

JOHN WESLEY'S SERMONS  
An Anthology

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UPON OUR LORD'S SERMON  
ON THE MOUNT  
DISCOURSE IV

*Sermon 24 – 1748*

AN INTRODUCTORY COMMENT

The unifying theme of Wesley's thirteen 'discourses' on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is the Christian life understood as the fruit of justifying faith. These sermons are not, however, a thirteen-part essay, tightly organized and argued as a unit. Each is a discourse in its own right. Yet the series is designed so that each appears as a part of a whole and shares a common aim: 'every branch of gospel obedience is asserted and proved to be indispensably necessary to eternal salvation' (letter to John Downes, Nov. 17, 1759). Wesley conceived the design of Matthew 5-7 according to its three unfolding themes: (1) 'the sum of true religion'; (2) 'rules touching that right intention which we are to preserve in all our outward actions'; and (3) 'the main hindrances of this religion'.

After commenting on the Beatitudes in the first three sermons in the series, Discourse IV turns to Christianity as 'a social religion' in which inward holiness (our love of God) prompts outward holiness (love of neighbour). Here Wesley is fleshing out a long-time theme, that the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. This theme he had stated vigorously against the mystics and Moravians in the introduction to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739): 'The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.' In this instance, he also develops the contrary corollary: 'to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.' Developing the scriptural text further in the second section, Wesley also explains that if true religion abides in the heart, 'it is impossible to conceal it', in spite of all pretences to the contrary. The third section answers the various objections brought against 'being social, open, active Christians.' In some instances, Wesley seems to be answering objections to the specific expectations of the *General Rules*. In every instance, the ruling principle is that outward and inward religion are both necessary.

This sermon was first published in the second volume of his *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1748). Although never reprinted separately, it was published in all subsequent editions of his collected sermons.

## Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount

### Discourse IV

*Ye are the salt of the earth. But if the salt hath lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men.*

*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

*Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house.*

*Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Matthew 5:13-16

1. The beauty of holiness, of that inward man of the heart which is renewed after the image of God, cannot but strike every eye which God hath opened, every enlightened understanding. The ornament of a meek, humble, loving spirit will at least excite the approbation of all those who are capable in any degree of discerning spiritual good and evil. From the hour men begin to emerge out of the darkness which covers the giddy, unthinking world, they cannot but perceive how desirable a thing it is to be thus transformed into the likeness of him that created us. This inward religion bears the shape of God so visibly impressed upon it that a soul must be wholly immersed in flesh and blood when he can doubt of its divine original. We may say of this, in a secondary sense, even as of the Son of God himself, that it is 'the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person': ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, 'the beaming forth of his' eternal 'glory'; and yet so tempered and softened that even the children of men may herein see God and live: χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, 'the character, the stamp, the living impression, of his person' who is the fountain of beauty and love, the original source of all excellency and perfection.

2. If religion therefore were carried no farther than this they could have no doubt concerning it—they should have no objection against pursuing it with the whole ardour of their souls. But why, say they, is it clogged with other things? What need of loading it with *doing* and *suffering*? These are what damps the vigour of the soul and sinks it down to earth again. Is it not enough to 'follow after charity'? To soar upon the wings of love? Will it not suffice to worship God, who is a Spirit, with the spirit of our minds, without encumber-

ing ourselves with outward things, or even thinking of them at all? Is it not better that the whole extent of our thought should be taken up with high and heavenly contemplation? And that instead of busying ourselves at all about externals, we should only commune with God in our hearts?

3. Many eminent men have spoken thus: have advised us 'to cease from all outward actions'; wholly to withdraw from the world; to leave the body behind us; to abstract ourselves from all sensible things—to have no concern at all about outward religion, but to 'work all virtues in the will', as the far more excellent way, more perfective of the soul, as well as more acceptable to God.

4. It needed not that any should tell our Lord of this masterpiece of the wisdom from beneath, this fairest of all the devices wherewith Satan hath ever perverted the right ways of the Lord! And Oh! what instruments hath he found from time to time to employ in this his service! To wield this grand engine of hell against some of the most important truths of God! Men that 'would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect', the men of faith and love. Yea, that have for a season deceived and led away no inconsiderable number of them who have fallen in all ages into the gilded snare, and hardly escaped with the skin of their teeth.

