

# The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

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## The New Spiritual Age and the Return of Christ

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GA 118

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### Sermon on the Mount – The Beatitudes

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<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.*

<sup>7</sup> *Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.*

<sup>8</sup> *Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.*

<sup>9</sup> *Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>11</sup> *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds  
of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your  
reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were  
before you.*

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If a theosophist, withdrawing for a moment from the immediate concerns of daily life, thinks about his tasks and duties in the external world and asks himself: Is there something that has to do with human happiness and human aspirations over and above the daily round of life? — then as a theosophist he will have an ample answer. He knows that he does not study Theosophy merely in order to occupy his mind because daily life leaves his soul dissatisfied. He knows that what he gets from Theosophy in his feelings can become a real force in his soul. For he is able at all times to say to himself: 'In my inmost being as man I am something different from what I am in the external world.

Together with such thoughts we should realise, deep in our inmost being, that as human beings we live all the time within two streams — one of which gives us our place in everyday life, and another which enables the soul to gaze into a world of the future, to assume its rightful place within the whole setting of cosmic life. This idea should never lead us to regard an external occupation as less important for cosmic life as a whole than some different kind of calling. We must realise that from a certain point of view the smallest and the greatest achievement of which we are capable are of equal importance for the whole. Life is a mosaic, composed of tiny pieces of stone. The man who places one little piece into the mosaic is not less important than the man who thought out the plan of the mosaic. As far as the Divine World Order is concerned, the smallest is just as significant as the greatest. Insight into this truth will avert any feelings of dissatisfaction which might otherwise so easily occur in life. This is the only attitude to our tasks in life that can give us a true understanding of the inner work that must be performed within our soul. It is the only true attitude to adopt to spiritual endeavour. Such ideas should never remain mere theory. The theosophist does well to bring home to himself over and over again in inner contemplation how little in keeping it would be with the World Order if some position in life left him unsatisfied. World-evolution could not take its course if we did not carry out in the right way what seem to be most insignificant details in life. This attitude will give us the right feeling for the great revelations of existence and we shall understand the significance of the teaching that each one of us, over and above what we represent in the physical world, should make ourselves as worthy as possible, in line with the wisdom of worlds. We must regard spiritual development in itself as absolutely essential. Many people say: What is the good of spiritual development if it does not make me useful in life? If we learn to recognise the beginnings of karma, our tasks in life will become clear to us. Not only is it our task to do this thing or that; it is our task to make ourselves as worthy, as valuable, as we possibly can. We must master the thought that we have within us countless forces, countless faculties which we dare not let run to seed in our soul. That the divine-spiritual World Order will do with what we have made of our soul must be left to the divine-spiritual World Order. If we work at our soul development and pay heed to the beckoning of karma, we shall realise what our duties are.

We should not theorize. It might be thought that the best kind of theosophist is one who works at his development for a time and then engages in some activity which brings blessing on his fellow-men. But it may be that our position in external life does not enable us to put into application in the world what we elaborate in the soul. There may be no greater fallacy than to imagine that a man can be a good theosophist only if he actually turns to account in the world what he has learnt inwardly. For decades we may not be in a position to put into application any of the impulses that are now within us. Then one day we may happen to be traveling with someone in a railway carriage and are able to say something of significance which otherwise we should have had no opportunity of saying. This single action may be more significant in life than one of much wider scope. We must realise clearly *what* we are capable of doing and that through the working of karma, the opportunity for turning it to account will be given us at the right moment.

When this is felt and experienced, we no longer ask: Of what use is Theosophy? — for such a question is absolutely pointless. The feeling described is the only one that can give us the right attitude to the great and incisive happenings of life.

It is often assumed that evolution, wherever it takes place, progresses step by step. But the course taken by life in its totality is not such that we can say: Nature makes no jumps — for in fact nature is continually making jumps. A plant, as it grows, is always making jumps — from the root to the leaf, from the leaf to the calyx, from the calyx to the blossom and from the blossom to the fruit. Sudden transitions occur in the life of every individual and in the life of humanity as a whole. Everywhere we find humanity progressing steadily for a time, developing as the leaves develop on a plant. Then the moment comes when a tremendous step forward is taken, just as happens in the plant from leaf to

calyx, from calyx to blossom, from blossom to fruit. In the evolutionary process of humanity such rapid transitions and jumps are constantly occurring. The greatest of all in the history of earth-humanity is the one brought about through the Events in Palestine.

