

NEW YEARS DAY 2023

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Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

INTRO: I was going to give you Jan Markell's analysis of the 10 big things that happened in 2022, prophetically speaking. And in light of prophecy, if we then look forward to what will happen in 2023, the picture is bleak. I didn't want a negative message. I had been working on the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount for the German messages. And if you look at those, they might seem negative too, but they give bright hope of the future. The individual that lives these beatitudes is the blessed person. How would you like to be the blessed person of 2023? How would you like to be the person, that if others recognized what you have, they would say, "I wish that was me!"

We went through two very dark times as a church. Twice we left a big building. The last time we left a beautiful library; a baby grand piano; lots of Sunday School rooms. I had a nice office. And the next day it was all gone. Poof! That next Sunday we met in a carport. Today we have a nice small church building but we have been placed on the outer fringe of our community.

The one bright spot in my life has been this, no matter what happened, I always had the joy of sitting down and studying the Bible to write messages. And usually, my studies drowned out everything else and my heart and soul rejoiced in the Word of God. No matter how dark the days got, it was never a drag to try to get a message ready.

And as we began anew the second time, my mind was drawn to the Sermon on the mount and I did a number of messages on the first 12 verses of Matthew 5. What a passage this is. In Psalm 1 we have the Psalmist's description of the blessed man. In Matthew 5:1-12 we have Jesus' view of the blessed man. I want to just pick out a few things this morning to encourage us into another year in which we will see man plunge further into darkness.

I have no doubt we would all like to be the blessed person, but we are not all willing to pay the price for that. In this message I will use a number of things I spoke of when we went through this passage years ago.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE BLESSED MAN

Now let me ask you a question: What do you think is the highest desire of people? Would I be correct to say what we all want is to be happy? Here are a few definitions of "happy" from the internet: 1. Feeling or showing pleasure or contentment. 2. Having a sense of confidence in or satisfaction with (a person, arrangement, or situation). And here are some synonyms for the word happy: cheerful, contented, delighted, ecstatic, glad, joyful, joyous, jubilant, lively, merry, overjoyed, peaceful, pleasant, pleased, thrilled, upbeat, blessed, blest, blissful, blithe, can't complain, captivated, chipper, chirpy, exultant, flying high, gleeful, gratified, intoxicated, jolly, laughing, light, mirthful, on cloud nine, peppy, playful, sparkling, sunny, tickled, tickled pink, up, walking on air.

We want to be happy. When we are happy, we feel pleasure. We feel good. We are joyous and contented. And if you want to know what the people of this world think will make them happy, just watch advertisements and you will soon know.

So, we need to take some time to consider this important word, *blessed*, which occurs nine times in our passage. It is no doubt that happiness is one of the supreme desires of all mankind. D. Martyn Lloyd Jones says, "Happiness is the great question confronting mankind. The whole world is longing for it and it is tragic to see the ways in which they go about getting it."

Well, when we come to Matthew 5, the passage that was read for us earlier, some view this word translated as 'blessed' as speaking of happiness. For example, Ryrie's study Bible says that blessed means happy. But I do not think that the word translated 'blessed' here, carries the meaning of 'happy' at all. Take, for example, the second beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn..." Would it sound right to say, "happy are they that mourn"? And maybe one might say, "Well, it is a paradox." That means it sounds like a contradiction, but really it isn't. But I think if it means happy, it is a contradiction, not a paradox. And so, as I see it, here in Matthew 5 Jesus' deals with, not the happy man, but the blessed man. That is the blessed man from God's perspective. And we want to see what it means when it says, "Blessed are...".

It is most important to understand what this word blessed means, because the state God looks on as the most precious state man can arrive at is described in these beatitudes. As a matter of fact, if we were in a continual happy state, I believe we would never get saved. If the saved were continually happy, they would never be conformed to the image of Christ. I have never heard of anyone seeking the Lord when they were happy. Mostly, if not always, we seek the Lord when we are unhappy. As a matter of fact, to come to the state of the first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit", one must come under a great deal of conviction of sin. No unsaved person is ever in a blessed state from God's point of view until he gets to see his present state as a cursed state. Every sinner, to be saved, must see the lostness, the emptiness, and the wretchedness of his or state, before true blessedness can come. We can never be in truly a blessed state when we are unsaved. And to get saved, we must become poor in spirit. And for that to happen, we have to come under a great deal of conviction of sin and not one of us enjoys that.

