

January 29, 2017

St. Matthew 5:1-12, I Corinthians 1:26-31:

***“This Is Who We Are.
This Is Who We Want to Be.”***

- I. The Strangely Blessed.*
- II. The Few in Christ Jesus.*
- III. The Saved.*

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St. Matthew 5:1-12, I Corinthians 1:26-31

Dear Friends in Christ,

I want to tell you something I've told you before, and I'm doing that because it came to mind when I read the texts, because it's a good introduction to the sermon and because I can't help myself. A number of years ago I saw a poster featuring a young Frank Sinatra. The older generations here will have to explain to the youngest who Sinatra was. Anyway, the Poster had printed on it this observation he made: "You only live once, and the way I live, once is enough." That's a cute statement to make - while you're young and "cute"!

When I saw that poster, my thoughts went to his song, "My Way", specifically the last stanza

For what is man, what has he got?
If not himself, then he has naught.
To say the things he truly feels.
And not the words of one who kneels.
The record shows I took the blows -
And did it my way!

These words of Scripture immediately came to mind: "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes (sets in place) his steps." (Prov. 16:9) Everybody wants to be a *somebody*, right? So...the oldest generation should explain to the youngest generation what a *somebody* really is and how important a "somebody" is, since the youngest generation doesn't know and probably won't care to know Frank.

So, just in case you're ever concerned about leaving your mark on the earth or fearful that you won't be remembered (which you won't - neither will I), let's consider . . .

THIS IS WHO WE ARE. THIS IS WHO WE WANT TO BE.

I. The Strangely Blessed.

God blesses us in a multitude of ways, doesn't He? And we usually size up the love of God for us according to the blessings we receive, don't we? Family, friends, material possessions, the ability to do this and that, to run here and there - and Jesus. We don't want to forget Him, do we? Most would insist, "Jesus is the greatest blessing." Do you believe that? Really?

If everything was taken away, except the love of God in Christ, would we still be blessed beyond our wildest dreams? Well, listen to these words from our Gospel lesson: "Blessed are the poor in spirit..." (those who see their spiritual poverty because of sin) - "Blessed are those who mourn..." (those who mourn because of their sin and its consequences) - "Blessed are the meek..." (those who humble themselves because they see their sin and what it does) - "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness..." (those who want to be perfectly obedient to God but can't because of their sin) - "Blessed are the merciful..." (those who give mercy because God is merciful to us in spite of our sin) - "Blessed are the pure in heart..." - (the heart that holds to Christ's payment for sin and thus is reckoned as righteous/pure for Jesus' sake) - "Blessed are the peacemakers..." (those who know the peace of God through the forgiveness of sin and seek to give that peace to others) - "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake..." (and that needs no explanation) - "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account..." (and that needs no explanation!).

So, let's try this one more time: What are the greatest blessings God gives us, in light of what Jesus said? Amazing, isn't it? Fits with Luther's words, "...and take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife (and I'll include husband, health, happiness...whatever), Though these all be gone, Our vict'ry has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth."

*This Is Who We Are: **The Strangely Blessed**. Possessors of a Kingdom through faith in Christ.
This Is Who We Want To Be!*

II. The Few In Christ Jesus.

And that brings us to our second lesson for this morning; first these words from verses 26-29 of I Corinthians 1:

Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

I think about those words a lot. I'm nothing, as far as this world is concerned. Well, listen again to the description of me: Not "wise according to worldly standards", not "powerful", not "of noble birth." I'm part of the "foolish in the world", the "weak", the "low and despised", one of the "things that are not." And so are you, if you claim Christ as your only payment for sin and only way unto eternal life. And please note I said **only**.

Well, get this: the world hates the reality of that! Only Savior. Only way to heaven. Denies it. Wishes to destroy it! Human arrogance can't stomach the truth: "...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." That's what humans do. They either boast that they're good enough and deserve God's love - which is a monstrous lie - or, they boast that there is no God, which is equally monstrous!

Here's the point: God made me alive in Christ. He opened my spiritual eyes that I might see the gross ugliness of my sin, God's hatred and eternal condemnation of it; but, at the same time, His desire to love, forgive and claim me as His through faith in Jesus. He did the same for everyone here. As John says, "...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (I Jn. 1:7)

And the world hates that. Even much of what calls itself "church" avoids the truth of that. Listen, please, to Christ's words: "The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil." (Jn. 7:7) Well, tell that to the world! No wonder the liberal church dances around the Scriptures. You can't get bodies and money with that: *The worlds' works are evil*. Later on, Jesus would say, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (Jn. 15:18-19) The truth of that cannot be softened for generations of people who have become gluttons for so-called positive thinking and self-esteem.

Look! Listen! Jesus said, "**For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.**" (Jn. 7:14) The church has, for the most part, made Jesus unnecessary. But, This Is Who **We** Are: The few! This Is Who We Want To Be!

III. The Saved.

In fact, our text closes with this wondrous truth:

And because of him (God) you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (vss. 30-31)

We have been blessed with the greatest miracle ever: The wisdom from God; that is, the knowledge that Jesus Christ laid down His life for our sin and secured our heaven. Or, as the text says, "Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God...". Not the wisdom of this world which scrambles for everything of this world only to have it rot in a grave. But the wisdom of God which grants us eternal life.

Man oh man, this is so simple. Isn't it? Or, is it? Well, as Paul writes:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world...and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Eph. 2:1,3b)

As we've said so many, many times: that which is dead cannot make itself alive, but God made us alive in Christ!. As Scriptures say, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved...". (Eph. 2:4-5)

We are the strangely blessed through faith in Christ who have been forever saved to live in unending joy and happiness in the Presence and Love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. *This is who we are. This is who we want to be. And this is what we want for others.*

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott