

Blessed are You!

When I was confirmed in 8th grade way back in the day, my mother organized a party for all the relatives, as was the custom. She asked her mother, who lived close to a very good bakery, to take care of the cake. Grandma brought the cake. It was great. It said, in frosting, “God Bless You, Martin.” That’s a great message. Yet, all afternoon, people kept asking me if I sneezed. (“God bless you.”) We use the word “blessed” in different ways. What does it mean here in Luke 6 when Jesus says that we are blessed? How does someone become blessed? Why did Jesus keep repeating, Blessed are you?

I was once talking with an unbeliever. It was a calm chat. I asked him his impression of Christianity. He said that Christianity was misleading and contradictory. When I asked why he had that impression, he pointed to this section where Jesus said that those who mourn are blessed. (I was surprised he knew any of the Bible.) He explained that a lot of people mourn, or are sad, and it's getting better. God was not fulfilling his promise. It's not surprising that an unbeliever would think of the word “blessed” from an earthly perspective. We do the same thing. If the surgery goes well, we say, “God blessed me.” But what if the surgery does not go well? If someone inherits \$1 million, people say he is blessed. In reality, all that money might cause him all sorts of troubles. It is possible to be blessed and not always feel happy. God will bless his children even if their lives are difficult in this sin-ruined world.

Considering that Jesus did not come to make a heaven on earth, nor to provide every community with a free grocery store or free health care, nor to stop all nations from fighting so there will be peace on earth – considering that Jesus did not come to be an earthly Savior but a spiritual Savior from sin and death, let’s look at these verses from a spiritual point of view.

Verse 20, “**Blessed are you who mourn.**” Spiritually, those who mourn are those who are sorry for their sins. They look to God for salvation and he forgives them as they enjoy “**the kingdom God.**” God’s kingdom is not a castle on the clouds. It is living in the confidence of faith. We enjoy God’s love and forgiveness. Such a person is blessed. He is at peace with

God even if he does not have any retirement savings or fancy cars or luxurious houses.

Verse 21, “**Blessed are you who hunger**” refers to believers who crave, desire, seek to be right with God. They are hungry for God’s decree of “not guilty.” They seek salvation from God. God sees their faith (which he gave them) and satisfies their spiritual hunger. Such people are blessed even if they struggle with all sorts of health problems.

Verse 21, “**Blessed are you who weep now**” are, again, those who are sorry for their sins. When they hear the message of forgiveness and eternal life, they laugh for joy. Just think of how we sing, “Joy to the World,” at Christmas. We are joyful even though everything might not be great in our lives at the moment.

Verses 22,23, “**Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.**” Doesn’t that sound lousy – to be hated, excluded, insulted, rejected. That happens every day as people pick on you for your faith at work, or school, or your neighborhood. I especially think of the murder and abuse believers are experiencing in northern Africa these days. Yet Jesus says, “**Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.**” Times WILL be tough on this earth, but we can look forward to when everything will be perfect all the time in heaven.

Really, I feel sorry for the fellow who has that perfect life – great health, great job, overachieving family, early retirement as he travels around the world, etc. But without any difficulties, he never realizes that this world is truly broken and that he needs a Savior. He’s never driven to his knees to pray, “Why God? Lord, have mercy.” He’s not really blessed. We need to look into our mirror and ask if we really are blessed. Just being in church doesn’t make us blessed. Does Jesus really have first place in our hearts and lives? Does he mean more to us than anything or anyone else? As one of my professors would often say, “God will put up with a lot of things, but second place is not one of them.” Do people realize by your lifestyle and words and that you are a kind and caring Christian, or do they get the impression that we are cruel as we bark at them for what they do wrong and we tell them that they should be more like us? If we reviewed the 10 commandments in detail, we would find that all of us regularly break all of them in some way or another. Instead of being

blessed, we could expect God to curse us, to separate us from himself forever in hell.

That's why Jesus shouted from the cross (Mark 15:34), "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**" With those words, Jesus was letting us know that he was being cursed. He was separated from God and his blessings. He was experiencing the reality of hell. Jesus let himself be cursed so that he could take your place. You and I deserve to be cursed, but Jesus was cursed for us. Jesus was cursed so that you would not be cursed. Jesus was cursed so that you could be blessed. Jesus gave you the holiness that he demands of us. Even though we were born in sin and mess up all day every day, Jesus declares you to be blessed. And his resurrection from the dead is proof that there is a glorious life after death waiting for us.

By God's grace you are blessed. If someone could put on spiritual glasses and look at you, they would see you shining, healthy, strong, happy, joyful, outstanding, brilliant, excellent in every way. But there are no such things as spiritual glasses. When people look at you, they see people who deal with pain every day, who struggle with finances, who are tired, who have old cars and older houses, who have to deal with irritable relatives, who struggle with a strained marriage, who face so many issues that it's a constant struggle to keep from sliding into a pit of depression and despair. That's what people often see when they look at you. But that is not your reality.

The Holy Christian Church – the gathering of all believers – is often called the Invisible Church. You can not see who believers are by looking at outward things. Only the Lord can see the heart. Only the Lord can tell if someone is a believer or not. When the end of the world comes, however, when this world as we know it ceases to exist, then there will not be an invisible church anymore. All people, believers and unbelievers, will see who are standing with God and who aren't.

I really, really enjoy watching videos of soldiers returning home. You've probably seen such videos. I like searching for them on YouTube. They make me happy. A dad who served overseas for a year steps into his daughter's 3rd grade classroom. She instantly runs to him as she cries tears of joy and jumps into his arms. A husband who served overseas for over a year surprises his wife at her job. With tears of joy, she drops whatever she's holding and collapses in his arms. I have to wipe away tears from my own eyes and I don't even know the people. That's a hint

of what heaven will be. There are loved ones who have died and are waiting to greet me in heaven. Who are you looking forward to seeing again – a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, a child, a parent, a grandchild, grandparents, a friend, etc. Jesus says, "**Blessed are you.**" Then and there, everything will be perfect and pleasant forever. Jesus did more for you than any soldier or relative or loved one. For as happy as we'll be to see our loved ones, we'll be even happier to see Jesus. As you hug him and tears drip down your cheeks, Jesus will wipe those tears aside as he looks you in the eye and says, "Welcome home. You made it. **Blessed are you.**" Amen.