

Blessings and Woes

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name's Tim. I'm one of the members here and it's a great privilege to come and to share something with you this morning. You are destined to reign in life. You are called by the Lord to be a success, to enjoy wealth, to enjoy health, and to enjoy a life of victory.

It is not the Lord's desire that you should live a life of defeat, poverty, and failure. When you reign in life, you reign over sin. You reign over the powers of darkness. You reign over depression, over poverty, over every curse, and over every sickness and disease. Here's another quote.

Anyone who tells you to deny yourself is from Satan. Or how about this one? Be blessed spirit, soul, body, and financially. Or one last one. God wants us to prosper financially, to have plenty of money, to fulfill the destiny he has laid out for us. Before some of the elders come and wrestle me from the stage, what you've just heard is what countless thousands and millions hear week by week when they come to a church. That it is your right as a follower of Jesus to experience bodily health and physical wealth right here, right now. But let's see the contrast of this fool's gold with what Jesus is about to teach us from Luke chapter 6 verses 17 through 26. You may remember from last week that Jesus has chosen from among his followers 12 apostles, an unlikely team, to take forward the message and mission that he has started. And now we're about to see that Jesus gives some very unlikely principles to them. So we're going to read

Luke chapter 6 verses 17 to 26. It's 1033 in the Pew Bible, so if you want to follow along. He, that is Jesus, went down with them, that is the disciples, and stood on a level place.

A large crowd of his disciples was there, and a great number of people from all over Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and all the people tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. Looking at his disciples, he said, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 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, when they exclude you, and insult you, and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

[3 : 51] Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven, for that is how their fathers treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. Let's just pray as we come to this tricky passage of God's word together.

Father, we thank you for the worship that we've been able to sing already this morning. And now as we turn to your word, we pray that you would give us open ears.

That you would give us hearts that are receptive. We pray that your spirit would come and bring this sermon of Jesus to life to us. We pray that the realities of discipleship would become real.

[5 : 05] That we would count the cost. And that we would gladly follow you all the same. We pray for this in Jesus' name. Amen. This is an incredible passage.

Before we set off, we need to note maybe a couple of things going on in the context. Firstly, as we've been going through Luke's gospel, this is really Jesus' first block of teaching. There is a sermon recorded in Nazareth and a few responses to some of the objections being raised against Jesus.

But this is the first time we hear Jesus teaching his disciples. This isn't some obscure course on going deeper for the fanatical followers.

Notice this. This is discipleship 101. This is entry level in Jesus' teaching. On that note, remember that he's teaching his disciples.

You could almost miss it there. But it says that he looked to his disciples as he taught these teachings. And that's going to be very important. So that we don't misinterpret what Jesus is saying.

[6 : 11] But on the other hand, notice that there is a big crowd around Jesus. He is exceptionally popular. And with that all said, let's try and get into the meat of this sermon of Jesus.

Blessed are the sacrificial, are the first few verses. Blessed are the sacrificial. Blessed are the poor, hungry, weeping, hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected as evil.

I wonder how you would define blessed. If we took a poll of everybody here and you were all asked to define the word blessed. I'm not sure that this would really rank high on the list, would it?

If we were honest, we'd probably have to admit that our definition of being blessed is being prosperous or being successful. Let me put it in another way.

I can't think of any time that I have been poor, hungry, weeping, hated, excluded, insulted, rejected as evil. That my instant reaction has been, oh look, goody, I'm blessed.

[7 : 18] Maybe I'm just very worldly and you all see the blessings in trials. But I don't think so. So what's Jesus saying here? Is he merely trying to harness the power of positive thinking?

Is he advocating a life of deliberately seeking poverty and abuse? Or is something else going on here? I think we need to notice one detail that will unlock this whole passage.

Notice what happens at the end of both the woes and the blessings. At the end of the blessings. It says, rejoice in that day.

Leap for joy because great is your word in heaven. For that is how their ancestors, that is how their fathers treated the prophets. And again at the end of the woes.

For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. The false prophets, sorry. The circumstances of the blessed. Particularly seen in the ostracism and hatred of the surrounding people.

[8 : 33] Is linked to how previous generations have rejected and mistreated God's messengers. And in the same way, we are going to be treated as disciples of Jesus Christ.

This really is the key to unlocking the whole passage. Now maybe you're saying the weeping, the hunger and the poverty seems disconnected from this. I wonder if that's only because we live in a world where our standing in our community isn't fundamentally necessary for success and prosperity.

