

# JESUS' PRESCRIPTION FOR DEPRESSION<sup>1</sup>

By Paul Penno Jr.

August 30, 2014

For Americans, the first weekend of September is the last bash of fun for the long summer. But our attention has been gripped by disquieting news: the war in Gaza and Israel, the war in Iraq, the war in the Crimea, Russia, the 6.0 earthquake in Napa: is God trying to say something to the world? Not that He sends these troubles—He does not; but is there a *still small voice* saying something that we can hear above the violence and shrieking of the hurricanes?

\* With all our scientific expertise we are powerless to tame the earth's crust; we just have to watch thousands of homes devastated. In California we watch hundreds, sometimes thousands, of homes burn in our dry season.

One lesson seems to come through loud and clear: our economic possessions are extremely fragile.

In some way or other, the injustice of James 5 is related to this problem: “your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire” (vss. 2, 3). “The Lord of hosts” is an observant Witness. “Wanton” living, whether here or there, is inappropriate today although it has never been more widespread. The world is living in the grand cosmic Day of Atonement. It's the biggest news to go to “every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6, 7), and somehow the attention of the world must and will be secured.

The American Declaration of Independence (1776) recognizes that every human being deserves “the pursuit of happiness.” And then Jesus Christ astounds us by telling us the most unlikely way to find that happiness: it's by being “poor in spirit.” We find that in Matthew 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The word “blessed” is an old English word that evokes for modern people dim cathedral aisles or

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 5:1-12. 229, 470.

pictures of unhappy canonized saints in stained glass windows. But it really means simply to be “happy.” But the idea of being “poor in spirit” evokes the opposite idea; it makes one think of being sad, or discouraged. But Jesus says that being poor in spirit is the path to really being happy. How so?

When you realize the truth that if it were not for Jesus the Saviour, you would be dead, that He is in truth “the Saviour of the world,” you are enabled to contrast your own sinfulness with His glorious righteousness. And then to realize that His righteousness is yours through His grace—this immediately gives you happiness.

You sense that your happiness is blood-bought; that it is not something innately yours because of your own merits, but it is a gift. In yourself, of yourself, you are indeed “poor,” but in Christ you are eternally wealthy. To be “poor in spirit” is simply to recognize that reality.

When finally you get your feet on this solid Rock of reality, you see each new day as an unexpected

dividend, a gift of happiness; you feel the joy of being redeemed from the grave, from a death-sentence, like someone long on death row who gets a last-minute reprieve from the governor. You gladly yield yourself to the Lord “as those that be alive from the dead” (Rom. 6:13). Happiness? You bet! That’s it.

### Who Are the “Blessed” Ones in the Bible?

The word “beatitude” is a big word which in the Bible is rendered as “blessed,” and that simply means “happy.” It means that certain people enjoy a happiness that is the natural result of their faith and obedience; it can also mean that God in a supernatural way gives happiness to such people. He does not show respect of persons, favoring one person over another (James 2:1). Don’t let Satan discourage you with his suggestion that you are not one of God’s favored ones. You may feel that way, but that doesn’t mean that his suggestion is true.

Can you name who is the most depressed person in the Bible? Job sitting on his dung-heap scraping his sores with a potsherd? Or Jeremiah

weeping while he writes his Lamentations, or surely Elijah in his cave at Horeb, praying the Lord to let him die? But no, there's Another—Jesus Himself hanging on His cross in the darkness crying out, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” He is the Prince of depressed people.

If you are tempted by despair; everything has gone wrong, disappointments and misfortunes seem to shout in your ears that God has forgotten you, and to top it all you are keenly aware of your own sinfulness, please remember Jesus. It would not be fair for you at last to “sit down with [Him,] in [His] throne” (as He promises in Revelation 3:20) unless you have at least tasted a little what He went through. Some “fellowship with Him in His sufferings” (see Phil. 3:10) is a great blessing to you in the end.

