

# Blessings and Woes (Part 2)

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>20</sup> And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. <sup>21</sup> “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. <sup>22</sup> “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! <sup>23</sup> Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

<sup>24</sup> “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. <sup>25</sup> “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. <sup>26</sup> “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:20–26)

### The Physical Sense

A. I made the case last time that, while these ideas (poverty, hunger, weeping, persecution) certainly have a spiritual sense to them at the deepest level, Luke particularly draws our attention here to their physical sense.

1. “Blessed are you who are poor” (v. 20). Not “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3), but “poor”.

B. However uncomfortable this may make us, he refuses to let us wiggle free from the physicality of our discipleship on these points. There is some sort of counterintuitive blessing to be found in them, though it may sound crazy to us at first.

### Should We Be Pursuing these Things?

A. The question, therefore, that I want to ask here at the beginning (as a way of setting us up for the rest of this sermon) is: If Jesus is pronouncing blessing upon such things as poverty, hunger, weeping, and persecution, does this mean we should be pursuing them—even in their physical sense?

1. As a disciple of Christ, am I supposed to be aiming for poverty—getting my shelter from a cardboard box, my insurance from Medi-Cal, and my food from a soup kitchen? When I’m begging for change, is that when I’ve finally made it as a Christian? Is that what Jesus is saying?

B. I don’t think so. I don’t have time to give you my reasons here, but I think, at least, what we ought to be able to say with regard to these blessings and woes, is that, because we have Jesus, neither side matters all that much to us anymore.

1. I’m not living my life in desperate pursuit of what Jesus woes—riches, a full belly, laughter, applause.

2. Nor am I living my life desperately trying to avoid what Jesus here blesses. I'm not afraid of poverty, or hunger, or sorrow, or rejection.
  - a. Indeed, we must admit that, if we are following hard after Christ, our lives will trend towards these things.
- C. But it doesn't matter all that much to us anymore. We are wonderfully free, unattached from the things of this world, because we are attached to the person of Christ.
  1. I'm reminded of Paul's magnificent statement in Phil 4:11-13: "<sup>11</sup> I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. <sup>12</sup> I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
    - a. He is what matters. Give me riches, give me poverty—I don't care! Just make sure you give me Christ!

## A Clash of Gospels

- A. Now, if this is the case, I want to spend the rest of our time here asking two basic questions:
  1. First: Why are we so afraid of what Jesus blesses? Or, to put it another way: Why are we so prone to pursue what Jesus woes?
    - a. Taking the first blessing and woe together as an example: What does poverty threaten to take away? What do riches promise to give us? What's the false gospel in play here?
  2. And then secondly: How is Jesus so much better? How does the true gospel give us what we are after—only in a fuller and lasting way?
- B. There's a clash of gospels going on in these blessings and woes.
  1. And I want to take each blessing with its corresponding woe and reflect on this with you.

## (1) Poor vs. Rich (vv. 20, 24)

- "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (v. 20).
- "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation" (v. 24).

## A False Gospel

- A. If Jesus blesses poverty in some way here, why are we so afraid of it? And if Jesus warns us against riches, why are we so tempted to live our lives in pursuit of them? Why do we make such a big deal about money? What does it promise us?
- B. The first thing that came to my mind is security. Money promises us security.

1. That's why we even use phrases like: "I'm financially secure." Everything is going to be alright now. I've got money.
    - a. If we run out of food, we can just head on down to the store and buy more. If the car breaks down, we can just buy a new one. If the doc finds a tumor in my body, we'll pay to have it cut out. We're secure.
- C. But beyond security, and moving now in the positive direction, money promises access.
1. The right amount of money can get you through almost any door the world has to offer. If I want it, I can go get it.
    - a. Think about it husbands/wives: There would be no need to talk with your spouse about the budget and work out some sort of a compromise so he can go on that trip with the boys or so she can buy that all-natural, organic face cream that costs more than a condo in Cupertino. "We have plenty of money. If you want it, get it."
- D. I suppose what money promises us is encapsulated in that word there in [v. 24](#): "consolation" [or "comfort"].
1. Money promises us comfort, in the sense of securing us from what we fear and giving us access to what we crave.
- E. But it's a false gospel and it will fail us in the end.
1. And we feel this even while we have it. This is why the rich are never quite rich enough. They always feel the precarious, fragile, unstable nature of it all.
    - a. They feel what Jesus identifies in [Matt 6:19](#), that treasure on this earth is never a sure thing: moth and rust can destroy it; thieves can break in and steal it. So what promised security and access leaves us anxious and chained.
- F. How did this work out for Judas? How did he feel when he finally got those thirty pieces of silver in his hand? Was he secure? Was he free? "This is it? I traded Christ for this? I've been duped by the devil!"
1. So he puts a noose around his neck and calls it quits. It's a false gospel.

