

“Who Are the Blessed?”

Matthew 5:1-12

Who are the blessed? In what is known as His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers us a different perspective on who are the blessed. Typically, when we think about those who we perceive to be “the blessed”, we look at the “jet set” crowd – the exceptionally wealthy (the top 1%) of wage earners. Of course, that includes most of you.

Why do you laugh? If you take the 7 billion people on earth, in order to get into the top 1% of all wage earners, you have to make at least \$34,000 per year after taxes. Again, that includes most of you. We live among the 1%. The world looks at you and says, “You are the blessed.”

But having the wealth of the world and a home and car and a smart phone is not what Jesus is talking about. In fact, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor,” but He is not talking about the bottom 10% of wage earners in the world who survive on less than \$2 per day. He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

The word for “poor” in the Greek language comes from a Greek verb that describes cringing or crouching down like a beggar. To be poor in

spirit is to recognize that you have nothing. Blessed are the spiritual beggars. Blessed are the spiritual beggars who have nothing and see the treasure of the kingdom of heaven coming to you from outside of you.

This is not Jesus the Law-giver telling you what you need to do in order to acquire the kingdom of heaven. Your task is not to figure out how to be poor in spirit; how to be meek; how to be peacemakers. If these are rules for Christian living, you will drive yourself crazy and end up on a quest to save the world, or at least live like Mother Teresa – and anything less than that makes you not a Christian, or at least not a real Christian.

Whenever you take God's words of blessing and turn them into a Law, those blessings become a curse for you. These words we know as the Beatitudes are a blessing – which is why they are called the Beatitudes. Beatitude means "Blessing." Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who have no hope in themselves. Blessed are those who know they have nothing and need the mercy of God, for to them, the kingdom comes, because Jesus, the King, has come.

The joy of salvation has come to you from outside of you, and yours is the kingdom of heaven. You are the blessed. And this word "blessed" (in the Greek "makarioi") is a word used throughout the New Testament, and overwhelmingly, the usage refers to joy beyond simply being "happy" but rather is the joy which we derive from our salvation and place within the kingdom of God.

This is the word Mary uses, in her song of praise known as the Magnificat, when she says, “All generations will call me “blessed.” This is the same word Jesus uses when speaking to Thomas and says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”

Who are the blessed? You are the blessed. You are the poor in spirit who have received the joy of salvation from outside of you. You are the blessed who have mourned and have received real comfort because you have the joy of the Gospel and the hope of the resurrection of the body and life everlasting in the kingdom of God.

We do not hope in vain. We are blessed with confidence in the resurrection of the body because we are blessed as spiritual beggars who have no hope other than to trust in the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

Who are the blessed? Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” We usually associate mourning as our reaction to the death of someone we love. This is not just talking about that type of mourning. Perhaps a better translation would be “Blessed are the sorrowful.” Blessed are those for whom this life does not hold the joy that we seek. Jesus says, “The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” [Jn. 12:25]. This is part of this consistent message that Jesus preaches throughout His ministry.

Just as being truly rich in spirit is a reality that only happens when that treasure of the Gospel comes from outside of you, so also true joy and love for life only happens when that joy of life comes from outside of life in this world.

Right now, think of that one person who you know who has wasted years of their life vainly chasing after the joys and pleasures this world offers and never finding satisfaction. Is it a friend, a loved one, maybe part of your own personal history? Pray for that person. Christ died for that person, and God wants that person to come to know the joy of salvation.

Being spiritually rich, finding joy in this life, finding comfort in this life; it all comes from outside of you and it all comes from God.

Who are the blessed? Jesus says the blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, and those who mourn. The meek and the sorrowful who are spiritual beggars who only trust in what they have received from God do not get to have their own reality TV show because this world will never celebrate the kind of joy and blessing we receive here today.

Who are the blessed? Having been received into the kingdom through the waters of Baptism; having heard the Gospel; partaking of the body and blood of the Son of God Himself; having received the treasure of God's grace which has come to you and filled you; truly you are the blessed. Amen.