

Christians are blessed!

Matthew 5:1-12

<sup>1</sup> Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>2</sup> and he began to teach them, saying: <sup>3</sup> **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. <sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

This week an article in the newspaper said that Japan is “a soft power powerhouse.” Soft power is the ability to attract others and influence others without using force or money. The article explained that Japan attracts and influences the people of other nations through its music, fashion, food, and ways of doing business. Many people in other countries want to buy these things from Japan. The article said that Japan should work harder to use its soft power in Asia and other parts of the world. This would be good for Japan’s trade deficit, and it might help Japan’s reputation in the world. But “soft power” is not able to produce solutions to the biggest problems in life.

Jesus Christ is different! He has the power to free us from our sins, from death, and from the devil. As the Risen Savior, Jesus has the power to raise us to life on the Last Day. During this season of Epiphany we remember that Jesus shines with divine glory! We see that glory in His miracles and in His teachings. Today, Jesus teaches us about the glory of His kingdom. Everyone who is a part of His kingdom is blessed. We are blessed in our relationship with God. We are blessed in our relationship with others.

Part One: Blessed in our relationship with God.

As we heard last week, after John the Baptist pointed out the Son of God, Jesus began His public ministry among the people of Galilee—in Galilee of the Gentiles. That was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (9:1-4). Jesus probably preached the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee, too, perhaps close to His home base in Capernaum. He preached this sermon to His disciples, but others in the crowd could hear the sermon too. This sermon may have been preached at a time when the crowds following Jesus were big. Later, many in that crowd turned away from Jesus because He did not give them the earthly blessings they desired.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explains to His followers what the life of a Christian is all about. Because of Jesus, Christians are God’s people. They belong to God in this world and forever in heaven. Because of Jesus, Christians have blessings in this world, and they are the heirs of eternal life. With these words, Jesus is not saying “Christians can be happy” or “Christians should be happy.” Rather, with these words Jesus is declaring that Christians ARE blessed! They have blessings that no one else in the world has! And they will have those blessings forever! The world says that Christians are a miserable lot, that they don’t have any freedom and can’t have any fun. The world says that Christians are deceived, misguided, and even dangerous. But Jesus, who came from the Father full of grace and truth, declares His disciples to be BLESSED! In the beatitudes Jesus explains why. Let’s take a look.

<sup>3</sup> **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** The poor in spirit are those who recognize their sins. When they stand before God they confess that they have nothing to brag about. When they read the 10 commandments and examine their own lives, they call out to God, “Have mercy on me a sinner.” The opposite of “poor in spirit” are those who think that they can earn their own way into heaven by being good or doing good works. Their attitude towards God is that He should be happy with them. They come before God with the coins of good works in their hands and they try to buy blessings from God. Christians, however, realize that they are beggars. They need to receive the coins of grace and pardon and forgiveness from God. They say to God, “Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to thy cross I cling.”

Through the prophet Isaiah God said, **“This is the one I esteem: who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word”** (Isaiah 66:2). Jesus says that those people are blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. They have every spiritual blessing in Christ—grace, pardon, forgiveness, adoption into God’s kingdom,

eternal hope, etc. Jesus is their King who will always be near them to bless them. They have God's grace now, and they will enter His glory later.

<sup>4</sup> **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.** Christians mourn as they live in this world. They see how sinful and evil this world is. They experience the bitter consequences of sin in their lives. They experience many troubles in this world because this world does not love them or their Savior. Christians mourn because they are sinful by nature and sin against their Lord every day. But Christians are comforted. Jesus says to them, "Your sins are forgiven. I paid for them completely." Jesus assures them, "I have overcome the world. I will judge the world. I am preparing a place for you in heaven. In heaven, all things will be new. There will be no mourning there."

<sup>5</sup> **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.** The meek are mild and gentle and patient. They are not concerned about getting more blessings for themselves. The opposite of the meek are those who are quick to anger, bitter, wild, violent, and self-seeking. They want to get all they can out of this life. In this part of His sermon, Jesus reminds us of what was written in Psalm 37: **"The meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked. If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm."** Believers are able to enjoy the blessings of this world in a way that unbelievers cannot. They "live life to the full" because they live their life under Christ, in His kingdom of grace. Believers receive their daily bread from God's hand with thankful hearts, and they use all their blessings for His glory.

<sup>6</sup> **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.** Christians long for righteousness. When we bring the report card of our lives to God, we want to be able to present to Him a spotless record. Jesus is the only One who can satisfy that hunger and thirst for righteousness. He is the only one who can change us from "sinners who deserve hell" into "saints who will enter heaven." Jesus atoned for our sins with His sacrificial death. His resurrection means that we have been declared righteous. He washed away our sins in Baptism. He covers us with His righteousness. Through the Lord's Supper, He assures us that we have forgiveness. He sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts so we can live lives of thankfulness to His glory.

#### Part Two: Blessed in our relationship with others.

The first four beatitudes talk about our relationship to God, but the last four speak about our relationship to the world. Listen again to beatitudes five through seven. <sup>7</sup> **Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.** <sup>8</sup> **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.** <sup>9</sup> **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.** God has given us grace and mercy in Jesus. Through faith in Jesus, we have become God's children who bear fruit for Him. Believers will seek to show mercy to others who are hurting. We will seek to speak to others in honesty, seeking their welfare, not our own gain. Without ever sacrificing the truth of God's Word, we will seek to proclaim God's peace to others—peace through Jesus—and we will guard the peace that God has given to His church. As we live such a life of faith, God will continue to give us grace and mercy. With the eyes of faith we will see God, and with longing eyes we will look forward to seeing Him face to face in heaven. And God, who sent His Son to give us eternal peace, will continue graciously to call us His sons—heirs of eternal life.

But the world will have a different attitude towards Jesus' peacemakers. <sup>10</sup> **Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** <sup>11</sup> **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.** <sup>12</sup> **Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.** As we proclaim the sinfulness of mankind and the greatness of Jesus the only Savior, we will face persecution. The world will insult us, mistreat us, and say all kinds of evil about us. In spite of that persecution, even because of that persecution, Christians are blessed! It is a privilege to suffer for the Savior who suffered and died for us. The persecution we receive from this sinful world is proof that we belong to God and that we have proclaimed His name. We are blessed because the world cannot take away from us the treasures of God's grace, of His gifts to us, and of the eternal glory He has promised. God will heal us and restore us completely when He raises us to eternal life with glorified bodies on the Last Day.

Dear friends, today once again, with hearts full of thanks, let us offer our praise to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. God could give us earthly power and riches if He wanted to, but He has done much, much more. Through His eternal Son, God has turned our sorrow into joy, our fear of death into hope, and our future from one of suffering into one of glory. The Lord is good! How blessed we are! Amen.