

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them. He said:

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 children 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.—Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV2011)

Blessed

Someone comments on the picture of a smiling family with their adorable kids, “You are blessed.” You tell a story about a recent enjoyable time spent with family and you end it, “I’m so very blessed.” After all that work, all those hours she spent, the resumes she sent in, she gets the job. He returns home from the doctor’s office with a clean bill of health. The paycheck comes in. The sale goes well. Most would say they are blessed. And they most certainly are.

But what about the wife and husband who are not able to have children? What about the grandma and grandpa who want to see their grandchildren but can’t? What about the guy or gal who were laid off and still looking for a job? What about the person who is not recovering from the illness? What about the individual missing a loved one who passed away? Are they less blessed?

When Jesus looks out at the crowd following him, he goes up on the mountainside, and sits down. And when he opens his mouth to teach he turns our world upside down. **“Blessed are the poor in spirit...blessed those who mourn...the meek...those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...blessed the merciful...the peacemakers...the persecuted and when people insult you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”**

Really? Doesn't Jesus know that this doesn't work if you want to get ahead in this world? Doesn't he realize that living like this isn't how you become successful? And it's not like we are asking for much. It just doesn't sound like it's going to be a very enjoyable or, really, a very comfortable life on this earth. It sounds like he is asking a lot from us.

And, yet, we want to be blessed. That's a good thing. We want that reward.

So you hear this list that Jesus gives and it can be like trying to drive down a narrow, icy, snow-packed road. If you are not careful, you could end up in two different ditches. You might hear this list and think: "Great! I just need to do these things and I'll be on my way." Before you know it, you're stuck in the ditch of self-righteousness. You see, your sinful nature loves lists. It likes to think this is a nice checklist to follow and, once you've completed each level, you can move on to the next to get your reward.

But pretty soon you start to realize, this isn't me.

Sometimes you are poor in spirit. You acknowledge that before God you are utterly helpless. You know nothing in yourself or this world can help. But then you also bargain with God to get you what you want as if you have something to offer the one from whom all things come and belong to.

Sometimes you mourn over your sins, the sin you see in the world, and sin's effects on so many lives. Other times we are quick with excuses. We point the finger at other people. We blame the situations. Instead of mourning and confessing our sin, we try to ignore or downplay it.

We can be meek not being caught up in ourselves or one's self-importance. It means putting others before yourself. Being meek remains calm, cool, and collected especially when life doesn't go the way they had planned. Other times pride rears its ugly head. It's not only 2 year olds who lose their temper and take it out on people around them when their opinion isn't being listened to or they aren't getting what they want.

We hunger for righteousness as we desire to live in that right relationship with God. But often we get distracted as we hunger more for a right relationship and good status amongst your peers. How often are you thirsting for a bigger number in your bank account and retirement fund? Are you are hungering and thirsting more to do what you want? You know it's going to make you feel better for a short amount of time. You know it's going to quench that desire to escape the monotony, responsibility, and stress of life.

You've been merciful when you do not treat others as their wrongs deserve. You do not wish or punish evil on your fellow man. You've helped and befriended others in their bodily needs. You've forgiven as Jesus forgives you. But what about the person who has a different political view from you? What about the person whose life-style choices do not match up with your own? What about the person who has sinned against you numerous times before? Do you forgive them? Do you have mercy? Or have you convinced yourself that you have every right to hold something against them?

The pure in heart act without selfish ambition or looking for personal gain. Too often I find myself doing things because I know who is paying attention, because it makes me feel good about myself, because I expect something in return. What about you?

The peacemakers look to get rid of those things that divide. They put aside differences, their own pride, their own selfish wants, and seek to have unity. How are you doing on that one? We've already seen how pride quickly gets in our way. We know how we can become so wrapped up in our own opinions and wants that we fail to hear our spouses need. You know those times when your words and actions have divided your brothers and sisters in Christ.

And before you know it, you've hopped into the other ditch. You can be quick to despair because you know that I do not do this. And if I can't do this, that must mean I will miss out on these rewards. So it can seem like God is unfair! He expects too much. Not only is this against the thought process of the society that we live in, but this is welcoming hardship, persecution, difficulty in our lives!

