

Blessings and Woes

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn now to Luke's Gospel, the Gospel of Luke, and chapter 6. And we'll read from verse 20, it's on page 1039, Luke chapter 6.

Verse 20, And leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. Now there's a lot of debate as to whether this section here, verse 20, in Luke to the end of the chapter, is the same as we find in Matthew chapter 5, which we just read.

There are some people who are persuaded that this is exactly the same as the Sermon on the Mount, except a more condensed version of it. I don't know.

[2 : 0 0] And there are other people who are persuaded that this is a totally different occasion, at a different location, and although the Sermon is very similar.

Now one of the reasons that people are adamant that it is the same occasion is because while the teaching in Luke is much more condensed than it is in Matthew, people are saying, well, it is really basically the same sort of thing, and they're saying it must be the same occasion.

But that doesn't really stand because don't think for one moment that Jesus wouldn't have taught the same truths in other places where he went.

You don't think for one moment that Jesus would simply have taught a particular, or taught, say for instance, as we have in the Sermon on the Mount, taught these truths and never taught these truths anywhere else again.

It's more than likely that he would have in many places that he went. It's the same, I don't believe that there is any preacher who, in whatever stock of sermons that he has, would never use the same sermon again somewhere else.

[3 : 1 6] It will not, when he preaches, it be exactly the same, but probably much of the structure of it will. It was Spurgeon who used to say, if a sermon is worth preaching once, it's worth preaching more than once.

And there's a lot of truth in that. So to say that because the teaching is very similar in Luke to what we have in Matthew, that it must be the same occasion because it doesn't hold ground.

It could be, but it might not. The bottom line is it doesn't really matter. What is important is the great truths that are taught here. And the first thing that really strikes us is the sharp contrast that exists between two groups of people.

Some are blessed and some have woes put upon them. And the funny thing is that those who have woes upon them look like the kind of people you would say are blessed.

And those that have the blessing upon them seem the kind of people who would be experiencing woes. it's kind of strange reading because it's kind of baffling because those who are blessed are those who are poor and hungry, those who weep and those who are persecuted.

[4 : 3 1] And so we also find that those who have the woes on them are those who are rich, those who are full, or those who laugh, and those who are well spoken of. And so at first reading it may seem kind of confusing.

Well, obviously Jesus doesn't mean here that those who are poor and that those who are hungry and those who are sad and those who are hated by others that these are people who are blessed. That the only way to know blessing in this world is to be poor, to be hungry, to be sad, and to be badly spoken of. Not at all. Jesus isn't saying that.

So, what is Jesus speaking about? Well, we read in Matthew chapter 5 a fuller version of this. And it sheds light on what is being said. Because in Matthew chapter 5 it goes further than just saying blessed are the poor.

It says blessed are the poor in spirit. And there's a difference. And that really is a great dividing mark between those who have accepted the Lord as Savior and those who haven't.

[5 : 48] Because when a person begins to seek the Lord as Savior and when a person comes to faith that's one of the things that's born within our spirit is poverty.

Where we realize that really we have nothing of ourselves. we have the attitude of the beggar with the begging bowl. And that flies straight in the face of what we feel naturally.

Because by nature we generally feel satisfied within ourselves. Not saying for one moment that we're all saying everything is perfect and correct.

But by and large we feel that in God's sight that we're we're okay. And that God must accept us as we are.

Because by and large and it's true we would say that the vast majority of people are good upright decent folk. And while looking at a human level that is true.

[6 : 51] But when it comes to a spiritual level when God's spirit shines into our heart and reveals to us the kind of person we really are all of a sudden there's poverty.

Because we see hey I've got nothing. I am nothing. And that's a very difficult thing to accept. And it's not something that we can come to at a rational working out.

It's not something that we can sit down and just work out in our own mind. This is a God given or it's a God worked realization within our soul. I have nothing.

I am poor in my spirit. it's a difficult thing. It's like the attitude of the prodigal. The man who had everything and all of a sudden the man who had nothing.

And it tells us that when he came to himself there was this dawning realization of who he was. And it can be a very difficult thing to cope with.

[7 : 50] And many a person has had their whole mind their whole being shaken by it when there's this self-discovery of what we are before God.

And when we go through the Bible we find loads of people who came to that point of self-discovery. And we find them crying to the Lord and asking the Lord to help them to forgive them.

