

Blessed are those who **Depend on God**

Matthew 5:1-12

Pastor Jim Rademaker

"God, please bless this ministry." "We want your blessings, Father." "Pour out your blessings on us, LORD." "God bless America." The blessings of God. We ask for them, claim them, expect them. Yet, too often, when we ask God for *blessings*, what we're really asking for looks more like material abundance, favorable circumstances, and little or no resistance to our plans. We're asking for things to go our way.

Jesus gives us a very different picture of what it means to be *blessed* in the eyes of God. From the Old Testament Patriarchs to the Prophets, from the disciples to the early church, the Bible paints a picture of *blessedness* that doesn't quite match our modern expectations.

The Patriarchs endured perpetual instability, great family turmoil and constant struggle to remain faithful, as they shepherded God's covenant people. The Prophets may have gained favor with a king or two for a time, but the bulk of their lives was lived in dangerous, relentless, and exhausting opposition to the communities they served... and rarely ended well.

The disciples sat in the front row for the miracles and teachings of Jesus, but did so as homeless, wandering, never-resting nomads, who gave-up everything for their long-term mission trip. The early church congregations were continually surrounded by noisy, hostile cultures, threatening to remove or destroy or compromise them. *Does this sound like what we are asking God for when we're asking God to bless us?*

As Jesus teaches His disciples what it means to follow Him, He lays out clearly those who are truly blessed. And notice what's missing. He doesn't say anything about lots of cool stuff, comfortable situations, financial prosperity, national success, or great social standing. (from John Pavlovitz)

Those who are truly blessed have nothing to bring to God, but rely solely on Him to provide. When we're empty, we can do nothing, but receive from God. To be given to by Him. And He loves to give to His children, those who are repenting and believing and trusting and following. We are most blessed, when we are most dependent on God.

Christian leader Francis Schaeffer warned in the 1970s that affluence is spiritually dangerous for Christians. He pointed to the ancient words of the Hebrew prophets and said that those who need never to wonder where daily bread will come from soon stop praying for it — and turn to immorality.

Evangelical leader Russell Moore comments: In the "religion" aisle at any given bookstore, one can see volumes promising "every day a Friday" and so on. Jesus is the charm to acquire what American culture has told us we deserve. This is closer to Canaanite fertility religion than to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have become the people Jesus warned us about.

When we encounter those persecuted around the world, we see a glimpse of what Jesus has called all of us to. We see the sort of faith that isn't a means to an end. We see the sort of faith that joins the global Body of Christ across time and space in the confession of a different sort of reign. We see a gospel that isn't the American Dream with heaven at the end.

So what about you? Are you blessed? And how do you know?

From the moment Alexander woke up, things just didn't go his way. As he gets up, the chewing gum that was in his mouth the night before ends up in his hair, he trips on the skateboard and drops his sweater in the sink while the water is running. In the carpool on the way to school, he doesn't get a window seat. At school, his teacher criticizes him for singing too loud, and publicly scolds him for skipping the number 16 at counting time. His friend, Paul, deserts him for his third best friend and there's no dessert in his lunch bag. Anthony pushes him into a mud puddle. Nick calls him a crybaby. He punches Nick in response, and their mother punishes him for being muddy and fighting Nick. *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.*

The thinking of the world is that you're blessed if good things happen to you - at least, things *you* think are good and consider good. So you may not think you are blessed. You may not feel it or look it. You may have had such an awful, terrible, no good, very bad day that you have trouble coming up with even a single blessing to count. Instead, maybe you feel cursed, weak, down and out, and the farthest thing from blessed.

But it's not that way at all. Good things happen to all people, and bad things happen to all people. You simply cannot judge by that. You cannot judge blessedness in terms of success or ease or hardship or struggle or whatever you think is good or bad. (Douthwaite)

In Matthew 4, Jesus calls people to be repenting, believing, trusting, following. Now, in Matthew 5, Jesus is beginning to train/teach His disciples, His followers. *Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Blessing and poverty. Blessing is the last word you would use to describe poverty. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit.* Those who are truly blessed have nothing to bring to God, but rely solely on Him to provide. When Martin Luther died, a piece of paper was found in his pocket on which he had written a number of sentences. The last sentence? "This is true. We are all paupers/beggars [before God]." When we're empty, we can do nothing, but receive from God. To be given to by Him. We are most blessed, when we are most dependent on God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Why? *"Theirs is the Kingdom of God!"* They're not poor at all. They lack nothing, for they are given everything. Blessed by God.

