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Blessed Are the Unlucky

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Luke 6:17 – 26

INTRODUCTION

In Luke 6, we have a portion of the *Sermon on the Mount* (cf. Matthew Gospel). In your Bibles, it's probably called the *Sermon on the Plain*. It's the same sermon, because Jesus likely was standing on a plateau on the way up a mountain.

This version is shorter. For instance, Matthew has 8 Beatitudes; Luke has 4 Beatitudes.

The Beatitudes describe what it is like to be a Christ-follower. They contrast Kingdom values with worldly values. And they show what we can expect from the world (here & now) + from God (i.e.: what He will give us).

Let's read, beginning with **v. 17**:

¹⁷ When they came down from the mountain, the disciples stood with Jesus on a large, level area, surrounded by many of his followers and by the crowds. There were people from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from as far north as the seacoasts of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those troubled by evil spirits were healed. ¹⁹ Everyone tried to touch him, because healing power went out from him, and he healed everyone.

²⁰ Then Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.

²¹ God blesses you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied. God blesses you who weep now, for in due time you will laugh.

²² What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man. ²³ When that happens, be happy! Yes, leap for joy! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, their ancestors treated the ancient prophets that same way.

And now comes some "*Beatitudes in Reverse*". . .

²⁴ "What sorrow awaits you who are rich, for you have your only happiness now.

²⁵ What sorrow awaits you who are fat and prosperous now, for a time of awful hunger awaits you. What sorrow awaits you who laugh now, for your laughing will turn to mourning and sorrow.

²⁶ What sorrow awaits you who are praised by the crowds, for their ancestors also praised false prophets.

Jesus might as well have said, "*If you're unlucky (e.g.: suffering, oppressed, impoverished), man you are blessed!*"

The word translated "*blessed*" (in some versions, "*happy*") is really too mild, insipid, tame a word. The Greek word is much more forceful, percussive: "*You are soooo lucky...fortunate... WOW, I can't believe how good you've got it!...you are to be envied.*"

How lucky are the unlucky! Blessed are the unlucky!

And the congregation hearing the Sermon on the Mount is going, “Huh?” == just like you & me. How can you be going through all that and be blown-away-blessed? I think it has something to do with the sense of contentment, rightness, in-sync-ness we feel when we are in a good relationship with God.

I think you have to approach Jesus’ Beatitudes on two different levels.

AS PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE

- ▶ Those who mourn will be comforted;
- ▶ The meek will inherit the earth;
- ▶ The hungry will be filled;
- ▶ The pure will see God.

This is not Jesus trying to make the unfortunate feel better. But genuine promises coming from One who had existed “on the other side”. . .who knew just how much the joys & rewards of the Kingdom of Heaven outshine the sorrows and distresses of this life.

In Christian circles, the idea of **future rewards** is not much in vogue these days. Maybe it’s because we’ve gotten a bit more affluent, and don’t like to sing songs like, “*This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through*”.

But, think about those songs that came out of American slavery: “*Swing low, sweet chariot, comin’ for to carry me home.*” “*When I get to heaven, goin’ to put on my robe, going’ to shout all over God’s heaven.*” “*We’ll soon be free, we’ll soon be free, when the Lord will call us home.*” All words that came from the mouths of slaves who had little hope in this world, but abiding hope in a world to come. For them, all hope centered in Jesus. Does it for us?

The eternal rewards mentioned in the Beatitudes are NOT “pie in the sky by and by”. To believe in future rewards is to believe that the long arm of the Lord bends toward justice. It is to believe that one day the proud will be overthrown and the humble raised up and the hungry filled with good things—whether on “this side” or the “other side”.

We keep fighting for justice NOW (in this life). We come against evil in any way we can. We don’t just cave in. . .and wait. But the Beatitudes are like a bell tolling from another world. They remind us that all for all we go through in this life, there’s something better coming. Let the promise of rewards remind you that evil has no future, only good does.

