

Who are the blessed?

Let's create two men and decide the one who is better off. Ralph lives in Charlotte, Ibrahim lives in a refugee camp in Chad. Let's add further details. Ralph works for Wachovia as a branch manager. He is married, has two kids in high school, drives a Volvo sedan, and owns a nice home in Weddington. He has good friends, is well-adjusted, and plays golf almost every weekend. Ibrahim has a wife and a 13 year-old daughter. They recently fled the Darfur region of Sudan after both his wife and daughter were raped by Janjaweed thugs. In his language, "Janjaweed" is slang for "devils on horseback." Ibrahim and his family now live in a dusty tent city in nearby Chad. Like most of the refugees, they live in extreme poverty. So—who would you say is better off?

Jesus would say the one who is living in the kingdom of God. Let's pretend that Ibrahim and his family hear the gospel of Jesus from a World Vision aid worker ministering in the camps. Through that witness, Ibrahim comes to believe in the love of Jesus. He concludes that the God and Father of Jesus Christ surely is sufficient for his needs and the needs of his family. So he begins to trust God. And in trusting God, Ibrahim is filled with a hope sprinkled with joy, which pushes away his despair. After months of deep depression and humiliation from his inability to protect and provide for his family, Ibrahim feels confident and strong once more. His wife and daughter begin to sleep at night. The vacant, hollow expression in their eyes begins to be replaced with a gentle peace. They find growing within them, by the Holy Spirit's goodness, a determination to overthrow the evil thrust upon them.

Still, they live on less than one dollar a day. (According to the World Bank, one out of seven people on this planet live on the equivalent of one dollar a day.) But they are taught to pray the Lord's Prayer by the Christian aid worker and begin to look for that daily bread promised by God. Sure enough, each day they find at least one meal. Ibrahim longs to read the New Testament given him by World Vision. A few tents away, other aid workers are conducting a literacy class, and Ibrahim begins to attend, hoping to learn to read the New Testament in his own language.

More than anything else, Ibrahim discovers that this Jesus is with him, morning through night, wherever he goes, and whatever he does. He no longer worries about his wife and daughter, or at least, not like he used to.



*Scott
Hilborn*

*Guest
Columnist*

A small bartering system has grown in the camp. Ibrahim joins in and begins to find that he is gaining more than he is spending. Generously, he shares some of his extra. When neighbors ask him why, he carefully explains about Jesus.

Jesus would say that Ibrahim is one of the blessed ones He spoke about in His Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12).

This world assumes that the wealthy, the educated, the sophisticated, and the talented are always better off. God says, "Not so." Those who are REALLY well off are those who have entered the kingdom of God by discipleship to Jesus.

The Beatitudes seem simple enough, but the casual reader can miss the point that these words are addressed to those who are ALREADY Jesus' disciples—in other words, to those who have begun to experience the goodness of the reign of God over their lives. That is why Jesus could say, in effect pointing out various ones standing right in front of Him who had just been healed, or comforted, or delivered from demons, that they were the blessed ones! They were blessed because they had encountered the kingdom of God by their faith in Jesus, and had come under its power. They were not blessed BECAUSE they were poor, or mourning, or meek, or persecuted—but in spite of those worldly conditions—because they were in the kingdom!

The way into God's kingdom is not by becoming "poor in spirit." Many have seen being "poor in spirit" as a meritorious condition. It is not. Jesus probably used the phrase "poor of spirit," to describe those whom others regarded as un-spiritual. Tax collectors, prostitutes, shepherds, or even just average working-class Jews who knew they did not measure up to the religious standards of the Scribes and Pharisees. Again, Jesus

taught the Beatitudes to His disciples, many of whom were unspiritual, or in mourning, or meek, or weak—the "nobodies" of life. He assured them that in the kingdom, their blessedness far out-stripped the poverty of their worldly life.

Koffi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, said in a speech on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, October 17, 2000, "Almost half the world's population lives on less than two dollars a day, yet even this statistic fails to capture the humiliation, powerlessness and brutal hardship that is the daily lot of the world's poor." But Jesus understands all of this. Most of those who respond to the gospel today, throughout the world, live in poverty. Our job as the rich is to live more simply, so that by our sharing, they can simply live. More than food is needed though. The gospel of Jesus is most needed. The life that is truly the blessed, well-off life, is the life found living under the umbrella of God's kingdom rule.

Aid organizations, by necessity, must work at the macro level, targeting masses of people in need of relief. God though, works at the micro level. He does not see masses of suffering humanity. He sees only individual sufferers, each one precious to Him. Person, by person, by person, God works to win us.

God is seeking you. Do you believe that? Possibly things in your past have caused you to lose hope about God's acceptance of you. I assure you, based on the life and words of Jesus, God does accept you. Perhaps your life seems a terrible failure. OK. I've felt that way, myself. Jesus Christ cares nothing about your worldly reputation. He simply sees the lonely, hurting, needful person you are and wants very much to enter into your life and make you whole. Come under His wing. Listen for His voice. Ask Him, "Lord, what do you think of me?" You will be surprised at what you hear. Begin to trust Him. Trust Him. Trust Him. And keep on trusting Him.

*Scott Hilborn is the pastor of the
Banks Presbyterian Church in Marvin.*