

Blessed Are...

Scriptures: Micah 6:1-8; Matthew 5:1-12

I'll Be Happy When...

Starting today, and for the next two weeks, we'll be spending time in Matthew's gospel, looking at what's become known as the Sermon on the Mount. See if you can finish this sentence: "I will be happy when _____." There's a million things you could put on that blank. Our kids might say, "I'll be happy when I grow up and move away from home," or, "I'll be happy when summer comes and I don't have to go to school." Me too! Some people may say, "I'll be happy when I fall in love and get married," or "I'll be happy when I can buy a new car." "I'll be happy when I get a promotion." I've heard some colleagues in the past say things like, "I'll be happy when I can retire."

When will you be happy? What would it take for you to be happy? What's the likelihood of that happening? How many years will it take for you to get there? Jesus sheds some light on this subject. His wisdom may not make much sense to us, if we look at things from the world's point of view. What He says is upside down based on the world's standards. If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Matthew 5:1-12. **Read Matthew 5:1-12.**

We don't know the location of where Jesus gave what's known in history as the Sermon on the Mount, but we know what He said. First off, He changes the vocabulary. He doesn't talk about happiness – though at least one Bible version translates all these as "Happy." Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..."

Now you see what I mean when I say these are upside down! These aren't the rules as most folks know them. The rules we're used to – that our society shoves down our throats include – Blessed are the rich, because they can buy whatever they want. Blessed are the strong, because they can take what they want. Blessed are winners, because it's not fun to be a loser. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst at the best restaurants, because they will be pampered, indulged, and filled. You get the idea here.

The Beatitudes

Jesus gives us a total of nine beatitudes. It's pronounced "be attitudes," and that's a great way for us to remember how we ought to be. The first one is the foundation for all the rest. You can't have the rest of them without the first one. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," (Matt. 5:3). If you aren't poor in spirit – you haven't got Jesus. In accepting what He's done on our behalf at the cross, that's us seeing that we've hit rock-bottom, spiritually. We can't fix our relationship with God and others under our own steam. Our own power. It can't be done. So we have to recognize that we're in spiritual poverty. Without Jesus, and His sacrificial death for our sake, we're dead.

Look at the promise He gives us – since we're poor in spirit – theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Is – present tense. You know, we get tripped up in a lot of chatter – great theological ideas and debates, views of various things. Our ancestors hundreds of years ago would have had a better grasp on what Jesus is saying here. Most of you know I'm a huge Science Fiction fan. Anything Star Wars or Star Trek, space-related, is right up my alley. I want to show you a video clip that I hope sheds some light on the idea of what Jesus is saying when He says, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtaEdpEuOyE>).

If you're not familiar with this scene from Star Wars, the Jedi go to arrest Chancellor Palpatine – who is actually the primary villain of the whole Star Wars universe. He's abused his power as head of the Senate, and has stayed well beyond the term he was originally elected to serve. You heard there Palpatine state, "I am the Senate."

Back before the American Revolution, and the idea of government created by the people, for the people, and of the people, folks had a different view of things. The State was synonymous with the King. In history, King Louis XIV of France, supposedly once said in Parliament, "I am the State." People long ago believed in the divine right of kings. A king – any leader – was there because God had put him in charge.

Jesus is Heaven

Looking at it through this lens, when Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," we get an added level of meaning. He's the King, and in a round-about way, He's telling the crowd on the mountainside – and us – that we're getting Him. And at the cross, we really do! "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted," (verse 4) He says next. They come in their grief, hoping to be comforted. When we see our brothers and sisters mourning – the role of the Church is to comfort.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth,” (verse 5). Basically, this ties back into our first Scripture reading this morning from the Prophet Micah – “walk humbly.” Being meek is another way of saying being humble. It’s precisely their humility – their openness and willingness to admit who they are, what they’ve done, and their need for a Savior – that makes them fertile soil to receive God’s blessings.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled,” (verse 6), Jesus says. Jesus fills us up when we trust Him. In John’s gospel (6:35), Jesus says, “I am the Bread of Life. Whoever comes to Me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in Me will never be thirsty.” Jesus fills us up with good things when we trust Him. Now, that’s not saying everything’s going to be sunshine and rainbows, but He assures us that He’s present and active in our lives.

