

The word "blessed" is kind of a fuzzy word for us. We use it so many different ways that it's kind of hard to tell sometimes exactly what we mean by it. We talk about giving a blessing, for example. We talk about receiving a blessing, for example. We talk about being blessed. We talk about God blessing us, about us blessing others. What do we mean exactly by the word blessed? And because that word's kind of fuzzy, it makes this passage a little fuzzier for us, and it's a little harder to understand exactly what Jesus is talking about.

But there's another way to translate that word that isn't fuzzy at all, one that we understand perfectly. And that is "happy." Happy are those who are poor in spirit! Happy are those who mourn! We all know what happiness is. We all know what that means. And it helps for us to see exactly what Jesus is doing here. Because the kind of happiness that Jesus is talking about is not the world's happiness. The world has its own ideas, and they butt up against what Jesus has to say. And they're so different from each other, in fact, that the world considers everything that Jesus is saying to be completely foolish, to be utter gibberish. What does it mean that "happy are those who mourn, happy are those who are sad?" But what Jesus is giving to us today, Christians, is a happiness totally unlike the world, one that goes on forever. Because while the world has its own ideas of happiness, they're all empty. They will all disappear. But the happiness which Jesus brings to us today is a happiness that goes on forever.

But I do want to make a couple things clear here before we dig into what Jesus is saying. And the first thing is that all of these things that Jesus talks about are not things that just happen naturally. We're not talking about somebody being naturally poor or naturally mourning or naturally meek. These are Christian virtues that we are talking about. The reason I bring that up is because if we think of it as something that happens naturally or something that we can even get if we work hard enough, then we might think that our neighbor over here who doesn't go to church but is all of these things, at least in our minds, is somehow a better Christian than the people who go. No, this isn't what Jesus is talking about. For us to be any of these things is a gift from above. It is a gift from God. One that comes to us because we are Christians.

But the other thing to remember here, too, is that this is not something that we can just pick apart. There can't be a Christian who is, for example, poor in spirit, but not mourning. There's no such thing as a Christian who is merciful, but is not pure in heart. This is a package deal. They all go together, so that all of them work together to describe what it means to be a Christian. Now we might struggle with some of these. Some of these might not come very naturally to us. We might have to work at them more than others. But they are all ours because we are in Jesus. If you want to know what a Christian looks like, and the happiness of the Christian, we have to look at them all together at the same time.

Now let's dig in. Verse three. "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus says, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The world might say, "That doesn't make any sense. How could you say, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit'? How can you say 'Happy are those who are poor in spirit'? Wouldn't you be happier if you were somebody who stood up for yourself? Somebody who was self-reliant? Somebody who was a go-getter? Somebody who did things all on their own? Why should I have to rely on anybody else? I have my own two hands. I can make happiness all for myself." But does that really work, Christians? Does that really bring happiness? The most self-reliant people in the world will eventually have to rely on somebody, especially as they get older.

And the person who refuses to kneel before Jesus now will have to kneel before him when it comes to the last day, to his ever lasting shame. No, the happiness that the world thinks is good, this kind of self-reliant, I'll take care of it myself, is something that comes to nothing. But what Jesus is talking about here, being poor in spirit, is the one who recognizes that they need everything from God. That they have nothing apart from him. God empties them of themselves and gives them their cross to carry, so that in becoming like Jesus, they find a real happiness, a happiness which goes on forever.

Jesus goes on: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Now, the world would say, "That makes even less sense. How can you say, 'Happy are those who are sad'? It's a contradiction. It just doesn't seem to work. So why don't you say instead, do whatever makes you happy? Find your happiness in life. Pursue those things that make you happy, and surely, you'll find happiness that way." But does that work either, Christians? Can we find a lasting happiness that way, when we try to make our own happiness and we try to be happy all the time? No, that doesn't really work either. Because the things of this world are empty. They come to nothing. And if we try to find happiness, worldly happiness, in them, we're bound to be disappointed. But Jesus says, blessed are those who mourn. Happy are those who are sad, sad over their sins, sad over the things that keep them away from God. And even if we are sad because of things that happen to us, we have a real hope in God, a hope which says that we shall be comforted because God himself is going to take care of us. We can face the future, even if we are sad now, because God keeps his promises.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Now, why would you want to do that? The world says. Doesn't the world belong to those who are go-getters, to the leaders, to the ones who take life by the horns, to the ones who really run after the things that they want? Every college advertisement these days I swear says be a leader in your community, because that's what life is about. Really getting after it, really going for it. None of this meek business. But does that work either, Christians? Is that going to make you happy? No. Because all of those things which the world promises and all the hard work we put into it might very well come to nothing. Some of the hardest working people I know have nothing. Ultimately it will crumble away into dust. But Jesus says happy are the meek, happy are those who receive everything from God and who look to his hand to get all these things. Because when we rely on God above all things and not our own two hands, we will never be disappointed. That will be a happiness which will go on forever.

Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Why would you hunger after that, the world says. Hunger after the things of this world. Don't you want that better job? Don't you want that higher salary? Don't you want that bigger boat or whatever it might be? Won't these things make you happy? But they'll come to nothing, Christians. That job we think is going to make us happy is going to turn out to be like every other job, just as much of a drudge and a bore as anything. That higher salary we thought would make us happy soon turns out to be nothing at all. We want more and more and more. And that bigger boat that we finally got ends up being too small. We want something bigger in the end. Because the things of this life do not satisfy. And more than this, this very night, Christians, your soul may be required of you. Jesus says, "And these things you have gathered for yourselves, whose will they be?" This world cannot satisfy, especially not the things of this

world. But we have a dearer treasure, Christians, in God. Because when we hunger and thirst for righteousness, when we hunger and thirst to be like God, we shall be satisfied, and we will find a joy in God, a pleasure in God unlike anything this world can bring us. So that even if we lost everything tomorrow, if it all burned up or went away, we would still be able to say: "Jesus lives, and because he lives, I am richer than any king."

Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." But why would you want to be merciful? The world says. That's getting pushed around. That's not getting your way. That's not standing up for yourself. Look at politics today. It seems to be about punching your opponents in the face. Why should we show mercy to anyone? That's not the way that you get anything in life. But that doesn't really help either, does it? Because being brutal and being unmerciful causes far more problems than it ever solves. Just look at the way this country is falling apart and the way that even our highest levels of government are fighting with each other. There is no mercy among them. But Jesus says, love your enemy. Pray for those who persecute you. Pray for them and treat them as you would your own family. Then you will be like your Father who is in heaven. And being like God, Christians, means that we will find a happiness unlike anything in this world.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Well, that's no fun. Should you have fun in life? Don't you have to be bad to have a good time? Why should we seek after these pure things? They aren't enjoying life. We need to seek after these pleasures, these things that really get something out of it, so that we can be happy that way. Maybe we can find it in fame. Maybe we can find it in fortune. Maybe we can find it in pleasures of this life. That will make me happy. But all of those things don't work either, Christians. Because we might try to find our happiness in pleasures, but as soon as they're over, they're quickly forgotten. We might try to find our happiness in 15 minutes of fame and thinking that we would have everything if we were just on top of the world. But why does it seem like the the most depressed people in the world, the worst drug abusers, are the ones who are the most famous? That doesn't bring happiness either. This world's pleasures are empty. But Jesus says, happy are those who are pure in heart, because they shall see God. To think on those things which are true, to think on those things which are right, to do those things which are pleasing in the eyes of God, these things will make us happy. Because then we will see God, and to see him face-to-face is a pleasure that will never come to an end. This world will, but God goes on forever.

Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Well now here's one, the world says, that we could probably agree with! Be nice to one another. Just kind of accept everybody for who they are. Be a peacemaker. Don't say that anything is sinful. Don't say that anything is evil. Don't say that anything is wrong. And then we'll all get along just fine. Society will advance, and we will be better. But is that true? When we just end up accepting everything and standing for nothing? Look at the world around you, Christians. We live in the most tolerant society in history, and what a mess we've made of it. It's not going to make anybody happy. That's not the way to find a lasting happiness. But to be a peacemaker, Christians, is to bring the Kingdom of God into this world. It is to introduce people to the Prince of Peace, to Jesus Christ himself. Because when we walk as Christians, bringing the kingdom of God into this life, then we will bring a real peace, a real peace with God, one that will go on forever.

But Jesus finishes by saying, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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." So it really comes down to this. The world says, you know what? I know the real problem. I know why I'm really not happy. It's because of you. It's because of the church. It's because of Jesus. If we just got rid of the church, the world says, we wouldn't have any of this talk of sin. We wouldn't have any of this talk of evil. We would all find peace. So maybe we'll just get rid of the church, get rid of those who claim to follow Jesus, and then we will be happy! But Jesus says, "Rejoice. Be glad on that day. Be happy when the world hates you, because that means you don't belong to this world. It means you belong to God. You belong to him forever. And no matter what happens, no matter what the world throws at you, no matter what you suffer falsely for my account, you will not be taken away from me." And that is a real joy, a real happiness that goes on forever.

And I think the reason why it's so important to talk about these things today, Christians, on All Saints' Day, is because the saints of old show us what this happiness means. Because think about all the martyrs, those who died for Jesus in years gone by. Think of the things that they suffered, the cruel, horrible tortures that they underwent because of Jesus. And yet while they were suffering, they could laugh. They could make jokes. They could sing. They could pray. They could do all of these things, even as their bodies were burning away. And the reason they could do that, Christians, is because they knew that real, lasting happiness is not to be found in this world. Happiness is found only in God. And when we hold on to God, when we look forward to heaven, to the things which are waiting for us, that is a joy that will never come to an end.

So go after him, Christians. Go after Jesus. Leave behind all of the things of this world. They are empty. They will come to nothing. But go to Jesus. Look to him, because he is your great happiness, one that will never pass away.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.