

When we think about being **blessed** or being happy we usually think about wealth, abundance, **security**, contentment, and so on. Happiness goes together with strength, ability, and freedom. If we have the wherewithal and if we have the opportunity, then we can do what we want. If we should be constrained with our resources or freedom, then we might not be able to do what we want. We most easily and naturally believe that blessedness or happiness comes from being able to do whatever we want. We usually associate not being able to do whatever we want with sadness.

Did you notice how Jesus's teaching was strange along these lines? What we usually associate with sadness, Jesus declares as blessedness or happiness. Let's look at a few of the things **Jesus** said.

He said, "Blessed are the poor **in spirit**." Is being poor ever good? **It's** always better to be rich. Even if Jesus is not talking about money, doesn't it sound better to be rich **in spirit**? Someone being rich in spirit **sounds** a lot more interesting than someone being poor in spirit.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn." If someone is mourning, then things haven't gone their way. Someone has died whom they would prefer were **still** alive. Something **has** gone wrong that they wish wouldn't have happened.

"Blessed are the meek." The meek are humbled. They can't be impressed with their own importance. We enjoy the feeling of being impressed with ourselves.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." If I had to choose between being hungry and thirsty for righteousness and being full of righteousness, I would much rather be full of righteousness. Then I could feel good about myself.

From these examples, you can see how Jesus teaches strange things. **If** we would turn Jesus's statements into their opposites, then they would make much more sense: Blessed are the rich. Blessed are those who are having a great time. Blessed are powerful. If the world would have its own set of beatitudes, or blessings, they would sound like this: "Blessed **are** the rich, because they can buy whatever they **want**." "Blessed are those who are having a great time, because they **are** making the most of this life." "Blessed are the powerful, because nobody is pushing them around."

Don't these worldly beatitudes make more sense? We more easily and naturally live our lives when we don't have to rely on God. If we can see to things ourselves, then God doesn't matter as much. What does matter is having the necessary resources and freedom. **You** better make sure you've **got** enough of that. And what must be feared above all else is lack and loss. Lack and loss are surefire recipes for misery and sadness.

That's one way of thinking, and it's pretty persuasive. It's what comes most easily and naturally. But one of the ways that Jesus is spoken of in the Gospels is that he has come to "proclaim good news to the poor."

The poor don't have anything. The good news is that they are going to get stuff. Where there was lack and loss there **will** be abundance and life. Jesus will bring this about. Or, at least, that's the **claim**.

Is there a way that I can prove it? No, I'm sorry, I can't. The promises of abundance and life in Jesus can be only either believed or disbelieved. Either Jesus is God and Lord and he will bring about what he has

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promised, or he **is** wrong. The poor aren't blessed. Those who mourn aren't blessed. The powerless aren't blessed. Either the rules **of** life that are laid down by **Jesus** are how things are, or how things are is governed by the rules that we much more easily and naturally believe. Either a person will put his or her **trust in Jesus** or a person will put his or her trust in those worldly recipes for **happiness**.

Today as we observe All Saints' Day we must consider this faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus is how a person is a saint, which means a "holy one." Only those who become holy are in heaven. Saints receive their holiness through faith in **Jesus**. They believe that he will keep the promises that he has **made** promises like you find in the beatitudes. All of the beatitudes, or blessings, that Jesus spoke of contain promises. They are really glorious promises, if you will challenge yourself to think about what they mean and believe that they can actually come to pass.

He says, "Yours is the kingdom of heaven." God's kingdom in heaven can't be described. The Scriptures say **that it** is beyond us, no matter how hard we try.

Jesus says, "God will comfort you." How good do you think God is at comforting someone? You perhaps remember the comfort **that** comes from being in the arms of your dad or your mom **or** your husband **or** your wife. God will comfort those who mourn.

Jesus **says**, "You will inherit the earth." World history is full of vain and ambitious men and women **who** have strained every fiber of their being to attain mastery over the earth. Jesus says you will inherit it.

"You will be filled with righteousness." Instead of temptations being victorious over you, you will be victorious over temptations.

Jesus says, "You **will** receive mercy." We hear about God's mercy all the time, but now we only know his mercy **by** faith. What will it be like to have our empty sack filled up with the undeserved good things of

God?

Jesus says, "You will see God." The Scriptures emphatically state that no one has seen God. "No one can see God and live," it says over and over again. What will it be like to see God?

Jesus says, "You **will** be called **sons** of God." This **is** not a slight or an insult to you female saints. Jesus is the only Son of God. By being called "sons of God" Jesus is saying that you will be like him.

These are good promises. But then Jesus makes a different kind of promise. He promises us that we will be persecuted. He says that we will be reviled. That means that people will say that you are a fanatic. You are impractical. You are a fool about money. You are a fool to love your enemy. They will pronounce **curse**s upon you that you **will** be poor and miserable and abused because you don't follow the rules of this old world. That is what you will get for following Jesus.

It can be scary to be reviled and persecuted and to have all kinds of evil spoken against you. And this will not be done just by strangers. Elsewhere Jesus says that this will come from our nearest and dearest.

Households will be divided. Families will be divided. **This last** promise is **so** bad, that we might think that
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we should just leave off with all this. It's not nice. It's disturbing. It's divisive. Religion **is** supposed to be peaceful and serene.

Except it's not. Jesus said, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Jesus is on the warpath as king against the devil and against all his falseness. Whenever Jesus drove out demons, they convulsed their victims and cried out and put up a mighty fuss. They didn't want to lose control of their victims, and so it **is** with all the false rules and false gods that possess people today. They don't want to lose their grip. They want to hold us captive. They don't want us to believe in this who has come who proclaims good news to the poor.

But these false rules and false gods are bad. They don't keep their promises. They **couldn't**, even if they wanted to, because their power is limited. They only pretend to be almighty.

No matter how rich you are, no matter how powerful you are, no matter how many memories you make, no matter how good of a life you believe that you **can** make **for** yourself, none of these things can forgive your sins. None of these things can defeat death. None of these things can fill you with God's love. None of these things can prepare you for seeing God. Only Jesus can do **these** things.

Believe in him! Are you poor? Will you become poor? Are you poor in spirit-kind of dumpy and something **of** a nobody? Believe in Jesus! He has good news for you even though you lack so much: "Yours **is** the kingdom of heaven." Are you mourning? Are things not going your way? Did you imagine that your life would be altogether different? "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be

comforted." Thus and so you can do with all these statements of Jesus. There are promises in there for those who will believe.

Faith, therefore, makes all the difference. John says in his epistle: "**This** is the victory that has overcome the world-our **faith.**" The saints who have gone before us all have **this** one thing in common: They believed in Jesus. You believe in him too. Believe, and then just wait and see how all the promises he has made will come true. Jesus keeps **his promises.**