It's the attitude of the publican who sing Lord be merciful to me a sinner. And my friend if you've never discovered this poverty of spirit I would ask you go to the Lord and say Lord show me.

It's not in a way you're not going to the Lord in a way that you'll be crippled but in a way that will drive you to himself because when you see your poverty of spirit you realize Lord I need you.

I need you. Not just as a crutch to lean on but as somebody that you want for your life. An awful lot of people don't realize that Christianity is about a relationship.

[8 : 59] And just in the same way as you gel with friends and you gel with people in life it's the same way as often say to say for instance at the time of a wedding when you have two people who come together and there was a stage in their lives when they were quite content to go down different roads.

Maybe didn't even know each other. Maybe they did know each other but there wasn't any great attraction any great drawing. Life was fine. One was getting on fine one way. The other was getting on fine the other way.

Then all of a sudden something clicks. It might be gradual. It might be sudden. Two hearts all of a sudden are beginning to beat together. Two lives are being drawn together.

And there's this growing desire for one another and to be with one another. And saying this is this is a person that I want to spend the rest of my life with.

And you know that's really what Christianity is about and we use that example because God himself uses that example in the Bible. That's what God shows us. The greatest example the Lord can give of what Christianity is and the relationship between believer and the Christ is the picture of marriage.

[10 : 19] marriage. So there's this it's a relationship where two are joined together. And that's what happens because we realize we want this person.

And every believer that's where they've come to because they've come to this place where they are happy with the Lord. They want the Lord. Not just in a sense of somebody to deliver them from the poverty of their spirit but someone that they gain satisfaction.

satisfaction from. And that leads us to the second part where it says blessed are those who hunger now for they shall be filled. And again in Matthew it is those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled.

And so we have this growing desire for the Lord. And realizing that you see this is the problem and this is why only the Lord can open people's minds.

And that's why I'm saying if you haven't come to this place of discovery ask the Lord to open your mind to see. Because while we live out our days in this world it's a very physical world and we're governed in this world by the physical.

[11 : 34] We're very earthly, very grounded in the physical. And we're physical beings, we're the physical passions of life. And we have our mental faculties and all the various things that stimulate our mind.

And it's very easy to be governed purely by these things. But we are also spiritual beings. We have a soul. And that soul needs nourishment in the very same way as the body and the mind need stimulus and they need feeding.

So does our soul. Needs that. that. And that's why the Lord is saying, look, I'm here for you. Your soul needs me. I am the missing piece of your life.

And I will give this stimulus, I will give this satisfaction, I will give this filling to you. And that's what happens when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

There is a growing desire for the things of life. Now again, you alone can answer the question as to what Jesus means to you.

[12 : 46] Is Jesus somebody that satisfies you in life? Is he somebody that you want? You want to feed? And when we talk about feeding, we feed upon the word.

We go to the word and it means something to us. It touches our life and we eat, as it were, the word. I'm not saying that every time we go to the Bible we're going to be nourished.

In the same way that every time we go and sit down to eat. Sometimes we will eat things and we, I've used that illustration before, there are many times we're eating and we're not really conscious of what we're eating.

We eat it and we get up and we go. And if somebody asked you three days down the line, what did you have for breakfast or what did you have for lunch, you couldn't tell them. But there are other days you will remember it was an exceptional meal.

And you say to yourself, oh I'll remember that one. And you can tell people. And so it is spiritually that there are high points and there are what we would almost call ordinary points, although the word is never ordinary.

[13 : 48] But it's still doing good, it's still nourishing us, it's still giving that bit of strength. It's still washing over us and sanctify them through the truth, thy word is truth.

So the word is doing for us. But if we have no spiritual appetite, then there's something wrong. And if we live only for this world, if all that we gain is in this world, if all our hopes and our dreams and our aspirations are purely on this world, then the spiritual things, we have no appetite for them.

And I'm sure it's happened to you as it's happened to me. Sometimes you've gone to a person's house, you're going there for something and you don't realize that they've prepared a meal for you. It can be a very embarrassing thing, particularly if you've eaten beforehand. And I'm sure all of us maybe have been in that kind of situation and you weren't expecting to have anything to eat.

I know that just for instance, and there's lots of different ways that can happen, but I know maybe when you're going away to a communion, and you phoned and you say, right, I'll have something before I come, don't prepare a meal for me the night I'm arriving.

[15 : 11] And maybe that message hasn't been conveyed on or the husband's forgotten to tell his wife or whatever, and you arrive there and you've eaten and there's a big meal set for you.

