

All Saints' Day
Matthew 5:1 – 12
Rev Joseph Highley
(transcribed from his sermon on Sunday, November 6th, 2022)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I do have some bad news this morning. That bad news is that this sermon is not near as interesting as the last two. So, if you're here visiting, I apologize. Two weeks ago I stained a white t-shirt that was \$10,000, with coffee and wine, and it is irreplaceable. Can't be fixed. It's going into a museum now of destroyed t-shirts. Then last week I tried to climb on top of boxes and almost went to the emergency room, bashing my head on the baptismal font. This week there is no such fun. There are no such great stories. This week you just get the word of God, which is far better than any sort of ridiculous thing I can do with a box or a t-shirt.

It's also a longer sermon, so buckle up. We have to get through eight beatitudes, eight blessings. Our sermon this morning is on Matthew chapter five here for All Saints Day and the beatitudes. So count your blessings. You've heard it said before. Count your blessings. Thanksgiving's coming up. Your mom and your dad, your grandpa, grandma says, "All right, time to count our blessings." Then when you're little and you're complaining and you're complaining and you're complaining and you're complaining, or maybe if you're old, then you're complaining and you're complaining and you're complaining. Someone says, your wife, your husband, your parents say, "Hey, count your blessings. You got a lot to be thankful for. There are a lot of people out there who have it worse than you do. Count your blessings."

All right, so here we go. You have toys, you got a warm bed to sleep in, you get three meals a day, you have your own bike, you have lots of friends, and you start to make your list of blessings.

I won't deny that any of those things are blessings, but is that all blessings are? Is that it? Just a list of good things that we have? Is there something more to a blessing? Is there something more to being blessed? And I would suggest that there is a lot more to being blessed and that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

This is our All Saints' Day celebration. At first glance, I can look at that reading from Revelation and tell you exactly why it is our All Saints' Day reading. Because it's the picture of all the saints gathered around the throne of God. It makes sense. Washed clean by the blood of the Lamb dwelling with God forever.

Okay. This reading makes sense. But why the beatitudes? Why did the people who made out these reading selections pick the beatitudes, the blessings? Why is this for All Saints' Day. In

short, it's because the beatitudes show a picture of who God's people are and how they are blessed. The beatitudes tell us about the blessed nature of God's saints now and for all eternity.

So let's move into these beatitudes. We're going to cover each of them. There are eight of them. But first, we have to set the stage for the beatitudes, the blessings. Jesus says, these blessings in our gospel reading at the beginning of Matthew, chapter five, that these are set on the Sermon on the Mount.

The beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, we call it a sermon because it seems to be an uninterrupted teaching by Jesus. If you have a Bible that has the red words and you open it up, Matthew chapter five, six, and seven, you're just going to see only red, just an uninterrupted sermon. It's probably a lot longer sermon than I'm about to preach to you now, so count your blessings, I guess for that. Except don't count your blessings because you don't get to be learning right at the feet of Jesus. This Mount, the Sermon on the Mount, because Jesus climbs up on this mountain at the beginning of chapter five. Jesus is a mountain climber. I wonder if he would've scaled Everest. Probably would have.

The whole crowd comes and listens to Jesus, and they're taught by Jesus on this mountain. Now, the mountain thing, it may not seem important. It seems like it's just kind of like a – all right, so he is on this mountain and he starts talking. No! In the Bible locations are important, and this time the location is actually pretty important. It's actually pointing to something very grand that we miss if we just kind of skim over it. So we have to backtrack for just a little bit.

[Pastor starts backing up] Backtrack. Backtrack. Okay. Look at that. I've backtracked all the way to Exodus. Perfect. That's exactly where I wanted to be. So we're in Exodus and a lot of commentators, they think Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is picturing himself as the new and greater Moses.

After all, Jesus does a lot of talking about the law. He says, well, you heard it said don't commit murder. I'm going to tell you this, and you've heard it said, don't commit adultery. He's like expounding on the 10 Commandments in the Sermon on Mount so it makes sense. It's like, okay, he's like a good Moses, but he's an even better Moses.

But I think we need to shoot even higher than that. As the Hebrews in Exodus – where we just backtrack too, you all did it with me, I know you did – the Hebrews are leaving Egypt and they go through the parted waters of the Red Sea. God takes them out into the middle of the wilderness and God takes them to a mountain, Mount Sinai, and God takes Moses up on this mountain.

