

Luke 6:20-31

How many of you have heard this passage a zillion times? Well, maybe a zillion is exaggerating, but so many times that you don't really hear it anymore? Blessed are you... who are poor, who are hungry, who weep, when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you *on account of the Son of Man*. You are the one who will receive the blessings. Now by blessings Jesus does not mean that you're going to receive material things. So many of us have got that wrong. Sure, we feel blessed when we have all that we need because everything we have comes from God, but there's a thin line between the gospel and the prosperity gospel. We have truly been born into privilege. God placed us where we are.

Back in the mid-70's I was living on less than \$7,000.00 a year, which was below poverty level then, even though I went to work 8 hours every day. Even when we don't believe we have what we need we have more than the rest of the world. If your yearly income in 2025 is \$7000.00 you are wealthier than 68% of the rest of the world. That is God-given privilege whether we want to think so or not.

So, if you're still listening to me, let's explore what the blessings are that Jesus is promising in this passage. Are these words to be taken literally? If you are poor, you have a place in heaven. If you are hungry, you will have food. If you are weeping, you will be happy. If you stand in your faith when you are ridiculed, you will be rewarded greatly in heaven.

However, Luke doesn't stop with blessings. Luke goes on to describe the woes that Jesus spoke about. And to those of us who live in America, these are pretty hard to hear. Woe to you who are rich, who are full now, who are laughing now, when all speak well of you. How many of us does that describe? We are rich compared to most of the world, and we definitely have more than some in our church community. Very few of us have to miss a meal because we don't have food in our home. Most of us like to laugh... I try to include humor in my sermons. And for the most part people speak well of each one of us. Where does this leave us? Is Jesus telling us that since we have had these experiences in life we have had all we deserve for eternity?

Is this what Jesus is saying to us? Well, I can't believe that is completely true. Scripture tells us that Jesus ate at banquets, and that Jesus laughed. Jesus isn't against enjoying life. Jesus is pronouncing woe upon those of us who may confuse the material blessings of life with the eternal blessings of God. When we put all our trust in our material goods what do we have left when they are taken away by a natural disaster? What do we have when our health fails? We have God.

Truthfully most of us have never been so hungry that we didn't know where our next meal was coming from (although I'm not doubting some of you have). If we had to spend our waking hours searching for food, we would not likely take notice of what is lacking spiritually. However, when we take our food for granted, we notice our spiritual troubles and hungers.

As for laughing, there will come a time for everyone when the laughter turns to mourning. We all face sorrows of one kind or another. On this All Saints' Day we recognize the mourning we have faced, the loss of loved ones. And we acknowledge that God is greater than our sorrow. God wipes away the tears with the promise of salvation. Mark 16:16 tells us that the one who believes and is baptized will be saved. It

is those whom believe they are invincible, that everything in life comes from what they have done all by themselves, who will be mourning for eternity.

What Jesus is doing here in Luke's beatitudes with his blessings and woes is showing us the difference between God's ways and the ways of the world. He's warning us to reject the way that leads to darkness and follow the path that leads to eternal light. He's showing us that when we believe the material things, the beauty of the world, the carnal pleasures are what we live for we will end up spending eternity, if not the rest of our earthly life when the money runs out, with none of those and plenty of woe. Those who realize that the true blessing comes only from putting Jesus first are the ones who are truly blessed.

Jesus goes on to say that if you are still listening, he's got some even harder tasks for you to follow. Tasks like loving your enemy. In today's situation we are being led to believe that our enemy is the one who drains the resources from our society. Jesus says to love them. Jesus says do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. I can't say who it is that hates, curses, or mistreats you however Jesus is saying to treat them with dignity, respect, and kindness. Not always an easy thing for us to hear or do when someone is plotting against us, or we feel as though we have been wronged. The same goes for not hitting back when someone hits you.

I think we find it easy to give to someone in need. The expression "They'd give you the shirt off their back," can be said about a lot of good people. But when someone asks for your coat, Jesus says to give them your shirt too. It's a spirit of generosity that we sometimes lose because we don't think the person is worthy of more than what we're "graciously" giving them. We've worked hard for what we have, shouldn't the other person be expected to do the same? Here Jesus is telling us to give to everyone who asks of you. Wow! That's a way to be taken advantage of for sure! He goes on to say if someone takes something that is yours don't ask for it back. Is he serious?

Jesus is reinforcing that we are to joyfully share what we have. It doesn't mean that we are not to call people to accountability. But when we see someone in desperate need we are to help. It brings to mind a story I once read about a prestigious man in old London, England. While walking near the Thames River one night he heard a splash and a woman cries for help. His first instinct was to help her. But then he began to second guess himself. What if she pulled him under? What was a woman doing walking alone at this time of night? What if he managed to save her only to find that she was a prostitute or another man's wife and the news reported their names linked together in the same sentence? What kind of notoriety would that bring him? Would it stain his character? As he pondered these thoughts he realized that he no longer heard the splashing in the water or the woman's cries for help. She had died. As he continued to walk on he questioned whether he should have helped her.

What about you? Are you willing to help someone drowning in need? That doesn't mean to hand them money, but to donate to agencies who can do a better job of helping. Or to carry a "blessing bag" in your car filled with a bottle of water, crackers, candy, a pouch of tuna, peanut butter crackers, and granola bars to hand to the person who is standing on the corner with a sign. Even more so, it means to work to change systems that keep people in poverty. We do this because we are people who follow Jesus. All glory be to God.