

Lesson: Matthew 5:1-12 (parallel Luke 6:20-23)

5:¹ Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying: ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. – NIV84

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God, you know that we are surrounded by many dangers and that we often stumble and fall. Strengthen us in body and mind, and bring us safely through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. The Spirit of the Lord is on me; he has anointed me to preach good news. Alleluia. (Luke 4:18)

Sermon Text:

Can you imagine what it must have been like? The New Testament tells us that simply listening to Jesus made it abundantly clear that He was different. Today, in our Gospel lesson, we are transported to the Sermon on the mount as Jesus taught. Three chapters of it are recorded for us in the book of Matthew. Admittedly, there is a part of me that has always wondered what it would have been like to actually physically sit at the feet of Jesus. What would it have been like to be there? To listen as He spoke? But the reality is that I wasn't there. I am not. But then a question begins to formulate in our minds. If I was not there, then are these words of Jesus really for me? Am I in Jesus' Sermon?

It should immediately be noted in the face of such a question that God is omniscient. He knows all things and through the inspiration of His Word has carefully crafted His Word for all of us, for people of all time. Yes, God had you in mind when He recorded, even as He spoke these words. So perhaps the question is less “am I” and more “where am I in Jesus' sermon?” At least at first, we may not like the answer.

Listen again to some of those descriptors of whom Jesus calls blessed. *Blessed are the poor in spirit ... those who mourn ... the meek ... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.* These first four, combined with the last, *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* “*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me,*” sound like what you want to be? Poor, mourning, meekness, hunger, and thirst. These aren't usually the things we associate with the term blessed right. I mean when was the last time you saw someone post on social media “Can't afford groceries anymore” #Blessed or “Crippled by grief and can't get up this morning” #Blessed? Weird right? I mean it might be true but it is not what we trumpet in the streets now is it?

We are beginning to wrestle with a common misunderstanding of these words. Many try to apply them to earthly lives exclusively and while it's true that some of these will become attitudes and virtues seen in the lives of Christians; the first four especially must speak of more, something else.

Because there is a sermon in each Beatitude, let's deal with the first and apply that knowledge to the others. *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* These words of Jesus are really a restatement of words spoken by Isaiah, *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor* (Isaiah 61:1). Here poverty doesn't just mean a lack in material things or we get the funny picture of Isaiah only speaking to the destitute. Instead, its spiritual poverty as Jesus speaks of today, soothed and comforted by the Word, by preaching and teaching. Interestingly enough Jesus will quote this again the only other time Matthew uses the word poor in chapter 11.

So what is spiritual poverty? Is it a lack of faith? That again leaves us with an awkward picture indicating that in order to be blessed God doesn't want strong faith found among His people. So what is it? Psalm 34 can help, “*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit* (Psalm 34:18).” Spiritual poverty is a condition of sinful man, one that acknowledges that we have nothing, that we can earn nothing, accomplish nothing on our own and that we need the help of a loving God for any blessing we need, for the greatest gift we can receive, the kingdom of heaven. It still may not paint us in the most positive of light but it is necessary because it's true.

Now, apply that to the rest of our opening set of four. “*Those who mourn*” doesn’t paint a picture of Christians plagued by grief each day, though sin will certainly do that, but of Christians who acknowledge their sin and among whom can be found that heartfelt contrition which is comforted by faith. “*The meek*” are not those who allow themselves to be picked on and abused (although the Christian will clearly endure hardship as Jesus tells us in the 8th and 9th Beatitudes). They are those who bow before the King of heaven and earth conscious of the condition of poverty in which they approach Him. And those who “*hunger and thirst for righteousness*”, well Paul once told the Romans, “*Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.* (Romans 10:4)”

Martin Luther once penned, “*Confession has two parts. The one is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution or forgiveness from the pastor as from God himself, not doubting but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven.*” Do you see the connection?

The middle three are a bit different again. We note that these begin to make sense, even sound right to our earthly ears. “⁷*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.* ⁸*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.* ⁹*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*” Having been shown mercy we will be merciful, as we focus our whole heart, undivided upon God we see Him as he truly is, peacemakers rightly should be called God’s people.

But there is a problem here too, is there not? In one of the commentaries I read on this lesson the author wrote the following, “Our meekness, however, often shines by its absence; our covetousness, pride and other faults necessitate God’s discipline.” The same could be said for these three, just as they need to be said for the first four and the last two. We fall flat on our face so often when it comes to these statements and I know that I can think of more than a handful of times when these statements have not applied in my life. I can only imagine that you can say the same.

Your Savior knows that too. And so in those final two statements He zeros in on why, once we have come to this knowledge we can truly consider ourselves blessed. Throughout our lesson Jesus says “*Blessed are those...*”. In the last two Jesus looks directly at those sin has left destitute and hungry and speaks, **BLESSED ARE ... YOU!**

Listen to those words again, “¹⁰*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* ¹¹*“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.* ¹²*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*”

Yes, there is a sermon on suffering and persecution in these words today as well. “To follow Christ” doesn’t mean that poverty will disappear in this world, nor does it mean that hunger and thirst will vanish from the face of creation. Although Christians will not ignore those issues either. But I’m not pointing us to these words today for that sermon. Instead, I want you to note the reasons that we are blessed when we face all kinds of hardship. In verse 10, Jesus tells us we face these things “*because of righteousness.*” In verse 11, Jesus tells us we face them “*because of me*”, because of Him.

Do you hear it there? All of this revolves around Jesus. Ultimately, He is the only one who is able to live up to the lofty picture of God’s people painted here. Keeping the will of His heavenly perfectly Jesus allowed himself to carry our sins, all of them, to the cross. There because we are people found to be poor in spirit, mourning, meek, starving and dehydrated, He suffered and died that through His sacrifice we could be called “Blessed”.

And that’s the key to the beatitudes and really the doorway to the rest of our Savior’s sermon on the mount. When we see Jesus, through the gift of faith given by the Spirit, everything else begins to click into place, often without our even thinking about it. As I behold the cross of Christ, I see what my poverty caused and I mourn over my sin. As we come and stand before our God lifting our voices as one in true meekness and Spirit wrought humility we conclude that we don’t deserve anything from God but that we stand before him hungry and thirsty for the forgiveness that He alone can give, grateful that He feeds us in Word and in Sacraments. In response to this love poured out on us, mercy, purity of heart, peacefulness will be seen in our lives, even when the world around us would ridicule and falsely accuse us.

And this last part really blows the mind of the world around us as it sees that we will even rejoice in all of this. When the world stands against us, and it will, we are in good company, “*for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*” But more importantly, connected to Christ, by grace and through faith, as God Himself works mightily in our hearts, minds and lives “*great is your reward in heaven.*”

I can only imagine what it must have been like to actually be there. Jesus preaching, Jesus teaching, it must have been awe inspiring. But then it still is. For here, on a mount, Jesus sits, down opens His mouth and as He does He see us, exposes our inability to save ourselves and reminds us that still through Him we are blessed. Dear Christian what a privilege, what grace, what mercy. God knows you, sees you, is speaking to you! Amen.