

The Blessed Life©

Matthew 5:1-12

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We use the word “bless” quite often ... at least in the church, don’t we? We even have a heading in the bulletin at the end of the service – The Blessing. Do you use it very often in your life outside the church? Maybe when someone sneezes, you say, “Bless you!”

What do you think it means to be blessed? (Happy? Satisfied? Favored? Well?)

The Greek word for blessed that Matthew and Mark both use is *makarios*. It can mean *happy* and some translations use that word. It can also mean *fortunate* or *well off*.

But to be blessed can mean that you have found special favor, or a unique standing, or an approval or permission, or you’ve been given power, or you have an endowment. There are all sorts of meanings in that little word – blessed.

David Lose – one of my favorite commentators who writes in the online commentary from workingpeacher.com suggests we might think, instead of what the word blessed means, we think of how we feel when we are blessed.

If we look at Jesus and what he says here in this part of his sermon that we know as the Beatitudes (which means blessed or happiness), what do you hear? Is it a list of things you have to do to be blessed?

Does Jesus say, “if you do this, then you will get this ...?”

Not really! What he is really saying is that if you ARE this way, then you are blessed by God. It is a state of BEING more than a state of DOING.

David Lose writes, when thinking about how it *feels* to be blessed ...

“I begin to get a sense of Jesus’ promise. To be blessed feels like you have someone’s unconditional regard. It feels like you are not and will not be alone, like you will be accompanied wherever you go.

Being blessed feels like you have the capacity to rise above present circumstances, like you are more than the sum of your parts or past experiences.

Being blessed feels like you have worth -- not because of something you did or might do, but simply because of who you are, simply because you deserve it.”

When Jesus went up and took his place on that mountain with the crowds watching and eager to hear what he had to say, I can imagine him looking out at them with great tenderness and love. His newly chosen disciples were there with him and he was teaching them as he also preached this sermon to the people.

Probably most of the people were ordinary folks – like we are. There were men and women ... their children running and playing around them.

Many were most likely peasants, poor and powerless. They suffered under the hands of those who had authority and power – the Romans, but even the Jewish leaders were unfair to them. They were taxed heavily and punished easily. Diseases were spread easily and were considered by the priests to be a sign of sin – an unclean person, not fit for the community.

In fact, most of the descriptions in this sermon were of people who were in the margins – considered to be nothing, or at least a disgrace.

Surely these people were – like most of us – eager to hear some hopeful word of good news – something that assured them of God’s love. Something that would encourage them to go on, to hang on.

It must have been pure joy and with amazement that they heard this assurance of God’s love, of God showing up and being with them in their disappointments, their struggles, their meek, powerless lives. In their longing for God and community, Jesus is saying everything is yours in God’s kingdom. You belong in that kingdom. It is your home.

What blessing. How do you think that blessing felt to them? It wasn’t about if you work hard enough, if you win or succeed in your job or your game, if you are attractive enough, young enough, wise enough, if you do everything right – you will then be given the keys to the kingdom.

Nope. It was all about being who they are; being loved just because they are God’s own children just as they are. Nothing to do. Nothing to work at. It’s just about belonging to God.

It was a topsy turvey kind of theology. It was against the grain of what society taught. Can you imagine what the powerful who were in the crowd felt? Were their ears burning? Were they indignant? Furious? Shamed?

How would you feel if you were there? Where in the crowd would you be?

Would you be one of the young children – playing, but still having an open ear to what Jesus was saying – because you could not help but be drawn to this man?

Would you be one of the mothers – trying to keep your children from making too much noise; trying to watch and make sure they don’t run too far off and at the same time, you are straining to hear every word this man is saying?

Are you one of the younger men – working hard, trying to get ahead, trying to provide for your family, feeling sometimes like it is an endless battle with taxes and laws and rules? Yet you are faithful and are trying your best to know and be what God wants you to be.

And you are praying all the time that you don't get sick or that your family stays well; that you don't lose your job.

Are you one of the older men or women who have lived a faithful life? Perhaps you have known many good things in your life – certainly you are there with wisdom from your experience and much to offer. Are you there with joy in where you are in life now or are you there with regrets, with sadness, with fear?

Put yourself there on the mountainside and imagine hearing the loving, powerful, amazing blessing from Jesus himself.

You are blessed! You are inheritors of God's kingdom. You are a part of God's family – of community – God's community where you are accepted and loved just because you are!

You are blessed when you are struggling; when you are unsure about tomorrow; when you are treated unfairly; when you are grieving; when you are sick; when you are young or middle-aged or old.

You are loved and you are blessed here today and forever more! In your baptism you were blessed – sealed in God's love and grace. You are a child of the covenant – the covenant made through God's own Son – Jesus, the Savior; Jesus, your friend.

May you know deep inside your heart and spirit, my friends –
BLESSED ARE YOU – because you are God's beloved.
Amen.

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