Go back maybe before cars and mass transit. Maybe even today go to a rural area and you will quickly find that to be of good repute within your locality affects your business.

It affects your employability. What people say of you could even affect your personal security to an extent that we can't even dream in city modern living.

But that doesn't leave this passage irrelevant. I think we're seeing events happening even in our own country that bring this teaching of Jesus right into today's society.

[9 : 53] Right into our struggle as Christians to live out our faith in front of Jesus. So all of these are tied together. If people reject us because of our association with Jesus and if we suffer hardship because of this rejection, we are to consider ourselves blessed.

Please be careful. Rejection by people is not positively a good thing. People have thought this in years past.

But if you have a caustic personality, if you are, as my father would say, thrown, awkward, or just downright unpleasant as a person, don't take this as license for your character flaws.

Jesus is very specific in saying, isn't he, that this is our association with him that brings the rejection. And on the other hand, don't make the mistake that lots of people have made in the last hundred years, that the poor or the weeping are morally or spiritually superior.

Someone with a bank balance of five pounds is no more blessed, no more holy than someone with five thousand or five hundred thousand pounds. What Jesus is teaching here has actually very little to do with what we have in our bank account or what's sitting on our dinner plates when we go home.

[11 : 24] It has everything to do with what we are willing to risk for him. It has everything to do with what we are willing to risk for him.

At the end of Hebrews 11, when the preacher is wrapping up his list of men who have stood firm in the faith, he says this, Others who were tortured and refused to be released so that they might gain a better resurrection.

It says, But notice the next words of the preacher.

The world was not worthy of them. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in caves and holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith. Not their hardships, for their faith. Yet none of them received what had been promised. The catalogue of incredible examples in Hebrews 11 is not here to show us how good it is to be afflicted and poor.

[12:47] However, it is to show us the faithful example of faithful people who held fast to the faith despite incredible opposition.

And that's where this whole passage turns around and asks the question to us, Are we just fair weather Christians? Are we willing to put on the altar our reputations?

Or is our most valued blessing what people think of us? Put a different way.

Are you able to live out your Christian faith staring down the barrel of redundancy or dismissal? Or am I so convinced that this good news of Jesus is true that I would hold on to it if it led me to the very edge of society, among the homeless and the hopeless, to live with no material blessings and yet consider myself blessed?

Blessed are the sacrificial. But then woe to the self-satisfied. The other side of this coin is scary.

[14:09] These woes have kindled in me a fear of who I am and where my values truly lie, and I wonder if it will do the same for you this morning. Notice verse 24 again.

Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your comfort. I wonder, are we so self-satisfied, so comfortable, so at ease that we are willing to risk nothing for the sake of Jesus?

Is our reputation of such high value that to mention our Christian faith at work or at university is just too risky?

Is it possible that we blend into the world so well that the people around us just don't see any difference in us, and so everyone speaks well of us?

We're polite. We're nice. We're tolerant. All the virtues of 21st century pagan Scotland are alive and well in us. We might even share the occasional inspirational tweet, but we misrepresent God.

[15:22] We fail to tell a dying world around us that they need Jesus, and in the end we embody the spirit of the false prophets. And here's the truly terrifying part.

It is so easy to do. This is terrifying. And please don't think that I'm standing up here bringing down this on your heads and not on my own.

I am a weak-willed man, and I often wonder if I should open the conversation, but far more often than not, I'd bottle it. Twice a week I walk up the Royal Mile, and I walk beside the statue of Hume, and on one side of me is this statue raised to an atheist philosopher who declares that the law is both blank and under his control.

If you ever walk past it again, notice the slabs, the tablets he holds are blank, and one of them lies under his feet. But on the other side of him, more often than not, I walk past people who are misrepresenting Christ, so-called Christians, who are deceived and who are deceiving others.

And to my shame, I have never stopped and engaged those folks in conversation. Underlying it all, I wonder if maybe we have lost our eternal perspective.

[16:55] Notice in verse 21 and in verse 25, blessed are you who hunger now for you will. Blessed are you who weep now for you will.

And it's the same down in verse 25, woe to you who are well fed now for you will. There's this contrast between now and then. I wonder if we're so willing to let people continue in their darkness because we fail to live in the light of eternity.

And is our unwillingness to risk our comfortable and reputable positions because we fail to grasp that eternity is determined by how we live in the here and now.

Amen. Amen. This is a fantastic Old Testament illustration. Way back in 1 Kings 22, Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, and Ahab, the king of Israel, his ally, were about to go to war.

