

OUR FAITH JOURNEY INCLUDES MOUNTAIN CLIMBING¹

On the road of life we encounter, experience and enjoy “blessings.” Blessed and bless are common words in the Old Testament and are found frequently in the New Testament. But these words are not part of ordinary speech today. When I met them for the first time, they puzzled me. As with many things I have encountered on my faith journey, as I continued to search the Scriptures, I found a rich meaning.

I was startled to learn that to bless means "to endue with power for success, prosperity, fruitfulness, longevity, happiness, etc." In essence, the one who is blessed is given a rich and abundant life—the “blessed one.”

In Old Testament practice, blessings were pronounced on the children or subordinates by heads of households or others in authority.² Yet God was recognized as the only source of blessing, and in the Old Testament blessings were offered in his name. God is the source of all blessing... "*LORD, you bless the righteous,*" says the psalmist³. God not only gives life but also enriches life. Even the power to get wealth comes from the Lord.⁴ When God blesses he bestows favor and well-being.

In Psalms I met those who are the blessed. The blessed person is the one who "*does not walk in the counsel of the wicked*", whose "*sins are covered*", who "*takes refuge in the Lord*".⁵

Psalm 1:1; 32:1; 34:8 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

- The blessed one makes the Lord his trust, has regard for the weak, and possesses the strength of the Lord.⁶
- The blessed have learned to acclaim the Lord, are disciplined by the Lord, maintain justice, and fear the Lord.⁷
- The ways of the blessed are blameless, for they keep God's statutes.⁸
- The blessed are those whose help and whose hope is in the Lord.⁹

These are descriptions of the qualities that bring blessing... they are qualities of a faith relationship with God and of obedience to him. To such persons, God is free to give his richest, most abundant life.

Yet when I came across the “blessed” in the Beatitudes I stumbled and lost my way.

¹ A personal journey for Farmer Dan

² e.g., Genesis 49

³ Psalm 5:12

⁴ Deuteronomy 8:18

⁵ Psalm 1:1; 32:1; 34:8

⁶ Psalm 40:4; 84:12; 41:1; 84:5

⁷ Psalm 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 128:1

⁸ Psalm 119:1-2

⁹ Psalm 146:5

Matthew 5:3-12 are the opening words of his Sermon on the Mount

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

My logic, at first, lead me to suppose that the "blessed are" statements of Jesus in the Beatitudes parallel the "blessed" statements of the Psalms. There are some similarities but also some significant differences. The "blessed are" statements in the Psalms describe human attitudes or actions that lead to blessing.

The Beatitudes also look at human attitudes. The blessed (happy) are poor in spirit, they mourn, are meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, are merciful, are pure in heart, are peacemakers, and are persecuted because of righteousness. The OT describes the path that leads to God's blessing, whereas, Jesus describes that blessing itself.

As I continued to wander (wondering) the Holy Spirit graciously lead me to see the Beatitudes as spiritual mountain climbing... a journey of eight upward steps in the divine life. The "blessing" of the OT was a straightforward blessing. The "blessing" of the NT is a divine paradox: a glorious experience of the kingdom of God and its inner riches amid external poverty and trial.

Oswald Chambers points out that the Sermon on the Mount is not some unattainable goal; it is a statement of what will happen in me when Jesus Christ has changed my nature by putting his own nature in me... Jesus Christ is the only One who can fulfill, in you and I, the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁰

¹⁰ Oswald Chambers "My Utmost for His Highest" Updated Edition

Beatitudes of Christ: Spiritual mountain climbing, eight upward steps in the divine life¹¹

Initial Step—Humility (Conscious need) “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*”

2nd Step—Penitence (Mourning for sin) “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*”

3rd Step—Meekness (Marking the birth of a new spirit) “*Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*”

4th Step—Spiritual appetite (Signifying growth) “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*”

5th Step—Mercifulness (An attribute of God, indicating further advance) “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*”

6th Step—Heart purity (Marking the attainment of higher attitudes, where comes the vision of God) “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*”

7th Step—Peacemaking (A Christ-like influence, calming the storms of life) “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*”

8th Step—The summit, suffering for Christ (Standing beside the Prophets and Martyrs) “*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

As I experienced this marvelous journey on the road of faith in Christ I came to Ephesians 1:3 which announces that God has, “*blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*” Because our blessing is found in personal relationship with Jesus and because that relationship is so intimate and real, we have in Jesus himself the abundant life for which we yearn and which God has ever yearned to give straying mankind. **What a blessing! What a journey!**

Ephesians 1:3-8 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Fellow travelers on a Journey of Faith, we are the “blessed ones” so let us proclaim each day... “*This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!*”¹²

¹¹ Thompson Chain Reference Bible (NIV) Matthew 5:3-12

¹² Psalm 118:24