



**B**LESSED are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. 10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5:3-12)

This life is filled with contrasts – light and dark, hot and cold, beautiful and the perverse. Our appreciation of each element of being is based on an appreciation of those contrasts. We could have far less appreciation for the sunrise if it were not preceded by the long, dark night.

There are physical contrasts and spiritual contrasts – curses and blessings, sin and righteousness. God need not teach us to sin for we come by that through inheritance from our primitive parents. He has, however, taught us righteousness.

I will point one glaring fact out up front: *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* (Rom 3:23) and *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom 6:23) Since we have all sinned, and all deserve our wages of death, how are the elect of God spared such a justice? It is only by the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and His works of righteousness and none of our own.

I have heard it preached that all sins are of like gravity in the eyes of the Lord. I beg to differ. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught that some sins are of greater gravity than others. 9 *And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.* 10 *Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest*

*thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? 11 Jesus answered, **Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*** (John 19:9-11) So there are degrees of sin. The Pharisees had committed blasphemy in denying Christ for they knew perfectly well who He was, but Pilate was guilty of a loss of courage under political pressure. For every sin, there is a curse; and for every obedience, a blessing.

The very first blessing God proclaimed to mankind was in the Garden at Eden. *So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. **And God blessed them,** and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.* Why was a special blessing given to the male and female God had created? It was because they would represent the first marriage couple on earth – a direct type of the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and His Bride the Church. God not only blessed them but gave them names. Of course we know the name of the man, Adam, and His wife, Eve. What was Eve's last name? Have you ever wondered? In western civilization, the woman has traditionally taken the family name of the husband for her own. In many Far Eastern countries, such as Korea, the wife retains her former name. How did this come about in the West? It probably comes from the following verse, ***Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam,*** in the day when they were created. Did you catch that? Adam's name became shared with that of Eve! God named them thusly because they became *one flesh* at marriage just as the Christian becomes one with Christ at conversion.

God blesses Godly marriages. In fact, I do not believe true marriage exists outside the authority of God. According to the traditional ceremony, *That which God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*

This brings me to a salient example of one sin that the Lord considers of great magnitude: *Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.* (Lev 18:22) The Lord uses the term 'abomination' sparingly. It is reserved for the most serious of sins, in this case, homosexuality. The seriousness of this sin is revealed again in parts of the New Testament: *22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 26 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: 27 And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.* (Romans 1:22-32)

There are habits that may lead to some health issues personally, but sins that deprive others of life itself are of far greater gravity. God does not easily forgive the shedding of innocent blood though it is possible under sincere and life-changing repentance. Gluttony, pride, selfishness, etc. are sins that are not so difficult to remedy when one is pardoned by the Lord; but others require a greater seriousness and leave

deeper scars. We may repent of murder, yet, our victim and his family have suffered irreplaceable loss. It is easy to forgive a friend for a small personal offense, but a greater contrition by far would be required of that same friend if he intentionally burned my house down.

The great grain of hope in all is that God is able to forgive every sin, and He will do so if the confession in our mouths matches the contrition in our hearts.

Please observe the contrasts shown between blessings and curses:

### **Blessings**

*And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: 2 And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. 3 Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. 4 Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. 5 Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. 6 Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. 7 The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. 8 The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. 9 The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. 10 And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. 11 And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. 12 The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. 13 And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: 14 And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.*

### **Curses**

*But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: 16 Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. 17 Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. 18 Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. 19 Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. 20 The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. \* 21 The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. 22 The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. \* 23 And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. 24 The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. 25 The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. \* 26 And thy carcase shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away. 27 The LORD will smite thee with the botch of Egypt, and with the emerods, and with the scab, and with the itch,*

whereof thou canst not be healed. 28 The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart: 29 And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the blind gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee. 30 Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. \* 31 Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them. \* 32 Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people, and thine eyes shall look, and fail with longing for them all the day long: and there shall be no might in thine hand. 33 The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed alway: 34 So that thou shalt be mad for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see. 35 The LORD shall smite thee in the knees, and in the legs, with a sore botch that cannot be healed, from the sole of thy foot unto the top of thy head. 36 The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. 37 And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee. 38 Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather but little in; for the locust shall consume it. 39 Thou shalt plant vineyards, and dress them, but shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worms shall eat them. 40 Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy coasts, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with the oil; for thine olive shall cast his fruit. 41 Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them; for they shall go into captivity. \* 42 All thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume. \* 43 The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. 44 He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail.

Simple blessings are abundant every day that we are able to awaken from sleep. One of the greatest blessings and memories I have of Christmas was fifty years ago. I was stationed at Ft. Rucker, Alabama, and on temporary duty (TDY) at the Infantry Center at Ft. Benning, Georgia. My wife, Debbie, and I drove home to Rucker on weekends. It was mid-December. Having traveled the backroads to Benning often, we were very familiar with the countryside and houses along the way. We had often spied a well worn house of unpainted wood walls a short distance beyond a tree-line. There were always six or seven small children playing in the yard, and not so well dressed. That mid-December, Debbie and I wondered how we would spend Christmas away from family and friends. So we decided to buy a small TV, bags of fruits, groceries, candies, toys and clothes and deliver to that needy family. Debbie has more courage than I have. I was ashamed to carry those items to the house fearing the people might be offended. So Debbie made three trips back and forth with the help of the older children. The family was over-joyed, but not so much as Debbie and I. It is the best Christmas memory we have.

That kind of blessing reminds me of the oft repeated text from Acts 20:35 following the sermon at Holy Communion: *Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*