



Living Blessed

Rejoice & Be Glad

Matthew 5:11-12

When my son returned back from the Wayumi Trip, where they learned about tribal missions, he talked almost non-stop for 2 ½ hours! I was refreshed and encouraged to hear what he learned and also how God had challenged him. I hope you have been encouraged to hear bits and pieces of encouragement from some people today. At the end of my sermon, I've also asked for Emily Nickel to share what God is doing in her life, and how God even used the Wayumi trip to propel her towards what she believes God is calling her to do.

You know, I mentioned last week that when I heard pastors or missionaries preach on sacrificing for Jesus, they communicated it many times in a way like sacrifice means you have to give up joy. It was as if you were happy then that wasn't godly. But that's opposite of what the Scriptures teach. As one old catechism asks, "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is "to glorify God and enjoy him forever." I came across a quote from a Christian from a couple hundred years ago. His name was Charles Simeon. He wrote, **"There are but two lessons for Christians to learn; the one is, to enjoy God in everything; the other is, to enjoy everything in God."** Then we get to the text we're studying today and Jesus calls his disciples to *rejoice and be glad!* Jesus is not a killjoy. Instead, he is revealing how we have limited our understanding of what joy is. When we hear the beatitudes, we think Jesus' thinking is upside-down. Those who mourn can't be blessed. Those who hunger and thirst or are spiritually bankrupt cannot be blessed! That's not how the world works. And to that Jesus affirms. The world is upside-down – not Jesus. His teaching is *reality*. The question is whether or not we embrace Jesus and reality. Do you embrace him? If so, even though we mourn, we'll rejoice. Even though we know our bankruptcy, we'll celebrate our riches in Christ. Even though we may be persecuted, we'll be glad in God.

This is why I've titled the sermon today as "Living Blessed." Remember that the word for blessed here refers to being in the highest possible human state of blessing, happiness, satisfaction. If you have turned from your sinfulness and turned to Jesus for rescue and forgiveness, then you are in that state of blessedness – no matter what your circumstances. Nothing can change that reality! That point is pressed in the words we read today. Look at them with me: Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.¹

When I read this, I can be very confused. I want to be like a dog that tilts its head. "What do you mean by this, Jesus? How can we rejoice and be glad when we're persecuted?" The reason I ask this is because we, as humans, live to try to get blessing. We think that if we do something right, then we should get something we like in return. But that's a rat race. In our consumeristic culture, we should realize by now that nothing this world gives satisfies the longing of the soul. What if instead of trying to gain blessed, we were already blessed? This is what Jesus is teaching his disciples.

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:11–12.

The reality is that only those who genuinely know their blessed state will live with this reality over all their circumstances – whether pleasurable or painful. But oftentimes, we can see more clearly when a person is living for Christ through persecution. Have you ever read biographies of martyrs or of Christians who suffered for their faith and persevered? When I have read those stories, my faith is strengthened because I see people who revealed, through their lives, that their treasure wasn't this world. Their treasure was Jesus and the world to come. The only way they could have persevered is if they valued Jesus above all. Do you treasure Christ? **Are you living blessed – basing your actions and attitudes on ultimate reality – letting ultimate reality inform you? Or, are you letting circumstances dictate to you?** Today, in looking further into Jesus' teaching, we'll see the contrast between living blessed versus living to be blessed. More specifically, we will see how **a Christian's blessedness transforms how we live.**

1. A Christian's blessedness transforms their perspective.

If the reality is true that those who trust Jesus and what he has done for us to be sufficient to bring our restoration with God, and that this means we are in the ultimate state of blessing; then that means we should no longer simply think from a worldly perspective. Our lives are hidden with Christ, in God (see Col. 3). Our perspective is now one that is heavenly.

But I want you to think through what a simple, **earthly perspective** would be. If people reviled you, persecuted you and said horrible lies about you, how would you respond? From personal experience, I know the thoughts that can rage in my mind and emotions. Thoughts like, **"My life is ruined,"** and **"I feel so alone."** In my actions, I can tend to do one of three things. I'll **get angry.** Either I'll let someone have it or I'll just let the anger seethe inside of me. Or, I'll **ignore and say I'm fine.** Have you ever talked with someone that you know isn't fine, but they just say, "I'm fine! It's ok. No big deal"? Denial. Or, I can move to **self-pity:** Nobody understands. I'm such a martyr. I can experience one or all of these emotions because I'm only thinking from an earthly perspective. I feel I've lost the good life, and I need to regain it. I need to defend it. If my life is ruined and I have to get it back, then it makes sense that I'd act in all of these ways, right? A perspective that says that my life is ruined and I'm alone can understandably lead to this. Can you relate to this?

