

Matt 5:1 sermon on the mount
Title: "Blessed are you"

In our Gospel lesson from Matt are the famous "Beatitudes." The words of the Beatitudes are known by both Christians and non. Blessed are the poor.... Blessed are the hungry... Blessed are those who weep...

Trivia time! The word "Beatitudes" comes from the Latin translation of the bible. It means fortunate or happy.

Jesus' message? "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Words of encouragement for the depressed... Words of comfort for those suffering,

The Beatitudes were an astounding revelation. You'll notice it does NOT say blessed are the rich blessed are the smart blessed are the beautiful. Rather it says blessed are **the poor** blessed are **those who are hungry** blessed are those who **weep....** This was practically the opposite of what the Pharisees and teachers of the law taught. People from all over Judea flocked to hear this message and understand. People flocked from all over to receive this message of Hope. You see, many of the people congregating around Jesus were the outcasts, the poor, the unclean. Many had done things which made them rejects in the Jewish society. Many were told by the religious leaders that the reason they suffered... the reason they were poor was because they were sinners or at best because their parents had sinned, and they were suffering for the sins of their parents. You suffer because you deserve it! You suffer because God is punishing you. At least, this is what the Jewish leaders were teaching.

However, here before them was a great Rabbi... a teacher, Jesus of Nazareth, who did not teach the same ideas like the teachers of the law. Here was a great Rabbi, who taught a different message. And what a message He had! Instead of what the teachers of the law were saying... this Rabbi, Jesus, said "You who are suffering, you who are poor, you who are hungry, you who are weeping, you are not the marginal people of God. You are not being punished. Rather, God loves you. You are blessed! You are blessed because you won't be like this forever. God has promised that He will make things all right again in a new kingdom, and YOU will be part of that new kingdom. What a powerful message. What a blessed message for those who had given up on the idea that God actually cared about them. What a blessing it was for them, the message that "God loved them." No wonder they flocked to hear Jesus. No wonder that the majority of people who flocked to hear him were the downtrodden, the outcast the sick the poor etc. They wanted to

hear... they needed to hear... they were dying to hear that “God loved them.” They were dying to hear that because God loved them, and that God had better plans for them.

As St. Paul would later say that the sufferings of this world are incomparable to the richness we shall experience in Heaven. You who are outcast in this world. You who are sick in this world. You who are poor in this world, you do not suffer because you are being punished. Rather, you are outcast, sick and poor precisely because the treasures of THIS WORLD are not yours. You were made for better things, greater treasures, eternal treasures. So rejoice. You are blessed. Do not be satisfied with the treasures of this world. Do not seek after the treasures of this world. Be outcast by this world... be poor in the eyes of this world,... for greater treasures await you. What a breath of fresh air it was to a people who were choked by the fear of sin, death and judgment, to hear that God loves them God has plans of good for them.

Sad to say, they weren't the only ones who crowded around Jesus. Amongst those who gathered around Jesus were those who did not believe in the free love of God. They had a different view on salvation. There were those who believed that salvation came from following the law. who considered themselves to be “righteous” because THEY followed the law perfectly, or at least they thought they did. They looked to their works to save them. They thought God loved them because of their obedience. They thought they were better than other people, because of their obedience. They thought their obedience they had earned them the right to be part of God's people. And Jesus knew their thoughts. Jesus knew their hearts, and he knew their hearts were darkened.

But also understand... that though He knew their hearts were darkened, He also loved them too. He did not want them to continue to live in their ignorance. In his sermon on the mount, he matches the first blessings, with a list of woes. Each of them warning “Woe.” Woe to those who are rich. Woe to you who are full. Woe to you who laugh now. There were warnings against being satisfied by the things of this world. Woe to those who have received satisfaction, security, joy in the things of this world. Woe to them because it means that they are blind to the eternal treasures promised by God. Woe to them because they think they could earn heaven by their good works.

