

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Beatitudes

Luke 6:20-23

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The Beatitudes

Scripture

About six months after Jesus began his public ministry, he called his growing number of disciples to himself and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles (Luke 6:13). Jesus chose the apostles to be with him in a ministry internship so that he could equip them to carry on his mission after his departure.

After he chose his apostles, Jesus came down from the mountain with them and stood on a level place, where a crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases (Luke 6:17-18a).

Until now, this was perhaps the greatest crowd of people to whom Jesus ministered. Luke recorded Jesus' sermon for us in what is known today as "The Sermon on the Plain," or what commentator Kent Hughes calls "The Sermon on the Level."¹

Jesus' sermon was about the kingdom of God. He drew a contrast between two ways of life. He explained the difference between those who belong to the kingdom of God and those who do not belong to the kingdom of God. Jesus began his sermon by teaching about the blessings of those who belong to the kingdom of God, which is the focus of our study for today.

So, let's read about these blessings, also known as the beatitudes, in Luke 6:20-23:

**²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on 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 shall

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 212.

be satisfied.

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

²² “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! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. (Luke 6:20-23)

Introduction

Jesus’ sermon is about the kingdom of God. Jesus spoke constantly about the kingdom of God. In fact, there are 53 references to the kingdom of God in the four Gospels. He talked far more about the kingdom of God than we usually do.

Jesus never said to anyone, “Receive me as your personal Lord and Savior.” Instead, Jesus routinely urged people to enter the kingdom of God.

In John 3 Nicodemus came to Jesus by night and learned that in order to be saved he needed to be born again. But why did Nicodemus need to be born again? He needed to be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus said it twice in his meeting with Nicodemus.

In John 3:3-5 Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the *kingdom of God*.” So Nicodemus said to Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the *kingdom of God*.”

So, what is the kingdom of God? If the whole point of being born again is to enter the kingdom of God, what is it?

Tim Keller answers that question as follows:

Now the kingdom of God can best be understood if we think about what happens when anybody comes into power.

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When a new president or a new king or a new governor or a new mayor or a new CEO – when anyone comes into power – that person’s new power is expressed through a new administration. The new administration is a new set of priorities and a new set of policies and a new set of strategies, and if the policies and priorities and strategies are wise, if they meet the needs, what happens is there is (I guess the catchphrase today is) “improved quality of life,” and that’s good!

Jesus Christ, though, is the supernatural and ultimate King; and when he comes into power, his power is expressed through a new administration called *the kingdom*. A new set of priorities, a new set of powers, and a new set of strategies. The effects are far greater than anything we might call “improved quality of life.” The effects are more comprehensive and radical than we can imagine.²

To enter the kingdom of God means to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It means that we submit to his authority and leadership and kingship over every area of our lives.

And when we enter the kingdom of God and Jesus reigns as king over us, we learn that the values in Jesus’ kingdom are totally different than the values of this world.

In Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plain,” he gave his disciples four blessings followed by four woes. Jesus drew a contrast between two ways of life. He taught what life was like for those in the kingdom of God in contrast to those who were outside of the kingdom of God. He taught that there are blessings that come with godliness, and woes that come from worldliness.

But what is so astonishing is that what brings blessing or woe is so completely different than what most people think. How can one tell if God is blessing you? The answer that Jesus gave was totally unexpected. Jesus said that the people who are poor, hungry, sad, and rejected are blessed. And he said that the people who are rich, full, entertained, and popular are con-

² Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

demned. Jesus taught his disciples to prize what the world calls undesirable and to beware of what the world calls desirable.

Lesson

Jesus teaches us in Luke 6:20-23 that it is better to prize what the world calls undesirable than to have what the world calls desirable.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Blessing of Poverty Results in Citizenship (6:20)
2. The Blessing of Hunger Results in Satisfaction (6:21a)
3. The Blessing of Sorrow Results in Joy (6:21b)
4. The Blessing of Rejection Results in Reward (6:22-23)

I. The Blessing of Poverty Results in Citizenship (6:20)

First, Jesus taught that the blessing of poverty results in citizenship.

