

Blessed are you who have been brought to faith and now are able to live a Christian life guided by God's Word. Amen.

5 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying: ³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Disciples of Christ,

A paradox is a statement that **apparently contradicts itself and yet might be true.** Some examples of a paradox might be:

1. Nobody goes to that restaurant; it's too crowded.
2. Don't go near the water 'til you have learned how to swim.
3. If you get this message, call me, and if you don't get it, don't call.

These might seem like strange statements and yet, in an odd sort of way, there are some truths there. **The portion of scripture before us this morning might seem to be full of paradoxes.**

At face value they seem to **contradict our human logic** and yet as we take a closer look at them, **through eyes of faith,** we can **see truths that shape our attitude towards God** and that also **help us in our relationships with one another.**

This portion of scripture is meant for believers – those who believe and trust in Jesus for their salvation. It's all about what we would call **the 3rd use of the Law – God's Word as a guide in our lives.** So what is Jesus saying to us – his followers and disciples?

I. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is one section of scripture that is **often misquoted.** People often say, **“Blessed are the poor,”** but no one wants to be poor. And yet this portion of scripture **isn't about your material wealth,** it's about those who are **“poor in spirit.”** We are poor in spirit because **we have nothing God needs or wants.**

All we have are our sins, therefore we come before God as a beggar. Jesus told a parable later in his ministry that gives us **a good picture of what it means to be poor in spirit.**

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

¹⁴“I tell you that this man [the tax collector], rather than the other [the Pharisee], went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10-14). **Which one was “poor in spirit?”** The Pharisee of the Tax Collector? The Pharisee was confident in his spiritual status (even though his faith was in himself) while the tax collector was acknowledging his sin and pleading for God’s mercy. **The tax collector was “poor in spirit” and was blessed with the kingdom of God** – receiving the blessing of forgiveness for his sins. We, too, are poor in spirit and like the tax collector, we too plead for God’s mercy and are able to leave today, justified – that is declared “not guilty” of our sins, because Christ has paid for them and has given us forgiveness.

II. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” When we think of mourning we think of **losing someone close to us in death**, but we can also **mourn over the difficulties in life** we deal with every day. Many things bring us sadness and frustration even taking us to the point where we ask, **“How much more can I endure?”** So how can this mourning be a blessing?

If we are mourning the loss of a loved one who believed and trusted in God for their salvation, then we have God’s comfort as he promises a joyful reunion in heaven.

If we **mourn the troubles and trials of life in a sinful world**, God comforts us with his Word by **reminding us he is still in control**. If we mourn over our sins which sometimes separate us from God, he calls us to repentance and comforts us with the assurance that our sins are forgiven – he has taken care of that debt for us. **We are truly blessed when we mourn** because **it pushes us to God and his Word** which reminds us that he is always by our side to comfort us.

III. **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”** This really goes against the logic of the world. Society says we should be **strong** and **proud** and yet here Jesus encourages just the opposite. **To be meek is to show patience and kindness even to people who are persecuting you or making your life miserable.** Jesus didn't just speak these words, **he demonstrated this as he hung on the cross, “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”** (1 Peter 2:23). To be patient and kind is **not the way of the world** but it is **the way of the believer.** And the result of taking the path of meekness and kindness is that we will inherit the earth.

A lot of times we look forward to inheriting heaven but Jesus doesn't say we will inherit heaven – no he is talking about the earth – **the world in which we live.** So what does he mean? This phrase may be a reference to how **he will take care of us and provide for our needs in this world** as the psalmist wrote, **“I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.”** (Psalm 37:25).

IV. Jesus continues by telling us, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”** Just as the body craves food and drink so **the believer will crave spiritual food.** Christians will hunger and thirst for righteousness – to find out what God desires for their lives. As we come to God's Word, God promises that we will be filled up with spiritual nourishment so that we can faithfully serve our Lord and live the life of a believer.

As we seek to be “right with God” he will bless us. As we hunger for his Word and take it in he will bring us peace and comfort – he will help us deal with the chaos all around us. Through his Word God will **fill us with spiritual knowledge** and **give us spiritual people** that will help us in every aspect of our lives.

V. **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”** You could almost turn this one around to say, **“You have been shown mercy, so be merciful.”** God has been merciful to us by calling us to faith and forgiving our sins. What great love he has for us and that really is what prompts us to be loving towards others. Certainly that includes our family and friends but don't forget the unfortunate folks all around us.

The Lord displays his mercy through us as we help others. Consider the story of the Good Samaritan who helped the poor traveler who had been mugged. A very appropriate story to guide us to help those in need. Whether we do that by giving blood, or donating to the food shelf or volunteering as a Big Brother or Big Sister or volunteering our time to help someone else or taking the time to talk to someone who seems to be struggling. As we look to show mercy, God will also give us opportunities to show his greatest mercy by talking about Jesus. **What a blessing God's mercy has been for us** and **what a great joy we can have in sharing that mercy with others.**

VI. **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”** I think Jesus interjects this here to remind us that we are pure in heart and will see God only because of the faith in our hearts. We can't work our way to heaven but the actions we take, as guided by the words in this section of scripture, come as a result of that faith and so our motivation is God's love for us. If we look we can see God's hand in our own lives and in the lives of those faithful Christians around us. **We look forward to the day when we will see God face to face in heaven.** That is the greatest joy that is ours through faith.

VII. **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”** Jesus is the Prince of Peace and we, his followers, also want to be peaceful people. **At peace with God and also to live in peace with those around us.** God's Word directs us to, **“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”** (Hebrews 12:14). Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself and that certainly will promote peace even if your neighbor is an enemy. So try and maintain the peace. Don't gossip about your neighbors or seek to get even when they wrong you. Even if they insult you, try to maintain the peace as much as you can knowing that this is pleasing to our God in heaven. And as we seek to live a peaceful life and to promote peace, especially spiritual peace, we will be known as Children of God.

VIII. This world isn't perfect and even as we live for our God, he reminds us to **be happy in the face of troubles**. **“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** ¹¹ **“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you**

and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Even though we strive to live as Children of God **we may face persecution as Christians.** **We see it every day, even if we aren't always on the receiving end.** But what's the worst they can do to us? **Crucify us as they did Jesus? Take our life as they did Stephen and James? Throw us into prison as they did Paul?**

Paul said, **“For to me to live is Christ. To die is gain.”** (Philippians 1:21). **When we are persecuted for being a Christian we are being faithful to our Lord and his Word.** Our greatest blessing will be a place in heaven. **So be faithful even to the point of death and you will receive the crown of life** (Revelation 2:10) While persecution may come in this world the Christian can look forward to the blessing of heaven in the world to come which is better by far

IX. There are many paradoxes in this world. Some are humorous and others mind boggling but when it comes to Christian Paradoxes, **God takes the standards of the world and turns them upside down.**

May we always look to His Word to help us understand these paradoxes and to guide us as we live our lives for our Lord and Savior and receive his many blessings. Amen.