live in ignorance, and the true Self, the divine light within him, remains covered. Concentration of the mind on the chosen ideal of God is the way to uncover that divine light.

This concentration, then, purifies what enters the consciousness through the senses. 'The light of the body is the eye,' says Christ, comparing the eye to a window through which the outside world enters. Through the five senses we gather impressions, and the sum total of these impressions make up our character. If we see good, we take in good; if we see evil, we take in evil. As a Vedic prayer says, 'With our ears may

we hear what is good. With our eyes may we behold thy righteousness.' Wherever we look, instead of the names and forms of things, we must learn to see God, the all-pervading Spirit. In this way, rather than distracting us from our ideal, every object in the universe becomes an aid to God-realization.

And so the light of God pours in upon us until eventually our 'whole body shall be full of light'. The scriptures speak of great souls whose inner illumination became objectively visible; their bodies actually became full of light. Once I had the memorable privilege of witnessing such a transfiguration. It was in Banaras in October of 1914. Swami Premananda, who as a disciple of Ramakrishna had attained God-realization, used to visit various temples after taking his daily bath in the Ganges. I would accompany him. One day, after we finished worship in the temple of Annapurna, the Divine Mother, the head priest placed a garland of marigolds around Swami Premananda's neck. When the Swami was about to take the garland off to give it to me, I placed my palms together, bowed before him and said: 'No, holy sir, please keep the garland yourself. You look so beautiful!' The word 'beautiful' reminded the Swami of God's beauty, and he went into ecstasy. His face flushed, and then a light began to emanate from his whole body. Walking slowly, he left the temple, and I followed him. The temple lane was crowded as usual, but on either side of us people stared at the Swami and made way. It was quite evident that everyone present saw him illumined. We continued to walk through the streets of Banaras while crowds stood still, silently watching Swami Premananda. He was completely absorbed in the thought of God and oblivious of his surroundings. As we approached the outer gate of our monastery, Swami Nirbharananda, the abbot, saw us from the veranda. He immediately ordered the monks to prepare a special welcome for Swami Premananda. We entered the monastery grounds to the sound of gongs and conch shells, and the ringing of bells. Then, when we arrived at the veranda, Swami Premananda took the garland off and placed it around

the neck of the abbot. Gradually the ecstasy abated, and the divine light disappeared.

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Compare Christ's words with the Hindu saying about Rama, one of the avatars: 'Where Rama is, there is no worldly craving; and where worldly craving exists, Rama is not.' Let us face the facts: the attempt to serve 'God and mammon' simultaneously is quite hopeless. The great spiritual teachers tell us that it cannot be done. We cannot become absorbed in God as long as we are slaves to cravings such as lust and greed. Spiritual discrimination must accompany spiritual practices. When our discrimination ripens, renunciation follows as a matter of course. Then, like the merchant in Christ's parable, we will sell all our possessions in order to buy the 'one pearl of great price', which is the kingdom of heaven.

A reading of Christ's gospel makes it obvious that he taught the ideal of renunciation exactly as it has been taught by all the great seers of truth: If you really want God, you must give up mammon. Like the message of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and every other avatar, Christ's message is universal: spiritual life without renunciation is impossible. In his own words:

'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'

What does it really mean to deny yourself, to renounce? It does not mean escape from the world and its duties. It means giving up selfishness, the sense of 'me' and 'mine'. It means loving God with all one's heart, soul, and mind. Sri Rama-

krishna used to say: 'Why does the lover of God renounce everything for the sake of Him whom he loves? The moth after seeing a light does not return to darkness; the ant dies in the heap of sugar but does not turn back. So the lover of God gladly sacrifices his life for the attainment of divine bliss, caring for nothing else.'

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Millions of people have known these words since their childhood, and thought them beautiful but quite impractical. They prefer the worldly-wise motto: 'Trust in God, and keep your powder dry.' And they are right, as long as they want to go on living by the values of this world. These teachings of Christ are impractical for any individual who is not completely devoted to God. But if you truly seek the kingdom of heaven, then you will not care where you live, what you eat, or where you sleep. There have been men and women in past ages, and there are some today, who live in this spirit of complete dependence upon the Lord.