And so they called together some prophets to let them know if God would be on their side or against them. And they called together about 400 of these prophets, these men who speak for God.

[18:16] And they told them, go for the Lord will give it into the king's hand. They said exactly what the kings wanted to hear. One of these prophets, a man called Zedekiah, you maybe can't see it in the picture.

He made probably a helmet with iron horns embedded on it. Think a Viking helmet style. And he declared supposedly from God, with these you will gore the Arameans until they are destroyed.

That sounds like a fun preacher to listen to, doesn't it? Object lessons and everything. Micaiah, though, another prophet at the time was summoned. He was warned that he should agree with what all these other prophets were saying.

And initially he even did. But then Micaiah tells the truth of what he knows from God. He exposes the falsehood of the other prophets as a delusion sent from a spirit, sent by God, all with the intention that Ahab, one of these kings, would be killed in the battle.

Zedekiah is outraged. He slaps Micaiah in the face. He calls him a liar and Ahab the king orders his imprisonment. Needless to say, in the next couple of verses, you find that King Ahab dies in the battle that follows.

[19 : 40] Isn't this just a perfect illustration of what Jesus is saying to us? To the onlooker, this flamboyant prophet Zedekiah is the blessed. Meanwhile, woe comes to the persecuted and slightly conflicted Micaiah.

And yet, the resolution of the battle proved Micaiah to speak God's word truly and showed Zedekiah and the hundreds of others with him to be false in what they knew of God.

And when it comes to us, do we only say what is acceptable and pleasant? Or are we willing to speak out against the other voices that our neighbors and our family and our friends are used hearing?

D.L. Moody would be a well-known name in the 19th century. He was one of the best-known preachers around. And he said this, out of 100 men, one will read the Bible.

The other 99 will read the Christian. One out of 100 men, one will read the Bible. The other 99 will read the Christian.

[20 : 56] And when we think of those who we work beside, those that we study with, the many that we bump into day by day, who else do they have to read? Who else do they have to read?

So often we go through life assuming that someone else will tell them about Jesus. But we're disciples, aren't we? Aren't we Christians? Aren't we the ones that God has put in their class, in their workplace, in their toddler group, in their social club, or on their street?

But the teaching of Jesus isn't a guilt trip. Let's lift our eyes from our failures to see God's perfect example.

We read in Philippians about Jesus who dwelt in unthinkable and unimaginable perfection and left it all and came to this world.

He held the glories of heaven with an open hand and He came and He lived among us. We find Him here on earth living in poverty, being hungry, weeping profusely, and knowing the full malice and rejection of mankind.

[22 : 22] Drink this one in. The one who was rich beyond all splendor, as the old hymn says, was really physically poor.

The one who owns every particle in the universe, never mind the cattle on the thousand hills, was actually physically hungry.

The one who was the source of all true joy really wept. He to whom all men will worship knew the spite of men who spoke evil of Him, who mocked Him, and who eventually crucified Him.

But what's His position now? Where is He now? He's exalted in the highest. He has the name above every name, and everyone and everything will bow to Jesus and confess Him as the King. So will we settle for our measly thousands of pounds now, or will we be wise enough to invest for an eternal dividend?

[23 : 37] Do we count the cost now in view of the reward then, or do we look to be rewarded now and pay the price for all eternity? Will we risk our all for Him here and now in the sure and certain hope that in Jesus we are blessed and have no need to fear want or hardship in the light of eternity?

Or will we see that our current satisfaction and comfort as too important, too worthwhile, too valuable, and prove that we actually follow a false gospel, just like those that we heard from at the start?

Let's take a moment, just before we close our service, to reflect on the challenge which Jesus brings to us in this passage. Maybe you're recognizing in yourself something that needs to be worked out, and we'll spend just a minute in quiet before we sing, and then our service will be over. Let's reflect. Father, we thank You that You were not willing to leave us as we were.

we thank You that You have warned us of the deceptiveness of riches, that You have warned us of the false poverty of material wealth, and You have shown us the true richness that belongs in You and in You alone.

[25 : 29] and we thank You that we can be oppressed here on this earth, and yet we can know with full confidence that we are accepted in Your presence, and that we are rich, not because of what we have here, but because of eternity.

Father, would You continue to speak to us? Would You continue to challenge us? Would You continue to encourage us to lift our eyes to Jesus?

And would we see the eternal value of all that You desire for us? Father, bless us, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.