

Count Your Blessings

Quite possibly, the most frequently used word in the Christian's vocabulary is *blessed*. "Have a blessed day," and "God bless you" are just a few of the ways we put it to use. We even say "God bless you" when someone sneezes.

Some people think of *blessed* as a spiritual term for "good fortune," like when we receive something good, or a good outcome, or when something exceptional happens. The world sees blessedness in someone who is rich, and great, and honourable in the world; they spend their days having fun, and their years in pleasure. This includes good health, a good job, a nice home, a nice car, even winning the lottery.

Now our Lord Jesus comes to correct this fundamental error.

So, what does it really mean to be "blessed"?

"Blessed" in the New Testament defines the kind of happiness that comes from receiving favor from God. While material blessings are certainly included in God's favor, Scripture gives us a much fuller meaning to the word *bless*.

Perhaps the most well-known use of the word *blessed* in Scripture is found in the gospel of today, the Beatitudes. Jesus used the term *blessed* in this instance to describe the inner quality of a faithful servant of God. This blessedness is a spiritual state of well-being and prosperity. It is a deep, joy-filled contentment that cannot be shaken; not by poverty, grief, famine, or any other trial or tragedy we face in life.

In human terms, the situations depicted in the Beatitudes are far from blessings. They are the opposite to what the world sees as a good thing.

Having lost a loved one is not seen as a blessing. But Jesus says "Blessed are those who mourn". Why? This is opposite to the world's view. They are blessed because God is present with us through our time of mourning and in every situation the Jesus describes. They will be comforted.

We are actually blessed by Him, in each of these situations. The true servant of God is blessed, regardless of circumstances, because God has favored him or her with a fully satisfied soul.

The material things we crave can never bring genuine happiness or contentment. True fulfillment can only be found in a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. We are blessed because our sins are forgiven and cannot be counted against us any longer.

This blessedness is not shown only in this part of scripture. In James' writing we hear "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him".

To those who put their trust in God, He grants an inner state of joy that is unaffected by external trials. What is this joy? It is knowing that we will have a victorious life in the world to come, where all trials will be ended. There will be no pain, no sorry, no hunger and no loneliness. The marvellous blessings we experience now are nothing compared to the benefits God has stored up for us in His eternal kingdom.

Blessedness comes from an unhindered fellowship with God the Father through our Lord Jesus. To be blessed is to experience the full impact of God's presence in our lives now and for all eternity.

Our Saviour here gives us eight characters of blessed people, which represent to us the principal graces of a Christian. On each of them a present blessing is pronounced; Blessed are they; and to each a future blessing is promised.

In the poverty of spirit, we are emptied of self, in order to allow our being to be filled with Jesus Christ. To be poor in spirit is, to be contentedly poor, willing to be emptied of worldly wealth, if God orders that to be our lot; to bring our mind to our condition, when it is a low condition.

Many are poor in the world. It is easy for them to feel the world is against them, but we must accommodate ourselves to our poverty, must know how to be happy in a simpler life.

To be poor in spirit means to cheerfully bear losses and disappointments which may happen to us in the most prosperous state. But if we are rich in the world, we must be poor in spirit, that is, we must put ourselves at the same level as the poor and sympathize with them, as being touched with the feeling of their situation.

Blessed speaks of our inner state of well-being, the prosperity of our souls in Christ. Blessedness comes from an unhindered fellowship with God the Father through our Lord Jesus. To be blessed is to experience the full impact of God's presence in our lives now and for all eternity.

When we are blessed by God, it's not just for our own benefit. It's an opportunity for us to bless others as well. When we receive blessings, we can share them with those around us, whether it's through acts of kindness, words of encouragement, or simply being a listening ear. By doing so, we become channels of God's love and grace, spreading positivity and making a difference in the lives of others.

So, what have we learned today? Being blessed by God is a gift that sometimes is hidden. It's a reminder of His love and care for us, a source of gratitude and fulfillment, and a catalyst for positive change. So, take a moment today to count your blessings, to appreciate the abundance in your life, and to share that abundance with others. You never know how your gratitude and generosity might inspire someone else to embrace their own blessings and experience the joy of a blessed life.

Let's take the advice from Bing Crosby in a song from White Christmas. It goes like this.

When you're worried and you can't sleep
Count your blessings instead of sheep
And you'll fall asleep, counting your blessings
When your bankroll is getting small
Think of when you had none at all
And you'll fall asleep counting your blessings