

Dear Future Me: "God Bless You!"

A sermon based on Matthew 5:1-12 - ***Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.***

He said:

***³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

***⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.***

***⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.***

***⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.***

***⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.***

***⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.***

***⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.***

***¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"God bless you!" Usually that phrase follows a sneeze, doesn't it? Sometimes it's said in response to something kind someone does, "Oh, God bless you." But, what does that mean? Have you ever thought about what you're trying to convey? "Oh, thank you"? "I hope you're ok after that sneeze"? I'm not sure. Are you?

But anyways, this morning, "God bless you," not because you sneezed or did something kind for me. No, this morning "God bless you" is followed by a list of things we should do (called the Beatitudes) and more. Someone once said Jesus' *beatitudes* are the attitudes we should *be*. *Be* merciful, *be* peacemakers, *be* pure in heart. Then (and only then), Jesus tells us, can you expect to *be* blessed by God.

In his famous "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus pulls off the gloves and hits hard with the law. For many believed they were good and worthy of God's blessings as long as they were fairly decent folk who stayed out of serious trouble, Jesus took the law to a whole new level. One even we can't keep.

So how can God say to us, "Bless you!"? How can we who fail to keep his law, be blessed by him? We don't deserve any blessing from God! But we are blessed by him and are rewarded by his grace, and, so, in turn we long to *be* a blessing to others.

Take a look at our verses from Matthew again. The word translated "blessed" in these verses can mean "happy." But the NIV translation got it right here when they translated it "blessed." Everywhere Matthew uses the word it's implied God is the one doing the blessing. Jesus isn't just telling people the key to finding true happiness. He's telling us how to be blessed *by God*.

So who exactly is blessed by God? Let's look at the list. "**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**" Now, Jesus isn't insisting we take a vow of poverty. The words "**in spirit**" make that clear. Blessed are those who humbly recognize their sin and see how spiritually poor they are before God. They recognize they have nothing of value to offer him that he needs or even wants.

"**Blessed are those who mourn...**" Obviously it's not just those who mourn over the loss of their own selfish interests. But blessed are those who mourn over their sin in true repentance.

"**Blessed are the meek...**" – who aren't haughty and proud before others, sure, but especially before God are humble.

"**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...**" – who long not for more money or for an easier life, but who crave a great righteousness and obedience to God. Who are driven by their longing to serve him.

"**Blessed are the merciful...**" – who are quick to forgive, show compassion on others, and who don't hold a grudge, but let go of their sense of being wronged and desire to get even.

"**Blessed are the pure in heart...**" – who have no unclean thoughts or attitudes, who are always pure, then, in what they say and think and do.

"**Blessed are the peacemakers...**" – who are quick to serve others instead of themselves, who are calm and patient, and seek to listen before they speak and understand before being understood.

"**Blessed are those who are persecuted... [and insulted] ...because of [Jesus].**" Meaning, blessed are those who are seasoning their speech with Jesus and making it known that they follow him. Blessed are those who don't back down from doing what's right when it's tough to do the right thing and the right thing will cause them suffering.

"Blessed are those," Jesus says, "who do all these things all the time." "**Great is your reward in heaven.**" But how well do you stack up?

A survey once showed 85% of all drivers in America consider themselves to be "above-average" drivers. Of course, this cannot be true: By definition, only 49% of drivers *are* above average, right? But the survey gives us an insight into human nature: People generally view themselves as better than others. And if they are better than others, then they are doing a good enough job.

But how well are we *really* doing? Driving skills aside, how do we compare to the beatitudes? Do you think you meet the qualifications of a saint? Do you do the things Jesus says here perfectly? Do you at least do them well? Are you even above average? Let's see.

Are you **poor in spirit** or **meek** or haughty and proud? If you answered, "No. I'm not proud! I'm always very humble!" Well, how ironic! See how easily we can fool ourselves?

Do you always **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, longing only to serve Jesus, **mourning** over those times you've failed God? Or do you sometimes selfishly hunger and thirst for your own comfort and convenience and mourn and complain only when things don't go your way?

Are you always a **merciful peacemaker**, looking for opportunities to serve and forgive? Or do you sometimes hold a grudge against someone who's hurt you or wrong you? (And this in spite of the way God has dealt so patiently and mercifully with you.)

Do you always boldly share your faith in Jesus, come what may? Or do you sometimes keep quiet in order to avoid any chance of **insult** or **persecution**?

And even if you do seem pure and good and kind and loving on the outside, are you always pure in heart, in your thoughts, in your attitudes, where only God can see?

