Brig and Chris Judy are missionaries we have supported for decades. They work among several tribes of the First Peoples in Saskatchewan, Canada. Last week, there was a 2 page newsletter from them in our bulletin sharing what Jesus was doing in their area. Let me share with you three recent e-mails I have gotten from Brig …

(“urgent prayer needed”) I just got off the phone with Brenda. Her daughter, Wilene (40ish), has some sort of infection which is shutting down her bodily functions (on dialysis, blood transfusions, ICU, etc). I highlighted Greg (Brenda's husband, Wilene's Dad )in my last newsletter (the one in the bulletin last week). They lost their youngest daughter to an embolism less than 2 years ago. Greg & Brenda are strong Christians, needless to say they are devastated. Please, please offer up a prayer for this family. Brig..

(“A not so great start to the new year”) Greg & Brenda have supported us in ministry. Emotionally, financially, sharing the preaching load, meals...any which way: they have been great friends! My first funeral in 2016 was to bury their 36 year old Carmen. My first funeral in 2018 will be to bury their oldest daughter, Willene. They are left with one son, Golden. I can't tell you how hard this is to write this news to you, prayer warriors and encouragers all. Pray for strength for us all in the days ahead...this is getting to be oh so hard. In this land of the living, where we dispense hope and bear burdens...we desperately need His grace. Limping into January... Brig

(“2018...gulp..”) Greetings! I apologize for writing yet again... Some weeks are just like that. Chris and I can not begin to express our deep gratitude for the many, many emails which have truly encouraged our hearts and challenged us in healthy ways. Willene's wake/prayer service will be Thursday evening, with the funeral on Friday (11:00 Central Time) at Brenda's home Reserve, "Carry the Kettle." It's about half way to Regina (45+ minutes away). Yesterday morning, two high school boys from Ochapowace hit a horse. The windshield shattered under the extreme cold and one of the boys is in the hospital with glass in his eyes. We're extremely close to both families...prayers for Damen & Peyton would be greatly appreciated. Last night, a "newbie" to Jacob Bear was texting me and wanting prayer for two of her wayward sons...lost in the city, battling their addictions. She felt better after an exchange of texts...but it felt fleeting and inadequate. Today, I was having coffee with an old-timer, "Shep." He was worried about his wife (some 20 years younger, according to him!), she had been in and out of the Regina hospitals for awhile now. I texted his daughter and she wrote back encouraging me to explain to him that she was doing better, even up and about. Four hours later she died. Apparent heart attack. We're doing okay, really. God is good and gracious and He is supplying our needs... But our friends are really hurting... I know we all have our own struggles and battles and I do not wish to elevate mine, I suppose I am using this platform...
to give you a glance into our last few days and asking that you would continue to be in prayer for Shep and his family; Greg & Brenda and their family; Peyton (eyes); and the ones struggling with addictions; and for us to navigate wisely. Thank you for being so awesomely supportive! It is a privilege to serve... Brig & Chris.

That is real life for the dedicated follower of Jesus isn’t it? We have high points where we see God work in incredible ways, then we have other times where the burdens of life are so overwhelming that we just feel like we are limping along in faith. This month I want to share some encouragements Jesus brings His followers from the gospel of Matthew. Normally I am in one of the gospels for all of December so we can better prepare to celebrate the incarnation — God becoming a man, which is what we celebrate at Christmas. But we still had some 2 Peter verses to do to bring a special gift to Jesus so I am doing that gospel section AFTER Christmas.

PROPOSITION: The dedicated follower of Jesus receives God’s powerful favor at times that often seem like a loss, failure, sacrifice or attack – have confidence those will come!

I. What are the Beatitudes? Matthew 5:3-10

READ v 1-2. Our passage comes from a 3 chapter message Jesus gave to the disciples as He was training them in the very different thought process that is a part of developing into a dedicated follower of Jesus. We call this message, found in Matthew chapters 5,6,& 7, “the Sermon on the Mount” because Jesus gave it after climbing up a mountainside. Jesus starts his teaching with a section in v 3-10 that has historically been called “the beatitudes” because the word “blessed” is repeated over and over again. READ v 3-4. Previous generations of Christians memorized these, while our generation hardly knows them.

