

ALL THE SAINTS!

November 7, 2010

Matthew 5:1–12

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN.

I. INTRODUCTION

On this first Sunday of November, we celebrate All Saints Day. We remember those who have gone before us, suffering persecution and even dying for the faith. We remember the saints who have, by the grace of God, served the Church and world with lasting contributions. And we remember those friends and loved ones who have now entered their eternal rest.

But what makes one into a saint? A saint is one who is holy, one who has no sin. Therefore, if you are without sin, you're a saint, too.

What does it take to be a saint? In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus recites the "Beatitudes," qualities of those who are blessed to be the saints. This is an important passage of Scripture, and one that carries with it great joy and blessing. However, it is also one that is often twisted and misunderstood to lead us into the depths of despair. We'll first examine these Beatitudes according to the Law; but then we will examine them in light of our Savior, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

But before we get into the study of the text, consider this observation, I read recently that 93% of all US drivers and 69% of all Swedish drivers consider themselves "above-average" drivers. Of course, this cannot be true: By definition, only 49% of drivers are above average. However, the survey gives us an insight into human nature: People generally view themselves as better than others. And if they are better than others, then they are doing a good enough job.

II. THE BEATITUDES AND YOU

This tendency transfers into religion far more than we are aware. It becomes apparent in how the Beatitudes are taught. Often one will hear, "The message of the Beatitudes is that, if I do these things well enough, then I will be happy. If I am good enough, I will be blessed." It's a human standard of measure: "If I am better than average, then I'm in good shape." But does this work for sainthood? Let's take a look at the Beatitudes, to see if we are good enough at keeping them. A short sampling should do the trick.

Jesus declares, ***"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*** Indeed, the Scriptures make clear that the saints of God will enjoy eternal life with a new heaven and a new earth; and Jesus declares here that saints are meek. Now, meekness is power under control. One who is

meek uses his power, authority, position and skills in service to others, not to self. Are you meek enough? Do you use your power, your position and your talents in service to others? More specifically, how do you treat your family? Do you live as a servant to them, considering their matters to be more important than your own? Is there ever a time that you lose your temper or want some time just for yourself? Are you a meek-enough servant at home?

Meekness has to do with how you handle your resources. Do you use what you have in service to others or could you give away more? Do you really need to purchase such nice things for yourself, when you should be helping others? Could you live with less than you do? Do you help as much as you can?

We could go on and on with more questions like these lines. But when such an examination goes on, the response of the sinful nature is, "Sure, I could be meeker, but I'm still meek enough," or "I am comfortable with my level of meekness toward others." But here's the thing: Jesus says, **"Blessed are the meek."** He doesn't say, "Blessed are those who believe that they are meek enough." When He calls for meekness, He calls for perfect meekness; it's not your measure that matters, but the measure of the almighty, perfect and holy God. To believe that we are meek enough is utter arrogance and pride; which is the very opposite of meekness, isn't it?

Jesus declares, **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."** To hunger and thirst for righteousness is sincerely desire the things of God, like faith and purity. Those who hunger and thirst will seize every opportunity to be fed. If asked, people will give a variety of answers on what it means to hunger and thirst enough for righteousness. Some might believe that it's enough to attend worship on Christmas and Easter, while others might claim once quarterly. Some will insist that every-Sunday attendance indicates an earnest desire, while yet others might add midweek services during Advent and Lent. Yet don't forget worship every Thursday before the Book of Concord reading group. And what about this hunger and thirst outside of worship? Do you have daily devotions? Are they long enough? Do you devote enough time to Scripture-reading and prayer? Have you memorized portions of Scripture as you hunger and thirst for righteousness?

Again the Old Adam says, "I hunger and thirst for righteousness enough because I'm satisfied with my efforts. I'm comfortable with my hunger and thirst." But should hunger and thirst ever be comfortable, wouldn't that be full and satisfied? Yet, Jesus does not say, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst by their standards." He offers no qualifiers. To believe that we hunger and thirst enough for righteousness, is a most unrighteous and arrogant act of pride.

One more example should be enough to do in our puffed-up view of self. Jesus declares, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."** Once again, to see God is a privilege of the saints, who will see Him in glory for all eternity. Of course, to be pure in heart, one must have no thoughts of lust or covetousness. Are you perfectly satisfied with the things that you have? Do you perfectly trust God when trials arise? Do not prejudices affect you? Do you ever indulge in gossip or bearing a grudge?

I don't know of any Christian or for that matter, any non-Christian, who claims to have a heart that's perfectly pure. As a matter of fact it's impossible. That's why the Old Adam comes up with this seductive line: "I'm only human, and I do pretty well, after all I could be a lot more impure than I am, I could be more like other people". But listen once again to the Beatitude: **"Blessed are the pure in heart,"** says Jesus. He doesn't say, "Blessed are the purer in heart." If we say or believe that we are pure in heart-or even pure enough in heart, we bear the fact that our hearts are far from pure.

Remember where we started with the Beatitudes, with the common misconception that "If you do these things, then you will be blessed and happy." That's a false teaching, because you must do these things perfectly, all the time, to earn the blessing and enjoy the happiness. Once you examine what these Beatitudes require, you are far more likely to cry out, "Enough of the Beatitudes! They

promise blessing if I do them perfectly, but I cannot. Enough of the Beatitudes! They are far more than I can do or bear.”

And if that is what you cry out, then indeed you are blessed. You are blessed by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, because you have made an honest confession of your sin. You have examined yourself by the unflinching mirror of God's holy Law, and you have concluded that you cannot live up to it. If it is up to you to be meek and merciful and pure, then you are without hope. And this is most certainly true. You now proper view of the Law of God that you cannot do anything to please Him or earn your salvation.

