

The Lord's Message: I Am Blessed!

Date: January 29, 2023

Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: Matthew 5:1-12

For the next three Sundays, we are going to be looking at a collection of Jesus' teachings that have been compiled into what is called the Sermon on the Mount. This Sunday, we start off with The Beatitudes.

Let us pray.

Last Sunday, Jesus called the disciples. This Sunday, Jesus begins to teach the disciples, the crowds and all of us about the Kingdom of God. Remember this: The Kingdom of God always turns this world upside down.

In chapter 5 verse 1, Jesus is forced up a mountainside, because of the large crowds that are following Him. This also gives Him a better advantage for teaching the disciples and the crowds. If you will notice the posture that Jesus takes for teaching. It is not standing up, but sitting down. In today's world, teachers, professors, lecturers and preachers all take the position to stand when teaching. Why does Jesus sit? In the rabbinic tradition of Jesus' day, the rabbi stood to read the scrolls, but taught from a sitting position.

Before we go on, I want you to see the location that Jesus is in. This reminds me of God teaching Moses about the Kingdom of God on Mount Sinai. In **Exodus 19:9,16-17**, God descends to the top of the Mount Sinai. It is on top of the mountains that we meet God, but we live in the valleys. We need the teachings and presence of God to help us dwell in the valleys. Jesus is sitting, teaching the disciples and the people about the Kingdom of God from the mountain.

Now, I need to get out my pet peeve about some contemporary Biblical translations such as the Common English Bible. Instead of using the word "Blessed," they use the word, "Happy." To me there is a great difference between these two words. Blessed is an action from God and Happy is a human feeling. God blesses us so that we, in turn, can bless others. Today, I feel happy. Tomorrow, I might be sad. So, now that I have gotten that out of the way, let us go on.

The first of Jesus' teachings are what is commonly referred to as The Beatitudes. These are blessings given by God to God's people for persevering, despite the hardships of this life. I think of them as the Proverbs of the New Testament. A proverb has a cause-and-effect relationship. For example, in **Proverbs 14:30**, it says, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. The cause, the heart at peace, has the effect of giving life to the body. Whereas the cause of envy has the effect of rotting the bones. The Proverbs are filled with examples of what happens when we do good or follow God versus what happens when we do bad or follow our own ways.

Now, what Jesus is saying in "The Beatitudes" are shocking revelations to the disciples and the people, compared to the Proverbs, which the disciples and people have often heard in the synagogues. I think that we might not find them shocking because of the translation. For that reason, I will read "The Beatitudes" in both the NIV and the Common English Bible.

In the NIV, **Matthew 5:3**, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Upset over something. Feeling down. Let us see what the Common English Bible (CEB) says, "Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs." Poor in spirit means hopeless. Hopeless means a whole lot more than just simply upset over something or feeling down. It means that there is no way out of the situation. I hope that you never feel this way. If you were living in Jesus' day, you might feel this way. The Romans are in complete control over everything. The people are being heavily taxed. If you went against Rome, harsh punishments were handed out, including crucifixion. That is a hopeless situation. Jesus is saying that when you find yourself in this situation, keep the faith, because in the end, Rome will not be in control forever, but God will.

The second Beatitude says in the NIV, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." We all mourn for the loss of a loved one in different ways and to different extents. The CEB says, "Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad." Jesus knew what it is like to grieve. There is reason to believe that his earthly father died when Jesus was a teenager. We know that before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He was moved by the grief of Mary and Martha. The most important and shortest verse in scripture is found in **John 11:35**. It reads, "Jesus wept." For a Christian we are made glad, when we will see our loved ones who believe in Jesus in Heaven. We grieve and feel the sense of loss in this life, but all will be made new by God.

The third Beatitude says in the NIV, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” The CEB says, “Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.” Meek and humble are not much different in translation. People in Jesus’ day, and today, are trying to glorify themselves. They are trying to establish their kingdom. The disciples were guilty of this in **Acts 1:6**. They thought that if Jesus reestablished the kingdom of Israel, then they receive their little kingdoms. In **Luke 18:25**, Jesus uses the term the eye of the needle in order to get into heaven. It is used as a term for a very narrow opening. One has to get down off their camel, off their pride and crawl through this opening. It is ironic that the people that will inherit the new earth are not the ones that are trying to control it, but the ones that are humbling themselves and allow God to control their lives.

The fourth Beatitude says in the NIV, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” The CEB says, “Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.” We should keep learning and growing more about this God that loves us so much. Keep reading our Bibles. Keep in contact with God through our praises and prayers. Our relationship with God should continue to go deeper. Then we will be fed until we are full.

The fifth Beatitude says in the NIV, “Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.” The CEB says, “Happy are people who show mercy because they will receive mercy.” Just think of what this world would be if people would just show mercy to each other.

The sixth Beatitude says in the NIV, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” The CEB says, “Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.” Our hearts can only be pure when we confess our sins to Jesus and ask forgiveness. Holy God can not be near sin. Jesus had to die on the cross, so that we would receive salvation. Jesus says in **John 14:6**, “**I am the truth, the way and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**” John Wesley said that we should continue to grow in our perfection. Only the pure in heart will see God.

The seventh Beatitude says in the NIV, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.” The CEB says, “Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called the children of God.” We live in a violent world. Wars are going on in many different places. The mass killings are escalating. Families are being torn apart by arguments and disagreements. As the children of God, God calls us work to make peace. Real and lasting peace will only occur when Christ returns upon this earth and establishes His throne. The prophecy in **Isaiah 11:6-9** will be fulfilled.

The eighth Beatitude says in NIV, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The CEB says, "Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs." When we stand up and say that we are a Christian, then we are marked for sacrifice. The devil is going to come at us and use every means necessary to defeat us. In many countries in this world, that if you say that you are a Christian, then you can be put in prison, tortured, or even killed. Even in this country, there is growing anger against Christians. Churches have been vandalized or painted with hate messages. Lest we not forget about the shootings in the church. We need to remember what **1 John 4:4**.

The ninth Beatitude continues this theme of persecution, but explain this in great detail. It says in NIV, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." The CEB says, "Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you. In **Acts 5:41**, this is the reaction that the disciples have after being arrested and jailed for proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God. It says, "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name." If we are upsetting the world, then the world is going to come after us. What is the measure that we know that we are living our lives for God, because the amount of harassment that will be directed at us. We need to realize this because we are living more and more in a post-Christian world.

The Good News of the Beatitudes is that in the end, if we continue to follow Jesus, we will receive our eternal reward. This life and everything in this life is temporary. We should long and work for everlasting life found only in Jesus. We are blessed by God. Say this to yourself when hardship, grief, or persecution come against you, "I Am Blessed." Amen.

