

Matthew 5:1-12

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.*

Sermon Theme: Blessed

Make a list of things or experiences that you would characterize as a blessed life. What does a blessed life look like for you? What happens? What’s part of it? Obviously some of those you write down or think about are unique to you. At the same time some pretty common ones will show up. We might think of our homes we live in and the food that we eat. We might think of our possessions, the job you work, and money you earn to buy those things you like to have. Some of you may have thought of your family. Others think of their friends. It’s very likely you didn’t think about what Jesus considers blessed in Matthew 5. When we and the world think about a blessed life, we think about the good things that one has now. We think of good experiences of the past. Usually one considers a blessed life to have certain ease, comfort, riches, pleasure, earthly welfare and well-being. But then here’s Jesus who turns it all upside down.

When Jesus sees the crowds coming, he sits down, opens his mouth, and begins preaching this sermon from the mountainside. Imagine you are one of those people following Jesus and you hear this is what you signed up for. Jesus says, “Blessed,” that is, these are the ones who have God’s divine favor and love. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” They acknowledge that they are

helpless without God and are in constant need of God's mercy. "Blessed are those who mourn" are those who recognize their failures and their shortcomings before God. They are sad over their own sins. They are upset about the misery and sinfulness of this world. The meek are the humble who are not overly impressed with a sense of one's self-importance. Again, they recognize their sins and that they are no greater than anyone else. They are considerate. They are calm-cool-collected when life's storms come their way. They do not seek revenge, but forgive. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness recognize their own failures before God. They are honest with themselves and focus on the one who does make them right with God. They daily turn away from sin and what grieves God back to the Lord for his forgiving love. "Blessed are the merciful." These are individuals who do not wish or punish evil but help and befriend every bodily need. The pure in heart seek the will of God and the good of all around them. The peacemakers look to share the peace that Jesus gives us. Those who are persecuted, insulted, and have people speak evil against them for Jesus' sake are picking up their cross, saying "no" to self, and following Jesus. Such people are the ones who God gives his favor and love.

This is just foolish. First, we see the timing of everything. You're putting others before yourself now. You struggle now. And the promised reward will be given at an unspecified time later. In a world of same-day shipping and instant downloads, how can God expect us to wait for some far distant future reward? Why should I have to wait? Why can't I have it now? We want the ease and are looking for the comfort not tomorrow, not years down the road. And when it's not, we question God's love.

But not only is the timing foolish, what Jesus says is just ridiculous. This simply isn't what one thinks their life will be like when they have God's favor. Yes, the world recognizes that at certain points these are good qualities to have. After certain events it's good to mourn. In general, society doesn't appreciate a blow-hard or someone who is too full of themselves. There is general acceptance that there's a time and place to be merciful. People want peace in their life.

But if you want to get ahead and have that ease, you have to be willing to do the "dirty" work. You can't seem weak; otherwise, people are going to walk all over you. You can't always be merciful; otherwise, people will take advantage of you. In order to have peace, sometimes you need to make war! If you are mourning, you look vulnerable and weak. If you are meek, if you need help, if you are being persecuted and insulted, it doesn't look like you have any of God's favor!

And that's where we find our own struggle. Like the world, we gravitate towards the idea that a blessed life with God's favor equals an easy, comfortable life. But here is Jesus who turns it all upside down. We know that we should live like this; otherwise, Jesus wouldn't have said it. When he opens his mouth to preach, this is something serious. We know we want to live like this. As children of God, God's will is our will. But there's still this struggle.

Sometimes I am very poor in spirit. I recognize my sins. I know I cannot save myself from God's wrath and hell. At the same time we are excuse-making factories. We are expert ignorers

of what you have done wrong. We convince ourselves that I usually try hard and God's not going to mind when I slip up.

Some days I am humble. More often my pride raises its ugly head. I get all sorts of upset when life doesn't go the way I want it. When things take a little longer than I would like, when someone doesn't act the way I expect, I'm too often anything but meek and humble.

Thirst for righteousness? Too often we chase after what makes life easier and more comfortable. We thirst after whatever's going to dull the pain and break up the monotony of life. We hunger for whatever can numb the mind, help escape, takes off the edge and make me feel good.