The next beatitude Jesus says is, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy,” (Matt. 5:7). That’s something worth considering. We live in an age where people are focused and fixated on getting even, and one-upping each other. We aren’t to be that way, if we’re following Jesus. We’re to “turn the other cheek,” (verse 38), He tells us, and to “love our neighbor” – and I suppose that even includes the ones – “as yourself,” (22:39).

Blessed Are... bad

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God,” (5:8), we’re told next. That boils down to us recognizing that we haven’t got anything we can come to God with which to bargain. That’s us, as humans, realizing that we have nothing to offer Him. He’s perfect. He doesn’t need us. But He chooses to love us, and gives us the life of His own Son in exchange for ours.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God,” (verse 9). When Jesus first said this to the crowd that day, this must have been a deal-breaker for many of them. See, in those days, folks wanted a warrior-king who would throw off the foreign rule of Rome. They wanted Jesus to be a king who would usher in a golden age for the Jewish people. Instead of spewing hatred for foreign oppressors, He preached peace. It still rubs some people the wrong way today. There are actually denominations of the Church, like the Mennonites, who are conscientious objectors when it comes to serving in the armed forces. They refuse to go into warfare because they believe so strongly in Jesus’ call to be peacemakers. What happens when they get drafted? They get put in prison.

When Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, (verse 10), “Blessed are you when

people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me,” (verse 11), and “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you,” (verse 12), they really go together as one big idea. He’s talking about the same thing here. He is Righteousness. He is our righteousness.

Paul writes to the church at Corinth, “It is because of Him [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption,” (1 Cor. 1:30), and to the church at Rome, “Now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Rom. 3:21-23). Jesus is our righteousness. At the cross, we have a swap-meet of universal, and eternal proportions – He swaps His righteousness and holiness for our sinfulness.

The Poor in Spirit

I have relatives, maybe you do, too, who think the Bible is a book of fairy tales. They don’t believe it. It’s very sad. In these situations, we pray, and ask questions of them. If the Bible weren’t true – and the things Jesus says weren’t right, would people willingly lay down their lives? I mean would look at it figuratively, in being made new in Him, but also literally.

There have been, and are, brothers and sisters around the globe persecuted for following Him. If Jesus was all made up – like some people think – would they die for Him? In an article published by Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in December, 2019, they estimate that more than 70 million Christians have been martyred – killed for their faith – over the last 2,000 years, starting when Stephen was martyred and Saul looked on (Acts 7).

Inside the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, a quote from Pastor Martin Niemöller, from 1946, is featured on a wall near the exit. “First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.” Under Nazism, Communism, and other nationalistic systems of government the cross of Christ is a threat to those who seek to hold power. I have to tell you, with the current field of politicians we have in this country, carrying on and trying to woo the Church in America the way they do, we’re at risk for falling into the same mess in which Niemöller found

himself. See, he and many other German pastors supported the Nazis – until they realized how wickedly they were treating minority groups – and by then it was too late to do anything about it.

Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...” They come in their poverty, hoping for bread. They come broken, hoping to be mended. They come deep in sin, hoping to be forgiven. They come in grief, hoping to be comforted. They come in their illness, hoping for healing. Do you need Him today, church? I sure do! Blessed are those who come to God on their knees – willingly admitting we aren’t in control, and exhausted from the striving. And He says to them, and to us – “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light,” (Matt. 11:28-30). We need Him! Amen!

Prayer: God our deliverer, You walk with the meek and the poor, the compassionate and those who mourn, and You call us to walk humbly with You. When we are foolish, be our wisdom; when we are weak, be our strength; that, as we learn to do justice and to love mercy, Your rule may come as blessing. Amen.