

Text: Luke 6:12-26

Title: Sermon on the Plateau: Blessings and Woes

Truth: Disciples recognize their spiritual need and await future blessing.

Date/Location: Sunday December 31, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

The early part of chapter 6 is like chapters 4 and 5 with its report of Jesus's teaching and miracles, calling people to follow Him, etc. A more detailed teaching is recorded starting at 6:20-49.

The beatitudes are sometimes called by the fancy name *macarisms*. You do not have to know this fact to get into heaven! The origin of this rare term is that in Greek, each of the four "blessed" statements start with the noun *makários*. So, these *makários* statements are *macarisms*. They are ascriptions or assignments of blessing—not wishes, not hopes—but certainties from heaven upon the people characterized as described.

Some of these statements are quite well known, particularly from the longer list in Matthew's gospel. Each makes a statement that a certain kind of person is blessed because some good thing will become theirs in the future. The blessing is given by God.

I. Choosing the Apostles and Introducing the Sermon, v. 12-19

A. In verses 12-16, the apostle Matthew describes that Jesus chose 12 men to be with him (Mark 3:14). Prior to doing so, He prayed all the prior night to the Father. He was making a critical selection that would impact the future of the entire church. For the cross to turn out as designed, He even had to select the one who would betray him.

Most who read this cannot help but think that before any decision, especially important ones, it should be our practice to pray. If the Lord in his perfect humanity needed to pray, how much more do we need to pray in our sinfulness?

B. The twelve are listed: Simon Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew (same as Nathanael, aka Nathanael bar Tolmai/Ptolemy), Matthew (Levi), Thomas, James son of Alphaeus,

Simon the Zealot (Cananite), Judas son of James (Lebaeus Thaddaeus), and Judas Iscariot.

I reflect on the privilege of these men, and the *wasted* privilege of Judas Iscariot. We must also remember that the Lord chose us in a manner not very dissimilar to how he chose His twelve (John 15:16, 19; 2 Thess. 2:13, 1 Peter 2:4).

The Lord introduced the term *apostle* for these men. They were not merely disciples but authorized and sent-out representatives.

C. After making this selection, the Lord came down to a “level place” and taught the multitude. The sermon from 6:20–49 is sometimes called the sermon on the level place, or the plateau, as opposed to the sermon on the mount (Matt 5:1).

D. Is the Sermon on the Plateau different than the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)? It could be. Some suggest it is, others not. The answer to the question does not seem to make much difference in our understanding of the sermon or our daily walk with Christ. We do expect that an itinerant preacher frequently reuses important teaching at different locations on his tour. The fact that Jesus is Jesus does not change this, say because of His omniscience.

The reality is there is not an infinite number of truths that God has for us to grasp, for He knows well our frame that we are very finite. Consequently, there are a small number of guiding truths—nothing like the body of federal law in the United States which reaches nearly 200,000 printed pages. Biblical principles can be boiled down even further into statements like the 10 commandments, or like “love God, love your neighbor” and the like. Even if you take the entire Bible and treat every bit of it as teaching unique truths throughout, it is only a couple of thousand pages, even in the longest study Bibles. This is good reason why we should have a mastery of the Bible: it is not outside of our reach.

E. As often was the case, there were needy people in the crowd, and the Lord helped them with their diseases and demons. If nothing else, this would serve to hold their attention for a while. But remember that it authenticated the messenger and His message

and demonstrated that the Lord had power to forgive sins (Luke 5:24). But this also was a distraction from the more important matter of teaching because everyone was crowding around wanting to touch Jesus.

Undoubtedly, the focus of many in the crowd was on physical healing. The Lord was concerned about a much more difficult problem: their spiritual well-being.

II. The Blessings, v. 20-23

Note that Jesus speaks to his *disciples*. In the crowd there are apostles, disciples, and “viewers.”

A. There are four blessing statements. The way I am thinking about it, the arrows indicate the direction of the blessing—the kingdom of God, for example, will be given to the poor person. At that later time, of course, they will not be in the same negative state they are now.

	Now		Later
Blessed	Poor	←	kingdom of God
	Hunger	←	shall be filled
	Weep	←	shall laugh
	Hated	←	reward is great in heaven

B. This teaching is like “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Matt. 19:30, 20:16; Mark 10:31). Or James when he warns the rich of their coming miseries and their present corruption.

C. Regarding the **poor**, Jesus is referring to those who are poor in spirit (Matt 5:33), and perhaps also poor in terms of monetary riches, since the two often (but not always) go hand in hand. Since He is speaking to His disciples, these poor are those who follow Him. Spiritual poverty is the main issue, though the Lord is sympathetic to the plight of those who are of the lowest castes of society. He is *not* beatifying all who are monetarily poor. Those who follow Him currently “possess” the kingdom of God. They are citizens awaiting the arrival of the blessings of that kingdom even as they walk through this life.