5. But has our Lord been wanting on his part? Has he not sufficiently guarded us against this pleasing delusion? Has he not armed us here with armour of proof against Satan 'transformed into an angel of light'? Yea, verily. He here defends, in the clearest and strongest manner, the active, patient religion he had just described. What can be fuller and plainer than the words he immediately subjoins to what he had said of doing and suffering? 'Ye are the salt of the earth. But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'

In order fully to explain and enforce these important words I shall endeavour to show, first, that Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it; secondly, that to conceal this religion is impossible, as well as utterly contrary to the design of its author. I shall, thirdly, answer some objections; and conclude the whole with a practical application.

I. 1. First, I shall endeavour to show that Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.

By Christianity I mean that method of worshipping God which is here revealed to man by Jesus Christ. When I say this is essentially a social religion,

I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other men. And in showing this I shall confine myself to those considerations which will arise from the very discourse before us. But if this be shown, then doubtless to turn this religion into a solitary one is to destroy it.

Not that we can in any wise condemn the intermixing solitude or retirement with society. This is not only allowable but expedient; nay, it is necessary, as daily experience shows, for everyone that either already is or desires to be a real Christian. It can hardly be that we should spend one entire day in a continued intercourse with men without suffering loss in our soul, and in some measure grieving the Holy Spirit of God. We have need daily to retire from the world, at least morning and evening, to converse with God, to commune more freely with our Father which is in secret. Nor indeed can a man of experience condemn even longer seasons of religious retirement, so they do not imply any neglect of the worldly employ wherein the providence of God has placed us.

2. Yet such retirement must not swallow up all our time; this would be to destroy, not advance, true religion. For that the religion described by our Lord in the foregoing words cannot subsist without society, without our living and conversing with other men, is manifest from hence, that several of the most essential branches thereof can have no place if we have no intercourse with the world.

3. There is no disposition, for instance, which is more essential to Christianity than meekness. Now although this, as it implies resignation to God, or patience in pain and sickness, may subsist in a desert, in a hermit's cell, in total solitude; yet as it implies (which it no less necessarily does) mildness, gentleness, and long-suffering, it cannot possibly have a being, it has no place under heaven, without an intercourse with other men. So that to attempt turning this into a solitary virtue is to destroy it from the face of the earth.

4. Another necessary branch of true Christianity is peacemaking, or doing of good. That this is equally essential with any of the other parts of the religion of Jesus Christ there can be no stronger argument to evince (and therefore it would be absurd to allege any other) than that it is here inserted in the original plan he has laid down of the fundamentals of his religion. Therefore to set aside this is the same daring insult on the authority of our great Master as to set aside mercifulness, purity of heart, or any other branch of his institution. But this is apparently set aside by all who call us to the wilderness, who recommend entire solitude either to the babes, or the young men, or the fathers in Christ. For will any man affirm that a solitary Christian (so called, though it is little less than a contradiction in terms) can be a merciful man—that is, one that takes every opportunity of doing all good to all men? What can be

more plain than that this fundamental branch of the religion of Jesus Christ cannot possibly subsist without society, without our living and conversing with other men?

5. But is it not expedient, however (one might naturally ask), to converse only with good men? Only with those whom we know to be meek and merciful, holy of heart and holy of life? Is it not expedient to refrain from any conversation or intercourse with men of the opposite character? Men who do not obey, perhaps do not believe, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? The advice of St. Paul to the Christians at Corinth may seem to favour this: 'I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators' (1 Cor. 5:9). And it is certainly not advisable so to company with them, or with any of the workers of iniquity, as to have any particular familiarity, or any strictness of friendship with them. To contract or continue an intimacy with any such is no way expedient for a Christian. It must necessarily expose him to abundance of dangers and snares, out of which he can have no reasonable hope of deliverance.

But the Apostle does not forbid us to have any intercourse at all, even with the men that know not God. For then, says he, 'ye must needs go out of the world,' which he could never advise them to do. But, he subjoins, 'If any man that is called a brother', that professes himself a Christian, 'be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner', 'now I have written unto you not to keep company' with him; 'with such an one, no, not to eat' (1 Cor. 5:11). This must necessarily imply that we break off all familiarity, all intimacy of acquaintance with him. 'Yet count him not', saith the Apostle elsewhere, 'as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother' (2 Thess. 3:15): plainly showing that even in such a case as this we are not to renounce all fellowship with him; so that here is no advice to separate wholly, even from wicked men. Yea, these very words teach us quite the contrary.

6. Much more the words of our Lord, who is so far from directing us to break off all commerce with the world that without it, according to his account of Christianity, we cannot be Christians at all. It would be easy to show that some intercourse even with ungodly and unholy men is absolutely needful in order to the full exertion of every temper which he has described as the way of the kingdom; that it is indispensably necessary in order to the complete exercise of poverty of spirit, of mourning, and of every other disposition which has a place here in the genuine religion of Jesus Christ. Yea, it is necessary to the very being of several of them; of that meekness, for example, which instead of demanding 'an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth', doth 'not resist evil', but causes us rather, when smitten 'on the right cheek, to turn the other also'; of that mercifulness whereby 'we love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them which despitefully use us and persecute us'; and of that complication of love and all holy tempers which is

exercised in suffering for righteousness' sake. Now all these, it is clear, could have no being were we to have no commerce with any but real Christians.

7. Indeed, were we wholly to separate ourselves from sinners, how could we possibly answer that character which our Lord gives us in these very words: 'Ye' (Christians, ye that are lowly, serious and meek; ye that hunger after righteousness, that love God and man, that do good to all, and therefore suffer evil: Ye) 'are the salt of the earth.' It is your very nature to season whatever is round about you. It is the nature of the divine savour which is in you to spread to whatsoever you touch; to diffuse itself on every side, to all those among whom you are. This is the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men, that whatever grace you have received of God may through you be communicated to others; that every holy temper, and word, and work of yours, may have an influence on them also. By this means a check will in some measure be given to the corruption which is in the world; and a small part, at least, saved from the general infection, and rendered holy and pure before God.

8. That we may the more diligently labour to season all we can with every holy and heavenly temper, our Lord proceeds to show the desperate state of those who do not impart the religion they have received; which indeed they cannot possibly fail to do, so long as it remains in their own hearts. 'If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men.' If ye who were holy and heavenly-minded, and consequently zealous of good works, have no longer that savour in yourselves, and do therefore no longer season others; if you are grown flat, insipid, dead, both careless of your own soul and useless to the souls of other men, 'wherewith shall ye be salted?' How shall ye be recovered? What help? What hope? Can tasteless salt be restored to its savour? No; 'it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be cast out', even as the mire in the streets, 'and to be trodden under foot of men,' to be overwhelmed with everlasting contempt. If ye had never known the Lord there might have been hope—if ye had never been 'found in him'. But what can you now say to that his solemn declaration, just parallel to what he hath here spoken? 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he (the Father) taketh away. . . . He that abideth in me, and I in him, bringeth forth much fruit. . . . If a man abide not in me' (or, do not bring forth fruit) 'he is cast out as a branch, and withered; and men gather them' (not to plant them again, but) 'to cast them into the fire' (John 15:2, 5-6).

9. Toward those who have never tasted of the good word God is indeed pitiful and of tender mercy. But justice takes place with regard to those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and have afterwards 'turned back from the holy commandment then delivered to them'. 'For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened', in whose hearts God had once shined, to

enlighten them with the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; who 'have tasted of the heavenly gift' of redemption in his blood, the forgiveness of sins; 'and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost'—of lowliness, of meekness, and of the love of God and man shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which was given unto them—and have fallen away, καὶ παραπεσόντας (here is not a supposition, but a flat declaration of matter of fact), 'to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame' (Heb. 6:4, etc.).

But that none may misunderstand these awful words it should be carefully observed, (1) who they are that are here spoken of; namely they, and they only, who 'were once' thus 'enlightened'; they only 'who did taste of that heavenly gift, and were' thus 'made partakers of the Holy Ghost'. So that all who have not experienced these things are wholly unconcerned in this Scripture. (2) What that falling away is which is here spoken of. It is an absolute, total apostasy. A believer may fall, and not fall away. He may fall and rise again. And if he should fall, even into sin, yet this case, dreadful as it is, is not desperate. For 'we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins.' But let him above all things beware lest his 'heart be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin'; lest he should sink lower and lower till he wholly fall away, till he become as 'salt that hath lost its savour': 'For if we thus sin wilfully, after we have received the' experimental 'knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins; but a certain, fearful looking for of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.'

