

2/9/2020 – Psalm 1, Matthew 5:1-12, (48-48, Luke 6:17) N.T. pg. 1378, Genesis 12: 1-2-3 O.T. pg. 15 – “Blessed”

“Blessed are,” the beatitudes promise. But do all the beatitudes describe experiences of blessedness to us? Although being blessed results in the states of the kingdom of heaven, comfort, inheritance, & reward, would any of us seek the original conditions of mourning or being poor in spirit, meek, hungry & thirsty, or persecuted to be blessed? These experiences and original conditions of the most of the beatitudes are not what we want, are they?

Now, we may desire to be merciful, pure in heart, & peacemakers, to be shown mercy, see God, & be called children of God. However, are we truly able to be merciful, pure in heart, & peacemakers? Maybe we can be merciful & peacemakers... sometimes, but certainly not always. Further, the condition at the very center of the beatitudes of being pure of heart is impossible. None of us are pure of heart. Scripture states that human hearts are inclined toward evil,

So, what is God’s word to us in the words of the “beatitudes.” Must be important. After all, this the 1st passage in Jesus’ famous sermon on the mount. Prior to this, as an itinerant rabbi, Jesus simply preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” But when the crowd gathers on a mountainside to hear him, he sits down & preaches a lengthy sermon, recorded in the stretch all the way from Matthew 5 thru 7 & roughly paralleled in Luke 6. So the beatitudes must important. Importance demonstrated, too, because Jesus strategically preached in natural amphitheater in order for crowds to be able to hear. I heard fisherman on boat in middle of lake.

Now to glean God’s word for us from the mountain in Matthew & along the level of the sea in Luke, we need to hear as the people heard. To know at least some of what they knew. To understand at least in part what they understood, by the words “blessed are.” The “beatitudes,” as we call them, are simply a collection of “blessed are” statements. The people who gathered knew that there are other “blessed are” statements in scripture, such as the one that begins Psalm 1, used as our call to worship. “Blessed are” statements are common in wisdom literature, like psalms & proverbs, but they are found in other areas of Scripture, too. Consider God’s promise & call to Abram, which the people who gathered along the sea knew & that we read in portion in both Chinese & English on Epiphany. Let’s read the blessing printed in the bulletin in English together again, from Genesis 12:2-3: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.”

Abram’s blessing also directs us to a latter portion of Jesus’ sermon on the mount concerning enemies at the end of Matthew 5 & immediately following the “woes,” a parallel to the “beatitudes” in Luke. Let us read together from the bulletin: Luke 6:27-28: “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” We did this as a Sunday school exercise a few weeks ago.

Jesus’ instruction in the sermon on the mount & the level along the sea regarding enemies is not new news to the people gathered nor should it be to us. They & we have heard it in God’s blessing to Abram. However, let’s consider the current circumstances of those in the Middle East, those who are heirs of Abraham, both Jew & Arab. Question is, are Abraham’s

descendants & enemies of each other a blessing to each other now? But what of us? Do we bless or curse our enemies? On my trip, I passed thru Pikeville, KY the home of the McCoys, who lived across the border from Logan County WV, where their relatives & still known arch enemies lived. They are who? Yes, the Hatfields. An American feud from the same century in which our church was founded notoriously also lives on in film & TV, even in cartoons. The history of the feuding family still continues today in driving tours, brochures, a visitor center, and souvenirs, like books, cookbooks, DVDs, cards, t-shirts, keychains, magnets, mugs, and, perhaps pun intended, shot glasses! We must admit that feuds between enemies continue all around the world.

So, our immediate response regarding blessing enemies may be, but why should we bless our enemies, when they don't deserve to be blessed! Why is because God in his word directs us to do so, all the way back to Abram and according to the beatitudes. When we bless, we will be blessed. As for enemies not deserving to be blessed, this may be true. But if we ask whether or not we deserve to be blessed, we get the same answer. No one deserves to be blessed. Being blessed occurs thru grace, not merit. Even more, being blessed is based on the dispenser of grace. And the one who dispenses grace is the only one, unlike us, who is wholly pure and righteous and always merciful, referring to conditions and results in the beatitudes. He is not just a peacemaker, but Jesus is the prince of peace. Yet Jesus did not receive mercy or peace from us. He is the one who was persecuted, who suffered and died, for us. So, when we are persecuted because of him, we are to rejoice and be glad. We are to rejoice and be glad, because of him, because of his kingdom, his comfort, his righteousness, his mercy, his purity, his peace, and his sacrifice for us! We receive not just persecution, but all the good blessings we have are because of him. All is grace.

Now finally the answer to the question: what exactly does it mean to be blessed? To be blessed means to be consecrated, to be set apart for a holy purpose. True that we are not pure of heart. But when we accept Christ as the Lord of our life: our heart, mind, soul, & strength, as Lord of our entire being, he purifies our heart. He saves our hearts, which are not pure, but inclined to evil and wickedness. To be blessed is to be turned over to Christ, to be purposed for his purpose, the purpose of his kingdom, realizing that he supplies more to us than our own desires & needs. His grace is sufficient. In fact, more than sufficient. And his father, now our father to whom we pray, is a good father. There is nothing we lack, when we are blessed by & turned over to God.

So, now perhaps we can pray for our enemies to be blessed, too. Pray for all others, in fact, to likewise be turned over to God. For God to have his way with all of us. For when our enemies choose to accept such a blessing, there can be, not just forgiveness in grace, but even reconciliation, restoration and healing of relationships and of all creation. The kingdom of heaven can come on earth. As Jesus taught us to pray to Our Father in the sermon on the mount: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is heaven."

Blessed are you. Blessed am I. Blessed be our enemies. May all be consecrated to the Lord Jesus, gracious and good Lord of all . Amen.