It must be remembered that the human soul has evolved slowly and by degrees. Man's life to-day is such that stimuli come to him from the external world through the senses. Even a person like Helen Keller needed a stimulus from outside before any development was possible. The whole development of the human soul to-day is dependent upon stimuli received through the senses. Man is obliged to depend upon the instrument of his brain for the forming of judgments and ideas. But there was a time when he was not dependent upon these impressions from outside, when he possessed a dim, dreamlike clairvoyance. Clairvoyant pictures welled up from within him, pictures which presented and gave expression to an outer reality but not the same kind of reality as we have around us to-day. Everything around us to-day — plants, animals, air, water, clouds, mountains — none of this was seen with sharp outlines, but as it were through a mist. With his dreamlike consciousness man looked to the realm immediately above him, the realm of the Angeloi. With still higher consciousness he looked up to the realm of the Archangeloi. We to-day look at the mineral kingdom but in those days man looked right up to the realm of the Spirits of Personality (Archai) and from there to the still higher Hierarchies. Just as to-day he knows that he is composed of mineral substances, so, in those olden times, he knew: My soul has come down from the realm of the Spirits of Personality and has been formed out of the substances of the realms of Archangeloi and Angeloi. He looked up to what was above him — and beheld there his spiritual home. From thence he has descended to existence in the physical world and to perception of the physical outer world. First of all he lost his vision of the Archai, and beheld the animal kingdom. Then he lost vision of the Archangeloi and beheld the plant kingdom. Then he lost vision of the Angeloi and beheld the mineral kingdom. But for a long time still, men were able at certain times to look upwards., knowing of the reality of these higher Beings. Only slowly and by degrees did their gaze come to be directed to the purely external world. The door to the spiritual world was closed. But when people who were still able to some extent to see into the spiritual world experienced what is to-day called 'Illness', illness and death had for them quite different meanings than they have for us to-day. There were intermediate states of consciousness between waking and sleeping and when some illness befell a man, it was possible for him to evoke a state of consciousness in which he had clairvoyant vision of the spiritual world. In such states he was permeated through and through by the spiritual and this worked as a remedy, as a healing power. To-day, when man has come down into the physical world, the physical body has become overpoweringly strong and the soul has become weak. Think of soft wax and wax that has hardened. It is difficult to make any impression upon hard wax, whereas soft wax is pliable. In olden times the physical body of man was pliable material which the soul was able to shape and mould. When the soul connected itself with the Spiritual, it was able to mould the physical. Intense devotion to the Spiritual can help the Spiritual to be a healing force. In olden times, man was able to permeate himself with the Spiritual, not for the purpose of knowledge alone but for the purpose of healing. In those olden times men lived in communion with higher Spiritual Beings. When they had descended to the physical plane but were still in connection with the spiritual worlds, they could not ward off the harmful spiritual Beings. They could be permeated with evil spiritual powers, for example by elementary beings inhabiting the astral plane. A man could lend himself to the good spiritual influences but he was also exposed to evil spiritual beings. To-day he is less subject to these evil demonic beings which in olden times worked with such strength in the more pliable material that men might be possessed by them. The reason for all this was because it was man's destiny to descend to the physical plane and gain self-consciousness. His had long been working from outside upon his human nature. But it was only through the Christ Impulse that man could become fully conscious of the Ego and its purpose. The Christ Impulse was revealed, first of all, in reflection, in the lightning in which Jehovah appeared to Moses, just as the light of the Moon reflects the light of

the Sun. Jehovah is in very truth the reflection of Christ. The first revelation of Christ is in reflection. We cannot understand the Gospel of St. John until we realise that the Christ Impulse is the essential, all-important factor in the development of *Ego*-consciousness.

Man was destined to be drawn away from influences which stream into him without consciousness on his part. This-made it possible for him to unfold Ego-Consciousness and prepare for the re-attainment of clairvoyance. But he must be able to withstand the influences of demonic beings. The more power there is in his Ego, the better is he able to keep the influences of demons at bay. The healing from demons, from demonic possession, can only be understood in the light of this knowledge. A number of sick people were brought to Christ at the time of the day when Christ could work most strongly as a *spiritual* power. It was the *spiritual* light which was to work — not the physical sunlight (which is only the garment of the spiritual light). It was when the sun had set that the sick were brought to Christ. We must picture to ourselves how the healing actually took place. The people who came to Christ had the firm faith and conviction that the impulse which can drive away the demons was working through Him. If the expulsion of the demons had been achieved through some external means, the Christ would not have been working through the *Ego*. A man can only know Christ by developing *inner* strength. And Christ can work only when this strength comes to expression in the *Ego* of man.