Let's contrast this with the **blessed perspective.** This perspective knows we're already blessed and we never lose the blessed state. This is what Jesus is saying in verse 12. Remember that none of the Beatitudes are statements saying that *if* you do something enough *then* you'll earn something. These are all statements of fact. The same is true here. So, read the end of verse 12 with me: for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.² Remember that the word "for" can be translated "because." Jesus is giving reasons for how his followers can respond completely different than those who don't follow him. He gives two reasons: 1) your reward is great in heaven, and 2) the prophets before you were persecuted for the same reason. Let's put it another way and compare this with the earthly perspective: 1) **My life is only going to get better in Heaven,** and 2) **The prophets are with me on this.**

Living blessed means that you know your life isn't ruined! Your life is secure, and this life is just a blip on the screen of how long you're going to live. That doesn't mean the pain here isn't real. That doesn't mean that there's no room for sorrow (Jesus calls his disciples to mourn over sin and brokenness in this world). But we know this is all temporary and that God will make all things right someday. Our lives are

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:12.

not ruined. In fact, not only are they not ruined. God, in his mercy and grace, will also give us rewards! What? Isn't that amazing? We who were born sinners. We who have defied him in all sorts of ways and lived life based on us, will receive reward? How can this be? This leads us actually to the second point Jesus makes. Let me explain.

Jesus states that living blessed also means that we're not alone. The prophets before us went through this, too, for the same reason. There are a couple of very valuable points to make here. First, Jesus says that the prophets were persecuted because of Jesus. Remember, Jesus doesn't call his disciples simply to be persecuted. Persecution is not something we pursue. Instead, in verse 11, we read that we are to rejoice when being persecuted on Jesus' account. As we proclaim Jesus, and people's need to be saved and forgiven by the Lord, there will be people who are angered by this. But we continue to proclaim him – no matter how people feel. They need to see there's a world to come. There's a Judge who will make himself visibly known someday. Will people be reconciled to him through Jesus or will they persist in their sinful arrogance?

This message of Jesus has been proclaimed throughout all the ages. And, at this point, you might be confused. How were the prophets persecuted for Jesus? Jesus wasn't in the flesh back in Isaiah's day. Was Isaiah sawn in two because of Jesus? What about Jeremiah? Was he stoned by exasperated Israelites for Jesus' sake? That's the bold claim Jesus is making here to his audience. Imagine what it would have been like for the people to hear this. Isn't Jesus just the carpenter's son? Who does he think he is? He's calling people to rejoice if they're persecuted for him? He's saying the great prophets of old were persecuted for him? Who is this one? That's the question, isn't it? Clearly Jesus is making claims of his worth. The Scriptures tell us who alone deserves this glory: God. Jesus, before he was in the flesh, was on the throne in Heaven, being worshipped by angels. Isaiah was called to his mission by Jesus in heaven's temple throne room. Now Jesus, on a hillside is calling his disciples to follow in the steps of the prophets. And the calling comes to us, too. We all who follow Jesus have been given the privilege to proclaim Christ to the world – and watch God save people from the kingdom of darkness and bring them into his kingdom! We are not alone! And, if we really believe there is a world to come, then we believe what Hebrews 12 says. Those who have gone before us are in the heavenly grandstands, cheering us on in our race.

But even more than this, remember that Jesus himself, *the* Great Prophet, has also suffered. He suffered at the hands of humans. He was reviled, persecuted and lied about. He was rejected by friends and enemies. But he experienced something else that no one else experienced. Have you ever felt forsaken by God? Have you ever had a moment where you could echo the psalmist's words, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" You've felt all alone by people and God himself seems silent and against you. But, Christian, did you know that even in those darkest of moments, God hasn't forsaken you. Do you know why? Because on the cross, Jesus actually experienced the God-forsakenness. There is not one person here who has experienced Hell. Hell is the experience of complete God-forsakenness. That doesn't mean that God isn't there, but that means that God gives no mercy or grace. Instead, he pours out all the righteous hatred towards sin. Jesus experienced this for sinners throughout all time! He was forsaken. And that means if you trust that Jesus took your punishment in your place – and you turn to God for forgiveness through him, you will never be forsaken. God has no wrath for you. He only has love, care, concern, help. That's all God can give to you because He willed for Jesus to satisfy the judgment you and I deserved!

