

Matthew 5:3-10

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed 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.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Tonight is the Super Bowl and no doubt there are people out there who are going to have to work and not be able to watch the game. Some of them might not want to hear the outcome, so they'll leave work without talking to anyone, ride home without looking at their phone or turning on the radio, carefully find the game on their DVR with the volume muted so that they don't inadvertently hear the score on a different channel. Because if they find out how it ends before they watch it, the game will be spoiled.

Sometimes though it's nice to know how something ends beforehand. I saw the movie “Lone Survivor” when it came out a few years ago. I had read the book and knew going into the movie how it would end, but so does everyone else since the title pretty much gives it away. It was a tough movie to watch, and had I not known that at least one person survives, it would have been much harder. While the team of Navy Seals was ambushed, through all the gunfire, grenades and helicopter crashes, no matter how bad it got, you knew that one would survive.

Or think of the biblical story of Joseph. Even though he was sold into slavery by his own brothers, and as a slave was thrown into prison because of lies, and then stayed in prison for years, we can read all that without worrying or feeling too sorry for Joseph because we know how it ends. He was elevated to 2nd in command over all Egypt, and was God's tool to preserve the promise of the Savior.

Or take Jesus. We can watch him be betrayed by a friend, beaten by the Romans, and even crucified by his own people, not in the desperation of those first disciples — because we know how it all ends. Jesus rose on the third day.

The words before us this morning, called the beatitudes, might be hard at first reading for us to swallow. They strike us as being depressing and loathsome for the followers of Jesus. **Blessed are the poor in spirit? those who mourn? Blessed are the meek, those who hunger for righteousness? Blessed are the merciful? the pure in heart? The peacemakers? Blessed are those who are persecuted???**

No, no, no. That doesn't make any sense. What we want it to say, what *we* would have said was “blessed are the rich. Blessed are those who are happy all the time! Blessed are those who have so much going for them that they don't have to worry about anything! Blessed are the successful. Blessed are the Peacemakers? Not if it costs me anything. And how can anyone who is persecuted be called blessed? It doesn't seem to fit does it? It's upside down. In Jesus' world it's down is up and up is down. He calls “blessed” people that the world would call unlucky or even cursed!

It seems upside down to us because we are surrounded by a world where the here and now is more important than the then and there. Blessings are things that make me happy today. Blessings satisfy my sinful nature's desire of instant gratification, no matter the damage to my faith. Blessings are things we can always see and always realize right away as something *good*. But sometimes blessings come in the form of a fall or accident that reveals a hidden illness. Sometimes blessings come in the form of difficult trials and tribulations that take us to the brink, but that also lead us to put our trust in God rather than our possessions, paychecks, and personal health.

But it is during times like these that the devil uses the world and tempts our sinful nature to get us to think that everything is upside down, that things are out of whack, that things are not going to work out. And usually the thing that seems most out of whack is God and his way of doing things. And why wouldn't it? That's the devil's plan - to get us to turn from God, to drive us away from him by using the things in our lives that we don't like, to say things like, “I just can't believe in a God like that...” so that hopefully, for the devil that is, we will join him for eternity in hell.

And it always makes me cringe when I hear someone answer these doubts with, “Don't worry, God's blessings will come again,” as if somehow they've stopped. “Brighter days are ahead,” others will say, as if God is holding out on us today. Or, “Don't worry, you're just storing up *your* blessings in heaven,” as if God isn't blessing us right now.

He is, even if we can't always see it, as Jesus points out to us today.

“Blessed *are* the poor in spirit, blessed *are* those who mourn, blessed *are* the meek, blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed *are* the merciful, blessed *are* the pure in heart, blessed *are* the peacemakers, blessed *are* those who are persecuted.

Jesus can talk this way because *he knows the ending*. He knows how this world and everything in it will end. Wealth and riches, fame and success are all nice, but in the end it will all be wiped away, gone for eternity, and everyone whose hope is in these things will be condemned to eternal death.

Jesus already knows the ending. He knows what we need for it. First, a perfect life before the almighty God. On our own we don't have it. We prove ourselves sinners each and every day from birth to death. And so Jesus came to live it for us, in our place. From birth to death he was perfect, without a single spot, without a single blemish on his record. It's ours! What a blessing! Every single day of sin has been replaced with everyone one of his days of perfection!

Second, Jesus knew that we needed our sins washed away. So he took that perfect life that he had lived so carefully, and laid it down to pay the price our sins deserved. He laid there as nails were pounded into his hands and feet for our sins, as he cried out to his Father who had separated himself from his one and only Son because of our sins. What a blessing! Every single sin of ours was laid on Jesus, and for every single sin Jesus paid the price in full.

Third, Jesus has given us a sure and certain guarantee when it comes how things will end. *There in the ground, his body lay, light of the world he came to save, then bursting forth in glorious day, up from the grave he rose again.* We confess this truth every Sunday in the creed: Died *and was buried*. Just like you and I will be one day, buried in the ground. But just like Jesus, at his call on the last day, the end for everyone else, we will burst forth from the grave to life everlasting. Fulfilling Jesus' own words: **Because I live you also will live!**

How blessed we are! Jesus knew the ending and now so do we! When the last day comes, whenever it comes, you and I will stand before God with Jesus' perfect life in one hand, his payment for all our sins in the other. We will receive from God the eternal life prepared for us by Jesus himself.

It's a certain fact that we cling to by faith. How certain? Jesus didn't say that we might be blessed, or even that we will be blessed. He said that we *are* blessed! It's all ours already through faith in Jesus' life and death and resurrection for our salvation!

So we are blessed when we are poor in spirit — the Kingdom of God is ours. We are blessed when we mourn — we have the ultimate comfort, Jesus our Savior and his promise of eternal life for all who believe. We are blessed when we are meek, because we aren't out anything — God has won for us all things. We are blessed when we strive with thankful hearts to be faithful to God, to be righteous in his sight. On good days and bad, through Word and Sacrament we are filled. We are blessed when we show mercy — it grows out of the unfathomable mercy we've already been shown by God himself. On and on the blessings flow, too many to list. To immense to comprehend — the grace, mercy, and peace of our God wrapped up in the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. What more could you want?

Well, hmpf... The world looks at this list before us and sees a bunch of empty holes. Being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting for fulfillment and meaning. And no matter how hard we try, these are holes that can't be filled in this life, not with anything that will last. You can be the smartest, richest, healthiest, person in the world. You could be the nicest, doing all sorts of wonderful things for everyone around you. You could put every one else first, meeting their needs before your own every day of your life. And if you don't have Christ, if your hope is built on anything but God's love to you in Jesus, you'll spend an eternity in hell. But for us who know Christ, we are blessed. These are not holes that cannot be filled. There is no emptiness. No, these are opportunities where God comes to us in our lives and meets all our needs and fills them all, today and tomorrow, yes, but especially into eternity.

So at first glance, these words of Jesus can leave us wondering what he really meant. As we live out our days, as this world keeps rolling on, knowing the ending makes all the difference. We are blessed beyond each and every treasure and tragedy that this world can bring to our door.

May we go back to these words often for comfort and confidence when this world gets us down, when life...and death gets us down. May we be reminded again and again that no matter what happens today or tomorrow, we know the ending already. Eternal life with God and our Savior and all

the saints who have gone before awaits. May we be strengthened to live
blessed lives, because truly, blessed is what we are, in Jesus' name, Amen!