- D. The **hungry** are not those who need more food stamps. Rather, they are the ones who mourn over their sin and hunger for righteousness (Matt. 5:6). *That* desire is met in Jesus so that in the future, Christians will no longer have that nagging sin nature that tempts and draws one into sin. Moreover, they will be filled with goodness, holiness, and righteousness.
- E. Those who **weep** are those oppressed by the sin, affliction, and oppression that comes with living in this world. Death of a loved one causes weeping—even Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). Sin and its effects in oneself or others cause weeping. Disasters of this world cause weeping. Those who feel that pain will, if walking with the Lord, will experience the opposite in the kingdom of God. Remember Luke 16:25—“But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.’”
- F. The last of the blessings is lengthy and has to do with **persecution** “for the Son of Man’s sake.” This is not referring to people who are, humanly speaking, misfits or outcasts. It is referring to those who believe in Jesus and because of *that* are hated by the world. Because of righteousness, the world hates them. The world thinks such people are evil. The Lord counsels that in the future, such persecuted ones will rejoice with their great reward, for they will be like the true prophets who received a great reward after being ignored, rejected, and harmed by their contemporaries. Those who are persecuted can take comfort because their plight adds proof to the case of their genuineness as disciples.

III. The Woes, v. 24-26

- A. What is often overlooked is that there are four corresponding woes. They are just the opposite, so that Blessing #1 corresponds as the opposite of Woe #1, #2 to #2, etc.

Woe	Rich	←	you have received your consolation
	Full	←	shall hunger
	Laugh	←	shall mourn and weep
	Loved	←	like the false prophets

- B. The opposite of promising a blessing is ascribing a *woe* to someone. They are going to have a bad outcome, a bad future, a bad judgment, a curse, a bad eternity.
- C. It is easy to overlook these woes because they are unpleasant, and no one wants to see themselves in a mirror that is reflecting sin. Just like theologians sometimes steal blessings from Israel for the church but leave behind the curses, we can also steal the blessings out of their context and leave behind the curses for someone else. What this does it to eviscerate God's message of any sting, of any teeth against evil.
- D. The **rich** are those who trust their riches instead of God, or focus on materialism instead of God. Like the poor above, this does not refer strictly to people who have a lot of money. This might shock you, but there is a corresponding woe for those who are poor and reject God!
- E. The **full** are those who feel they have need of nothing and certainly do not concern themselves with their sin—very much like the rich of the prior verse.
- F. Those who **laugh** are the ones who are at ease and think they have no need of God. Their self-sufficiency anesthetizes them to their deadly peril and true poverty.
- G. Those who are **well-spoken of** are the famous, the movers and shakers in the community. They are proud, part of the in-crowd—but again, with no relationship to God. They are just like the false prophets of old, many of whom had a following and good words spoken about them. Notice the parallelism between the true prophets (v. 23) and the false prophets (v. 26). What we really should want is the commendation of *God*, not of *men*!
- H. Whereas the blessings assume the poor, hungry, weeping, and hated people experience those things alongside their faith in God, the woes are just the opposite. The Lord intends for us to understand that the woes have the built-in idea that the rich, full, joyous, and well-known people in this life are enjoying those things *apart* from God.

We cannot say that every person who has wealth is eternally condemned. The same goes for every person who is momentarily full or those who are joyful. At least I hope you do not think that, because many of us are among the wealthiest people in the world, and we should have joy, and God has given us our food in due season so that we are full.

Jesus is pronouncing woe to those who *trust* in riches (Prov. 11:28, Mark 10:24, 1 Timothy 6:17)—or in themselves, but not in God. Their riches overwhelm any view of God so that they hold the riches as if God is out of the picture. Same with those who are full or have joy—apart from God that is deadly joy. Fame is empty apart from God and leads nowhere. The Laodicean church was like this. They said, “I am rich...and have need of nothing.” The rich farmer is similar: “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19). Both were foolish.

- I. The outcome for these functional atheists is very dim: their best life *is* now—the next one will be worse. They will have hunger and weeping and condemnation like the false prophets. Their comfort, if it really is comfort, is that they have it easy right now.

Conclusion

Obviously, the Lord is highlighting the blessedness of the humble. His preaching, though it does not explicitly demand this kind of conduct, obviously is calling for us to be that way. We should pray to God to help us recognize our spiritual poverty; ask Him to give us an insatiable appetite for righteousness and to fill it; ask him to sustain us as we weep over things that grieve Him until the time of joy comes; and seek to persevere in persecution knowing that if it is for the Son of Man’s sake, it is eternally worthwhile.

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