

Treated to the Timeless Tune of Truth

1. Heard in words of gracious blessing.
2. Seen in lives of glad confessing.

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Grace and peace to you from him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

The holy gospel from Matthew chapter 5 is our focus.

The curtain opens, the lights go dim, the screen in front of you gets brighter, and a quote from Martin Luther appears in iconic lettering: “*In our day the pattern of the true Christian life has reappeared, terrible in the world’s eyes, since it means suffering and persecution, but precious and priceless in God’s sight... (dot-dot-dot).*” The words fade out and a large medieval town appears; it the town of Brussels and a date flashes at the bottom of the screen: “July 1, 1523.” The focus zooms into the marketplace where a crowd has gathered. In the middle of the square are two Augustinian friars, their monk’s tonsure and brown habits give them away. These two men, Johann Esch and Heinrich Voes, are tied to a post, placed in the midst of a mountain of wood. These are the first two Lutheran martyrs and they face their end, not for Luther, but for Christ and his Word. They are undeterred by the weeping of the women around them and the insults of the Inquisitors. They are resolute, they are ready. A month later Martin Luther hears of their deaths and, deeply moved, writes his very first hymn, *Ein neues Lied wir heben an*. And a flurry of hymns and hymnals follows, all to the glory of God and for the good of his saints.

Suddenly you become acutely aware of a tune playing in the background, softly this entire time. At first it sounded like dissonance, but soon its beauty overwhelms you. It is **the timeless tune of truth**.

The images before you fast forward exactly 100 years to a small town in Bohemia on the other side of the European continent. It’s the town of Joachimsthal, and the Counter-Reformation is under way. The emperor’s emissary reads a decree from the steps of the town church and the Lutheran pastor and two deacons are expelled from the town. The townspeople walk with them to the edge of the city limits and then return to their homes singing, *Salvation Unto Us Has Come*. And indeed, thanks to homes filled with Lutheran hymnals and Bibles, the pure teaching of the gospel survived for another 25 years, despite penalties and punishments for avoiding the Catholic Mass and every public institution being forcibly catholicized. And in large measure it was thanks to the women who resisted the Counter-Reformation, “the vast majority of them preferred to disobey the imperial authorities and their own husbands rather than to abandon the faith that they had learned with the Bible and Luther’s hymns at their mothers’ knee” (*Singing the Faith*, p.148). Finally, you watch a scene of the last Lutherans in that town, 853 total people, miners, milkmaids, mothers and children, emigrating *en masse* over the mountains (“Sound of Music” style) into Lutheran Saxony.

And again, that same tune from earlier plays in the background. There’s a little discord at times, but the tune’s beauty still overwhelms you. It is **the timeless tune of truth**.

What is this timeless tune and from whence does it come, you wonder. The images on the screen pan a visual timeline back further into the past. The picture locks in on a hillside in Galilee and a large crowd is gathering. It’s a small mount and there’s a man giving a sermon on that mount. He opens his mouth and he speaks to his followers in front of him: *Blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn because they will be comforted... Blessed are the meek because they will inherit the earth... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled... Blessed. Blessed. Blessed. Blessed.* The One speaking these words is in fact **treating us to the timeless tune of truth**. This is Jesus of Nazareth and the tune is **heard in words of gracious blessing**.

This is the tune that was playing in those other scenes. *Blessed*, he says to his followers, his holy ones, his saints. *Blessed*, he says to you. Not merely “happy” as some might render that word, as if this Rabbi was the first creator of the sappy smile emoji. *Favored by God himself, chosen to be his own, showered with good things, graciously, unconditionally. Blessed. Blessed.* This tune started out like dissonance. It didn’t sound quite right, you remember, at the start. Why? Because you and I are accustomed to a different tune.

This other tune has been around for a long, long time. In fact, you’ve heard this other tune your whole life and your experience outside this particular venue has only strengthened the tune’s legitimacy, for a part of you. You know the tune: *Happy are the pushy and the powerful, because they get what they want and always finish first!... Happy are those who are complimented, congratulated, and celebrated, because they will receive their participation trophies and so much more!... Happy are those who never mourn, because they don’t get bothered by death’s sting or old-fashioned concepts like “sin” and “guilt”!* How “natural” that tune sounds to a part of your heart, and even now you wrestle with it. Why is this tune so appealing? It’s also the tune of the Counterfeit Saints and it entices you, woos and wins you over at times. It rings out when we get so proud in our own accomplishments—we sing songs of praise to ourselves. It rings

out when we refuse to put up with those people “who don’t really appreciate just how good I am.” It rings out when we hunger and thirst for success, satisfaction, and every other Satanic idol that masquerades as a God-pleasing goal. The tune of counterfeit saints, indeed—and when it rings out, we deserve to hear only one word, *Cursed! Cursed! Cursed!*

