

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
January 29, 2017

AHA!

Finding Joy that Nothing Can Destroy

Matthew 5:1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,² and he began to teach them. He said:

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 children 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.*

What was Jesus' purpose in speaking the Beatitudes?

When your pastors are preparing a message, we keep these four quadrants in mind.

Justification Law: Is this written to convict me of sin and my need for the Savior?

Justification Gospel: Is this written to assure me of God's forgiveness in Christ and salvation?

Sanctification Law: Is this written to guide me in my life of sanctification or Christian living?

Sanctification Gospel: Is this written to give me strength to live the Christian life?

As a Lutheran pastor, and perhaps all of you who have sat at the feet of Lutheran pastors, tend to look at passages primarily as convicting us of sin, that is, Justification Law.

And the Beatitudes can be understood in that way. I hear the words “poor in spirit,” and I must confess that pride is a part of my life. I’m not always “poor in spirit.”

I hear the words, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” and I think of the email that I sent that wasn’t meant to bring peace but was meant to express my frustration and anger.

Blessed are the pure in heart, and any number of men and women present here are convicted because of the impure images they’ve seen on the computer screen or impure and lustful thoughts about some hunk on TV.

Yes, we can read the Beatitudes as Justification Law. And when we do, they convict us.

But I warn you that you certainly won’t find “Justification Gospel” in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. There is nothing that announces that his blood would pay for our sins. Nothing that can calm the troubled heart.

But a Lutheran sermon wouldn’t be a Lutheran sermon without that assurance. That’s part of the reason I wore my gown today. Sometimes we dismiss old traditions because we don’t understand them. The preaching gown was meant to say, “The man isn’t important. But the Word of God he proclaims is.” As churches gradually shifted to white preaching gowns, they have become symbolic of our forgiveness. Our sins are washed away. On this Sunday where we are celebrating four baptisms, I look to the Prophet Ananias’ words to Paul, “Get up and be baptized and wash your sins away” (Acts 22:16).

When you read the Beatitudes as Justification Law, then claim again the Justification Gospel in your baptism. Your sins have all been washed away. The stain of sin is gone. You are perfect in God’s sight!

But I don’t believe Jesus spoke the Beatitudes to cover this ground of justification law and justification gospel. The entire Sermon on the Mount is about sanctification, calling us to a higher level of Christian living. He doesn’t start the Sermon on the Mount telling us to be poor in spirit or merciful. What he is actually doing is simply describing what a Christian is like.

Underline those words or phrases that describe you:

- I am humble and see my failings.
- I have lost things and people most dear to me.
- I don’t stand up for my rights and am often taken advantage of.
- I am never satisfied with my level of Christian obedience.
- I am kind and caring to those less fortunate.
- I am often considered a prude.
- I try to help everyone get along.
- I am sometimes mistreated because of my faith.
- People put me down because I’m “too Christian.”

Jesus wasn’t saying, “Do this!” He was saying, “This is who you are as a follower.”

Pastors wear the stole that is meant to look like a yoke that is put on a horse or an ox. It is based on Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

But sometimes the yoke of following Jesus doesn't feel very light. You get tired of always seeing your failings. You wonder if it is worth it when you lose people you loved. You feel like you are always the one taken advantage of. You are tired of being mistreated. You are tired of being considered a prude.

Jesus is speaking to the temptation to just hang it up. This whole Christianity thing is too hard. It is too hard trying to help out. It is too hard to stand out. I just want to blend in with the rest of the world.

I hang it up.

Into that despair, Jesus says, “**Take it up!**”

- You who are humble have God as your King.
The King of kings and Lord of lords reaches down and calls you his own. You are poor in spirit but God sees you as his greatest treasure.
- You who have lost things and people have God as your Comforter.
Your Savior understands the pain of loss. He wept at Lazarus' tomb just as you have wept. But at the resurrection, all our tears will be wiped away. We will enjoy such a reunion with our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Christ.
- You are taken advantage of own the entire world.
Revelation ends with the promise that we shall reign with Christ forever and ever. The evil are not the victors. Christ is and we are.
- You who want to live a more Christian life have the Spirit who can make your dreams come true.
In your baptism you have the promise that the Holy Spirit is working in you. He has the power to enable you to grow in as a Christian spouse, parent, child, friend.
- You who care for the less fortunate will be cared for by the Merciful One.
The Christian church in the Roman Empire was famous for staying in the cities when plagues broke out to care for the sick. They knew, and we know, that even in death the Merciful One is by our side.
- You who are prudes will see God himself.
We may seek to shield our eyes now from evil, but some day we will see visions of God that will make the sacrifice and ridicule all worthwhile!
- You who try to help people get along look just like your Father.
You will be called children of God because God has made peace with us.
- You who are mistreated for your faith have God as your King,
Persecution and trouble isn't an indication that we are outside of the kingdom. By faith we know that God is our king even now.
- You who are put down for being “too Christian” are in good company with Jesus.
They ridiculed Jesus. They can ridicule us. That's ok, but if we have Jesus, we have all we need.

This is Sanctification Gospel! These are promises spoken to us to encourage us when we are overwhelmed. Jesus isn't throwing more weight on your shoulders! He is lifting the burden and saying, “It is all worth it. **Take it up!** And let God **light it up!**”

Jesus goes on in the Sermon on the Mount: ¹³ *“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

What happens if you and I hang it up? Then we can't be used by God at all. We are like salt that doesn't taste salty.

But when you take it up, take up this yoke, take up the challenge of being a Christian, Jesus is saying you are like a lamp that shines out of the darkness.

¹⁴ *“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.*

So I'd ask you... who of you have ever felt like hanging it up? Raise your hand. Let's read the Beatitudes again.

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.*

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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 children of God.*

You have the kingdom. You have the comfort. You have the earth. You have the perfect righteousness that you seek. You have God's mercy. You will see God. You are God's child.

Do those promises make you want to hang it up? Not me either. Let's take it up, this yoke, the challenges of following Jesus. And then let him light it up. Let him put us on the top of the hill, on top of the stand, to give light to those around us.

I'd like to give you an example of someone who experienced that. Others took up the Christian life. God lit up his life through them. And today Kevin will be baptized. But not only that. Kevin his let his light shine, so that his teenage sons will be baptized as well. Let his story encourage you to take it up and light it up. Amen.