

Matthew 5:3-6: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“It’s Just the Opposite”

THE TEXT:

Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus.

The text for today’s message is the first four Beatitudes from today’s Gospel reading.

INTRODUCTION

We Americans like our champions, our victors. Last month marked the 25th anniversary of Bill Buckner’s fumbling a routine ground ball in the sixth game of the 1986 World Series. Due to his error, the Boston Red Sox lost game six and went on to lose the Series in game seven to the New York Mets. Bill Buckner was a great athlete—a crucial component in the Red Sox’s American League championship in 1986. But this one error marked him as a loser. The media crucified Bill Buckner and he received death threats from Boston fans. When he retired from baseball in 1990, he moved his family to the obscurity of Boise, Idaho.

We’re enamored by the rich and famous—for us, bigger is better, richer is better, stronger is better. Last week, millions of Americans were focused on Kim Kardashian—one of these celebrities who’s famous simply for being famous. Her divorce after 72 days grabbed the headlines—while other much more important news was stuck on page two.

I don't think we Americans would have paid much attention to Jesus. He was a poor, Jewish man, born and raised in backwater Jewish villages. And His suffering and death on a Roman cross certainly wouldn't have caught our attention with all the other important things going on—like Charlie Sheen's meltdown or Kim Kardashian's divorce.

But this is how God works. The Holy Spirit wrote these words to the Corinthians through the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 1:27-28): ²⁷God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

In today's reading from the Book of Revelation, the Victors are those who died in the field of battle: “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

In the Epistle reading, those who are known to God, are unknown to the rest of the world—in God's eyes, the unfamous are famous.

We expect God to work through great and majestic ways—but He works through suffering and death, through poor, miserable sinners.

**WHEN GOD WORKS IN YOU AND IN THE WORLD, IT'S JUST THE OPPOSITE OF
WHAT YOU WOULD EXPECT!**

Today's Beatitudes demonstrate that God works opposite of what you expect.

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

In business, it's said that a person should never say, "I'm sorry"—never admit you've made a mistake. That's because that kind of attitude is regarded as a sign of weakness. Not so with God, it's just the opposite.

Being "poor in spirit" is to admit that you are a poor, miserable sinner—that you have nothing to offer God—it is to feel the weight of sin and His wrath.

Blessed are you when you are humbled by God's Law, by life, by your own weaknesses, because God is at work through these things, calling you to repent and turn to Him—to trust in Him for all things.

Blessed are you who are poor in spirit—for Jesus is the kingdom of heaven and He is yours.

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Today is All Saints' Sunday—the Sunday on or immediately following All Saints' Day. On All Saints' Day, we remember the faithful who have departed from our midst to be with Jesus.

Death is a terrible thing—ask anyone who's lost someone they love. Death is the ultimate defeat, the ultimate humility, the ultimate reality of sin. We may try to hide from death, escape death, make it less terrible by turning it into something entertaining, but that doesn't change the reality. Death is a product of sin—it comes to all of us.

Christ's death on the cross, though, was just the opposite of what you think—it wasn't defeat, but it was God at work defeating sin and death. Jesus didn't try to hide from or escape from sin and death—He didn't downplay their horrors—He took them on and defeated them. The proof of that is His resurrection.

Blessed are you who mourn—who see the world as it really is—filled with sin and death—for you shall be comforted. In Christ there is victory over sin and death.

Jesus said, “⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Many of you here know who Tim Tebow is. He’s the young man—a Christian—who won the Heisman Trophy as a sophomore and led the Florida Gators to two national college football championships in his collegiate careers. He’s a champion, a great player—known for his public displays of faith, like putting Bible verses on his eye black and getting down on one knee to pray during football games. Tim was a media darling while he was winning football games for the Gators.

Not so much now. He’s struggling enormously in the NFL. Last Sunday, two Detroit Lions thought it would be fun to mock Tim Tebow. After they sacked him, they got down on one knee and “prayed” over the faltering quarterback.

The Detroit Lions, once the worst team in professional football, far from being humbled and thankful for their recent success on the football field, have become arrogant and conceited—the opposite of meek! But they’re the victors—they’re the ones we think will inherit the earth—or at least win the Super Bowl.

But where is God at work? In victory or defeat? In the strong or in the meek? Ask yourself—when is Tim Tebow most like Christ? It’s the opposite of what you think. It’s not in the exhilaration of victory, but in the humility of defeat, for it is in defeat that Tim Tebow has the greatest opportunity to demonstrate the love of God in Christ.

You see, it’s easy to praise God when things are going well, but what about when things are not going your way?

Tim Tebow shows his God-given meekness in this—he refuses to condemn those who mock him—he doesn’t lash out against his enemies. Meekness is that inner strength that comes from the Holy Spirit and makes you like Christ when you suffer humility and defeat for the sake

of Christ. It's that power to bless instead of curse those who mock you—it is that power to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

No wonder Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” On the cross, Jesus could have summoned thousands of angels to destroy His enemies. But instead He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” That's meekness defined. As you suffer humiliation and defeat for the sake of Christ, blessed are you for you shall inherit the earth with your Savior.

Jesus said, ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

For what do you hunger and thirst? Most Americans think they'll be happy if they could have more money. In fact, when one of the richest people in America was asked, “How much money is enough,” John D. Rockefeller answered, “Just a little bit more.”

With all of his millions, Rockefeller wasn't satisfied. Yet, when he died, what did he take with him into the grave? Just a nice suit and tie.

Does God ever promise you earthly wealth and comfort? Is that the way God works? There are preachers who try to make that claim, and then they'll ask you to send them money. But no, God usually operates opposite of what you think.

Earthly pursuits never satisfy—we always want more—more money, better health, bigger house, better job. And eventually all earthly things pass away. And earthly wealth and comfort don't improve our relationship with God—they actually hurt our relationship as we sinners tend to trust such earthly things over God.

God works by giving His people a hunger and thirst for that which truly satisfies. To be truly satisfying, it must endure. Money doesn't endure—we spend it and need more. Beauty

doesn't endure—we age and lose our good looks. Health doesn't endure—we all get sick and die. Our earthly heroes all let us down.

But not Jesus—He is the righteousness that satisfies the soul's true hunger and thirst. He alone satisfies our most important need—our need to be loved by God and to stand before Him forgiven of our sins.

CONCLUSION:

When God works, it's just the opposite of what you think, which is why Jesus says:

³“Blessed are you who are poor in spirit—who know in your hearts that you are poor, miserable sinners for God is at work in you showing you that you need your Savior, and that Savior is here—He has come to give you the kingdom of heaven by forgiving your sins.

⁴“Blessed are you who mourn for God is at work showing you that this world is only temporary, passing away in sin and death, for you shall be comforted by the resurrection victory of Jesus over sin and death.

⁵“Blessed are you who are humbled and defeated for the sake of Jesus, for God is at work in you, giving you Christ-like meekness that you may demonstrate true love to the world and become co-heirs with Christ.

⁶“And, Blessed are you who have learned that the world does not satisfy, for God has given you a hunger and thirst for what truly satisfies righteousness—the righteousness of Christ.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.