

# The Christ-Focused Beatitudes

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According to my dictionary the word “blessed” is a very positive adjective meaning “enjoying happiness,” “enjoying the bliss of heaven,” and “bringing pleasure or contentment.” If these expressions are true, there is an apparent strong contradiction between the blessings we seek in today’s success-oriented world and the blessings the Savior refers to in the eight beatitudes that open the great Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the poor? Blessed are those who mourn? Blessed are the meek? Blessed are those who hunger and thirst? Blessed are those who are persecuted? These are startling and attention-grabbing contradictions. Who needs problems if these are blessings? These declarations are not quiet philosophical stars in a summer night. Rather, the Beatitudes of Christ are lightning bolts and thunder claps of spiritual surprise! Please review them with me as a list of Christ-like attributes we should each seek to develop.

The first beatitude in the Bible says, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*” and the Book of Mormon version adds, “*who come unto me.*” We can all agree that being poor economically is not usually a desired blessing, but the Savior is talking about something entirely different. He is talking about humility and subjecting oneself to

the Lord in all things. The most powerful scripture we have on this attitude is from Mosiah 3:19, where King Benjamin gives us a definition of the ideal latter-day saint as one who

*... becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.*

In comparison to the Father, from whom all blessings flow, we are indeed poor in spirit—we are spiritual paupers, beggars even—and we must humble ourselves before God in every situation of life.

I would like to use a short version, as I remember it, of the famous Hugh B. Brown parable to illustrate submission. When he was young, President Brown had a nice yard in front of his home with a lawn, flowers, shrubs, fruit trees, and shade trees. There was a currant bush he had carefully trimmed to be in an

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attractive shape and to produce the best fruit. Noticing that it had started to branch out again, he went for the pruning shears. As he approached the currant bush, he seemed to hear it say, “Oh please, Mr. Gardener, don’t cut me back, I’m just getting started and I want to be big like the shade trees.”

President Brown responded, “No, my little bush. I am the gardener here and I have planted thee to be a source of fruit and an adornment in this part of my garden, and I am going to prune thee back to size.”

Many years later President Brown was a full colonel in the Canadian forces in France in World War I. He could see the possibility of an illustrious military career. He wanted to become the first LDS general since Book of Mormon times. He was competent and well prepared. The next vacancy as a general should have been his, but when the vacancy occurred, he was called in by his superiors and told, “We are promoting someone else over you.” In effect they were saying, “There has never been a Mormon general in his Majesty’s Royal Forces and there probably never will be.”

He retired to his quarters, crushed with disappointment, and knelt in prayer asking fervently, “Heavenly Father, why couldn’t my prayers have been answered? Haven’t I lived up to my covenants? Haven’t I done everything I was supposed to do? Why? Why?”

And then he heard a voice, an echo from the past, saying, “I am the gardener here. You were not intended for what you sought to be.” Humbled, President Brown then prayed for humility and patience to endure the pruning and to grow as the Lord would have him grow.

I translated that story for him on a tour of South America. He told me afterwards, “Bob, I know if I had continued in that direction I would never have developed the way the Lord wanted me to so I could eventually serve him as an apostle and in the First Presidency.”

Yes, it is a desired virtue to be able to humble ourselves, to seek out God and come unto

him in all humility, and to accept and overcome whatever tribulations and trials and testings that come into our lives. Yes, it is a blessing to become “poor in spirit before the Lord.”

### **Blessed Are They That Mourn: For They Shall Be Comforted**

I imagine that of all the Beatitudes, this would appear at first glance to be the most unusual and contradictory. At the least it is a very strong paradox. How can it be a blessing to be in mourning? To mourn is to show grief or pain at the death of a loved one. To mourn is much more profound than to just be sad. It is a deep, agonizing, penetrating, intense pain that cannot be hid from the world, nor from God, nor can it be eased, nor pacified, except with comfort and consolation from God through the Holy Ghost. Why would the Savior then say it is a blessing to mourn?

It may be that pain and suffering from the death of loved ones is really an essential and important part of our mortal experience, just like our own death is inevitable some day. There seem to come a maturity and a deeper dimension and a more profound understanding when we are left behind. The reality of death obliges us to face the question of the reality of the spirit world and the hope of the resurrection. It is through suffering that one discovers the difference between those things that are important and that which is unimportant in the eternal perspective.