Joshua would accompany him, later. Later on, then the whole elders of Israel would come up and God teaches Moses there on the mountain and he teaches Joshua and the elders and he speaks to the people from the mountain. They hear his voice directly. So I think the grand

connection that Matthew's trying to make here, which would be very clear for a Jewish audience that's familiar with the Old Testament, is that in going to the mountain and sitting at the feet of Jesus, the people are like Moses and Joshua and the elders. That makes Jesus, God. This is kind of a big deal, this Sermon on the Mount. While the Sermon on the Mount does indeed deal a lot with God's law, it's not just a list of instructions and rules that Jesus is like, right, have to start piling some rules on you people. You didn't have enough rules.

You think you're haven't been committing adultery? Well, guess what? You have. In your hearts. You think you haven't been murdering people? Guess what? You have. In your hearts. It's true. Jesus talks that way on the Sermon of the Mount, but we have to remember these beatitudes. The blessings here at the beginning of chapter five, this is the doorway to the whole rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

This is the entrance point, and so we have to make sure we get these beatitudes right. These blessings, right? It's the prism that we're going to view everything from.

When I was little, I always would hear this passage in church and I'd sit there and I'd get out like a little mental checklist and I'd be like, all right, I want to be blessed. Blessing is good. Blessed is good. Let's see how many of these I can check off. Okay, blessed are those who mourn. Dang it. Haven't had anybody die. Mom, is anybody going to die anytime soon? No. Okay. Darn. Well. Okay. Can't mourn. Okay. Blessed are the meek. I don't know what that means. Next one. Blessed are the peacemakers. Ah, I'm the middle child. And that one time I kept my siblings from fighting. I'm the peacekeeper. Yes. Check it off, get that blessing. That may seem like a really silly approach. Hopefully it does seem like a silly approach, but that's how a lot of people approach the beatitudes. How a lot of people read these blessings.

That's not how they're meant to be read. This isn't meant to be a prescription of – you better do these things if you want to be blessed. Here're the attitudes and behaviors you better start checking off if you want to get these types of blessings. This is meant as a descriptive reality of just simply – this is what it means to be a Christian. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This is what it means to be blessed.

Speaking of blessed, blessings. What on earth does that even mean? What is a blessing? Talk about burying the lead. This is a sermon about the beatitudes, the blessings. And we haven't even talked about what a blessing is. Is it happiness? Is it being cared for? Is it contentment? Is it being given lots of things? We call this section the beatitudes. That's a label on it, yet you don't see the word beatitudes in there. It's just an old fancy word that we use. And I looked up the definition of beatitudes and it means “supremely blessed.” Which is not particularly helpful in understanding what a blessing is, because it just means you're “supremely blessed.” But we still have to figure out what it is. Okay, so you're supremely happy, supremely cared for, supremely given lots of things? You've seen the word bless or blessed treated like this.

You see it online with the hashtag blessed. That's what the kids do for hashtag. Hashtag. Is that what the kids do for hashtag? Wesley, you're cool. Do the kids do that? Do the kids do that for hashtag? Dang. He says no. I saw a kid do it one time. Hashtag blessed. You walked down the sidewalk. I found a \$10 bill.

Hashtag blessed! So wonderful. Or you're like getting – my favorite – you go to the candy machine and you put in your dollar and then you put in another dollar and then another dollar and then another dollar because, you know, inflation, and then you press your buttons and you get your Twix. And look! Two of them come out! You got two candy bars. What a blessed day. What a blessed day. You might even take a picture of it. Hashtag blessed.

Now that's silly. We're Christians here. We're a little bit holier than other people who might think of blessings that way. Now we sit down with our bucolic family and we make sure everyone's smiling in front of the fireplace there at Thanksgiving, our Christmas, and we say smile cheese, and we tickle the kid, so the kid has to smile for that brief moment, and then the kids go back to killing each other right after the picture's over. Then we post it online and say, blessed. Because family, family, that's the highest blessing there is. Family. Not quite there either. Family is indeed one of the greatest blessings there is. Children and brothers and sisters and parents, but in scripture, especially right here in Matthew, we have to change the way that we look and think about blessings. Extra candy bars, a house, a home, food, clothing, the love of your family, all of them. We have to take it up a notch. Here in Matthew, to be blessed is synonymous with being saved, with being redeemed. Because that's what it truly means for God himself to bless you.