II. 1. 'But although we may not wholly separate ourselves from mankind; although it be granted we ought to season them with the religion which God has wrought in our hearts; yet may not this be done insensibly? May we not convey this into others in a secret and almost imperceptible manner? So that scarce anyone shall be able to observe how or when it is done? Even as salt conveys its own savour into that which is seasoned thereby, without any noise, and without being liable to any outward observation. And if so, although we do not go out of the world, yet we may lie hid in it. We may thus far keep our religion to ourselves, and not offend those whom we cannot help.'

2. Of this plausible reasoning of flesh and blood our Lord was well aware also. And he has given a full answer to it in those words which come now to be considered: in explaining which I shall endeavour to show, as I proposed to do in the second place, that so long as true religion abides in our hearts it is impossible to conceal it, as well as absolutely contrary to the design of its great author.

And, first, it is impossible for any that have it to conceal the religion of Jesus Christ. This our Lord makes plain beyond all contradiction by a twofold

comparison: 'Ye are the light of the world. A city set upon an hill cannot be hid.'

'Ye' Christians 'are the light of the world,' with regard both to your tempers and actions. Your holiness makes you as conspicuous as the sun in the midst of heaven. As ye cannot go out of the world, so neither can ye stay in it without appearing to all mankind. Ye may not flee from men, and while ye are among them it is impossible to hide your lowliness and meekness and those other dispositions whereby ye aspire to be perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Love cannot be hid any more than light; and least of all when it shines forth in action, when ye exercise yourselves in the labour of love, in beneficence of every kind. As well may men think to hide a city as to hide a Christian: yea, as well may they conceal a city set upon a hill as a holy, zealous, active lover of God and man.

3. It is true, men who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil, will take all possible pains to prove that the light which is in you is darkness. They will say evil, all manner of evil, falsely, of the good which is in you: they will lay to your charge that which is farthest from your thoughts, which is the very reverse of all you are and all you do. And your patient continuance in well-doing, your meek suffering all things for the Lord's sake, your calm, humble joy in the midst of persecution, your unwearied labour to overcome evil with good, will make you still more visible and conspicuous than ye were before.

4. So impossible it is to keep our religion from being seen, unless we cast it away; so vain is the thought of hiding the light, unless by putting it out. Sure it is that a secret, unobserved religion cannot be the religion of Jesus Christ. Whatever religion can be concealed is not Christianity. If a Christian could be hid, he could not be compared to a city set upon an hill; to the light of the world, the sun shining from heaven and seen by all the world below. Never therefore let it enter into the heart of him whom God hath renewed in the spirit of his mind to hide that light, to keep his religion to himself; especially considering it is not only impossible to conceal true Christianity, but likewise absolutely contrary to the design of the great Author of it.

5. This plainly appears from the following words: 'Neither do men light a candle, to put it under a bushel.' As if he had said, 'As men do not light a candle only to cover or conceal it, so neither does God enlighten any soul with his glorious knowledge and love to have it covered or concealed, either by prudence, falsely so called, or shame, or voluntary humility; to have it hid either in a desert, or in the world; either by avoiding men, or in conversing with them. "But they put it on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house."' In like manner it is the design of God that every Christian should be in an open point of view; that he may give light to all around; that he may visibly express the religion of Jesus Christ.

6. Thus hath God in all ages spoken to the world, not only by precept but by example also. He hath 'not left himself without witness' in any nation where the sound of the gospel hath gone forth, without a few who testified his truth by their lives as well as their words. These have been 'as lights shining in a dark place'. And from time to time they have been the means of enlightening some, of preserving a remnant, a little seed, which was 'counted unto the Lord for a generation'. They have led a few poor sheep out of the darkness of the world, and guided their feet into the way of peace.

7. One might imagine that where both Scripture and the reason of things speak so clearly and expressly there could not be much advanced on the other side, at least not with any appearance of truth. But they who imagine thus know little of the depths of Satan. After all that Scripture and reason have said, so exceeding plausible are the pretences for solitary religion, for a Christian's going out of the world, or at least hiding himself in it, that we need all the wisdom of God to see through the snare, and all the power of God to escape it—so many and strong are the objections which have been brought against being social, open, active Christians.

III. 1. To answer these was the third thing which I proposed. And, first, it has been often objected that religion does not lie in outward things but in the heart, the inmost soul; that it is the union of the soul with God, the life of God in the soul of man; that outside religion is nothing worth; seeing God 'delighteth not in burnt offerings', in outward services, but a pure and holy heart is 'the sacrifice he will not despise'.

