

11/2/11

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy Christian Church, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow the example of believers of all time, who were made holy by the blood of the lamb, so that we may live our faith in Jesus in all virtuous and godly living. We pray that, together with the saints of all time, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE FIRST LESSON Revelation 7: 9-17

(John sees saints and angels around God's throne in a beautiful revelation of paradise.)

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" 14 I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. 16 Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 5:1-12 *(Jesus teaches the blessings of His kingdom.)*

1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

INTRO - Last night in our men's Bible Study and Prayer Group, in Promise Keepers, we talked

some about the results of the Great Depression on our parents and grandparents. One person mentioned it may have scarred his family, and made them extremely cautious about financial transactions. Another person talked about a desire for good shoes on the feet of family members.

However, in the midst of these struggles it seems that everyone's family was connected with the church and looking to God. They turned to God because they needed God's help. Do you see how the difficulties of life were a blessing?

I. Jesus talks in our Gospel lesson about how life is different for those who are part of the Kingdom of God.

A. Who would think about these things as being blessings? Being Poor in Spirit? Mourning? Being meek? Or being insulted and persecuted.

1. Yet, in all of these situations we are told the people are blessed.
2. They are blessed because God is with them through the trials, with His love, leading them ultimately to eternal life.

B. No wonder God's people can say things like.

1. In Romans 5:3-4, 3. . . we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
2. In Romans 8:28 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
3. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 10 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.
4. In Philippians 1: 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

II. Last week the St. Louis Cardinals won the World Series, and a local St. Louis boy, David Freese had a great playoff run. He drove in more runs and had more total bases than anyone ever in baseball. His key hits helped the Cardinals to escape defeat and achieve victory. Everyone is talking about his great accomplishments and the victory.

But, the focus only on the good can detract from the reality of the situation. Do you know the other side of this story? Actually, this is a young man who had quit baseball, a young man who has fought ankle injuries, and a young man who has given up drinking because of problems. Focusing on the glory can cause us to forget the struggle.

A. In our world people can and do focus on success, on wealth, on possessions. These things can give us a different way of thinking than the Beatitudes.

B. Instead of seeing being Poor in Spirit as a blessing, we can see it as a curse. Instead of seeing mourning as a blessing because it points us to God, we can see it as unfair. Instead of seeing persecution as a blessing, we can see it as failure.

1. That's the way the world looks at these things
2. We can end up thinking the same way, and then missing the help and strength of God in life's trials.

III. When we are part of the kingdom of God, God changes life.

A. First, our forgiveness and love and eternal life did not come from what started out as a winning battle, but suffering and death.

1. Jesus suffered and died because of the reality of our sin and the sin of the world.

2. But, He did so trusting in the love of His heavenly Father who raised Him from the dead so He can offer us forgiveness and eternal life.

B. For Christians, whose eyes are on God's kingdom, We think differently.

1. The best blessing in life is not the possessions and success of this world, but the love of God especially as received in Jesus.

2. For Christians whose eyes are on God's kingdom, our goal is not so much success, or wealth, but eternal life in heaven with God.

C. For Christians, people who are part of the kingdom of God, we act differently.

1. When trouble comes we don't complain, but we look for God and His help.

2. When trouble comes, we look for ways to grow in faith and closer to our Lord in love for Him.

3. Because God is with us what seems like the struggles of life can actually be blessings that draw us closer to Him, and help us to better see His love.

CONCLUSION - There is another side to that David Freese story. He is a member of one of the Lutheran Churches from our denomination. In difficult times God helped him, and turning to God helped him to persevere and helped him to develop character. Difficult times helped him to see the bigger picture, helped him to see God. I hope the success does not cause him to forget it.

When trials come to Christians, people who are part of the kingdom of God because of the love of God in Jesus, we look for God in the difficult times.