

## “Blessed you are if...” Matthew 5:1-12

**Seeing the crowds, he 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.”**

Today for our meditations we have a real treat. One of the most famous passages in the whole Bible. The Sermon on the Mount. The first opening sentences in Jesus’ most famous address. Perhaps we could say that this is the most famous address ever. So much is written about it. It has been debated so much.

But still, it is hard to grasp just how radical Jesus’ message is. It would not be an overstatement to say that with these opening verses Jesus challenges everything that we hold dear. He challenges the very foundations of how we perceive this life.

We could again use the same metaphor of “glasses” to describe what He is doing. He is stripping us of our old worldly “glasses” and He is giving us new ones, made so that we can begin to see this world as it is, as our God and Father sees it.

Now, let’s do a little test, how would we finish this sentence. “Blessed you are if...”. How would you finish it? ... .. We can probably easily come up with quite a few ways of how people, ourselves including, understand blessings.

And celebrating the Harvest Festival is a fitting time to reflect on different sorts of blessings. You are blessed if ... you have a good harvest. You are blessed if ... you are healthy. You are blessed if ... you are wealthy. You are blessed if ... you are happy. You are blessed if you have a good job.

You are blessed if you have a good marriage, a good family. You are blessed if you have children, and grandchildren. You are double blessed if you have good children. You are blessed if you are in control of your life, if things happen the way you want. You are blessed if you live in peace with everyone. And so on...

I guess we would all agree that we think and speak about these things as blessings. We use it in our language: “He or she is so blessed...”, and then we may add some of the good things that we mentioned above.

And surely, there is nothing wrong with saying that, or thinking this way. All the above-mentioned things are gifts of our generous God, and we can call them God's blessings, and it would be great if more people actually acknowledged that.

If we were asked to arrange these blessings according to their importance for us, our answers probably would differ, and that is okay too. But then comes Jesus... and re-arranges everything, saying somethings unexpected.

He pulls our old "glasses" off and turns our attention to something entirely different. He turns upside down our understating about what we should consider as the most important blessings of our God. And here it comes...

"Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the lowly... 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 for righteousness' sake..."

Okay, Jesus, what is this all about? Can you help us to understand? This doesn't sound too good. First four of beatitudes speak about – "being poor in spirit... mourning... being lowly... thirsting for righteousness...". I am not sure that I want anything to do with those experiences. And to call such things blessings?!

And then the next four speak about "being merciful, and pure in heart, being a peacemaker and being persecuted...". Did you have these things on your list of how you understand what it means to be blessed? But that is it, this is Jesus' list.

Explain it to us, Jesus! And He does, He uses the best theologians, He enlightens them with His Spirit, so that we can all be encouraged by His message. So that we all can get these new and correct "glasses" and be able to see things as they are.

Pronouncing all these blessings Jesus doesn't speak about some abstract people. He speaks about us, about you, about those who have responded to His invitation to follow Him. These are not some commands that we need to keep. Jesus simply describes the reality of our lives.

It begins with being in Jesus' presence, with sitting at His feet and listening to His life-changing and life-giving words. Just as those many brothers and sisters did when Jesus spoke those words sitting on the Mount. Just as we do it now.

The first four beatitudes speak about our situation. We are the poor in spirit, when we realize that there is nothing that we haven't received, that there is nothing that we can bring to our God. That we daily live only by His grace, by His generosity.

We are those who mourn. For the closer we are to our Lord, the clearer we see the evil and brokenness of this world. In ourselves, in our loved ones, in people and society around it. It is daunting, it can be depressing. We may want to turn it off.

We are the lowly. Those who realize that we are not in control. We don't rely on our strength or wisdom, or connections, or abilities, we rely on the Lord, who daily opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing, He is our rock and our shield.

We are the ones, who hunger and thirst for righteousness. The light of Christ changes the way we see the world and suddenly we see how much unrighteousness, how much selfishness, how much injustice is all around us.

