

Luke 6.20-26
Blessing and Woe

1. Desiring the Kingdom

What are you living for? Where is your treasure? You might remember that those are the questions we ended with last week.

*Is your treasure in the kingdom and values of this *this present age*? Or is it in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus, which will only be fully realized in the age to come?* These are the sorts of questions this section of Luke's Gospel here in chapter 6 forces us to deal with.

And verses 20-26 really set the tone for everything that follows in chapter 6. As here Jesus describes the basic character and way of life of his disciples *in contrast* to those who reject him.

And there's an *underlying presupposition* behind everything Jesus says through the rest of this chapter. And *that presupposition* is that the Day of God's judgment is coming. Everyone will one day stand before God and give an account of what they've done in their lives.

And in light of that coming judgment, Jesus here *completely overturns* all social conventions of this present age, and exposes how backwards things really are.

This was all indicated way back in chapter one, when Mary sang in verses 52, 53: "*The Lord has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.*"

And here in the blessings and woes of verses 20-26, Jesus proclaims this overturning of social norms. As he destroys any pretense to divine favor anyone might claim due to their particular place in human society. And that's why there's a list of woes after the list of blessings.

Because if your trusting *solely* in riches, or food, or entertainment, or popularity for your happiness, you'll ultimately be left empty. And whatever pleasure you might find in those things for a time will pass away soon enough.

Now, there are a *few differences* between the Beatitudes in Matthew and the blessings and woes here in Luke. The presence of the woes in Luke is one of them. But there are some others. For instance, Luke's version doesn't have anything about the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, or the peacemakers.

And Luke also doesn't have the elaborations for the poor and the hungry that we have in Matthew. Luke just says "*blessed are the poor*" and "*blessed are the hungry.*" But Matthew says "*Blessed are the poor in spirit;*" and "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.*"

And I'd suggest that Jesus may have said both things at different times and for similar but distinct reasons. You see, the Beatitudes in Matthew emphasize the internal spiritual state. While Luke highlights the outward, visible way of life.

And those two things really go hand in hand. Because *truly* being poor in spirit and hungering for righteousness leads to a certain way of life. Sacrificing pleasure in this world for lasting treasure in the age to come.

Where your treasure is—your heart's true desire—will determine how you live your life.

And keep in mind the setting here in Luke. These people Jesus is teaching generally were outcasts to society. They're people who've been healed of disease and demon possession, tax collectors, sinners.

They were excluded from society and yet embraced in the redemptive purpose of God's Kingdom. And what Jesus wants these people to realize here is that what's to be ultimately desired, beyond everything in this present age, is God's kingdom and righteousness.

Now, let me just say right off the bat that none of that's to say that material blessings aren't good. They are. We should be thankful for them when we receive them. But the point is that they don't ultimately satisfy. They sustain life, *yes*. They encourage us, *yes*.

But they're meant to point *beyond themselves* to the God who gives them to us. Because what ultimately satisfies is God himself. *And he* is the

lasting reward of those who seek him and reject the allurements of worldly pleasure for his Kingdom and righteousness.

2. Poor/Rich; Hungry/Full; Weeping/Laughing (verses 20-21, 24-25)

Now, focusing in on the blessings and woes themselves, if you look carefully you'll see that they're 4 pairs of opposites that run parallel. Poor and rich (vv. 20, 24), hungry and full (vv. 21, 25), weeping and laughing (vv. 21, 25), and being hated and accepted (vv. 22-23, 26).

And the point in every one: *Whatever your state is in this present age, it will be the opposite in the age to come.*

OK, so, The inevitable question: *Is Jesus saying we all need to live in poverty in order to be his disciples? That's sort of what it seems like he's saying, isn't it?*

But the things mentioned here in Luke 6 aren't things we're told we can't have or can't do. We're not told that we can't have possessions. What we're commanded to do in Scripture is to be thankful for what we do have and give freely and generously to all who have need.

We're also not told that we have to spend our lives in hunger. But we're commanded to be content with what we have, and to feed the hungry. And we're also not told we can never laugh. But we're commanded to weep with those who weep, and to rejoice with those who rejoice.

I mean, we'll, find out in the very next chapter that people accused Jesus himself of being a glutton and a drunkard because he ate and drank. And we just saw him in the previous chapter feasting at the house of Levi!

So, he's not saying that his disciples can't have any possessions, have to constantly be hungry even if they have opportunity to eat, and can never have a good time.

And he's also not elevating poverty *per se* as a specially privileged social condition. Because while the temptations of being rich can be

greater, you can still be in poverty and idolize the things of this world as much as someone whose rich.

Alright, but *what is he saying?* Well, the whole point is that we're *not to live* as though our reward is in this world and hoard up possessions and food and constant indulgence as though this world is all there is.

Because, remember, the *underlying presupposition* of what Jesus is saying here is that a Day of Judgment is coming!

