

“Life” is the Enjoyment of God’s Blessings

- **death in the desert** (vv.5,6)
- ‡ **Trust in the LORD.** (vv.7,8)

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Lord, dear mirrors of God’s grace in Christ:

Glitz and glamour for American movie stars could not save Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) from suicide, or Anna Nicole Smith (1967-2007) from death by strange circumstances. Fame and fortune could not comfort their lonely despair. Only the self-sacrificing love of God in Christ can overcome life’s loveless heartbreak. When the clouds cover the sun, it’s good to remember our Good Shepherd saying, “***I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***” (John 10:10 NIV) We need God’s Word to train us that “**Life**” is the **Enjoyment of God’s Blessings** for time and for eternity. Otherwise, it’s...

- **death in the desert** (vv.5,6)

Here’s a mouthful of meaning for life: ***This is what the LORD says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man....”*** More literally, this is what the LORD says, “Cursed is the big guy who trusts in mere man.” “Big man on campus” used to be the star athlete with enough brains to impress the ladies. But military men have their mighty generals, aviators their flying “Aces,” scholars their “PhD’s,” theologians their dogmaticians; beauties have their pageant queens, children their action heroes. And all who reject all of the above have their own money, intellect and hard work in which they trust. Ultimately, that was Adam and Eve’s problem when they gave in to the temptation of trying to be “like God knowing good and evil.” In rebellion they reached for the forbidden fruit. They trusted in themselves to grab “life” and enjoy their Creator’s blessings without their Creator. But God makes sure this only brings **death in the desert**.

After a few thousand years locked out of Paradise you’d think we sons of Adam would learn. But if you’re trusting in your house as a retirement investment, how do you deal with falling home values in the suburbs? If your company’s retirement plan puts you to sleep at night, how will you rest if the company goes down without a parachute? If the good economy or a powerful military are your source of confidence for life, what do you do in the face of depression, defeat and death? No matter on what side of the world you live, people are the same. As Chinese seminary student Daniel says in our China Partners DVD, “Many Chinese students are committing suicide because they have no hope in Christ.”

So it was nearly 3,000 years ago when God the Holy Spirit inspired Jeremiah to write: ***This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.”*** Nothing is more lonely and empty than trying to live without help from God the Creator of all life. What help is mortal man when his next breath may be his last? How can someone help you who cannot help himself? How will you stand before the righteous Judge if your soul is like your shoes and pockets in the desert – full of sand? ***“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*** (Genesis 3:19 NIV) That’s what the LORD God told Adam after he listened to his wife instead of to his God. Nature was cursed because of Adam. **Death in the desert** came to all. Not dirt and dust but holiness God demands.

Remember the first and last “unsinkable” ship? The *Titanic* went down on her maiden voyage. Some of the richest people in the world were aboard that Sunday evening, April 14, 1912: millionaire John Jacob Astor IV and his pregnant wife Madeleine; industrialist Benjamin Guggenheim; Macy’s department store owner Isidor Straus and his wife Ida; streetcar magnates, railroad executives, a United States presidential aide named Archibald Butt; authors and socialites, writers and painters, film critics and

movie stars. One of the ship's builders, Thomas Andrews, was on board to observe any problems and assess the ship's performance. But trust in man's ingenuity was so futile we still refer to wasted effort as "moving the deck chairs on the *Titanic*." No man could keep her afloat, or stop WWI less than ten years off, or ease the despair of countless souls suffering **Death in the desert** instead of putting their...

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"But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Sometimes we say, "*Blessed* means *happy*," but then it's fair to ask, "Are all 'blessed' people happy"? Do they never suffer loss from shipwreck, heartache, disease and depression? More in keeping with Scripture and real life experience we should say that "blessed" means "having God's infinite love directing His almighty power to bring us safely home to eternal happiness in heaven with Him." In short, we could say that being "blessed" means having God on your side. Sometimes on earth God's blessing calls for sadness as our Lord Jesus says to His disciples in today's Gospel Lesson: *"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets."* (Luke 6:20-23 NIV) God's Word, the Redeemer of our souls, tells us to dry our tears and do what John the Baptist did before he was born. *When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.* (Luke 1:41 NIV)

Even through tears we "*leap for joy*" when we **Trust in the LORD**. First the dear Holy Spirit cuts our hearts with the laser of God's Law. Otherwise, we're like a man with cancer who doesn't even know it. In fact, no medical technology can reveal our tumor of sin that separates us from the holy God. If every human being had a tumor growing from his face, it might be fashionable. Maybe that's why we sinners admire the same selfish ambition that God curses. We ignore our own personal need.

How terribly depressing to be so sick the doctors cannot help. But that's what they told Pastor Loren Steel in the Spring of 2003, if memory serves. So why was he not depressed? Why could Pastor Steel and countless Christians be confident that **"Life" is the Enjoyment of God's Blessings?**

Again, God's Word is the key to **Trust in the LORD**. God's Word shows us how hard God has worked to earn our trust, not because He had to, but because His eternal love compelled Him to take away our fear by removing our sin. God nailed it to the cross with Jesus, then raised Him from the dead to sound like a ship's horn blasting through the fog, like a lighthouse piercing the dark night of wind and waves: "All is well! Be at peace with God. Come home to the harbor of God's grace in Christ."

Tears on earth? Yes, for "*we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 14:22 NIV) But on the way God keeps promising to turn every difficulty into deliverance, as the Lord told the Israelites through Moses at the Red Sea: *"Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."* (Exodus 14:13f NIV) God keeps reassuring us "*that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*" (Romans 8:28 KJV) Even the worst family tragedies our gracious God turns from bitterness into blessing as He did for Joseph whose brothers sold him into slavery. You remember how the LORD made Joseph prime minister of Egypt to save their families of Israelites from famine and the promise of our Savior Jesus from extinction. (Genesis 50:20) God's Word kindly tells of His eternal goodness, compassion, grace and mercy. In Christ Jesus we are "blessed" to live **"Life" as the Enjoyment of God's Blessings**. Through smiles and tears we **Trust in the LORD** to comfort guide and bless as He does best. There's just one question to ask: Who can you tell today? May God unseal our lips to speak His praise! Amen.