All people except two (Enoch and Elijah) have died the first death—a “sleep.” Christ's death was different. It's bad enough to die “despised and rejected of men” (Isa. 53:3); but He had to die feeling despised and rejected of God (Matt. 27:46), a cumulative,

corporate, total death embracing all humanity, a divine-human consciousness of all the guilt of every person. That killed Him, “made to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21).

We cannot encompass it; all we can do is to be prayed for by the apostle Paul that we might “comprehend” it “with all saints” and not be left out (Eph. 3:14-19). When we meet Jesus face to face (as we shall, for certain) we don't want the embarrassment of not having wanted to “know Him,” to have evaded “fellowship with Him in His sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). To share with Paul what it means to be “crucified with Christ”—oh, that will be glory.

If we remember Jesus, we can see how depression is not necessarily sin, even if some well-meaning people rub that in to make your sufferings worse (Job had his three “friends,” remember).

Because of Christ's sacrifice, you must believe that the Lord loves you and has chosen you to be His child. That's what the “believing” in John 3:16 means. So, who are the “blessed” ones in the Bible? The

answer has to be: those who believe God's gracious good news. Their faith works, and that is why they obey, and the natural result is "blessedness."

There are well over 100 "beatitudes" in the Bible. But when Jesus came, He surprised the Jews of His day with "blessings" that seemed directly the opposite of their ideas: "blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are they that mourn," "Blessed are the meek," "Blessed are they who are hungry and thirsty," "Blessed are they which are persecuted," "Blessed are you when people revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely." Stunning! Those words awoke a class of people who had been educated to feel left out of the kingdom of God!

And so, after more than two millennia, Jesus Christ continues to upset our assumptions and contradict them. We think that those who are always smiling are the happy ones, the self-esteemed, the purpose-driven saints, the always-on-top Christians, like corks that can't sink.

Is something quiet and unobtrusive going on behind our backs—peopling the New Jerusalem with quiet, sober, even troubled people we haven't thought will get through?

Then Jesus drives the thorn in deeper: "Blessed [happy] are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (vs. 4). He even sounds like disappointment and pain and heartbreak are good experiences! How apparently backward can His thinking get?

He sounds like real lasting "comfort" can only follow being acquainted with grief first. The "mourning" He speaks of is not losing loved ones in death; it's heart-sorrow for the sin that the Holy Spirit has convicted us is buried deep in our hearts. As the "Son of David," Jesus reveled in the psalms of David, learning as we must learn. Obviously He had read 126:5, 6: "Those who wept as they planted their crops, gather[ed] the harvest with joy! Those who wept as they went out carrying the seed will come back singing

for joy as they bring in the harvest” (GNB). Could this have inspired His Beatitude?

Another of our popular assumptions He pricks like a balloon: “Blessed are the meek [not the “success-stories”]: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). The “meek” are those who always manage somehow to get trampled on, because they react to contingencies like the One who said He was “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29) and ended up on a cross.

If you follow Him you get so you can’t even exist another day unless you believe what He says. That’s how “the just shall live by His faith” (Hab. 2:4).

Throughout history there has been a terrible abuse of women. In some places in the world, wife-beating is common, and even in the Christian. In India, the tragic abuse of women is well-known. And let’s not be proud: in our Western culture county and state governments and churches have to open shelters for battered women.

Now, here comes Jesus Christ telling these battered women: you must learn to be meek, for “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). He says, “Come unto to Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, . . . I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28-30). And the apostle Peter admonishes women in particular in 1 Peter 3:1-6 to be meek, because God likes to see a woman “adorned” with “a meek and quiet spirit.”

And the women’s rights people around the world retort with anger—“That meekness is exactly what women don’t need! They have too much meekness already, that’s why they put up with all these beatings and cruelty!”

Now, here is a real problem: Does Jesus admonish women to become doormats? And is that the Apostle Peter’s idea? Does the Bible support this world-wide trampling of women’s rights?