## The True Gospel

- A. Jesus, on the other hand is going to say: "Let it go. Let money go! I'll give you so much more than consolation now. I'll give you 'the kingdom of God' now and forever."
- B. We might think of that wonderful section in [Matt 6:25-33](#) where Jesus tells His disciples to look at the birds and how His Father feeds them; to look at the fields and how His Father clothes them; and He comes out in [vv. 31-33](#) and says: "<sup>31</sup>Therefore do not be anxious . . . <sup>32</sup>For . . . your heavenly Father knows [what] you need . . . <sup>33</sup>But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

- C. Or we might think of Jesus' words in Luke 12:32-33: " <sup>32</sup>Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup>Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys."
- D. There's your security! There's your access! We're not afraid of poverty, we have God. We are free to give everything in love for neighbor because He is our Father and our Shepherd, and His kingdom is ours.

## (2) Hungry vs. Full (vv. 21a, 25a)

- "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied" (v. 21a).
- "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry" (v. 25a).

### A False Gospel

- A. Why do we avoid hunger and pursue fullness now? What does food promise to give us?
- B. I think it promises a sense of immediate satisfaction.
  - 1. This is why people are drawn to food or drink on a bad day. "I can't change the circumstances in my marriage, or at my job, or with my health, at least not immediately, but I can immediately eat and drink and feel a little better—feel a sense of pleasure...now."
- C. I got a little taste of this (no pun intended), last week. It was my birthday we went out to the Cheesecake Factory. After my burger, I didn't even want cheesecake, but Chloe talked me into it. So we all shared a slice of the chocolate mousse. It was amazing. It was rich. We couldn't even finish it so we packed it up to go.
  - 1. And do you want to know what I did later that night when no one else was looking? I walked quietly into the kitchen, opened up the fridge, and I ate it all. "Ya I know we were splitting it, but it's my birthday, I want it, it's mine."
    - a. But I started to feel a little bad as I was getting to the last bite, so I did what any good husband and father would do. I left the last bite in the container and put it back in the fridge. I saved some for them, right?
      - i. Not exactly. I pretty much ate it all, at their expense. Why? Pleasure. Immediate gratification.
- D. Now this is kind of funny, but truly it's a window into something much more profound. In many ways, the way we handle food is a parable of the way we handle life in general.
  - 1. So what does that little bite I left in the fridge to be split three ways by my wife and daughters say? It says: "Daddy is willing to put his appetites, his desires before you. He's willing to devour others to get what he wants."

- E. But it's a false gospel. Do you think I was satisfied after binging like that? Yes and no, right? There's always something underneath saying: "This isn't it." I had a full belly, but I also had indigestion.
- F. How did this work out for Esau? He traded His inheritance for a bowl of soup. "Just give me some of that stew. I'm hungry now!" ([Gen 25:30](#)).
  - 1. He got the meal, the full belly, but he traded everything to get it ([Heb 12:17](#)).

## The True Gospel

- A. But, when we surrender our appetites to Christ, we find ourselves strangely satisfied. He talks about having food to eat that we don't know about ([John 4:32](#)), and He starts to give some of that to us. He fills us as with His Spirit and with the fullness of His fellowship.
  - 1. So we can forego our appetites now in love for others. And sometimes we just fast because we want Jesus more than we want food.
- B. And in the end, church, we will be more satisfied than we could ever dream: "[To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God](#)" ([Rev 2:7](#)).

## (3) Weeping vs. Laughing (vv. 21b, 25b)

- "[Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh](#)" (v. 21b).
- "[Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep](#)" (v. 25b).