Now if you were to ask people today what characteristics lead to the good life they may say things like – look out for #1, learn to assert yourself, pursue happiness, help others, focus on excellence, become self-reliant, do what feels good, achieve, seek comfort, the list goes on. But here Jesus takes situations that are very much outside that list and tells the child of God — you are blessed by God when you go through these. That is a very different way to picture life than we are brought up in here in the US. Jesus is giving us this new perspective so we may be encouraged in the hard times as well as the good times!

A. Blessed means fortunate, having God’s favor

READ v 5-6. Blessed means fortunate — It is a super positive word which points to what leads to a meaningful and rich life. A blessed person is a privileged recipient of God’s favor — it has the sense of a right and harmonious relationship where one person does good for the other person. The word is difficult for translators to find words that give us the super positive sense of this word. The word “blessed” doesn’t have much excitement for many Americans. Some have tried “happy”, but our term ‘happy’ is very feelings oriented. Feeling happy is not the meaning of this word. Others have tried “fortunate” but in many contexts, fortunate means “to have good luck”, which is very different from this word. Others use “well off” but it is not directly referring to physical things. It is to be in a favored position to receive good.
B. The blessing is from God
What is key, but often missed in the translations, is that the one doing good is God. The blessings are from God! They aren’t just random, or chance or fortune. Since these blessings are intentionally from God, they are of the highest quality and importance. We might put warmer weather, a bigger paycheck, less things breaking, intellectual sharpness or no pain on our list of good blessings, but God here gives us 8 characteristics or situations which we face in our life that don’t seem to always be blessings. Take the 8th one in v 10.

C. These situations don’t seem fortunate or having God’s favor
READ v 10. Being persecuted doesn’t seem fortunate or a sign of God’s favor. Each of the beatitudes that Jesus says will bring a meaningful and rich life is very different – in fact incredibly counter-cultural – from what we think will bring a meaningful and rich life. Persecuted, poor in spirit, mourning, meekness – these are all things Americans try to avoid! Yet Jesus says we are blessed when we go through them. So Jesus is clearly calling us to see the world differently than we naturally do. And Jesus promises the results will be much better than if we just go through life like others do. We will be a privileged recipient of God’s favor! Now that is a great encouragement for a cold day!

D. Jesus calls us to a different perspective
Matt 5:11-16
Jesus is seeking to develop a Christian worldview in us – one that will transform what we value and bring a radically different perspective to our thinking. It is based on what God has, is and will do. Look quickly at the verses following the beatitudes – Matthew 5:11-16.

• READ v 11-12 – So we can rejoice in unfair situations because great is our future reward in heaven. And when God says “great” it is GREAT!

• READ v 13 – Our stands against societal decay seem fruitless at time, but they are an important and powerful slowing down of decay which God uses powerfully.

• READ v 14-16 – With all the opposition to our faith, we can be tempted to hide our faith and not actively share the good news of Jesus. But publicly talking about Jesus brings light to this world. The truth of Jesus is mighty because it is our message of hope.

II. How can these be blessings?
So let’s go through these 8 “beatitudes” and ask the question, “how can these be blessings?” We aren’t going to experience Jesus’ encouragement here, if we don’t start to see life from a different perspective and grow in our sense of faith, hope & love. Please let at least one beatitude personally challenge you today.
A. Broken in spirit

**READ v 3.** To be "poor in spirit" is probably the hardest of these 8 virtues to define to an American. To be poor in spirit is to recognize our **utter spiritual bankruptcy** before God – there is this brokenness we get inside, especially before God. To be physically poor is to be in poverty – this poorness is not in terms of money or possessions but in terms of our spirit – what is going on deep within us.

