

The Blessing Already Begun

Matthew 5:1–12

Let us pray: Father God, through your Word today, grant that we may partake of Christ, who is the very blessing we receive. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Brothers and sisters, the passage we hear together today is one of Jesus' most well-known teachings, the Beatitudes.

Because these words are so familiar, we often approach this text with certain assumptions. We may think, "This must be telling us how we should live in order to receive blessings." "This is the standard we must meet to be considered true disciples of Jesus." Or, because these words seem so lofty, we may simply take them as ethical ideals, something it would be nice to live by, and then move on.

But what is Jesus truly trying to say to us through this passage? In today's text, Jesus does not go up the mountain to evaluate people, nor to determine who is doing well and who is falling short. Rather, through these words, Jesus first brings us a piece of news—news we may not have considered before. And that news is this: the blessing of the kingdom of God has already begun.

Moreover, Jesus does not proclaim this news only to a select group of people who were already prepared or spiritually accomplished. Scripture does not say that those who followed him were already living exactly as he described in his teaching. They were still wavering, still struggling, and still unable to fully live out the life Jesus spoke of.

Jesus begins with this word, "Blessed." He does not say, "If you do this, then you will be blessed." He does not add conditions such as, "You must reach this level in order to receive a blessing." Rather, Jesus first makes a simple yet unmistakable declaration: "Blessed."

These words are not a demand but a proclamation. Before people who were not yet living according to his words, before those who were still following him without fully knowing how they ought to live, Jesus first opens up the reality of the kingdom of God. For this reason, the Beatitudes are not words that test people, but words that give life; they are not ethics, but gospel.

Jesus begins by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Here, Jesus is not presenting an ideal model of a believer. To be poor in spirit

does not mean trying to appear humble, nor does it refer to a spiritually mature person who has chosen to lower themselves. Rather, it describes a state in which one has come to realize that one can no longer sustain oneself by one's own strength.

As we go through life, we each sustain ourselves in our own ways. Plans, experiences, relationships, diligence, and even the years of our faith become supports that hold our lives together. Yet there come moments when those supports can no longer hold us.

At that point, we become poor in spirit. Not only before God, but even before ourselves, we feel that there is nothing left to put forward. It is precisely then that Jesus says, "Blessed."

This word is not a consolation that says, "It's still okay," nor an evaluation that says, "This is enough." It is the declaration that, because Jesus has come, the kingdom of God has begun right there and then. The kingdom of heaven is not given as a kind of reward; rather, it means being transferred into God's reign, no longer living by one's own strength.

We do not create this reign ourselves. We receive it, and within it we begin to learn how to live. This is a blessing. Therefore, the one who is poor in spirit, having no strength to hold on to oneself, comes to hold on to God. And it is precisely at that point that the kingdom of God is revealed more clearly.

The first word of the Beatitudes does not ask us, "How well prepared are you?" or, "How well are you living?" Instead, it proclaims this: "At the very place where your life feels empty, the kingdom of God has already begun." This is the gospel that Jesus proclaims first.

The Beatitudes are not a process by which a person gradually becomes qualified step by step. Rather, they are words that reveal the many faces of a single human being standing before grace. Poverty, mourning, and meekness are not descriptions of different kinds of people; they are the varied expressions of one person who lives within the grace of God.

If that is so, what then is revealed next in the life of the one who stands before grace? Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," and "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Jesus is not speaking of two different kinds of people. He is describing other aspects that naturally emerge in the life of the same person who has become poor in spirit.

Mourning is not an emotion that one produces because one's faith is deep. Augustine says that mourning is the cry of a soul that has come to realize it has been separated from God because of sin. To such a person, Jesus says, "Blessed," and promises, "They shall be comforted." This comfort does not mean that circumstances will immediately change; rather, it is a declaration that God is present in that very place.

The same is true of meekness. Meekness is not the absence of strength. It is the presence of strength that is no longer used according to one's own will. A person who has become poor in spirit and has passed through the place of mourning no longer seeks to force the world forward by their own power.

That is why Jesus says that the meek shall inherit the earth. This does not mean taking possession of the world, but receiving, as a gift, a place to live under God's reign. Mourning and meekness are not virtues we manufacture through effort; they are ways of life that naturally emerge in those who have received grace. For this reason, Jesus speaks not in commands, but in declarations.

Jesus sees that, in the life of a person who has come to stand within grace, movements in a new direction begin to appear. And so Jesus says that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers are blessed.

These words are not demands to try harder; they describe the direction and the expressions of life that begin to emerge naturally in those who belong to the kingdom of God.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness does not mean that one is living perfectly. It means that one has come to know how one ought to live. A person who has realized that they cannot live by their own strength finally begins to long to live according to the way of the kingdom of God. And Jesus promises that God will satisfy that longing.

Mercy, purity of heart, and a life that makes peace are likewise not traits we force ourselves to produce. Those who have received grace become gentler in the face of others' weaknesses, no longer hide before God, and, even in places of conflict, gradually participate in the work of reconciliation that God is bringing about, rather than insisting on establishing their own righteousness.

And Jesus does not hide the fact that, in the lives of those who live in this way, persecution and misunderstanding may sometimes follow. Yet even that place is not avoided by Jesus. There, too, he says, "Blessed."

This word is not a call to boast about persecution, nor is it meant to be used as a report card of faith. It is a declaration of comfort: even within the unavoidable tension that comes with belonging to the kingdom of God, God is still present.

That is why Jesus encloses the beginning and the end with the same promise: “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Brothers and sisters, we often think that we live the life of faith “in order to receive blessings.” But today Jesus says to us, “You are not here in order to receive blessings. You are already blessed.” The blessing spoken of here is not merely the improvement of circumstances. The greatest blessing is this: that God is holding us fast. And at the center of that blessing stands Jesus Christ.

So today, the Beatitudes do not ask us, “Are you worthy to receive blessings?” Instead, they proclaim, “The kingdom of God has already begun among you.” Not because we are strong, not because we are sufficient, but because Jesus has come. If we receive this word in faith, then we have received this blessing.

Therefore, today does not end merely with a resolve to “live better.” Rather, we entrust ourselves once again to this grace. And within that grace, through worship, prayer, the Word, the Sacrament, the love of the community, and the practice of mercy, we are shaped, little by little, into the likeness of Christ.

This is the gospel of the Beatitudes. By grace, may our identity as those who have received the blessing of the gospel become more clearly visible in our lives. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we thank You for coming to us as our blessing. Teach us not to be ruled by our circumstances, but to trust in Your Word. Help us to receive Your reign fully and to live under it each day. In all things, shape us to think and live as blessed citizens of Your kingdom, and let the blessing we have received flow out to others. In Your blessed name. Amen.