

**Good News: Blessed Are...**  
**Matt 5:1-12, Romans 8:18-25**

Friends, I want to start out by asking you this morning – “What are the keys to success?” In other words what is necessary to have a healthy, happy, successful life?

Well you would probably answer back that there are many factors involved - right?

Things like education... a good upbringing... self-confidence... self-esteem... good decision making skills... access to resources... etc... all of these things contribute towards someone being successful.

And if these keys to success are present in your life, they will increase your chances of having a good job, good relationships, a good family, and good health and so on...

And if we are parents we sort of instinctively know this as well... it's a large part of raising kids. We will go to great lengths to ensure our children have the kinds of opportunities that will give them the keys to a successful life.

And as our children go through High School and become young adults they become aware of this as well. They realize they need good grades to go on to College or University. They realize if they go a school with a good reputation it will increase their chances of finding work in their field.

They realize they will be more successful in getting job interviews if their resume shows a lot of volunteer experience, good references... and they are not sporting any visible tattoos or body piercings.

The same holds true as we go through the other stages of life – there are keys to success for relationships, marriage, and parenting, managing your finances, saving for your retirement, and staying healthy through it all.

Friends as we go through the various stages of life we come to realize that our success is largely dependent upon whether or not we possess these things which are the keys to success.

And the more keys to success you possess... the greater your chance of being successful in life is. Conversely if you are lacking these keys... it not only increases your chance of failure, but it also increases the likelihood that it will be very difficult to gain the keys you need for success.

Nothing ensures success in obtaining keys to success like having the keys to success!

So we are always eager to hear the news that a new key to success have been discovered and we are quick to try and take advantage of it.

You know the headlines: "Scientists discover link between eating acai berries and weight loss!" So we all run to Booster Juice and have our acai berry smoothies...

"Study shows that men who wear plaid socks to work tend to receive more promotions" So we go out and buy some plaid socks...

"Children born during the first months of the year have a greater chance of playing in the NHL!" So parents with hockey aspirations for their future kids decide to celebrate Valentine's Day in May instead of February...

Friends, whenever we hear the news that something can lead to success, we consider it good news... and we do our best to acquire that key to success!

So when we hear Jesus say "Blessed are..." it's understandable that we would hear this as good news.

It's even more understandable that we would hear it as good news about more keys to success and it's almost expected that we would subsequently go and try to be more or do more of whatever it is that Jesus himself says is blessed; Be poor in spirit, be pure in heart, be peacemakers...

Well friends, these nine "Blessed are..." statements - the Beatitudes, as they are commonly known – they are indeed good

news; but not because they are keys to success... but because they are promises that Jesus Christ will fulfill for us.

When Jesus says “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” He doesn’t mean go and be poor in spirit so that you can enter into the kingdom of heaven... He’s not saying that you must be poor in spirit in order to experience the kingdom of heaven...

In the first four beatitudes Jesus is not describing people with “good spiritual qualities,” instead he is describing people in bad situations: it is not good to be poor in spirit, meek, mourn, or lack in righteousness – that does not lead to success... But yet Jesus is promising success to them anyways in spite of what they lack.

So blessed are the poor in spirit really means, I will cause good things to happen to those who don’t have what it takes to succeed...

Blessed are they who mourn means, I will cause good things to happen to those who are stuck in grief...

Blessed are the meek means, I will cause good things to happen to those who won’t take advantage of the opportunities which are given to them...

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness means, I will cause good things to happen to those who really need to do the right things but never seem to be able to ...

This is Jesus giving a blessing to those who seem to think God has it out for them, no matter how much you say to them that God loves them... to those who are broken hearted and blame God for it... to those who are reticent to assert their status as children of God... to those who just plain out don’t do what pleases God...

These are promises that Jesus is making to those who don’t have the necessary keys to be successful in their relationship with God. And so the whole idea of having keys to success is being flipped on its head here... and friends believe it or not that is good news!

This is good news friends because if you have ever felt like you just don’t have what it takes to be successful as a Christian – and I

think we've all been there at some point - this is Jesus saying to you "it doesn't matter I'm blessing you anyways!"

Now friends it's important to understand that a blessing is not a reward and it is not a statement of fact. So when Jesus blesses the poor in spirit or the meek he's not saying "I'm rewarding you for this" or as we said before "be meek so that you will..."

A blessing is a pronouncement of good things yet to come... but somehow through being pronounced... those good things start to become a reality in the life of the one being blessed.

Jesus blesses those who lack success in their relationship with God because he intends to provide them with success through his ministry: through his death and resurrection, the Great Commission, his accession to heaven and sending the Holy Spirit...

So if we were to summarize the first four of these nine blessings it would be Jesus saying "Blessed are those who were lacking, who were empty... for they will be filled up... indeed as you hear this

you are already starting to be filled up and you will be completely filled up in who I am and what I will do."

Friends Jesus' blessing contains within itself the power to bring about what it promises!

So if you have ever felt like you don't have what it takes to be a Christian, hear the good news "You are Blessed! And you will receive all the mercy, purity of heart and peace that you need to follow Christ – and just by hearing this it is already starting to become a reality for you!"

That's good news!

So Jesus moves on to the next three blessed... Blessed are the merciful, the pure of heart and the peacemakers.

