

LIVING LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE RIVERBANK!

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. The *poor*? Why are the *poor* blessed? The poor people's lives' were and are far from easy. The poor had and have no worldly goods to be considered blessed in the traditional use of the word! Their difficulties and hardships of life separated them from any social alliances. Some were cut off from their families or religious groups. The poor placed their hopes and expectations in God to deliver them from their poverty. To Jesus, the poor came in numbers to receive their consolation.

Other people in society had connections to count on: family, social, religious or political connections. On the larger scale, Judah as a nation had made military alliances with nations that worshiped false gods instead of God. We too have military alliance with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty). For Judah, alliances without was futile and unproductive because Judah stopped putting her trust in God, instead trust in human treaties and armies. God was no longer their sole Protector and Savior.

The Bible affirms that those who trust in God flourish like trees planted along the riverbank. According to Psalm 1, there are joys when a nation obeys God and misery when its people align with those who discredit or ridicule God. Friends and associates can make subtle influences and can take us away from God especially if those friendships are indifferent to God's will.

This brings us to the poor that Jesus called blessed—*blessed are the poor*. At face value, it appears as if Jesus is making a blanket statement of blessing anyone below the poverty line. Many have adopted such an interpretation and aimed their ministries to serving the downtrodden. Truly though the poor suffer now, they will be blessed with glorious blessings in the world to come. No wonder that Jesus encourages us to give alms to the poor.

Jesus makes it clear in the Gospel of Luke that *the real poor are blessed*. Matthew, on the other hand, focuses on spiritually poor, and not the physically poor. Think about it, *the hungry whose stomachs are empty need a fill; to them having their stomachs filled is a blessing*. The ones who are *hated, reviled, or excluded because of being followers of Christ* to them being accepted as members of the Body of Christ is blessing and those who receive them are blessed. Naturally, the poor are inclined to seek God's help as they come to God with nothing to offer Him except their great need.

In Luke's Beatitudes, suffering is real in life and those who help to take it away bring a blessing to the sufferers. The poor carry sufferings with them and God blesses the responsible rich who make an effort to use the resources God has given them to alleviate or take the poor out of poverty.

No wonder, the Bible denounces the irresponsible rich people- *Woe unto the rich; Woe unto the well fed*. This means that there is the right way of living and the wrong way of living for all that

has. One rich heart is inclined to sin if it does not see the plight of the poor and render help. Prophet Jeremiah was addressing the same issue, denounced any rich person who gains his riches by unjust means. Such a person portrayed as foolish and poor in his/her heart.

Whether at work, school, or play, we must strive to seek God's face. Getting a promotion, passing an exam, or gaining prestige by dishonest means will never bring God's blessings or lasting happiness upon a person.

Anyone rich or poor person must understand this principle: Before God we are all poor. We are impoverished if we have no spiritual resources to draw from. The Bible portrays such a person as a *stunted shrub* in the desert because all blessings come from above. We came with nothing and will return with nothing.

The truth about God is that He doesn't judge people on the bases of material wealth, nationality, gender, tribe or race. God judges people on the basis of the wealth in their hearts and how well they respond to His will.

Those who choose to trust in God choose a kind of poverty that will bring them real abundance for their needs and for the needs of others. They will be fruitful because God has invoked a blessing upon them. God has consecrated them to succeed in life. *They are like trees planted along the riverbank with roots that reach deep in the water--- they are not bothered by the heat or worried by drought...Their leaves stay green..(Jer. 17:8).*

It is easy to forget who the Provider is and yield to temptations self-satisfaction. We must seek full blessing and satisfaction in God, the source of all benefits. The image of a tree planted near the riverbank stands for those who trust in God. The ability to deepen their roots in the reservoir of God's provisions is guaranteed to us as a blessing. The more delighted we are in God, the more fruitful we will be. But when we associate with those who ridicule God, our thoughts and attitudes will be infected and the more we will separate ourselves from God's reservoir of blessings.

Decide to prosper and abide in God and His provisions. Although are not immune to failure or difficulties, when we apply God's wisdom, we will have an increase and will receive God's approval and God's blessing. Amen!