It might be that it is a blessing to become more fully aware, through the death of a loved one, that God’s ways are not our ways and that we must trust him in that fact. One of my favorite stories with roots in Islamic traditions illustrates that especially in death we need to look for the hidden purposes of the Lord, which, when understood, turn to comfort and blessings.

It seems that Moses, being in heaven, wondered about the work of a certain angel who

was departing for earth. He asked the angel if he might accompany him on his errand. The angel responded, "Nay, thou wouldst not be able to stand that which thou wouldst see." Moses insisted, so the angel placed a condition. "No matter what thou wouldst see, thou must remain silent." Moses agreed and the two came to earth.

They left the borders of dry land and went far out over the sea, even beyond sight of land, where they found some humble fishermen in their boat fishing. The angel, unseen, broke the boards of the keel, the boat sank, and the fishermen drowned. Moses started to protest but the angel declared, "Thou must remain silent."

Next they came upon an Arab boy walking through the sands of the desert. Unseen, the angel breathed in the boy's face; his blood froze, and he fell to the earth, dead. Moses started to protest but the angel silenced him, "I told thee that thou wouldst not stand what thou wouldst see. Thou must remain silent."

Then the two came upon a poor home where lived a widow and her two sons. Their only means of survival was the produce from their small garden, protected against the wind and sands of the desert by a tall adobe wall. To Moses' surprise the angel pushed the wall over, crushing the vines, melons, and cucumbers, which the family sorely needed. Moses could not stand it any longer. He erupted. The angel silenced him and said, "Thou canst go with me no longer. Thou must return. But first, lest thou misjudge Allah who has sent me, I will explain. The fishermen would soon have been captured by a pirate boat approaching over the horizon, and been enslaved, tortured, and killed. This way they die in the profession they loved. The Arab boy would soon have fought with another mother's son, killing the latter. This way the second boy lives and this one dies blood guileless. The widow's husband, before he died, hid a fortune in the base of the adobe wall. Now the boys, rebuilding the wall, will find the fortune, invest it wisely, and

prosper. But thou didst doubt. Thou canst go with me no longer."

When we can see the Lord's purposes fulfilled in that which gives us sorrow, the Holy Ghost can give us full consolation, and the atonement and resurrection truly become to us the cornerstone of our faith. In the midst of mourning one discovers deeper dimensions of love, friendship, and brotherhood. In the midst of mourning, one determines if his faith is a social decoration or if it is an essential ingredient upon which his whole life is based. It is in the midst of mourning that one discovers the personal closeness of his Heavenly Father and his Savior Jesus Christ and the comfort of the Holy Ghost. As President McKay used to say, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity" (John Flavel [c. 1680], see Burton Stevenson, comp., *The Home Book of Quotations* [New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956], p. 1430). We will be blessed in mourning and be comforted as we reflect on eternal marriage, eternal families, eternal values.

### **Blessed Are the Meek!**

In the greatest sermon ever preached the Savior declared, "Blessed are the meek for they shall *inherit* the earth," to which a modern skeptic has quipped, "That would be the only way the meek would get anything!"

I use that little bit of humor to illustrate that in today's fast-paced, success-oriented world, the quality of meekness is not universally admired. We don't usually think of successful executives as being meek, nor can we mentally accept the idea of a successful quarterback on a winning football team being meek. In fact, success in anything seems to involve quite the opposite of meekness.

Webster's dictionary gives two commonly accepted definitions of the word "meek":  
 (1) deficient in spirit and courage, and  
 (2) not . . . strong.

No way do I want to be looked upon as, nor can I imagine myself as being "deficient

in spirit and courage.” Those are negative attributes that I want no part of—likewise, “not . . . strong.” All my life I have tried to “be strong.” One of my favorite slogans for success is, “Plan, Simplify, and *Be Strong*.”

In the minds of many, the term “meek” means to be submissive, passive, mild, retiring, bashful, soft, lowly, placid, etc. The mental image of a “meek” person is that of a compliant doormat, Casper Milquetoast, who is so timid and unassertive that he accomplishes nothing, does nothing, seeks nothing, and contributes nothing to the world he lives in. Is this weak interpretation of meekness really what the Savior had in mind? I do not think so. I believe there is another better interpretation of the word “meek” in Spanish. Please allow me to share it with you.