The problem can be solved by properly defining the word “meekness.” Yes, Jesus was meek and lowly

in heart—but look at Him throwing out the money changers from the temple, overturning their tables and scattering their money all over the floor. And look at Him as the soldier slaps Him in the face before Caiaphas—He shot back these words: “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil. But if not, why smitest thou Me?” (John. 18:23).

And think of Moses, said to be the meekest man in all the earth (Num. 12:3): look at him demanding of the pagan Pharaoh, ruler of the earth, to “Let My people go!” True meekness is not being a flabby doormat, a masochist; it is selfless standing up for right principles, fearless of the consequences. And yes, the women of the world need that kind of meekness, a blessing “in Christ.”

To endure poverty that is thrust upon you unwanted is one thing; you grumble at your lot and wish you had more money. But to be content with poverty, actually to enjoy its discipline and privation, is another. And that immediately makes us think of Jesus—a hard-working peasant who in later life said

He had not where to lay His head. And He said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .” meaning, they are the truly happy people. Wealthy people are seldom happy people. It’s not poetic fancy but hard truth that “godliness with contentment is great gain.”

There are many homes where people who have very little of this world’s goods barely have the “food and raiment” wherewith to be “content,” but they have the sunshine of happiness in their homes.

There’s a beautiful hymn by Anna Waring that was in the old Hymnal, but it’s been left out of the new Hymnal, probably because its sentiment goes too much against the grain of modern American philosophy. She says:

“I have a heritage of joy  
That yet I must not see;  
The hand that bled to make it mine  
Is keeping it for me.  
There is a certainty of love  
That sets my heart at rest;  
A calm assurance for today,

That to be poor is best.”

Wow! Of course! Such an idea must never be promoted in the richest nation on earth! But it’s Bible teaching. No, not that abject, grinding, painful poverty is good—of course not; let’s be reasonable. “Food and raiment” are necessary; and the One who had not where to lay His head doesn’t want you be like that—He wants you to have a roof over your head, yes, that doesn’t leak, and a bed to sleep in. And He wants you to have the necessities of life which today probably mean a car and a refrigerator, yes. Folks elsewhere don’t have those things.

But the principle is the thing: “a person’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he/she possesseth” (Luke 12:15). “More abundant *life*” the Good News is not that Jesus merely offers it to you; He *gives* it to you. Receive it! Don’t resent it!

The Father of our Lord Jesus is pledged to “bless” the poor who appreciate His love. The Bible is full of encouragement for poor people: “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of

all his troubles” (Ps. 34:6). “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth. . . . The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing [there is no promise that you’ll never get sick, but there is the promise that the Lord will be your attending Physician and your special duty Nurse, for] Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness” (Ps. 41:1-3).

Are you poor? Be thankful for the special blessings the Lord has promised you, and rejoice. It may well be that the Lord is favoring you especially so that you will be that much more happy in the kingdom of heaven. The ticket for entrance is that list of “blessed” that Jesus enunciated in Matthew 5. You can be sure that if you can be truly happy in heaven, you will be admitted, for “whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). Now are you rich?

There is one Beatitude of Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount, in Matt. 5:4 that says, “Blessed [happy] are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

That's one of the sayings of Jesus that stuns people because it appears to be backwards from reality. But Jesus is always upsetting us like this—telling us things we don't want to hear, but which are stark truth.

There are two kinds of mourning here, and both bring “blessedness,” or happiness: (1) Mourning because of bereavement or loss of something precious to us. And (2) mourning because of a deeper, clearer view of our own sin, which of course means a deeper repentance. And both are things we don't like to talk about.

What kind of Good News is here?

When we mourn the loss of a loved one in death, or the loss of our own life, or a serious loss in business (a bankruptcy) or family relationships (a divorce, for example), how does that relate to genuine happiness?