But that list is still there. And try to get out of that despair you point to how you're better at this than someone else. You aren't as bad as them. You might start treating your suffering, your struggle as a type of trophy to show how much you are willing to endure! It can start to seem like this competition on who is willing to put up with more hardships in life. And before you know it, you've overcorrected and you're back in the ditch of self-righteousness.

We want to be blessed. But what we really mean is what American-culture says is blessed: successful, a certain status, the good job, the happy family with dependable friends, free from most health problems and struggles, financially stable, out of debt, with enough to comfortably live and retire. Not much, just blessed. But when that doesn't come, we might question, am I not included with the blessed? Do I need to suffer and struggle more? Didn't I already "do my time?" "When is it going to be my turn?" you might wonder or even accuse God.

But being blessed doesn't necessarily equal success, comfort, or life going well. And when we forget that, we find ourselves trying to make a paradise on earth. And in this paradise God is more or less the help who gives us things to make us happy and comfortable. He's there when you need him and when it's convenient for you. And when he doesn't, that must mean he has failed. That means he must not love us. That must mean that he no longer cares. That must mean we aren't blessed. And then we are back into the other ditch of despair.

Jesus doesn't open his mouth to speak these words to give us a new list of commandments to live by. He shows us that being blessed is not determined by us or the world we live in. We who are cursed with sin need one who has no sin. We need someone to live perfectly for us. So he who is without sin—holy—comes to make us holy—without sin. Jesus buys you back from the curse by becoming a curse when he hangs from the cross and dies in our place (Galatians 3:13). He who is life, gives up his own, to give us a blessed life with him.

That very same Jesus assures you that you are blessed already now, no matter what situation you are in. You are blessed because the kingdom of God is already yours. Jesus has made

you part of God's family and, therefore, heirs of eternal life. The kingdom of heaven is already at rule in your heart of faith the Spirit creates in you.

You are blessed because your sins are forgiven. God's justice is being carried out. He will not punish you as your sins deserve. He's already punished Jesus so you have peace with God. Take comfort, your time in this sin-filled world will come to end and the real paradise is waiting for you with him.

You are blessed because God does not leave you starving and without strength as you hunger for righteousness. He gives you his Word of the Bible where you taste and see that the Lord is good and know his will for you. He feeds your starving soul with Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. There he forgives your sins and strengthens you in your continued fight against sin and temptation. He forgives your sins and has mercy on you, so our hearts of faith desire to share this mercy to all.

No sinful human being can see God, but you are blessed. You've been washed in the blood of the Lamb. He washed your sins away. In baptism he made you a new creation with a pure heart. So one day you will see God with your own two eyes and see him face-to-face!

Until then, with eyes of faith, you see God here in the Word when you hear his voice spoken to you. You see him there in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper with his very real and present body and blood. We see him there using your hands and mouth to carry out his good purpose.

You are blessed not because you've accomplished a task, but because this is what Jesus makes you, the Spirit seals to you, and the Father declares you to be. You are God's child and his saint. And as children of God and his saints, rejoice and be glad because the end is already guaranteed. Great is your reward in heaven. It was won for you on the cross, guaranteed with Jesus' rising from the dead, and promised to you at your baptism. It's a treasure that Jesus promises will not fade or grow old. There's a crown of life waiting to be placed on your head. There's a room with your name on it in your Father's house prepared for you by Jesus. It's there with all the saints triumphant in heaven—all the holy ones—who have been washed in Jesus' blood. Today we rejoice and give thanks for all those the Spirit kept in the one true faith until life everlasting. We join that great host praising God and partake with them in that foretaste of our heavenly banquet of heaven as we come to the Lord's Supper. They see clearly what we look forward to in faith. And until that time comes when we will join the saints in heaven, we saints on earth push forward knowing that the end is already guaranteed. So whatever situation we may be in—with sins washed away, made pure in the blood of the Lamb and baptized children of God—we are blessed. Amen.