Supremely Fortunate

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Feast of Tabernacles Sermon

When we come together for the Feast of Tabernacles, there are a lot of reasons for us to rejoice. We enjoy the fellowship, the food, and the change from our normal routine, and all of the physical blessings that God gives us.

But one of the greatest blessings that we have is something that is very easy to take for granted: God has given us knowledge and understanding of what all of this means. We understand why we are here. We understand what this Feast pictures. We understand, at least in part, what God is doing with mankind and where His plan is ultimately leading.

Over in **Matthew 13:16**, Christ made an interesting statement. He said, **But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear**. The word "blessed" is the same Greek word that we are going to see repeated today in Matthew 5, "*makarios*." And as we are going to see, "*makarios*" carries the idea of being "supremely fortunate."

I think that is a good way for us to begin thinking about this subject. We are supremely fortunate. Not necessarily because our physical lives are easy, because sometimes they aren't. We are supremely fortunate because God has allowed us to see and understand things that are of far greater value than anything physical.

God has shown us what He is creating and where His plan is leading. This present world is temporary, but His Kingdom is coming, and He is offering us an inheritance in that Kingdom.

The title of today's sermon is *Supremely Fortunate*.

So, let's start off here by heading straight over to Matthew 5:1. Here Christ gives one of His first sermons of His ministry, and it's about the good news of God's coming Kingdom. That is something that is pictured with the Feast of Tabernacles – the time when that Kingdom will finally be here on Earth.

So, we are going to start here today in **Matthew 5:1—And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain. And when He sat, His disciples came unto Him. And He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**.

Many of you know this section of scripture that begins with "blessed are," and that it is often referred to as the beatitudes. This comes from the Latin Bible because "blessed" is translated as "*beati*" in Latin. I won't be referring to them as that, though. We all know which church uses Latin and, well, we don't need to use them as a reference for anything dealing with the truth.

Instead, let's start off and look at what the original word in Greek actually means. In Greek, the word is "*makarios*." As a side note, the Spanish name "Macarena," where we got the 90's dance phenomenon, derives from that same Greek word. But anyway, this Greek word does indeed mean "blessed." And sometimes it is translated as "happy," but that isn't the best word since it doesn't really mean that in our modern definition of an emotional state of being happy. And also, that connotation seems to come more from the Latin translation.

But this Greek word does also carry the meaning of being "supremely fortunate." So, this word was first used to describe the Greek mythology and their gods. They were seen as living forever and being "supremely fortunate," not having the stresses that mortals experienced. However, with time, the word started to be used to describe rich, powerful people who didn't have to struggle in everyday life. It was basically used to describe those who had attained the highest levels of human success and comfort.

I think it's interesting to see how this word was used and how it was so physical. If you think about Greek mythology, it was filled with drama. Sure, they lived forever, and they had the best from a physical standpoint, but their supreme fortune was just that, physical. But that's also how this word was used to describe wealthy people. Again, in a totally physical form.

However, when Christ used the word here, He is not referring to physical wealth, but He is talking about a wealth which cannot be measured. And indeed, it is a supreme wealth. It is about that which comes from God. These blessings are what we receive from God as a result of our living life as He has commanded.

And if we understand correctly, God wants to give us everything. We are to inherit everything as heirs. Over and over, the Bible speaks about the choice that God has put before us – life or death. Blessings or cursings.

If you remember, further south from this mount in Galilee where Christ gave this sermon, there were two other mounts – Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. This is where the covenant from Moses was renewed by Joshua in the Old Testament. One mountain was for blessings and the other for curses.

But if you go back and look at the listed blessings that were promised on Mount Gerizim, you will see that they are all physical – abundant crop harvests, victory over your enemies, economic abundance, rain in its due season, etc., etc.

And then if you look at Mount Ebal and the curses, you will see too that they were just physical – military defeat, famine, disease, bodily affliction, etc., etc.

And now, on this mount in Galilee, we see Christ who is talking about spiritual blessings. This is something different than before. These are blessings that are indeed about a supreme wealth that is immeasurable.

Let's read **verse 3** again—**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** This word for "poor" in Greek isn't just about being poor. Today, we might describe someone as being poor, even if they work and have a job. We might call it "working poor." But this word here is describing a poor, a type of poor that is well beyond that. It is more like being poor like a beggar. And a few times it is even translated as beggar. It is describing someone who is so poor and destitute that they have to resort to begging.

So, if we look at the verse from that perspective, then we should be able to understand it on a deeper level. Without God, we possess no spiritual wealth. We aren't poor and having little spirit; we have none. Do we recognize that we are spiritual beggars? A beggar is typically someone who is homeless and lives by asking others for money and food. They are totally dependent.

Well, that is us on a spiritual plane when it comes to God and His spirit. We are totally dependent on Him. So, is that something we recognize that we are not spiritually self-sufficient? If we do, then we will be blessed. God will give us what we need. And this has a lot to do with humility and seeing ourselves for how we really are. It is only then that we can be taught and learn from God.

We have nothing, and God gives everything. If we keep that mindset, then we are on our way to becoming part of Elohim.

In the next verse, **verse 4** states, **Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted**. What's this about? Well, mourning is usually reserved for when people die, right? Is Christ saying that we should be sad and be moping around all the time? Is being depressed and sad the way to live our lives? Of course not.