So how do things seem in our lives when we are "poor in spirit" or "broken in spirit". They don’t seem good. We feel like we have failed Jesus or messed up yet again. I often find myself thinking, "I love your Lord – I’m not much good for you – but thanks for being my God." There are times we simply don’t feel worthy of being God’s child. We aren’t feeling victorious inside. AND YET, Jesus tells us “the Kingdom of heaven” is ours – that is we are fully welcomed into and will receive the full benefits of heaven. Our worthiness does not come from us, but from Jesus. That is the message of the cross! We are often most transformed in life by changes that come out of one of those times when we are “poor in spirit”! As one Pastor said, “I am convinced that the first step towards attaining a higher standard of holiness is to realize more fully the amazing sinfulness of sin.” When that happens we rightfully feel broken but Jesus also wants us to understand we are blessed – He tells us we are most fortunate! We are a privileged recipient of God’s favor at the very time we don’t feel that is even a possibility! Jesus doesn’t want us to keep beating ourselves up, but freely receive His grace. He is excited we are at that point where His love will most be felt and our lives can most change in positive ways!

B. Heart break/sorrow

**READ v 4.** The term mourn means “to experience deep grief.” We don’t feel victorious at that moment – our hearts break and life feels heavy. What blessings and favor from God could come out of experiencing deep grief?

**READ v 4.** It is precisely at these times that we can most experience the supernatural comfort of Jesus. This comfort doesn’t take away the sorrow or grief of loss, but it overwhelms it for a time. Jesus’ comfort brings light into our darkness, empowers our weakness and reassures us that we aren’t traveling through this sorrow alone. Imagine, when we are feeling deep grief, Jesus tells us we are blessed – we are a privileged recipient of God’s favor. That is not how we feel, but it is THE TRUTH.

C. Stepped on, spat upon

**READ v 5.** The meek – In our culture the meek (dictionary defines that as “quiet, gentle, and easily imposed on, submissive”) – In our culture, the meek get taken advantage of so most Americans make every effort to NOT to be meek. In our minds the only thing the meek will inherit is the left over scraps when everyone else has taken what they want! This verse so puzzled the pop singers, Simon and Garfunkel, 50 years ago they wrote a song about the contrast.

_Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit._

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Blessed is the lamb whose blood flows.
Blessed are the sat upon, Spat upon, Ratted on, (then)
O Lord, Why have you forsaken me?
I got no place to go,

Simon and Garfunkel didn’t see anything fortunate, or blessed, in being meek – they just saw weakness and abandonment. That’s because genuine meekness is SO counter-cultural. Biblical meekness is not weakness or cowardice or self-loathing – it is “strength under control”. It is Jesus willingly suffering on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins when He had the power to come down at any time. It is Moses who could call down the wrath of God on those attacking him, but chooses to intercede for them instead. Meek people don’t have an inflated sense of their importance NOR do they feel the need to defend themselves when others attack, gossip or speak poorly of. The meek will inherit the earth – it doesn’t look like it now because this is something that happens in the future and the earth they inherit will to so much better than it is now. It is well worth the wait!

D. Frustrated with unrighteousness

READ v 6. - Hunger and thirst for righteousness. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means we are driven inside for righteousness – that people will treat each other right, they honor God, they never lie or deceive, that true justice will be had for all. Just as hunger and thirst constantly drive you to food & water so this desire for justice, fairness & obedience to God constantly drive you. That doesn’t seem to be negative? It does because we both live in a broken world AND none of us can consistently live what we want others to do. So not only is it totally frustrating to see the constant unrighteousness around us, but we are also torn inside because we fall so far short ourselves. We try to compensate in dysfunctional ways – blame others for problems – complain, push or manipulate people to do more of what we think will bring righteousness – substitute outward legalism for true righteousness to try to feel better about ourselves – we even become hypocritical excusing our own failures and attacking others for not doing enough of what we aren’t doing ourselves. We falsely think the way to satisfy this inner hunger and thirst for righteousness will come from our own actions. Jesus reminds us that in these frustrating, unfair times – there is relief. It is from God filling us”, not by artificially trying to make heaven on earth now. As we let go of our insistences and join God in what He is doing around us, that hunger and thirst is satisfied, because we are filled with awe in God.