And when you stand before God, the things you have—the money you've made; the respect you've gained from people; how many friends you accumulated—nothing like that will really count for anything.

When you stand before God, he *will not care* about your financial portfolio. He *will not care* about the size of your house. He *won't care* about any of those things, *other than* how thankful you were for them, and how much you used them for his glory and the good of your neighbors.

So, instead of seeking out the things esteemed in the world, what we're to seek is the Lord's Kingdom and his righteousness. And if we do that, all else will be added to us. Just as Jesus will later say in chapter 12.

And there's *both* a specific form of hope *and* condemnation here. The woes are *specifically* for the type of luxurious living that either *oppresses* or *neglects* the poor. Those who live in constant comfort and indulgence and by doing so contribute to a system of social injustice.

And, the specific hope here is for those disciples of Jesus who do live in poverty and hunger, mourning, and persecution—just like many of those he's talking to here in Luke 6.

For them, the reward of the future age is *so glorious* that the two *aren't even worth comparing* (Rom. 8.18). Their lot in this present age will be *entirely overturned forever* in the age to come.

Now, as I was preparing this very part of this sermon, I heard Monica in the background *yelling for raisins*. Yvonne and I kept telling her, “Have patience. Have patience. We’ll get you some raisins in a minute.”

But she *didn’t understand*. And the more we told her to have patience, the more worked up she got. She eventually started screaming and crying. *Raisins! Raisins!*

You see, she thought that if she didn’t see the raisins in front of her right then, she’d never have them. Mommy and Daddy had a whole bunch of raisins. And we were going to give them to her very shortly.

We just wanted her to have patience and be thankful for what she was about to receive. But she *didn’t believe it*. She *didn’t understand*. And that’s what we’re like *so often, isn’t it?*

The Lord is calling us to be content in our lives, and to have patience. To wait for our reward in his eternal Kingdom, that’s coming *far sooner* than we realize.

But we kick and scream! I want those raisins! Give me those raisins! But the Lord’s saying to us, “*You’ll have your raisins soon enough. Just have patience and wait until I make all things new! So be content with what you have now. And share generously with everyone.*”

Paul brings this out in 1 Corinthians 7. In the midst of talking about marriage, he writes in verses 29-32,

This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods,³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.³² I want you to be free from anxieties.

You see, the point for Paul isn’t that you can’t be married. The point is that even if you *are married*, understand that the time is short. If you

have wealth, understand that it's not going to be around for long. And you'll be called to give an account for how you used it.

Don't cling to the things of this world as though they're going to last forever. Because this present age is passing away. So, be thankful for what you do have. But don't live for those things or strive for them.

But *how*? *How* do you live as poor when you do have possessions? How do you live as hungry when you do have food? How do you live as one who weeps when you do laugh?

Well, none of it's the same as actually having no possessions or food. But for starters, you *flee idolatry*. The world is addicted to money, to food, to amusement. We *idolize* those things. We *live* for them. We're so *fixated* on them that we can't lift our eyes up to heaven.

So, ask yourself, Is your heart *set* on the things of this world? Do they have *dominion* over you? Are those things what you're trusting in for your happiness?

1. *Are you trusting in money?* What James says about the rich in James 5.1-6 is worth noting here:

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. ² Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. ⁴ Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. ⁵ You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered the righteous person.

We see 3 basic concerns in James. 1. Living in luxury and self-indulgence. 2. Taking advantage of the innocent for your own gain. But 3. *Underlying everything* is what James says at the end of verse 3: "*You have laid up treasure in the last days.*"

You see, the point, again, is *where is your treasure? Is it in this present age, or in the age to come? These are the last days!*, James says, *So why are you still hoarding up stuff for yourself?*

When I was in high school I listened to rap music. And there was this one song by a group called the Wu Tang Clan that was called “CREAM: *Cash Rules Everything Around Me.*” That really epitomizes the ethos of our world, *doesn't it?*

Cash does seem to rule *everything* around us. But the question Jesus is asking us is, *“Does it rule You?”* Does money *have dominion* over you? Is your life *defined* by chasing it more and more and more?

Sure, plan for the future. Of course, it's your calling to provide for the people under your care. It's right to try to improve your situation in life when you have the opportunity. To seek the best for your children's future.

Those are all things we must do as good stewards of what we've been given. But as you do all those things, don't live for this present age as though it's your *ultimate prize*. Instead, use the goods of this present age for the building up of others.

2. Do you *make an idol of Food*? Here's something that's pretty dominant in our culture. Food is even a source of entertainment in our society. We have whole TV networks devoted to it! And like wealth, it's a good gift from God. But it can be abused.

In Matthew 25, when Jesus describes the Last Judgment, the first reason on the list for those who'll be received into the Kingdom of God is that they *fed the hungry*.

