

# Still Shining Through Our Weaknesses

## Matthew 5:1-12

### Introduction

Recently in my personal devotions, I was trying to develop a good definition for the word "saint." As you may know, many times the Apostle Paul addresses his epistles to the "saints" in a particular city. This verse from Ephesians is an example:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the **saints** at Ephesus...  
(Ephesians 1:1)

Now, I have always understood that to refer to all Christians – not to any special class of Christian. But what would be a good workable definition of that? What would I answer if someone – you – were to ask me to define it? What would I say?

- So I "googled" it...

Here's one of the definitions that I found:

Saints are persons in heaven, who lived **heroically virtuous lives**, offered their life for others, or were martyred for the faith, and who are worthy of imitation.  
(source: US Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Heroically virtuous lives. That's a high standard! That knocks out a lot of people, doesn't it? If that's the definition, are there any saints in attendance today?

- If that's the standard, I'm out.
- Heroically virtuous? No, call me cowardly flawed.
- That could be discouraging ... right?

But don't let it be! The epistle reading for today was written for flawed people like you and me. Listen to this part of the reading again:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

A few years later the same writer of those words would write a second letter to this same church, where he would make this encouraging statement:

But (God) said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I

delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

On the night Jesus was born, the angels filled the sky ...

... and the glory of the Lord shone around them (Luke 2:9)

In the days that followed wise men from the east followed the light of a star to find the newborn King, asking ...

Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. (Matthew 2:2)

Today Christmas is in the past. Epiphany is over. But know this:

The light of Christ still shines.

And one of the places where it still shines brightly is in the lives of cowardly flawed people like you and like me. When we are weak, God is strong. When our lights glow dimly, His light still shines. Do you want evidence?

The Bible is with the stories of flawed people used by God in amazing ways to shine the light of Christ.

- Noah was a drunk.
- Abraham was old and a liar.
- Sarah laughed at God's promises.
- Leah wasn't pretty enough.
- Joseph was abused.
- Moses had a stuttering problem and a short temper.
- Miriam was a gossip.
- Gideon was afraid.
- Samson was a womanizer.
- Naomi was a widow.
- Job went bankrupt.
- David was an adulterer and a murderer
- Elijah was suicidal.
- Jeremiah was clinically depressed.
- Jonah ran away from God.
- Hosea's wife was a prostitute.
- John the Baptist ate bugs and lacked people skills.
- Martha worried about everything.
- The Samaritan woman was divorced, more than once.
- Peter denied Christ.
- Thomas doubted Him.
- And the list goes on.

And the light of Christ continued to shine in and through each one of those people. From our texts today, let me make a couple of observations:

### **OBSERVATION 1: FLAWED PEOPLE ARE BLESSED PEOPLE**

I call your attention to the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5.

Blessed are ... who?

The meek. The poor in spirit. Those who mourn. The persecuted. Even descriptions like "peacemaker" or "merciful" might be viewed as signs of weakness or as flaws. We are living in a "tough guy" age these days.

Just Thursday I started to listen to a book "On Becoming a Man" by Scott Galloway. It was recommended to me since I am the primary male in the life of one of my grandsons. I listen to it on my 10-minute commute between the church and office, so I am only about 5% into the 10-hour audio. Not far enough to form an opinion.

- But my initial impression is that his definition of a man is modeled after the stepfather of his childhood friend ... who drove a Jaguar, made a fortune as a lawyer defending insurance companies and never complained about anything.
- I hope the book offers more, because that doesn't define me either.

But it is also not the picture our texts paint, either. It is the flawed people who are blessed.

When the Gospel of Luke records the Beatitudes, it also records some warnings to people like the man Scott Galloway described in the first 5% of his audiobook. In Luke's version, Jesus adds:

There is trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you'll ever get. And there is trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your *self* will not satisfy you for long. And there is trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games. There's suffering to be met, and one day you're going to meet it. There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests ... Your task is to be true, not popular. (Luke 6:24-26)

As I study the Scriptures – particularly the texts I have shared with you today – I am taught that I DON'T NEED to have it all together. I don't need to be perfect.

- I just need to have my faith placed in the God who is perfect, the God who has it all together.
- And when I do, my life will be blessed.

What does that mean?

Blessedness comes from unhindered fellowship with God the Father through our Lord Jesus. To be blessed is to experience the full impact of God's presence in our lives now and for all eternity.

## **OBSERVATION #2: GOD'S REQUIREMENTS ARE ATTAINABLE**

Look Micah 6:8:

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

Pastor Larry Bannick stopped by my office this week. He is preaching this morning at Salem Lutheran Church in West Alexandria – where Pastor Dan Mershon serves. Dan was an intern here about 10 years ago.

- I asked Pastor Bannick what his preaching text was going to be. That's a common question among preachers.
- He quoted this verse and said it would be a key part of his sermon today.

The scene in Micah 6 is a courtroom. God has called His people to be judged.

For the Lord has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. (Micah 6:2-3)

In the verses that follow, the people repent and ask God a simple question:

How can we make up for all that we have done?

We could bring sacrifices, but they can never wash away sins.

- All our religion can never save us.
- Even if we sacrificed our own children, that would not cleanse us.
- What do you want from us?

God's response is: It is not hard. All I want ...

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

It is that simple.

God does not want extravagant gifts and sacrifices; He wants our hearts.

And when He has our hearts, His Light shines through.

## **APPLICATION**

Take heart! God is not looking for perfect people. He seeks people whose heart is His.

- His light shines through people like that ... flawed, ordinary people ... but people whose hearts belong to Him.

My saint definition?

A saint is an ordinary person, who has confessed their sins, proclaims Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and is now striving to live a life that pleases God and through whom God shines the Light of Christ.

We can live up to that one.

Amen