So, what state is the state God looks on as the most precious state for man to reach? Well, it is the state He calls blessed. And this blessed state is a growing state. It begins by being poor in spirit; grows into mourning; which gives way to meekness; which gives way to hungering and thirsting after righteousness; which turns into becoming merciful; which gives way to being pure in heart; which finally turns people into peacemakers. And when one reaches the state of being a peacemaker, then persecution comes. Does the blessedness described here seem like a precious state to you? Or does it seem like a state to be avoided? Well, from a human standpoint, it is a state to be avoided at all cost, and almost all do. But from a divine perspective, man is only on the right path when anyone becomes poor in spirit. Now, for the very first time he is on the right path.

Now this passage is called the 'beatitudes', and so we ask, just what is a beatitude? One commentary says, "The sayings in this subdivision are called beatitudes from the word *beati* (meaning "blessed"), with which they begin in the Vulgate, or Latin Bible" (The Fourfold Gospel Comm.). So, the word behind our English word 'beatitude' is Latin. The NT word that has been translated "blessed" is the word

'makarios.' Strong's says that *makarios* is "a prolonged form of the poetical *makar* (meaning the same); supremely blest; by extension, fortunate, well off..." end quote. This word *makarios* has been translated blessed 44 times and happy 5 times in the KJV.

Now, I mentioned earlier that many feel this word has the idea of happiness. But I think there is a better explanation. The People's NT commentary says, "The word 'blessed' is first applied to God, and means more than "happy," as it has sometimes been translated. Happiness comes from earthly things; blessedness comes from God. It is not bestowed arbitrarily; a reason follows each beatitude." End quote.

Because the state described by the word blessed is so important, it is important for us to seek to understand what is meant by it. This state of 'blessedness' is the precious state for man, from God's point of view. The beatitudes describe the state of a man who has the ultimate life. It is most important then, to understand what is meant by it. And never will we find the life of the worldly man and the life of the spiritual man in sharper contrast than we will in these beatitudes.

So let me explain what I believe this word, 'blessed' or *makarios* means. I believe the idea behind this word is Hebrew. There are two words in Hebrew translated *blessed*. I had studied these particular Hebrew words long before I studied Matthew 5, and when I considered the beatitudes, I said to myself, "I believe I know which Hebrew word is behind this idea." So, I confirmed that by checking the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT.

Go to Genesis 29. We are here in the life of Jacob. He had married two wives due to his father-in-laws trickery. And there was always competition between these two wives on who would bear Jacob the most sons. Rachel was Jacob's favorite from the start. Leah, of course, found that very hard.

And each time one of them bore a son, it was a very great event for them. Look at Genesis 29 beginning in verse 31:

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.

32 So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."

33 Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.

34 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.

35 And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

Now let me tell you that was hard on Rachel, Jacob's beloved. Now look at chapter 30:1:

1 Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!"

Well, by various means she too bore sons to Jacob. And now we come to Genesis 30:9-13:

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife.

10 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.

11 Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad.

12 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

13 Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.

When Leah bore a second son through Zilpah, she said, "I am happy." The Greek translation says, "I am makarios." Here is our word. The Hebrew word behind it is the word 'asher'. Now look at this verse again. She said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me *blessed*." Now, both the word translated 'happy' and the word translated 'blessed' have the same Hebrew root word. But the first word is slightly

different in the Hebrew and literally she said, "I am asher, for the daughters will call me asher." So, our translation says, "I am happy for the daughters will call me blessed." I believe the word translated "blessed" is the Hebrew word behind the word translated "blessed" in Matthew 5.

Some time before Christ came to earth, the Jews translated the OT into Greek. That was 100-300 years before Christ was born. It is called the Septuagint. And in the Septuagint the word 'asher' is translated by the NT word 'makarios', which we have as 'blessed.' Now let me tell you what I believe it means. A person who was 'asher' was a person who was to be envied for what they had received or were experiencing. That is envy in a good sense. Let me illustrate. Let us say our own Prairie Packers put a whole beef on a raffle and your friend won it. We would consider that person 'blessed' from a human perspective. He would be asher. Why? Because we would all wish we had been in his place! And we might say, "Oh, I wish that had happened to me!" That is 'asher'. And I would translate it as 'to be envied' in a good sense. So, in our passage it would go like this: To be envied are the poor in spirit, etc..

