

# Blessed is Who?

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## Lessons for Eppiphany 4 in Year A

Micah 6:1-8

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

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How have you been blessed? Have you been blessed with good friends and a loving family? Have you been blessed with never having to really go hungry except for days when you didn't like what was being served in Kimmel? Perhaps you've been blessed with good health or a good mind. Is there a particular talent you've been blessed with? If you're a senior, maybe you've been blessed with knowing you've got a good job lined up after graduation. And maybe, just maybe, you haven't been blessed at all, no matter how many of these things you have. Maybe you've just been lucky.

Yes, luck. I know, a lot of Christians are really uncomfortable with the idea of luck. A lot of Christians want to believe that God controls every single detail of the universe, and as a result, there's no room for luck. But even Jesus himself alluded to the fact that some people just plain old have bad luck. Consider what he says in the first five verses Luke 13, when he talks about the Gallileans killed by Pilate or the 18 who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them. He says that they were not any worse sinners than anyone else, they were not being specifically punished by God - they were simply unlucky enough to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Which brings us back to our many "blessings." If we're blessed to have the many good things that we have, are those who are less fortunate cursed? And yet, there goes that word again, for you see, "fortunate" comes from the root "fortune," which means luck. So perhaps those who have less than us, those who are suffering, those who are hungry, those who never seem to get an even break, are merely unlucky. Perhaps they are as unlucky as we are lucky, with no assumption of curse or blessing implied.

Now to be sure, God *has* from time to time chosen to bless people with good fortune, and to curse them with ill fortune. But to turn the few documented occasions of it into a general rule seems to be a dangerous precedent, and one that sets those of us who are more lucky as seeming to deserve it, and having no responsibility toward those who are less lucky - because, well they deserved it.

How are we blessed? *Who* is blessed? Jesus seems to have a much different idea about this than most people did then and than most people do now. Jesus's idea of who is blessed isn't based on what you have, be it power, wealth, health, talent, or popularity. It's based on some of the very things that

the prophet Micah mentioned toward the end of the first lesson.

Micah said that what was pleasing to the Lord was not an empty following of the rules, with no real concern for others, but instead that you do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. A person who does these things is blessed in ways that this world may not quite understand, even though their luck may be lousy.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who thirst for hunger and righteousness, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake, blessed are those who are reviled and persecuted on His account. I don't have time to go into all of these this morning, but I would like to touch on a few that have special meaning for me.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. How often do we just hear that as "blessed are the *poor*"? Especially since that's the version that *Luke* gives. But here Jesus is saying "Blessed are the poor in *spirit*." What does this mean? Well, the notes in my **Word in Life Study Bible** say that it means humility, and that this is listed first because from humility, the others follow.

Now let's not confuse the humility being talked about here with the false humility that so many of us are familiar with, and may even practice ourselves. If someone says that you play piano beautifully, and you shyly say "Oh it was nothing," that's not humility. Denying that we've done or can do anything worthwhile is *not* humility. In fact, I've come

to wonder if we Christians don't have an inverse sense of pride - one that glories in being called the least, the smallest, the most unworthy. No - when someone compliments you, accept it gracefully and thank the person. The humility that's being talked about here, the *real* humility, is that which allows us to admit that we're not always right, that we can't do everything ourselves, that we need people to show mercy to us as often as we need to show it to others.

Blessed are those who mourn. I cry easily. There are certain news stories that I can't follow because I'm afraid I'll start crying and never stop. I can't watch the beginning of Disney's *Cinderella* because of how horribly the stepmother and sisters treat her at the beginning - even though it's a cartoon and I know she wins in the end. And if I can't watch *Cinderella*, I'm definitely not going to be watching either *Schindler's List* or *Amistad*. They would upset me too much, I would end up crying too much for real people whom I've never met. And yet the fact that I would do this, the fact that these things do affect me this way is a good thing - because I mourn. I'm not talking about the kind of mourning I experienced when my grandmother died 17 years ago. I'm talking about the mourning that understands that the world as we know it is not all that it should be, that it's not the place that God would have it be for us. I mourn for God's control of the world. And Jesus says that I will be comforted.

Blessed are the peacemakers. I want you to note here that the term is **peacemakers**, not **peacekeepers**. To me there's a real difference between someone who is trying to **make** peace and someone who's merely

trying to keep the **appearance** of it. A peacekeeper is a person who attempts to smooth over some very real conflicts in order to keep everything looking nice on the surface. Conflicts which, left unresolved, will fester and become even worse. A **peacemaker**, on the other hand, is often one who realizes that some serious pain may have to be inflicted, be it emotionally, physically, or both, in order for things to be truly, and **justly**, resolved. And blessed is the person who's willing to go through the pain that that involves.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Hmm - there are two ways to take this. The way I understood it before last night was that people who were persecuted because **they** were

righteous and the world was not, were blessed. This still makes sense to me. But there's another possibility that I want to throw out to you. Perhaps Jesus also means that those who are persecuted **by** the righteous, or at least by those who believe they're acting righteously, are blessed too.

You see, the good news in what Jesus says here is that we are not blessed by what we have, nor are we cursed by what we don't have. But instead, by intentionally following what Micah said, we can be blessed in ways which go far beyond simple good luck.

This is most certainly true.