There's an answer: it establishes for us a point of contact with Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, the Son of God. John 11:35 says that Jesus actually cried at a funeral, in sympathy with a world that grieves continually. If your so-called “happiness” is mere fun

and games and shopping and reveling in superficial pleasure, you have never wept in sympathy with those who suffer everywhere, and you are not happy even if you're cracking jokes all the time or watching comedies with mechanical laughter dubbed in. You are masking reality, and in the deepest unconscious layer of your soul you are sick.

Loneliness is looked upon as a curse, but it is your opportunity to get acquainted with the Man who was “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). I am not ashamed to say it: that is a rare and precious privilege.

Like everybody else in the world, you and I have to eat food every day in order to survive physically. It takes time to do this, and also some effort to dig the food from the ground or pick it from vines or trees. No one has successfully made a pill or capsule to take, in place of eating food itself.

Likewise, our souls need spiritual food if we are to survive spiritually. Jesus said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they

shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). A good appetite is a marvelous “blessing,” to be able to feel hungry and thirsty-ah, what delight, to sit down then to a good square meal!

But a sick person feels no such appetite. For example, a person suffering from severe hepatitis, ordinarily would enjoy delicious mashed potatoes and gravy. But the ailing one tastes something like sawdust with engine oil poured on them. That person has to be healed before he can enjoy food again.

If you are not hungry for spiritual food from the Bible itself, if you prefer reading light religious novels, you are feasting on cotton candy instead of whole-wheat bread. And spiritual weakness or even paralysis will be the sure result.

If you do feel hungry, rejoice; come and eat. If you are sensitive enough and honest enough to realize that you don’t have an appetite, that you are actually starving spiritually, then here’s what you must do: get on your knees, humble your heart before the God of heaven, and beg Him to give you an appetite. Be

sincere and straight-forward enough to let Him do it—turn off your TV and radio and CD’s, and stay on your knees and “listen” for His “voice.” Get serious.

If Jesus were to invite you to dinner and set an empty plate before you with a knife and fork, say “Thank You!” immediately. Likewise, even though your Bible seems as dull and unpromising as an empty plate at dinner time, tell the Lord “Thank You,” and believe that He is faithful to keep His promise and give you some delicious “bread of life.” He Himself, not I, has promised He will not give you a stone! (Matt. 7:7-11).

Another beatitude worth meditating upon are the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Can we find some good news in these words?

If you *are* “pure in heart,” that of course is good news. But how many people have seen God? John 1:18 says, “No man hath seen God at any time.” So, how many people really are “pure in heart”? Romans 3:10 says, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” Saul

of Tarsus thought he was until he discovered the tenth commandment which says, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife,” and he realized that the deepest thoughts, emotions, feelings, of his heart were *not* pure. Hebrews 12:29 says that “our God is a consuming fire.” It would be very bad news for anyone with an impure heart to see God!

We may imagine that our hearts are pure when in fact they are not, because Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Perhaps this discloses the real reason why Jesus has not yet returned in the clouds of heaven. When people see Him come if they are not ready, it will be disaster for them, because “when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” it will be “in flaming fire” (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Only the “pure in heart” can “dwell with the devouring fire” when “the sinners in Zion are afraid, [and] fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites” (Isa. 33:14). His coming is bad news for the impure in heart!

So, where’s the good news? Here it is, in Psalm 51:7-13, the prayer of an adulterer and murderer crying out for salvation: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. . . . Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.” “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32). Cry out for true cleansing of heart! If you are serious, and not a hypocrite, the Lord *will* cleanse your deep, inner heart.

Peacemaker. “Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9). There is one thing that all of us do every day, whether we are young or old—we talk to other people. Maybe members of our families, or neighbors, or just meeting people at the post office or the market, or at school.

Here’s a word for us today. It’s in Colossians 4:6: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.”

Paul says, “*Let* your speech, your words, be full of grace.” In other words, if you let the Holy Spirit direct you, your spirit will always be gracious. And if your spirit, your inner feeling, is gracious, then for sure your words will be gracious. Grace in our words is like a little salt in insipid food.

