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The Wisdom Way of Knowing:  
Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition  
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# The Wisdom Jesus

*Transforming Heart and Mind—  
a New Perspective on Christ  
and His Message*



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sort of ring to them when we approach them not as little moral lessons but as radical calls to the transformation of your consciousness. We'll begin with the most well known of these teachings, then move into turf that is perhaps much less familiar.

### The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12)

If you were raised Christian, you are probably familiar with the beatitudes. They're one of the "top three" texts that you get to memorize in Sunday school (along with the Ten Commandments and the Twenty-third Psalm). These eight short sayings (called "beatitudes" because they all begin with the phrase "Blessed are . . .") lay out Jesus's core teachings in a wonderfully concentrated and compelling format. Curiously, of all his teachings they are also the *least* commented upon by the church fathers and theologians<sup>1</sup>—most likely, as we shall soon see, because they are clearly nondual teachings of the highest order, and most of the church still isn't there yet. Let's consider each of them in turn.

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* From a wisdom perspective (that is, from the point of view of the transformation of consciousness), "poor in spirit" designates an inner attitude of receptivity and openness, and one is blessed by it because only in this state is it possible to receive anything. There's a wonderful Zen story that exactly translates this teaching. A young seeker, keen to become the student of a certain master, is invited to an interview at the master's house. The student rambles on about all his spiritual experience, his past teachers, his insights and skills, and his pet philosophies. The master listens silently and begins to pour a cup of tea. He pours and pours, and when the cup is overflowing he keeps right on pouring. Eventually the student notices what's going on and interrupts his monologue to say, "Stop pouring! The cup is full." The teacher says, "Yes, and so are you. How can I possibly teach you?"

This first beatitude speaks to that principle. In one of his most

beautiful insights, the contemporary Christian mystic Thomas Merton once wrote, "At the center point of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and illusion, a point of pure truth, a point of spark which belongs entirely to God."<sup>2</sup> From time immemorial wisdom teaching has insisted that only through that point of nothingness can we enter the larger mind. As long as we're filled with ourselves, we can go no further.

*"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."* Essentially, from a wisdom perspective, this second beatitude is talking about vulnerability and flow. When we mourn (and we're talking about true mourning here, not complaining or self-pity) we are in a state of freefall, our heart reaching out toward what we have seemingly lost but cannot help loving anyway. To mourn is by definition to live between the realms. "Practice the wound of love," writes Ken Wilber in *Grace and Grit*, his gripping personal story of loss and transformation. "Real love hurts; real love makes you totally vulnerable and open; real love will take you far beyond yourself; and therefore real love will devastate you."<sup>3</sup> Mourning is indeed a brutal form of emptiness. But in this emptiness, if we can remain open, we discover that a mysterious "something" does indeed reach back to comfort us; the tendrils of our grief trailing out into the unknown become intertwined in a greater love that holds all things together. To mourn is to touch directly the substance of divine compassion. And just as ice must melt before it can begin to flow, we, too, must become liquid before we can flow into the larger mind. Tears have been a classic spiritual way of doing this.

*"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth"* is how the third beatitude is usually translated. A better translation is "Blessed are the gentle," and perhaps an even better one is "Blessed are the gentled." Remember that wonderful passage from *The Little Prince* when the fox asks, "To tame something: what does that mean?" The prince replies, "It means to form bonds. If I tame you, I become responsible for you, and you depend on me because I have tamed you."<sup>4</sup> That's the ballpark this beatitude is working in. Blessed are the ones who have become spiritually "domesticated": the ones who have tamed

the wild animal energy within them, the passions and compulsions of our lower nature. In the Gospel of Thomas we will hear this process described as “devouring the lion”—because otherwise the lion will devour us! Only when we have dealt directly with our animal instincts, and the pervasive sense of fear and scarcity that emerge out of our egoic operating system, are we truly able to inherit the earth rather than destroying it.

“*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*” The key to this fourth beatitude lies in understanding what the word “righteousness” means. To our post-Puritan, post-Victorian ears, righteousness is a synonym for virtue. It means being moral, behaving correctly. But in Israel of Jesus’s times, righteousness was something much more dynamic than that. You can actually visualize it as a force field: an energy-charged sphere of holy presence. To be “in the righteousness of God” (as Old Testament writers are fond of saying) means to be directly connected to this vibrational field, to be anchored within God’s own aliveness. There is nothing subtle about the experience; it is as fierce and intransigent a bond as picking up a downed electrical wire. To “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” then, speaks to this intensity of connectedness. Jesus promises that when the hunger arises within you to find your own deepest aliveness within God’s aliveness, it will be satisfied—in fact, the hunger itself is a sign that the bond is already in place. As we enter the path of transformation, the most valuable thing we have working in our favor is our yearning. Some spiritual teachers will even say that the yearning you feel for God is actually coming from the opposite direction; it is in fact God’s yearning for *you*. “The eye with which you see God is the eye with which God sees you,” said Meister Eckhart, one of the greatest Christian mystics, stressing the complete simultaneity of the energy of connection. When we yearn, we come into sympathetic vibration with a deeper heart-knowing. I spoke in the previous chapter about how the heart is an organ of alignment; it connects us. Yearning is the vibration of that connectedness. In this beatitude Jesus is not talking about doing virtuous deeds

so you’ll be rewarded later; he is talking about being in connection with your fundamental yearning.

