

## ***“Blessed in the Kingdom”***

Blessed are the poor, the hungry, those who weep – “blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil.” Woe to those who are rich, those who are full, those who laugh – “woe to you when all people speak well of you.” Really Jesus? You can’t be serious!

That sounds like “crazy talk.” It just doesn’t line up with the way we see things – and that’s just it – things are not the way we often see them. And that’s exactly why we need an EPIPHANY.

We need God to show forth what is true – what is “blessed” – and what is “woe.” And that is what Jesus is doing for you today – so that you may know His truth, and be blessed.

Jesus is catechizing you by using the OT tradition of “the two ways” – the way of blessing and the way of curse – the way of life and the way of death. To be “blessed” is to have God’s grace and favor rest upon you. And when God announces a “woe” – it indicates that the person stands under the judgment of God.

To all who are His disciples (His followers), Jesus says – “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”

I remember my parents and grandparents speaking fondly of those times early in their marriages when they hardly had two nickels to rub together. They were poor. They couldn’t afford much, but they managed to get by. Instead of things, they had each other.

On the other hand, how many times have you said something like, “If only I had more money, then I’d be able to \_\_\_\_\_”? However, experience teaches us that being rich doesn’t mean being satisfied. There is always this desire for more.

It’s no wonder that greed is condemned by God – for it has a way of consuming you – giving you false hopes – and false gods who demand that you “fear, love and trust” in them above all things.

Those who are rich have their consolation now, in this life – but rejecting Jesus by worshipping the riches of this world brings God’s judgment of woe for eternity.

YOU however who are “poor” – “yours is the kingdom of God.” You who see the kingdom of God manifested in Jesus are truly blessed – for Jesus has made Himself poor, so that you may become rich.

YOU have been baptized into Christ – and all that is His is yours! The kingdom of God is yours – already now – even though the full inheritance will not be realized until the Great Epiphany of the Last Day. Then, YOU who are in Christ by faith, will see how truly “rich” you are. To put it simply – to have Jesus is to have it all.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.” Have you ever listened to a child whine about being hungry? It sounds like they are going to die. That’s what our greedy stomachs do – they whine and complain, always wanting more – and then, we’re stuffed, and miserable. “Woe to you who are full now,” Jesus says, for you shall be hungry – eternally hungry!

Blessed are YOU who hunger now – who realize your need for nourishment in order to live. Blessed are YOU who are like the 5,000 whom Jesus fed – and all ate and were satisfied. Blessed are YOU who know and believe that Christ’s grace is sufficient for you – now, in this life – and for all eternity.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” Once again, we get things all turned around – we think weeping is a bad thing, and laughing is a good thing.

Like Jesus who weeps and mourns over those who do not believe – who do not look to Him for life – we too are taught the blessing of weeping and mourning our sin and harm that it brings.

You might remember that Sarah (and Abraham) laughed at God when He promised to give them a child. Or the time Jesus came to the little girl who had died and told those gathered, mourning her death, that she is sleeping – and they laughed at Him.

That same Jesus comes to forgive and restore those separated from God by sin – and those who laugh at Him, reject Him and His promises ..... well ... that is reason enough for God to announce His “woe.”

But for those who see that God reigns over all things in Jesus Christ, His Son – what a blessing indeed. YOUR tears are turned to laughter as Christ comes to you and resurrects you with His forgiveness of all your sin. With “repentant joy” you receive His Body and Blood, communing with Him in His kingdom, now and forevermore.

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spur your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!” And, “woe to you, when all people speak well of you.”

Oh, how we hate it when others hate us, exclude us, speak evil of us – and oh what we’d give for all people to speak well of us. How tempting it is to exclude Jesus from our lives to gain the favor of others.

When people “spurn your name” – remember that your name is “Christian.” That is who you are – “one who belongs to Christ.”

Jesus announces His “woe” to those who follow the false prophets – and there is no greater false prophet than the devil – who lies to you, seeking to cover up the truth of God’s love and blessings that are yours in Christ Jesus. He would have you reject Jesus and walk away – but to all who set aside Jesus, the Savior of sinners – God’s judgment remains on them.

Dearly beloved, we are like those at the beginning of our Gospel reading – those with diseases, those troubled with unclean spirits – who came to Jesus, seeing in Him not only God’s kingdom and rule over their afflictions – but in Him, the favor and blessings of God.

YOU, are His dear children. YOU have, already now, in Christ Jesus – all the blessings of God’s kingdom.

No, that is not apparent to the eye or to your senses – but that's why Christ continues to reveal this truth to you – so that you may know and believe and receive all that He promises and offers.

Indeed, YOU are “blessed” – for in Christ, your sins are forgiven – and where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation – now, and for all eternity. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.