All this shows us that in that significant moment of time, mankind was standing at a great turning-point. It was the last echoing of an ancient epoch and also the moment of the coming of a mighty impulse whereby men were led into a new age. In earlier times man had been in much closer connection with the spiritual world. In states of ecstasy he could find the way to the spiritual world. But entry into the spiritual world now was to be through the Ego. This impulse was given in the call of John the Baptist and through Christ Himself: 'Change the disposition of your souls, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The link that connected you with the kingdom of Heaven must now be sought and found *within* you!'

To those who understood, it could be said: There was once a time when human souls, rising above the Ego, came into a world of spirit and the spiritual was bestowed upon them for their healing. They became 'rich in spirit', possessors of the spirit. Then came a turning-point. Those who are *beggars* for the spirit are now summoned to enter the kingdom of heaven. Those who are beggars in the spirit can now become 'blessed' — God-filled in their inmost being. ( 'Selig (blessed) means 'verseligt werden': ascent from the body into the soul). Beggars for the spirit, those who yearn and long for the spirit — they will receive into themselves the kingdom of heaven.

Those who suffer, who mourn, they too will be 'blessed' when They receive the Christ Impulse. Through seeing in their own Ego for the link with the spiritual world, they will be healed.

Those whose passions made them violent, could in earlier times be calmed when in states of ecstasy, they were permeated by the Spiritual. The mission of the earth is to be fulfilled by those who quell their passions through the power of the Ego.

Those who suffer will cease to suffer if, in the Ego, they receive Christ. Those who receive Christ in the Ego, can be calmed, can be meek; and they will rule over the earth.

The first verse of the Sermon on the Mount has to do with the physical body. (Blessed are the poor in spirit ...)

The second verse has to do with the etheric body (Blessed are they that mourn ...)

The third verse has to do with the astral body (Blessed are the meek ...)

The fourth verse has to do with the Sentient Soul (Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness ...) Man's conscience should not apply only to the physical realm. Those who in the Sentient Soul hunger and thirst after righteousness can be blessed.

That a man can become in the Intellectual or Mind Soul is expressed in the verse: Blessed are the merciful. The Ego, the 'I' flashes up when we have passed from the Sentient Soul to the Mind Soul. Man must feel himself as an Ego and every other human being as well. What lives in the soul passes from Ego to Ego; subject and predicate are equal: 'Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy — or love.'

The Sermon on the Mount is a record unequalled in statement concerning the mighty transition inaugurated by Christ.

*(The following notes are from a lecture given on a different date, and much earlier, namely, Berlin, 20th Aug, 1904.)*

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*There are certain expressions which since very ancient times were used in all secret schools in order to conceal certain facts from the uninitiated — for example, the expression "on the mount". This means the innermost of the temple where the pupils were initiated into certain secrets. When it is said "Jesus went up into the mount", this means that he led His disciples into the innermost sanctuary of his Mystery School and spoke to the multitude only in images. The Sermon on the Mount, in its mighty significance, could only be given to the disciples, not the people.*

*There are Nine Beatitudes ... 3x3.*

*Three virtues which correspond to the lower nature of man are: Longing (Blessed are the poor in Spirit), Suffering (Blessed are they that mourn) and Peace (Blessed are the meek).*

*To be drawn upwards through Longing, to overcome through Suffering, to come to Peace.*

*The second group of three virtues stand higher: Righteousness, Mercy, Good-Will in the Heart. If we compare this second stage with the first, we find that the first three virtues refer to the individual, the second group of three to his fellow-men.*

*Thirdly, there are the virtues which lead up to the higher Beings. (Blessed are the peacemakers ...) whoever speaks to injure another, to say what makes him uncomfortable, cannot find the way to higher Beings.*

*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake ... willingness to endure persecution for the sake of righteousness.*

*Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you, for my sake ... this means to declare oneself as belonging to the Master.*

