

Sunday Sermon February 5, 2017

Sermon Text: Matthew 5: 1-12

Sermon Theme: The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached: The Beatitudes.

We can be Joyful living in the blessing of Christ

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying:

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 sons 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.

What is the best singer or group of all time? Some would argue for Elvis, others the Beatles, or Michael Jackson. There would others who would no doubt argue for some other group or singer. Some might make their argument based upon total sales of albums and songs while others would argue based upon opinions and feelings. In the end, we may would not all agree on who the best singer or group is.

What is the best sermon of all time? While there have been really, really good preachers who have given really good sermons, there is no discussion about who the best preacher of all time is. Jesus is the master teacher who preaches the best sermons. His lessons and parables get to the heart of sin and grace in a few words. They cut to the heart, laying open our sinfulness, while at the same time providing the comfort and hope of forgiveness for those who sorrow over sin.

Matthew records for us what is regarded as the Greatest Sermon Ever Preached. It is called the Sermon on the Mount and it is recorded for us in chapters 5 through 7 of Matthew’s Gospel. Over the next few weeks we will look at several parts of this Greatest Sermon ever Preached.

This morning we look at the first 12 verses of Jesus’ sermon called the Beatitudes. As we look at these nine statements we will see that although the world might mock the life of faith which follows Jesus, we can be joyful living in the blessings which Christ gives to us. This thankfulness and joy for the blessings of Jesus will show itself in the way that we live in this world.

It would be very easy to take these 9 statements and turn them into a checklist of the things that we should do in life so that God will bless us. There are many people who believe if they can just follow these 9 things then they know the road to heaven. That’s not what Jesus is preaching and teaching here. He is not telling people to follow these 9 things so that they can earn heaven.

Jesus had preached to the people. He had called out to them to repent of their sins because the kingdom of God was here. The Holy Spirit had led many people, including the disciples, to see their sins and repent of them. They believed in Jesus as their Savior and Messiah and had great joy at the news of forgiveness. Now they looked to Jesus with a question, “What now? How do we live a life that thanks you, Jesus?”

Jesus answers with 9 μακάριος (makarios) statements. μακάριος is the Greek word translated here as blessed. While blessed is a good translation, the word joyful is actually closer to the root meaning of μακάριος. In answer to their question, Jesus tells them to be joyful because forgiveness and salvation are theirs. Then to be joyful by living in this new life of faith, giving thanks to him for the blessings he has given to them. We will look at these 9 statements of joyful living.

1. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The Psalmist writes, “Create in me a clean heart oh God and renew a right spirit within me.” From the time of our first parents, sin created a separation between God and us. We feel this separation from God and we fear God’s punishment because we

are sinners who sin much. We are not spiritually rich, we cannot earn and do not deserve anything from God. We are unworthy of God's love in all we do. Yet, Jesus calls out, "Repent," to wretched sinners like you and me. Why does he call out to poor troubled sinners to repent? He does this because, in his love, Jesus wants those who sorrow over their sins and repent to experience the hope and comfort of his forgiveness.

Joyful are those who see their sin and repent because through Jesus they have the forgiveness which leads to the kingdom of heaven.

2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. We often see and hear people bragging about what they have done wrong. We cringe at the posts of friends and neighbors glorifying homosexuality, drunkenness, selfishness, or division... maybe we have been guilty of thoughtlessly posting things that glorify sins as well. Without thinking we might brag or boast about the sins we committed last weekend or those done in youth without so much as a guilty thought.

Jesus says that those who mourn over their sins can be joyful because they will be comforted. Those who refuse to call sin sin, who brags about their sins and boast in their sinfulness have no sorrow over their sin and will not be comforted. True repentance sees that the consequence of our sin extends to the cross. We see that Jesus paid the price for our sins and the cost was not light. Yet, while we mourn our sins and their consequences there is comfort. Our hearts can also look with joy at the cross because in Jesus suffering and death there is payment for our sins. He has paid the price we deserve. Be joyful and take comfort in what the loving Savior has done for you.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Meekness is not a word that we use much today. When it is used it has a negative connotation. Meekness is compared with shyness. To be meek is to be scared of everything including people.

The definition the Greek word *πραεις* (prayerice) is actually very positive. It means to be gentle or humble.

