

## Matthew 5:1-12

5 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up onto a mountain. When he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>He opened his mouth and began to teach them. He said these things:

<sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed are those who mourn,  
because they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed are the gentle,  
because they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup>Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
because they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup>Blessed are the merciful,  
because they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup>Blessed are the pure in heart,  
because they will see God.

<sup>9</sup>Blessed are the peacemakers,  
because they will be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup>Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>“Blessed are you when people 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 great is your reward in heaven. In fact, that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

## You Are Blessed

### I.

Blessings. Thanksgiving is typically the time we sit down and think about our blessings. Perhaps you even make a list of things you are thankful for. New Years is another time people think about their blessings. They look back at the blessings of the last year and begin to reflect on blessings.

The list of blessings typically starts with things or with people. You look at the possessions that have been accumulated over a lifetime. If it's been some time since you have moved, perhaps it would be a good idea to go into those seldom-used spaces and begin to take inventory. Often there is so much that hasn't been touched in years.

After taking an inventory of all your possessions, you get down to serious business. Really, the relationships you have might be greater blessings than the things you have acquired. Your parents are a blessing. Your children are a blessing. Your spouse is a blessing. So are your close friends and maybe your extended family. Sometimes even more casual friends can show what a great blessing they are to you in a time of crisis. There's also your church family. Though you may not always reach out to members of the congregation when you are facing challenging times, they are here. If you need support, this is a great place to find it.

Next, perhaps, you take stock of your health. It's a great blessing if you have no serious medical concerns in your life. If you have some, the blessing you count might be that you live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where modern medicine can give you some hope or some relief to deal with your medical challenges.

The thing is, often, when we consider our present circumstances, we don't see blessings. Perhaps we *do* see them as blessings, but we attach a rider. It's a blessing, *but* it could be so much better if only.

If the health conditions you face are severe, is your perception of health a blessing, or do you think of what you experience as a curse? Whether there is 21<sup>st</sup> century medicine or not, you experience a great deal of pain and anxiety about your condition.

When it comes to relationships, many find that they leave much to be desired. Parents are stubborn as they get older and don't want to listen to advice from the children they raised from the

time they were infants. Children are recalcitrant and rebellious. To give them instruction feels like talking to a brick wall. Spouses constantly bicker and argue with one another. Friends desert you when your choices don't go along with theirs. The church family doesn't help you (perhaps you forget that you never invited or asked for their help, or even let them know your circumstances).

As for your possessions—who doesn't want more? Your retirement fund hasn't kept pace with inflation, especially in the past couple of years. Someone else drives a nicer car or has a bigger house. The things clogging your basement and garage you don't find to be of much value anymore, so those things don't really count.

We don't always give thanks for our blessings, do we? We don't always see the things we have and the relationships we have and our physical condition as blessings at all.

## II.

Today's gospel is the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He sat down with a group of his disciples—that indicates people who were already believers—and began to teach them.

He starts his sermon by firing off a bunch of Beatitudes—blesseds. Anyone who has been a Christian for a while has heard these verses read before. How did you feel as you listened to Jesus run down his list?

Perhaps you have made your peace with all those things we spoke of before. Maybe you can echo the Apostle Paul: "I have learned to be content in any circumstances in which I find myself" (Philippians 4:11, EHV). Sometimes all your relationships aren't going the way you would like, but you give thanks for those that are and move on. Perhaps you are down on your luck financially, but you have grown more and more able to trust in God to somehow help you see the way through those problems. When you face medical challenges, you give thanks for all the years that you had health and trust that God is going to work in you and through you and with you to make it through this one, too.

But then Jesus sits down on the hillside and lists a bunch of things that don't sound like blessings at all.

## III.

Jesus' blesseds require a little closer look, because they don't make simple, mathematical sense to us.

Start with the two that bracket the blesseds that are indented in your Bible. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven... <sup>10</sup>Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, 10, EHV).

With these two "blesseds" Jesus calls attention to a blessing you have right now: the kingdom of heaven. How does a person *have* the kingdom of heaven? How does one *obtain* it? The blessings of heaven come only by faith—faith that is *given* to you by the Holy Spirit.