E. Taken advantage of

READ v 7. Similar to hungering and thirsting for righteousness, showing mercy is a very positive thing. To be merciful is to show forgiveness and compassion to those in need. Mercy is great. But those who are merciful soon find themselves taken advantage of. People of mercy can often become the most hardened with someone who keeps disappointing them. The merciful often find themselves worn out & irritable. This leads to frustration, negativity and even getting mad at others & God.
The wonderful encouragement Jesus gives us is that when we are merciful— even though we hit these times of overload, frustration & hardness, God will be merciful with us. He will first try to get through to our faulty thinking or actions in the most gentle ways. Is it worth it to be merciful—you bet! There is nothing you want more than God’s mercy!

F. No excuses, cut corners or rationalization  
READ V 8—Pure in heart. The heart refers to the center of who we are. To be pure means there is no impurity or uncleanness. So being pure in heart means we have a singleness of heart toward God—there is no hidden motives, hypocrisy, bitterness or false humility in us. Jesus is first and we want to please God in all things. That means we probably won’t have as much as other people and we will regularly be frustrated by peoples’ excuses, rationalizations and cutting corners— including our own. Our world loves “gray”, but not those “pure in heart”. So it is hard to be “pure in heart” and it definitely isn’t appreciated by others. We won’t appreciate it either unless we believe Jesus’ encouragement here—it is more than worth it to pursue Jesus first and foremost because you will see God. That is you will experience the goodness and greatness of God personally!

G. Shot at by both sides “peacemakers”, v 9  
READ V 9 —Peacemakers. Peacemakers are those who help bring reconciliation to broken relationships— including encouraging people to be reconciled with Jesus. This sounds easy until you actually try to be a peacemaker and find yourself “shot at” by both sides! There are conflicts all around us and in us! While sin shatters peace, God is the God of peace—He wants to bring in spiritual peace, relational peace and global peace based on His truth & justice, not simply the absence of outward conflict. But total peace won’t happen until Jesus returns, satan & the demonic are bound and might taken away from egotistical leaders. In the meantime, we seek peace but often find ourselves attacked. But it is worth the pain of sharing the good news of Jesus with even the most hardened person, because we are giving them the chance of healing and eternal life. In the meantime, God affirms that we are His children through faith in Jesus and we will receive the rich inheritance, majestic status and wonderful love that comes from being called “God’s child”.

H. Mistreated “persecuted” & false accusations, v 10  
READ V 10—Persecuted because of righteousness. Just so we are clear—this is only referring to undeserved persecution or mistreatment, not mistreatment for being egotistical, contrary or socially inept. This is when we face societal disapproval, opposition or wrong treatment for holding to Jesus’ truth and ways. How can we be most fortunate when this pain and suffering happens? Like those who are poor in spirit we will receive the Kingdom of heaven which v 12 goes on to say includes great reward in heaven. So the next time someone says “are you so bigoted to think that there is only one way to heaven?” or “how can you be so unloving to think marriage should only be between one man and one woman for life”, remind
yourself of Jesus’ words here. You are now going to get a rich reward in heaven and all eternity will be richer for you. You will have status like that of the prophets of old.

Being a dedicated Christian always means we will receive mistreatment, insults, false accusations or persecution sometime in our lives simply because we hold to Jesus’ ways and teaching. It is not all the time so don’t get a “martyr’s complex”. Instead in those times of frustration, look to heaven and thank God for the future reward you will receive and remind other believers of their rich welcome as they go through those kind of difficulties. Be encouraged, not just in the good times, but also in these 8 hard times!

Read Ben ->
May God encourage us this year.

New ENDING ->
I finished the sermon before
I received an email last night from Bill & Chris that confirmed everything we said today... (Red up to first name)
I don’t have time to read this morning but I’ll send it to all on the prayer chain this afternoon.

LAD
Greetings from Saskatchewan!

Wow!

We feel like we have a gang of thugs backing us up!

Prayers can be powerful, but never more evident than when we see multiple answers to prayers in a variety of ways.

The Mom reported back to us that one of her sons wanted her to pick him up and bring him