

Sharing God's Blessings

Matthew 5:1-12

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Country music artist, Martina McBride asserts in one of her hit songs that "WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED." Indeed we have. This world is a beautiful place. Most of us have people who love us. Few, if any, of us got out of bed this morning wondering where we would find something to eat. All of life is a blessing. That is where I would like to focus our attention for the next few weeks.

OUR POSSESSIONS ARE BLESSINGS FROM GOD

If you have food in the refrigerator and clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world. If you can read a newspaper or a road map, you are more blessed than 2 billion people in the world who cannot read. The fact that you can attend church without fear of harassment or torture or death is a blessing that almost 3 billion people in the world do not enjoy.

Why was I born in the land of the free and the home of the brave? Why was I raised in a house I didn't buy by parents who cared for my needs? Why am I an American sitting comfortably in my living room rather than an Indian squatting in some rat infested alley of Calcutta? Why do good things happen to ordinary people? If I didn't know better, it would make me believe in predestination. So much of life is a given. We have been blessed.

The sin of suburbanites is the illusion that our fine houses, our fancy cars, our elite life style, is a product of our own ingenuity and imagination. We did it our way. We worked for it, paid for it, earned it, deserved it, and now all we have to do is protect it from individuals or institutions who might dare to alter the wonderful life we have so carefully constructed.

"Property rights" are a cherished freedom in this country. The Bible has a better idea. The Bible says: "The earth is the Lord's and everything that is in it" (Psalm 24:1). "God owns the cattle on a thousand hills; the sun, the moon, and the stars are his" (Psalm 50:10). We are stewards and managers of what God has entrusted to us. The question on our final exam will be "What have we done with what we have been given?"

It would be a great day of rejoicing in heaven and earth if we who call ourselves Christians, brought our possessions under the Lordship of Christ. It may be the

most spiritual thing that could happen in any individual life. I pose some questions for you today.

- Do you seek the will of God concerning your assets?
- Do you ask God to guide your spending habits?
- Have you brought your debts to the Lord for wisdom and guidance?

Our possessions, whatever form they may take, are spiritual matters. We do not live our spiritual lives over here and our daily material lives over there. The reality is that Jesus Christ must be Lord of all that brings it all. Our decisions need to be spiritual decisions.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor and the pure.” Was He recommending poverty and piousness? I think not. He was advising recognition of need and singleness of heart. He was saying to those who have nothing and those who have everything: “You have spiritual needs that things will never satisfy.” He was saying that no person can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money. He was saying you are blessed to be a blessing to others. It would be a great day in our Christian faith if we brought all of our possessions and all the things that we have under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Is that not our call? Our possessions are a blessing from God.

OUR PROBLEMS ARE BLESSINGS FROM GOD

Andrae Crouch is one of my favorite Christian artists. In addition to writing and singing award winning songs, Andrae is the pastor of Christ Memorial Church in Los Angeles. Andrae has survived four different forms of cancer. In a recent interview he said: “I wouldn’t want to wake up in the morning without saying “Thank You God for another day.” One of his songs goes like this:

I thank God for the mountains,
I thank him for the valleys,
I thank him for the storms, he brought me through.
For if I never had a problem,
I wouldn’t know that God could solve them,
I’d never know what faith in God could do.

Life is filled with problems. Grief is a problem. My friend, Doris Jones, writing about the death of her husband says, “Grief is amputation without anesthesia.” But, as the title of her book states, “Never once did the birds stop singing.” Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Sin is a problem. Paul laments in Romans 7; I just don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t do it. My decisions don’t result in action. Something has gone wrong deep within me and it gets the better of me every time.

St. Augustine, brilliant 4th century thinker of the Christian Church, understood Paul’s problem. Born in North Africa to a saintly mother, Augustine taught at the

finest universities but could not bring his personal life under the guidance of God. Once when his mother convinced him to give up his concubines and get married, Augustine prayed, "Lord, grant me chastity, but not yet." Then in the summer of 386, while in a garden praying, Augustine underwent a profound personal conversion to Christianity, abandoned his career in rhetoric, gave up any ideas of marriage and devoted himself to religion, celibacy and the priesthood. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be satisfied.

Persecution is a problem. I do not like being talked about, lied about, judged without reason, criticized without understanding. I like to please people. I have high needs for recognition and approval. Why do you think people like me wind up in the ministry?

So when Jesus says rejoice and be glad when people insult you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely; if it is for righteousness sake, your reward will be great in heaven. I find that to be a hard blessing to swallow. Wouldn't it be nice if we could just all be nice to one another as nice folks should and do? Or would such pseudo-community which tastes good with the first bite grow bitter with the second and third chew? If God did not expect you to have a few enemies, why would he have spent so much time telling you to love them?

Here is the truth. We learn more from our problems than we do from our successes. People sail through the good times, but dig deep wells in hard times. People walk by fact when they have it all together, but they walk by faith when life is falling apart. Helen Keller said, "I have always thought it would be a blessing if each person could be blind and deaf for a few days during their early life. The darkness would make them appreciate the light. The silence would teach them the joys of sound." I thank God for the problems. God has used them in redemptive ways to make me a better person.

OUR POSSIBILITIES ARE BLESSINGS FROM GOD

It has been nearly 30 years ago now, but I remember it as if it happened yesterday. I took my youth group to a conference youth rally in Lexington, Kentucky. On the program that day was a 100-voice youth choir from a Methodist home in Mississippi that ministered to the physically handicapped. During that concert a twisted, limited young man hobbled up the chancel steps and taking a microphone began to sing:

I am a promise, I am a possibility,
I am a promise, with a capital P.
I am a great big bundle of potentiality,
And I am learning to hear God's voice,
And I am trying to make the right choice,
And I can be anything God wants me to be.

I found myself praying that day. Lord, never let me complain again about my lot in life. Let me use what little talent you have given me to help people believe in themselves like that. I am a promise, I am a possibility. Do you understand the possibilities of your life?

Jesus said the meek, the merciful and the peacemakers are blessed by God. Meekness is neither shyness nor self defeat. Meekness is having your feet planted firmly on the ground. The earth belongs to the meek. I got to thinking the other day about some things I have learned since I thought I knew it all. I have learned:

- 1) I am not the center of the universe.
- 2) There are more things I do not know, than things I do know.
- 3) The greatest truths of life are mysteries.
- 4) I was born not to get, but to give.

Mercy generates mercy. The quality of mercy is not strained; it drops like gentle rain from heaven above to earth below. The merciful are blessed with mercy.

Nearly 100 years ago, we fought a war that was to end all wars. We called it World War I. The smoke had hardly settled when we saw another 6 million people killed in World War II. Even now body bags containing our young men and women arrive back in the states every day. Is peace an optimistic ideal or a fervent possibility? I do not know, but count me among the peacemakers. I want to be called a child of God.

We have been blessed.

Will we use our blessings to bless others?