We don’t have to be sharp and sandpaper in our words. Why should we wound people? Everyone has enough trouble, why should we add to people’s burdens by speaking tartly, bitterly?

Please remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is a Savior—not only when we die, but now day by day, He will save us from bad habits that we have formed. You can become known as someone whose words are always pleasant to hear, uplifting. You can become known as someone whose words are always pleasant to hear, uplifting. You can be a peacemaker, spiritual nurse or doctor bringing healing to people who are wounded spiritually. The Lord has promised to teach you and make you such a person if you will *let* Him do so.

Here’s another Beatitude which goes contrary to our human nature. It’s what Jesus said, “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake; rejoice and be exceeding glad” (Matt. 5:11, 12).

It seems to me that this must be the most difficult “exam” a follower of Jesus can have—can you actually *rejoice* when you are reviled falsely? I think for all of us, by nature our pressure valve blows before we get to that place. Now, a fanatic whose understanding is veneer-thin may wallow in attracting to himself the disgust of reasonable people and “rejoice” that he is a “martyr,” but I am not referring to that. I mean, can you be patient and smile when Christian people falsely accuse you of being a servant of the devil? Maybe you’ve never had that experience. Don’t kid yourself; if you hang on until the end of the world when “the mark of the beast” is finally enforced, you’ll find yourself in that situation. And it will be a supreme test of your patience. Jesus said, “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:19).

That “patience” is the heart of the Third Angel’s Message of Rev. 14:6-12, where we read in vs. 12, “Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” That last phrase is the key: realize that you are “in Christ.” The insults and reviling are not directed at *you*, but at *Him*. And to realize that you are privileged to share His suffering, that is reason enough, and the only reason, why you can and will *rejoice*, beginning today. Yes, that’s good news, and you can begin to enjoy it today.

I cannot prescribe medication. I can only tell someone good news. I cannot tell someone who is “without strength” (Rom 5:6) to “do something.” That phrase “without strength” means what it says; that’s our condition, we can’t do anything to save ourselves or get ourselves out of depression. A program of salvation by works is therefore useless.

What I can do is to tell someone something to “believe.” Which is—that “Christ died for the ungodly.” It is on His cross that He identifies fully with you.

There, He suffered the ultimate in depression. And He wasn’t allowed the luxury of lying in the fetal position. The darkness that enveloped the cross was God’s merciful veiling of His facial agony from the mockery and ridicule of human devils. But the darkness also enveloped His soul. He was terrified of the second death that He faced. He was within a millimeter of coming “unglued.” The cable that bound Him to sanity was only of a hair’s breadth. But through that cable of a hair’s breadth there flowed a millivolt of faith: “Why have You forsaken Me?” was His despairing cry, but He did ask the question. And He waited in the darkness for the answer. He did not curse God, which Job’s wife told him to do. And don’t you do it!

Jesus doesn’t tell us to *do* what He *did*; He only tells us to *believe* what He *did*, that is, to appreciate it. And what did He do? He built a bridge in that total darkness of despair, a bridge over the chasm of human lostness, a bridge which we call “the atonement.” The Father did not reconcile the Son to Himself; the Son reconciled Himself to the Father.

If the Father wills to “forsake” Him (the Son), then the Son will choose to will not to forsake His Father. “You can forsake Me,” cries Christ, “but I will not forsake You!” In the total darkness of being “made sin” itself, suffering the ultimate hell of God-forsakenness (2 Cor. 5:21), being “made” you, bearing the total weight of your sin, your guilt, your selfishness, your despair, your hell, all that you and I deserve,—in all this horror He chooses to believe a morsel of good news. That millivolt of faith triumphed: “He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid His face from Him; but when he cried unto Him, He heard” (Ps. 22:21-24). He chose to believe without an iota of subjective evidence to verify it. Thus “*agape* never faileth” (1 Cor. 13:8).