Yet, you suddenly see in front of you *the people* to whom Jesus has spoken those **words of gracious blessing**. Not just first century Jews with sun-burnt skin, dark eyes, and dusty clothes; not just medieval Europeans with blonde hair and blistered hands—you see people from every nation, tribe, people and language and all of these people, from the greatest to the least, is treated to this timeless tune, from the lips of our Lord Jesus himself. (And you are treated too!) What he says sounds backwards and up-side down, but therein lies the key to understanding. *Blessed are the merciful because they will be shown mercy... Blessed are the pure in heart because they will see God... Blessed are the peacemakers because they will be called sons of God...* This is not a 10-point plan to better living. This is the underserved status you and all the saints have before our Father in heaven. Not a counterfeit saint, but a son, a daughter of the Living God. This is the saints’ symphony within the terror and trouble of this life—and by these words Jesus shows us his kingdom within the kingdom of this world. Jesus treats us to **words of gracious blessing!**

The kingdom of this world will never accept, apprehend, or approve of the timeless tune Jesus sings. How do we know that? Just consider and connect what Christ says with what happened in his earthly life. Jesus was merciful, but was he shown mercy? Jesus was pure in heart, and what did it get him? Jesus lived as a peacemaker and he died as what, a criminal, an insurrectionist? You and I know well what people addicted to that other tune did to Jesus. They crucified, killed and discarded the Creator of this **timeless tune**—and yet, he wasn’t done. He rose victorious, glorious, majestic. Because of what he did in your place, bearing your sins and shame and making eternal satisfaction, this tune plays in your head and heart. With limitless, love, and bountiful blessing, Jesus treats us to **the timeless tune of truth!**

This tune continues to play in our world today. Where and when do we see it sounding forth? The screen in front of you shifts its picture again to Ukraine, where Russian tanks are rolling through the countryside and a small Lutheran congregation meets in a house church. The picture flashes further south to Africa where the holy people of God are gathered around a water-pump, hearing and drinking deeply from the Water of Life—all while Boko Haram gathers its forces in the village nearby. Then, the picture in front of you pans the Atlantic and floats much closer to home, to a small, church with an even smaller choir, and you are sitting there... waiting... wondering why we can’t get any more basses for this choir and praying the sopranos can hit that note! Even there, you are treated to the timeless tune of truth, because it’s **seen in lives of glad confessing**.

Friends, the words Jesus shares from Matthew chapter 5 are not the latest Bruno Mars pop hit and the Christian church’s experience is not a Netflix series to binge watch. This is the true Christian life, the life of saints through the centuries—this is your life and mine, even now. Jesus said, *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.* Jesus treats us to the intimate connection between present reality and our future hope. We won’t hear and see the completion of his masterpiece until we enter glory, but the kingdom and its tune are yours even now. He didn’t say, “Yours will be” the kingdom of heaven or “might be” or “good luck.” Yours IS the kingdom of heaven, and what we will be has not yet fully been made known (1 John 3:2), yet when he appears we shall see him as he is. That’s why he calls on us to see by faith his tune played out **in lives of glad confessing**.

If we were living as if this tune didn’t exist, how sad our song would be! We would prepare worship music with disgruntled attitudes. We’d write sermons expecting mass conversions. We’d praise everything we do and look down on everything everyone else does. And what would that get us? If we ignore Jesus timeless tune, then we’d sing the sad song of weeping and gnashing of teeth. *If we live according to the sinful nature [and its tune], we will die.* (Romans 8:13).

But the Crucified One sings this new song into our hearts through his Word, and the tune does in fact at times become visible in the lives of God’s saints—not perfectly, though. It’s never so this side of heaven. But there is rejoicing and gladness, even amidst pain and persecution, deadlines and disappointment. You are treated to the timeless tune of Christ’s love for you and so, we hum that tune, even when choirs aren’t quite what we hoped they might be. We hum the tune, even when preparing a lesson for students who don’t seem to quite get “it” (whatever it might be). We hum the tune, because we know that brothers and sisters around the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings (1 Peter 5:9). We hum the tune, and Satan squirms when that song is sung **in lives of glad confessing**.

Finally, the camera pans to a very plain house in a very plain American neighborhood. Inside, a Christian mother stands a table with a child lying in front of her—this mom changes a diaper while two more ankle-biters are swirling beneath her. Yet, a smile appears on her face, as she lives out her vocation as a Christian mother, wife, friend and musician. She smiles because she has been treated to the timeless tune of truth. And we smile too because we know the song. It’s the song of joy and victory resounding in the tents of the righteous (Psalm 118:115). Amen.