Jesus says specifically, *“I was hungry, and you gave me food.”* And conversely for those shut out of the Kingdom, *“I was hungry and you gave me no food.”*

So no, you don't have to always be hungry yourself in order to be blessed in the coming age. But you should give of your own food generously and be willing to go with less so that others might have more.

3. What about Laughter? This is especially relevant for us today. We're a culture that's *addicted* to laughter.

Now, I'm *firmly convinced* that laughter is a gift from God. But again, like all gifts, it can be abused. You can use the gift of laughter as a way of life to retreat from reality. And that's an abuse of the gift.

We *should* laugh together. But not if we *don't also* mourn together. Romans 12:15-16: "*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.*"

And here's how to know *whether or not* you're abusing laughter. Does your love of laughter keep you from loving people who can't laugh? Does it cause you to avoid dealing with serious things? With grief? With pain in yourself or others?

You see, the laughter Jesus condemns here is *self-indulgent* laughter. Laughter that trivializes the plight of others. The *haughty laughter* of the *privileged* who either oppress or neglect the *under-privileged*.

3. Being Hated and Being Accepted (verses 22, 23, 26)

And then there's the fourth pair of things mentioned in the blessings and woes—being hated and being accepted (verses 22, 23, 26).

Now, it's *really important* to understand that Jesus isn't talking here about being hated for *any old reason*.

A lot of people are hated just because they're rude and obnoxious. And a lot of Christians can even be hated because they present the gospel in rude and obnoxious ways. That's *not* what Jesus is talking about. *What he's talking about* is being hated on account of him!

If people hate you and exclude you because you're rude and obnoxious, then it's not on account of the Son of Man. It's because, well, you're rude and obnoxious!

So, Jesus isn't saying you're blessed just by virtue of being hated. But *specifically* for being hated "*on account of the Son of Man.*" Living as Christ's disciple in the world.

And, in order to be reviled for Christ, you do have to *do something* that gets you reviled! Nobody's hated by just sitting around and keeping to themselves.

And that something Jesus is talking about is living and speaking like a Christian. Living as a witness to Christ's death and resurrection in both your way of life and your speech.

And if you're hated and reviled specifically for your witness to Christ in the world, Jesus says in Verse 23: "*Great is your reward in heaven.*" Here he makes it abundantly clear that he's talking about heavenly reward, not reward in this life.

And notice the tense. Great *IS* you reward in heaven. He did the same thing with the first blessing, too: "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours IS the kingdom of God.*" But for the middle two—the hungry and those who weep—the reward is future tense. Why?

Well because the reward of the Kingdom is both *present* and *future*. It's *already* here because Christ the King has come. But it won't be fully realized until the coming age.

So we're *already* citizens of the heavenly Kingdom of God. As Paul says, the *Jerusalem above is mother of us all*. But we won't enjoy the full benefits of our citizenship until the King returns and makes all things new.

And this has been the hope of God's people throughout all the ages. Hebrews 11.16, for instance, tells us that God's people before the coming of Christ were all seeking "*a better country—a heavenly one.*"

And this is why Jesus' comparison with the prophets in verses 23 and 26 is important. Think about the prophets. *False prophets* are loved because they toe the party line. They maintain the *status quo*. They shout "*Peace, Peace!*" when there is no peace.

But think about prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, for instance. What's the one thing the Lord told each one of them when he called them to proclaim his word? He told them people would reject both *their message and them!*

Isaiah 6.9-10: "*Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'*"¹⁰ *Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."*

Jeremiah 1.19: "*They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you."*

Ezekiel 3.7: "*the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me: because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart."*

This is the lot of a prophet. This is the lot of one entrusted with the word of God. The way of God's servants is unpopular because, *like Jesus himself*, it overturns social conventions that are defined by what's esteemed in this world.

And the *only way* you can live like this is if you have *ever before your eyes* the fact that you are *right now* a citizen of God's kingdom through faith in Jesus. And that your *true reward* lies in the future when Christ returns to take you to himself and *make all things new*.

Blessed are the poor and hungry in this present age. Because in reality *everyone* is poor and hungry in this present age, *aren't they?* Sure, there's a whole lot of variation in terms of material possessions. But for everyone, What this world has to offer ultimately can't satisfy.

That's why *St. Augustine* in his *Confessions* writes to those who seek their rest in this present age, "*Rest is not where you seek it. Seek what you seek. But it is not where you seek it. You seek happiness of life in the land of death, and it is not there."*

But, *brothers and sisters*, the true rest and satisfaction of eternal life is the heavenly food and drink of God's Kingdom that's *come down* to us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And just as the Lord said to Abraham (Gen. 15) after he rejected the plunder of war from the King of Sodom, so he says to us today if we sacrifice the *riches and acceptance* of this present age for the *lasting treasure* of the age to come, "*Fear not. I am your shield. Your reward shall be very great.*"