I answer, it is most true that the root of religion lies in the heart, in the inmost soul; that this is the union of the soul with God, the life of God in the soul of man. But if this root be really in the heart it cannot but put forth branches. And these are the several instances of outward obedience, which partake of the same nature with the root, and consequently are not only marks or signs, but substantial parts of religion.

It is also true that bare, outside religion, which has no root in the heart, is nothing worth; that God delighteth not in *such* outward services, no more than in Jewish burnt offerings, and that a pure and holy heart is a sacrifice with which he is always well pleased. But he is also well pleased with all that outward service which arises from the heart; with the sacrifice of our prayers (whether public or private), of our praises and thanksgivings; with the sacrifice of our goods, humbly devoted to him, and employed wholly to his glory; and with that of our bodies, which he peculiarly claims; which the Apostle 'beseeches us, by the mercies of God, to present unto him, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God'.

2. A second objection, nearly related to this, is that love is all in all: that it is 'the fulfilling of the law', 'the end of the commandment', of every command-

ment of God; that all we do and all we suffer, if we have not charity or love, profiteth us nothing; and therefore the Apostle directs us to 'follow after charity', and terms this, the 'more excellent way'.

I answer, it is granted that the love of God and man arising from 'faith unfeigned' is all in all 'the fulfilling of the law', the end of every commandment of God. It is true that without this whatever we do, whatever we suffer, profits us nothing. But it does not follow that love is all [in all] in such a sense as to supersede either faith or good works. It is 'the fulfilling of the law', not by releasing us from but by constraining us to obey it. It is 'the end of the commandment' as every commandment leads to and centres in it. It is allowed that whatever we do or suffer, without love, profits us nothing. But withal whatever we do or suffer in love, though it were only the suffering reproach for Christ, or the giving a cup of cold water in his name, it shall in no wise lose its reward.

3. 'But does not the Apostle direct us to "follow after charity"? And does he not term it "a more excellent way"? He does direct us to 'follow after charity'; but not after that alone. His words are, 'Follow after charity; and desire spiritual gifts' (1 Cor. 14:1). Yea, 'follow after charity,' and desire to spend and to be spent for your brethren. 'Follow after charity'; and as you have opportunity do good to all men.

In the same verse also wherein he terms this, the way of love, 'a more excellent way', he directs the Corinthians to desire other gifts besides it; yea, to desire them earnestly. 'Covet earnestly', saith he, 'the best gifts: and yet I show unto you a more excellent way' (1 Cor. 12:31). More excellent than what? Than the gifts of 'healing', of 'speaking with tongues', and of 'interpreting', mentioned in the preceding verse. But not more excellent than the way of obedience. Of this the Apostle is not speaking; neither is he speaking of outward religion at all. So that this text is quite wide of the present question.

But suppose the Apostle had been speaking of outward as well as inward religion, and comparing them together; suppose in the comparison he had given the preference ever so much to the latter; suppose he had preferred (as he justly might) a loving heart before all outward works whatever. Yet it would not follow that we were to reject either one or the other. No; God hath joined them together from the beginning of the world. And let not man put them asunder.

4. 'But "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth". And is not this enough? Nay, ought we not to employ the whole strength of our mind herein? Does not attending to outward things clog the soul, that it cannot soar aloft in holy contemplation? Does it not damp the vigour of our thought? Has it not a natural tendency to encumber and distract the mind? Whereas St. Paul would have us "to be without carefulness", and to "wait upon the Lord without distraction".'

I answer, 'God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.' Yea, and this is enough: we ought to employ the whole strength of our mind therein. But then I would ask, 'What is it to worship God, a Spirit, in spirit and in truth?' Why, it is to worship him with our spirit; to worship him in that manner which none but spirits are capable of. It is to believe in him as a wise, just, holy being, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; and yet merciful, gracious, and long-suffering; forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin; casting all our sins behind his back, and accepting us in the beloved. It is to love him, to delight in him, to desire him, with all our heart and mind and soul and strength; to imitate him we love by purifying ourselves, even as he is pure; and to obey him whom we love, and in whom we believe, both in thought and word and work. Consequently one branch of the worshipping God in spirit and in truth is the keeping his outward commandments. To glorify him therefore with our bodies as well as with our spirits, to go through outward work with hearts lifted up to him, to make our daily employment a sacrifice to God, to buy and sell, to eat and drink to his glory: this is worshipping God in spirit and in truth as much as the praying to him in a wilderness.

