

In Light Of Good News

Vineyard Church of Milan

01/16/09

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.

He said: *[read together, responsively...]*

"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely 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 were before you.

Matthew 5:5-12

As we said last week, this is the announcement of the good news of God's kingdom arriving in and through Jesus. *Good news. Full stop, dance a jig, pop the cork, you heard it here first, run and tell your sister, your mother, your brother and get Papa up outta the lay-z-boy, get on your blue suede shoes, go tell it on the mountain, we'll I'll be, no you just didn't, Yes I did, Good news.* The life of God, the blessing of God for everyone who might be considering themselves

counted out. Considering themselves cursed. Considering themselves forever on the outside looking in. As Dallas Willard writes, this is good news for the:

The physically repulsive, those who smell bad, the twisted misshapen, deformed, the too big, too little, too loud,
The bald, the fat and the old,
Those not relentlessly engaged in romance, sex, and fashionably equipped physical activities,

AND

The seriously crushed ones:

The flunk outs and drop outs and burn outs,

The broke and the broken

The drug heads and the divorced

The HIV positive and herpes ridden

The brain damaged, the incurably ill

The barren and the pregnant too many times or at the wrong time

The overemployed, the underemployed, the unemployed, the unemployable

The swindled, the shoved aside, the replaced

The parents with the children living on the street, the children with parents not dying in the "rest" home.

The lonely, the incompetent, the stupid.

The emotionally starved or emotionally dead.

AND

The moral disasters:

the murderers and child molesters.

The brutal and the bigoted.

Drug lords and pornographers.

War criminals and sadists.

Terrorists.

The perverted and the filthy and the filthy rich.

The David Berkowitzs, Jeffrey Dahmers, and Colonel Noriegas.

Something is changing right now. *This blessing* is the case for you in **the kingdom of God that is near, here, approaching, encroaching, present in and**

through Jesus. People just like you, happy in this kingdom. Possessing this kingdom. Inheriting the earth. Satisfied. Experiencing mercy. Seeing God. Revealed as his kids. Rewarded.

And it's all coming to pass though the work Jesus is doing.

It's not do this, or become like this, and then... it's the radical announcement that **God is arriving for accursed people** with blessing and involving himself in (previously) impossible struggles with grace. The question for us is what are we going to do **in light of it?**

Next week, hunger and thirst for righteousness...

What it means to be in this condition, how we can end up there. Along the way we'll talk about how it fits in the flow of the sermon on the mount, the list of beatitudes. And what the good news is for people who find themselves with this kind of ache.

But first, let's pick up where we left off last week **and more specifically address the answer to the question**, *what am I supposed to do in light of Jesus' announcement of good news to the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek? Especially if I'm not one of them*, at least not most of the time.

Well, **that depends** on whether or not you want to be involved in what God's doing in this world or not. On whether you want to cooperate with him or resist him.

If you want to resist him, may I recommend you find someone poor in spirit, in mourning, or meek **and say something along the lines of:** *you know why life isn't working out for you? It's because God is against you. Probably because of some deficit in your character, or because of your sins, or because you haven't been trying hard enough to please him. [different than speaking the truth in love...]*

Truth be told, you don't even need to say it out loud. **All you have to do is**

ignore the poor in spirit, the mourning, and the meek. Don't spend time with them. Don't make friends with them. Don't stand up for them. Don't comfort them. Don't seek to be an agent of blessing to them. Because as someone God is obviously blessing (in that life is working out o.k. for you), **the message will come through loud and clear** that God is on *your* side and wants nothing to do with them.

And don't be surprised if one morning you wake up and find out **the kingdom of God has passed you by in your sleep**, the kingdom of heaven you thought was yours now in the hands of the poor in spirit, the comfort you now realize you desperately need already given away to the mourners, even what you thought was your inheritance now apparently in the possession of the black sheep of the family. [*Scrooge...*]

But if you *do* want to be involved in what God's doing in this world, if you want to cooperate with him and his in-breaking, glorious kingdom, then may I recommend seeking out the poor in spirit, the mourning, and the meek?

Because that's what God is doing. Look for the people in your workplace, your school, your neighborhood, your church who seem to be living under the curse. Who might have reason to think God is against them. And be one reason for them to think that maybe God isn't against them. Through your words, your actions, your very presence. Because God is obviously blessing you, and now you have become a blessing to them, therefore God is blessing them. It's not hard to do the math. It's the kind of math people did with Jesus all the time. *Wow, he's eating with me, and he's the son of God! Wow, he healed me, wow, he touched me, wow, he talked with me, wow, he stood up for me! That must mean...no it can't, but yes, it must mean...God **isn't** against me. God might even be **for** me.*

All sorts of ministries in the church are **opportunities to be cooperating with God in this particular announcement of good news**, and even beyond that, in the realizing of this good news. Take **youth ministry** for example (the struggling teen, Glee)... or **ushering** (man in the wheelchair, the person who recently lost his best friend ...) or **compassion** (so many meek) ...or **children's** ministry (the single

mom, the child of parents who are divorcing) ... or **leading a small group** (the lonely couple)... or **prayer ministry** (the downtrodden, afflicted, demonized person)...

No doubt, **Jesus isn't saying that only** the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, etc. will experience the blessing, the happiness of the kingdom. No, the **blessing is open to all** who put their trust in his announcement of good news, who repent and follow him.

But if you're on the upside of an upside down world, and God's kingdom is coming to turn everything rightside up, well then clinging to the upside is the wrong strategy. **The only path to life is the kind of downward mobility** Jesus demonstrated. He wasn't poor in spirit, a mourner, meek – not in the least! – but **he abandoned his attachments** to his privileged position, and came among those who were poor, mourning, meek, made himself available to them, even took on their suffering... (weeping for Lazarus - John 11:35; like a lamb before slaughter – Matthew 27, Acts 8; my God, my God – Matt 27:46-50, gave up his spirit, suffocated on the cross)

So members of the church, students of Jesus, seekers after life, **what are you going to do?** Some of us are like beggars who've found some bread. Will we try to keep it for ourselves, or **invite every other beggar** we know to the table? Others of us are like connoisseurs who have discovered that the best bread, the bread that truly gives life, that never goes stale, can't be found in exclusive stores or bakeries, but **can only be eaten at a common table** with beggars, prepared by one who looks like a beggar himself, but is in fact the king of kings.

[tell my story, our story...]

[Jesus is our center. The gospel is our message. The bible is our book. Love is our aim. We're infusing our world with the life and love of Jesus, building growing communities of growing disciples, faithfully creating breathing room for the disconnected to connect, the disfavored to find favor, and the discounted to count.]