

Jeremiah 17:5-10

5 Thus says the Lord: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the Lord.

6 They shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see when relief comes.
They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

7 Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.

8 They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

9 The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it?

10 I the Lord test the mind and search the heart,
to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

Luke 6:17-26

17 [Jesus] came down with [the twelve] and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. 18 They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. 19 And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 “Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

22 “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

24 “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

25 “Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Luke 6:17-26

Well, does today's text make you feel uncomfortable? It sure makes me feel uncomfortable... because I am among the richest of the world's people, I am full, I do laugh, people do speak well of me, at least I think they do.... So where does that leave me, and where does that leave you if you also fit in with this?

Why do I think I'm rich? I have more income than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the world's people. My trip to Zimbabwe only confirmed what I already knew: that I have more material possessions than it takes to live a full life. I had seen pictures of poor people, people who had to search for water, but until I went to Zimbabwe and saw people who had to walk two hours one way to get water for just one day, I did not realize what it meant. I had seen pictures of people living in mud huts with grass roofs, but until I entered a mud-floored, mud brick home, I had no idea what it felt like to be present in one, to consider it as a living space. I knew what it was like to cook over an open fire, but actually having to have an outdoor kitchen for everyday life? That was beyond my comprehension. What about joyfully dancing down to the offering plate to give my offering? That was way beyond my comprehension.

But what if that isn't what Jesus meant when he said, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation?" What if he meant, woe to you who think you have all you need so that you don't believe you need God in your life? Now that puts a completely different outlook to the phrase. Because if I think I'm so full of everything that I need that I don't need God, where am I? Lost. In the blessed section, the one where the rich are contrasted with the poor, Jesus tells his disciples, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." If we realize that without Jesus, without the Holy Spirit, without the presence of God the Father, we have nothing, then we are blessed.

Let's go back to the money thing though... because if we who are monetarily rich do not share what we have then we are keeping others from what they need. When we put food in our little pantry we are sharing our wealth. When we give to the food bank we are sharing our wealth. When we put money in the super bowl soup pot today, we are sharing our wealth. When we put our offering in the offering plate we are sharing our wealth all around the world as part of our offering goes to global causes. However if we do this just because we can, just because we have the ability to do so out of our own goodness we are missing the point. When we share our wealth we need to realize we do so because we know the love of Jesus and it is that love that motivates us to action.

Then Jesus said, "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry." How many of us know what it's like to be hungry? Not because we're dieting or doing a self-imposed fast, but really hungry, so hungry that our belly is bloated? Jesus tells us in the contrasting blessed verse above that those who are hungry will be filled. Ok, again, we know we need to share our resources. Yet, what if this again is about the word of God?

What if we think we don't need to read and study the Bible because we have all the information we need to live a good life? If we know everything we need to know why should we study? Because there is so much more in the Bible than what is touched on in church. Think about an iceberg. About 1 tenth of a iceberg is visible above the water, 90% is unseen. What you get in church is the tip of the iceberg. When you're hungry for the rest of God's word you want to get into the Bible as much as you can, going as deeply as you can into understanding

God's word. That is when you get fed. Here you receive a bit of milk toast, digging deep you get into the steak. If you're afraid that you'll misunderstand and get the wrong idea from the scriptures, there are plenty of resource books available in the church library to keep you on the right track. And you can always bounce your ideas off me, we can do some research together. I had a professor tell the class to always be hungry, always be searching for more, never be satisfied. That's what God wants... God wants to be the center of your focus.

Then Jesus says, "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep." Since I totally believe that God has a sense of humor I don't think this means we aren't allowed to laugh. So, where is our laughter directed? Are we one of those who are laughing because we think we are on the top, looking down at those who we see as beneath us? I like to read murder mystery novels, and it seems as though in every one of them that the plot centers around the murderer who is one step beyond the detectives trying to solve the murder. While the murderer laughs at their ineptitude. That's taking it to the extreme, but I think this may be where the laughter woe is directed... to those who are laughing because they believe they are better than someone else. If that person who believes they are better than someone else because they believe religion is an opiate for the poor, or some idiotic superstition that they are above needing, then woe to them.

The opposite of this is the "Blessed are those of you who weep now, for you will laugh." Those who know that they need Jesus in their lives are far more blessed than those who don't believe. I would far rather believe I need Jesus now so that when I die and face him on judgement day I already know him. If it should happen that what I believe now is false, what have I lost? Nothing. But if I choose to ignore Jesus now and find that I need him on judgement day, where does that leave me? Weeping.

OK, so that leaves us with the last woe... "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to false prophets." The false prophets told the people what they wanted to hear. They spoke to ease the spirits of those who were in control. They didn't listen to what God was saying when God warned them of impending doom. And so they were well spoke of in their circles. The opposite of this is where Jesus said, "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man."

So very often we leave off the last phrase, "on account of the Son of Man." That is the important part of this phrase. When a person who has searched God's word has found a truth that needs to be exposed, many times they are reviled, spoken ill of, even hated because their truth isn't what the majority of the people want to hear. People don't like to be shaken out of their comfort zone. They don't like to have what they hold as truth being challenged. Even if it is a message from God. They laugh, they ridicule, they disbelieve. And in the end they weep.

So, search God's word for what is true, look to God to find the true power, the healing power that comes through believing that Jesus is God's son who came to give forgiveness and show us the way to God. Draw close to God and seek his food. Laugh with the joy of the Lord. Speak God's truth. And through all of this remember to be kind, be kind, be kind.

All glory be to God.