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Kali Yuga, the Dark Age, had already lasted for 3,000 years. It began in the year 3,101 B.C.. That is the year when the spiritual world began to darken, to be shut off from men. Before that time, men had direct consciousness of the spiritual worlds. After Kali Yuga had lasted for 3,101 years there came the impulse whereby man is led once again into the spiritual world. But this impulse was possible only because a God descended into the physical world. This was the initial impulse for the return to the Spiritual world. The evolution of humanity took a great forward jump because men were able henceforth, out of the Ego itself, to ascend again into the spiritual world. The Descent of Christ was necessary in order that the human Ego should not waste away through inertia and fall out of the onward stream of evolution. For a very considerable time there were only a few men who knew that Christ had lived in Palestine. Tacitus, for example, knew very little of it. About 100 years later, people spoke of a sect living in a poor quarter of Rome and teaching of Jesus. This, the mightiest of all impulses, the Christ Impulse, was practically unknown. It might have remained unknown altogether but in fact it did not. The Christ Impulse was received into humanity. And when a similar impulse is given mankind must be in a position not to let such a jump happen in evolution without noticing it.

In 1899 the Dark Age, Kali Yuga, came to an end, having lasted for 5,000 years. We are living to-day at the beginning of an epoch when quite new forces and faculties will develop. Before the first half of the century has run its course, a number of people, simply through natural development, will possess unusual faculties. From the end of Kali Yuga, from the year 1899 onwards, a certain faculty of etheric sight unfolds in mankind, and this will have developed in a number of people between 1930 and 1940. There will then be two possibilities. Mankind may sink more deeply still into the morass of materialism; everything may be flooded by materialism. This awakening of etheric sight may be ignored, just as the Christ Event was ignored. But if men do not experience this awakening, they will be submerged in materialism.

In the course of 2,500 years a sufficiently large number of human beings will develop etheric sight. This is the beginning of the clairvoyance that will be an added faculty of the Ego. Those who understand it will be able to convince themselves of the truth of the Christ Event exactly as Paul became convinced of it at Damascus. When men have developed etheric sight they will be able to behold Christ in an etheric body. This is Christ's new descent to the men of Earth. In reality, however, it is an ascent, for Christ will never again incarnate in the flesh. Those men who have developed etheric sight will be able to behold the Christ in the etheric body and will know from *direct experience* that the Christ lives.

Through soul-development we shall begin to understand this most important Event. If Theosophy did not develop understanding in men, this Event might pass by unheeded. Theosophy should prepare us in such a way that we can make this greatest Event since the close of Kali Yuga bear fruit in mankind. No matter what their activities may be, those men will be of importance who have prepared themselves to see this etheric happening. But this happening will also be of importance to those who are living between death and rebirth. It has its effects in the spiritual worlds too but the organ for perceiving it must be developed here, on the Earth.

We ourselves now proclaim the new Christ Event of the 20th century. Later on it will be proclaimed as an Event whose effects work on for the whole of humanity. But it may be that materialism will be introduced even into the theosophical conception of the new Christ Event. Materialistic consciousness may imagine that Christ could come again in the flesh. When the Event takes place it will be obvious whether or not theosophy has understood it. In the first half of the 20th century, false Messiahs will arise.

Mankind develops in order to be able to recognise the Messiah with *higher* faculties. The test will be whether Theosophy has enabled men to understand this Event aright, has led them to the Spiritual in such a way that they can understand the Return of Christ in its *true* form. Christ will come again for a number of men — who will be forerunners — just as he once came to Paul at Damascus.

Unbelief becomes more and more widespread as the result of literary criticism of the original records. The more the historical evidences lose importance for men, the more will the faculty ripen through which the Christ can be seen. The real Christ will be revealed to those men who through Spiritual Science can unfold the understanding, the vision of the true Return of Christ.

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## A Note on the Term "Theosophy"

At first glance the use of the term "theosophy" may be somewhat misleading for the English reader. It may suggest to him associations with Anglo-Indian Theosophy and the Theosophical Society founded by H. P. Blavatsky.

Rudolf Steiner, however, uses the term independently and with different and much wider connotation. In earlier centuries, particularly in Central Europe, "Theosophy" was a recognised section of Philosophy and even of Theology. Jacob Boehme was known as the great "theosopher". In English the term goes back to the seventeenth century.

Ultimately it leads us back to St. Paul who says (I Cor. ii, 6-7): "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world ... But we speak the wisdom of God (Greek 'Theosophia') in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory."

All "theosophy" implies a knowledge of the spiritual world, and such knowledge has been attained in different ways at different epochs of man's history. The Rosicrucian way referred to in the title is the way suited to modern man in this age of world knowledge and individual freedom.

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