Lloyd Jones seems to not have been clear on the meaning of this word, though he does a phenomenal job on these beatitudes. Mostly he calls this man happy. But sometimes he substitutes the phrase, 'to be congratulated'. The man described in these beatitudes is to be congratulated. And I think that is much closer to the real meaning. At one point Jones even quotes someone else who said it meant, 'to be envied'. I believe blessed literally means that someone is in a state that is to be envied, or to be congratulated. Here is the man of Psalm 1. But this blessedness is from a divine perspective. From a divine perspective there are no unsaved people who are "blessed."

Now we may all desire happiness, but in the end, that which truly satisfies is not happiness, it is the blessedness that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 5. I believe that which truly satisfies is not happiness but spiritual fulfillment. And I further believe that fulfillment comes from finding and doing the will of God in one's life. Fulfillment is that which is achieved when we do that for which God

designed us. If we understand the blessed state, then such a person is to be envied.

A worldly man who is gifted in art, may find a good deal of fulfillment in art. But there will never be the ultimate fulfillment that would be there if that gift, that special ability was brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. If that gift is brought under the control of the Holy Spirit, it then becomes a spiritual gift. There is no greater fulfillment achievable in this life than when one's life is brought under the control of the Holy Spirit and one finds that place God meant for us. And when that happens, and one finds that which God has gifted one for, then fulfillment comes.

Now let me give a warning here. These beatitudes are not designed to be precepts to be followed. It does not mean you need to make yourself poor in spirit and the other things mentioned here. You cannot decide to mourn and then mourn. You are not like these beatitudes talk about unless you reach a certain state. You cannot make yourself become like this by wanting to be like this. When one is not a Christian, one is simply not like this. If you concentrate on becoming like this, say by being financially poor, or mourning or chastising the body and so on, you will never truly become like this. Take men like Francis of Assisi, so revered by Catholics and so admired by many Christians; was he truly poor in spirit? Can one become poor in spirit by becoming poor in purse? No, these beatitudes are not designed to lay down precepts to be followed. Nor do you become a Christian by trying to become like this. These beatitudes simply point out the character of one who becomes or is a true Christian. They tell us what a true Christian is like.

Francis of Assisi was born to rich parents. He was a bit of a rebel and eventually had a deeply religious experience and ultimately became the founder of the Franciscan order. The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary says of him that after his religious experience, "Following this (he) went into seclusion, made a pilgrimage to Rome. His strict asceticism estranged him from his father and divorced him from society. He devoted himself strictly to religious life. Dressed scantily, ate sparingly, took up abode with the

lepers, and rebuilt several chapels, one of which became a holy place to him" (pg 148).

Now I ask you, can one attain the blessed life like this? Can you become poor in spirit by becoming poor in purse? No. You see, these beatitudes are not precepts to be followed. They are descriptions of those who truly get saved. They show what happens in a man who truly gets converted.

II. RECKONIZING THE BLESSED MAN

A. Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

Now all of that was to help us understand what the word "blessed" means in this passage. And now we ask, how does one recognize the man who is in an enviable state in life? We go now to Matthew 5. It begins like this:

1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.

2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

If you should go to Israel you could go to Capernaum, and then go up the hillside, and you would come to a church that commemorates this place and from up on the mountain which we would call a high hill you have a most beautiful view of the Sea of Galilee.

Verse 3:

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

In my years of preaching, I have concluded you have to graduate out of almost all else in the Bible to preach on the teachings of Jesus. To me, His preaching exceeds all the rest of Scripture. It is very often very hard to comprehend what He is saying.

So, the beatitudes, in my interpretation, begin like this: To be envied (or maybe, to be congratulated) are those who realize they are spiritually empty; lost; sinful; wretched and miserable! And the lost will say, "Just a minute! I do not envy such a person one little bit and I want none of it." This is the first beatitude. You can't get to number 2 before you have

been past number 1. This is the beginning of the Christian life. Anyone who does not arrive at this state by conviction of sin will also never enter heaven! Unless one comes to the place where one realizes how sinful and lost one is one will never get saved. One has to become poor in spirit. The person who arrives here is squeezing through the narrow gate!

What is this being poor in spirit? Go to Luke 18. We'll read from 9-14:

9 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:

10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

11 "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

12 'I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'

13 "And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'

14 "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

I ask you do you see the blessed man in that account? Here is a tax collector. Oh, what a despised lot they were. Do you remember Zacchaeus? When he repented, what did he do? He counted the stolen money he had, multiplied that by four, and returned it. And then for the money he didn't know whom it belonged to he gave half of his goods to the poor. Why? He had cheated a lot of people and he did not know who they were or how much he cheated them out of. And he wanted to be right with God, so he gave half of his goods away.