This is about seeing the world and ourselves. The problems of the world and of our own lives are a result of going against God. And like those other two mounts illustrated, there are blessings, and there are curses for our actions. These are the choices that were outlined for the Israelites, and they are also the choices for spiritual Israel.

So, the mourning this is referring to is how we feel about sin. Look at this world, look at the news. Do we mourn for what's happening? I don't know about you, but sometimes it's just about more than I can take. So much stupidity, so much politics and fighting, and so much suffering as a result. And it could all be avoided if we would just listen to God.

This is how God feels too when He looks in the world. On one side, it's this way because there is no other way to bring about Elohim. But on the other side, it is sad to see what mankind has done throughout its history. That is what the mourning part of this verse is about.

You can think of it this way as well. I mentioned how mourning is usually reserved for when people die, right? Well, what does sin lead to? Sin is death. So that is something we should mourn. When we sin, we aren't growing or creating anything. We are at a loss as a result of sinning.

So, we should also apply that mourning to our own lives. Do we mourn when we sin? Do we recognize the hurt and the pain that it causes in our own lives and those around us?

And then in the second half of this verse, it says that our mourning will be comforted. Yes, of course. If we recognize our sin and recognize what verse 3 said – that we are spiritually dead without God (essentially spiritual beggars) – if we recognize those two points, then we will be comforted.

Now, the word translated as "comforted" here is "*parakaleō*." It carries the idea of calling someone near or alongside, and from that comes the sense of comforting, encouraging, strengthening, or consoling someone. This is closely related to the word "*paraklētos*," which Christ later uses when speaking of the comforter, the holy spirit. They are not the exact same word, but they come from the same word family and express a similar idea – help and encouragement that comes alongside us.

So, when we truly mourn over our sins and what sin has produced God does not leave us there in that mourning. He gives us comfort, encouragement, and strength through Christ and through His holy spirit.

Let's continue here in **Matthew 5:5—Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth**. What does it mean to actually be meek? Sometimes we think meek is just mild, shy, and kind of weak. But that's really missing the mark.

You don't have to turn there, but in Matthew 11:29, Christ describes himself as meek and says to learn from Him. So, was Christ timid, shy, and weak? Not at all! Just because He allowed himself to be put to death does not mean He was weak by any means. Look at how He spoke. Even here on the Mount, it was with authority and power. And we know that He came first as a Lamb for a purpose, but we also know He is returning as a Lion.

Meekness is not the absence of strength. It is strength that does not need to prove itself through aggression. Before He died, Christ mentioned that He could pray to His Father and He would provide more than 12 legions of angels to fight for Him. But He didn't because God's will was most important and that had to be fulfilled. This shows that He was not helpless, but He chose to forgo His own will. He humbled himself before God, His Father. So that is a big part of what meekness is about. It is about humility towards God. God's will will be done.

Sometimes we have to restrain ourselves. Just like Christ had to show Peter when he took out that sword and chopped the guy's ear off. Peter was a little too eager there; he was ready to fight. But Christ had to remind him that the scriptures had to be fulfilled; it was not the time to fight.

We have to understand that God fights the real battles. We cannot let our impulses or wants get in the way of God's plan. And we see in the second half of this verse that if we maintain this characteristic of meekness that Christ so eloquently illustrated in His own life, that we will inherit the earth. In other words, our inheritance comes in due time because we have the patience and we have waited on God to act.

Continuing on in **verse 6—Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled**. I think this verse is pretty straightforward, and it goes along with the first "blessed" verse here about "Blessed are the poor in spirit." We are like beggars. We have no food or water, and we should be thirsting for it.

It makes me think of the tax collector who was so eager to see Christ that he climbed the tree. That guy had hunger and thirst just to see Christ. And when Joshua saw him, he came down from the tree and said, "I am going to go to your house today."

So, how much do you hunger and thirst? Are you willing to climb a tree? Not sure how many of you have tried to climb a tree as an adult, but it's not as easy as when you were a kid. But anyway, the question remains: "How hungry and thirsty are you?" Are you willing to travel to get to services so that you can be with God's people and be fed? I know people who will travel long distances just to do that. And there are others who couldn't be bothered to even go a short distance. But the choice is ours. How hungry and thirsty are we?

And regardless of where we are on the planet, it's still a mindset to be thirsty and hungry. Are we eagerly looking forward to each and every Sabbath, the primary time when we are fed? How do we approach the Sabbath day? Are we prepared? These are all things that are reflected in our attitude toward God and what He gives us.

The next verse here in Matthew 5 continues, **verse 7—Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy**. What is mercy about? Well, here's a definition: "compassionate action that alleviates suffering or forbears punishment, even when justice, rules, or past actions dictate otherwise."

So, we are told to be merciful. We are to have compassion for others who are suffering. And where does suffering come from? As a whole, it's a result of sin. And what do we do every day? We sin. And the payment for sin is death. So, God has to show us a lot of mercy. And if God shows us mercy like He does every day, then who are we to not show it to others? If we aren't merciful, then why should God be merciful to us?

That's something to think about here at the Feast. We must show mercy to one another in order for us to get along and in order for us to rejoice together. Because we aren't perfect, and there will be some instances here at the Feast where someone does something dumb, and someone else will need to show them mercy. We must all show it toward one another in order to have proper fellowship and unity.