Jesus preached "The Sermon on the Plain" to the apostles, the disciples, and also the great multitude (Luke 6:17). Jesus was preaching about the kingdom of God, and he wanted people to know what it meant to enter the kingdom of God.

So, Luke said in verse 20a that Jesus **lifted up his eyes on his disciples**. The first part of Jesus' sermon was not directed to everyone; rather, it was directed to his disciples. That is, Jesus began his sermon by explaining what it meant to be a member of the kingdom of God.

It is helpful to keep in mind that because there are four blessings listed Jesus was not talking about four different groups of people in the kingdom of God. Jesus wanted **his disciples** to understand that *all* these blessings belong to *all* members of the kingdom of God. In other words, the blessings are characteristic of his followers.

So, Jesus said in verse 20b, **“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”** Jesus wanted his disciples to know that in spite of their present poverty, they were citizens of an everlasting kingdom.

To understand the word **“poor,”** we need to begin by taking it literally. In Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus preached a similar sermon known as “The Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). But in Luke’s Gospel, in keeping with the emphasis on the materially poor, Jesus said, **“Blessed are you who are poor”** (Luke 6:20b).

Not all of Jesus’ disciples were poor. For example, Levi was apparently rather well off financially because he was a tax collector (Luke 5:27-29). Peter, James, and John had a fishing business, and it is possible that they were doing rather well financially too.

Nevertheless, Jesus wanted to encourage his disciples who were materially poor, and especially if their poverty was because of their service to him, as was the case for most of his disciples.

However, the mere fact of poverty is not in and of itself a blessing. So, how should we understand Jesus’ beatitude?

Bishop J. C. Ryle explained it this way:

We must take good heed that we do not misunderstand our Lord’s meaning, when we read these expressions. We must not for a moment suppose that the mere fact of being poor, and hungry, and sorrowful, and hated by man, will entitle any one to lay claim to an interest in Christ’s blessing. The poverty here spoken of, is a poverty accompanied by grace. The want is a want entailed by faithful adherence to Jesus. The afflictions are the afflictions of the Gospel. The persecution is persecution for the Son of Man’s sake.³

³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 177.

It is very tempting in our culture to rely on wealth, both for ministry and also for our own personal happiness. But this way of counting blessings is spiritually impoverished.

Ordinarily, when people are materially poor it is because they have run out of material resources. They are no longer self-sufficient and they look to others for help.

Biblically, every person is spiritually poor and we have no resources of our own to satisfy God. We discover that we are not in fact self-sufficient, and we need God's enabling grace to give us the new birth and entrance into the kingdom of God.

Jesus recognized that people who are materially poor understand the lack of resources. They understand that they need to rely and depend on others for deliverance. And in a similar way, they are able to understand spiritual poverty as well.

In order to receive the kingdom of God, a person must recognize his or her spiritual poverty and come to God for grace. According to commentator Norval Geldenhuys, the blessing of God's kingdom is for people "who do not seek their wealth and life in earthly things, but who acknowledge their own poverty and come to Him to seek real life. Where outward poverty leads anyone to realize his utter dependence on God and to walk humbly with his Lord, such a person will be blessed—in measure even in this life, and more abundantly in the next, he may expect rich and glorious fullness of spiritual life and joy."⁴

So, Jesus taught that the blessing of poverty results in citizenship.

II. The Blessing of Hunger Results in Satisfaction (6:21a)

Second, Jesus taught that the blessing of hunger results in

⁴ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 210.

satisfaction.

Jesus said in verse 21a, **“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.”**

In its most literal sense, this blessing is closely tied to the first blessing. The same God who provides for the materially poor also feeds the physically hungry.

But, as with all the beatitudes, Jesus meant for his disciples to take them in a spiritual sense. Jesus was speaking of his disciples who were hungry for God and his grace.

Two passages in the Psalms give eloquent expression to this spiritual craving. Psalm 42:1-2 says, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” And Psalm 63:1 says, “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

The Psalmists express in vivid language their craving for satisfaction. Their souls thirst for God. Their spiritual longing is like a bodily ache. Life apart from God is empty, vacuous, and depleted. But, God promised in Jeremiah 29:13, “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.”

