

All Saints' 2021 – They Shall be Blessed

1. This week we recognize All Saints' Day – of course that was Nov 1, the day after Reformation Day, but that was this past Monday.
 - a. Today we hear our Lord deliver the “Beatitudes” in His Sermon on the Mount, and many of us are familiar with at least some of them.
 - i. The Beatitudes can be divided in groups by the kinds of people they describe: verses 3–6 address the qualities of those who are patiently waiting for something; verses 7–9 speak of the qualities to be exhibited in a life of love to the neighbor; vss 10-12 describe those who suffer for the Kingdom of God
 - ii. These are the qualities that so many people equate with a worldly concept of saintliness as though we could live up to those ideals on our best days.
 - iii. But rather in the Beatitudes, Jesus Promises His Believers **That They Shall Be Blessed**: who recognize their dependence on God for these things.
 - b. You have heard me say many times that it is only natural that humans pursue happiness – often equating happiness with blessedness.
 - i. It's everyone's hope that with some effort and by making good choices, one will be rewarded in this lifetime with happiness.
 - ii. Usually that state of happiness is measured by worldly standards: an abundance of material possessions, experiences, fun, relationships...
 - iii. And as the person looks around and sees what he has, he might draw the conclusion, “Look, I must be truly blessed.”
 - iv. But what does a blessed life look like according to our Lord the Beatitudes? Much different than the world's concept, and how do we achieve it?
2. I think many of us have heard of Robert Louis Stephenson's “The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.”
 - a. It's about the duplicity of human nature: Dr Jekyll is a kind, well-respected and intelligent scientist who by tampering with science brings out his dark side in Mr. Hyde.
 - i. His evil alter ego indulges his base desires and doesn't repent or accept responsibility for his crimes and evil ways, including murder.
 - ii. Jekyll tries to control his alter ego, and for a while, Jekyll has the power, but by the end of the novel, Hyde takes over and they die.
 - b. As believers our lives often look a lot like Jekyll and Hyde – acknowledging God's Word and His will in statements like the Beatitudes as good, right and proper yet living for ourselves, indulging our baser instincts
 - i. To some of you familiar with Martin Luther, the Jekyll and Hyde phenomenon might sound familiar – Luther referred to it as “simultaneously sinner and saint.”

- ii. In this world we are daily confronted by the temptations of the flesh – in our hearts and minds we might profess faith in God, yet we fail to carry it out in our lives.
 - iii. What we hear as “blessed” in the Beatitudes is something that goes contrary to our expectations contrary to what our society values and affirms.
 - iv. So, when we compare our lives and our motivations to the Beatitudes can we be surprised that more often than not we’re anything but saintly or blessed?
 - c. We hear our Lord say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (vv 3–6).
 - i. Could Jesus really be saying what it sounds like to our modern ears – poor in spirit, mournful, meek – who calls this “blessed” at any point in history?
 - ii. The traditional explanation is that it means people who recognize their own spiritual poverty, their need for God; those who mourn is taken to mean people who repent and mourn for their sins...
 - iii. "Meekness" is a humble attitude seen in the patient endurance of offenses. It implies mercy and self-restraint. Meekness is not weakness.
 - iv. But even so, even if our Lord is talking about the spiritual realm how often do we take time to recognize our spiritual poverty or mourn over sin or exercise mercy and self-restraint?
 - d. We hear, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”
 - i. Look at those traits...merciful...pure in heart...peacemakers
 - ii. How merciful are you...how pure in heart...how peaceful? Are you only merciful, pure and peaceful compared with others or are you absolutely, always all of these? And how much of them do you need to be blessed?
 - iii. If you look into your life and at all of the motivations for all of your actions, Mr or Ms Hyde, there are more than several occasions whether you’re young or old that you KNOW you have NOT been purely merciful or pure or peaceful.
- 3. Held up against the Beatitudes we all fall woefully short of what Jesus calls “blessed”
 - a. But it would be a mistake to look at the beatitudes as requirements that have to be fulfilled before we can be blessed.
 - i. That would turn these verses into Law, a checklist of what I must do to get right with God rather than a description of who we become through Christ.

- ii. God comes to those who realize their need: the destitute, who lack all of these qualities that merit God's mercy, Christ has become for them their righteousness (1 Cor 1:30).
 - iii. He comes to those who often don't display any of the qualities that He describes in the Beatitudes on their own but rather receive them through faith.
 - b. Paul tells us in 2 Cor, **"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** (2Co 5:21)
 - i. In short, Christ IS the fulfillment of the Beatitudes for our sake – in His life He perfectly exemplified and fulfilled all of the qualities that He described as "blessed" for our sake.
 - ii. And in His death God laid on Him all of our sins, He became sin – He became murder, pride, anger, lust – He became our worst sin-maddened alter ego.
 - iii. That sin was crucified and died with Him so that when He rose again that first Easter morning, He became the guarantee of our own resurrection and new life.
- 4. Now having fulfilled God's Law for us through His life and having paid for our sins with His own death He gives us the fruits of His victory through faith – our sins have been forgiven and we have been reunited with God
 - a. Thus, for the Christian being blessed means to live in the now and not yet
 - i. In this life we are simultaneously sinner and saint – one who continues to wrestle against the temptations of this world and our own sinful desires
 - ii. Yet is forgiven through faith in Christ and accounted righteous (saint) for His sake – we take comfort in the limitless mercy of God
 - b. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to look at the Beatitudes rightly as a gift from God worthy of imitation, not a checklist of do's and don'ts that God requires to forgive us
 - i. We daily put to death the Old Mr. Hyde in each of us with his hate, pride, anger, lust, etc to become more Christlike
 - ii. We are gifted the ability to work for the good of our neighbor, and we receive mercy, purity, and peace, that we then show others.
 - iii. And we look forward to the time when we will be freed from this mortal life with all of its frailties of body and spirit and united with all of the saints before us who now enjoy our Lord's presence – yes, in Christ we are truly blessed now and forever.