Now maybe we say, "I am saved already, so this verse does not really apply to me." We all know we need revival in this community. Now I have no doubt there are those who do not need revival for themselves, but they long to see it in others. But when times of refreshing come, now we go right back to beatitude # 1. Revival does not come until we become poor in spirit.

The apostle Peter had walked with Jesus for quite some time. And one day he got to see Jesus in a whole new light. That needs to happen to us sometimes. And when he did, he said, "Depart from me Lord for I am a sinful man." He had once again become poor in spirit.

What is the opposite of being poor in spirit? It is pride. Let me recommend to you Andrew Murray's book called "Humility." Here is what he says on the cover of the book: "The deepest humility is the secret of happiness (I would say blessedness), of a joy that nothing can destroy." Let me give you a few quotes from him:

One: The truth is this: Unless pride dies in you, nothing of heaven can live in you (pg. 5).

Two: How much there may be of earnest and active religion while humility is still sadly wanting (28).

Three: How impotent all external teaching and all personal effort are to conquer pride or give the meek and lowly heart (29).

Four: Let us consider deeply how far the disciples were advanced while this grace was still so terribly lacking (31).

Five: The humble man feels no jealousy or envy (36).

Six: Pride can clothe itself in the garments of praise or penitence (42).

Well, maybe that is painful enough. Oh, the blight of pride on the saved and on the unsaved.

A while ago we had this question: "Is there any hope for a hard heart?" Unless we come to beatitude # 1

there isn't. But if we will hear and head God's voice, the hard heart will melt!

Now why will the poor in spirit be blessed? It is not the experiences he goes through in this life. There may still be many a hard place in life. But note what it says, "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." When I spoke on these beatitudes some years ago, I had not studied Hebrews 3-4. I said the kingdom of heaven is those people over whom God reigns. He reigns from heaven over true believers. He is in authority over all the unbelievers, but He does not reign over them in the sense that they are doing His will.

When I looked at how I dealt with this kingdom when I did those messages, I was surprised to see this. I said:

"Now this kingdom, the kingdom of God, begins the moment we truly get saved. The kingdom is ours. But when Jesus Christ returns to earth at the end of the tribulation, He will set up His visible, literal kingdom... This includes all believers of the first resurrection, which includes the true Christians of the Church age. Yes, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." End quote.

This kingdom that is coming is the millennium and it already belongs to the poor in spirit. It is theirs. They have not yet obtained it in the final sense but if they walk faithfully to the end, that kingdom is now theirs. It is only a matter of time until they inherit it. Let me encourage you with this: By 2030 we may have spent 7 years in heaven with the Lord, and we could be coming back down to earth with Christ to reign with Him in that kingdom. The poor in spirit who has locked on to that promise and keeps going, will soon possess! That is a hope for 2023!

B. Blessed are the Mourners

That brings us to beatitude # 2. Only when we get to see our own inner sinful self do we become candidates for this second beatitude. Matthew 5:4 says:

4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

Now go to some worldly person and say, take a look at this verse, "Oh, to be envied is the person who mourns." And they will say, "See what a fool the Scriptures make of an otherwise normal person!" Well, there is coming a day when every lost person who stands before God to be judged will say of these beatitudes, "Oh, how truly blessed are those who attained this state! If only I had turned the day I heard His voice! Oh, how greatly I failed to recognize the truly blessed man."

I would say this from my experience: The more we get to know God and godliness, the more we will mourn what we see inside ourselves. But it will lead to more blessedness! It is amazing how far different the true perspective of blessedness is from what we would naturally think!

The poor in spirit were called blessed because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now why is the mourner to be envied? Because he will be comforted. We will only ever begin to mourn over what we really are like on the inside when it is revealed to us and this is what the Word of God does. We only become poor in spirit when this happens and we respond to it positively. We can let our pride take over and if it does, we will never become poor in spirit or mourn our sinful state.

C. Blessed are the Meek

Verse 5 of our text says:

5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

No matter how important or unimportant a person is in this world, if he becomes poor in spirit and mourns his own sinfulness, and deals with it according to God's Word, it will result in meekness!

Now when you think of a meek person, what do you think he or she is like? Is such a person weak? Is he ever tolerant, or willing to compromise? Is he a peacekeeper, a smooth-it-over kind of person? Will a meek man keep peace at any price? Just what is

meekness? What do you think of if you think of a meek person?