And you don't like to say, I'm full. And you're saying, I'm going to have to try and eat this because you don't like to appear ungrateful. And it's difficult, even for someone like me.

It's difficult though because you say to yourself, I don't have the appetite just now. And you know, you'll often find that with children, that if they're eating sweets, they're eating way in their crisps and sweets and whatnot, and then they come to their tea, and they're picking at it because they've got no appetite for it.

The good food is pushed aside because they've been eating all the junk beforehand. And if we live in the junk of this world, we won't have a spiritual appetite for this, for the real meat, for the

nourishment of the word.

So that's what we have here. And this is a great promise. If we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we will be filled. We'll move on quickly. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

[16:32] While there are many great blessings and joys within the Christian faith, it also brings its own sense of sorrows. And there is a great sense of sorrow brought about by our own failure.

If you're here today as a believer, don't tell me there's never been a time where you've gone to the Lord and you wept. Maybe you have actually wept physical tears, but you've certainly wept in your heart because of your own sense of failure, of how you've let the Lord down, of how you've let other people down.

And in letting other people down, you've let the Lord down as well. It's all tied up. And so often as you look at your life, you feel this sense of failure. Again, when you look out sometimes in society, you weep, particularly at the sense of injustice, where we see injustice, where we see oppression, people losing their rights.

All these kind of things, they can hurt us in our heart. And so, of course, everybody in the world weeps at these sort of things, or they should, but certainly with regard to our own sense of failure. But again, we're told that those who do weep, that they shall laugh. You see, all these things are evidences and marks of the true believer.

[17:59] You might be here today and saying, you know, I don't know where I stand. I don't know whether I'm a believer or not. Well, if you hunger and thirst after righteousness, you're a believer.

That's what the word is saying. And you will be satisfied. You will be filled. And if you are poor in spirit and weeping over your own failure before God and seeking that you might be close with the Lord, these are all evidences and marks of the believer.

And then it says, blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and revile you and so on. And no cause or system or philosophy or belief has suffered like the Christian faith down throughout the years.

And we needn't be surprised at that because Satan hates, Satan hates the kingdom of God. There are two great kingdoms in this world, two great spiritual kingdoms.

There's a kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God and they're at war one with another. And that is why, that is why down throughout the centuries, and unfortunately even when you look into the history of the church in its broadest sense, even the church has been at war with itself because it's been stirred up.

[19:22] The history of the church can often be a very sad reading. It shouldn't be. Sometimes it is. But the thing is this, that the whole area of where people are shunned and people are slandered and hated for no other reason and the fact that they are Christians is really saying, well, Jesus is saying, well, that's what happened to me.

And what happened to me is more than likely to happen to you. But, he said, rejoice because it's not always going to be like that. There's a great reward laid up for you. You are going to share, you may share in my suffering here in this world, but he says, you're going to share in my glory in the world to come.

Forever and ever and ever. Time is moving on. Just very briefly, we see the second where Jesus pronounces the woes. And he says, again, these words are strange, woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are full now, and so on.

And does that mean that if a person is rich in this world, or a person prosperous in this world, that woe comes upon them? Not at all. When you go through the Bible, there have been some of the most wonderful saints who are very wealthy.

People like Abraham, people like Job, people like David. They had immense wealth. And there wasn't a woe placed upon them. And again, when you look at woe to you who laugh now, and again, many of God's people have been very happy people, have been people who are known for happiness in this world.

[21:04] The apostle Paul, though he had a very difficult life, was a man who was always rejoicing. You read Philippians, and you will find that whatever picture we may have on our mind about the apostle Paul, there is no doubt but that there was joy, was one of the great features of his life.

He was a man who was filled with joy. So what is Jesus saying here? Well, woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are full now. rich. And really, what Jesus is saying here is, the woe is upon those

whose whole ambition in life is simply to be rich and to prosper with no thought of their soul. That's where the woe is. Woe to you who are rich. For them, you see, the gospel is relegated, not just to second or third place, it's relegated way down the line.

The main priority of life is to prosper. Now, don't get me wrong, as we live out our lives, we have a duty to do the best that we can. In whatever sphere, wherever we're placed in life, we ought to do what is said before us and to do it with our might, to do it with all our ability.

Jesus is not saying there's anything wrong with prospering. There's nothing wrong with going up the ladder. There is nothing wrong with success. These can all be very good, healthy, worthwhile things.