ILLUSTRATION> A number of you have gone on missions trips to one place or another. There’s a sizable group that goes from our church every year to **Red Bird in KY**. We’re getting ready to go again this year, end of April. The UMC has a well-developed collection of ministries designed to address the material and spiritual needs of one of the poorest regions in the USA.:

- In Labor Force (over age 16): 64% USA; 40% there [avg. of 3 surrounding counties]
- Families below poverty level: 9% USA; 31% there [based on 2000 Census]

Red Bird has a K-12 school + a medical & dental clinic + community store (with low-cost clothing and furniture) + economic opportunity for local crafters to market their handiwork in one of the neatest craft stores I’ve ever seen—and I don’t generally like craft stores! ☺

Here’s what impresses me every time I’ve been there. . .same in the inner city of Detroit where I used to work. . .saw it again yesterday at Cass Community Center: The people there, though they are living in the harshest of circumstances (e.g.: extreme poverty, no jobs, no opportunities, pathetic housing) have a different attitude. They have a triumphant spirit and good humor. You don’t hear the fearfulness-fretfulness-anxiousness-complaints that we hear in our more “prosperous” surroundings. I believe it is due to their unwavering belief in heaven, in future rewards. These people feel grief and pain—but they know this life is not all there is.

Maybe we can take a lesson from them.

I fear we've become a little too this-worldly—chasing after only what this world and life have to offer (good as that is). **C. S. Lewis:** *“If we consider the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, our Lord must find our desires not too strong, but too weak.”* We'd be content if we had financial prosperity, the physical pleasures of this world, or everything that's enjoyable & beautiful. But alas, we grasp for far less than what the Kingdom of Heaven offers.

“Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has the mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. [Gal. 2:9]

AS A REALITY CHECK FOR THE PRESENT

As much as I look forward to what God has in store, this still is in the future. What about the present? What about now? How are we to live now? The Beatitudes show us how.

If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, you hold a dual citizenship: you are part of the Kingdom of Heaven + kingdom of this world. The kingdom of this world is very incompatible / antagonistic to the Kingdom of Heaven. In the kingdom of this world, the Beatitudes might read something like this:

- Blessed are the self-assertive...the confident...the rich.
- Blessed are the happy and the strong...the competitive and the connected.
- Blessed are those who hunger & thirst for a good time.
- Blessed (successful) are those who look out for #1.

That's how the world lives. But we don't live like the rest of the world. How then should we live? Jesus says we are to live:

- As MOURNERS == those who mourn NOT only over our own personal losses (many of which are unfair and/or unexpected), BUT over things in this world and culture that are not right. . .and the victims of injustice (e.g.: those who do not have adequate food, housing, health care).
- As the MEEK == humble (meaning we recognize the greatness of God + we are not God), gentle in their dealings with other people, and have a servant's heart (even when not recognized).
- As those who HUNGER & THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS == our own (for God's will to be done in our own personal situation); also “social righteousness” (working for better conditions for the poor, homeless, hungry ← the action side of “mourning”).
- As those who are MERCIFUL [in my water polo game, all bets are off on this one ☺] == who've learned to show compassions & forgiveness.
- As those who are PURE IN HEART (NOT perfect) == sometimes have to ask Holy Spirit to take captive every thought, attitude, and action so that the image of Jesus becomes more apparent in our lives.
- As PEACEMAKERS on all levels == work for world peace, peace with our neighbors, our relationships, within ourselves. God desires peace for our lives and our households!
- As those who do what is right + speak out in love & truth → sometimes PERSECUTED, ridiculed, and maligned. **I Peter 3:15** says we are always to do this *“with gentleness and respect”*. But oh, how costly. This is deeply personal to Marcie & me; a friendship has recently been lost. We're always swimming upstream as long as we live as witnesses of Christ in this world. It's sad and frustrating, because there are so many distortions...so many misperceptions out there; people tend not to hear or understand us.

Sounds like a life of misery—being a follower of Christ. *“Congratulations! I bet you can't wait for people to reject you for your Christian values.”*

“Congratulations! You’re so virtuous! Look at all that work you’re putting into becoming righteous...becoming pure in heart.” Well, not exactly. Jesus never intended to make virtues out of these things. This is just life in the present.