Some wandering monks in India take a vow not to go for alms for certain periods of time. They seat themselves in

meditation, and make no attempt to provide for themselves. No one who lives that way ever starves. Several disciples of Sri Ramakrishna practised this austerity, and somehow or other they always received enough food to sustain them. The experiences of such devotees of God prove that Christ's teaching of perfect renunciation can be followed without any compromise.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Sri Ramakrishna taught the same truth: 'A holy man cannot lay things up. Birds and wandering monks do not make provision for the morrow.' And he was criticized for teaching this precept to the young boys who came to him for religious instruction instead of encouraging them to live 'useful' lives in the world. He knew that all people cannot live the ideal of total renunciation, and he asked perfect self-denial only from his future message-bearers. But his householder-disciples also were expected to practise renunciation and self-surrender. He told them to fulfil their duties in the spirit of non-attachment the way a nursemaid affectionately and conscientiously takes care of her master's son but knows that he does not belong to her. And he asked them to resign themselves entirely to the will of God: 'He has placed you in the world. What can you do? Surrender yourselves to him!'

In order to illustrate the ideal of self-surrender for the householder, Sri Ramakrishna used to tell the story of a weaver who was devoted to God as Rama. The weaver was loved and trusted by everyone in his village, because he was so honest and guileless. One night he was sitting alone in the worship hall of his home when a gang of robbers arrived. They needed someone to carry their loot and took the weaver with them. After they had

broken into a house and stolen many things, they piled the load on the weaver's head. Suddenly the watchman came. The robbers managed to escape, but the weaver was caught and put in jail. The next morning, the villagers unanimously told the judge that the weaver could not possibly have stolen anything. So the judge asked the weaver to describe what had happened. The weaver said: 'Your Honour, by Rama's will I was sitting in the worship hall, chanting the name of God. By Rama's will a band of robbers passed by and took me with them. By Rama's will they committed a robbery and made me carry their loot. By Rama's will the watchman arrived, and I was caught and put in jail. And by Rama's will, this morning I have been brought before your Honour.' The judge was convinced of the weaver's truthfulness and piety, and released him. On the way home, the weaver told the villagers: 'By Rama's will I have been released.'

When an individual reaches such a state of complete self-surrender to divine providence, God guides his every step. The avatars testify to this truth. Christ promises that the heavenly Father will take care of the needs of his devotee. Similarly, Sri Krishna declares in the Gita :

' . . . if a man will worship me, and meditate upon me with an undistracted mind, devoting every moment to me, I shall supply all his needs, and protect his possessions from loss.'

If we really seek the kingdom of God to the exclusion of everything else, we will feel God's grace in a special way.

' . . . and all these things shall be added unto you.' This passage has been interpreted to mean that love for God will bring material benefits. It is perfectly true that the Lord watches over his devotee and provides his necessities of life. But to worship God in order to obtain fulfilment of material desires is to use him as the means for a worldly end. It is a degeneration of religion. What is added unto the man who depends entirely on God? Spiritual benefits: purity, divine love, and eternal joy.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

How concerned we are about the future! We suffer needlessly, recalling past pain and fearing repeated hardship to come. Christ admonishes us to give up worrying. Worrying does not solve our problems; rather, it keeps the mind restless and distracted, unable to think of God. In the words of Swami Vivekananda: 'Every time we are anxious or depressed we become atheists.' But if, instead of worrying about tomorrow, we practise directing the mind to God, our problems will be solved. We will find strength and peace of mind. We will gain poise in the midst of the opposites of life. And we will eventually become spiritually illumined.

The Gita says:

That serene one
Absorbed in the Atman
Masters his will,
He knows no disquiet
In pain or in pleasure,
In honour, dishonour.