“*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*” In this beatitude Jesus again returns to the idea of flow. Notice that there’s an exchange going on here: we give mercy and we receive mercy. And this is not coincidental, for the root of the word “mercy” comes from the old Etruscan *merc*, which also gives us “commerce” and “merchant.”<sup>5</sup> It’s all about exchange.

Usually we think of the mercy of God as a kind of divine clemency, and we pray, “Lord have mercy upon us” as a confession of our weakness and dependency. (Because these qualities are distasteful to a lot of modern people, the “Lord have mercy” prayer has currently gone a bit out of style.) But in this other understanding, mercy is not something God has; it’s something that God *is*. Exchange is the very nature of divine life—of consciousness itself, according to modern neurological science—and all things share in the divine life through participation in this dance of giving and receiving. The brilliant young South African teacher Michael Brown writes in his 2005 book *The Presence Process*: “Giving is receiving is the energetic frequency upon which our universe is aligned. All other approaches to energy exchange immediately cause dissonance and disharmony in our life experience.” Surely Jesus knew this as well, and his teaching in this beatitude<sup>6</sup> invites us into a deeper trust of that flow. Exchange is at the very heart of his understanding of “no separation.”

“*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*” This may well be the most important of all the beatitudes—from the perspective of wisdom it certainly is. But what is purity of heart? This is another of those concepts we have distorted badly in our very morality-oriented Christianity of the West. For most people, purity of heart would almost certainly mean being virtuous, particularly in the sexual arena. It would be roughly synonymous with chastity, perhaps even with celibacy. But in wisdom teaching, purity means *singleness*, and the proper translation of this beatitude is, really, “Blessed are those whose heart is not divided” or “whose heart is a unified whole.” Remember the *ihidaya*

from chapter 2?—the “single one” who has unified his or her being and become what we would nowadays call “enlightened.” According to Jesus, this enlightenment takes place primarily within the heart. When your heart becomes “single”—that is, when it desires one thing only, when it can live in perfect alignment with that resonant field of mutual yearning we called “the righteousness of God,” then you “see God.” And this does not mean that you see God as an *object* (for that would be the egoic operating system), but rather, you see through the eyes of non-duality; God is the seeing itself.

So this beatitude is not about sexual abstinence; it’s about cleansing the lens of perception. The question, of course, is how does one do this? We will be taking up this question in chapter 6, but for now it is worth noting that Jesus flags this particular transformation as the core praxis of the path. Somehow when the heart becomes single, the rest will follow.

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.”* This beatitude follows as the logical consequence of all that has been laid out so far. When our hearts are gentled and single, when we’ve tamed the animal instincts, we become peacemakers. We are no longer wielding the sword of the binary operator that divides the world into good guys and bad guys, insiders and outsiders, winning team and losing team. When the field of vision has been unified, the inner being comes to rest, and that inner peaceableness flows into the outer world as harmony and compassion.

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* Jesus is not talking about martyrdom here, but about freedom. The Gospel of Thomas records this beatitude with a slight but telling variation that captures the very essence of Jesus’s meaning here—and in fact, throughout all the beatitudes:

Blessed are you in the midst of persecution who,  
When they hate and pursue you even to the core of  
your being,  
Cannot find “you” anywhere.<sup>7</sup>

Talk about freedom! Whatever this elixir of pure liberation may be, it is what the journey is all about. And it is attained gradually within us—distilled drop by drop from the terror and turmoil of our egoic selfhood—as we learn to let go and entrust ourselves to the Divine Mercy. Situations of persecution (or anything else that shakes us out of our egoic comfort zone) can become great teaching tools if we have the courage to use them that way.

Do the beatitudes appear differently to you against this wisdom backdrop? In these eight familiar sayings we can now see that Jesus is talking about a radical transformation of consciousness, embraced through an attitude of inner receptivity; a willingness to enter the flow; a commitment to domesticate those violent animal programs within us; and above all, a passionate desire to unify the heart. This is a very powerful fourfold path. It has both a contemporaneity and a timelessness to it—not unlike the teaching you would hear today from the Dalai Lama and other great spiritual masters who have dedicated their lives to increasing the quality and quantity of human consciousness.

## The Parables

Let’s turn now to the parables. Even more so than the beatitudes, these are the familiar and well-loved ground of Jesus’s teachings. Who doesn’t know the parable of the good Samaritan or the prodigal son? But as I’ve mentioned already, most of us don’t really have a clear idea of what a parable is. We get confused between a parable and a proverb. A proverb is something along the lines of Aesop’s Fables: a teaching story with a moral to it, whose purpose is to help us live better and wiser lives. Parables are something completely different—at least the way Jesus uses them. His parables are much closer to what in the Zen tradition would be *koans*—profound paradoxes (riddles, if you like) that are intended to turn the egoic mind upside down and push us into new ways of seeing.

About a generation ago, a few biblical scholars began to catch