5. But if so, then contemplation is only one way of worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Therefore to give ourselves up entirely to this would be to destroy many branches of spiritual worship, all equally acceptable to God, and equally profitable, not hurtful, to the soul. For it is a great mistake to suppose that an attention to those outward things whereto the providence of God hath called us is any clog to a Christian, or any hindrance at all to his always seeing him that is invisible. It does not at all damp the ardour of his thought; it does not encumber or distract his mind; it gives him no uneasy or hurtful care who does it all as unto the Lord: who hath learned whatsoever he doth, in word or deed, to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus; having only one eye of the soul which moves round on outward things, and one immovably fixed on God. Learn what this meaneth, ye poor recluses, that you may clearly discern your own littleness of faith. Yea, that you may no longer judge others by yourselves, go and learn what that meaneth:

Thou, O Lord, in tender love  
Dost all my burdens bear;  
Lift my heart to things above,  
And fix it ever there.  
Calm on tumult's wheel I sit,  
Midst busy multitudes alone,  
Sweetly waiting at thy feet,  
Till all thy will be done.

6. But the grand objection is still behind. 'We appeal', say they, 'to

experience. Our light did shine: we used outward things many years; and yet they profited nothing. We attended on all the ordinances; but we were no better for it—nor indeed anyone else. Nay, we were the worse. For we fancied ourselves Christians for so doing, when we knew not what Christianity meant.

I allow the fact. I allow that you and ten thousand more have thus abused the ordinances of God, mistaking the means for the end, supposing that the doing these or some other outward works either was the religion of Jesus Christ or would be accepted in the place of it. But let the abuse be taken away and the use remain. Now use all outward things; but use them with a constant eye to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness.

7. But this is not all. They affirm: 'Experience likewise shows that the trying to do good is but lost labour. What does it avail to feed or clothe men's bodies if they are just dropping into everlasting fire? And what good can any man do to their souls? If these are changed, God doth it himself. Besides, all men are either good, at least desirous so to be, or obstinately evil. Now the former have no need of us. Let them ask help of God, and it shall be given them. And the latter will receive no help from us. Nay, and our Lord forbids to "cast our pearls before swine".'

I answer, (1) whether they will finally be lost or saved, you are expressly commanded to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. If you can and do not, whatever becomes of them, you shall go away into everlasting fire. (2) Though it is God only changes hearts, yet he generally doth it by man. It is our part to do all that in us lies as diligently as if we could change them ourselves, and then to leave the event to him. (3) God, in answer to their prayers, builds up his children by each other in every good gift, nourishing and strengthening the whole 'body by that which every joint supplieth'. So that 'the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee'; no, nor even 'the head to the feet, I have no need of you'. Lastly, how are you assured that the persons before you are dogs or swine? Judge them not until you have tried. 'How knowest thou, O man, but thou mayst gain thy brother,' but thou mayst, under God, save his soul from death? When he spurns thy love and blasphemes the good word, then it is time to give him up to God.

8. 'We have tried. We have laboured to reform sinners. And what did it avail? On many we could make no impression at all. And if some were changed for a while, yet their goodness was but as the morning dew, and they were soon as bad, nay worse than ever. So that we only hurt them—and ourselves too; for our minds were hurried and discomposed; perhaps filled with anger instead of love. Therefore we had better have kept our religion to ourselves.'

It is very possible this fact also may be true, that you have tried to do good and have not succeeded; yea, that those who seemed reformed relapsed into sin, and their last state was worse than the first. And what marvel? Is the servant above his master? But how often did he strive to save sinners! And they would

not hear; or when they had followed him awhile they turned back as a dog to his vomit. But he did not therefore desist from striving to do good. No more should you, whatever your success be. It is your part to do as you are commanded: the event is in the hand of God. You are not accountable for this: leave it to him who orders all things well. 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper' (Eccles. 11:6).