Gentleness and humility are not traits that are shown very much today. To win the argument we know we will need to be louder, meaner and crueller than the other person. And often, we are willing to do that to win.

The picture of gentleness and humility may be viewed as weak by some, but the picture we are to think of is turning the other cheek. Turning the other cheek is anything but weak, to choose to accept persecution, mocking and abuse in the name of Jesus without returning harsh or angry words, actually shows strength. To be meek, gentle and humble is to show people what the selfless love of Jesus looks like.

The meek can be joyful. This earth will not be won by a show of force or dominance, through Christ we are already victorious over the rulers of this earth; sin and death. Through Jesus, we will inherit blessings much greater: the new heavens and the new earth..

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. The Psalmist asks the Lord to create in him a clean heart, later he asks that the Lord help him to walk in his ways, the ways of righteousness. We do not walk in God's way when we hunger and thirst for things that glorify us and our lives on earth. We hunger and thirst for righteousness when we put into practice what Paul says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." We hunger and thirst for righteousness when we pursue the Word of God and cling to the promises of the Lord, when we partake of the Word and the Sacraments as often and as urgently as we partake of our meals.

We can be joyful because as we hear and study God's Word, God promises that his Holy Spirit will always fill us up with Christ's blessings.

5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Christians forgive, that is what we do. We have the greatest example of forgiveness in Jesus. In him we see the fullness of his forgiveness for us. Yet, we struggle so much to forgive as we have been forgiven. We have bitterness, anger, resentment, revenge and whole host of other sins that show we keep and hold onto in our hearts. We are not merciful as we should be. Jesus warns us that to hold onto these sins is also a sin itself. **"But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."**

The answer to our lack of mercy is to rely on the one who is perfectly merciful. We can be joyful, not because we are good at being merciful, but because our Savior is merciful to us. We ask him to replace our

hearts filled with sin with hearts filled with mercy modeled on his mercy for us. Then we joyfully share mercy with others.

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

How hard is it to be pure of heart? It's almost laughable isn't it? While we can seem good to others on the outside, we know how sinful our thoughts can be. We know how often we are not true and honest with other people. Rarely a moment goes by where we are not sinning in thoughts, or those thoughts show themselves in sinful actions. The last thing we want to see with hearts like this is God.

Jesus says we do not need to fear, we can be joyful. God answers our prayer, "Create in me a clean heart Oh God." He washes the sin from our heart with the blood of Christ. Our hearts are made pure and clean. Because of Christ we will see our heavenly Father, not for judgment, but for joy.

7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. What is a Christian to do when they see conflict? This world tells us that we must pick a side, we must choose one side or the other and we must do it wisely or we will be on the losing end of things. Jesus says quite different. He tells us that rather than picking a side and trying to be the winner of the conflict, we are to strive for peace between two sides whenever possible.

This peace reflects the peace that Jesus has given to us. After every table of Holy Communion, we hear the amazing words -- -Go in peace, your sins are forgiven. Jesus made peace between God and man, he brought wandering man back to God, and even when man wants to wander again, Jesus shows God the blood that was shed and the price that was paid which brings everlasting peace.

We can be joyful, Jesus has made peace between God and us. God now calls us his children, sons and heirs of eternal life. Because of God's peace we can live in peace with others.

8. 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.

Trouble usually starts when we open our mouths or when we take action on things. Have you ever thought, "If I just wouldn't have said anything, this never would have happened."? Persecution can be avoided. We can live in a very tidy Christian bubble our whole life where we separate our church going on Sunday from all of the other activities and people in our lives. We can keep our mouths shut and live without the trouble of defending our faith.

Is this the life that Jesus is pointing us too? Of course not, Jesus wants us to put our thanks into action every day of our life. And what's going to happen when our faith shows itself? The same thing will happen to us that happened to the prophets in the Old Testament, to Jesus and the apostles in the New. There will be persecution of some sort because of our faith.

We can be joyful, not with the persecution, our joy goes beyond persecution to the deliverance that is ours through Jesus. Whether that deliverance is earthly, or from the earth, we can trust that the Lord is watching over us. Nothing can separate us from that love of God, not now, not ever.

Be joyful in the blessings that Christ gives. Be joyful as you live this new life and put that joy of faith, forgiveness and salvation into action today and every day. Amen.