Do you see the progression here – how Jesus will move us from blessing to blessing.

Those who were lacking are now full of that which are the keys to success in a relationship with God – provided of course through the mercy Jesus showed to us, the purity of heart that can only be found in Him and the peace which he established between humanity and God.

So these three blessings are the assurance that our present fullness will be sufficient to withstand that day where we must stand before God to give account for our lives.

Those who have been filled with Christ's mercy will be shown mercy by God, those who have been filled with Christ's purity will have God reveal himself to them, and those who are filled with Christ's peace will have the peace of knowing they truly belong to God – they are called children of God.

Jesus speaks this to us now – a blessing which promises that judgement day will be a joyful day for us – and by hearing it now our final state of perfection is already starting to become a reality for us..."

So, through these three particular blessings Jesus takes our final reality with God and starts to change our current reality with others - so that we are merciful towards them, we are pure towards them, we bring peace: shalom... we work to restore wholeness among them.

But again this flips the whole idea of keys to success on its head because generally speaking in our world; and even more so in Jesus' day, those who are merciful, pure of heart and peaceful get chewed up and spit out...

How many movie stars, pop stars, politicians, business executives will tell you that the secret to their success has been showing mercy, being pure of heart or staying centered on God, trying to bring reconciliation and wholeness into the brokenness of this world?

Sure these are nice qualities to have if you are Mary Poppins – but they won't get you elected as a politician, they won't take you to the top of the business world.

In fact in many situations these qualities will make you look ridiculous, they will leave you vulnerable to those who would take advantage of you, people will not appreciate what you are trying to do, they will criticize and mock you as naïve, idealistic, foolish!

Ironic isn't it that by trying show God's mercy we will incur violence, when we show purity of heart – that our lives are centered on God and his desires - we are ridiculed, and when we work to make what is broken whole... we are accused of hatred and discrimination.

If you don't believe me just post something on Facebook which says that Christians ought to show God's mercy to those who wrestle with same sex attraction by inviting them to be a part of the church where they can experience forgiveness and healing through community and grow towards wholeness; God's intentions of male and female for human sexuality...

Post a merciful, pure, reconciliatory statement like this and just watch the anger, hatred, and violent derogatory comments about Christianity that will pile up...

You certainly won't feel like you are being blessed for showing mercy, for keeping God at the center of your lives and attempting to bring wholeness and peace – you will feel persecuted.

So Jesus speaks to this in the final two blessings... He says “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness” in other words even though it doesn't look like it at first, good things – like the Kingdom of Heaven – will happen to those who are persecuted for doing what is right..

And then Jesus expands on it a bit more... He says “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”

So let's go back to that Facebook statement for a moment – If a Muslim, a Hindu or a Jewish person were to state their belief that homosexuality was wrong – there might be a minor fuss... but as I said earlier, connect a comment like that to Jesus Christ and you better watch out for the backlash!

Friends the Good News is that in spite of the adverse reaction that Christ's mercy, purity and wholeness will bring – we are still blessed!

Initially persecution may cause us to waver and doubt, we may wonder if we still are blessed because we never expected so many trials and obstacles to come from doing what is right... but Jesus has said You are Blessed when you are persecuted for my sake!

So instead of persecution being the cause for doubt, it is now the proof that Jesus has filled you with His mercy, purity and peace – so take heart Jesus intends to bless you with the Kingdom of Heaven.

And remember – that hearing this blessing starts to make this become a reality in your life right now – in the midst of persecution you will begin to experience Christ's Kingdom, His power, His rule, His protection, His vindication – and ultimately this will come in fullness when Jesus Christ returns.

That's why Jesus says "great is your reward in heaven"

And in case you think that is too much of a pat answer, listen to what Jesus says to the disciples in Matthew 19:28-29.

*"I tell you the truth! At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."*

Friends it truly is a great reward – this is ultimately what Jesus' blessing will bring about in our lives and in this world.

You know, we ought to spend time more time thinking about the new world that's coming when Jesus returns.

We ought to dream about what it will be like to live in a world where righteousness is celebrated, honored, encouraged... a world where everyone knows and worships the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... a world where things have been restored, made whole... a

world without the evil of sin twisting and warping of things God intended to be good.

So somehow the grass will be greener, the sky will be bluer, the water and air will be cleaner and clearer, the mountains will be more majestic, men and women will be more handsome and beautiful! It will be like going from an old TV to a brand new HD plasma screen!

But to top it all off – we will know our Lord and Savior face to face.

And friends, at that point – if it's still possible to think back to what we experience in our lives now, to compare what we've gone through to that moment in our future when we are talking with Jesus...

And to remember how we used to be so wound up and concerned about achieving what we considered to be a successful life... as we start eternity in a world more beautiful than we could ever imagine – as we start a life which had nothing to do with any of our keys to success...

Well I think the apostle Paul sums it up pretty well, he says “*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*” (Rom 8:18) and that may be understating it somewhat...

Blessed are...

Truly, on that day we will know what blessed fully means. We will fully experience what Jesus intended to bring about in our lives when we first heard that good news... “*Blessed are...*”

So friends hold on to this blessing – it's a promise when you lack; it's an assurance when you fear judgment; it's a motivation and it's a comfort for your relationships with others – and it's all you need for true success in this life - and in the next...

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit – for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” Amen.*