

## Unexpectedly Blessed!

### Matthew 5:1-12

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St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

*Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said:*

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*“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.” (Matthew 5:1-12 NIV)*

Dear fellow disciples of Jesus, our Lord and Savior:

How would you finish this sentence: “Blessed are...”? We might say, “Blessed are the rich, who can buy whatever their hearts desire. Blessed are the happy, who don't have any pain or sorrow. Blessed are the powerful who exert their will over others. Blessed are the well-fed, the satisfied, and those who are well-liked by everyone.”

As you heard in the gospel reading, when Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount, his list of those who are blessed was the direct opposite of what we might consider “blessed.” Today let's take a closer look at what are called the “Beatitudes,” those whom Jesus calls “blessed”, and let's find out how you and I are **Unexpectedly Blessed!**

Before we look at those blessings, we should note who was Jesus' audience in this sermon. He went up a mountainside to get away from the crowds that were following him all around Galilee. Jesus' disciples came to him, “and he began to teach them,” the disciples. These were people who already were putting their trust in him. So when Jesus taught them the Beatitudes, he wasn't telling them how they could become blessed. He was letting them know how they were already blessed with their faith. Martin Luther compared the Beatitudes to fruits on the tree of faith.

The first four Beatitudes describe our unexpectedly blessed relationship with God. “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” The word “poor” is someone beggarly poor, bowed down, homeless, someone who has absolutely nothing. “Poor in spirit” are those who realize they have nothing before God except their sins. You could be materially rich or poor—we're all spiritual beggars before God.

“Blessed are those who mourn.” We mourn over sin, we cry and weep over the consequences of sin, losses in life, and losses of death. Yet Jesus says that mourners are the ones who are blessed!

“Blessed are the meek.” These are the ones subservient, utterly humble toward God and others. The world promotes the powerful and aggressive, but Jesus says the meek are the ones who are blessed.

And likewise, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” They realize they have no righteousness that counts before God. According to God's law we cannot stand right with God because of sin. Oh, how we hunger, thirst to gain that status of being right with God!

But how are all these considered “blessed”? Jesus explains. The poor in spirit who have absolutely nothing have everything; “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” It’s God’s free gift. And when we mourn, it’s a blessing, “for they will be comforted.” Jesus came to wash away all sin, and he is the Resurrection and the Life to give us victory over death through him. What great comfort! As for the meek, “they will inherit the earth.” Don’t be fooled by the powerful in this world; it’s the meek, the humble believer in Christ, who gains the true blessings on earth. Regarding those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus promises, “they will be filled.” We are declared righteous before God, not by our works, but through Jesus’ righteous life and his blood paying for our sins. His work fills us with righteousness!

Do you see the key to being unexpectedly blessed in our relationship to God? It’s Jesus. After the law has done its work of making us realize how sinful we are, poor in spirit, lacking righteousness, meek and mourning over sin and its consequences, the gospel of Jesus fills our hearts. So take heart, fellow beggars, meek, thirsty mourners! Hold on to Jesus, and trust in him, for he’s already given you the kingdom, and he will dry your tears, fill your desires of righteousness, and give you your inheritance, now and forever!

But Jesus is not done telling us how we are unexpectedly blessed. The last four Beatitudes describe being blessed in our relationship with others. “Blessed are the merciful.” Our faith will lead us to show mercy and kindness to anyone around us, whether they deserve it or not.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.” “Pure” in this statement isn’t focused so much on sinlessness—though God does view us that way through our pure Savior—as it is on having pure motives. We work with others, not selfishly or with sinful intentions, but with single-mindedness to help the other person.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” Jesus is the “Prince of Peace,” we are now at peace with God, so we strive to live at peace with the people around us, which means yielding our rights and seeking to de-escalate, not escalate, conflict. But those around us may not feel the same way. Here’s perhaps the most unexpected group of those who are blessed: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness.” Jesus goes on: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.” When we live our faith and try to spread Jesus’ peace, there will be those who ridicule our beliefs and insult us and shun us. They do it “because of righteousness,” when we stand up for what’s right; they do it “because of me,” Jesus. Those who reject Jesus will reject his followers.

But take heart, merciful, persecuted peacemakers! Those who show mercy will be shown mercy. The pure in heart “will see God,” as explained by the apostle John: “We know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure” (1 Jn. 3:2b,3). By God’s grace, peacemakers will be called “children of God.” And Jesus comes full circle to that great, unexpected blessing: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Even those who persecute us can’t take away the most precious treasure of all!

Yes, blessed are you, fellow believers. Don’t let appearances fool you, especially in this age when persecution and insults will make it look like being a Christian is a curse. It’s not! Remember the great blessings we have in Christ! As Jesus tells us, “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven,” a reward of grace, for that truly is an undeserved gift of God’s love to us. Rejoice, for we are indeed unexpectedly blessed in Christ! Amen.