Continuing on in **verse 8—Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God**. This is all about that which comes from inside of us, our hearts. The heart is a representation of our minds and the core of who we are. It's about our thoughts, motives, desires, intentions, will, etc., etc.

And if we look at this sermon from Christ, especially a little later on, where He makes the statement "You have heard it said before that you shall not kill… But I say unto you…" and then He goes on to explain the

deeper meaning. Those commandments that we were given before in the Old Testament were just the beginning. It goes way, way deeper. Sin begins in our hearts and minds. It just takes one wrong thought, and if we don't repent of it, then it can grow like a cancer. It can lead to more wrong thoughts and ideas. And then eventually, maybe you even murder someone.

That's why in court they often judge people who are accused of murder based on if it was premeditated or not. In other words, did they think about committing the crime in advance and plan it out? In that case, the law sees it differently than someone who gets attacked and is defending their own life, and as a result somebody gets killed.

So, we can see that the bigger sins, such as murder, start off in the mind as something smaller, but they grow and grow and get worse and worse. So, we are told to keep our hearts pure; if we have a wrong thought or action, we need to clean it.

For example's sake, I think it would be good to look at another example of Christ rebuking the Pharisees for not being pure at heart. The Pharisees always seem to be a good example of what not to do – which is funny because they thought they were the best, and that was their biggest problem.

Anyway, if you want, you can turn there, but you don't have to. This is from **Matthew 23:25-26—Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. You blind Pharisees, clean first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also**.

This rebuke really gets to the core of why Christ admonishes us to have a pure heart. As He told the Pharisees there, it starts on the inside. And the Pharisees were all about the superficial – how they appear to the outside.

This reminds me of an expression I first heard from some Cubans, although I do think it is used in other Spanish-speaking countries. But the saying is basically like this: "It's more important to have a clean face and a dirty butt than to have a dirty face and a clean butt." However, the Cubans express this in a more crude and descriptive manner, you can say. But the meaning behind it is that public appearance and reputation matter more than what is hidden or private.

When I first heard this expression, I didn't think about the deeper meaning of it. You know, I just thought, "No! No! Gross! That is a horrible expression! You should keep them both clean!" But then I thought about it a moment longer, and I still thought it was a horrible expression. And it's the opposite of how Christ tells us to be. It's the very thing that He rebuked the Pharisees for!

The Pharisees had the appearance of being clean and pure but they were anything but that. Inside their hearts and minds, they harbored sin and wrong thoughts and ideas. They were doing just like that expression – their butts were soiled, but their faces appeared clean. Pretty gross. And that's a good description too, because sin should be gross and repulse us.

And so, when Christ rebuked them, He told them to clean from the inside out. If you clean starting from the inside, and then to the outside, yeah, the outside is going to be clean as a result. For the bigger sins that are listed in the Ten Commandments, for example, if you make your heart clean and stop sin at the source of it, that is, when a wrong thought or idea enters your mind, then you're never going to have to worry about it snowballing into something larger.

So, like **verse 8** states – **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God**. What does it mean that they will see God? What does it mean to see God? It's not about physically seeing God with our eyes, like when Moses asked to see God. We understand that it's not possible. But what this is about is the ability to recognize God, His word, His character, His activity. It's about being able to discern and judge with God's help.

When we sin, we cloud our perception. Just think of how sin works. First, it starts off as a wrong thought or idea. If that isn't repented of right away, then our minds are already clouded; it's that much easier to continue in that sin and take it further and further. When that happens, how can you tell what is right and what is wrong? How can you tell what is of God and what isn't? Well, you can't. And that's what seeing God is about.

The more pure our hearts can become, the more we can come into unity and harmony with God and His ways. And when that happens, our spiritual perception is heightened, and we can begin to actually see God.

Continuing on in **verse 9—Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God**. What is peace about? In the Old Testament, it is often referred to as "shalom." And it's about much more than just the absence of war. It's about wholeness, well-being, and completeness. The only way to have this kind of peace is with God present.

Right now, we are incomplete; we aren't whole. That's what Elohim is about. That's what the law is about. It's about bringing about a creation that is complete and whole, nothing lacking. That is what real peace is about.

Christ is the one telling us to be peacemakers, and who is a better example of just that than Him? If we understand Christ's work, then we understand that one of the primary things He is working on is bringing about peace between mankind and God.

As human beings, we naturally resist the ways of God. We want to do our own thing. That puts us at odds against God. Christ and His work is about helping us to restore a proper relationship with God and to make reconciliation for our sins.

You don't have to turn there (I know you all know this scripture), but over in **Luke 23:34**, Christ says **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do**. Now, this was right before He was put to death, and He did not have any ill will towards those that were putting Him to death. Christ understood what

these people were; they were acting according to their natural human nature, without truly understanding God or the enormity of what they were doing. So, rather than asking the Father to punish them, He asked God to forgive them. He made allowance for their ignorance and weakness.

This is part of what it means to be a peacemaker. A peacemaker does not immediately condemn, retaliate, or insist on making another person suffer for the wrong he has done. He tries to sympathize as to why the person acted as he did. He recognizes that people often act out of ignorance, weakness, fear, pride, or the natural hostility of the human mind toward God.

Christ did not pretend that their actions were right or justified. They were committing a terrible sin. But He did not allow their sin against Him to produce hatred and revenge in Him. Instead, He sought mercy for them and left the judgment in His Father's hands. In other words, even though they were putting Him to death, Christ still wanted the best for them.