This serenity is not what we ordinarily think of as stoic resignation to suffering and misery. Like all embodied beings, the man of God feels heat and cold; he experiences pleasure and pain, praise and blame. But these dualities of life no longer affect him. Once he has become spiritually illumined, he recognizes that body and mind are separate from the Atman, his true Self; and his purified heart experiences the infinite happiness which exists beyond the grasp of the senses.

CHAPTER VII

Strait is the Gate

MATTHEW 7: 1-29

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

ALMOST everyone has a tendency to gossip, to criticize and judge others. We relish gossiping and criticizing others because it swells our own sense of ego. Behind our criticism is the feeling: 'I don't have this weakness. I am greater than they are.' Usually, the weaknesses we seem to see in another person exist only in our own impure imagination. How many of us can really look into the depths of another human being and see all the motives which are prompting him to act in a particular way? Yet we are eager to judge and impute motives—evil motives!

Gossip may seem very innocent, yet it causes immense harm in human society, and particularly to those who indulge in it. Those who dwell on the faults of others develop the same faults themselves; for in the mind of every individual both good and bad impressions and tendencies are stored up, and if you criticize another person for a certain fault, and go on criticizing, similar tendencies which were dormant in your own subconscious mind are released and become active. If, on

the other hand, you make a habit of seeing the good in others, your own good tendencies are released and strengthened. So for his own sake as well as for the sake of others, the spiritual seeker must not criticize, gossip, or judge. 'If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others,' taught Sri Sarada Devi, a great woman saint of Bengal. 'Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger; this whole world is yours.'

In India we have a saying that the fly sits on the filth as well as on the honey, but that the bee seeks only the honey and avoids the filth. And so one of the first vows given to the religious aspirant is: 'May I follow the example of the bee, not that of the fly!' As we progress in spiritual life, we learn to see the good in everyone, we learn to have love, sympathy, and compassion for all. Real holy men have that attitude towards mankind: if you have the least drop of goodness in you, they see an ocean of goodness within that drop—not because they are overly optimistic, but because they see the possibility of future growth, and they emphasize it. They know that through the grace of God a man may be freed in one moment from all sin and bondage. Swami Brahmananda used to say:

'Heaps of cotton can be burnt with one matchstick; similarly, one gracious glance from God can wipe out mountains of sins. The man who appears as a sinner today may be a saint tomorrow.'

Does this mean that we should be blind to one another's faults, and never try to correct them? No, Jesus does not say that. But he says:

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Jesus is asking us to correct our own defects before we try to correct our brother's. We are hypocrites as long as we

rationalize our weaknesses and find them worthy of forgiveness, yet remain unwilling to bear with our brother's imperfections. When we have cast the beam out of our own eyes, when our hearts are purified and we really have love for mankind, then we can tell others where they fail—not with malicious relish, but with sympathy and compassion. My master, like all such great souls, had moods when he saw no faults in anyone. He saw God everywhere, and nothing but God. But at other times he scolded us, thundered at us, pounded at our faults. Afterwards he would say: 'Do you think you can run away from me, because I am apparently so cruel? The mother holds the child, and spansks it. The child cries "Mother!" And all the while it is in its mother's arms.' But until we feel such love ourselves, we have no right to criticize others. Hands off! We will find it more profitable to see the fault in ourselves.

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Here Jesus tells his apostles how they are to teach the truth of God. He warns them to discriminate, to preach only to those who are prepared to receive and follow the teaching. We find parallel passages in the scriptures of Vedanta. In the Mundaka Upanishad we read: 'Let the truth of Brahman be taught only to those who obey his law, who are devoted to him, and who are pure in heart.' Similarly, after giving the message of the Gita to Arjuna, Sri Krishna says: 'You must never tell this holy truth to anyone who lacks self-control and devotion, or who despises his teacher and mocks at me.'

A real guru does not entrust an exalted precept to an unspiritual man, who may misinterpret it, misuse it to justify his worldly cravings, or ridicule it. There are certain conditions which an individual must meet before he can assimilate religious truth. He must have purity, a thirst for divine knowledge, and perseverance. When both the aspirant and his teacher are properly qualified, spiritual life becomes fruitful.

