

## MATTHEW 5:1-12

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November 4-6, 2023

Smith

### You are Blessed

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up onto a mountain. When he sat down his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he opened his mouth and taught them. He said: <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 satisfied. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be given 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 sons of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted on account of their righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when men insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> "Rejoice and be glad, because your reward is great in heaven! The fact is, their fathers did the same thing to the prophets who came before you."

The logic and reason of the world preaches that wealth and power are the greatest blessings. They are the achievements we seek after. And people believe that if they can gain the greatest power and then sneak away from the table so that someone else has to pay the bill, then so much the better. This is not what Christ our Lord says. Better to be poor in every way and yet be righteous, to be right in God's sight.

But more than that. Our dear Lord doesn't only say, "Blessed are the poor," but "**Blessed are the poor in spirit.**" He wants us to understand that our souls should be crushed and pulverized by the Law of God, by looking into the Law of Moses and seeing ourselves as the biggest sinners and hypocrites that ever were, and be terrified by the very thought of being wrong in God's sight. When we are crushed, then we truly look to Christ and only to Christ, and not into ourselves. I am not what makes me holy. Jesus Christ alone makes me holy. Then the Kingdom of Heaven is truly and surely mine.

Let's understand what Jesus means by "**those who mourn.**" He does not only mean mourning and grieving for those who have died, but the sadness the Christian feels about all of the trouble and evils in the world every day. Each of us can live a life that says "Thank you" to God for all his gifts and fulfilled promises. Each of us here in this city, as delightful, safe, and wholesome as it is, we still grieve and suffer that so much sin runs rampant all around us. We know that there are signs up here and there in town that commemorate an

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<sup>1</sup> My own translation.

attack on our city in the 1860s, but imagine the number of bronze plaques there would be if every single attack on our faith was commemorated in the same way? Every wall, every door and window, every car, every chair, every desk and counter, every computer keyboard would have little memorial words: “On this day, this and that Christian was attacked by the devil’s tricks and temptations, and this many fell into sin all at once on an early November day,” and so on. But Jesus says: “You will be comforted. I am with you always, to the very end.” It’s not as if we can grieve and mourn and never be happy ever again. Jesus tells us to cheer up. The believing writer said, “Sadness has killed many a man,”<sup>2</sup> and the Scripture says, “A crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Prov. 17:22). **A little joy after a good cry does great good for both body and soul.**

Consider, then, the ways Jesus is urging us Christians to live. Don’t make yourself into the kind of person who gets revenge or always has to get their way. **“The meek,”** rather, **“will inherit the earth,”** because the ungodly and everyone who tries to put themselves first will end up being last and having nothing at all.

And to be righteous is a joy, to be made holy by the work of the Holy Spirit. We live out our lives in that righteousness. But, Jesus says, yearn and search and long for more. **“Hunger and thirst for righteousness,”** search and study the Holy Scriptures, and through the Scriptures and our study of God’s word we are filled. Isaiah says: **“Come, all who are thirsty, buy without money or cost. Eat what is good and your soul will delight”** (Is 55:2).

At this point this part of our Lord’s Sermon is similar to the Lord’s Prayer and even to the Ten Commandments in its outline. The first parts are about our relationship with God and his word, and the last parts are mainly about our relationship with other people.

**Showing mercy** is one of the greatest fruits of faith. When we contribute to the common good, helping other people, our Lord wants us to do it with kindness and mercy. Luther says: “A person should not immediately raise a rumpus and start a riot if things do not go as they should, as long as there is still some hope for improvement.”<sup>3</sup> Someone who fakes their piety or sanctity will never show pity or mercy on the frail or the weak. Even if someone has a minor flaw they will fume and fly into a rage with fury and betray their unbelief.

Here again we see our own sins coming back into our lives like an overflowing toilet. We are faced with our failings and the devil laughs because he wants us to despair and turn away from Christ. But he usually overplays his hand. When we are faced with our worst, Christ

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<sup>2</sup> Sirach 30:23

<sup>3</sup> LW 21:20

comes inviting us back, and his invitation is mercy beyond our wildest dreams; the forgiveness of all of our sins, forever.

**Pure in heart** comes next, and this means very simply that the Christian constantly replaces what is in my heart with what the Word of God says. The thing I should fear every day is my own opinion. What do my thoughts, my desires, my will, have that could ever compare with God's will? God says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 5:8).

And the people who put God's plans and way first are also the people who are the **peacemakers**, those who are often victims of injustice, but rather than getting even or thinking about hitting someone back with words or worse, they think it over, try to bear it, and have peace. And if that is impossible, you have the law and the government—for the command to maintain peace and justice is God's command to the government and not to you. When we do this, we are God's children, because the alternative is to be the devil's children who do nothing but lie and quarrel and seek revenge.

To listen to Jesus preach on this mountain with these words is to face my life knowing that I don't measure up. And even when we manage to listen to God and live as one who obeys rather than live like rebels, the world turns on us. The world and the world's boss, the devil, would like us to join with them in being adulterers, murderers, robbers, and thieves. The world can tolerate sinners, and they persecute Christians and make fun of Christians for the slightest attempt at godliness.

And it's hard to hear Jesus telling me that he is delighted when I suffer, because I should recognize the company I keep. This is how the Israelites treated Moses and wanted to throw him out. And this is how Israel scoffed and jeered at Elijah when 450 priests of Baal went up against one prophet of God to see who would listen to a prayer, God or Baal.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, John the Baptist-- and Jesus himself. If this is the company into which the world tosses me in its persecutions, shouldn't I be humbled and honored? I don't deserve to be stood shoulder to shoulder with Peter when he was led where he did not want to go, or with Paul when the Romans carried out his sentence, or James who was run through with a sword, or with Stephen when the stones began to fly. But they trusted in Jesus, and that is the main thing in every aspect of our faith. Trust in Jesus always, for you are blessed. Blessed in this world, with help and encouragement here below, and blessed in the next, with a place prepared and the certainty of a place at our Master's table. God bless you, dear Christian-- for that is exactly what Jesus has promised to do.