SERMON: ***If We Have Beautiful Attitudes, God Promises Us Fruitfulness***

Let us begin today by considering **1 Corinthians 12:4-7**, which says,

> ***4*** *Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit,* ***5*** *and there are varieties of services but the same Lord,* ***6*** *and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.* ***7*** *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* ***8*** *To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,* ***9*** *to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,* ***10*** *to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.* ***11*** *All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.*

Essentially, in this passage **we are promised** that **if we follow God and strive to fulfill his purpose** for us as individuals living in God's kingdom on earth, then **God gives us gifts of the Spirit that will enable us to accomplish all he sets before us**, in his name.

And yet, there are times in life when everything is coming at us all at once. Though we strive to keep our focus on God, our purpose gives way before our grief and our struggles. As I've mentioned before, the Christian life is not promised to be an easy one! But God knows our struggles, and has experienced the strife inherent in a human life. In walking among us, he experienced both love and hate, vigor and tiredness, abundance and hunger. He experienced joy and sorrow, knowing what it is to love and lose a friend, and has wept at the grief of those around him. Our Father is intimately aware of the emotions and stress that weary us and distract us from accomplishing our purpose. This knowledge is reflected in Jesus' Sermon the Mount, as he spoke the *Beatitudes*, which we find in **Matthew 5:3-12**. These reflect God's promises to us for such times, for times when we struggle yet remain true to him, living our faith.

Note how Jesus begins this set of promises. He acknowledges that adversity and hardship are something we face, but that we do not face them alone! ***If we are poor in spirit*** (as we are in times when all seems bleak, in times of great loss), ***God promises us the kingdom of heaven***. And ***if we mourn***, **God promises *we will be comforted***. Remember that once Christ ascended, our Father sent his Spirit to us to fulfill that very promise, and the Church was established so we have a family here on earth to also give such comfort. God has provided for spiritual comfort as well as our physical and emotional comforting!

God's people knew such hope even before the coming of the Messiah. Recall the hope presented in the midst of a book of great sorrow and lament: In **Lamentations 3:22-26**, in the middle of a tale of desolation, we find hope to cling to. *"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;* ***23*** *they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.* ***24*** "The LORD is my portion," *says my soul,* "therefore I will hope in him." ***25*** *The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.* ***26*** *It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."* Even before Christ, before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers, God's mercies were known, offering fresh starts and hope for this life.

The Beatitudes go on from there to say that *if we are meek*, God promises *we will still inherit the earth.* Now this is hope to cling to during our most troubled and trying times! Truly, **if we**

submit ourselves to God and trust in his strength to get us through, we are promised an unbelievable inheritance through Jesus Christ. Whereas in our society the meek are often trampled upon, in the kingdom of God such *meekness* is understood for what it is – a sense of awe before our Creator, of reverence before him and a desire to live in the kingdom of God now, to see it rise up around us in this life, not just the next. And God has given us guidance through the life and ministry of Jesus, showing us the *power* of meekness, the power that it takes to *refrain from lashing out* when the powerful in this world would disregard or wipe their feet upon us, reviling us. And look at what *God accomplished* through Christ's meekness before authorities, a meekness that led him to the cross! Good triumphed over evil, defeating the power of death and the hold of sin upon humanity. The strength of character and desire to do good, to not return evil for evil – this strength is greater than that of bullies and tyrants. And God's Spirit provides us the strength to return good for evil.

Matthew 5:6 proclaims a promise to cling to as we wait upon the Spirit's guidance and strength: ***If we hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Jesus Christ*, God promises *we will be filled*.** Perhaps these words of his teaching from the mount were on his mind as the time for his arrest grew imminent. Knowing that he would no longer be physically present on earth, he provided a means to make his presence known to us in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup as we celebrate the Lord's Supper. We celebrate it, whether things are going well or we live in chaos, because we hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God in our lives. In desiring this meal, our hunger and thirst for righteousness is made plain, and we gratefully receive it, seeking to be filled. This is why Communion is also called the *Eucharist*, or *true thanksgiving*. In taking it, we thank God for his presence and care.

