When Blessings Look Like Suffering

Premkumar Immanuel Clement

Scripture: Matthew 5:1–12 | All Saints' Day

Let me begin with a little experience from our home. My wife, Sujatha, once tried to prepare a dish by following instructions from YouTube cooking videos featuring Julia Child and Joshua Weissman. She followed the recipe, used the ingredients, and did her best. Yet the dish did not turn out quite like theirs!

Apparently, having the right ingredients and following the right instructions are not always enough. Something more is needed—the experience, the personality, and the presence of the person who brings the recipe to life.

I think something similar happens when we read the Beatitudes. We may treat them as a collection of principles for good living: be humble, show mercy, make peace, and pursue righteousness. But the Beatitudes are more than a recipe for virtue. Their authority rests in the person of Jesus—in his life, his character, his relationship with God, and his invitation to follow him.

Today, on All Saints' Day, we remember those who heard that invitation, trusted Christ, and lived it out. And we discover a surprising truth: sometimes, God's blessings look remarkably like suffering.

1. What does it mean to be blessed?

The word *Beatitudes* comes from the Latin *beati*, meaning "blessed" or "happy." We might understand it as a declaration of the highest or deepest happiness.

But listen to Jesus: “Blessed are those who mourn.” “Blessed are the meek.” “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” “Blessed are those who are persecuted.”

How can mourning be happiness? How can meekness be a blessing in a world that rewards power? How can those who suffer injustice be called fortunate? Biblical language invites us to understand blessing through several related images: finding the right road, as in Psalm 1; bowing in praise before God, as in Psalm 103; and receiving the blessing of a God who turns toward us in grace, as we hear in Numbers 6: “The Lord bless you and keep you.” Together, these images help us see that blessing is not simply possessing something desirable. It is walking the right road, living in relationship with God, and receiving God's gracious presence. Jesus is showing us that road in the Beatitudes. But this road challenges the values we often take for granted. Our society teaches us to measure happiness by wealth, professional success, recognition, influence, and the lifestyles of celebrities and powerful people. We look outside ourselves for the next achievement, possession, or approval that will finally make us happy. We most often fail to look inward, into our souls.

Jesus invites us to see the world differently. He declares that the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the merciful, and the peacemakers are blessed—not because their circumstances are desirable, but because God's kingdom belongs to them. The Beatitudes invite us to change not merely our behavior, but our entire way of seeing the world.

2. Does Jesus glorify suffering?

Absolutely not. Jesus does not tell us to seek suffering, accept injustice passively, or imagine that pain automatically guarantees happiness in the future. Rather, he tells us that ordinary life can

become a place where we discover God's presence and live out God's purposes. The Beatitudes are not simply commands telling us what we must do. They are declarations of what is true about God's kingdom. Jesus announces that God draws near to those whom the world considers weak, unsuccessful, or insignificant.

Here is the challenge: we often assume that God's work must begin with power from above—with authority, wealth, influence, and control. But Jesus reveals a God whose power is also made known through humility, compassion, service, and self-giving love.

The Beatitudes are first about the character of God and then about the character of God's people. We are called to show mercy because God is merciful; to make peace because God seeks reconciliation; and to care for the vulnerable because God's kingdom does not abandon them.

When we refuse to live this way, the problem is not merely that we have failed to follow an ethical rule. Sometimes, it is that we have not trusted God's way enough to live by it.

3. The saints show us this upside-down happiness.

On All Saints' Day, we remember people who discovered this surprising blessedness in ordinary, humble lives. Think of Francis of Assisi, who turned away from the pursuit of wealth and status to embrace simplicity, care for the poor, and love God's creation. By the world's standards, he gave up the things that promised happiness. Yet his life became a witness to a joy that possessions could not provide.

Think of Mother Teresa, who lived among the lepers, the homeless, the dying, and the uncared-for people on the streets of Calcutta, yet led a graceful, happy life. Her story reminds us

that a life need not be publicly celebrated to be deeply faithful. And think of the countless monks, hermits, caregivers, parents, and ordinary believers whose lives were marked by prayer, service, generosity, and quiet faithfulness. They remind us that holiness is not reserved for the famous or powerful. It can be found in an ordinary life lived in extraordinary love.

Perhaps some of the saints we remember today are closer to home: a mother who prayed faithfully through difficult years, a father who worked quietly for his family, a Sunday school teacher who encouraged us, or a church member who visited us when we were grieving. Society may never have celebrated them as successful people. Yet they gave us something more enduring than worldly success: they showed us how to live with faith, hope, and love. Their happiness did not depend on having perfect circumstances. It grew from the life they shared with God and the love they shared with others.

Conclusion

Dear friends, Jesus does not offer us a recipe that guarantees a trouble-free life. He invites us into a relationship with him and calls us to walk his road.

So, on this All Saints' Day, let us remember those who have shown us the way. Let us give thanks for their faithfulness, receive strength from their witness, and continue their work in our own time.

May the saints who have gone before us inspire us, may the Beatitudes guide us, and may the joy of God's kingdom be visible in the ordinary lives we live today.