

## ***“Blessed No Matter What”***

### **Matthew 5:1-12**

Are you blessed? We say we're blessed when good things happen to us. Maybe you say you're blessed when you get a promotion or a raise. Maybe your kids said they were blessed when they come home with treats from someone's birthday at school. Maybe you felt blessed by the ISU victory over Kansas State Tuesday night, or by watching the success Brock Purdy has had in the NFL. Maybe you feel blessed when you get a good report from your doctor. Maybe you feel blessed when you get that internship with the company you've wanted to work for. Maybe you feel blessed just because you can afford a dozen eggs.

Most of the time, we say we're blessed only when good things are happening. But what about when bad things are happening? What about when your children don't listen? What about when your noisy neighbors keep you up all night? What about when your favorite team loses? What about when the test results aren't good? What about when you struggle to find a job that uses your degree? What about those days when nothing seems to go right, when your computer won't work and your car acts up? Are you blessed then?

We all seek to be blessed, yet it seems few people seem to have reached such a goal. We often equate being blessed with being happy. Happiness is a goal that we all strive for, but when that goal is reached, or when we think we've reached it, we realize that there is always something else that would make us even happier and more truly blessed. The Declaration of Independence says that we all have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but it doesn't guarantee that we will ever actually catch happiness.

When Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount, he begins with what we've come to know as the

Beatitudes, because each sentence begins with blessed, and the Latin word for blessing is *beatitudo*. The Greek word that Matthew uses is *makarios*, which means happy, having a full life, free from normal cares and worries. But the people Jesus is talking to, and the people he is talking about, sure don't seem blessed or happy. Those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who are persecuted are not our usual candidates for happiness or blessedness.

This shows us that Jesus' definition of what it means to be blessed doesn't depend on us or what is happening around us. These "happiness" sayings of Jesus – the Beatitudes – present us with a whole new idea of what it means to be blessed. True happiness, true blessedness comes not from our circumstances, but has to do with knowing God, belonging to God's Kingdom, and being a part of God's family.

Some people will tell you that blessing is all a matter of perspective—of your attitude. Even now many Christians subscribe to the school of Norman Vincent Peale and his *Power of Positive Thinking*, or think they can manifest positive things with their good thoughts. They think that God loves us and wants us to be happy, and that our happiness is his goal. If you stay positive and keep a good outlook, then good things will come your way. For people of this mindset, the Beatitudes are really “Be Attitudes,” examples of moral virtues that we should try to cultivate within ourselves. In other words, the so-called “Be Attitudes” teach us how we should act and be in our daily lives—and the kind of blessings that we can expect from God in return. Treated this way, they lead to a vending machine god – put in good attitudes, get good blessings.

The trouble with viewing the Beatitudes as virtues is that it turns Gospel into Law. The beatitudes are not ideals to attain or moral requirements to strive for. They are blessings conferred upon those of lowly status: the poor, the weak, the sorrowful, the merciful, and the persecuted. Thus, as disciples of Jesus, we enter into the Christian community through the Word of blessing that Jesus speaks upon us. His Word is living and active, creating the reality that he speaks into being. Because Jesus calls you blessed, you are blessed, whether or not you feel like it. As Lutheran pastor Bo Giertz wrote, "The beatitudes are not a catalog of Christian virtues in terms of endeavors. Rather they are a proclamation, an intervention of God. They contain the promise of God's kingdom, a promise that is given to a gathering of people who live in affliction and have a hard time believing that they are children of the kingdom."

In the middle of all the difficulties we have living out our Christian faith in our daily lives; when we are sad and sorrowful; when we are despondent and depressed; when others reject and ridicule us for our faith or for sticking up for what we believe is right; when we try to show mercy and love or bring about peace and we are told it's none of our business; God meets us, he forgives us, he comforts us, he strengthens us, he helps us endure, he gives us the courage to move on. He reminds us of our Baptism into the crucified and risen Christ, that we belong to Him for Christ's sake, and He will never let us go. In such circumstances our "weaknesses" become occasions for Christ's strengthening word of encouragement and his promising word of grace. This same kind of blessedness enabled Paul to write to the Philippians from his jail cell, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (4:4).

The blessedness comes not because of what we do, but because of what God does for us. In a

world where we want to be independent, the Beatitudes invite us to recognize our dependence on God. The Beatitudes are declarations of salvation to those who place their trust in God. Those who are blessed are the "humble," those who have realized their helplessness and know the desperate need for grace alone.

Because of what Jesus did, you are blessed, too. One of my pastor friends pointed out that when we read most of the Beatitudes, Jesus is talking in the third person, blessed are "they." But in the last one, Jesus switches to the second person, blessed are "you." Blessed are you! At the end, the Beatitudes become personal. Instead of speaking about "them," Jesus speaks to "you"! You are blessed, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ! You are blessed because you are the disciples of Jesus. Jesus speaks blessing upon you. Even if you are poor in spirit, mourning, or meek, you are blessed. Even if you are hungry and thirsty, for righteousness or for food and drink, you are blessed. Even if you are in need of mercy and a purified heart, you are blessed. If you are a peacemaker or persecuted, you are blessed. They are promises that Jesus makes with authority. You are blessed. You are blessed no matter what happens in your life. You are blessed because Jesus died on the cross to forgive your sins. You are blessed because Christ Jesus rose from the dead. You are blessed because Christ will come again. You are blessed because Jesus calls you his disciples and calls you blessed.

The Beatitudes don't tell you how you ought to be. The Beatitudes remind you who are—and whose you are—because of Jesus. And that makes you truly blessed.

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