Even so, we may grow impatient with God's timing and seek our own will. At times even the most devout Christians will stray from walking Christ's path. Perhaps we forget to ask for strength or refuse (in our anger or impatience) to follow his guidance. Yet, even then, in his mercy God graciously forgives us. How much more merciful is our God to us when we ourselves are merciful to others, even those who persecute or bully us to get their way. For according to **Matthew 5:7-8** ***when we show such mercy*, God promises *we will receive mercy*** as well. And if we do not stray, **if we *remain pure in heart*, God promises *we will see God***. I often wonder how to interpret this promise… Perhaps Jesus was saying that in staying true to God, remaining pure in heart, we live in the kingdom now and can see Christ in others. This is a deeper seeing that goes beyond the surface; an intentional gaze upon another that reveals the very presence of God with them. When we have a heart after God, we take the time to really see others in both their times of joy and pain. Then the Spirit within us moves us to action.

It would be wrong to turn to the outcome of these beautiful attitudes without considering the corresponding passage found in **Luke** chapter 6. **Verse 6:21** tells **those who follow Jesus Christ** that ***if they weep now, they are promised future laughter***! Yes, joy is to follow sorrow. In fact, in **Psalm 30** we hear the psalmist speak about this truth that was known long before the coming of Christ, this knowledge that relief will come when we place our faith in the Lord, for it tells us in **verse 5** that *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."* Once again, we see that the teachings of Christ, the Word incarnate, have always been there, in God's word, as part of the Old Testament. Jesus just made their meanings and interpretations more clear.

In this sermon series, I do not tell you of God's promises just so that you can claim them for yourself. We are given gifts of the spirit and are blessed by God so that we might be a blessing to others. If we are walking in the love of our Father according the Way of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit – there is no way that we will not bear good fruit of some kind. Our fruitfulness is not to be judged according to the standards of the world, but according to the fruits desired by our God. These have been laid out before us by Paul in **Galatians 5:22-23**: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* Paul even goes as far as to state: *"There is no law against such things."* How true this is! However, sometimes we must be creative in finding ways to bear such fruit, when trying times come, yet we can always find a way to do so as we continue to live in hope.

The *Parable of the Talents,* found in chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel, is a well-known teaching of Jesus on bearing fruit with whatever you have been given, one which ends with a promise that *"to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance, but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."* This promise is found in **Matthew 25:29**. Although it could be misunderstood as punishing the poor, really it is about reaping what you have sown. This is made clear when looked at through the lens of the fruit of the Spirit. **If you sow seeds by this fruit** instead of living in fear, if you share your love, joy and peace with others (being patient and kind and generous), remaining faithful, gentle, and practicing self-control… **then the blessings of the kingdom will be yours**. You will lack nothing that you truly need, because your needs are known by God our Father.

But if, like the servant given 1 talent, you keep what God gives you to yourself and do nothing with it, God is not given a chance to multiply it, so that you can offer it back to God with growth. Actually, this was not a new teaching that Jesus came up with; he just made a parable to drive it home. It has always been the way of God's people. Consider the same basic promise given in **Proverbs 3:9-10**, which says: *"9 Honor the LORD with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine."* If we honor the Lord with what we have, then we are promised to live a life where we have enough and to spare – essentially, God will bless us with enough to share, that he might bless others through us.

Yet even when, metaphorically, our barns are full and our vats are bursting, that does not mean we will not face trials. Nor does God promise we will have all his blessings all the time, without woes. In fact, in **2 Timothy 3:1-5**, we are told *"1 You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. 2 For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unfeeling, implacable, slanderers, degenerates, brutes, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!"*

And in verses **12-13**, Paul goes on to admonish Timothy, saying: *"12 Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. 13 But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed."* This is godly wisdom – we cannot control others, but we can live

according to what we have learned and believed as Christians. The powerful can and will rip things away from you, stealing financial security, taking away what you thought you had earned in life, what you believed to be yours by right. But take heart that God's promises will always be yours as his children. No one can take these from you!

So, **hold onto the promises of God**. Believe that God has your best interests, and the best interests of all peoples, at heart, even when distressing times come. **Live unto your purpose**, claiming the gifts that God has given to you to accomplish all he asks of you. **Bear fruit and be a blessing** to others, knowing that God is with you, by your side through the Spirit, and has promised to be with you until the end of the age (**Matthew 28:20b**).

To God we give all glory, for in him is found the greatest power and might and strength, now and forever. Amen.