Sure, if I bless you with something the most I can give you is another candy bar I got from a vending machine. But when God blesses you, that's salvation, that you're saved, that you are his people. So when this crowd of disciples comes up to this mountain to learn from Jesus, he's telling them, you are blessed. You are my people. You have salvation in my name. So keep that in mind here as we're looking at these. Blessing equals salvation.

Blessed that are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God. This is the first blessing. Along with these first four, they have a similar theme. There is an emptiness about those who are blessed. The first four describes the state of Jesus' disciples. They're empty. They're in need of being filled. What does it mean to be a disciple? It means you're needy. There's a little bit of law and gospel for you. You must confess that you are broken and needy. To be poor means you have a lack of resources. To be spiritually poor means you have a lack of spirituality.

Indeed, you are spiritually destitute. You are spiritually helpless. But in comes the gospel. You who are spiritually poor, who are spiritually destitute, yours is the kingdom of heaven. Why? Because Jesus fills you. He gives you his spiritual riches and takes on your spiritual poverty and you become an heir of the whole kingdom.

You become an inheritor. Jesus goes the way of the cross, and he takes your poverty there with him. In dying and rising again he pours out riches on your spiritual poverty. Those riches, as a saint, which you are, is yours right now. They're the promise for all eternity as well, and for all the saints who have gone before us.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. This is just simply another picture of who Jesus' disciples are. It's not something we have to strive to be or try to be. But Pastor, I don't have anything to mourn about right now. Well, are you awake? Do you need to wake up? As Christians, we have much to mourn about. We don't have to seek it out just open your eyes and look around. We have friends and family that are falling away from the faith. Mourn. We have a country that just wants to go straight headlong into sin, that's killing one another, tearing one another down, exploiting one another, ripping each other apart. Mourn. Sometimes it's okay to turn away from the morning and just look joyfully at God, but other times we need to open our eyes to what's around us and lament and pray and mourn. But this isn't an exhortation to mourn. This isn't an encouragement to mourn or that your mourning needs to just be a little bit more mournful. It's just a reality that as believers, we will mourn at the state of things and those who mourn shall be comforted. Those emptied of joy will be filled.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Once again, this is not an encouragement to be humble or lowly, though you should be. It's just the reality of being a believer. We're not special. Our status as believers doesn't get us up there and earn wealth and power. And if it is, well that's something we need to repent of. More than that, this just parallels again, that first blessing that we are spiritually lowly. We're spiritually oppressed. Which is where this blessing then is yet just another turn and switch of fates. While we are spiritually low, we have this Savior that has defeated sin, death and the devil, and has defeated the powers of the world, and he has promised victory to us who are lowly. We will live in glory in the new heaven and the new earth. In our lowliness we are blessed and exalted. In our lowliness, we are filled.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. But Pastor, I don't always hunger and thirst for righteousness. In fact, sometimes I'm like St. Paul in Romans chapter seven, where I actually want to do the bad thing. I really want to do the bad thing, and I want nothing to do with the good thing. I don't hunger for the good stuff. Yes, you do. It's part of who you are as a believer. You ever sit down and start eating something and then you realize, Wow, I was way hungrier than I thought I was. Just because you don't feel that yearning in your gut, that emotional yearning for righteousness doesn't mean you don't hunger for it. The whole aspect of being a believer is that we confess just as we did moments ago, that we are by nature, sinful and unclean. But beyond confessing that we are by nature, sinful and unclean we pray for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us, forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name.

But Pastor, a lot of times I just say that, I don't really feel it .Doesn't matter. Do you know sometimes when I pray here in church, sometimes when I'm consecrating the elements of Jesus' body and blood, I don't really feel. God's word still works. God's word still works when I'm not feeling it. God's word still works when you're not feeling it. God's word got you out of bed here this morning. Even if it took hunger or guilt or just a simple habit to get you here, or the fact that we were able to set our clocks back an hour, God's word got you here to receive the forgiveness of sins and to hear his word and to receive his body and blood so that you are fed and satisfied. And you are.

Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. And this is where we have the shift in the beatitudes, the blessings. The first four blessings, identify the disciples of Jesus as being empty and then being filled in various ways. Here we go to the next four, simply describing the state of those who are united with Christ.

Two weeks ago, the whole point of dying the shirt with the coffee and the wine is that, it may be really difficult to get a stain out of something like this, but more than even trying to get a stain of red wine out of a white t-shirt is the fact that you cannot be separated from God's love. It cannot be separated from you more than anything in this earth that is separable. You can't be separated from Christ, and you are united with Christ as a saint. You are blessed, you are saved, you have been transformed. And so these next four are about the transformed disciples of Jesus. How you've been united with him.

