

Luke 6:17 [Jesus] went down and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, ¹⁹and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

²⁰Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

²⁴“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

WORDS FOR THE ROAD—JESUS’ WORDS FOR YOUR ROAD

“Here am I. Send me!” That was where we closed out last week. We were sideline observers to the prophet Isaiah in God’s throne room. We saw him trembling and frightened. And then, he was forgiven. So, when the LORD asked, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”, that once trembling, frightened, but now forgiven Isaiah boldly said, “Here am I. Send me!” And we said it too. We sang it in the last hymn, “Hark the voice of Jesus saying, ‘Who will go and work today?’... Answer quickly when he calleth, ‘Here am I. Send me, send me.’” That’s how we walked out of church!

So how’s it going? Has that exuberant enthusiasm survived the week? Maybe it has. If it has, God bless you! Or has this week done kind of the opposite thing to you. Do you feel beaten up in your walk with Christ? Like, “I’m holding on, but just barely.” Whether at either extreme or anywhere in between, Jesus this week encourages you in the faith that made you say, “Here am I. Send me!”

To you Jesus says, “***Blessed are you...***”

Feels good, doesn’t it? To hear Jesus say to you, “***Blessed are you.***”

When you hear how he said it, it will feel even better. But on this point, I am going to have to talk about Bible translations for just a minute. First thing: I am generally a fan of the NIV Bible. Second: There is no such thing as a perfect translation. So while I am generally a fan, in verse 20 the NIV fumbles the ball. “***Looking at his disciples, he said...***” You get the impression Jesus is issuing just another directive, that it is just “another day, another dollar.”

Most translations stay closer to the original language.

So what you have in verses 17-20 are crowds, great crowds, coming to Jesus; hundreds, maybe thousands of people. There they are, out in the blue and green amphitheater of God's creation. In one translation, verse 20 then says, "***And he, lifting up his eyes upon his disciples, said, Blessed are ye poor...***" (Darby translation). Jesus lifted his eyes upon that great crowd of his disciples. He didn't cast a passing glance at them, "he lifted his eyes upon them." He is not looking at the thing in his hand to watch the next 30 seconds of clickbait. He is not looking at his calendar, ready to rush off to something else more important than you. (He is, after all, the Savior of the world!) Not task oriented, Jesus *is* people oriented. "***Lifting up his eyes upon his disciples***" you see his calm, unhurried gaze. It rests on them. He has time. He knows. He knows their names; he knows their lives. For each of them he knows whether it has been an up week or a down week. It's all there is the patient gaze passing over the crowd. Jesus lifting his eyes upon me would be a moment that would stay with me for life. I could never forget that! That is how he looked at these new, green disciples gathering around him who really didn't yet know what they were getting into, it makes his words strike home.

"***Lifting his eyes upon his disciples, [he] said, Blessed are you...***" He went on to name four blessings. These "Blesseds" are sometimes called The Beatitudes.

When he speaks these blessings, we must—we simply must—remember to whom he said these things. Listen carefully: "***Lifting up his eyes upon his disciples, he said...***" Jesus is talking to his followers, his believers. God's word takes pains to mention that these blessings were spoken to his disciples, not to the great masses. That is important. This is his message for you in the pews, not out in the world.

Some things are like that. They are internal matters that are supposed to stay internal. Some things are not for general consumption. It's like a family pow-wow where the patriarch of the family is addressing an important issue. The family is all ears, but there are also some people outside, literal outsiders, backs against the house, sitting beneath the window, eavesdropping on the conversation. The conversation is not intended for their ears. It does not apply to them. They are not family members. They have no share in what is going on. And they will misunderstand what was never intended for them to hear.

Same thing with these Beatitudes. These are intended for you, God's children to hear, not for all people. No matter how much a parent loves the children of the neighborhood, he or she has to save some words that are only for their own children, or else what kind of parent are you. And if you think about it, the reason Jesus says these things only to his people is pretty obvious.

When the outsider hears, "***Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,***" they think that the kingdom of God is a virtue club where the entry fee is good behavior. "Be generous, be nice to others, and you get into heaven," is what they hear from outside under the windowsill. Yes, how many people think they will get into heaven because they have been good people! They think, "I don't have time for God in my life. I don't like church. I'm not interested in the Bible. I'll make up for it by being generous, kind and helpful. These Beatitudes say that is what God wants." No! You, outsider, weren't supposed to hear this. Jesus knew you would misunderstand. No one, not a single soul, will get to heaven that way. "***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the***

gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Galatians 2:8-9). Only through faith in Jesus’ completed work for the forgiveness of our sins, not through lives of virtue, will we be saved.

You here know that. You know that the Beatitudes aren’t how you get into heaven. To people who already possessed heaven, to believers, Jesus spoke these words. These verses are not a road map to eternal life, they are words of blessing and encouragement for those already having eternal life. Understand this and suddenly there is no guilt trip in these blessings, but only joy.

