

## “Blessed”

*Matthew 5:3-12*

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**Prayer for Understanding** God never let our reason distort your truth. Holy Spirit inspire us and reveal your will to each of us. Amen

It has been said that the gospel comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable and that a sermon should do the same. Many people interpret Jesus comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable in his *Sermon on the Mount*. Woe is a word for the comfortable in need of affliction. Dietrick Bonhoeffer put it this way: “God calls each person to die so that they can live. Our hate, judgment, oppression, selfishness, desire to control and fear, needs to die so compassion, love, belonging, community, peace and joy can live.”

Richard Rohr said: “Christianity is a lifestyle — a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared and loving. However, we made it into an established “religion” (and all that goes with that) and avoided the lifestyle change itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish and vain in most of Christian history, and still believe that Jesus is one’s “personal Lord and Savior” ... The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great.”

Many in the crowd were suffering, poor, and oppressed. Through the beatitudes, Jesus gave them blessings.

Jesus preached: **Matthew 5:3-12 NLT “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are meek, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.”**

The beatitudes are core competencies for abundant life. There is repetition of God blessing, which means shalom, whole, peace, satisfied, happy, hopeful, joyful and more. The beatitudes are both healing and convicting, refreshing and challenging. The beatitudes describe our transformation from life in the ordinary world in which sinful humanity seems to be in charge to the emerging community where all belong, living in harmonies love. Through our loving, peaceful, joyful, moments, we glimpse the coming heavenly community.

There is blessing and woe, comfort and affliction, for you in the beatitudes. Your act of worship is to open yourself to the Holy Spirit, to wrestle with the beatitudes. These perspectives hopefully will augment your wrestling. Embrace some. Reject some. Be unsure about some. And go beyond. These perspectives are meant to launch a spiral of deeper thoughts, feelings and actions.

**“God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.”** Blessed are those who cherish God’s redeeming grace freely offered to all people. Blessed are those who realize their need for God, that there is absolutely nothing they can do, think, be, will or believe that in anyway earns them a place with God forever. Blessed are those who let go of their ego, arrogance, and conceit and savor the free gift of God’s transforming love. Blessed are those who rest in God’s steadfast everlasting love. Woe to those who think they have all the answers, are right and judge

others. Woe to those who think they can earn love. Woe to those who believe that they have done something to earn salvation.

**“God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”** Blessed are those who grieve the temporary separation from those who have died and entered Life Triumphant. Blessed are those who grieve their temporary losses that are awaiting them in a more glorious form in heaven. Blessed are those who mourn violence, oppression, hate, fear, and discord in the world. Woe to those who are indifferent to the pain and suffering of others. Woe to those who are not heartbroken by the mess of the world. Woe to those who choose to be apathetic to those who are advocating that every person is free to be true to the way God created them, true to their God given skin color, gender, orientation, personality and essence. Woe to those who use fear, politics, or religion to control, exclude, or oppress.

**God blesses those who are meek, for they will inherit the whole earth.** Homiletics did a word study on the word we translate as meek and wrote: “Greek philosophers such as Aristotle were fond of describing ethical living as a mean, or mid-point, between two extremes. On the one extreme was wild and uncontrolled anger; on the other was a total lack of anger, a spineless resignation. In between was righteous anger, the middle way, or the golden mean, it was sometimes called. Aristotle used a form of this very same word translated here as “meekness” to describe a life lived in perfect balance.” Another aspect is each person is a mean, midpoint, an equal. Blessed are those who see the goodness in every person and love all people. Blessed are those who believe all people are siblings, who have a cherished place in heaven forever. Blessed are those who view themselves and all people as equals. Woe to those who perceive themselves as better than another.

**“God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”** Righteousness is being in good, whole, loving, life giving, dynamic, right relationships with all people, God, the cosmos and self. A definition of faith is the desire to be in loving relationship with all. Heaven and hell are states of relationship. Heaven is being in loving relationship. Hell is being in broken relationship. William Barclay writes: “How much do you want goodness? Do you want it as much as a starving person wants food, as a dying person yearns for a drink of water? The true wonder of the human race is that even in our sin we are haunted by goodness, that even in the mud we can never wholly forget the stars. Our Creator means us to hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Blessed are those who are striving to be in loving relationship with all people, self, God and the cosmos. Woe to those who have given up on anyone. Woe to those who want revenge. Woe to those who shun reconciliation.

**“God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”** Blessed are those who have empathy, compassion, and kindness. Blessed are those who can move past being hurt maintaining love for everyone. Woe to those who are cruel, label people, dehumanize and name call.

**“God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God.”** Blessed are those who think good, loving thoughts. Blessed are those who are curious. Woe to those who are fragmented, have hidden agendas, and ill will to others.

**“God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.”** An element of biblical peace is wholeness, “both and” thinking. Blessed are those who are striving for inner peace, peace with all people and peace with the cosmos. Woe to binary thinkers, good/better/best, either/or, us/them, friend/foe. Woe to dividers of people.

**“God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.”** Blessed are those who are tenacious in living the most excellent way of love. Woe to those

who believe that striving to love, or loving a certain way, results in an easy life, wellbeing, success, or safety.

Nadia Bolz Weber writes: “It’s so easy for us to default to hearing Jesus’ sermon on the mount as pure exhortation. As though Jesus is giving us a list of things we should try and be so we can be blessed — be meeker, be poorer and mournier a little more and you will meet the conditions of earning Jesus’ blessing. But the thing is, it’s hard to imagine Jesus exhorting a crowd of demoniacs and epileptics to be meeker. Jesus wasn’t telling them what to try and become. Jesus was telling them you are blessed and you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Perhaps there were people in the crowd who totally had their crap together. People who had solid relationships and had paid off their student loans and always backed up their hard drives. People who had nothing they felt shame about and who didn’t have terrible secrets and knew exactly what they were doing. Of course that is possible those people were in the crowd, it’s just, that’s not who we are told were coming to Jesus. The ones we are told were coming to Jesus, the ones presumably to whom Jesus was preaching, were described as the sick, those who were in pain, who fought with demons, who were broken and addicted and late on their back taxes. Who has more than one ex-spouse, and who watch too much Netflix and think that maybe a little heroin might be a good idea. In other words, they were people standing in the need of God. And standing in the need of God is standing in the way of blessedness in a way that having it all together never is.” End quote.

Listen again to the beatitude from the message paraphrase. **Matthew 5:1-12 MSG** “**When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said: “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and God’s rule. “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you. “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought. “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. God’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat. “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for. “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world. “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family. “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom. “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.” Amen**