

The Savior's Sermon
Turning The World Upside-Down

A Sermon on Matthew 5:1-12
Year A - Epiphany 4
29 - January - 2017

JJ¹

Have you ever been blessed with something that you didn't really consider a blessing? Maybe it's some of your physical attributes—hair color, freckles, need for glasses, height, etc. Maybe it's a gift you've received but have no use for—smelly candles or soaps when you're allergic to synthetic scents, a homemade itchy wool sweater, etc. Well, when we look at the beginning of Jesus' great Sermon on the Mount we might feel the same way. *Blessed* are the poor, mourners, hungry, thirsty, persecuted, insulted, slandered.

Our sinful hearts look at those things and say, "Blessed? No Way!" Today as we begin our journey through **THE SAVIOR'S SERMON**, Jesus shows us that he isn't lying when he says that we are blessed by these things. Today our Savior puts our priorities straight by **TURNING THE WORLD UPSIDE-DOWN**.

Chapters 5-7 of Matthew's Gospel cover Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. Today we begin a four week look at the greatest sermon ever preached. That sermon starts with what is called The Beatitudes. The word "beatitude" comes from the Latin *beatus* which often gets translated "happy." Sometimes I've said that is what "blessed" means, but that can be a

bit misleading. Happy can be part of it, but it doesn't get at the heart of what the Greek word translated "blessed" means.

To say that "blessed" just means "happy" confuses what Jesus says at best, and at worst totally changes what he says. To be blessed is far deeper than just having a feeling of happiness. If Jesus were only talking about feelings, then we'd look at this portion of Scripture and have to say it doesn't apply to us. Who of us has always felt happy as we mourn—or hunger and thirst for righteousness—or are persecuted???

No, to be blessed is more about an inner quality of life, rather than an external quality of life. It is more about what has been done for us, rather than what we have done. To be blessed is all about the status God gives us in his eyes through his gift of faith. To be blessed is all about the blessings God gives us now through faith and most importantly, the ones he promises will be ours forever in heaven. With this understanding of the word "blessed," we can now begin to dig into our Savior's sermon which turns the values of the world completely upside-down.

In verses 3 & 5 Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and "Blessed are the

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

gentle." To be "poor in spirit" and "gentle" means that as children of God, we recognize the sad reality of being a human being. It means that we recognize our spiritual poverty and just how desperately we do need God. We don't rely on our own strength and goodness, thinking we can make it on our own without God.

The perfect example of this is found in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Luke 18. Who was blessed in that parable? It wasn't the Pharisee so full of self-righteousness, but it was the tax-collector who was "poor in spirit," recognizing his desperate need for God and his forgiveness.

It doesn't seem like such a happy thing when our sin stares us in the face and God's holy law says, "You will die!" In fact, our sinful heart wants to run away, plugging our ears and shouting as loud as we can so we can't hear. But that's where the Savior **turns the world upside-down**. Jesus says, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and "they will inherit the earth." And these aren't just blessings for our future in heaven, but blessings right now. Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is ours right now as we receive the forgiveness of sins!

Next Jesus says: "Blessed are those who mourn," and "Blessed are those who

hunger and thirst for righteousness," and "Blessed are the pure in heart."

Now there are all kinds of things that can cause us to mourn in this world—losing a job; illness; accidents; the loss of a loved one. But all those things are things that unbelievers mourn too, and God doesn't say they're blessed because of those things. So what is it that causes us specifically as Christians to mourn? Isn't it recognizing sin in our lives? But grieving

because of our sin is a blessing, because it drives us to have that grief removed through repentance and Christ's forgiveness. But we also mourn because we see the results of sin around us in this world. We mourn as we see a world grow farther and farther away from God. We mourn because we long for righteousness. We hunger for righteousness to surround us in our lives. We thirst for righteousness to fill

our hearts and the darkness of sin to be gone forever!

We're blessed, even now as we mourn in this world because we know that in the future we will be perfectly comforted when we are called to our Savior's side. We will be comforted because we will be filled with Christ's righteousness and there won't be any darkness left in us at all! And what's more, we will see God with our own eyes! Seeing this future



helps us understand why we are truly blessed right now and gives us what we need to endure!

Jesus continues **turning the world upside-down** by telling us that we are blessed as we live a selfless, not a selfish life. "Blessed are the merciful," and "Blessed are the peacekeepers." As people of God we are blessed as ones who seek to be merciful to those in need instead of looking out for just our own needs. We are blessed as we seek to bring peace to others through the message of Jesus' undying love for the world. Jesus says we are blessed when these traits describe our lives because we too "will receive mercy," and we will even "be called sons of God!"

Finally, Jesus says that we are blessed as we endure persecution. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness..." "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me."

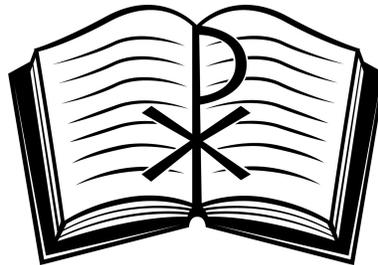
Now I know that most of us have probably faced only mild persecution because of our faith. But if the Lord continues to let this world go on for much longer it will only grow worse, even in this country. The hatred of Christ and his people is growing every day.

Friends, you might wonder, "How in the world can that be a blessing?" Well, con-

sider the opportunities persecution grants you to witness to the truth of God's Word and to live as his children. And on top of it, we have Jesus' promise: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"

Jesus turns the world upside-down and puts our priorities in order. His sermon teaches us what truly makes us blessed. Believing this, we are prepared to hear and believe his final words to us today: "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. In fact, that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you." What? Rejoice? Rejoice

and be glad? How can I do this in the middle of all this heartache and ridicule and suffering and sorrow? Ah, because our reward in heaven is great! And we can rest assured that God will get us to heaven, his gracious reward, because he has promised to do it!



Yes, the life of a Christian isn't all that appealing to this sinful world. In fact, he turns the world upside-down! But in all these things, we have learned that we truly are blessed by God. He has blessed us with spiritual riches, even when on the outside we may be poor, destitute or diseased. He has blessed us with the status of "child of God" which warms our hearts with confidence as the world sees that status as a reason to give us a cold shoulder. Friends, remember that you are truly blessed by God. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for “To God Alone Be The Glory”. This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn’t about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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