I am sure He would love for them to have the opportunity in the future to repent and to become part of Elohim. And if not, then the other outcome is also just – to not exist for eternity. Because in the end, it is up to the individual to choose. But nonetheless, Christ wants to see us make the right decision and to add to the harvest that the Feast of Tabernacles pictures.

So being a peacemaker requires us to make allowances for the weaknesses of others, just as Christ did. It means being willing to absorb an offense rather than immediately returning it. It's about sacrificing ourselves instead of escalating hostility. That is how Christ makes peace between mankind and God. And that is another example He gives us to follow in our relationships with one another.

Let's continue in the next verse in Matthew 5 because it builds directly off of this one. **Matthew 5:10—Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven**. Notice here it is making a distinction in the reason behind the persecution. Because we can be persecuted and suffer because of sin. It specifically says that we are blessed if the persecution is for righteousness; in other words, when we are persecuted for living God's way of life. The blessings here in verse 10 are reserved for those who obey God and for those who refuse to compromise. That is righteousness.

Let's look at 1 Peter 2:19-20. And you can hold your place here since we will be coming back shortly. **1 Peter 2:19—For this is thankworthy**… Now, this, right off the bat here, this word for "thankworthy" is "*charis*," the word that is usually translated as "grace." Some other translations state: "For this finds God's favor." And that gets a little bit closer to the real meaning. In this sense, grace is really about God's favor. This is something commendable and pleasing before God.

So, we can read it as, for example, **For it is commendable or worthy of God's favor if a man, for conscience toward God, endures grief, suffering wrongfully**.

Another way to say "conscience toward God" would be "mindful of God." So, if a person could escape suffering by lying, retaliating, or in any way compromising what God says is right, if they choose not to do this and still suffer, then God sees that as commendable. It is about our decision to choose God, even if it means we suffer. We are going to do the right thing because it is the right thing – no compromising, ever.

Verse 20 continues—**For what glory is it, if, when you are buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God**.

Here Peter is making a similar point to what we have seen in Matthew 5 and especially verses 10 and 11. He is contrasting suffering based on the causation. He basically asks, "What is especially admirable or commendable about accepting punishment that you brought upon yourself?" Again, we will suffer when we sin. If you go to jail because you committed a crime, then, obviously, that suffering is not righteous. Whereas if you get thrown in jail because you failed to bow down and worship another God (maybe something like the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego), then that is commendable before God.

In that story, the three of them were totally prepared to die for what they believed in. They said, "Whether we live or die, God will deliver us." We know that God did ultimately rescue them from a physical death, but nonetheless, this is the type of suffering and refusal to compromise that these scriptures are referring to.

The part in verse 20 that talks about "taking it patiently" is about enduring. It is about not abandoning righteousness. Because when we are threatened, especially physically, it can make things much more difficult for us.

Even Peter, who wrote this verse, came to know exactly how difficult that is. Remember how he refused Christ three times? He was afraid for his own life, and three times he denied even knowing who Christ was. But it's safe to say that after that experience he learned his lesson.

Now, the next few verses here in Peter are about Christ being our example. Let's read **verses 21-23—For even hereunto were you called – because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again. When He suffered, He threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judges righteously**.

Christ suffered for righteousness and had no sin. He didn't compromise. He was indeed tempted, and we are going to look at that in a bit, actually. But first, let's turn back to Matthew 5 and continue in verse 11.

Matthew 5:11—Blessed are you, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. This, again, is just emphasizing and expanding on what we read in verse 10, and those verses over in Peter.

Let's notice **verse 12—Rejoice and be exceeding glad. For great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you**. This verse ties in with the Feast of Tabernacles. How? Well, we know that we are told to rejoice at the Feast. It is commanded. We know that before the crops were gathered in, that it was a time for rejoicing. And with the booths and seeing what God did by leading and protecting the people, that they were to rejoice because of that.

But here we are seeing one of the greatest reasons to rejoice, and it's about the spiritual harvest that the Feast represents. It's about seeing the final goal line and understanding what it's all about. We aren't rejoicing because we go through hardships alone. Hardships and suffering aren't fun to go through. But right now, we live in a world that is not ruled by God or His Kingdom. And when we try to live God's way now in this present time, we are going against the grain.

By doing the right thing, often those around us don't like it. Why? Well, oftentimes it is because it exposes them and their wrong way of living. If someone likes to live for instant gratification and pleasure that so much of this world seeks after, and you don't, then they might not like you. You don't do the same things as them. Why? "Oh, because you think you are better?" "Oh, you don't want to go get sloppy drunk with me? What, you think you are better than me?" "Oh, you don't want to go to the football game on Friday night because of your religion?"

Or maybe you have co-workers or a boss who wants you to do something shady, like lie on official paperwork or statements. Maybe it's even the norm in your industry. I have heard of such things happening in the banking world, for example. Well, not compromising in these types of situations could very well mean the end of your job.

These are just a few little examples, but people want you to compromise your beliefs. They want you to conform to this world. And when you don't, oftentimes there are repercussions.

Just look at the example of Christ. What did He ever do other than speak the truth? He didn't harm anyone, yet they reviled and hated Him with passion. Why? Because He wouldn't compromise. His government wasn't from this world, and He wouldn't conform to this world.