Let me quote from a message I did years ago, "And once again it is important to define. Many years ago, I heard this definition of meekness, and I have not been able to improve on it yet. Here it is: *Meekness is not weakness; but controlled power.* A meek man does not have to assert himself. The world admires a man who asserts himself. A self-made man. But a meek man does not have to assert himself. He does not have to show who he is. Lloyd Jones says the meek man is an enigma to this world. Imagine speaking on these beatitudes at a grade 12 grad. How would that go over?

A.W. Tozer once wrote, "The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto", end quote.

Before we go on let me mention that these characteristics are not meant to be seen as some Christians are poor in spirit, others mourn, and still others are meek. All who become Christians enter the kingdom by first becoming poor in spirit. This will bring them to mourn over their sinfulness. And from there they progress to meekness and so on.

Now look at the promise to the meek. It says, "...for they shall inherit the earth." Having studied the word "rest" in Hebrews 3-4 and having come to believe it speaks in particular of the millennial kingdom, I wondered, what did I do with this passage that promises that the blessed will inherit the earth. Here is what I said:

"With that, we come now to the promise to the meek. It says they shall inherit the earth. Now note the promise to the poor in spirit in verse 3, and compare it with this promise. What is the difference? Well, the kingdom

of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit now. It will belong to them in the future as well. But the promise of the inheritance of the earth is in the future tense. Now some may argue that the earth belongs to us now (1 Cor. 3:21-23), because Paul says all things are ours, but I think the promise to the meek is talking about the future.

"Now notice that it does not say the meek will inherit the world. No, it is the inheritance of the earth, the meek are promised. Go to Psalm 37. We could read the whole Psalm but we will look at a few sections.

We go Psalm 37:9-11:

9 For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit the earth.

10 For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more.

11 But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Now verses 21-22:

21 The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives.

22 For those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth, But those cursed by Him shall be cut off.

Verses 28-29:

28 For the LORD loves justice, And does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever, But the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.

29 The righteous shall inherit the land, And dwell in it forever.

The word translated 'earth' is the Hebrew 'eretz'. It speaks of the earth or some part of the earth. In the OT it has been translated land 1543 times; earth, 712 times; country, 140 times; ground 98 times; and world three times. In the NT it is the word gee. This NT word

has been translated earth, 188 times; land, 42 times; ground, 18 times and world 1 time. Well, I think that it speaks of the inhabitable part of the earth. All of what we think of as the earth is what it is speaking about."

In the OT, as in Psalm 37, usually 'the earth' or 'the land', when used in reference to Israel, referred to Canaan or the land of Israel. I think the People's NT commentary may be right when it says that 'the land' or 'the earth' is a special reference to the Messiah's kingdom, of which 'the land' of Canaan was a type." Types are a particular kind of prophecy. And I think that a special reference is made to the earth during the millennial kingdom. God promised Abraham that in him all the families of the 'earth' would be blessed.

CONCL: Well, we conclude by reading verses 6-12:

*6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.*

7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

*9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of
God.*

*10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness'
sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say
all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.*

*12 "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward
in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before
you.*

If anyone would have interest in those 12 messages you can get them at sermonaudio.com/mecl. They are called, "The Beatitudes." We have entered 2023, according to our calendar. Without doubt we would all wish this to be a happy year for us. But what about longing for a blessed year; a year in which we enter the state of being blessed from a divine stand point of view?

If we are not a Christian, that means beginning with being poor in spirit. Down is the way up. Humility is a principle for blessedness from a spiritual perspective. It leads to sorrow over what one sees inside oneself and only when we come to those points do we begin on a better trend beginning with meekness. Oh, how the world would scoff at these states of blessedness, but then the world has never yet learned what the blessed life is all about. Only when one bows before God Almighty in recognition of how bankrupt of goodness we are and how filled with badness we are.

When we learn that and we continue on past that, we gain more and more godliness until we end up being persecuted. And the Scripture pronounces blessedness on the one who arrives at the wonderful point of persecution for righteousness' sake. Who in his right mind would ever call such a person as one to be envied. So contrary to human nature are the divine principles. Those who are reviled and persecuted, and against whom all manner of evil is spoken falsely for the Lord's sake are the truly blessed people!

2 Timothy 3:12 says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." My daughter had a teacher in Bible school who read this verse to the class and confessed he had never suffered persecution. Persecution for righteousness sake, from God's perspective, is the epitome of blessedness. This is the last step; persecution.

Should I say, "Have a blessed new Year?" May we learn to know God in new ways for what time we will have in 2023!d