And we can't change all of it, we can't change this world, regardless of how much we try. Thus, we hunger and thirst for the day when God's righteousness will be restored. This is us, dear brothers and sisters, that Jesus is speaking about.

This is our situation. And to us Jesus says these wonderful words of encouragement and hope. Blessed you are for yours is the kingdom of heaven... for you shall be comforted... for you shall inherit the earth... for you shall be satisfied.

Blessed you are indeed, for all of this means that you are the people of God, you are the heirs of His Kingdom, and your God and Father assures you that, what you long for, will be given to you. For these are not simply our human longing, they are created by the Holy Spirit who points us to the better future... and in this future, all these longing will be satisfied. By Jesus Himself.

The other four beatitudes speak about the fruits of the Holy Spirit in us and what it means for us as the end of this age and the Last Day draws closer. Again, these are not instructions that we need to follow. Jesus describe what happens with us, when we respond to His invitation, when we stay with Him, when we listen to Him.

His words are Spirit and life. They change us, they make us a new creation. We are by no means finished products, but if we are with Jesus, this is what happens with us. His grace and mercy enable us to be merciful.

His unconditional forgiveness purifies our hearts. The divine peace that He brings to us, overflows into our lives, and we become messengers of His peace, doing our little part into spreading His peace in this troubled world.

And when we do that, when we go in Jesus' name, when we want to extend His wonderful blessings to others, you know what happens – often we are rejected, we can sense that our message is not welcomed, and sometimes we can face even persecution. This is what Christian life is like. This is what the Spirit does in us.

And this is why we are blessed. For when the Last Day comes, we shall receive mercy, and when the life in this age is over, we shall see God, and not only that, but we shall be called sons of God, for ours is the kingdom of heaven.

As it was said earlier, many of these experiences don't immediately sound like blessings to us, so Jesus goes ahead and reiterates it once more, just to assure us that if this is what you experience, then you are indeed in the greatest company.

“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.”

Rejoice and be glad! Your reward is great! And you are in the same boat with all the great saints of old, with the prophets and the apostles. For that is exactly how they experienced the greatest of God's blessings – His presence, His fellowships.

These first sentences of the Sermon on the Mount indeed help us to see everything differently. Many of our Christian experiences, which our old selfish self doesn't enjoy, are actually signs of God's favour and His greatest blessings.

Blessed you are if you desire to follow Jesus, to be with Him, to live for Him. Blessed you are if your heart is full of pain for people around you, if you desire to bring them to Jesus, if you are rejected and suffer because you want to remain faithful to Jesus. Simply put – blessed you are if you are a Christian.

Concluding I will share some information from pastors' life, from our struggles. We also want to be blessed. And too often we have our own ideas about what God's blessings are supposed to look like. So, what do we want, what do we long for?

We want to see the results of our ministry. We want to see how the Holy Spirit changes hearts and lives. We want to see how more and more of our fellow brothers and sisters are drawn closer into the fellowship with the Father and the Son, how they thirst to learn more, hear more, to live for Him and to participate in His mission.

But it doesn't happen that often. Are we blessed or not? Has our Lord turned His back to us? Perhaps we are not faithful enough? Perhaps our teaching and preaching is not good enough? Are we blessed or not, is our ministry blessed or not?

The answer is found in this radically new way of defining what blessings are – to be with Jesus, to listen to Him, to read and meditate upon His Word, to be able to share the Gospel with others, to grow in God's wisdom and to experience His joy.

To be filled with the Holy Spirit, to be criticized for being too focused on the Word of God, for teaching too much... and so on. These are true blessings in the life of every pastor. Of course, it is not how we naturally think according to our old and selfish nature. This is not how I naturally think – just give me more glory!

But ... the Lord gently answers, not only to pastors, but to all of us: “My grace is sufficient for you... and blessed you are if I am with you.” And blessed you are – for the Triune God is with you, and will be with you till the end of this age. Amen.