

“Blessed” Luke 6:20-26

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Luke 6:20 -26 *Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor,*

For yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. 22 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers 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, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

The New Testament scholar Leon Morris once remarked, “*Jesus promised His followers that they would be absurdly happy; but also that they would never be out of trouble*” (Luke [IVP/Eerdmans, p. 127). We members of the human race seem to consistently struggle with quality of life issues...and those of the faith community are seldom exempt. The battle between the here and the *hereafter*...the present and the eternal. We tend to spend our existence trying to suck the very essence and vitality out of the marrow of this earthly life while still desiring to spend eternity in the heavenly realm once our time here comes to an end. We want both. It's the ‘brass ring.’

Jesus begins what is quite possibly His most well-known address ...what we call “The Beatitudes.” He speaks in this passage about the ‘lifestyle’ of one who would be blessed, and He pronounces “woe”...a “great sorrow and distress” upon those who would choose a life in the ‘fastlane’ of secularism. Such a concept is hardly a minor or passing issue with Christ. It is a common and emphatic theme throughout the gospels if not the whole of the New Testament. But seldom is the concept discussed and/or taught, and even less often is it actually embraced and practiced.

Jesus said things such as, “*the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*” (Matthew 8:20), and “*those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last*” (Matthew 20:16, NLT), and “*I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God*” (Matthew 19:24). He said to one man “*You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me*” and said also...speaking of material issues, “*These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs*” (Matthew 6:32, NLT). Jesus tells us here that a certain form of living will cause us to be “blessed.” We then toss the word around as Christian ease and use it like we actually know what it means, *but do we?*

First of all, the language presented herein by Jesus begins with “blessed are *you* poor”...not “blessed are *the* poor.” There is nothing inherently Godly or spiritual about being poor. It can cause struggle, time-consumption and distraction in effort to merely *survive*. But on the other hand, we clearly gather that being rich in this world is not something we should seek to attain either. It wasn't that the people were blessed because they were poor but rather it was the poor people herein that were blessed. They were blessed not because they were *poor* but because they were *there*. They were blessed because apparently their priorities were different than those who sought riches and worldly comforts. They were blessed because they were “seeking first the kingdom of God.”

These folks were seeking to be close to Jesus and seeking to be healed. They were in *need* and they knew it. The rich seldom feel they are in need or that they are lacking. This is no doubt why we get a slightly different vernacular in Matthews's version while still receiving the same clarity: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matt 5:3) The opposite of being "poor in spirit" is having a spirit that is full of self. MY interests...MY desires...and MY pursuits.

Notice the promise for those whose hearts are focused rather on Him and kingdom pursuits. It says that the “kingdom of God” is theirs. Not “*will be*” theirs, but *IS* theirs...in the present tense! This is not just a matter of choice to live now or live later. It is rather to live now AND later, or live now...*at least attempt to do so on your own with obvious mixed results*, and NOT later!

Blessed are those who *hunger*. Again, if this statement is meant purely as an affirmation of those who don't have anything to eat...those who don't have food to sustain themselves, then it would certainly seem to be cruel and unfeeling. Such would alter the very nature of Christianity...moving from a positive life motivated by heart and passion into a physical lifestyle of ascetics and self-denial. This was the life of much of the Gnostic sects of the first and second century, where one would reject all of the physical in pursuit of the spiritual and intellectual. The practical side of this thinking presented itself in abject poverty, homelessness, joblessness, health issues, and even nakedness in attempt to reject and refuse all of the needs of the flesh. There are Hindu priests who practice this form of Gnostic lifestyle even today.

First, we can certainly gather in the light of the context in which Jesus was speaking, that this “hunger” in which he speaks is primarily a “hunger” for righteousness, as he says in the Matthew version. Jesus said there that for those who so ‘hunger’, that they “*shall be filled.*” Jesus was affectively drawing a distinction between those who exist in a tacit religious mandate or constraint to “do” or “be” in order to achieve some church stance or position, and those who humbly and openly “hunger” to be like Christ and to please Him...those who are motivated to “turn the world upside down” because they are compelled by love and gospel understanding. Such a spiritual picture is further supported in John 6:35 where Jesus said "*I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.*"

I don't think Jesus was saying that if I follow Him with my life that I will never need to eat food again! Can such a passionate priority and a seeking affect one physically? Can it take away physical comforts and push us away from steak and lobster, toward a “raman noodle” life? Oh yes! It would be quite simply a lie to intimate that following Jesus will not cost you on the physical, the financial and the relational aspects! Paul certainly knew it! In 1Corinthians 4:11 he said “*To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.*” And then again in 2Corinthians 11:27 ... “*in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—.*” He wasn't a ‘top shelf

Christian' because he lived in such a manner, but rather there were times he lived in such a manner because his priorities were Christ and kingdom first.

The point to what Jesus was teaching was not lifestyle directions, but heart directions. Our lifestyles as disciples of Christ come quite naturally out of our passions. Heart changes behavior, but instruction and discipline alone rarely changes our hearts. Especially as adults. Such does not mean we fail to discipline our children or teach them a lifestyle of discipline, as children are being formed and good habits need to be part of the training. But rarely does an adult respond in the same manner.