As Jesus speaks, he repeatedly contrasts Now versus Then. You know what he means by Now versus Then: this world versus God’s kingdom. This world and God’s kingdom are in a competition for our attention, yes, this happens even to believers! As believers choose one, they let go of the other. Jesus urges us to hold tight to the Then, to God’s kingdom. He promises that all the ease and comforts of this world—of the Now—that you given up for the Son of Man, will be compensated by bigger and better blessings in the Then. “Compensated” not in the sense of earned. But he promises that in heaven, all the tears and sorrow and loss and everything that we can suffer in this world for Jesus’ name will be swallowed up in God’s infinite blessings. Stand firm through hardship. You will be blessed.

Let’s look especially at Jesus’ first blessing: ***“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”***

Now before I say more about ***“Blessed are the poor,”*** I must say that Jesus is not minimizing the struggles of people who are having trouble making ends meet. None of us would choose to be there, and there are many earthly difficulties for people in those situations. Yet Jesus tells us there are blessings, significant blessings, in having less.

First of all, Jesus words are just plain encouraging to people who fall short by the world’s measure of success. The world’s number one way to measure whether or not you have made it is to judge you by how much money you have, the car you drive, the clothes you wear. People who fall short of the world’s measure in these things often feel like they have failed. Sometimes they say, “I’m not sure what I did to make God angry, but here I am.” Sometimes they are laughed at and looked down upon—maybe you remember people treated that way in school days. To those with little, who clung to the words of Jesus but were derided as people who needed faith to compensate for their failures—you ever hear people say that?—Jesus lifted his eyes upon them and said, ***“Blessed are you who are poor, for your is the kingdom of God.”***

Here is another blessing of the poor. In other places God’s Word warns us that wealth is dangerous. Most of us say, “I’ll take my chances.” But it says that, *“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith”* (1 Timothy 6:10). Again, Jesus told a parable comparing a man sowing seed to the kingdom of God. About the seed tossed into the weeds Jesus said, *“The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear [the Word of God], but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures.”* Yes, you’ve seen that. You know names. People whose faith has been choked out by the things of this world. Poverty is not without its challenges. The temptations of wealth are many more.

And there is another reason that each of us should take to heart Jesus' words, ***"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*** Every time you give 10% of your income to God, you are going to have 10% less to spend than your co-worker who gets the same paycheck. Is not every act of giving an implicit trust in this promise of Jesus? Is it not in some small way an acceptance of poverty now for the future greater good of the kingdom of God.

Let me give you an example. This weekend, in fact it's happening today, there is a young Christian couple getting married. They probably should have been married a while ago, but this has been very difficult for them. You see she as a single mom has gotten a check in the mail over the last couple years that as a married mom she will not get. Doing what Jesus wants them to do *is* going to cost them some serious cash, thousands! And Jesus lifts his eyes upon this young man and young woman pledging themselves to each other today and says, ***"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."***

And we could go on. ***"Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man."*** We would benefit from contemplating all these blessings, only we lack for time.

But let us briefly think about the last three verses. Here is the shocker: ***"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort."*** That's not the sort of thing we expect Jesus to say! And he says it four times. When Jesus says, "Woe to you," he isn't saying, "Shame on you." He's saying, "God's judgment will come upon you." Four times he says it. "God will judge...God will judge." So we start looking around in this reading for the bad guys. Maybe it's Pharisees, or teachers of the Law, or hypocrites. Where are the baddies Jesus is saying "woe" to? Then we remember what it said at the beginning. ***"Lifting up his eyes upon his disciples, he said... 'Woe to you who are rich... who are well fed... who laugh... when all men speak well of you.'"***

Jesus was speaking these words to us. He lifts his eyes upon his own people and says ***"Woe"*** not out of anger against his disciples, but out of love for them. Jesus does not want us to fall pray to Satan's traps. Jesus reminds us that as long as we are on this side of the grave, we must be vigilant against sin. We must be ever quick to repent.

Here, too, Jesus warns us against treasuring worldly riches: we who would trade time with God for a little extra income, or a night out. He warns us against seeking the world's acceptance by doing the outrageous thing that makes you the cool kid. They're all acts of betrayal. Betrayal of God and betrayal one's future.

Understand, our Savior's disapproval of these things is no hatred for you. It is profound concern. It is the same as his prayer for his crucifiers' forgiveness, his tears for Jerusalem.

Watch as Jesus lift his unhurried eyes upon his followers. Listen to Jesus speak these caring words for his people. He speaks woes of warning against our sinful flesh that would rob us of heaven. But most of all, I would encourage you in the theme of the day, that Jesus promises blessings to those who stand steadfast. Hear Jesus proclaim that truth and the joy that should be ours from verse 22: ***"Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven."*** Amen.