“Well, lucky you, you get to mourn (grieve) over the condition of the world, the church, the family.” That’s painful! Jesus never denied the pain that living out the Beatitudes would bring. He did, however, spend a good deal of time trying to remedy these miseries.

So, why put yourself through all this—even if the future rewards I spoke of earlier will one day leave us saying, “It was worth it all!” WHY?

Because that’s who Jesus blesses and uses. That’s who gets his favor. If you are a person who is needy, desperate, and dissatisfied with life, you are in a position (posture) to receive the love and grace of God—more so than one who is more comfortable or self-sufficient. It is from this position, this posture that God is able to work in your life AND through your life.

How many of you came to Christ when you were on a wave of popularity...after winning the lottery...or coming into a huge sum of money? I would venture to say that none of us here came to Christ because everything was going well in our life. Not many do.

ILLUSTRATION of Rick Tramanto> I read of a famous chef in Chicago at a restaurant Marcie & I ate in while visiting Jeremy. He was on the road to destruction (e.g.: cocaine-snorting, binge drinking, had a serious anger problem—very gruff and impatient with employees, would scream and berate his chefs—was neglectful of his son, and on the verge of splitting up with his wife). All that in spite of all the accolades! One day he heard a preacher on the radio say, “Make a decision to go after the things that are going to bring lasting change inside of your life.” He had nowhere else to turn but to Jesus. He was desperate==”*poor in spirit*”. So he cried out to God for help. God saved Him → Rick T. became a changed man. His family came back together...his fame and notoriety, career and business ventures have continued to soar.

Rick T. works in a world where hedonism (i.e.: pleasure any way you can get it) is “god”. Now he’s living out the Beatitudes in his own life—and making quite a difference.

So here’s the bottom line. . .

If you live like Jesus is proposing in the Beatitudes, you have much to look forward to—both in this life + the next! Actually, Dave Ramsey’s mantra sums it all up: *“If you live like no one else now—and the Beatitudes will cause you to do that--later you can live like no one else.”*

STUDY GUIDE: Luke 7-11

Monday: Read Luke 7. In vv. 36-50, do you think the Pharisee was aware of the social custom to greet guests with a kiss and wash their feet? Why do you think the sinful woman came to the Pharisee’s house? What made the Pharisee upset? In the story about the two men who owed money, what was Jesus saying to Simon? Who was the prophet in your life who believed in you and saw beauty in you before you believed in yourself?

Tuesday: Read Luke 8. Of the people traveling with Jesus, what position do the women seem to have (cf. vv. 1-15)? What does this passage tell us about them? Based on this passage and Luke 7:36-50, what is your general impression of Jesus’ relationships with women? Do vv. 9-10 indicate that Jesus wants people to misunderstand his teaching? Before becoming a Christian, what preconceptions did you have about Christians? What effect did these have on your receptiveness? What can you do to help turn someone’s bad preconceptions into “good soil”?

Wednesday: Read Luke 9. Why do you think Jesus empowered the disciples to perform miracles? What is the purpose of miracles in Jesus’ own ministry? How important are they? In vv. 18ff, what does the title Christ (or the Messiah) mean? [See a Bible dictionary.] Nowadays, who do most people say Jesus is? Why is it important to know what people believe about Jesus? What does it mean to you to (a) deny self, (b) take up your cross daily, (c) follow Christ, (d) lose your life?

Thursday: Read Luke 10. Focus on vv. 25-37. Do you think Jesus knew about the Samaritans? What made them social outcasts? If the priest and Levite were taking the dangerous road because they were in a rush to get to their religious duties in Jericho, do you think they could be justified in passing by the wounded man? Why do you think the Samaritan stopped when the others “passed” by on the other side? What makes a Good Samaritan really good?

Friday: Read Luke 11. What miracle did Jesus perform in vv. 14-28? What three reactions emerged from the crowd (vv. 14-16)? What was Jesus’ point in vv. 24-26? Is just cleaning up our lives enough? To avoid becoming an easy target for Satan, what do we need to fill our lives with? In vv. 42-44, what four woes did Jesus direct toward the Pharisees? What was he criticizing in each instance? Which of these has your name on it? In what ways would you like to see your life change, even this week?