

The beatitudes that Jesus proclaims seem for all the world to be “empty or broken”! Blessed are those who are poor, hungry, weeping, hated, excluded, insulted, and denounced! Really?

For the most part, beatitudes were a formula that encouraged people to do good. For example in our Responsorial Psalm we read, “Blessed is the one who does not take the wicked for his guide, nor walks the road that sinners tread.”

Psalm 41 says, “Blessed are those who consider the poor. The Lord will deliver them in time of trouble.” Jeremiah 17, today’s reading has “Blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, ... he is like a tree planted [next to] water that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green.”

Beautiful and numerous are the beatitudes in Hebrew scriptures. They say that if you do good things, you will receive blessings. Thus, people were not surprised that Jesus used them in his teaching.

But in the sermon on the plains, he does seem to have reversed them—not making a lot of sense to us!

Blessed are you if you do the deed of suffering. What do you mean? Am I supposed to seek to be penniless and live in sorrow and in pain?

Why would he encourage us to be in such terrible states?

I don’t think we can say that God wants us in a terrible state. I believe there is a real clue that will lead us in interpreting these beatitudes and it is found early in the reading from the prophet Jeremiah. “Cursed is the one who trusts in human beings, who seeks his strength in flesh, whose heart turns away from the LORD.”

Bishop Robert Barrows, reminds us that where your heart is there is your treasure...Jeremiah speaks of the heart that turns away from the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, all of the ancient texts in the Hebrew Scriptures speak about the blessing of being single hearted...“Hear O Israel there is but one God and you should love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.”

Blessed are those whose heart belongs to God and him alone...All my other interests, concerns and preoccupations, while important, need to take their rightful place around the heart that belongs to God.

The one who turns from the Lord “is like a barren bush in the desert that enjoys no change of season, but stands in a lava waste, a salt and empty earth.” A waste and empty earth is how Jeremiah describes what it is like when your heart belongs to someone or something other than God...we dry up, we become lifeless.

On the other side Jeremiah tells us what happens when we put things in right position “Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose hope is the LORD. He is like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it fears not the heat when it comes; its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still bears fruit.”

When I trust in the Lord, my roots are deep and I do not have to fear the heat when it comes. Even when the test comes I can thrive because my roots, my heart are buried deep in the life of God.

So when failure comes, sickness comes, the death of loved ones come, the sense that all my work and endeavors amount to nothing. I’m alright because I am firmly planted near the living waters. My heart belongs to the Lord.

Now turn to the Gospel of Luke. Raising his eyes to his disciples...Looking directly at us...the Lord is saying Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. What an awful thing to wish for me! How can you say poor people are blessed? What Jesus is saying to us...Is how blessed you are if you are not trusting in wealth. You’re not planting your life to that hopelessly dry stream! How blessing you are, happy you are, lucky you are, if you are not grounding yourself and relying to wealth to make you happy.

He goes on...Blessed are you who are hungry..so now Jesus is glorifying physical hunger? No, read it this way. How blessing you are, happy you are, lucky you are if your heart does not belong to the sensual pleasure of this world. We are..the world is attracted to physical pleasures, food, comfort, sexual pleasure. Some would say we are obsessed with these pleasures. As you know the pornography industry is a multi-billion dollar industry. Evidence that people have planted their

hearts in the excesses our culture affords us. These things will leave us profoundly empty at the level of the heart.

Blessed are you who are weeping...so what now we are glorifying depression and sadness. No, how blessing you are, happy you are, lucky you are when you are not grounding your life in always feeling good. Good feelings come and they go...sometimes I wake up feeling good, sometimes I don't. Sometimes I'm in a good mood and sometimes I wake up on the wrong side of the bed. Sometimes this thing makes me happy, sometimes, it means nothing. You see, feelings come and go. There are some people that are deeply addicted to good feelings. They'll take any kind of drugs they can find to produce good feelings. Marriage Encounter and Engaged Encounter, retreats in the Church, have a catch phrase, "Love is not a feeling, it is a decision!"

Again good feelings themselves, as is wealth, and pleasure are not evils in themselves. But they come and they go. The heart needs to be grounded in not what comes and goes, but in God, otherwise you are in a salt and empty earth.

And then there is this one...**Blessed are you when people hate you, insult you, exclude you on account of me.** Rejoice and leap for joy on that day. What? Now you are telling me I need to be happy when people hate me and persecute me? No, don't plant your heart on the honor the world can give you. Trouble is many of us can get addicted to honor and the adulation of people. "The Pharisees, like to be greeted in the market places and have the seats of honor at banquets." Who are the most honored people in our society? The best people? The most morally honorable people? By no means...very often the best people are dishonored. So how blessing you are, happy you are, lucky you are when you don't hang your hat on the adulation of others. "**Do not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing.**"

You see Jesus is making the same point that Jeremiah is making. And it raises for us the question to whom and what does my heart belong. And what give me life?

Unless it belongs to the Lord, our lives are empty and dried up. If our hearts are rooted in the Lord, then we thrive!