In fact, Jesus addresses this very issue. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' This saying comes from the fifth commandment... comes from the

Bible... so then no problem, right? But the problem was that the Jewish leaders and teachers of the time had reduced the fifth commandment, to the mere act of one person taking the life of another. As long as they had not physically killed someone, the scribes and Pharisees were very much at peace with themselves in terms of their keeping the law. But Jesus goes on to say "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" With His words Jesus tears down their misconceptions about salvation with the true meaning and intent of the fifth commandment. Jesus more or less says, "I know what you've heard and have been taught, but I'm telling you that the command "not to kill" goes farther than just the physical act. It deals with matters of the heart as well." To be "unjustly angry" with someone is as sinful as actually murdering that individual. Yikes! And by the way... I just read an article from the seminary which says: Because humans are sinful "only God is capable of righteous anger" which means all of OUR anger is "unjust anger" all of OUR anger is a violation of the fifth commandment. all of our anger is sinful. Yikes! Jesus wanted to shake the Pharisees up a bit. "If you think that you are righteous, think again." "If you think that you are acceptable before God because you have followed the letter of the law. "Think again." "Unless you have learned to perfectly control your anger, to perfectly control your lust, to perfectly honor your vows even when your spouse doesn't deserve it, you do not have the obedience which makes you righteous before God. When the Jewish leaders spoke of "obedience to God" they meant one thing. When Jesus spoke of "obedience," He meant something "totally different." The Jews believed in righteousness coming from obedience to the letter of the law Jesus spoke of Obedience to the spirit of the law.

As it turns out, any attempt at being righteous through obedience to the law in any form will always end up in failure. It will always end in failure, not because it is hard, but because, basically, it is our human nature to avoid obedience. For example, in everybody, there is a temptation to break the seventh commandment there is a temptation to steal. that given the right set of circumstances, even the most "righteous" of people will steal. that if the opportunity to steal is very convenient, "I would act upon that temptation." Not only that but many times, the things which keeps us honest is not a desire for righteousness but rather fear.... fear of exposure fear of punishment. An obedience which comes from fear is not the kind of righteousness which God wants. In fact, that is a kind of false obedience, and is simply just another sin. So that is why trying to live by following the law, in any form, always leads to failure. When you try to live by the law, there is a part of every human which tries to get around it. For every human there is a temptation to break the law. For this reason, perfect obedience to God is impossible. It is in our very nature. Do you see "obedience" to God... to

authority as the thing which keeps you from doing what you want to do? That is sin. It is the sin within us which makes us see “freedom” as something which allows us to do what WE want to do, If we see “freedom” this way, obedience becomes a burden. And that is sin.

A rich young ruler once asked Jesus, what did he need to do to be saved, When he asked Jesus this he was actually asking was, “What is the least number of rules I need to follow to be righteous, so I can be free to do “what I want to do: with the rest of my life.” In seeking the letter of the law, he totally missed the spirit of the law. In seeking righteousness through following the law, he totally missed the purpose of the law... the spirit of the law... He saw the Law as a burden, an obstacle to overcome, to achieve righteousness. Jesus tells him the purpose of the commandments... is just the opposite.... the spirit of the law... is summarized in two commandments Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your might and the second is like the first Love your neighbor as yourself. The spirit of the law. was not to be a burden. The spirit of the law sought only two things. Love God Love your neighbor. The spirit of the law, the purpose of the law was love. Love God Love your neighbor. True obedience is to love. Love God... Love your neighbor.

In fact, one of the ways to see “love” in God’s commandments is to convert them to its grace form. What God forbids in law, he commands the opposite in Grace. The opposite of “Though shalt not kill” becomes the Grace commandment Thou shalt protect thy neighbor. The opposite of Thou shalt not commit adultery or thou shalt not lust after other women, or thou shalt not divorce becomes the Grace command “Thou shalt honor thy marriage (and the marriage of others) and keep it sacred” When we practice these, we follow the spirit of the law which is “love.” Love God Love your neighbor as yourself.

Now this means “life will not always be fair.” But God says “that’s okay.” He calls us to love one another, despite unfairness and unequal sharing. He call us to do this because, unfairness is the nature of Grace. Unfairness is the crux of the Gospel message. While we were yet sinners (worthy to be sent to Hell) God sent his son Jesus to die for us, so that we might live. Unfairness is the foundation of love.

So finally.... Blessed are the poor. We are the poor. They are the poor. We are all THE POOR. Do not seek satisfaction from the treasures of this world. Do not seek after the treasures of this world, at all. Be outcast by this world. Be poor in

the eyes of this world, for far greater treasures await you. Blessed are we for we have the love of God. Rejoice. You are blessed by God. Amen