

***As It Will Be, So It Is***

All Saints' Day [Observed]

The Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity

November 5, 2023

Matthew 5:1–12

Today we are invited to pull back the shades a bit and peer through the window. If you look far off in the distance you will get a glimpse of what we will experience in heaven. The apostle Paul says in First Corinthians 13 that “now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face.” In our Epistle reading the apostle John says that “what we will be has not yet been revealed.” We are shown in the First Reading from Revelation what is described in the Collect of the Day as the unspeakable joys which those saints who have gone before us are already experiencing in heaven. Jesus likewise speaks in the Gospel reading of blessings to come.

But we can't just keep staring out the window, waiting to be blessed in eternity. Jesus has us covered. Two of His beatitudes are of present blessing: theirs *is* the Kingdom of Heaven. We *are* waiting, but it's not for something we don't have now. What we long for is to experience it free from the sin and the sorrow of this life. For now, in this life, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” In this life you are able to provide for yourself many comforts and enjoyments. But these things do not last. Even those who seem to have it all fall into depression or disillusionment. Those who are blessed are those who are spiritually poor. This is a good thing. We see that our sin prevents us access to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is yours because you despair of yourself and entrust yourself fully to Jesus Christ, that He has accomplished everything the Law of God demands and suffered the penalty for us not doing everything the Law demands. You are poor in spirit, your only hope is in Christ.

Those who are blessed are those who mourn. They will be comforted. The Bible never says that Christians should not mourn. If someone you love dies you should not buck up and forgo grieving as if by that you are denying that Christ has conquered death in His resurrection. Just the opposite, the Bible says you should grieve, but not as those who have no hope. Just think of the comfort you will have when you once again see your loved ones who died in Christ on the last day.

Those who are blessed are those who are humble. They will inherit the earth. It sure looks like the powerful are the ones who have control on this earth. But Jesus is speaking here of something far greater than power on this earth. The promise of land for God's people in the Old Testament was never ultimately about the land of Canaan. It was always about the true Promised Land, which is described in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as the New Heaven and the New Earth. This is just one of many ways the Bible is describing being in the eternal presence of God. We cannot obtain this through worldly power but through humility. Blessed are the humble, those who see that they bring nothing to the table. Just as life itself has been given to us, so also eternal life.

Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed. We are so caught up in the things of this world that we may forget the things not of this world. It's not that the things God has given

us in this world are bad. They are good, He has given them all to us for our good. But they nevertheless are for a while. Righteousness is lasting. We need to be here. We need this every week, to be here. We need to be in the Word of God every day. We strive for what we need in daily life—how much more should we hunger and thirst for what we need for eternity! And we will be filled. Just look at the many blessings we receive here of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Jesus speaks further of how those who are blessed live their lives. They are merciful. They are pure in heart. They do what makes for peace. Jesus is not saying, “You must do these things, you must act in these ways, otherwise you will not be blessed.” If He were laying this upon us as how we must be this would not be a blessing at all but a hopeless cause. These three characteristics of the Christian exhibit who we are in Christ. Instead of retaliation, you have mercy on those who hurt you and you forgive them. You too will receive mercy from our gracious God. Instead of seeking advantage over others or what is best for yourself, your motives are pure. What can you do to love and serve others? You are given spiritual sight to see them as God sees them, as people He loves. Instead of holding on to grudges or making sure you are treated fairly, you do what makes for peace. Specifically, the peace we have in Christ, of sins forgiven by God because of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice. Because of this peace of God you are sons and daughters of God.

The last two beatitudes fly in the face of everything the world stands for and our own sinful nature cannot bear. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness. When you do something wrong you deserve any consequences or punishment you receive. But what if you do what is right? When you are mistreated and you are harmed, that is just not right! But according to Jesus you are in a good place. You are blessed. And why? The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to you. You do not have to wait until you are no longer being persecuted. God’s eternal Kingdom is already yours.

But Jesus becomes even more pointed. Blessed are you when people insult you, and persecute you, and say false things about you. You are blessed! The reason He says this is that it is because of Him. Rejoice. Be glad. Your reward is great in heaven. They cannot do anything to harm you. Not really. They can hurt you. They can even take your life. But you have eternal life, they can’t truly harm you. You have something they can’t take away from you, eternal life. You are in good company, they persecuted the prophets in the same way. You will join in the everlasting glory of those who have already gone before you. Take a peek through the window and you will see it.

But don’t look so far off into the distance that you lose sight of what you have now. Eternal salvation is not just in the future. It is not only what you will receive when you get to heaven. Do not just be waiting for what you already have now. What does it say that those saints in heaven are doing? They are before the throne of God and before the Lamb. Isn’t that what we already have? Right here? In this place, at this very altar? When you and I approach this altar, we are before the throne of God and before the Lamb. Jesus is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world in His atoning sacrifice on the cross. There He gave His body over into death and shed His blood, pouring out His life that we may have life. We have it. Right here. At this very altar, a little glimpse of the glorious altar even now in heaven.

We do not share with them the fullness of their glory, but we are gathered around this altar in the Lamb's Sacrament, which means that we are as we pray in the Proper Preface with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Heaven is now. Salvation is here. In fact what we will have has already been revealed. What we will experience is already now. As it will be so it is now. Amen.

SDG

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