

Matthew 5:1-12

Epiphany 4; Christian Education

January 29 & 30, 2023

It must have been strange and, maybe, even a little shocking for the crowds to hear the words of Jesus' sermon. The poor in spirit are blessed. Those who mourn are blessed. The gentle are blessed. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed. The merciful are blessed. The pure in heart are blessed. The peace makers are blessed. Those who are persecuted are blessed. So, how does that match up with your perception of happiness? That's really not how the world would describe happiness, is it? None of the conditions that Jesus says gets you ahead in this world. From what we see, the people who are blessed are those who are strong, who are proud, who do not care about righteousness, who are merciless, who are harsh, imposing, and demanding, who are impervious to problems, and who cause strife and make war. If you can do all those things, you can achieve happiness. I imagine that the people, who are listening to Jesus preach his Sermon on the Mount, felt the same way.

So, how do we achieve "*happiness*" in our lives? Maybe we have to first of all define what *happiness* is. Happiness is a reaction to circumstances. That smile you feel when things are going well? That's happiness. Therefore, are you happy? Shouldn't we be happy? We're Christians. Jesus died for me. He took away my sins. I have eternal life. Depression should never affect me at all. I should be walking around each day with a big old smile on my face. That's not what Jesus is saying in these words of his sermon. He is not saying that no matter happens in life, we can face them with that emotion of *happiness*. Sometimes, life kind of stinks, doesn't it? We are hurt. We are sad. What happens when we think that the circumstances in life doesn't seem to match up with what God promises us? There certainly is nothing wrong in being happy in this world. Jesus is not against happiness. It's okay to smile, even in church.

Jesus had begun his public ministry. He is still early in his ministry. He was beginning to attract crowds. People were listening to him, but they really were getting impressed with what he was doing. He was healing the sick. People were once again beginning to walk after not be able to walk. He would even raise the dead. Why wouldn't you want to follow Jesus. Look at what he is doing? He is taking away all the bad things in this world. He is fixing everything that is wrong. If being a follower of Jesus means no more sadness, no more sorrow and no more pain, why wouldn't you want to follow Jesus? We would most certainly be blessed by following Jesus.

Blessed. It's the one word that pops out of this section of Jesus' sermon. So, what does Jesus mean when he says: "**Blessed?**" Think about how we use that word ourselves. Think of the new family that you just met. Think of the father who just got a job promotion to the corporate office. They now have a high enough of an income that the mother can stay home with her children as she has dreamed of doing. They now can move into a neighborhood where they can feel safe with their family. And after you meet them, you can't help but think that they are so blessed by God. Think of the young woman who gets accepted to a very prestigious medical college. She is one more step closer to fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor. You can't help but think how blessed she is.

Now, please don't misunderstand him. God certainly can work to bless people with material things. It's good to give him thanks and praise. The problem, however, is when we limit our thanks and praise only toward the only the good things that people obtain in life. We consider someone blessed only when they achieve something that looks like the American dream.

But what about the young woman who didn't get into medical school and now lives with her parents and works part-time at the dry cleaners? What about the father who was once again passed over for the promotion or lost his job, and the family now needs to move down the ladder of prosperity rather than up? Can such people be blessed? Is God still at work in their lives? If we think that if we are only blessed when we experience the good things in life, we would have to answer that question with a "no." If we think that we are only blessed -- when we have a better relationship with someone we love; when our children would listen to us more; when we have a better job -- we will be disappointed. Jesus is not saying in these words our text this morning that happiness is found in wealth, in health, in power, in privilege, etc. Jesus wants the people listening to him preach that day on the side of a mountain, that happiness is not found in the circumstance in life. It is found in him. Listen again to his words:

³ **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

When we realize that just how poor we really are without Jesus, we realize just how rich we are in him. There is nothing we can do to earn eternal life. The good news is that we don't have to. Heaven is ours through the blood of Jesus.

⁴ **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

When we look at this world and look at ourselves, we can't help but see what is loss. The perfect world that God created is no more. When we look into our hearts and see the sin that we can't get rid of, we are also comforted that God has washed us clean.

⁵ **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

When we hear the word “meek,” we think of “weak.” God is really saying the opposite. Followers of Jesus trust the strength that only comes through Jesus, not ourselves. In Christ we have everything.

⁶ **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

Christians want to hunger and thirst for righteousness. We want to be right with God. When we trust in Jesus, we live thankful lives for him.

⁷ **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.**

How could we not show mercy to others when we realize just how much mercy goes has shown us? We want more to know that incredible mercy he has shown to us.

⁸ **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

There is no one here this morning who can have pure hearts by themselves. With his blood, Jesus has scrubbed them clean. Because of that, we can see God in eternity.

⁹ **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

There will never be peace on earth on this side of heaven. But with Jesus we have peace with God. We are called the sons of God. Share that peace.

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.** God's people have always been persecuted following Jesus. With God on our side, how can we not be blessed.

We are blessed. May Jesus opened our eyes to see how God comes to sinful human beings and to those who have messy lives. For in Jesus, you will be eternally blessed. May God grant it. Amen.