## A False Gospel

- A. Our culture loves to laugh and hates to cry. That's why we put our comedians up on stage and our corpses in the ground, so to speak.
  - 1. We try to so distract ourselves with laughter so that we don't have time to really sit and think about how broken this life really is, how broken we really are.
- B. Culture among men can be especially superficial in this way. Guys will go with you to the office and talk about work, they'll go with you to the game and talk about sports, they'll go with you to the bar and talk about girls, but when it comes to the matters of the heart—the stuff underneath the surface that's broken in us—no man wants to talk about that!
  - 1. "Don't get all soft on me. Men don't weep. Little boys weep. The only liquid that should come down from a man's face is sweat. No tears here."
- C. Laughter seems to indicate a person is on top, a person is in control, a person has it all together. Weeping indicates the opposite.
- D. But doesn't all our laughter in this way feel thin? It's a false gospel that lets us down in the end.

1. That's what drives us crazy when men like Chris Farley or Robin Williams kill themselves. These are the funny guys?! These are the laughing guys?! You mean underneath all the smiles and jokes, they're broken and depressed and scared and lost? Yes. Just like us.

## The True Gospel

- A. Jesus, on the other hand, blesses those who weep because they see life as it really is. They see themselves as they really are. "This place is broken. I'm broken. We have sinned against a holy God and hell is the destination of all men if He doesn't intervene in grace."
  1. That's heavy. That's a party-killer. But it's the truth.
- B. And, though the gospel message is hard on our flesh, truly it is an invitation to a party the likes of which Hollywood can't even imagine.
  1. Enough with the silly, superficial, thin, one-night stand laughter that leaves you hungover in the morning. God has so much more for us! "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4).

## (4) Rejected vs. Accepted (vv. 22-23, 26)

- " <sup>22</sup> Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! <sup>23</sup> Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets" (vv. 22-23).
- "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets" (v. 26).

## A False Gospel

- A. Anybody else want everyone to speak well of you? Anybody else afraid of rejection? What does the acceptance of people promise us?
- B. Is it not a sense of identity?
- C. Have you ever noticed how the way that other people see you starts to become the way you see yourself?
  1. Have you ever had someone come up to you: "Man, you look so tired." And you're like, wait, I actually got a full night's sleep. And from then on, whenever you look in the mirror, all you can see are these huge, sagging shadows under your eyes.
    - a. Their words about you shaped your sense of identity.
  2. And it works the other way too right? Like the other night, at Nob Hill. I got one of the sweetest compliments I've ever received. The dude at the checkout told me I look like Jason Bourne. I was like, "Man, I'm going to have to disagree, but that's still awesome. You think I look like an international spy who can scale buildings with nothing but his hands and race

motorcycles upwards of 150 mph.” Needless to say, I had a little extra pep in my step after that.

- D. But don't you see? You get a little taste of people's praise and it feels so good you start to crave it. You come alive when you get it and die when you don't. You'd do anything to be well spoken of—you'd even deny your Lord.
- E. But something about man's praise feels fickle, doesn't it? Something feels false.
  - 1. This is why, I imagine, those celebrities that are getting older start resorting to plastic surgery to keep their bodies from aging and changing. “If I'm not as beautiful as I once was, the people won't love me anymore!”
    - a. Their praise is fickle. And your identity built upon it is fragile.

## The True Gospel

- A. Do you remember the Father's declaration over the Son at His baptism? “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22).
  - 1. I wonder if you realize, brothers and sisters, that this declaration becomes ours when we are baptized into Christ—that God now sees you through the lens of His Son.
    - a. All your sins and stains washed clean at the cross, and your identity in Him is now as stable as His resurrection body. His banner over you now and forever is love (Song 2:4).
- B. And when you know His banner over you is love, you don't care so much when all the world comes at you with hate.
  - 1. O that we would be like Stephen. The fury of his kinsmen didn't cause him to stutter for one moment. Why?
    - a. Because up above the hatred of these people, the heavens were opened and he saw his Father and his Advocate, and he know, even as they were stoning him, it is well with my soul!

## Conclusion

### Come Down off the Ledge

- A. The way I've been reading this text it's as if Jesus is trying to talk us down off the ledge.
  - 1. We look out at the things of this world—at their big houses, their big meals, their big parties, their big crowds of fans and friends—and we think: “Yes!”
- B. But it's a false gospel. And Jesus is coming to us in this text and saying: “No child. You don't see it now but, if you take that step, there's nothing underneath you but air and, 100 stories down,

concrete. It's suicide. You end up dead on the bottom with Judas, or Esau, or all the false prophets with all their false gospels.”

- C. I don't know what ledge you've been standing on lately. But I'm begging you along with Christ: Come down off it. Turn away from the things of this world and turn back to Him. There is salvation in no one else!