And as it states here in verse 12, our reward also isn't from this present world. It comes from God. The word for "reward" that is used here is also the same word that was used in ancient Greek for wages or the pay for compensation to workers. And we know that we are co-workers with Christ, so this reward is about what we are building together – Elohim and the harvest that the Feast pictures.

So, even though we may go through tough times because we strive to live God's way, we are told to rejoice in the work that we are producing and remember the end goal.

What else are we to glean from this series of scriptures here that have to do with being blessed in Matthew 5? Well, we can see that they are bookended with the same wording. In verse 3 it says, "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and then it says the same thing in verse 10. What is this about then?

Well, it shows a focus. The kingdom of heaven is about the Kingdom of God, and sometimes they are used interchangeably.

We know that those in God's Church are able to get a head start and begin to live this way of life under this present world government. It's like the name of the Church, *Preparing for the Kingdom of God*; the only way we can prepare for it is to start living it now.

The verses start out by showing the need for spiritual help, to understand that we are poor in spirit without God. And then it ends with a focus on loyalty to God and not compromising under any condition. We are tested throughout the way, and our loyalty is tested. Why? Because that is what God's Kingdom is about. If we are ever to be a part of God's Kingdom, then there must be unity, peace, and complete loyalty.

I think it would be good now to look at the account of Satan tempting Christ. In that account, we can see the clear contrast between the way Satan's kingdom operates and the way God's Kingdom operates. We also see the same kinds of temptations that Satan still uses today. His ways offer shortcuts, immediate gratification, and the temporary rewards of sin. God's way, on the other hand, requires obedience, perseverance, and patience — but it leads to an inheritance far greater than anything Satan can offer.

So, this story takes place in the previous chapter in Matthew, in Matthew 4:1, and this is right after Joshua was baptized but before His ministry started. Let's start in verse 1. **Matthew 4:1—Then was Joshua led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted** (tested) **of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was afterwards hungry**.

So, we know that 40 is an important number in the Bible. It represents a period of testing, trial, judgment, preparation, or transition. Just some examples that come to mind: The flood lasted 40 days and 40 nights. Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights before receiving the law. Israel was in the wilderness for 40 years. Elijah travelled for 40 days and 40 nights to Mount Horeb before God gave him instruction. And now Joshua was fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. We can also count His resurrection, when He was also 40 days with the disciples.

Now, of course, none of us can even begin to imagine what a 40-day fast would be like. One day is hard enough for me. I mean, even after sundown at Atonement, I know a lot of us feel thirsty. But Joshua must have been feeling very weak physically, to say the least. The fact that He didn't just die shows how God was sustaining His physical life.

We don't know what happened during those 40 days. He was a physical being, so He was already being tested in that time for sure. But it doesn't seem like the real test came until after those 40 days were up and He was in a fragile physical state, because we see in the next verse who shows up.

Verse 3—And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If you be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Now, would it have been wrong for Christ to turn these stones into bread? He

had the power to do so. If you had the power and were in that situation, I think most people would say, "Yeah, of course, turn those stones into bread and feed yourself! Of course! Duh! There is nothing wrong in feeding yourself if you are starving, right?"

But the real question is, was it the will of God the Father to perform such a miracle, especially to prove to Satan that Joshua was the son of God? That was his trick, so to speak. But Christ understood God's will completely. His 40 days and 40 nights of fasting I'm sure helped Him to understand God's will even more.

Look how many times Christ was tempted by others to perform miracles that they wanted in order to prove to them who He was. That was not what God intended. Christ demonstrated that He was God's Son by His obedience to His word.

And His response in **verse 4** is as follows**—But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God**. We do indeed live by every word of God. We have to follow what God says. If you don't, then that is sin, and sin is death. So, what Christ here pronounced to Satan carries a lot of weight.

Alright, now on to the next test. **Verse 5—Then the devil took him up into the holy city, and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, If you be the Son of God, cast yourself down. For it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning you, and, In their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against the stone.**

So, Satan knows scripture, and he knows what he is quoting, and this comes from Psalm 91. But what he's quoting here is only partial, and that's one way he uses it to manipulate. And how often does that happen today? Well, just look at traditional Christianity. They quote scripture in part to make it say something it doesn't. I find it frustrating when people try to claim that scripture is up to interpretation. Because in most cases where that is claimed, it's not up to interpretation and it's actually very clear.

That's why Herbert Armstrong called the magazine *The Plain Truth*. Because when you read it for what it is, the truth is pretty clear. But since the world won't accept the truth, they do whatever they can to manipulate it to say what they want. And that's exactly what Satan is doing here. It's the same as what he did with Adam and Eve in the garden, and he's been doing it ever since. It makes me think of today when people speak of "their truth," as if there is anything but one truth.

But back to what Satan was quoting here from Psalm 91. If you go back and read that chapter, you'll see that it's all about God's protection for those who trust in God and live according to His way. Psalm 91 teaches us to trust in God's protection as we walk in faith and obedience according to His will. It's not a promise that we may act recklessly, place ourselves in unnecessary danger, and expect God to rescue us. To deliberately jump from a height and demand angelic protection would not be faith; it would be testing God.

So, we can see how Satan manipulated this chapter here, these scriptures from Psalm 91, by turning a promise that was meant to encourage trust into an excuse to follow one's own will. True faith trusts God while obeying His will; it does not use His promises to justify doing whatever we choose. It also does not try to force God to prove His promise on our terms.