So then woe to you, if you think that you can keep the Beatitudes and thereby achieve holiness. Woe to you, if you think that you have done enough in the way of meekness and mercy and all the rest to earn God's approval and become a saint. For is so you disregard Scripture and are headed for despair. Woe to the one who believes he does a "good enough" job of righteousness to please God.

And woe to me, or any preacher, who preaches God's Holy Law at anything less than its full strength! It's always a temptation to proclaim these Beatitudes as if they are something within your power to do. It's tempting to urge you simply to be meek and humble, merciful and peaceful, promising that you will be happy if you do all these things to the best of your ability. But if that's what I tell you, then I do you a grave disservice. For one thing, I teach you that you can, by your own reason and strength do these things to God's satisfaction. Far worse, if I teach you that you can do it, then I will not teach you that you need a Savior because you can not. Woe to any person who preaches that you can fulfill the Law. You are now prepared to hear about the One who has saved you, who showers these blessings upon you.

III. THE BEATITUDES LIVED FOR YOU!

So, enough of the Beatitudes! At least, enough of this idea that we can become happy and blessed if we do these things well enough. For that shall never happen. No, God grant that, by faith, we agree with His Law and make this blessed confession: ***"I, a poor miserable sinner - justly deserve Thy temporal and eternal punishment."*** Such a confession means that we're ready to hear of the One who has done enough.

Though we cannot fulfill the requirements of these Beatitudes, we by no means shun them. For one thing, we need to know of our sin. For another, these Beatitudes give us the opportunity to rejoice in our Savior, Jesus Christ. He has kept these Beatitudes perfectly. What's more, He has kept them perfectly for you. Listen, marvel, and rejoice.

Jesus says: ***"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*** No one has been poor enough in spirit, except Him (†). Jesus, the Lord God almighty, emptied Himself, taking on our form to serve us. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, taught the sinner, forgave the penitent, and raised the dead. He didn't practice pride or demand service. He served, even to the point of death on the cross. He was poor in spirit enough, that we might have the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Jesus mourned-not just the death of a loved one like Lazarus, but the killing sinfulness of man. He mourned for Jerusalem and her inhabitants that would not repent. Furthermore, He paid the price for sin upon the cross, that our mourning might be turned into joy. Jesus did more than mourn; He saved us from eternal mourning. He mourned enough, that we would be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Remember, meekness is power under control, used in service to others. Jesus didn't use His omnipotent power for His own profit, but in service to others. He cured diseases, multiplied bread and fish, and cast demons out of the possessed. When beaten and spat upon by sinners, He didn't wipe them out with a single word;

meekly, the all-powerful Son of God allowed Himself to be crucified. He has been meek enough, so that you might be delivered to heaven.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Remember the Temptation of Christ in the wilderness. Jesus suffered hunger rather than listen to the devil's temptations and turn stones into bread. He hungered enough for your righteousness there, that you might be filled with forgiveness. Remember the words from Jesus parched lips near His death, **"I thirst."** He has thirsted and died on that cross enough, that you might be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." To be merciful is not to give an evildoer what he deserves. Again, the Lord Jesus didn't destroy those who arrested Him, who blasphemed Him, who crucified and mocked Him. He could have; He could have come down from the cross, He could have saved Himself and utterly destroyed them. Instead of giving them what they deserved, He spared them; He died for them, to give sinners what they do not deserve: **forgiveness!** Instead of condemning you, He forgives you. He has been merciful enough, so that He might give mercy to you forever.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Of Jesus, Hebrews 4:15 declares, **"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."** Jesus was perfectly pure in heart! **Why?** Hebrews 4:15 tells us that because He was without sin, we can go before His throne of grace with confidence. Jesus has been pure in heart enough so that you might see God in glory forever.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." The Lord Jesus Christ made peace. He made peace between man and God by breaking down the wall of separation between the two (Eph. 2:14), by removing the sin that kept us from God's presence. He has made enough peace so that you are sons of God and heirs of heaven.

Do you see? We cannot keep the Beatitudes. They only show us how deep and dark is our sin. But look what happens when we look at the Beatitudes through Christ: See your salvation! He has fulfilled the Beatitudes enough. He has done these things perfectly, and He has done them for you. The great exchange has taken place. Jesus has taken away your sins at the (†) cross! He has suffered God's wrath for your failures, your failures to be poor in spirit, meek, merciful and all the rest. But in taking away your sins, He has not left you with nothing; instead, He has given you the credit for His obedience, for His keeping of the Beatitudes. Because He has done so, God the Father looks upon you and says, "I see no sin, because My Son has taken it all away. In you now I see one who is poor in spirit, mournful and meek, earnest for righteousness – holy. I see Jesus!

How odd it seems at first: We do not become holy because of how well we fulfill the Beatitudes. Rather, we are made holy because, by the work of the Spirit, we confess that we cannot keep them as we ought. And if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This is why the life of the Christian is one of repentance continually confessing our sins, and rejoicing in what Jesus has done that we could not. And how He has covered us with Himself in Holy Baptism, you receive credit for Jesus' work.

What does it take to be a saint? To be without sin! And so you are not a saint by your work, for it is never enough. But you are by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. He has done the work and paid the price to make you holy. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it gives me great joy to proclaim how blessed you are. For you are His saints: Because you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and by the blood of Jesus. And you are Holy in Him (†). For Jesus sake and in Jesus name, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
AMEN.