The Upanishads tell us that many persons, though they hear of the Self, do not understand it.

'Wonderful is he who speaks of it. Intelligent is he who learns of it. Blessed is he who, taught by a good teacher, is able to understand it.'

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

In this passage Jesus sums up the whole truth of religion. Before the door to the kingdom of God is opened, the spiritual aspirant must have both longing for God and faith.

What is faith? It is knowing that when we knock at the door it will be opened. This faith does not come until we have achieved purity of heart. Lusts, passions, and fleshly desires prevent us from seeing God, who is nevertheless present at all times, everywhere. The more we knock, the more we ask and pray, the more this world will be seen to be a mere appearance, and the reality of God's presence will open to us.

True longing for God—the hungering and mourning which Jesus calls blessed—comes only when we are no longer attached to the objects of this world. We must reach a stage of spiritual unfoldment in which, in the words of the Psalmist, the soul yearns for divine union 'as the hart panteth after the water brooks'. The great Hindu mystic Chaitanya longed for the vision of Krishna so desperately that an instant's separation from his beloved Lord seemed to him like a thousand years. He felt that his heart would burn away with its desire and that the world, without God, was 'a heartless void'. When this intensity of longing arises, God grants the prayer of his devotee.

If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

We must always remember that God loves us, who are his own children, and that we have a right to his indulgence. Sri Ramakrishna said:

'If a son begs continually for his share of the property, his parents will give it to him even before he comes of age. The Lord will surely answer your prayers if you feel restless for him. He is our own Father and Mother. We have every right to claim our inheritance from him.'

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

The truth which Jesus teaches here is common to all the major religions. It is the Golden Rule, our guide for conduct in human society. There are almost identical passages in the Mahabharata, the famous Indian epic: 'Treat others as thou wouldst thyself be treated.' 'Do nothing to thy neighbour which hereafter thou wouldst not have thy neighbour do to thee.' Our goal in life is to experience union with God and all beings. We can make this end the means of realizing God. If we practise trying to see the unity, if we do unto others as we would have them do unto us, our consciousness will eventually be transformed. Then we will actually see the one God vibrating in every atom of the universe, and love him in all beings.

Teaching Arjuna the truth of universal love, Sri Krishna says:

Who burns with the bliss
And suffers the sorrow
Of every creature
Within his own heart,

Making his own
 Each bliss and each sorrow :
 Him I hold highest
 Of all the yogis.

There are some who believe that the search for God is apt to make the searcher indifferent to the sufferings of others, but the very opposite is true. The more we turn to God with love, the more sensitive we become to the problems of others and the more we care for them. We begin to realize that our own Self is the Self in everyone else. Because we wish to be happy, we cannot cause unhappiness to others; and so we cannot hurt others in any way. My master used to say: 'Go and meditate, chant the Lord's name. Then you will find your heart expanding in sympathy for all.'

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Jesus warns us that realization of God is not easy. Purity of heart can only be achieved after a great struggle. In the Katha Upanishad we read: 'Like the sharp edge of a razor, the sages say, is the path. Narrow it is, and difficult to tread!' We are also told that the Lord created the senses outgoing;

'Accordingly, man looks towards what is without, and sees not what is within. Rare is he who, longing for immortality, shuts his eyes to what is without and beholds the Self.'

The natural human tendency is to rush out through the broad ways of the senses and lose oneself in the world. The process of religious growth is to turn that whole current of life around and make it flow inward, through 'the strait gate'.

The meaning of the 'strait gate' seems to be made quite clear

by the Yoga teachings on spiritual awakening. The yogis of India identify three nerve-passages in the spine, which are called the ida, the pingala, and the sushumna. The ida and the pingala are the two outer passages of the spinal nerves, but modern anatomists have been unable to find any use for the sushumna, the central passage. Yoga, however, reveals its use. According to Yoga there are seven centres of spiritual consciousness located along the spine in the human body. At the base of the spine a reserve of latent spiritual energy is situated which, awakened by spiritual practices and devotion to God, flows upward through the narrow channel of the sushumna. As this energy reaches the higher centres of consciousness, it produces various degrees of enlightenment.

