

SERMON: “JESUS 101 – BLESSED ARE ...”
TEXT: OLD TESTAMENT MICAH 6:1-8
NEW TESTAMENT MATTHEW 5:1-12

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INTRODUCTION

My generation may have a thing about dentists. Think about it.

A classic Christmas story, Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, features an elf who feels like an outsider because he is more interested in teeth than toys

Dr. Strangelove features a general who starts a nuclear war because he is convinced the communists are poisoning us by putting fluoride in our water

And then there is the gum commercial, Dentyne ... “Four out of five dentists would recommend Dentyne to their patients who chew gum.”

That phrase “four out of five dentists would” gained plenty of traction in popular culture ... at least enough to be used a sermon illustration

I think it applies to the primary presentation of Jesus’ teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, chapters five through seven of Matthew’s gospel

In particular, the beginning of that teaching, the Beatitudes (named so because the Latin word for blessed is beatus)

That is the word used to begin each of the first nine sentences

Here is how I’d work (or overwork) the metaphor about four out of five dentists

The one dentist that goes against the conventional wisdom is the one who is blessed Jesus’ teaching isn’t about jumping on a bandwagon with all the other dentists

It is very much against the grain, counter cultural

Saying like the beatitudes were quite common, then and now.

Quotes about the good life that can be needlepointed, put on a bumper sticker or turned into a sign. You got any of those Hobby Lobby type signs at your house?

Jesus doesn’t really follow the “live, laugh, love” trend

Jesus goes in a decidedly different direction with his definition of “blessed’

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Blessed are those who mourn

Blessed are the meek

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Blessed are the merciful

Blessed are the pure in heart

Blessed are the peacemakers

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you

and utter all kinds of evil things against you falsely on my account

THE KINGDOM LOOKS LIKE ...

Not quite what we expected, huh? Not the folks we'd call blessed.
Jesus challenges our assumptions, our conventional wisdom.

He gets our attention by naming people as blessed that we would not
the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers
It is Jesus' way of getting us to say, "What did he say?"
It is his way of getting us to look at the world differently

Last week, I talked about Jesus calling his first disciples
He did so talking about his favorite subject – the kingdom of God
He tells us it has come. And he shows us what it looks like ...
especially through the many ways he heals us – touching the untouchable
and loving the unlovable, stirring up 'good trouble.'

He also tells us what the kingdom is like through his teaching
Matthew puts a whole lot of Jesus' teaching together in one place,
the Sermon on the Mount in chapters five through seven
He begins with some imagery that gets our attention early
raising the question, "who exactly are you calling 'blessed?'"

He is telling us that this is what the kingdom looks like
It is a world where these people are the ones who are called 'blessed'
They are the ones whose pictures are featured in the promotional brochure
That's what these opening sentences of Jesus' sermon are ...
a picture of how God sees the world, a look through God-colored glasses

This is not a picture of what it might look like some day, in the sweet by and bye
Those whom God calls "blessed" are blessed here and now ... "Blessed are"
The verb tenses used in these verses are key
Borrowing from Tom Long's commentary on Matthew ...

The use of verb tenses in the initial eight beatitudes is quite subtle and theologically important. Each beatitude begins in the present tense: "Blessed are ..." In other words, those who are blessed are joyful now, in the present. In six of the beatitudes, however, the specific reason why they are blessed lies not in the present, but in the future ("they will ..."). What this indicates is that the church, the community of Christ, is a joyful people, but the source of their joy is not that they live easy lives in happy world or that things are getting better every day, but that their trust is in God's coming kingdom.

The church of Jesus Christ sees its life in two frames of reference. First, we see what everyone else sees, too – the world of human history ... The church also possesses a second frame of reference. It sees what others do not see, that God is at work in this world even today and will surely bring all creation to a time of peace and rejoicing.

Thomas A. Long, Matthew

BOGUS MATH

God is at work in this world, in and through individuals, through movements too
I've tried, in word and deed, to point to and point out that ongoing work
I pray I have, we have, eyes to see God at work. And not only that ...
But to see the patterns of God's work. And maybe even begin to see
how God looks at the world, how God defines things like 'blessed'

As citizens of the kingdom, we try to see the world through God colored glasses
How do you look at the world ... and at all the people in it?
What definitions are you using? What does your vocabulary sound like?

Are you going along with the definitions put forth by the four out of five dentists
Dentists who actually encourage their patients to chew gum?
Are you buying what so many are trying to sell?
Or do you see things, and people, differently?

I remember a poem I heard on a Youth Sunday, when the high schoolers led worship
The poem did a great job of contrasting different worldviews
the difference between the four out of five whose voices may be popular
or persuasive (or just loud and frequent) ... and the voices of the one
who dares to be different. The one Jesus would call blessed

*You have heard it said, "You can have it all."
And if you don't . . . you will fall
in the eyes of your peers, your parents, yourself
You'll fall to the back of the useless kid shelf
with other middle of the roaders who never stood out
So do not sleep and do not rest; there's only nothing . . . and the best.*

*You have heard it said. But I say,
But I say . . . "You, dear child, won't know you're "enough"
if you measure your worth in check marks and stuff.
The world's math is bogus for adding up you*

The language may be different for every generation. But the truth remains the same.
The world is always going to be selling us its version of what's valuable & what is not
The messages may be as old as the hills or as recent as some celeb's latest tweet
but four fifths of it is bogus, lots of sound and fury signifying nothing

Are we really going to buy or buy into happiness, the good life, as defined by
anything or anyone other the God whose love created us and saved us?
The beatitudes and the way Jesus defines happiness are meant to be
that voice speaking against the grain to give us a glimpse of God's worldview.

Yes, I said "happiness". That is how the world talks
And that is one way to translate blessed ... as happy. But blessed is more than that
Happiness can be rather fly by night. Blessed has deeper roots
It can also be translated as fortunate, favored. But it is still more than that

SUMMARY

The best definition of blessing I know, other than one Jesus paints here,
is the picture painted in Numbers, chapter six, verses 24-26
It is a blessing that has been titled 'the priestly benediction'
You've probably heard it before. As you hear it now, picture if you can God's face

**The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.**

You know that look, when someone's face shines, when their countenance is lifted
You see it on parents and grandparents faces quite often
It's that "I am so proud of my kid" look you see when the child
is singing a song at church or playing soccer or showing you
the picture they drew or the grade they got on that exam

Being blessed is having God look at us that way ... making God smile

I use an illustration about the look on our faces when we look at our kids
because that look isn't reserved for our children when they are at their best
I've seen that look in mid tantrum, in messy rooms, in hospital rooms
That look isn't a reward. It is a gift.

Reading the Beatitudes as a recipe for getting a blessing is reading it the wrong way
This is not Jesus saying, "do this and receive your blessing"
This is Jesus telling us that blessing is a gift more than a goal or a reward

This is Jesus telling us what makes God smile
And Jesus telling us that God smiles more than we know
Even more than four out of five dentists would know or notice