I was visiting a huge estancia (ranch) in Argentina with over 100,000 acres of lush pampa. They had 20,000 head of cattle on the ranch and over a thousand head of beautiful horses—some for the gauchos to ride, but most were thoroughbred polo ponies that they trained and sold all over the world.

In the course of the afternoon’s conversation I asked the distinguished estanciero (owner) if we would see a rodeo where the gauchos would be breaking wild horses like our western cowboys. The owner was aghast. “Not on this ranch you won’t,” was his emphatic answer. “We would never break a horse. We don’t want to break his spirit. We love them and work patiently with them and train them until they are meek or ‘manso.’” He said, “Our meek (or ‘manso’) horses are still full of fire and spirit, but they are obedient and well trained. They lose nothing of their speed or maneuverability. A polo pony has to be the finest horseflesh on the face of the earth. They are lightning fast and superbly maneuverable to follow the run-and-gun type of game that world-class polo is. The horse cannot be timid or afraid of anything, but must be obedient and superbly well trained.”

I can see a great spiritual application now to the meaning “manso” or “meek.” I don’t feel the Savior wanted us to be doormats to be walked on. I prefer to think he meant that we should be *obedient* and *well trained*. You can be strong, enthusiastic, talented, spirited, zealous, and still be “meek” by being obedient and well trained. I can seek to be that kind of a meek person and be proud to have that as my goal—obedient and well trained—and still coexist in the success-oriented world in which we live.

### **Blessed Are They Which Do Hunger and Thirst After Righteousness: For They Shall Be Filled with the Holy Ghost**

All who hunger and thirst for righteousness are striving to reach higher spiritual planes. President McKay said, “Man is a spiritual being. . . . There is something within him which urges him to rise above himself, to control his environment, to master the body and all things physical and live in a higher and more beautiful world” (*CR*, Oct. 1928, p. 37).

How many of us are striving for the higher spiritual levels as though we were hungering and thirsting for it? To hunger and thirst for something is to really strive and struggle, work and sacrifice for it. My father-in-law crossed a strip of desert on horseback as a young man—sixty miles with no water. He planned to meet a wagon train midway to replenish his water, but they were delayed two days in starting and he met no one else. His tongue swelled up, his throat was parched, his dog died, and the horse keeled over. He thought he was going to die. He finally made it, but, in listening to the story, I can feel the intense, agonizing, thirsting desperation for moisture, just like a man held under water gasps for air.

The highest blessings of the gospel are not for the fainthearted, lukewarm, coolly rational, theoretical philosopher, nor for the intellectually curious. The highest blessings are for those stouthearted souls who are on a noble quest,

a crusade for greater personal righteousness. They *hunger* and *thirst* for righteousness.

One of the best facets of this beatitude is that one need not have reached spiritual perfection nor sainthood to receive the blessings that are promised. The blessings seem to come from being involved in the search for the higher way. When we want to be better, to be more pure, to be more virtuous, then we are blessed. No one should think for a moment that just wishful thinking without effort is going to produce any blessings, but if we develop that hunger and that thirst that is sincere, the door to higher stairs will be opened and we can then climb them.

The blessings are immeasurable. Remember the woman of Samaria at the well. The Savior told her, and it applies to all of us,

*But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. [John 4:14]*

Jesus also said, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

Hungering and thirsting for a higher spiritual life lifts one above the dark storms of this mortal existence that plague many of us. Working and striving to become temple-recommend worthy, with the goal of entering those hallowed halls, is a soul-satisfying quest with blessings all along the way. Hungering and thirsting to be ready, worthy, and prepared to serve a full-time mission and to let your voice sound out as with the trumpet of an angel lifts one to spiritual heights seldom achieved before in the life of a young person.

The pathway to perfection is long and narrow, but each step brings rewards, beautiful experiences, and enhanced hope of even greater things to come. The early goals of serving a mission and marriage in the temple soon are replaced with the longer-term goals of raising

a family in righteousness and serving valiantly until the end. Yet at all stages of life the real goal is righteousness, and everything else takes its place within that all-encompassing arc. When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we become increasingly strict with ourselves. We impose on ourselves higher goals and loftier standards than even our leaders place for us. The Savior talked of higher and stricter laws by saying, “Ye have heard. . . thou shalt not kill; . . . But I say, thou shalt not even be angry.” And “Thou hast heard, thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, thou shalt not even look upon a person of the opposite sex to lust after them lest thou hast already committed adultery in thine heart” (see Matthew 5:21–28).

