

“Blessed Are You”

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks the Beatitudes to you – and upon hearing His Word, you think to yourself – “That doesn’t sound like me, who is He talking about?” “Am I poor in spirit? Do I mourn? Am I meek? Do I hunger and thirst for righteousness? Am I merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker?”

You ask yourself these questions – but it sounds more like this – “Do I hunger and thirst ENOUGH? Am I pure ENOUGH in heart? Have I been meek and merciful ENOUGH” – and on it goes.

When you make the Lord’s blessing about you, and how you measure up – you’ve taken the blessing out of His hands, and tried to make it your own.

When the Lord says “Blessed are the poor in spirit” – “Blessed are the meek” and “Blessed are the peacemakers” – He’s not laying out certain standards that you must meet in order to receive His blessing. He’s not describing what you must do so that He can, in turn, bless you.

NO, the Lord is simply blessing you – giving you His blessing – and telling you where His blessing leads. And it’s not what you expect – because with Jesus – it’s FIRST to the cross, and then to victory – FIRST to the grave, and then to the resurrection – FIRST to suffering, and then to relief. That is the way of the Blessed One – Jesus Christ.

First, He suffers under Pontius Pilate, is crucified, dies and is buried – then He trumpets His victory in hell, and on earth on the third day, and even now from the right hand of the Father in heaven.

First, He endures the temptations and assaults of the devil, suffers death – and then, in the belly of the grave, our Lord breaks the jaws of death. First His heel is bruised, and then He crushes the serpent’s head. And what looks to be nothing more than a shameful defeat – is His glorious victory.

If this is the way it goes for the Blessed One, Jesus Christ – then shouldn’t you expect His blessing FOR YOU to come in the same way?

There is no Easter Sunday until the Lamb of God's Good Friday sacrifice. There is no salvation by His blood, until He is first covered in His own blood.

And yet, in His suffering and death, in His bloody cross, in the midst of the hatred and scorn and persecution and reviling that He must endure – our Lord is merciful, pure in heart, and the peacemaker.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He opens not His mouth – except to say – “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He does not defend Himself, but trusts the Father to be His sure and certain defense. And to those who curse Him and laugh at Him and mock Him – He answers only with more kindness and blessing.

That's where the Lord's blessing leads YOU. Not “an eye for an eye” – but, “turn the other cheek.” Not “love your neighbor and hate your enemy” – but, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

So, forgive as you have been forgiven – and be merciful just as your heavenly Father is merciful – even if that means you will be cursed and persecuted. Remember, you are not trying to live up to (or earn) the Lord's blessing – rather, you ARE blessed.

And when others hate you and speak all kinds of evil against you, because of Him – then you simply get to bestow the blessing, the mercy, the love, the kindness that our Lord Jesus Christ has already given to you.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you are not alone as you endure this great tribulation. Consider your fellow saints who have endured the cross – saints like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Stephen and Paul, Perpetua and Ignatius – and the Christians in places like North Korea and Somalia who are being persecuted for the sake of Christ.

They show us where the Lord's blessing leads – first to death, then to life – first to martyrdom, then to the crown of righteousness. For these are those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

There are many other saints who do not suffer the martyr's death – but still participated in Christ's cross by making the good confession of the Faith. Saints like Carol Luedders, Bill Umland, and Clifford Schildt – who show us where the Lord leads – from baptism, through temptation, through death and the grave, to the eternal blessing in heaven.

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints – for the same reason that we celebrate at the funeral of one who has died in the Lord. We do not gather to worship the saints – to hold them up as examples of HOW one can be meek, and merciful, and pure ENOUGH to gain the blessing of the Lord.

And neither do we gather at a funeral to eulogize the deceased – to talk about how good a person they were – and thereby, give the impression that if others are good ENOUGH, they too will be worthy to be received into the heavenly kingdom.

Rather, we gather to “speak good words” of Christ – that HE has suffered all, even death – in order that He might bless us with His righteousness, His worthiness, and His life. That is where His blessing leads us – through death, into life everlasting.

The Lord gathers you to Himself today – you whom the world reviles and persecutes and speaks all kinds of evil against, because of Him – and He blesses you.

He blesses you by washing you in His blood and making you holy. He blesses you with His Body and Blood – given into death, but raised to life again – so that you may live, even though you die. And because you ARE blessed – “rejoice and be glad [dear saints], for your reward is great in heaven.” Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.