Me, neither. And that's a problem, friends.

"Blessed are those who do all these things," says Jesus. But that's a pretty big condition to be met before one can say "God bless you." You see, this portion of Jesus' sermon is all law. We can't do these things well enough. We deserve no blessing or reward from God.

So, we've failed at keeping God's law. We deserve no blessing. How can God still say, "Blessed are you," of everyone here. How? Not because we keep the law, but because Christ kept it *for us*. It's been said you should always, "Practice what you preach!" Well, Jesus did...

A German Lutheran pastor who served during the time of the Second World War and stood up to Hitler at the cost of his life, a man by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, understood the Beatitudes well. He said, ***"Having reached the end of the Beatitudes, we naturally ask if there is any place on this earth for the community which they describe. Clearly, there is one place, and only one, and that is where the Poorest, Meekest, and most sorely Tried of all men is to be found — on the cross at Golgotha. The community which is the subject of the Beatitudes is the community of the crucified. With Him it has lost all, and with him it has found all."***

Jesus, and Jesus alone, embodied the Beatitudes. Only he was everything the law demanded we be: He was poor in spirit and humble even though he alone rightly could be proud since only his heart was perfectly pure with no unclean thought or attitude, with no sin ever committed. He was meek, humbling himself before God the Father by becoming a man, humbling himself before others, becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Jesus mourned over sin—not his own, but ours!—and over its effects in the lives of sinners. And he took action! He hungered and thirsted—longed for and craved—our righteousness. He was so hungry he would willingly cast his soul into the hell of separation from the Father to bring it about!

Yes, Jesus, perfectly practiced what he preached. And so he alone deserves blessings from the Father, but he chose to be persecuted for **our** righteousness, insulted because of **us**, and to die for **us** so he might be merciful to **us** and forgive **us**. He is the perfect Peacemaker – winning peace for us between God and us.

And by his work, by practicing what he preached, he gave us God's blessings. He says to us, "God bless you!" and it's true by his grace. Blessed are those who know Jesus. Now, ours is the kingdom of heaven—right now as God rules in our hearts and forever in glory. We have been shown mercy by God and when we mourn over our sin, when we're meek and poor in spirit, confessing it to God, we are comforted by his forgiveness. Now, we are pure in heart with every sin removed. We are filled and satisfied with Jesus righteousness won for us, never to hunger or thirst or be lacking again. We are called Sons of God—brought into his family, with the promise to receive an inheritance. We will inherit not only the earth but heaven itself. We will see God—face to face!

How true it is that we can "**Rejoice and be glad, because great is [our] reward in heaven**"—a reward not earned by us, but a reward given to us by grace. And now, we can't help but be changed people—people with Beatitude attitudes!

One Sunday as they drove home from church, a little girl turned to her mom and said, "Mommy, there's something about the sermon I don't understand." "Oh? What' that?" mom asked. "Well, pastor said God is so big He could hold the whole world in His hand. Is that true?" "Yes, honey, that's true." "But Mommy, he also said God lives inside of us when we believe in Jesus. Is that true, too?" Again, the mother assured the little girl what pastor said was true. With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?" And you know, she was right. That's what the Beatitudes are all about—God shows through.

When we understand what Jesus has done for us in spite of what we deserve, we hunger and thirst for righteousness. Our greatest joy is found in serving him in thanks and we can never be satisfied in that desire.

But Jesus isn't here, physically. So how can we serve him? Well, he tells us later on. "**Whatever you [do] for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you [do] for me.**" (Matthew 25:40) Hearing that, can you take a look at this week's "Dear Future Me..." writing prompt? There are three things I want you to think about and write about...1) Looking at the Beatitudes, which is the one you struggle with the most or have struggled with the most recently or you know you'll keep on struggling with in the future? 2) Can you find a specific verse in Scripture that specifically describes how Jesus displayed that attitude for you? 3) List one specific way, starting today, how God can show the attitude through you. Then, next year, when you look at this one, will you be able to start working on another attitude?

Again, hearing Jesus tell us how showing these attitudes to others means we're displaying the same to Jesus, now we're eager to share what we've been given by God with others. We're meek and humble in regard to our status. After all I'm just one beggar telling another beggar where to find free bread. We hunger and thirst to share Jesus' righteousness with them and are willing to be persecuted, insulted and wronged for it, ready to show mercy to those who hurt us, ready to make peace. And if no peace can be found and we continue to be hurt or insulted or persecuted for it? Who cares? It's nothing to us because we're blessed by God! Rejoice and be glad always, because great is your reward in heaven! God has blessed you. Amen.

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