

January 30, 2011

Epiphany 4

"The Savior's Sermon: You Are So Blessed"

MATTHEW 5:1-12

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach 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 be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I grew up in an environment where I often heard people wish each other "Good Luck!" Maybe that was also true of you. "How was your fishing trip? Did you have any luck?" We even heard people say to those going into the hospital for surgery, "Well, good luck!" And then there were the strange words sometimes heard after a near accident on the freeway, "I can sure thank my lucky stars!" Have you ever heard someone say that? The heathen Romans believed that the Fates or luck had more power and control in their lives than the gods. You expect to hear the words "Good luck" from the person running the gambling games in casino, but how strange that sometimes even Christians use this expression "Good luck."

Today we listen to our Lord Jesus speak to us in this famous Sermon on the Mount. He gathers his disciples around him, sits down and then teaches them how blessed they were even when they faced major challenges in their lives. This morning we want you to think about some of the tough challenges that face you in your life. It is a blessing to have these challenges and an even greater blessing to be part of God's kingdom and his love that never fails us.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up to a mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him and he began to teach them. Literally it says that he opened his mouth to teach them. Here we are today and we can actually listen to the words Jesus spoke to his disciples on that day because they are recorded for us by the Holy Spirit in this book we call the Bible. Jesus does not tell us how lucky we are. Instead he speaks to us and tells us how blessed we are.

If you are poor in spirit you are blessed. In fact you are doubly blessed because no matter how poor in spirit you may be, the kingdom of heaven is yours. **"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."** Think of how blessed you are. You are so poor in spirit that you believe there is nothing you have inside yourself to offer God to make him love you and accept you. With David you confess your poverty before your

God, "For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me." You see nothing in yourself, but you see everything in Jesus. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." You are so blessed because even though you see nothing in yourself worthy of God's love, yours in the kingdom of God. You have Jesus as your King who rescued you and made you part of his kingdom of love that never changes and lasts forever. With Paul we joyfully proclaim, "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves."

We are so blessed because even when we mourn we will be comforted. **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."** Do you know what it is like to mourn the loss of someone you dearly love who died in the arms of Jesus their Good Shepherd? You mourn, but you are comforted to know that you will see them again on the resurrection on the last day. Do the problems you see in other people lead you to mourn and be sad? You are comforted every time the words of Psalm 46 come to your mind, "God is our Refuge and Strength, an ever present help in time of trouble."

We are so blessed because the Lord our God works a meekness in our lives similar to that of Jesus. **"Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth."** The words of Philippians 2 come to mind which tells us that our attitude towards other people should be the same of Jesus who humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross. The meek Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples the night before he died also gives us this huge blessing of wanting to stoop down and serve other people out of love for what he has done for us. Along with this blessing comes the further blessing of being able to inherit the earth. It was Jesus who told us, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." I think of how much Bob and Pansy Hoffmeyer enjoyed helping and serving other people with their lives. They knew how Jesus served them. They wanted to serve others. They inherited the earth. They saw life on this earth as something valuable and worthwhile. What a blessing this is.

We are so blessed because the Lord our God puts into our lives this deep hunger and thirst for righteousness. **"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."** Not a day goes by when we are not aware of how inadequate our righteousness is, but then we think of Jesus and his righteousness that has been credited to our account and makes us loved by our God. We say with Isaiah, "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with the garments salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." And now we are blessed to have this intense hunger and longing to live the righteousness life that has been given to us. And we are blessed because Jesus tells us that we will be filled. Think of how many times you are reminded every week of that beautiful white robe of righteousness that you wear. Think of how many times the Lord has filled you with joy as he leads you to live up to what you already are in Christ.

We are so blessed because the Lord our God leads us to be merciful to other people. **"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."** People cried out to Jesus for mercy because they knew he cared about people. Think of how blessed you are. Because Jesus has had mercy on you, he puts into your heart and thoughts and life feelings of mercy and compassion for other people. You care about people. You worry about whether or not they will spend eternity with you in heaven. You pray for people going through problems because your life is filled with mercy for people because you are

a Christian, you want to be like Jesus. You are so blessed to have these feelings of mercy. You are so blessed to know the mercy of God that has been shown to you. Every day we can saw with Peter, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Your God has shown his mercy to you.

We are so blessed because we are pure in heart. **"Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God."** I know my heart is not pure by itself. I read the words of the prophet Jeremiah and I have to honestly admit that this is my heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand?" I hear the Psalmist ask the haunting question, "Who may ascend hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?" The answer comes back, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart." Look at your hands. Are they clean? Look at your heart. By itself it is not clean, but with Jesus it is. Jesus said in John 15 "You are clean through the word I have spoken to you." It was David who prayed in Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart O God." You are so blessed and so am I because our God was working on your heart and my heart to make it clean and pure. We are so blessed because we will see God. Someday we will see God face to face in his glory and we will be pure and enjoy living with people who are pure.

We are so blessed because we get to live our lives on this earth as peace makers. **"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called sons of God."** When we got into fights in our family, my dad would often help us overcome our tension and anger by asking us, "Who will be the peacemaker?" I did not like it when my dad said that. I rebelled against it, but eventually we came around and made peace with a brother or sister. Fighting gave way to feelings of love. Some of the best moments of your life have come when you have stepped to be the peace maker. "I am sorry." "Please forgive me." "I acted rudely." One man once told me he and his wife were blessed when they had a fight because it was always so special to make up.

Oh, don't you love the words of Paul in Colossians 3 that tell us, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful." Peacemakers are doubly blessed because they proclaim to the world not just in words but also in actions, "We are the sons of God." As we will sing in the closing hymn, "Blessed are the saints of God... They are lights upon the earth, Children of a heavenly birth."

We are so blessed even when we are persecuted and insulted for what we believe. **"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who went before you."** You are so blessed when you are persecuted for Jesus and his righteousness. You are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is yours. You love the righteousness Jesus has given you. You love being in his kingdom of love. The world does not understand this. It is totally foreign and strange to them. If we stand up for Jesus, the world will not applaud us and praise us, but it is the greatest honor and privilege anyone could ever have in this life.

We are so blessed because we know our reward in heaven is great, a reward we did not earn by our merits, a reward Jesus earned for us. We are so blessed to know where we

are going when we die, and so privileged to live for this kingdom with every breath of life the Lord give us to us. We are blessed to be part of a long line of great heroes of the faith and took their stand for Jesus and then entered into his glory. What a blessing it has been to sit down with Jesus and hear him tell us how blessed we are. Amen.