As long as the mind is attached to worldliness consciousness dwells in the three lower centres, at the organs of evacuation and reproduction, and at the navel. The mind then contains no spiritual ideals or pure thoughts. The fourth centre of consciousness is in the heart region. When the spiritual energy rises to this centre, the aspirant sees a divine light and experiences ecstasy. As the energy reaches the fifth centre, at the throat, he wants to think and talk only of God. At the sixth centre, between the eyebrows, he experiences the vision of God. There is still a slight sense of ego left, and the aspirant longs to break down that last barrier of separation from God. When the spiritual energy bursts into the highest centre, in the brain, the realization dawns that 'I and my Father are one', and perfect divine union is attained. So the sushumna would be literally a narrow gate leading to eternal life, to the knowledge of God himself.

In India, Yoga teachings on the spiritual centres have been corroborated by the experiences of aspirants for thousands of years. But mystical realization is, of course, not limited to India—it is the same for all, whether they are Hindus, Christians, Jews, or followers of any other religious path. For a striking resemblance to the experiences of the Indian yogis, consider the example of Jacob Boehme, a Christian mystic of

the sixteenth century, who describes in his *Confessions* his own spiritual awakening:

'For the Holy Ghost will not be held in the sinful flesh, but rises up like a lightning-flash, as fire sparkles and flashes out of a stone when a man strikes it.

'But when the flash is caught in the fountain of the heart, then the Holy Spirit rises up, in the seven unfolding fountain spirits, into the brain, like the dawning of the day, the morning redness. . . .

'From this God I take my knowledge and from no other thing; neither will I know any other thing than that same God. . . .

'Though an angel from heaven should tell this to me, yet for all that I could not believe it, much less lay hold on it; for I should always doubt whether it was certainly so or no. But the Sun itself arises in my spirit, and therefore I am most sure of it.'

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Jesus tells us to discriminate between true and false prophets and true and false religion. True religion shows us how to overcome the world and attain the knowledge of God, but the teachers of false religion hold out the promise of success and wealth in the world. The fruits of true religion are illumination, selfless love, and compassion for all. Sri Ramakrishna

followed the paths of many religions during his life on earth, and always applied the same test to each: 'Will it give me the illumination of God?' When told about some new sect, he would ask: 'Does it teach love for God? Does it teach people how to realize God?' If not, he would have nothing to do with it.

A religious leader should be an illumined soul. If he teaches the knowledge of God without having that knowledge himself, he is like the blind leading the blind. But it is difficult for a spiritual aspirant to judge the fitness of a teacher or prophet, because a truly religious man does not advertise his holiness. There are, however, certain qualities which are characteristic of a genuine spiritual leader. First, he knows the spirit of the scriptures. Second, he is sinless and pure in heart, which means that he lives what he preaches—an intellectual grasp of religious truth is not enough. Third, he works out of pure love for mankind; he does not teach with any ulterior motive—such as the desire for wealth or fame. The spiritual leader or prophet who possesses these three qualities can be trusted, and the aspirant who approaches him with humility and reverence is blessed.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

These verses have frequently been used to justify a kind of humanistic religion. The humanists interpret the phrase about doing 'the will of my Father' as a command to perform good works in the external world. They say, 'Lord, Lord', to give the work a touch of emotion, and then go ahead with their social

service. They use God as a scavenger to clean out the drains of human society.

But there is only one way of doing the will of God, and that is, first, to realize him. Until we have done that, we can never know what his will is. This does not mean that we must give up our humanitarian work. If a man is hungry, feed him; if he is sick, nurse him. However, we must do this, not as philanthropy or service to mankind, but as service to God out of love for God.