[22 : 36] And so much good can be done to this world by those who have prospered and those who are wealthy. But, it's what we do, it's where our heart lies in these things.

If we are given in life to these things so that they consume our life. So that when we get up in the morning we're thinking, right, how can I get on more?

How can I get myself richer? How can I get up this ladder? What can I do? And we're prepared to do anything and everything in order to get on and prosper to the neglect of our precious never dying soul.

And Jesus is saying, look, be careful. Because if this is how you live your life, there's a woe on you. It's like those in the parable of the great supper. And remember, they were invited to this great supper.

And they all began to make excuses. And one said, oh well, you're going to have to excuse me because I've just bought a piece of ground and I've got to go and see it. And another one said, oh well, you're going to have to excuse me because I've just bought five yoke of oxen.

[23 : 49] In today's language would be just I bought five new tractors and plows and I've got to go out and try them. You're going to have to excuse me. And they all put forward their reasons.

Another one said, oh I've just got married. You're going to have to excuse me. They were all taken up with perfectly legitimate good things of life. But these things had become a hindrance.

These things had blotted out the spiritual aspect of life. And they had taken God from his throne and pushed him right down. And the Lord is saying, that's where the woe is.

Get your priorities right. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And all the other things will be added to you. And again, Jesus says about the next, just looking at this very, very briefly.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Again, Jesus is not talking about laughter. There's the expression, laughter is the best medicine.

[24 : 55] There's a lot of truth in that. And it's one I believe God has given us the ability to laugh. It's a tremendous buffer in life. And it often is a great release of tensions.

And often we can feel an awful lot better through and because of laughter. The Lord is not saying here for any one moment that woe to you who laugh now.

This word laugh, the idea of the laugh here, is those who are living purely and simply for what we would term the pleasure of the moment.

It is this philosophy of I've just got to fill up my life with a crack right now. It's got to be I've got to just find every moment of life.

You know the Bible terms of this philosophy, let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. In other words, I'm going to live for this moment and I'm going to pursue whatever pleasure I can to satisfy myself at this moment.

[26 : 02] Forget tomorrow. Forget the consequences. Forget everything else except this moment which is for me it is to be the moment of laughter and merriment and pleasure.

nothing else matters in life but the pursuit of pleasure. Jesus says no. Of course, life is full of pleasure and God has given us the capacity to enjoy life and it is filled with so many pleasures. Often the simple pleasures that we take for granted. But life is filled with these pleasures. pleasure. But the Lord is saying don't give your life over just to the pursuit of pleasure because real lasting pleasure is ultimately found in me.

And if you go down any other road, whatever pleasure you may gain in this world, it will slip through your fingers like the sand of the seashore. You cannot keep it. It's gone.

But the satisfaction and pleasure in me is eternal. At thy right hand, the psalmist says, are pleasures forevermore. And finally, we see the last category.

[27 : 18] Christ pronounces woe over those really who love woe to you when all people speak well of you. And again, that has been sometimes put where people love the praise of men rather than the praise of God.

God. That is really what has been spoken about here. Where people love the praise of other people rather than God's praise. In other words, if you live your life simply according to the way you think people think of you, if what motivates your life is so that you will be popular and well spoken of by people, you've missed the point.

Now, of course, nobody goes out of their way to antagonize. Nobody's going to go out of their way and deliberately upset people so that people will speak wrongly of them. Not at all. The Christian actually should be spoken of well, not just within church circles, but within the community.

Like Timothy. There was, what does it say? Something like, of Timothy, who had a good report from without, in other words, from without the church community, even those who were non-believers, thought well of Timothy.

He was that kind of person. And that's how it should be for the believer. But the praise of men, of praise of God, I should say, is more important than the praise of men.

[28 : 51] And I believe there are people who push the Lord Jesus Christ aside because of this very thing. Where the praise of men are more important than the praise of God.

And they're saying, oh, I can't become a Christian because of what people would say, what people would think. My circle of friends, I get all kinds of hassles. They would think, they would begin to talk about me.

And in a close community like this, you may be saying to yourself, I couldn't bear the idea of being laughed at in the pubs and people sort of having a sort of joke about me.

Oh, he's going off now to the church. Can't cope with that thought. Why? Because they love the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Jesus is saying, that brings a woe on it. Seek the praise of God. And the way we seek the praise of God above all others is by seeking Jesus as our own Lord and Savior.

[29 : 58] Let us pray.