This is why Jesus' first "blessed" starts out with the poor in spirit. He's not talking about things, or even health or relationships. He is talking about a spiritual condition. Remember the Pharisee and the Tax Collector? The Pharisee was confident of his spiritual status: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people..." (Luke 18:11, EHV). He went on to list things that he felt should gain him great favor with God. The Tax Collector wouldn't look up to heaven as he prayed. His prayer was: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13, EHV). The Tax Collector knew he was doomed if he were to rely on his own righteousness. Instead, he looked to God for mercy and strength. The poor in spirit Tax Collector was blessed.

When you sit down to count your blessings, first and foremost is the blessing you have in Jesus. It isn't wealth. It isn't health. It isn't relationships with other people. You have forgiveness.

For all those times you forgot to put the blessing of forgiveness first, Jesus brings forgiveness. For all the times that your relationships didn't work out because of your own pride or stubbornness, Jesus brings forgiveness. For all the times you failed to be content with the blessings you have, or failed to thank the Giver of those good gifts, Jesus brings forgiveness.

Jesus made the sacrifice. Jesus purchased and won forgiveness in full for you.

Sometimes people persecute you or mock you because of the way you live your life as a Christian. Sometimes people might point out your flaws and faults and try to convince you that God can't

possibly want anything to do with you. You can look back to Jesus' words and realize they are for you: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, EHV). Heaven already belongs to you.

#### IV.

Between those bracketed "blesseds" that list blessings that are already yours come lots of "blesseds" where Jesus uses the future tense to speak about your blessing as a believer. Most of them are also in the passive voice—in other words, they are something that will happen *to* you, not something that is done *by* you.

"Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4, EHV). It is true that believers mourn at the loss of loved ones, but we do not mourn with no hope, as unbelievers do. Here Jesus is speaking even more about the way believers mourn over the evil we see in the world—and the evil we see in our own hearts. But we aren't left in this state of mourning. Jesus comforts us as he turns our eyes heavenward. That's where we will experience final comfort.

"Blessed are the gentle, because they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5, EHV). Christians naturally want to treat those we deal with gently. We forgive, because God forgave us first. The blessed gift to come is the inheritance God gives us.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6, EHV). Every day we do what Luther encouraged when he talked about baptism: we drown the Old Self with its evil deeds and desires to let the New Self shine forth once again. The Lord answers our prayers for righteousness. Living as a believer is so satisfying. You won't be perfect at it—not until you get to heaven. But growing in your understanding of God's will and living according to it fills you with peace.

"Blessed are the merciful, because they will receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7, EHV). God has shown compassion to the undeserving. That's what the very word "grace" means: God's undeserved love. It is a great way to respond to God's love for us by showing love to others, especially the family of believers, as Paul once said (Galatians 6:10).

"Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God" (Matthew 5:8, EHV). The Psalmist David once said: "Who may go up to the mountain of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup>He who has clean hands and a pure heart, whose soul is not set on what is false, who does not swear deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3-4, EHV). How does one get "clean hands and a pure heart"? Only through faith in Christ Jesus. With the clean hands and pure hearts given by our Savior, we will find ourselves in a heavenly home where we will see God face to face.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9, EHV). Christians are set apart by God. There is a different attitude toward things that go on in the world. The Lord Jesus came to bring us real peace—peace between us and God—the peace that comes because we can stand in God's presence as redeemed and forgiven children of God. As people who have real peace, we seek to share that peace with others.

"Blessed are you when people 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 great is your reward in heaven. In fact, that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12, EHV).

Jesus wraps up this section of his Sermon on the Mount. He reminds all his disciples that he did not promise it would be easy to be his followers. Even the prophets of old and faithful believers who were thought of as the Fathers of the Faith were persecuted because of their faith in the Messiah who had been promised.

As we wait for our final reward, we can expect that at times we will be mistreated. Don't forget that your Savior is still with you. Don't forget to count your blessings in the life to come. Don't forget to count those spiritual blessings that are already yours by faith. All the physical blessings and the blessings of your relationships on earth are just a bonus.

Great is your reward in heaven. You are blessed. Amen.