

May you always be poor, hungry, weeping, even hated.

This is a strange blessing, isn't it? Certainly not one you'd wish on your parents as you leave for university nor on your kids on their wedding day. It's probably not what you'd wish your spouse on your deathbed. Usually we wish, or pray, or hope that they have a long life, full of joy and sparse with trials, with enough food and money not to worry about tomorrow and friends to get you through whatever tough spots you find yourself in. You'd rarely wish for those tough spots to come.

And thank goodness Jesus doesn't bestow a blessing like I do upon the people-- not in His actions at least. He preaches the kingdom of God and brings about healing here and now. He brings the good stuff so that people would know that they are loved and cared for.

So why on earth would your pastor bestow such a blessing upon you? Because it is my prayer for you today. May you always be poor, hungry, weeping, even hated.

These are not what we would like in life--not for ourselves, not for our families, maybe only on our worst enemies might we wish these things, but I think we'd want even them to at least have a little respite. We bestow such blessings because they counter the trend of this world; we're always striving to get more because the way it is, in the natural path, we are on our way to nothing--we work so that our food supplies aren't depleted, we seek out friends and get together because yesterday's memories are great, but they are just moments, and not a life of memories to bring us joy and companionship. We seek out money because as our accounts sit, we won't have enough for all of our tomorrows, should they last a normal lifespan.

And Jesus has entered creation, divine flesh dwelling amongst the flesh He created, in order to bring an end to that destruction and need, to bring about the new creation--and this is what we heard Him preach in the temple, this is what we've seen Him act out as He rebukes

diseases and spirits alike, caring for body and soul, the whole of His creation. Among the people, even as He begins teaching today, He is bringing healing to the wounded, freedom to the captive, forgiveness to the guilty, as His Gospel power exudes from His very being, from His hands, feet, even the clothing draped over Him. He is the New creation which wants all others to be united with Him in such a creation.

Then He opens His mouth:

Should you desire blessings? Make sure you're poor or hungry, mourning or an outcast among the people. Should you want anything else, you will find yourself cursed, full of woe.

What does Jesus mean by these? Are they simply spiritual deficits that we should relish in? Or should we seek poverty? How poor and miserable must I make myself?

The answer is not that you could make yourself nothing-enough; monks have tried over the years, withholding themselves from the pleasures of life, and with an artificial cut-off, they can manage to get to a point where they can pat themselves on the back. Normal people do it too; they decide what God wants them to cut out, and with that decision made, they can then strive, and they feel good when they get close or even get there, but it's a manufactured limit--less tv, cursing, money, alcohol, vices of any sort. They made a limit, but in reality it's still not far enough, because the real answer not that Jesus wants us to have a depleted bank account or shrinking friends list; He wants us to be poor in the way that we realize we are nothing, whether we have a mansion or a shoebox or a straw hut, Whether we eat at the Keg regularly or if a treat is off the dollar menu. The poor Jesus speaks of, the poor who will be blessed, know they must find their satisfaction and place their trust in, they must seek and anticipate something outside of this world, because no matter how much money they have, they still lack something

Only one was made truly poor, who forsook the riches of heaven to dwell as a travelling preacher; who truly hungered, for food and for righteousness, as He left the abundance of heaven where neither *could* lack, entering the world where the stomach was never satisfied and righteousness can't be found; He left the joys of heaven and entered the land devastated by sin-- anger, lust, jealousy, paranoia, greed, apathy, rampant selfishness tore through the streets leaving people sick and injured, dying and dead, separated with no hope of reconciliation, and they caused Jesus to weep. He is the one who was hated on account of His name and His Word which He proclaimed and the Word which He enacted right in front of their eyes. He was excluded from among the living, reviled by those He came to save, spurned as a liar, blasphemer, a helpless man. He, like the prophets before Him, was rejected, and for all this He is truly blessed.

He was raised from the dead, blessed despite all the suffering He had born, and was bestowed an eternal crown and the name that is above every name; in His resurrection, who Christ was from eternity was revealed unto the other end of eternity. And the greatest part is that He rose in order to bless you.

You are joined with Christ; in your baptism you died with Him so you might live with Him, and His name, Christian, was bestowed upon you. You, even now, even today, are one with Him. And He rose to be your riches and food, your joy and your comfort.

So Jesus' beatitudes are not this demand, as if there were a carrot on the end of a stick leading us down the path of the poor and hungry and the mourning and hated. It isn't that we must follow the treasure map into these places to find blessing, but that we are now united with Blessing Himself, Christ our Lord who has opened heaven to us, and now we find ourselves living a life shaped like His, in the places where He went, surrounded by the people He surrounded Himself with.

So the beatitudes from Luke are a little bit like a mirror and a guide. We know that we have been adopted by Christ and bestowed from Him every blessing because in His life and on the cross He absorbed every woe,

Yet do the beatitudes sound accurate? Sure, I'm one with Him, but am I poor? Not that I need to live at a certain poverty level to receive God's blessing, but if money is an idol that distracts me from Christ, I must turn and hear His forgiveness which frees me from the need to be self-sufficient.

What about mournful? Do I walk around life with my sackcloth undies on, always grieving that sin is tormenting the world even amidst my life, which often isn't too awful? Or am I oblivious to what is going on in order to protect my corner of the world? More often than not, I'm the latter. I'm guessing that's you too, some days. I'm not going to wag a finger at you--I've got no right. I'm just going to invite you along with me to the table today to receive Christ's forgiveness.

And am I hated? The answer to that is no. Do I need to be? Not necessarily, but the question is, am I willing to be; if someone starts smearing me because I'm a Christian, am I going to jump ship? "Lord," I would say, "You know I'm weak so you better hold me tight." And maybe I might need to repent of the times when I have already jumped ship, keeping my mouth shut, in essence denying Christ around the firepit with Peter. Trust me. It happens, but it's not the end of the world; Christ yearns to forgive you, so simply repent and receive His forgiveness and mercy for today, strength and wisdom for tomorrow.

In each of these, in our failures to live like Christ, what is occurring is that we forget that we are reliant on Him, that He is enough for this life, and instead we become satisfied with all

that this life gives. But Christ, who gave up everything, invites us to not be satisfied with this world, and so not seek out its riches but instead seek to give them out.

This life that Jesus invites us into isn't too glamorous. It's not a hoot all the time, especially as we encounter our brothers and sisters who have been beaten down by sin, death, and the devil himself in an attempt to steal away their faith. But it's a life we ought to love because we're also only here because of His grace, demonstrated in His Word and these very people, His body.

And it can be equally rough when we go out into the world, dealing with those whom Christ loves--they aren't often lovely, nor are they in the most welcoming of situations. But these are whom He sends us to, that they may be one with us in His body and know His love, minute by minute, so we pray the Lord take us there and give us the strength.

This life is not glitzy, but it's our life here. One day, the new creation is going to be revealed and at long last our faith will be made sight, we'll know perfection inside our bodies and out. Poverty and hunger, grief and hatred will no longer persist because the power which Jesus enacted in healing will radiate over the whole of the new creation and sin will cease and death will be no longer and tears will be dried up. This is where we want to be.

This is precisely why I pray such a blessing for you today. May you always know your need, so that you remain reliant on Christ who is taking you to paradise.

Today, I certainly hope that you would have enough food and money and friends to carry you through your days, and yet at the same, time, that you would cling to Christ and always know your need, may you always be poor, hungry, weeping, even hated, all for Christ's sake...until the day you're not, and in that day you won't know suffering or loss ever again.