

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

Brothers and sisters, 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.

And this also holds true as we go through the other stages of life as well – we come to realize that our success is largely dependent upon whether or not we possess these things which are the keys to success for relationships, for marriage, and parenting, managing our finances, saving for our retirement, and staying healthy through it all.

And it quickly becomes evident that 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 for you to gain the keys that you need for success.

Nothing ensures your success - in obtaining the keys to success - like having some keys to success!

So we are always eager to hear any news that has identified another key to success 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 children decide to attempt conception by celebrating Valentine's Day in May instead of February...

Brothers and sisters, I think you would agree that when we hear about 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 saying in our scripture reading this morning *"Blessed are..."* it's understandable that we would hear this as good news.

And as such.... it's even more understandable that we would hear it as good news BECAUSE it sounds like its identifying additional keys to success!

So that's why upon reading and hearing what Jesus says here so many of us subsequently go and try to BE more, or DO more, of what Jesus has said is blessed... be poor in spirit, be pure in heart, be peacemakers... and so on – because we want to be blessed, we want to be successful.

Well brothers and sisters, I have to tell you this morning that these nine “Blessed are...” statements - the Beatitudes, as they are commonly known – are indeed good news; BUT they are NOT keys to success... they are instead promises that **Jesus Christ** will fulfill for us.

You see 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... nor is he saying that you must be poor in spirit in order to experience the kingdom of heaven...

What is actually happening in the first of the four beatitudes is that Jesus is describing people with “terrible spiritual qualities,” He is identifying and describing people in bad situations. It is not good to be poor in spirit, to be meek, to have to mourn, or to lack in righteousness – these qualities keep you stuck, they hold you back, they do not lead to success...

But - Jesus is promising success to these people anyways in spite of what is holding them back.

So blessed are the poor in spirit doesn’t mean that its good to be humble, it really means that Jesus will cause good things to happen to those who have terrible self esteem, who lack confidence, who don’t have the internal discipline or motivation that it takes to succeed in life.

Blessed are they who mourn means, I will cause good things to happen to those who are stuck in grief and can’t get past it and its affecting their ability to function well in life.

Blessed are the meek means; I will cause good things to happen to those who are too fearful and timid to step out of their comfort zone, to grow beyond what they know, to take advantage of the opportunities which are given to them, to take risk for a reward.

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, to make good decisions and to exercise discernment and do what it right – but always seem to be going from one terrible decision to another...

These first four statement Jesus blesses those who don't deserve it, and if you know or have experienced being like this in your own life, it feels like God has it out for you right? And no matter how much people tell you God loves you, it doesn't connect. Because you can't believe it – these four conditions are standing in the way.

But Jesus speaks blessing 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 blessings 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!

It's 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 brothers and sisters it's important to understand that a blessing is not a reward, nor 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 being this way"* or as I mentioned before *"be meek so that you will..."*

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

Jesus speaks blessing over those who lack success in their relationship with God - because he intends to provide them with success through His own 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.”*

Brothers and sisters Jesus’ words of blessing contains within themselves the power to bring about what Jesus 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!

And I hope brothers and sisters, that you make the connection here on further ways that you can bless people spiritually – in telling them this kind of good news. That when you speak blessing to people – in Jesus’ name – it has a power in it to bring that blessing to fruition in their lives.

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

Pay attention because there is a progression here – see how Jesus will move us from blessing to blessing.

Those who were lacking are now being filled with that which is the key to success in their relationship with God – but its provided 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.

And Jesus speaks this to us now – a blessing which promises that judgement day will be a joyful day for us – and by hearing it

spoken to us now, it is causing our final state of perfection to already start to become a reality for us...

So, through these three particular blessings Jesus takes our impending reality of standing before God and starts to change it, which also begins to change our current reality with other people - so that we are merciful towards them, we are pure towards them, and we bring peace: shalom... we work to restore wholeness for them.

Again – these are ways that we go out to bless other people spiritually – with mercy, purity, peace and restoration... go and pray this into the lives of the people on your list, speak it verbally to them, bless them with it.

Now as I said before 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 by staying centered on Jesus, trying to bring reconciliation and wholeness into the brokenness of this 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!

They may be 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.

And ironically, recent attempts to make Hollywood, Harvard, Wall Street and Washington more peace loving, kind hearted and merciful through what is known as the Diversity, Inclusion and Equality movement, or D.I.E. for short, have only resulted in the vicious cancelations of those who won’t go along with it. I guess you have to be ruthless in the noble pursuit of being inclusive.

So whether you are up against old school ruthlessness, or new school DIE-delology these Christian mercy, purity and peace/shalom are not going to make you successful in the world.

Case in point when Christians try to show God's mercy towards sinners - we will incur violence, when we show purity of heart – that our lives are centered on God and his desires instead of our own desire - we are ridiculed, and when we work to make what is broken whole in encouraging and helping people to live chastely and monogamously... we are accused of hatred and discrimination.

For example, if we make a statement on FB that Christians ought to show God's mercy to those who wrestle with same sex attraction or are questioning their gender by inviting them to be a part of a church where they can experience forgiveness and healing through Christian community, accountability, and grow towards wholeness; God's intentions of male and female for human sexuality in a life long committed marriage.

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 will risk getting cancelled and banned from Facebook.

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.

This is why last week I had Pastor Jim speak about putting on the armor of God, because going out to spiritual bless people means you are going to be undermining the work of the devil in people's lives – and he's going to push back against that. It's spiritual blessing as part of spiritual warfare.

So Jesus speaks about this in the final two blessings from the beatitudes. 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!

But brothers and sisters, the Good News is that in spite of the adverse reaction which Christ’s mercy, purity and wholeness can bring when it confronts the enemy – 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, in fact its almost the only way for Jesus to bless us with the Kingdom of Heaven, because considering persecution as a blessing is not something of this world. Only heavenly, Godly, pure, peaceful, merciful character can do that.

And remember – 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, His ability to say *“Forgive them for they know not what they do!”* – 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 at that point – if it's still possible to think back and remember what we experienced in our lives in this world, to compare what we've gone through in our lives in the old creation to that moment in our future when we are talking with Jesus in the new creation...

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...

If it is possible to think about and remember and consider all that, well I think the apostle Paul sums it up pretty accurately when he says "*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 Brothers and sister hold on to this blessing from the Lord this morning, AND go and speak it out over the lives of your five people on your list.

It will be a promise when you are lacking; It will be an assurance when you fear judgment; It will be a motivation for your relationships with others; and provide the endurance when you go through persecution. 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.*