

The Heart of the Gospel 01/29/22

Matthew 5:1-12

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught 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 receive mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. 10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Our Scripture for today is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. It is a great discourse at the heart of the gospel as Jesus provides insight into the law. The Beatitudes focus on present situations and future ethics. The promises of future glory go to those that are hurting in the present. They are blessed because God reverses the misfortunes of the people that are suffering from oppression and injustice and brings justice to the righteous.

Jesus teaches a moral life where righteousness exceeds the actions and lessons of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus offers hope to those that have lost hope. The poor in spirit are those that are the victims of oppression. They are despised by those with self righteous pride and aggression. Those who mourn are sad. However, they mourn as God does because the mourning is over the wickedness of humanity – the shame of the streets, greed of the market, and violence of the nations. The meek are not aggressive and seek peace while the proud falsely claim righteousness. The Jews had the pride of heritage and the Romans had the pride of power. However, the children of God are watched over by God and desire righteousness which is what God desires. As the wicked prosper and use their power to oppress and go against the will of God, Jesus promises comfort for those that go with the will of God. The merciful respond with loving kindness while the Pharisees are harsh, self righteous, and cruel. The pure in heart are not morally perfect, none of us are, but they strive to be right with God and try to do the will of God. Jesus repeatedly extends a call for peace, and the peacemakers seek it and pursue it. Those who seek peace will love their enemies and walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Those that are persecuted for righteousness are faced with the same reality of the prophets that were persecuted. And those that persecute the righteous go against God.

The immediate lesson to the audience is how the divine way is not only opposite of the human way but is much better for everyone. The human way of power and oppression not only takes advantage of others but physically, emotionally, and spiritually hurts others, and this goes against God. The lesson shows how the people that are down and out may be helpless or feel hopeless at the moment, but God has not given up on them. The immediate lesson that Jesus delivers to hurting people is that God has not given up on them. People who have been denied by the powerful elite will get their reward. The future glory is a reversal of fortunes as God alleviates the suffering that is

caused by humans. Jesus presents a vision for those that are wronged in society – they are blessed. Victims of unfortunate circumstances struggle now with pain and poverty but their reward is coming for them in the future.

The contemporary lesson for us is our response – the response of the individual within the realm of a wayward society. Whereas the multitudes of people hear the message from Jesus, like the message, and even say amen. But few are disciples and actually obey the teachings of Jesus. The call is to a greater degree of righteousness; to not only follow what Jesus said to but to teach others. Disciples are called to do more than just lead others to believe and accept Jesus. Disciples are called to teach others to follow Jesus. Disciples are a devoted few in a wayward society that is complacent in its faith and continues to commit sins against humanity. We are to be agents of God's blessings by showing mercy as advocates to alleviate suffering. Our devotion is to be genuine and not for show. We are to be active agents of peace. We are to live by the rule of God such as justice, mercy, righteousness, and peace. Scripture reveals the secret of happiness, success, and harmony for the individual and the whole of humanity. You do not escape the harsh realities of life, but receive a blessing - hope in a promise of the kingdom of God that is fulfilled in Christ.

The most repeated lessons of the Bible are the consequences of going against God. It is inevitable whenever you go against God you are doomed to destruction by the forces of hate, anger, and evil. The Bible emphasizes that God's servants remain true. Jesus expects followers to put his teachings into practice. You are a disciple. You are a person that takes the place of one of the disciples of history. Disciples are committed to live according to teachings of Jesus which means surrendering completely to the Lord. The Beatitudes are a prescription for spiritual happiness. Jesus does not promise comfort and success. Jesus provides assurance in the midst of pain and oppression and flips conventional expectations as God blesses those on the fringes of society.