What was unsettling about what Jesus was therefore saying was that following Him would seldom bring worldly riches and comfort. In fact, if Jesus was the focused priority, one's comforts and possessions will likely suffer because of it. We cannot "serve two masters." As the old saying goes.... "if you have two dogs, the one who gets fed the most will get the biggest and be the strongest."

"Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh." Along with the physical ramifications of a Christ centered life, there will be heartbreak. People will hurt you because of your Christ affiliations. People we care about deeply will not follow you and will instead seek fulfillment in this world, and...like untold millions who have passed through time, they will find only emptiness and pain in their efforts. Thus we are bound to shed some tears for those who experience pain because of their decisions.

As children of God, our eyes have been opened a great deal and we see the world in a brighter light. We see the bitterness, the anger, the sadness and angst that is created when the world practices 'bait and switch'... promising people reward and pleasure and ultimately taking from them until they are left empty and without purpose. The practice of Christ style love will often be rejected by those around us, desiring only support and affirmation. When we cannot give it, there will be even more rejection and thus more tears. Jesus promises however that laughter..*deep joy*, will follow. As I often instruct the ministry community, the life of faithful following seems to cut away the 'middle' of our lives. There is great joy and great heartbreak. Greater trials and testing, and the more wonderful victories. The 'valley experiences' and the "mountain top views.'

Jesus understood this aspect of living for Kingdom! He goes on to tell us that *"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake."* Such is not a pleasant experience in our humanity. No one likes to be so reviled. In this, many of us cannot bear and we attempt compromise and acquiescence. We fall to the mantra of the false church as they cry out "just love everyone!" Such sounds wonderful, but we fail to grasp that what we think that means, they mean something very different. They mean we should look the other way when sin is pursued, support their misadventures and not 'judge' their lifestyles. But that's not love. In fact, it is the opposite of love!

Certainly there are those within the faith community that suffer because they act out of pride and elitism. Jesus isn't promising a blessing if you are being hammered because of your own practice of sin or your own stupidity. He is speaking of those who *because they love as Jesus did*, are despised, reproached and slandered in their *loyalty to Christ*. This promise is a very real and sure response to faithful kingdom pursuits! But the key is at the end of verse 22: *"...for the Son of Man's sake."* When we put Jesus first, there will be both a great cost and a great joy. There will be plenty of tears and yet great fellowship of joy and laughter with brothers and sisters that often draw closer to us than our earthly family...especially those who do not share our faith. What we do without, and what we suffer through, is nothing compared to what we receive in return! However, such is only

realized in the camp of the totally committed. A “middle road” approach to Christ and kingdom may relieve us of some of the reproach and rejection, but it will also keep us from knowing the laughter, the ‘filling’ and the joy! Such folks only languish in the ever shifting sands of the ‘middle ground.’

Persecution was something Jesus profoundly experienced. Why do we think we can or should be exempt if we seek to be a disciple...if we seek to be like Him? Would not it go without saying, that to walk in His shoes will come with the same fires He endured? Keeping one’s “head down” may keep you out of the line of fire, but in such a position you will fail to see the victories either. The fact is, it is impossible to be a disciple without experiencing these things!

We are apt to think that living in the heat of the battle as so presented in these passages can be avoided and we can still be a disciple. We can merely *speak* of our allegiance and attend church somewhere...preferably one that isn’t too hardcore, and we can indeed have both. But Jesus makes it clear by repeatedly condemning such a “lukewarm approach.” In Revelation 3:15-16 Jesus warns us about such with the most graphic of language saying: *"I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth."* There is no escaping such a judgment! If we are not in all the way, we are not in at all.

Jesus goes on to present the “flip side” of such a committed life. He pronounces “woe” upon those who pursue instead the world’s comforts and amenities. What is this “woe” that is given here and elsewhere in scripture? The dictionary rightfully expresses it as “great sorrow and distress.” So we can read it as “there will be great sorrow and distress” for those of you that are rich...those of you that are ‘full’...those that find their happiness in the world...for those who the world speaks well of. And why not? These positions are not that of Christ. Therefore they are not of any true disciple! It is not the riches themselves that are inherently evil, but the heart that follows such. Riches bring dependency on not God but on our bank account. And it is hard to say we love when we hoard the resources that could minister to people’s literal hunger and lostness. It is a lie to seek our peace from this world instead of God and still attempt to claim family membership.

Where is your security today? What is your “lifeline?” What are you holding on to? Because Isaiah 42:8 tells us that *"I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images."* God will not “share” us or cut a deal so we can compromise our physical and heart commitment.

Throughout scripture we are called to be “all in.” Jesus was one radical individual! And to be His disciple calls upon us to wear that same mantle. For thousands of years man has tried. From the garden until today we have tried to commune with God on our own terms and whitewash Christianity to make it palatable to our family and co-workers. Forgetting that Jesus himself was "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." He says *"They"...these who fail to embrace that Jesus, will “stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed."* (1Peter 2:8) It is a hard thing to watch, and an even harder thing to participate in or to support! These are the ‘tears’ that Christ spoke of, and the tears we share...