So we see Christ's response in **verse 7—And Joshua said unto him, It is written again, You shall not tempt** (test) **the Lord your God**. So, Joshua just quoted **Deuteronomy 6:16**, where it says, **You shall not tempt the Lord your God, as you tempted Him in Massah**. Well, let's throw in a little recap. What happened in Massah? Well, the Israelites were complaining to Moses that they didn't have water, and they were demanding that God provide it for them. They said, "Is the Lord among us, or not?" They weren't simply asking God for help; they were demanding a sign as proof that He was with them, despite everything He had already done for them.

In that sense, they were tempting or testing God by making their trust conditional. In other words, they were really saying, "Prove that you are with us by giving us water."

And if you think about it, who are we to ever test God? Who are we to say our trust is conditional to the Almighty God? He gave us everything, including life. It's really dumb to think of testing God. The reality is that we are the imperfect creation; we are the ones that have to be tested, not God!

Continuing on in Matthew 4, we come to verse 8 with the final test from Satan, but perhaps it's the most tempting from our physical mindsets. **Matthew 4:8—Again, the devil took Him up unto an exceeding high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And he said unto Him, All these things will I give you, if you fall down and worship me**.

We know that Christ was already offered all of the kingdoms, the earth, and everything by His Father. But think of what this offer entailed – Christ would have to wait, to work, to do the will of His Father and not His own, and then go through suffering and excruciating death… and much, much more.

Satan's offer was therefore a shortcut: "You can have the kingdoms now. You don't have to wait. You don't have to suffer. You don't have to go through a horrible death. Just make one compromise—bow down to me."

Of course, from our perspective, accepting that offer would have been foolish. Christ would have been surrendering everything of eternal value for something that was already promised to Him. He would have exchanged the Father's approval and an everlasting Kingdom for temporary power obtained through rebellion.

Yet this is essentially the same kind of offer Satan makes to mankind every day. He may not offer us all the kingdoms of the world, but he offers us shortcuts to money, pleasure, status, success, and satisfaction. His message is always similar: Why wait? Why work patiently? Why obey God? Why deny yourself? Why not take what you want now?

This way of thinking is deeply embedded in modern society. Many people want the reward without the labor, pleasure without responsibility, success without character, and possessions without first earning the money to pay for them. The idea of "buy now, pay later" illustrates this mentality quite well.

Now, of course, there is nothing inherently wrong about borrowing money or taking out a responsible loan. But the underlying temptation can be revealing – enjoy something now and concern yourself with the cost afterward. Receive the benefit today and do the work necessary to pay for it tomorrow.

Satan's offer works in much the same way. Have what you want now. Enjoy the pleasure now. Take the shortcut now. Worry about the consequences later. But the "pay later" part never disappears. Satan emphasized the immediate benefit while concealing or minimizing the eventual cost. Sin may bring pleasure, profit, or advantage for a time, but payment eventually becomes due. And just like with what Satan offered Christ here, that shortcut always entails a compromise.

A person lies because the truth might cost him an opportunity. They cheat because honest effort requires more time. They engage in sexual immorality because they want pleasure without the boundaries and responsibilities established by God. They use dishonest business practices because integrity may produce slower profits. They steal, commit fraud, or manipulate others because they want something they have not honestly earned. In every case, the offer is essentially the same – you can have what you want, but you must bow.

The bow may not be physical, and the person may never consciously think of themselves as worshipping Satan, yet whenever someone knowingly rejects God's will in order to obtain a desired reward, they are accepting the principle behind Satan's offer, receiving something through compromise rather than waiting for it according to God's will.

That is the lesson for us. Satan's shortcuts may appear faster, easier, and more pleasurable, but they always lead us away from God and eventually demand a far greater price than we expected. God's way may require patience, work, sacrifice, and self-denial, but it is the only way that leads to a real reward.

So, after Satan offered Christ all of the kingdoms of this world, we come to **verse 10—Then Joshua said unto him, Go away, Satan! For scripture says, You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him alone. Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto Him.** It's kind of interesting to see that God took care of Joshua via the angels in the end here.

This just further proves the point that Joshua didn't need to take it on himself to perform miracles such as turning the stones into bread like Satan suggested. Because with that particular test or temptation, Satan was effectively saying to Christ, "You have power. Use it for yourself." He didn't say, "You have power. Use it to do God's will, what God wants." No, of course not. He wanted Christ to be like him, to say, "I have the power, and I will use it to do what I want."

That's what Satan wants for all of mankind – to please self. Just look at his temptation of Eve in the garden. It was essentially the same temptation, "Choose your own will. Decide for yourself what is good and what is evil. You can be like God, determining right and wrong for yourself."

Satan understands that mankind possesses free choice. That is a power that we all have. We can choose whether we want the freedom that comes from living God's way, or whether we want to become slaves to sin. That might seem simple and basic but think about what is unique about mankind right now. We are presently being given an opportunity to exercise choice, make mistakes, repent, change, and develop character. We aren't yet the finished creation.

The angels, they are in a different situation. Those who rebelled made a choice that became fixed. They are not going through the same process of sin, repentance, correction, and character development that God has allowed for mankind to experience. Satan and the demons chose their own will over God's, apparently believing that doing so gave them freedom. But we know that this is a false freedom; they became slaves to their own rebellion and sin. And Satan wants mankind to follow the same path.