I was much impressed lately with Rabbi Silver’s approach to fasting. I had asked him about the traditional Jewish fasts from sunset to sunset. He said, “In order to make sure, we fast twenty-five hours by the clock. It is difficult to know exactly when the sun sets, so we solve that by adding an entire hour.” I am afraid that many Mormons shave a few hours off the twenty-four hour period rather than adding some just to make sure. The difference is in the attitude—a more generous fast offering, a more generous tithe, more generous home teaching rather than the minimum of one visit per month. To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to go beyond the mark, not to just barely reach a minimum.

### **Blessed Are the Merciful: For They Shall Obtain Mercy**

Usually when we think of mercy we think of the relationship between justice and mercy. We all want the Lord not to judge us with justice, but rather with mercy. None of us wants to be punished according to our sins. We all want the Lord to be merciful, to overlook our imperfections, to take into account the efforts we have made and how far we have progressed *lately*. The Old Testament is full of references about the mercy we hope God will



show toward us, now and at the day of judgment.

But the Savior in the Beatitudes introduces another element. He seems to be talking about *us* showing mercy in order to obtain mercy from God. The principle here is that we will be judged with the same measure that we apply to others. If we are generous to others, the Lord will be generous with us.

*If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:*

*But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*  
[Matthew 6:14–15]

The master forgave the head servant that owed him ten thousand talents, but that same servant would not forgive his fellow servant that owed him only 100 pence. The master, upon finding this out, declared, “O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?” (Matthew 18:32).

The quality of mercy is to temper the strict, severe sentence with generous interpretations and understanding of extenuating circumstances, or, like the infinite mercy of God, simply cancelling any and all punishment because the person asks for forgiveness and promises to follow Christ. God’s mercy seems to come from his unlimited and unconditional love for us. Our mercy to others should likewise come from our unlimited and unconditional love for others. Love of this sort does not come solely because they deserve our love. This kind of love comes from our serving and sacrificing for *them*. For example, our Heavenly Father loves us, not because we deserve it but because he has given and sacrificed for us. Our Savior Jesus Christ loves us, not because we deserve it but because he has given so much and sacrificed for us. Our parents love us, not because

we deserve it but because they have given so much and sacrificed for us. In order for us to love others, we must give and sacrifice for them. The more we give and the more we sacrifice, the more we will love them and forgive them their weaknesses, and the greater will be our tendency toward mercy. Unfortunately, some young people do not understand this. When they don’t love their parents or brothers and sisters or roommates, they tend to think it is because parents or others have not earned their love or do not deserve it. It is the other way around! If you do not love someone as much as you should, it is because *you* have not yet given enough nor sacrificed enough for your parents or for that brother or sister or roommate. This is why those homes “blessed” with a parent suffering from an incurable disease or “blessed” with a handicapped sibling are so full of love—i.e., everyone is serving, giving, sacrificing, and that generates greater love.

Just as mercy is a fundamental ingredient in the relationship between God and man, our Savior obviously expects that mercy will be a fundamental ingredient in the relationship between us and our neighbors.

God so loved the world that he gave us his Only Begotten Son. Jesus so loved the world that he gave his life, and he suffered for our sins. Oh, what love! Oh, what mercy! Can we not find the way to be merciful to all those about us?

### **Blessed Are the Pure in Heart: For They Shall See God**

There are two parts to this beatitude. The first part is to really understand what is meant by “pure in heart,” and the second part is to really understand what is meant by “seeing” God.

In Spanish, the term “pure in heart” is translated “clean of heart” (*limpios*). That is closer to the original Greek text. It means no stains, no dirt, no marks. In other words, it is the opposite of dirty. It is a physical

interpretation, as if talking of clean clothing just laundered. It could also refer to clean water, with no contamination. It is used with regard to ceremonial cleanliness after baptism or after leaving the temple. Other interpretations refer to being clean of guilt, clean of bad habits, clean of pollutants, etc.