Instead of being merciful, we are quick to judge. We hold back on forgiveness afraid that they might take advantage of our love and care. We grip tightly onto grudges against anyone who hurt our easily-injured pride. We look for revenge against someone who pains us.

Instead of being pure in heart, even my kindest actions are often stained. I do it because it serves me. It makes me feel good about me. Someone is going to be more appreciative of me and what I do.

Peacemaker? There are more times when I'm more concerned about getting my point across. We want to win the argument. We say and do things simply to stir the pot.

Oh, it's a struggle. Some days you then wrestle with despair because you know you don't live as Jesus says. Other days you are fighting against that Pharisee who is secure in your own supposed goodness. It's a struggle because my sinful nature hears what Jesus says and this is just utter foolishness. "That's not how life is!" Or so we might think. And so, instead of trusting God and his will for us, instead of leaning on his promises, we turn to ourselves to try and hold onto whatever ease and comforts we can find in this life.

Understand Jesus isn't saying that we shouldn't enjoy the good things we have in our life. He isn't saying that we need to be more sad and stoic. Quite the opposite. He says rejoice and be glad! God knows how foolish this all sounds to the world and to us. But, then again so are God's promises. God makes it abundantly clear in his Word, the reward for sin, for not living as God and his Law demands, is death. Death ends your life on earth and means eternal pain and suffering in hell. But instead of hell, Jesus promises heaven. Instead of suffering, comfort. Instead of God's wrath and punishment, God's mercy. Instead of complete separation from God as his enemies, you will be called God's children who see his face.

But these rewards are not going to change our hearts to live as Jesus directs. Jesus isn't giving you a different way or another blueprint to follow to have eternal life. Jesus preaches this sermon to get us to stop looking to ourselves and see that the answer lies completely in him.

In Jesus we have one who possesses to an infinite degree the qualities he demands. Here's one who goes to the Father in prayer recognizing his need for him and the Spirit to carry out the work as our Savior. His grief over our sins and how it destroys your relationship with God moves him to take on flesh and make his dwelling among. He is perfectly humble and meek while he puts others before himself becoming lower than lowest slave to give up his life as the

ransom for many. His hunger and thirst for righteousness gave him joy as he faces the cross because Jesus knows he is going to make you right with God. Filled with mercy, Jesus sees your sorry state claiming your sin to be his own. It's not for his own personal benefit that he comes to this world. It's not because he needs validation that he dies on the cross. It's not because he was trying to gain something for himself that Jesus dies. With a pure heart Jesus dies for you to make peace between you and his Father in heaven. He is persecuted and insulted. He is mocked and falsely accused as he picks up his cross to die for you. And when he hangs on the cross, forsaken and abandoned by God, Jesus pays the price your sins owe so that you are set free, bought back and redeemed. How foolish! He didn't need to do it. He receives nothing from it. But he does it to win forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and life eternal.

As if that wasn't foolish enough, Jesus gives this away for free. He asks nothing in return. He demands nothing from you. Jesus tells you, "Yes, life is difficult right now. But it's going to be okay. The end has already been written in my blood and sealed to you at your baptism. In that water of baptism you died with me on the cross and from those waters you rose with me. Heaven is already yours. Forgiveness is what you have. Holy and without sin, that's what God sees and what I declare you to be. And there is nothing that can take this promise away."

Yes, life is hard at times but Jesus is with you the entire way. You hear his voice speak to you through the God's Word reminding you it's going to be okay. He gives you his body and blood for the forgiveness of your sin in the Lord's Supper to strengthen you. He points you back to your baptism reminding you what he made you as God's child with sins forgiven and life eternal today. Such blessed foolishness that God should come to us in the Word, in Baptism, in the Lord's Supper. But he does to shame the wise and the strong so that our boast is in the Lord.

Because the ending is already written, that means between now and then everything is going to be okay. Jesus sets you free from the foolish trying to get ahead in this world. You are now free to serve your neighbor being merciful, humble, peacemaking and love giving. You are set free from trying to achieve glory for your name and impress. God is already well-pleased with you. Live freely glorifying the Name who saved you from sin and death. You are set free from the foolishness of this world to look ahead to the promised glory that awaits. Jesus turns our world upside down to see that even in the difficult and especially when it's hard, in Jesus we have one who is infinitely greater and superior. During the good and during the rough, with Jesus we are blessed. Amen.