

Luke 11:27-28

Dear Friends in Christ,

Who is truly blessed? Are you truly blessed if you have a lot of money in the bank and a nice paid for house to live in? Most people would say that's being truly blessed. Or are you truly blessed if you have loving family and children who behave, who don't challenge your authority or get into trouble at school or with the law. Most people would say that's being truly blessed.

The woman in the crowd that was listening to Jesus thought that Jesus' mother must have been truly blessed. She had a famous son. He healed people. He spoke with authority. He even dared to challenge the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. She thought, "How proud his mother must be of her son!" Finally she couldn't contain herself and she blurted out, "**Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.**"

She was right, of course. Mary was truly blessed. Gabriel called her **highly favored**. Elizabeth exclaimed, **Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!** Even Mary sang, **from now on all generations will call me blessed.** Every young Jewish girl who believed God's promises hoped that maybe she would be the one; that the promised Messiah would be her child. What a blessing that God chose Mary to be the mother of the Savior! Just imagine how wonderful it must have been raising Jesus. He was perfect, sinless!

Yes Mary was truly blessed in many ways. But she might have wondered about how blessed she was when Simeon told her that her special son would be a cause of controversy and that a sword would pierce her soul. Now that Jesus' ministry was public, she could see Simeon's words being fulfilled as the Jewish leaders were constantly trying to get him to say or do something they could use against him. Then, at the foot of the cross, she felt the sword Simeon foretold. Being the mother of the Messiah was a blessing but it brought with it great pain as well, as she had to watch helplessly as he suffered for her sins and everyone else's.

The woman who blurted out a blessing on Mary probably did so because she was thinking about how proud Mary must have been of her famous and gifted son. But, without knowing it, she reminds us of an important fact that helps us prepare for Christmas. Jesus was born. He had a human mother. He grew up under the training and instruction of Mary and Joseph just as we have grown up under the training and instruction of our parents. Christmas reminds us that Jesus is a real human being. His human ancestry can be traced through the kings of Israel, to David, and then to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and ultimately to Adam and Eve to whom the first promise of a savior was given.

Not only does the fact that he was born of a woman fulfill the prophecies, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that it assures us that he can identify with us. He is our flesh-and-blood brother. He knows what temptation is like. He knows what it is to feel hunger and thirst. He knows what it's like to suffer pain and to face death. He knows what it's like to be mocked, to be betrayed by friends, and even physically abused. He has experienced it all. Therefore we are assured that he knows how to help us in every time of need. Those who know that Jesus is their flesh-and-blood brother are truly blessed.

When the woman in the crowd blurted out a blessing on Jesus' mother Jesus didn't reprimand her. He didn't deny that Mary was blessed, even if this woman wasn't thinking about the real reason that Mary was blessed. What she said was true as far as it went, but Jesus reminds us that our focus is not to be on Mary. He wants this woman, the people in the crowd, and us as well, to know how we can be truly blessed. He responded, "**Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.**"

Those who listen to the word of God recognize that Jesus isn't just the son of Mary. They realize that Jesus isn't just a miracle worker; a good person whose example we ought to follow. Those who listen to the word of God recognize that Jesus is also the Son of God. They are like another Mary, Lazarus' sister, who spent time listening to the word of God, sitting at Jesus' feet instead of helping her sister in the kitchen, who later anointed Jesus with expensive perfume because, unlike Jesus' disciples, she understood that he was going to have to die.

Blessed are those who hear the word of God, who spend time in the word every day. They receive the greatest blessing there is, the blessing of being reminded daily that Jesus is true God and true man; the promised Messiah who has paid for all their sins. They also receive the blessing of comfort in the midst of trouble and hard times because they are assured by God that he is with them and will not forsake them. They receive guidance as they make difficult choices in life. They are not confused by scholarly sounding or emotional arguments about abortion or homosexuality, or many other issues of the day because they know what God has said in his word and that his word is truth.

But, Jesus points out that just listening to God's word isn't the only thing that is important. It's those who hear the word of God AND obey it, that he says are blessed.

It's interesting that Jesus says this shortly after he talked about what could happen if a demon is cast out and later returns and finds that his former home is unoccupied. Either the person who was possessed didn't continue to listen to the word, or just let what God's word said go in one ear and out the other. Jesus warns that in such a case the demon might return and bring others with him, and that person's state would be worse than it was before. And so Jesus uses present tense verbs here. Those who continue to hear the word of God, who don't leave themselves empty, and who continue to obey it, they are the ones who are blessed.

The Apostle James makes a similar point in a graphic way. He says, **anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.** Now if you are late for class in the morning you might just run out the door without checking what you look like—hair sticking up all over, shirt on backwards, whatever. But most of the time, before you leave the dorm or the house, you check yourself in the mirror. If your hair is sticking up you comb it. If something is messed up with your clothing, you take care of it. So, James says, the way of blessing is not merely to listen to the word, but to do what it says, to apply it to yourself and to put it into action in your life. He says, **the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.**

Do we always do what God tells us to do in his word? No. And when we disobey God we find that we aren't blessed. That's why we need to continue to hear the word of God, so that God can point out our sins and call us to repentance; and so that he can assure us that Jesus was born to live and die to pay for the times when we disobey.

Who is truly blessed? Is it the person who has money and a paid for house? Yes. They are blessed. Is it the person with family close by and well-behaved children? Yes. They are blessed. Is it Mary the mother of Jesus? Yes. She was blessed. But Jesus wants us to know that we too are blessed when we listen to the word of God. We are truly blessed because through the word we know that Christmas means that the Savior was born, and that he lived and died in our place so that he could give us the best gift ever, forgiveness and eternal life. We are truly blessed when we hear the word of God and, instead of letting it go in one ear and out the other, we apply it to ourselves; we acknowledge the sins it shows us; we confess them; and then in love

and thanks to God for our forgiveness in Jesus, we let his word guide our thoughts and actions every day.

Remember what Jesus said. You are truly blessed when you continue to hear the word of God everyday and when you continue to obey it.