'But the trial hurries and frets your own soul.' Perhaps it did so for this very reason, because you thought you was accountable for the event—which no man is, nor indeed can be. Or perhaps because you was off your guard; you was not watchful over your own spirit. But this is no reason for disobeying God. Try again; but try more warily than before. Do good (as you forgive) 'not seven times only; but until seventy times seven.' Only be wiser by experience: attempt it every time more cautiously than before. Be more humbled before God, more deeply convinced that of yourself you can do nothing. Be more jealous over your own spirit, more gentle and watchful unto prayer. Thus 'cast your bread upon the waters, and you shall find it again after many days.'

IV. 1. Notwithstanding all these plausible pretences for hiding it, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' This is the practical application which our Lord himself makes of the foregoing considerations.

'Let your light so shine'—your lowliness of heart, your gentleness and meekness of wisdom; your serious, weighty concern for the things of eternity, and sorrow for the sins and miseries of men; your earnest desire of universal holiness and full happiness in God; your tender goodwill to all mankind, and fervent love to your supreme benefactor. Endeavour not to conceal this light wherewith God hath enlightened your soul, but let it 'shine before men', before all with whom you are, in the whole tenor of your conversation. Let it shine still more eminently in your actions, in your doing all possible good to all men; and in your suffering for righteousness' sake, while you 'rejoice and are exceeding glad, knowing that great is your reward in heaven'.

2. 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works': so far let a Christian be from ever designing or desiring to conceal his religion. On the contrary let it be your desire not to conceal it, not to put the 'light under a bushel'. Let it be your care to place it 'on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house'. Only take heed not to seek your own praise herein, not to desire any honour to yourselves. But let it be your sole aim that all who see your good works may 'glorify your Father which is in heaven'.

3. Be this your one ultimate end in all things. With this view be plain, open, undisguised. Let your love be without dissimulation. Why should you hide



fair, disinterested love? Let there be no guile found in your mouth: let your words be the genuine picture of your heart. Let there be no darkness or reservedness in your conversation, no disguise in your behaviour. Leave this to those who have other designs in view—designs which will not bear the light. Be ye artless and simple to all mankind, that all may see the grace of God which is in you. And although some will harden their hearts, yet others will take knowledge that ye have been with Jesus, and by returning themselves 'to the great Bishop of their souls', 'glorify your Father which is in heaven'.

4. With this one design, that men may 'glorify God in you', go on in his name and in the power of his might. Be not ashamed even to stand alone, so it be in the ways of God. Let the light which is in your heart shine in all good works, both works of piety and works of mercy. And in order to enlarge your ability of doing good, renounce all superfluities. Cut off all unnecessary expense, in food, in furniture, in apparel. Be a good steward of every gift of God, even of these his lowest gifts. Cut off all unnecessary expense of time, all needless or useless employments. And 'whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.' In a word, be thou full of faith and love; do good; suffer evil. And herein be thou 'steadfast, unmovable'; yea, 'always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as thou knowest that thy labour is not in vain in the Lord.'

## UPON OUR LORD'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT DISCOURSE V

Sermon 25 – 1748

### AN INTRODUCTORY TEXT

Wesley's interest in Matthew 5-7 was not with critical textual or historical problems. He felt that the Sermon on the Mount was the only Gospel passage where Christ designed 'to lay down at once the whole plan of his religion, to give us a full prospect of Christianity'. We catch here then Wesley's sense of the wholeness of the message he is interpreting, his conviction of the honest integration of a profoundly ethical evangel with an ethic that is also vividly evangelical. This set of sermons, as much as any, highlight Wesley's distinctive concern for integration and balance—between the faith that justifies and the faith that works by love.

In Discourse V, Wesley is most concerned with the balance of law and gospel. The law points us to the gospel, and the gospel leads us to a 'more exact' fulfilling of the law. Wesley's manner of relating law and gospel hinges upon a view of grace that can prove the maxim he had long held: 'every command in Holy Writ is only a covered promise.' He is not hesitant to agree with Jesus' expectation that our righteousness should 'exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees', whom he then describes in some detail as being 'singularly good'. The specifics of this pattern coincide exactly with the three-fold structure of the *General Rules*: do no harm (avoid evil), do good, and attend the ordinances of God (use the means of grace). These external actions (the righteousness of the law) should then be both met and exceeded by the Christian, whose righteousness is manifest in the internal dispositions that comprise 'the religion of the heart', characterized by a list of virtues ranging from poverty of spirit to purity of heart.

This sermon was first published in the second volume of his *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1748), and like most of the other thirteen essays in this series, was reprinted only in collected rather than separate editions.