Someone might reason, "Well, I have free will, so I can do what I want." And that's the way of the world. People think freedom means doing whatever their own minds desire. But the godly use of free will is very different. It says, "I have the ability to choose what I want, but I freely choose to do what God wants."

And that is really what makes submission to God meaningful. We are not submitting because we have no choice. We are choosing to place our own will under His. This is what we should all strive for. If we understand it, the greatest use of free will is to freely choose the will of God. That is what we see Christ doing over and over throughout His life.

He had desires and wants just like every other human being. He didn't want to go through an agonizing death, and He asked God Almighty if there be any other way. But He still submitted himself to the will of God. And this ties back with what we read about being meek in Matthew 5, where it says, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Being meek is about submission, especially and most importantly when it comes to God and His will. That is how our disposition to God should be. Just like Christ had that disposition of always putting God's plan first, and He is the best example because He indeed had and has lots of power.

A person can be meek without having much power. This can be seen in how they respond to mistreatment or hostility, for example. But meekness is most visible when someone does have power to choose. Christ could choose who He submitted to. Again, He could have called on the angels to fight his battles, but He submitted himself to God's plan.

God wants to give us more and more power. He wants to give us everything. And in Matthew 5, it says the meek will inherit the earth. Well, He isn't going to let those who do not submit to Him inherit the

earth. He isn't going to let those who please their own will to inherit the earth. That experiment is already playing out before us. Satan and the demons go after their own will, and they are the ones that God has allowed to be in charge on this earth for the time being. And we have the proof of what that has produced.

Let's turn over to Psalm 37. This chapter has many similarities with Christ's sermon on the mount, and we will see that Christ even quoted directly from here in one of His "blessed" verses there. There is also a common theme throughout chapter 37, which is that in this present world the wicked often appear to prosper while the righteous suffer. However, in the future, it shows that the wicked disappear and the righteous inherit the land. And that is similar to how Christ described things in those first verses of Matthew 5. Basically, Christ was building on what is stated here in Psalms.

Let's start in **Psalm 37:1—**It says, **A Psalm of David. Fret not yourself because of evildoers, neither be you envious against the workers of iniquity**. The word for "fret" here has to do with "anger and kindling," like a burning. It actually stems from another word that means to literally burn. So, it's saying not to get angry because of evildoers and not to be envious of them.

But look at the present world we live in. So often, evildoers are looked up to and celebrated. People want to be like them. They want to have what they have. But we are told not to be envious of what it seems like they have.

Verse 2, speaking of the evildoers, it says, **For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb**.

Verse 3—Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed. Delight yourself also in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. Fret not yourself because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass.

This part in verse 7 about resting in the Lord is not really about resting per se like we might think of a break or something relaxing. In its most basic form, it is about being still, silent, and motionless. And these verses we just read are telling us to trust, commit, become still, and wait.

There are evildoers and injustices all around us. And sometimes it seems like the wicked are being rewarded. We know that the wicked are not truly being rewarded, but sometimes it can look that way. They may have wealth, comfort, and an easy life, and seeing that can even tempt us to compromise God's way in order to have some of those same things.

But we have to remember that this present world is temporary. Just like our physical bodies, which the booths at the Feast help picture, it's not meant to last forever. And more than that, this present

condition of the world is part of God's plan. We cannot force everything to happen according to our own timing.

And that can be difficult, because when we want something, we usually want it now. We want God's way to be established, for example, and we want righteousness to prevail. So, when we see people doing wrong and apparently prospering because of it, it can be frustrating. But that is exactly why we are told to trust God, to wait on Him, and not allow what we see in this temporary world to pull us away from His way. And like verse 2 says, they are going to be cut down like the grass and wither away.

Instead, we are told to bring forth righteousness, to delight ourselves in God's ways, and wait patiently on God and His timing.

Let's continue with the next few verses. Verse 8—**Cease from anger, and forsake wrath. Fret not yourself in any wise to do evil**. So don't be angry or wrathful. Again, it is not our place to be like that, even though it can be difficult. You just turn on the news these days and you see all kinds of evil and stupidity in the world. I just have to turn it off sometimes because I can only take so much communism and woke ideology in one sitting before I want to pull my hair out.

The second part of verse 8 is not really translated very well. A better way of stating it would be "Do not become inflamed or angry; it will only result in harm or lead to wrongdoing." Why? Because we are going to do what we think is right in our own eyes. We aren't considering what is God's will. And like I mentioned, so much of the evil in this world is part of God's plan for mankind to learn from. It's not easy to go through, but it is part of the plan, and it's a necessity.

Let's continue in **verse 9—For evildoers shall be cut off. But those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be. Yes, you shall diligently consider his place, and it shall not be**.

And now we come to verse 11, which is pretty much word for word of what Christ said at the beginning of His sermon on the mount. It says, **But the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace**. This verse ties back very well with verse 7, where it says, "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently on Him." Like I mentioned just a bit ago, the word "rest" in verse 7 is about "being still," and it's actually a part of what meekness is about. If we understand it then, being still is not reacting. Not reacting to fulfill our own will with our own wants or desires. Like being motionless. If you are motionless, then you aren't reacting.