With the coming of Jesus, he became the source of all satisfaction. Jesus said in John 6:35, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

So, Jesus taught that the blessing of hunger results in satisfaction. And as we hunger for God and his grace, he satisfies our hunger, which leads us to hunger even more, which leads to even more satisfaction. As Kent Hughes says, “The promise is at once eternal and temporal, because we can know both hunger and satisfaction in this world.”⁵ The key is to keep on hungering.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, 217.

So, Jesus taught that the blessing of poverty results in citizenship. Second, the blessing of hunger results in satisfaction.

III. The Blessing of Sorrow Results in Joy (6:21b)

Third, Jesus taught that the blessing of sorrow results in joy.

Jesus said in verse 21b, **“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”**

Jesus did not mean, “Blessed are you grim, cheerless Christians,” though some have apparently interpreted Jesus’ words this way.

The great Victorian preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said that some preachers “appear to have a white cravat twisted round their souls.”⁶ Robert Louis Stevenson must have known some preachers like that because he once wrote in his diary, “I’ve been to church today and am not depressed.”⁷

Jesus was not pronouncing a blessing on a forlorn disposition. He was instead referring to all the sorrows that we have because we live in a fallen world.

We weep for our sins, repenting of all the wrong that we have done. We weep for the sins of others, lamenting the dishonor that is brought on God’s name. We weep for the sins of our society, knowing that we ourselves are implicated in those sins. We weep for the unsaved, praying that God will rescue them from eternal destruction. We weep for those who suffer, grieving over natural disasters, armed conflicts, and social injustices. And we weep for our loved ones who have departed this world, knowing that they are gone and will not return.

And yet, even as we weep, we know that godly sorrow

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: a Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors’ College, Metropolitan Tabernacle.*, vol. 1 (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1875), 181.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, 218–219.

will turn to joy. One day God will take away our sinful nature, and we will never sin again. One day he will right every wrong and gather his people into his eternal city. One day all our sufferings and sorrows will come to an end. And one day our laughter will be heard on every street in heaven. As we traverse the eternal city, we will hear, amidst the praise of Jesus, laughter!

So, Jesus taught that the blessing of poverty results in citizenship. The blessing of hunger results in satisfaction. The blessing of sorrow results in joy.

IV. The Blessing of Rejection Results in Reward (6:22-23)

And finally, Jesus taught that the blessing of rejection results in reward.

Jesus said in verses 22-23, **“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.”**

Jesus was speaking of one particular kind of rejection: rejection for the sake of the gospel. He was speaking directly to his apostles at this point, all of who suffered violent persecution and most of whom were martyred for their faith in Jesus.

But all disciples of Jesus experience rejection on account of Jesus. To follow Jesus is to share in his sufferings.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed under Hitler, said:

Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. . . . That is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those “who are persecuted and martyred for the Gospel’s sake.” . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is

therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy and a token of His grace.⁸

Bonhoeffer was right when he called this a joy, because Jesus told his apostles to rejoice in their sufferings. He did so for a reason: they would have a great reward in heaven – a promise fulfilled in the foundations of the New Jerusalem, where their names are written in glory. The apostles clearly took Jesus' promise to heart, because in his second book (the one we know as *The Acts of the Apostles*) Luke told us that when the apostles were beaten by the Sanhedrin, "they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41).

So, Jesus taught that the blessing of poverty results in citizenship. The blessing of hunger results in satisfaction. The blessing of sorrow results in joy. And the blessing of rejection results in reward.

Conclusion

Therefore every believer should prize what the world calls undesirable rather than have what the world calls desirable.

Jesus taught that things are different in the kingdom of God. Those who enter the kingdom of God experience the blessing of poverty, hunger, sorrow, and rejection. But they prize these things that the world calls undesirable.

Why?

Because they receive citizenship, satisfaction, joy, and reward that begins now and lasts throughout all eternity. Amen.

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1969), 101.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father in heaven, your kingdom is completely different than we imagine. Your values are different than the world's values. Your ethics are different than the world's ethics.

You sent your Son, Jesus, to call people to enter the kingdom of God. Help us to enter the kingdom of God.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!