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BLESSINGS AND WOES

Luke 6:20-26; Epiphany 6C; February 15-16, 2025

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew begins with beatitudes. "Blessed are..." statements. Jesus' Sermon on the Plain in Luke begins the same way, with "beatitudes, "blessed are" statements. To be "blessed" is to enjoy God's blessings.

In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus paired four beatitudes with four contrasting "woe" statements. "Blessed" is a Gospel statement of what God does for us in Jesus. A "woe" is a word of warning to those who do not seek blessings in God's kingdom by faith in Jesus. "Woe" to those who seek this sinful world's rewards, which won't last forever. "Woe" is a law statement, God warning us not to trust in these worldly things that will fail us in the end.

As we hear each "blessed" and "woe," we can't help but notice that what Jesus describes is the direct opposite of what we want our world to be like. He undermines the very things that give us comfort and security in our lives. What He teaches seems unreasonable and illogical. The things Jesus says are "blessed" are the very things we consider "woes," and what He says are "woes" are the things we consider "blessings." If it seems like Jesus is turning this world upside down, we would be right. The temptation is for us to reject what Jesus says are blessings to keep the world's blessings and ignore Jesus' warning woes. If we do this, ours is not the **kingdom of God**.

Let's look at each blessing and the woe paired with it.

**Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God...
But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.**

Being poor is not having enough in this world to thrive; being rich is having more than enough. The poverty and riches Jesus describe here are both material and spiritual. Why would Jesus say that it is "blessed" to be poor rather than rich? His point is that the world's definitions of rich or poor do not reflect whether someone is in the kingdom of God. Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (16:19-31) illustrates this truth. The rich man had everything in the world but ended up in hell; the poor Lazarus had nothing and went to heaven.

It was common in Jesus' day, and even today, that people interpret poverty as being rejected by God and having wealth as God's reward for being faithful. If you are poor and suffering, God must be punishing you for something you did wrong. If you are rich and comfortable, God must be rewarding you for being good. This is what Jesus is rejecting in our Gospel Reading today.

The "blessedness" of being poor that Jesus teaches, materially with regard to how much stuff we have or need, and spiritually with regard to our relationship with God, comes only to those who have the kingdom of God now and forever. The "woe" of being rich comes with the warning that being comfortable in this life does not necessarily mean that we are in God's kingdom.

No matter what our situation, Christians must realize that we are always poor before God. Poor or rich in things, everything belongs to God whether we have little or a lot. When we consider our faith, we can only come before God as poor, miserable sinners with the humble realization that we must rely on God for everything when it comes to salvation. But our poverty before God does not prevent God from being rich toward us.

Consider God's Word in 2 Corinthians eight: **For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich** (8:9). The key to unlocking the truth of these beatitudes and woes is seeing that they apply to Jesus first and then to us. Jesus took both our material and spiritual poverty as His own. Materially, everything He had in the world was taken from Him; He was stripped naked on the cross until dead with not a penny to His name. Jesus was also clothed with the poverty of our sins even though He was rich in righteousness. On the cross, God reversed everything for our sake.

When we stand before the cross of Christ, we are always the poor. Jesus died for the rich and poor alike. Rich or poor in material things, we are all beggars before the cross in need of God's grace and mercy, the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation. In Christ and by faith in Christ alone are we the blessed poor.

The next two pairs of blessings and woes show this. Notice how the present condition in each will be taken care of by God.

**Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied...
Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.**

**Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh...
Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.**

God promises to take care of us both materially and spiritually. Hunger, which is the result of being poor and not having enough to live on, will be satisfied by God and we will be full. Weeping is the result of experiencing losses in this world, often by the suffering and death of loved ones. God will turn our tears of sorrow into joyous laughter by curing our diseases and raising us to live forever.

God showed John this truth in his Revelation. The saints in heaven **“shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore... For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”** (Rev. 7:16-17). On the Last Day when Jesus returns in glory and raises all the dead, the way we experience life and death now in this world will be overturned and reversed forever. God will keep these promises in His eternal kingdom, but He also satisfies the hungry now with food and other material needs, the mourning and weeping now with the joy of laughter.

James, the brother of Jesus, addressed how Christians should not continue to function in worldly ways, but according to Christ's words. In the Epistle of James, the Church is warned not to show partiality to the rich members and look down upon the poor members. **“Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which He has promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?”**
(2:5-7)

James went on to explain how God satisfies the hungry in this world. **“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”** (2:15-17). Those who are poor members of the Church with material needs should never go without basic necessities because those members whom God has given an abundance will share with them.

The last blessing and woe pair notes that the Church will be hated, excluded, and reviled as strange and abnormal by the world for believing and living according to God’s Word.

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! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. This describes how the blessed Lord Jesus Christ was treated for our sake, and what was true of Him is also true of His Church. **Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.**

We are warned not to trust the false prophets of our day who teach the lie that having material wealth and physical security is a sign being a faithful Christian. There are plenty of false churches condemning faithful Christians who seek to live according to God’s unchanging Word. We should not try to seek their favor, but rejoice when they condemn us as “unloving,” especially when we call sinners to repent and believe the true Gospel.

Jesus turned the world upside down and reversed what is sinful. The rich Man Jesus became poor for our sake, so that we, the poor, can gain His riches. **Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Amen.**