

LESSON 1

HEAVEN: OUR FINAL DESTINATION

BACKGROUND READING



When we begin a journey or a trip somewhere, we must first decide where we are going. Otherwise how will we get there, or even know if we are on the right road? In the same way, in order to begin the journey of our life in Christ, we must first reflect on our destination. Keeping the end goal of our lives foremost in mind will have a powerful impact on the way we lead our lives.

Beatitude: The Kingdom of God

Every human person is called by God to choose the path that leads to Him. Our feet are set at the start of this path. But where will it take us and what is our destination? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us the destination of all human beings is to live forever in the blessedness of God, or to live in God's beatitude. While often the word "beatitude" is used to describe the list of eight promises that Jesus made to His disciples in His Sermon on the Mount, the word "beatitude" itself means blessedness, and refers to the blessedness to which those who follow Christ are called: "The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude" (CCC 1719).

So we know our destiny or destination is beatitude. But what does that mean? The New Testament describes in various ways the beatitude to which God calls us:

- ▶ The coming of the Kingdom of God (see Matthew 4:17)
- ▶ The vision of God: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8)
- ▶ Entering into the joy of the Lord (see Matthew 25:21-23)
- ▶ Entering into God's rest (see Hebrews 4:7-11)

Another way of thinking of beatitude is as St. Augustine, a famous theologian of the early Church, describes it in his simple and beautiful way: "There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love, we shall love and praise. Behold what will be at the end without end. For what other end do we have, if not to reach the kingdom which has no end?" (CCC 1720). This Kingdom, which has no end, where we will see God and enter into His joy and rest, is often called Heaven or paradise. This blessedness of God is none other than a share in the divine life of God Himself. But to share in the divine life of God is far beyond

the ability of man without the gift of grace, as the *Catechism* tells us: “Such beatitude ... comes from an entirely free gift of God” (CCC 1722). Thus we can see that the ultimate destination of every human person is Heaven, but we cannot get there on our own. This is why Christ came down from Heaven – so that He could walk the path to Heaven for us and show us the way.

Signs along the Way: The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes

We are called to journey along the path of Life in Christ toward our final destination of Heaven. But how do we know that we have chosen the path that leads there? The *Catechism* tells us that “The Decalogue, the Sermon on the Mount, and the apostolic catechesis describe for us the paths that lead to the Kingdom of heaven. Sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we tread them, step by step, by everyday acts” (CCC 1724). The Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes given in the Sermon on the Mount, and the teaching of the Apostles act as signs and directions that lead us to the eternal Kingdom of God. We will take an in-depth look at the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes later this year and see how they act as signposts for the moral life.

The Ten Commandments are also known as the Decalogue. The word “Decalogue” is derived from Latin and means literally “ten words.” God gave the Israelites these Commandments after He had liberated them from slavery in Egypt, as told in the book of Exodus. God spoke these “Ten Words” to His people as He revealed Himself to them. The Israelites committed themselves to following

these laws as their response to God’s revelation of Himself and His loving care for them. As the *Catechism* explains, “The commandments ... express the implications of belonging to God through the establishment of the covenant. Moral existence is a response to the Lord’s loving initiative. It is the acknowledgment and homage given to God and a worship of thanksgiving. It is cooperation with the plan God pursues in history” (CCC 2062).

Even though the Ten Commandments are given in the Old Testament, which is the story of how God prepared His people for a Savior – Jesus Christ – they still apply to Christians. Jesus says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place” (Matthew 5:17-18). He did not do away with the Old Law. Instead, He perfected it and showed the power of the Spirit at work in it.

With the Beatitudes, Jesus fulfills all that was promised in the Old Law of the Ten Commandments. The *Catechism* says, “The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus’ preaching” (CCC 1716). They show us the face of Christ and His love. They shed light on the attitudes and actions of the Christian life. While the promises of the Beatitudes are strange and even paradoxical to the world’s way of thinking, they give hope when we are undergoing trials and difficulties. They tell us of the blessings and promises that already belong to the disciples of Christ. By living out the Beatitudes, the Christian disciple is already living out the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.