

Blessed is the One Who Trusts in the LORD!

Jeremiah 17:5-8 February 17, 2019 Pastor Robert Hein

Dear Fellow Children of God,

I want you to look at a series of pictures up on the screen and tell me which person in each scene is blessed. The first scene pictures the rich man and poor Lazarus. Seems obvious, doesn't it? It must be the rich man. He was dressed in purple and fine linen, and lived in luxury every day. He enjoyed the lifestyle of the rich and famous. But at his gate was laid a poor beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores, and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. Obviously the rich man must be the blessed one, right? But remember, appearances can be deceiving! Poor Lazarus didn't enjoy many earthly treasures, but he did cherish the one thing needful. He cherished the Lord and trusted his promises. He enjoyed life as a forgiven child of God. When poor Lazarus died, he left this veil of tears to enter Paradise to live with Jesus forever. The rich man, on the other hand, had no time for God and no place for Jesus in his heart. He only loved himself and his worldly pleasures. His life was actually pretty empty and his future was bleak. You see, when he died, in unbelief, he was condemned to eternal torment in hell.

Now take a look at this next scene of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple. Which one is blessed? Again, many might point to the Pharisee. He held a place of honor and prestige among the people. The Pharisees were considered to be the cream of society. They boasted of their righteous life and their good deeds. In the other corner however, we see a humble tax collector. Most people hated tax collectors and considered them to be the scum of society. And this tax collector didn't have any cause to boast either. No, with his head bowed low, he humbly confessed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Which one was blessed? Well Jesus answered that for us, didn't he? Jesus said, **"I tell you that this man, the tax collector, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."** Luke 18:14

Anyone who boasts about themselves and expects their good deeds to earn God's favor and a ticket to heaven will be greatly disappointed on Judgment Day. They will tragically discover that all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God. Because they had no place for Jesus in their heart in this life, they will hear Jesus speak those awful words to them on the Last Day, **"Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Matthew 25?**

The humble tax collector however recognized his dreadful sins and his great need for a Savior. Despairing of himself, he clung to Jesus and embraced his promise of forgiveness. He was the blessed one, the one who actually enjoyed peace with God and freedom from his guilt. Once again, appearances can be deceiving.

Then take a look at one more scene. On one side you see the apostles Peter and John, in prison. On the other, you see Caiaphas, the leader of the Jewish ruling council. Who was blessed in this situation? It must be Caiaphas, right? He is the one in charge. He enjoys all the fame and prestige. He's the judge. Those poor disciples on the other hand were in chains. They had been arrested and beaten and imprisoned. They faced threats and persecution. Who would ever want to be in their shoes?

But it was Peter and John who actually were the blessed ones. You see, in his sinful pride, Caiaphas had rejected Christ. He had corrupted the teachings of the Bible and was living in sin and unbelief. When he died, the real judge, Jesus Christ, condemned him to hell. Peter and John on the other hand were truly blessed. Although their outward circumstances were very difficult, they enjoyed the blessings and freedom and new life their Savior offered them. Jesus blessed them in times of trouble, and ultimately he rescued them from this sinful world altogether to enjoy the eternal pleasures of heaven.

To understand who is truly blessed then perhaps we need to define that word "blessed." A synonym of blessed is the word "happy", but those words can actually mean two different things. People may be happy in the moment when they enjoy some thrill in life, but it doesn't last. Some people are happy doing sinful things, but they are not blessed. Blessed means to embrace God's promises and to follow God's will. A Christian therefore can be blessed even in difficult circumstances. As Christians, we can

be blessed in a hospital bed, in times of persecution, even at a funeral. We may not feel real happy at the time, but we are blessed, because we have embrace God's promises and rest secure in his faithful love.

Someone described it this way. If you have everything in life, but don't have Jesus, you have nothing. If you have nothing in this life, but have Jesus, you have everything!

Jesus described us a blessed people in our Gospel reading today as well. He said, **“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.”** Luke 6:20-22
Yes, my friends, it really is true! Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord! *

Understand that every person on this earth is walking on one of two roads. There is a road to heaven and there is a road to hell. You are either on one or the other. Now the road to hell is wide and paved, and many people walk on it. Right now, that road is enticing and appealing. It seems like the right way to go. Some might call it life in the fast lane – a life of sex, drugs and rock n roll. It's a life full of earthly pursuits and worldly pleasures, but includes no time for God. It's a popular road because so many famous people; Athletes, rock stars, movie stars and politicians are walking that path and they are urging you to join them.