Christian, you are not alone! Not only that, you await to see Jesus and the prophets. And you await eternal reward as well! How can this glory be?! If you haven't trusted Jesus, I pray you would today.

Why take Hell on yourself? Why would you rather die than have eternal hope and joy in Jesus? If you have trusted Christ, I pray you'd embrace this eternal perspective.

At this point, I can imagine some of you saying, "Well, Pastor Timothy, this is easier said than done." You don't know how hard things are. You're right that I don't know how difficult things are for you. And, for some reason, God loves to work in us through a process. So, we often don't experience all relief right now. Even Jesus here calls us to look forward to the future – not to the right now. He doesn't take away the persecution. But, I do want to say something else. You didn't go far enough. This isn't simply easier said than done. This is an impossible mindset to have without the grace of God at work in you. Yes, I mean impossible. This isn't simply the power of positive thinking.

As I've said in previous weeks, the entire Sermon on the Mount is a call for Jesus' followers to depend on Jesus. The same is true here. We express our dependence on Jesus through continual prayer and expressing our need for his Spirit to work in and through us. We need the Word of God to permeate our thinking and we need God to unite our hearts with the realities. Too many times I've heard people say, "Easier said than done," as an excuse to continue to disbelieve God and just stay in their current state. That's no excuse. Even impossibility is no excuse because we believe the God who does the impossible! Jesus promises that without him we can do nothing, but with him all things are possible. Yes, even your heart and mind can be transformed and you can live blessed!

So, listen carefully, you can lose money, power, precious relationships. You can lose your health, your reputation, your family. None of these things *are* your life. Your life is hid with Christ in God, and Christ is our life! Therefore, Jesus reveals to us that this blessed life not only changes our perspective, but. . .

2. A Christian's blessedness transforms their attitude.

Compare with the earthly perspective again: **sinful anger, denial, self-pity**. But what is the blessed response? Rejoice and be glad. Why? We've already talked about this. Our blessed state hasn't changed. This reminds me of the apostle Paul's words in Romans 8. He expands on these ideas and says, "**If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**"³

Everything in the lives of all believers submits to God's plan for them. That includes you, Christian! Not one tear is wasted by God. Not one lie stated against you, for Jesus' sake. Nothing! You will not be separated from God, ever. And, in the Judgment, that will be the greatest joy! Where some will hear, "Depart from me, you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." You will hear, "Welcome into the joy of the Lord!" And that's not because you were right or so good. It's because he's so good, and by his grace, you looked to him to rescue you! This is mercy and grace.

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:31–39.

So, how can we say our lives are ruined? We can't. Why should we resort to sinful anger and denial and self-pity? We can't. We don't turn to sinful anger, we can have a righteous anger and also rejoice in our good, good Father. We don't deny the pain. We mourn, and we are also glad that God has a good plan. And we don't resort to self-pity because we are dependent on Jesus. Our lives are based on him. So, we turn to godly rejoicing in him!

Again, this is totally contrary to the world's perspective because those who don't love and follow Jesus won't be motivated to endure persecution for his glory. They also won't be motivated by realities that they don't really believe are true or real. They won't find this compelling.

Ventura, in just a moment, Emily Nickel is going to come up and share how God's working in and through her. But before she does, I have a couple of application questions for us all.

1. Do you *know* Jesus? I'm not asking if you've heard about him. I'm not asking if you've been a church member or if you serve and do things *for* Jesus. At the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he says there will be people who will say they've served him and they also call him, "Lord," but Jesus says he never knew them. That means, they never really grew in a relationship with Jesus. They didn't depend on him for everything. Is that you? If it is, please don't delay. Talk to someone if you have questions or call out to Jesus now. And, then please talk to someone about next steps in follow Jesus.

2. Are you justifying your earthly perspective – hanging tightly to this world? Are you an "easier said than done" person? What are things you're valuing more than the Lord? Listen, God is not mean for taking them out of your hands. It might feel like it, but you can be guaranteed that the one who did not spare his own Son, is only working for your eternal good. Will you today entrust these things to the Lord today?

3. Who can you proclaim Jesus to? Being persecuted for Jesus' sake means we make Jesus known. Maybe God is calling you to foreign missions. Maybe he's calling you to talk to your neighbor and be more lovingly explicit about Jesus. Maybe you're not standing for Jesus' name with believers who are running unrepentantly in sin. Whatever the case, may our prayer be that the Spirit works in and through us so much that we exude Jesus and the gospel. And, even if we're cut, we bleed Jesus.

A Christian's blessedness changes how we live. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." ⁴

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 5:11–12.