

Redefining Blessing

Matthew 5:1-12 NAS95 1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and 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 shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

This passage is referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, because of the location of Jesus' teaching venue. Jesus announced a total of nine blessings, each opening with "Blessed are." Jesus is fulfilling the role of Prophet by providing a series of blessings, a word which means "happy." This passage is full of contrasts and surprises, but since many of us are familiar with these verses, the content often loses its shock-factor. The introduction of Jesus as a prophet who blesses contrasts with the usual depiction of the Old Testament prophets who announced a series of curses and woes against those who refused to follow God. Jesus came to announce that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and this is what the kingdom looks like. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the Sermon on the Mount is not a list of new things that people have to do in order to be right with God (shocking?), but rather it is a list of defining qualities of people who have been transformed by God. This passage reveals Jesus' upside-down value system of what is truly blessed.

Jesus redefines the blessed life. In America, we have a subtle (or not so subtle) internal paradigm of "the good life." Think about how these traits contrast how the world defines "the good life" or what the Bible calls blessing. Someone living the blessed life:

1. Is poor in spirit. Any sort of poverty in the world's eyes is seen as an obstacle to overcome, a blight to eradicate. But a poverty of spirit allows one to be humble, leading a person to recognize his/her spiritual need for God.
2. Mourns, meaning that he or she recognizes that this world is not their home and looks to God for comfort.
3. Exhibits gentleness, meaning a Christ-follower doesn't have to be aggressive to get things done because the true identity and validity of one's life is established in Christ's power.
4. Hungers and thirsts for righteousness, meaning he or she prioritizes eternal things over finite and temporary satisfaction in the ways and things of this world.
5. Shows mercy, because he or she was offered mercy, and through the forgiveness received, grace can be extended to others.
6. Is pure in heart, meaning he or she is not entangled with the evil ways of the world. The child of God lives with an undivided heart.
7. Is a peacemaker, not just someone who tries to keep the peace at all cost. They actively seek peaceful solutions even in difficult situations which forces them to rely upon God more deeply.
8. Endures persecution with a vision toward eternity knowing that it is better to suffer than to succumb to the temptation to compromise one's loyalty to the true King.

9. Endures insult because of the proclamation of truth (Word of God) just like happened to the prophets. We are in good company.

In summary, Jesus raised the bar of understanding to show us that righteousness was not a bunch of behaviors that came by trying harder, but rather were qualities of the heart that were only possible to display through God's transforming power. These nine traits are the result of being born from above (John 3:3). Instead of being depressed that we can never be this good, Jesus delivered this sermon in order to invite us into a new way of life. But the invitation can be a bit of a jolt, for our paradigm of blessing does not include poverty, mourning and persecution. We have a lot to learn. And He can teach us.

He is the One who transforms us from the inside out, so that we can reflect His Kingdom's value system.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

How do you respond internally when you read the Sermon on the Mount? Does it feel like another list of impossible feats that you must accomplish in order to win God's favor? Or, have you responded to Jesus' invitation to life in the kingdom (where He is the King of your heart), and the Sermon on the Mount is a reflection of the work that He is doing in your life? If your response is more the former, that this is another list of impossible feats, you can turn to God in prayer and ask Him to give you His life from above and so be born anew.

Take a look at the list of what Jesus' categorizes as "blessing." Which traits has God been working on in your life (whether you had recognized it or not)? How is Jesus inviting you into a new way of life that reflects these Kingdom values?

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