The road to heaven on the other hand is narrow and uphill, and few walk that way. That path may include hurtles and obstacles and struggles. Christians walking that path may be persecuted and ridiculed by the people of this world. We may be hated because we trust God's promises and follow God's will. Here is a little chart that describes the mindset of travelers along each path. Those on the road to hell trust in themselves and their own merits. They are prideful. They have no time for God. They indulge their sinful nature and they despise God's Word.

On the other hand, those of us on the road to heaven trust in the Lord and cherish his promises. We are humble and repentant. We strive to put God first in their life. We daily crucify our sinful nature and treasure God's Word.

Right now, the sinful path looks very appealing and the godly path looks pretty difficult. That's why the Lord issued this warning and encouragement through the prophet Jeremiah in our Old Testament lesson today. He wants us to realize where a life of impenitence and unbelief ultimately leads. He opens our ears to see its final destination, and it is not a pretty picture. One of our hymn-writers put it this way, "Then woe to those who scorned the Lord and sought but carnal pleasures, Who here despised his precious Word And loved their earthly treasures! With shame and trembling they will stand And at the judge's stern command To Satan be delivered." CW 207 v. 4

Never envy the wicked! Never adopt their sinful attitude, their worldly priorities, their empty way of life. Remember, they are walking away from God toward eternal regret and remorse in hell.

But as Christians, as people who trust God's promise and love his will, we are running a race that leads to heaven. We can look forward to continual joy and eternal pleasures with Jesus in Paradise. That is the blessed future which awaits all those who repent of their sins and put trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

But you know something? You don't have to wait to get to heaven to start enjoying the blessings of a Christian walk with God. Jesus came to bring us a rich full life right now! In our devotion from Jeremiah chapter 17 the Lord described our lives as a children of God this way, "**Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. 8 They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.**"

This doesn't mean you are going to win all your basketball games and never suffer a job loss or a health problem. But it does mean that you will enjoy a rich full life as a forgiven child of God. Right now, you are blessed with peace and freedom and new life in Christ. Right now you enjoy comfort in times of trouble, confidence to pray and power for Christian living. Right now the Holy Spirit is producing the fruit of the Spirit in your life – love joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and

self-control. Remember, Jesus doesn't just get to heaven someday when you die. He also helps you get through the week. He helps you work on your marriage, to mend fences and resolve conflicts. He helps you overcome temptations and break free from sinful habits. He helps you do your best in your daily vocations. He helps you persevere in times of trouble, and he empowers you to face the future with confidence.

Those who walk a sinful path however suffer painful consequences even before they reach their final destination. A life of sin is a life of slavery – slavery to the devil and slavery to your sinful nature, which exerts more and more control over your life. A life of impenitence and unbelief is meaningless and empty, no matter how much money you have in the bank or how many trophies you have on your shelf. Jeremiah described the futility of life apart from God this way, **“Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the LORD. 6 That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.”**

By God's grace you and I are on the right road, the godly path which leads to heaven. The Holy Spirit set us on this right path when he created faith in our hearts, for many of us at our baptism. He turned us from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. He took us off a path of sin and placed us on the right path of life with him.

But I have to warn you. There are many spiritual enemies out there who want to lead you astray. They want you to give up your race to heaven, forfeit your relationship with Christ, and head back down the path of sin and slavery all over again. There is a battle going on, and your soul is at stake. Here are some warning signs to watch for.

- Are you losing your hunger for the Word?
- Is your worship attendance starting to slip?
- Is your prayer life weak?
- Are you losing your appetite for the Lord's Supper?

- Are you becoming comfortable with your sins, making excuses so you might continue in them?
- Are you starting to adopt the mindset of this sinful world?
- Are you placing the wisdom of people above the wisdom of God's Word?
- Are you more concerned about increasing your earthly treasures than expanding the kingdom of God?
- Are you starting to envy the wicked, and adopting their sinful lifestyle?
- Are you in danger of veering off the godly path to heaven to pursue a worldly path instead?

I think we all need to take these warnings to heart. And if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

The best way to stay on the right path is to put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Stay connected to Jesus through his Word and the Lord's Supper, and he will empower you to remain strong, firm and steadfast. Keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he will help you see through Satan's lies to know and enjoy the blessings of walking the Christian walk. Here is a beautiful poem which reminds us how truly blessed we are to know and follow God's will.

“There is a purpose for why life is given. It centers around the pursuit of heaven. Some seek fame, while others seek gold, but your purpose in life has already been told. It begins with faith planted deep in your heart, along with the prayer that it may never depart. It must be watered and fed by the Word, and regularly studied and faithfully heard. It must be lived with words and actions, to reflect God's love and eternal satisfaction. And it must be shared so that others might know, that by a cross, we have beaten the old evil foe. So live each day before it is lost by keeping your eyes, always on the cross.” Amen.