"Blessed are those who mourn. John 16:20 I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. Those who have no time for God in this life, who don't mourn in the least over their sin – but do whatever they want, who make fun of Jesus and His followers ... they are not blessed; not given to. Why? They don't see themselves in need, wanting. They don't need God (don't see their need of God). Even though they seem to prosper in this life and live such a blessed life here on earth ... they are not at all blessed ... for one day they will meet God face to face, and they will know eternal cursing, not blessing!

But the repenting one, the one mourning over his/her sin, who's in the world but not of the world, the follower of Jesus who doesn't fit into this world and suffers for not going along with everybody else ... he is blessed, because he has a Comforter, One he can always turn to and be forgiven ... and in the end, he will be comforted. Every sorrow turned to joy. (see Psalms 31-34, 37)

2 Corinthians 4:18 *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. "Blessed are those who mourn. Why? ... for they shall be comforted.*

"Blessed are the meek. What is meekness? Jesus has those in mind who quietly resign their all to the will of God, and who, without anger and resentment, tolerate those who harm them or cause them personal offense. The meek remain calm and unruffled when others are easily provoked, they do not seek revenge, but forgive from a loving heart. (Ylvisaker)

"Blessed are the meek. Why? ... for they shall inherit the earth. (Ps. 37 a commentary)

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. What do you hunger and thirst for? That which you don't have. "Blessed are those who long for righteousness as a starving person longs for food and as a person perishing from thirst craves water to relieve their parched throat". *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Why? ... for they shall be filled.* The verb be filled is a passive verb. Something done to us, not something we do. Filled with Christ's righteousness. God has switched accounts. Jesus' life has been credited to your account. He has taken your sin, and has given credited you with His righteousness.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." For a child of God, this hunger never ceases. Ironically, our spiritual hunger continues the more it is satisfied. And the satisfying can continue only as long as there is hunger. We daily cry for forgiveness, and daily God satisfies us by richly and daily forgiving us our sins. We are blessed just because our hunger continues. If it should cease, Jesus could no longer call us blessed because he could then not fill us anymore. (Lenski)

"Blessed are the merciful. The old adage was what? "An eye for an eye." "Love your friend and hate your enemy." Mercy comes from poverty of spirit, those broken before God, those mourning over their own sin, the meek, those hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Mercy is a gift from above. *But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God. (Nehemiah 9:31) Blessed are the merciful. Why? ... for they will be shown mercy.*

"Blessed are the pure in heart. There's only One on the throne of their heart. There's only One who rules and directs above all others. *Blessed are the pure in heart. Why? ... for they will see God.*

*"Blessed are the **peacemakers**. Blessed are those who don't insist on always getting their way, who don't dig in their heels and make it their goal to win at all costs, who are willing to swallow their pride, rather than destroy a relationship. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The forgiveness of sins is the sole ground of all peace." **Blessed are the peacemakers.** Why? ... for they will be called sons of God.*

*"Blessed are those who are **persecuted** for righteousness' sake ... "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.*

1 Peter 4:12-13 *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

When we're going through the pain of persecution - from our perspective - we're tempted to believe what? It's not worth it. It's not worth it and all the trouble it brings. We're tempted to give in and go along with others instead of put up with their constant persecution. Jesus wants us to know that our perspective couldn't be more wrong. "Believe Me", he says. "It's worth it! Trust me. I recently heard an illustration of trusting God and His goodness, even when we don't fully understand what He's doing. It's known as the parable of the resistance leader. (by Oxford philosopher Basil Mitchell).

Imagine you're in German-occupied France during World War II and you want to join the resistance movement against the Nazis. One evening in the local bar a stranger comes up to you and introduces himself as the leader of the local resistance. He spends the evening with you, explaining the general requirements of your duties, giving you a chance to assess his trustworthiness, and offering you the chance to go no further. But his warning is stern: If you join, your life will be at risk. This will be the only face-to-face meeting you will have. After this, you will receive orders, and you will have to follow them without question, often completely in the dark as to the whys and hows of the operations.

Sometimes the actions and motives of the resistance leader won't be obvious. He might appear in a Gestapo uniform arresting fellow freedom fighters —unknown to you—releasing them out of sight to help them escape the Nazis. But always you must trust and follow his orders without question, despite all appearances, no matter what happens. Only after the war will the secrets be revealed and all of the leader's actions make sense. As followers of Jesus, we can say, "Lord, I don't understand everything that you're doing, but I trust that you're always good." We are most blessed, when we are most dependent on God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Why? ... for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Rejoice and be glad! Why? ... for your reward is great in heaven!

Revelation 7 *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes ... Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ... "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore ... For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

"God, please bless this ministry." "We want your blessings, Father." "God bless America." Those who are truly blessed have nothing to bring to God, but rely solely on Him to provide. We are most blessed, when we are most dependent on God. And God blesses us with the very best - Himself, now and for all eternity.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places! (Eph. 1)