Our English version of “pure” has a definitely moral and spiritual tone to it. It might be more a matter of integrity, or innocence, or righteousness.

But in either case, pure or clean, we can see that the Christian ideal for us is to be both cleansed by ritual, repentance, and obedience and to be pure of heart in our actions, our words, our thoughts.

From studying the scriptures one of the strongest interpretations of being pure or clean of heart has to do with sexual purity. “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly” (D&C 121:45). Alma tells us we will be judged for our actions, our words, and our thoughts. Sexual impurity is rampant in the world we live in, and it attacks first in thought, then in word, and then in action. The defense against Satan is to control our thoughts, control our words, and control our actions. For this reason the Lord and his servants warn so often and so strenuously against pornographic material of any media. No one can be clean and pure and involved in such staining, tarnishing, corrosive, degenerating influences.

It is probable that this beatitude requiring we be clean and pure of heart requires the greatest degree of self-examination of all the Beatitudes. It really means, “Blessed are those whose thoughts are pure and clean and untainted by ulterior motives or conflicts of interest or anything spiritually degrading.” This person’s heart must be absolutely genuine and sincere. The self-examination must be honest and humbling. All pride and self-gratification must be eliminated.

The second and most startling part of this beatitude is the statement “For they shall see God.” We are all aware of similar promises in the scriptures, and we believe that each can have his own dreams, visions, and manifestations. My favorite is Doctrine and Covenants 88:68:

*Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and [but] it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will.*

There is also the possibility that the “to see” means “to perceive.” In fact, I checked in my desk dictionary, and here is what I found. To see: to perceive by the eye; to have experience of such as “to see army service”; to discover or to come to know; to form a mental picture; to visualize in one’s mind; to perceive the meaning or importance of something; to be aware of, to imagine the possibility of; to call on, *to keep company with*, etc.

Only one definition out of ten meant to see by the eye.

*Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.*

*And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh;*

*For without this no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live. [D&C 84:20–24]*

I firmly believe it makes little difference whether the “seeing” is physical or spiritual. The important part is to commit oneself to a course of purification that will lead to God through having a purer, cleaner heart, remembering always that after we have done all we can do, Christ is really the one who, through his atoning sacrifice, makes us clean before our Heavenly Father.

### **Blessed Are the Peacemakers: For They Shall Be Called the Children of God**

In Spanish this beatitude is a little different. It says, “Blessed are they who *seek* peace”—peace makers versus peace seekers. The English Book of Mormon version has more action in the verb. The person is making peace, producing peace wherever he or she is—the home, the office, the classroom, the neighborhood, church, or governmental positions—making peace all around. The Spanish interpretation could imply that the person seeks peaceful settings or environments. In this case, although both are admirable, I really like the English version the best.

I have had two daughters in Israel studying with BYU Semester Abroad. In every letter home they used the word “Shalom” several times. I understand from them that “Shalom,” or peace, has two principal meanings. The first is a greeting in which you wish or pray that the person you are addressing may enjoy well-being, happiness, tranquility, a kind of peace. The second is a term describing good personal relations, friendship, and constant goodwill between two people.

Paul and Peter and others writing the letters included in the New Testament begin and end most of their epistles with the saying, “Grace be unto you and *peace* from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The term “peace” is used almost one hundred times in the New Testament and seems to always be closely identified with Christ as the Prince of Peace. The Savior had no material wealth to give to others, but he frequently gave them blessings of peace—a kind of legacy. In this beatitude, those who are blessed are not particularly those who love peace but rather those who *seek* peace and who *produce* peace. The blessed ones are those who are the doers of the word, not just passive listeners.

Sometimes we look upon this war-torn world with its open strife, terrorism, and

tension between nations, and long for peace. We honor statesmen and diplomats who are peace-makers. It seems, however, that the Savior was not talking about that kind of peace. He said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation:” prefacing that statement with, “In me ye might have peace” (John 16:33). He said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). The Savior was not talking about peace between nations achieved after a military victory or even with bilateral agreements worked out by the leaders of the two nations (not peace like the world gives), but rather he referred to the peace that comes to a person’s heart when he or she lives the commandments, comes unto Christ with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and repenting and with faith, enters into the waters of baptism, receiving the peaceful, comforting spirit of the Holy Ghost. We achieve inner peace when we feel our lives are in order in the sight of God.