Blessed that are the merciful. You are blessed because you're merciful. It's easy to hear this as be merciful, so that you'll be shown mercy by God. Like a quid pro quo. Quid pro quo Clarice. That was a really bad Anthony Hopkins. What am I saying, I didn't even try. Scratch someone else's back. I'll go have mercy here and God will show me mercy. That's not what it's saying. It's saying, you are blessed. You are saved. As a blessed disciple of Jesus, you are just simply merciful. You are merciful, and you will be shown mercy. That's the reality. It's not a quid pro quo. It's not a command. It's just the truth and reality of who you are. Now, some of you may be hearing this as law and go, ah, but I haven't been as merciful as I should have been.

Good. That should make you feel guilty. The lack of mercy isn't because of who you are as a believer. It's your old, sinful nature that's still clinging to you. Repent of that. You are forgiven of it. You are blessed. Go and be merciful because that's what you do. Not because you earn favor with God so that he'll be merciful to you. You are merciful.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Again, Pastor, I'm not pure in heart. I know what my heart thinks about. I hear it all the time. We talk. Again, that's not your new heart in Christ talking. Your new heart in Christ, the blessed heart, knows no impurity. It knows impurity is wrong. So if you're feeling convicted by that, repent of it. Drown it in the waters of baptism, in remembrance of your baptism every single morning. Bring that new reality to Christ to the front. That is purity. It's not your own purity. It's not your own purity that you're bringing

to the table so that you can see God. It's that you have been made pure and you do see God. You see God whenever we proclaim his word here in this church. You see God whenever we receive the forgiveness of sins, and you see God here, in the sacrament of the altar, and you'll see God face to face in eternity. You get this blessing now and forever. That's the wonderful thing about being a saint. They're blessed now and you're blessed for eternity.

Blessed are the peacemakers – we only got two left – for they shall be called sons of God. Not to repeat myself, but again, this is simply a description of who you, as a disciple are, of Jesus. If this description makes you feel guilty because you haven't always been a peacemaker, good, repent of that and be forgiven, and live in the reality of who you are as a child of God. That reality means you are a peacemaker. That reality means you're a son and daughter of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And then Jesus actually takes this one, you could say it's an eight A and an eight B, adds this particular blessing. Blessed are you when others revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. There's that refrain of our opening song. Rejoice and Be Glad. All these blessings that Jesus states here in Matthew are for those disciples who are gathered up on that mountainside, and they're also for all believers at all times and in all places.

Notice the shift. He has a shift in language. Here at the very end, he says, blessed are you. Blessed are you. You who are blessed, you will be persecuted, either mildly or like the martyrs who are killed for their faith. Sometimes something in between. All because you are united with Jesus. Jesus says that we should consider this a joy because they persecuted the prophets who came before, like Moses or Jeremiah or Isaiah, sawing them in half, throwing them in pits, beating them, torturing them. We get to participate in suffering for the Lord just like them. We're in good company and that's the incredible thing about being a saint. We are in good company.

We're surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, martyrs, and when we gather together to eat here at this altar, the body and blood of Jesus, we're united with the whole church together. Our brother, Carl Pierce, who passed away two days ago, was buried at a funeral right here, right where we have our remembrance candles set, is where his body was, we're united with him.

We're united with all those who passed away this past year in faith. We're united all the years before that and all the years that are to come. We're united with all believers because we're part of the body of Christ.

But Jesus seems to have left something out. Now, maybe because he simply wasn't ready to announce things yet at this stage of his ministry. But he leaves one out that we will suffer with as well and that is himself. Jesus doesn't leave us to suffer on our own. He first suffers on our behalf. He suffers and dies on the cross for your sins, and then he suffers with you in your

suffering. Rejoice in this. Rejoice when you're slandered and mocked and ridiculed because of the name of Jesus.

I mentioned that one of the incredible things about being a saint is that we're united with the whole body of believers that have gone before us, our family and our friends, and all believers in Jesus that will come after us. But I left someone off there too. Receiving the Lord's body and blood, we're tangibly connected with the believers across time, which is amazing.

But even more amazing as a believer, we're united with Christ himself. We're united with God. In a few moments, when we come up to receive the body and blood of Jesus, we're going to be tangibly united with Christ, the eternal son of God. Blessed are you because of what Jesus has done for you. You're united with him.

Go and be blessed. Amen. May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.