

Series: The Blessing

November 18, 2018

Title: Status

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Text: Matthew 5:5

The Third Blessing

Imagining the Unimaginable:

How would you tell a fish what it's like to be free from living under water? How would you describe the joy of breathing in fresh mountain air, or smelling the fragrance of a rose? For the fish, of course, this would all be nonsense: it depends upon the water for its very existence.

How would you describe living in God's restored Creation to a person living in a broken and disjointed world?

That was Jesus' mission when He gave His 8 Blessings. Each one dares us to imagine the unimaginable: living in what He called the Kingdom of God instead of the tired and corrupt kingdoms of this world.

The Third Blessing

His First Blessing dared us to see poverty rewarded by receiving the kingdom. His Second Blessing promised replace inconsolable grief with God's own comfort.

And that brings us to the Third Blessing:

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Matthew 5:5 J.B. Phillips

"Happy are those who claim nothing, for the whole earth will belong to them!"

Imagine living a life in which you made no claim to fame or reputation.

It's a riddle. You have to puzzle it out, unpack it, walk it out in your own life!

The Quest for Status

The Status App:

David Rock has made himself a student of a thing called “status.” Our status refers to how we compare to those around us. We have a higher sense of status when we see ourselves as better than those around us; conversely, we have a lower perception of status when we feel inferior to those around us.

Rock writes:

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Maintaining high status is something that the brain seems to work on all the time unconsciously. (David Rock, Your Brain At Work, Kindle loc.3167)

You can think of your brain as if it is running a “Status App” 24/7. For instance, let’s say you’re driving down the interstate in your not-so-new truck. A 2018 Toyota Tundra zooms past you. You notice. You notice that it’s a Toyota Tundra. You notice the rims, the 4 doors, the 4 wheel drive capacity. Your brain immediately rings up a calculation as to just how much that baby cost. You may even calculate what that would look like as a monthly payment. And you compare the Tundra to your 10 year old, slightly rusty F-150 with a crack in the windshield.

All this happens without any effort on your part. The brain is just running the Status App. You can’t turn it off. You don’t even know where the switch is. And when the App runs, your status goes up or down. It runs when you see another woman’s designer purse or when you see a friend whose perm went wrong.

Threat/Reward:

David Rock explains that low status creates a very real experience of pain:

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A feeling of being less than other people activates the same brain regions as physical pain.

Social pain can be as painful as physical pain, as the two appear synonymous in the brain. (Rock, loc. 3103)

Conversely, the experience of higher status produces what he calls “one of the world’s greatest feelings.” The chemical rewards in the brain enable us to think faster and better. We function at a higher level. What’s not to like about that?

Perhaps this helps explain why it’s so exhilarating to drive a new car off the lot, or put on a new outfit. Think of the status message when we receive our diploma or get a promotion at work.

And all the time everybody’s Status App is running full blast. The newly engaged woman’s diamond evokes a threat or a reward response in everyone who sees it. Just one point or one pound in deer season can make all the difference at deer camp – and for the next year.

Status

Humble:

The traditional translation of this Blessing is “Blessed are the meek...” A better translation would be “Blessed are the humble and gentle people who happily live as servants of the God who created them.”

Here is a challenge to live an entirely different way. Jesus dares us to live as someone who somehow overrides the Status App. He challenges us to seek our status in God’s sight instead of by endlessly scanning the social world around us.

Why is this so important? Jesus the King defined Himself in precisely these terms. He took a moment to clearly state His status to His followers. First, He reminded them of just how *high* His status was and is:

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Matthew 11:27 Phillips

“Everything has been put in my hands by my Father, and nobody knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son – and the person to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

You can’t find any status higher than that! But then He says:

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Matthew 11:28-30 Phillips

*"Come to me, all of you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest! Put on my yoke and learn from me. For I am **gentle** and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

The word "gentle" is the same word used in the Third Blessing. It describes a King who takes no thought of His high status, and takes no joy in another's low status. He told His followers that He came to *serve, not be served*. A different kind of King for a different kind of Kingdom. As different as going from breathing water to breathing air.

The humble King:

This same word appears one more time in Matthew's gospel. When Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a steed, Matthew reminds us of an ancient prophecy which said:

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Matthew 21:4-5 Phillips

All this happened to fulfil the prophet's saying – 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Behold your king is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey'.

Here the word "meek" or "gentle" is translated "lowly," noting that Jesus took a place of low status, just as He would when He washed His disciples' feet at the Last Supper. A different kind of King for a different kind of Kingdom. In a few hours He would be stripped, beaten and nailed to a Roman cross – the most degrading death the Empire could inflict.

Status:

What is the thing that most defines your status for you? Is it your salary? Your family? Your good looks? Your reputation? Your possessions? Your education? Your career?

What are the things that make you feel the lowest status? Lack of education? Lack of money? Your appearance? Your background? Your failures?

Take the piece of paper from the pew in front of you and write down the thing that gives you the highest status *and* the thing that gives you the lowest sense of status.

Would you be willing to trade them in for a whole different kind of status – good standing in God’s Kingdom? Would you trade this old world and its fleeting offers of status for “inheriting the earth” as part of God’s New Creation? Would you be willing let God’s Spirit reconfigure your Status App so that you seek the best for others?

If so, bring your paper down and pin it to the cross. Give Jesus permission to override the Status App. It’s time to start breathing the fresh air of a whole new world!