There is a very important distinction between the two attitudes of philanthropy and service to God. Among those who set out to serve mankind we often find egotism arising. They survey their work, and soon they are saying: 'Without me, everything will go to pieces. Nothing must stand in the way of this work. The world needs me.' And then, it is not long before they are saying: 'God needs me.' When I first came to this country, I visited a Sunday-school class—the teacher had written on the board: 'God needs your help.' Later on I heard a minister say: 'We all know that God is not omnipotent. We must help him to gain more power.' That is the direct opposite of what Jesus taught. Jesus taught that God does not need us; we need him. He taught that the wonderful works we do in the name of God will not enable us to enter into the kingdom of heaven; we work 'iniquity' unless we surrender our egos to God and merge our wills in his will.

Regarding selfless service, Swami Vivekananda said:

'It is sheer nonsense on the part of any man to think that he is born to help the world. It is simply vanity; it is selfishness insinuating itself in the form of virtue. . . .

The desire to do good is the highest motive power we have if we know that it is a privilege to help others. Do not stand on a high pedestal and take five cents in your hand and say, "Here, my poor man!" But be grateful that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. . . . What can we do at best? Build a hospital, make

roads, or erect charity asylums. . . . One volcanic eruption may sweep away all our roads and hospitals and cities and buildings.

'Let us give up all this foolish talk of doing good to the world. It is not waiting for your or my help. Yet we must work and constantly do good, because it is a blessing to ourselves. That is the only way we can become perfect. . . . We think that we have helped some man and expect him to thank us; and because he does not, unhappiness comes to us. Why should we expect anything in return for what we do? Be grateful to the man you help, think of him as God. Is it not a great privilege to be allowed to worship God by helping our fellow man?

'Do what good you can, some evil will inhere in it; but do all without regard to personal result. Give up all results to the Lord, then neither good nor evil will affect you.'

Religion must be neither egocentric nor altruistic, but theocentric. We must centre our whole mind upon God, and then, extending our arms to everyone, embrace all in the love of God.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

The rock upon which the wise man builds his house is the rock of spiritual experience. When once you have been face to face with Reality, when you stand upon that, then nothing can shake you. Until we have built upon that rock—no matter how strong our faith may seem to be emotionally—we shall

be shaken by the storms of doubt; and the house will fall, and have to be rebuilt again and again.

A Christ, a Buddha, a Ramakrishna arises and says, 'I have seen Him!' No second-hand report, no amount of study, no wealth of eloquence can be compared to the absolute guarantee of first-hand witness which such an illumined teacher brings us. But even the testimony of these illumined teachers, even that is not enough—their testimony must move us to action. The faith of a person who merely says, 'I believe in Jesus', or 'I accept Buddha', and does nothing further, is not true faith. 'And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.' True faith makes us strive until we too are reborn in spirit and enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Actually to have been present, to listen to the Sermon on the Mount, must have been one of the most tremendous experiences a human being could have—yet even this was an experience at second-hand; and so we find that some of Christ's most intimate disciples were later troubled with doubts. Swami Vivekananda had doubts too, even after long intimacy with Sri Ramakrishna; and those doubts only vanished finally when he directly perceived the truth of God. And so we return to the basic principle that religion is something we ourselves have to do, and be, and live—or else it is nothing.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

I would like to quote a passage from Swami Vivekananda's lecture on Christ: 'He had no other occupation in life, no other thought except that one, that he was Spirit. He was disembodied, unfettered, unbound Spirit. And not only so, but he, with his marvellous vision, had found that every man and woman, whether Jew or Gentile, whether rich or poor, whether saint or sinner, was the embodiment of the same undying

Spirit as himself. Therefore, the one work his whole life showed was calling them to realize their own spiritual nature. Give up, he said, these superstitious dreams that you are low and that you are poor. Think not that you are trampled upon and tyrannized over as if you were slaves, for within you is something that can never be tyrannized over, never be trampled upon, never be troubled, never be killed. Know, he declared, "the kingdom of God is within you." You are all Sons of God, immortal Spirit. Dare you stand up and say, not only that 'I am the Son of God' but I shall also find in my heart of hearts that "I and my Father are one".'

This is the eternal gospel which every great Messenger has taught and which Christ asks all of us who would be his children first to hear, then to realize for ourselves.



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