So when we look at the world and how it is, when we see someone who appears to be prospering through wrongdoing, we don't respond in kind. We don't think, "I will outscheme them, or fight them, or seize what I need or take justice into our own hands." Instead, we are to continue doing good, become quiet before God, and wait for Him. When we do that, we see that we can be blessed now as Christ

stated in Matthew 5. But the real reward comes in the future. It says we will inherit the earth and delight in the abundance of peace.

Let's turn back over to **Matthew 5:12—**It says: **Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you**. This is a good message for us today at the Feast of Tabernacles. We know that the Feast is about the gathering in of the crops at a great harvest and gathering in physical crops is worth celebrating. It is indeed a time to rejoice and be exceedingly glad.

And here in Matthew 5, Christ is showing us something else to be grateful for and to rejoice in. This is about the spiritual harvest, and it is far, far greater than anything physical.

It's not easy to go through all the things that Christ lists here in the first verses of chapter 5 and then to restrain our own will. The present world is a world that celebrates the self. Every day we are tested to see if we will choose our own will or God's. We are tested to see if we will make compromises, even the tiniest little ones that might seem insignificant.

And these tests may come to us when we are in a weakened state. That is why it's important to stay close to God. Even Christ must have been physically weak after He fasted. And then look who came along to test Him when He was in that physically weakened state.

Let's not forget how Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup when he was also in a weakened state. If we aren't careful too, we can lose out on our inheritance because of such stupidity. These tests and trials are real, and they aren't easy. But we know that we are actually working towards a great harvest, and we want to be a part of it.

Let's think of the physical harvest for a minute. You know, growing crops isn't easy. It is a whole lot of backbreaking work to be able to grow enough food to provide for just yourself. And we've become so disconnected from this concept today because we have oil and energy that can run machinery that have made it very easy compared to times past. But when we think of how difficult it was before, you know, pretty much all of your time and energy went to just feeding yourself; that was not an easy life.

But we are like those farmers now who sowed seeds. They watered and took care of the crops as they grew. But they aren't ready for harvest just yet. Just like we aren't quite ready. But you can already see them growing and the progress that is being made. The reward isn't quite there, but we are told that we can already be exceedingly glad and rejoice, because if we just stay the course, God has promised us a reward.

Eventually, we know there will be a great spiritual harvest, so these hardships that are a result of our testing are temporary. It's just like the booths that are also pictured in the Feast of Tabernacles. They too are temporary. And what may sometimes appear permanent now in Satan's world isn't really permanent – just like those kingdoms that Satan tried to offer Christ.

What do you want that is temporary that can compete with that which is eternal? The answer should be pretty obvious. Nothing.

In closing, let's turn over to **Isaiah 65:17-18—For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, nor come to mind**. Notice what God says there: "That which I create." God is a creator. He designs, He builds, and He has a purpose behind what He creates. And if we understand His plan correctly, He intends to bring us into His Family and allow us to share in that work of creation with Him.

Think about what that kind of power represents. We are talking about something far beyond anything we are capable of even imagining today. But tremendous power also requires complete unity. You can think about it in terms of design and hierarchy. If you have a group of people working together on a project, there has to be one direction. There has to be an overall design and purpose. If everyone on their own decides, "I don't care what the plan is, I'm going to build whatever I want," then very quickly you don't have a unified creation at all, and you just have confusion.

God is the supreme designer and creator. It is His plan, His purpose, and His creation. He can give others tremendous responsibility and power within that creation, but everyone involved has to be in agreement with what is being built.

And that brings us right back to meekness. Remember "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Why the meek? Meekness is not weakness. As we saw, it is a willingness to place our own will beneath God's will. It is having the power to choose for ourselves, but freely choosing to follow God's direction.

Christ demonstrated that perfectly. He had tremendous power. He could have called upon legions of angels, and Satan even tempted Him to use His power for himself. But Christ continually chose the Father's will over His own.

Satan represents the opposite. He rejected God's hierarchy. He chose his own will. And we can see the result of that rebellion in the world around us.

So, God is not going to give unlimited power and an inheritance to His Kingdom to beings who still insist upon saying, "I will do things my way." That is why these tests we experience now matter.

Every day, in ways both big and small, we are learning whether we trust God's judgment above our own. Will we compromise what we know is true because something looks easier or more pleasurable right now? Will we take Satan's shortcut? Or will we become still before God, wait patiently for Him, and continue doing what is right?

God is preparing people who can be trusted with what He wants to give them. And this brings us back to where we began today—with that word "*makarios*." To be blessed. To be supremely fortunate.

If we really understand what God has revealed to us, then we are supremely fortunate right now. Not because everything in this physical life goes our way, not because we never suffer, and not because we possess everything that we might physically want. We are supremely fortunate because God has given us eyes to see and ears to hear. He has allowed us to understand what these temporary booths are for.

We understand why we are being tested. We understand what He is building in us. We understand what the Feast pictures. And we understand, at least in part, what He intends to create in the future.

And if we continue to submit ourselves to that design — if we trust Him, remain meek, refuse to compromise, and patiently wait for His promises — then one day we won't simply understand what God is creating, we will have the opportunity to take part in it. That is why Christ could tell us to rejoice and be exceeding glad even while talking about persecution, hardship, and sacrifice.

We are being given the opportunity to become part of the creation that the harvest pictures, part of that Kingdom, and part of the Family of God. That is why, even now, before we have received the inheritance, we can truly say that we are blessed; we are supremely fortunate.