Many *homes* are torn with strife, tension, and virtual individual war between husband and wife, between parents and rebellious children, between siblings motivated by jealousy or pride. Blessed is that person who comes to find, through prayer and counseling and reading from the best books, and through personal changes and sacrifices, the ways that they can contribute to peace in the home. No home can be a dwelling place for the Spirit of the Lord if it is torn by lack of peace. No home can be a celestial home unless peace is felt from the moment every person enters the door, be it a member of the family, a guest, or a casual visitor. Order, cleanliness, beauty, etc., are all a part of creating an environment of peace, but even more important is the daily practice of prayer, scripture reading, love, kind words, and the gospel in action in every way.



**Blessed Are They Which Are Persecuted for My Name's Sake: For Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven**

This beatitude is often referred to as the blessing of the martyrs. In the days of the New Testament, the meaning of “witness” and “martyr” was virtually synonymous. Bearing testimony always has brought persecution. We need to remember Paul said he had seen a light and heard a voice, and in response to that *testimony*, the people heaped up ashes on their heads, tore the seams of their garments, and said, “Kill him!” And they would have had it not been that he was a Roman citizen. Stephen could have continued preaching like many pagans as a kind of entertainment in the central squares, but when he looked up into heaven and bore his *testimony*:

*. . . I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God, “*

*Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,*

*And cast him out of the city, and stoned him.*  
[Acts 7:56–58]

Joseph Smith was not murdered for political or economic reasons. He bore his testimony that he had seen the Father and the Son, and a mob with painted faces attacked and killed him and his brother, Hyrum. The Savior was not crucified for the Sermon on the Mount, nor for walking on water, nor for healing the sick. The one thing the populace could not take was his *testimony* that he was the Son of God.

*. . . Again the high priest asked him, . . . Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*

*And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

*Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?*

*Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death. [Because he testified!] [Mark 14:61–64]*

Bearing witness is courageous, and the faithful have always done it—in the Old and New Testament, in the Book of Mormon, and in the early days of the Church.

There were a number of reasons why the early Christians were persecuted: Christians were different, they tended to separate themselves physically by living in communities or neighborhoods together. They had different morals. The pagans looked upon the Christians as a despised Jewish cult; the Jews looked upon the Christians as apostates and rebels. The secret meetings of the Christians to preserve the sacredness of some ordinances as well as to avoid attracting attention brought suspicion that the Christians might be doing something strange or immoral in their meetings. The worship of Caesar was a test of political loyalty and good citizenship, and becoming a Christian made the person appear as a traitor and apostate heretic.

It is inevitable that the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints find themselves looked upon by many just about the way the Christians were looked upon by different aspects of society at the meridian of time.

Where will persecution come from in the future? I do not know, nor does it concern me. It may come because of not giving the priesthood to women; keeping temples sacred and not open to the public; not aborting babies or limiting family size to control the population; political, economic, or professional jealousies; appearing to criticize the lifestyle of gay people and those who are unmarried living together; or because the Word of Wisdom places us in opposition to the tobacco, brewery, and distillery lobby, coffee and tea lobbies, or other self-interest groups.

The prophets have said that in the last days persecution will come again. But this time we have the absolute assurance that persecution will not destroy the Church nor its doctrines. This time no unhallowed hand can stop the work. From Joseph Smith we are told that

*. . . the Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done. [HC 4:540]*

The Beatitudes are a formula for a Christ-like life. They are a beautiful formula to lift

ourselves to a higher level of living. I pray that each one of us might truly understand the Beatitudes and the in-depth interpretations of them and make them a part of our lives. I pray for the Lord's choicest blessings upon each and every one of you in your homes, in your studies, and in your church callings and positions. May the Lord bless you as servants of Christ. May the Lord bless you, each and every one, as saints. I pray for these blessings to be upon you and testify that our Heavenly Father is in his heaven—he lives, he loves us. I testify that Jesus Christ lives, resurrected, glorified, exalted; he stands physically at the head of this Church that bears his name. His spokesman here on the earth today is the living prophet Ezra Taft Benson. And everything we teach and preach—the doctrines, the covenants—are all true. I testify of this humbly, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.