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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 28, 2015
5th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 17:1-9; Acts 4:1-12

Hymns: 11; 409; 412; 413:5-6 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:7-12

7 Blessed are the merciful,

For they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,

For they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,

For they shall be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,

For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Life Under Christ

As we turn once again to the Sermon on the Mount and the beatitudes which open this beautiful sermon, it is important for us to recall the fact that opened our meditation last Sunday, that Jesus

was addressing this sermon and most certainly these opening beatitudes to His disciples. That was not limited to the twelve, for there were many gathered around Jesus on that day, but followers of Jesus nonetheless. These words are not properly understood or applied to the Christian's life apart from, the gospel. It is when viewed in light of the gospel that we understand the beatitudes to be as instructive for –

THEME: Living in a Blessed Spiritual State.

We are truly blessed by the Lord. We are blessed because we have been --

I. Blessed to Know God in His Grace, Mercy, and Peace.

Matthew 5:7-9 “Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.”

We start this morning with the concept of mercy. The merciful of this world do indeed show empathy to those who are suffering, those who are in need of help. They often speak of acting in an altruistic way towards those who are around them. However, when one probes into the motivation behind their kind deeds one often hears expressions of self-aggrandizement. People feel better about themselves, they see themselves as better people, when they are merciful to others, even to those who got themselves into an awful mess. One hears these acts of mercy tied to expressions like “paying it forward,” or “Be kind to others and someday when you are in need someone might be kind to you”, or they might say “What goes around comes around, and that is just as true about doing good as it is about doing evil.” The idea is then expressed that we are merciful because we want to live in a compassionate community. From a world view all these things are true, but these are not the truths that bring us into a blessed spiritual state about which the Lord Jesus is teaching us.

That must begin with the Lord and the revelation of His mercy toward us who believe. Jesus couples this expression of mercy with the possession of a pure heart. This, again, is a major indication of the spiritual nature of these beatitudes. We may try as hard as we

might and we will not attain purity of heart. We are sinful and corrupt by nature. Our heart is purified by God the Holy Spirit who calls us to faith through the gospel. It is only when the Spirit has drawn us to God as our loving Father in heaven and as our Redeemer from sin that we know the only true God, and worship Him alone, and have a pure heart. This comes to us by God's grace, as David acknowledged in the psalm we sing every Sunday.

Psalm 51:9 -11 “Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”

By God's forgiving grace we possess a pure heart, a heart purified by the Holy Spirit's cleansing power that washes away every stain of sin with the blood of Christ. Then we live in hope according to faith. We live with the assurance that we shall see God. We know that on that day when He shall call us to be with Him we shall be blessed with eternal life. As beneficiaries of His mercy and grace we also become merciful. Not only are we empathetic with the temporal sufferings of people in this world who are caught up in distress caused by any of a variety of calamities, be it natural disaster of earthquake, drought or famine or disease, but we are also in a position to understand their spiritual plight which poses a far greater threat to their eternal wellbeing. The greatest kindness we can show to others is to share the mercy and grace of God that has come to us in the gospel.

Currently we have opened our hearts to those distressed in Nepal because of the great earthquake that struck there. But there is another effort that is going forth from our fellowship starting tomorrow with those three of mission helper teams flying to Africa. They will be teaching children in Bible schools in four countries, teaching these children about the mercies of God. Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.

But not everyone agrees with this course of action. While helping with the needs of the body receives general approval from the world, addressing the greater needs of the souls is often criticized as meddling with the culture of others. Indeed there are risks involved in being a peacemaker even when it is peace with God,

that peace that is so essential to life, that is being shared with others. The Lord would have us not only realize this risk but embrace it. In this state of grace we are –

II. Blessed to Suffer for Righteousness' Sake.

Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Again, let us be sure that we understand what Jesus is saying with these words. There are others who are persecuted in this world who are not blessed, who are not going to know that joy of heart that is ours through faith in Christ. There are all kinds of reasons that people have to be mean to others. Sometimes it is because they are from a different country and so they speak a foreign language, or their skin color may be of a different shade. To treat others badly for this reason is sinful, but Jesus isn't calling these victims of cruelty blessed. Sometimes it is because of another's religion when it isn't Christianity. There is no doubt that, using the false religion of the victims as an excuse for their inhumanity, many have suffered and even died at the hands of others. Even though God condemns such sin, this isn't suffering for righteousness' sake. This isn't what Jesus is referencing in these beatitudes. Sometimes Christians suffer because of their own sin or foolishness. Yes, Christians may say or do things that are not reflections of God's love or mercy that bring down the wrath of others on their heads. Jesus is not referencing this situation, even though the child of God may turn to God seeking deliverance from such suffering.

Jesus is telling us that when we are faithful to His Word, and treating others according to the love and grace which He has revealed to and in us, and stand up for the truth of Christ in this world of sin, we may indeed suffer for it. But we should remember that we are blessed, for according to God's grace and love in Christ Jesus we already possess the kingdom of heaven. We know that heaven is our homeland, and we shall live there before the Lord, our Redeemer forever and ever. That is our comfort that is our joy.

That is our salvation. That is our righteousness which Christ secured for us at great suffering which He willingly endured for us.

So then when we stand up for the Lord's truth, and live according to His Word and will, doing all to His glory for His praise, we will suffer for righteousness' sake. People will object, and object strenuously to what we say and about what we believe. Sometimes the objection and revilement comes at us from people about whom we care very deeply. That will be true even when we walk in love toward others and strive to live in peace with our neighbors, as we are encouraged to do by the Apostle Paul saying, **"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men"** (Romans 12:18).

In spite of our efforts to live in peace and harmony with our neighbors in this world there will be times when we will suffer for righteousness' sake. We will be despised for being loyal to Jesus, for rejecting sin, for testifying to the truth of His gospel. We can learn from the Apostles' example. They were brought before the Jewish council, the same council that had condemned Jesus, and told in no uncertain terms that they should not preach any more about Jesus. We read in --

Acts 5:40-42 "When they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

The Apostles were beaten with rods to make sure the Jewish Council had gotten their attention, communicating that the council was very serious about their order to stop preaching about Jesus; and then the Apostles were sent on their way. They didn't go on their way defeated or feeling sorry for themselves, Not hardly! They rejoiced to be found worthy to suffer shame for Jesus. They continued to preach and teach and worship the Lord, and not only privately in people's homes, but openly, every day in the temple! We need to remember, as did the Apostles that life is not about the here and now. Jesus has secured heaven for us! The reward Jesus

reserved for you with His merits is eternal life in heaven. All this, including the trials of this life, shall pass away.

Any persecution we may endure has been endured by others before us, and by many others in the world today. It is not something strange or foreign that we shouldn't have to endure. It comes with being a child of God. We join the faithful remembering that we are blessed, and that it is a blessing to suffer shame for Jesus and His gospel.

May these beatitudes from the Jesus' Sermon on the Mount encourage us and assure us that we are among the blessed of the Lord as we live to Christ's glory, and show forth His praises in word and deed during our sojourn here on earth. We look for the Lord's return eager to add to the number of the blessed by being faithful witnesses of His grace, mercy, and peace.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.