

Sermon

February 16, 2025

Luke 6:17-26

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Identity is an essential part of being a human. Even before you're born, you have an identity. Identity is something that's given to us. Mom and Dad identify you as their child and give you a name. Other times identity is something we take on ourselves. Our vocation, as well as our job, give us an identity. We might be an engineer, chef, designer, uber driver, teacher, pilot. By being a hard worker or always being late . . . people identify you as such. Some are moms or dads, daughters or sons, aunts or uncles. It's important to us to know who we are!

Today Jesus gives two identities. The first is those who are blessed. The second is those who are woeful. We all want to be identified with those who are the blessed. That's the choice in our best eternal interest. To be woeful is to be, well, woeful!

I always used to think that when I die and go to heaven my first question to God was going to be, "Why did you make bacon taste so good but be so bad for you?" Now I am learning that bacon isn't all that bad for you if eaten in moderation. So maybe my first question to God will now be, "Why did you make the Bible so hard to understand?" I'm sure some of you are with me on that one.

When Jesus explains who is blest and who is woeful, he does it in such a way that it is easily misunderstood. I don't think Jesus does it intentionally. It's just that his thoughts are so much different than ours we have trouble keeping up.

First, there are the blessed.

*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.
Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*

This sounds great to those who are poor. It is encouraging for those who have an empty cupboard and nothing in the fridge. When the chips are down and we suffer emotionally, these words are welcomed news.

Yet when we hear these lines from Jesus, it tends to make us think about becoming poor in order to be blessed. If it is indeed the poor who are blessed, well then, I guess we better think about how to get poor. We also better get rid of most of our food and go on a starvation diet. And then hope something bad happens so we are crushed in spirit and brought to tears. That's kinda what Jesus is saying, right?

And it gets worse!

*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.*

This is the sort of thing that makes people not want to read the Bible! We have all worked hard to try NOT to be poor. To be self-reliant. And therefore, we have shelves full of food, a fridge with eggs and milk and cheese and meat. We have a freezer full of chicken breast, vegetables, steaks, and pizza. We go out to eat. We enjoy plenty of food and have snacks at the ready in case of the slightest twinge of hunger. We have tried to make good choices to avoid pain and suffering and enjoy the good life. Now Jesus comes along and says "Woe" to us because the median worldwide income is about \$2800 so we are rich, and we often have smiles on our faces and like to laugh? No fair!

Here's where the prophet Jeremiah can shed some light on what Jesus is trying to say here.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.
Jeremiah 17:7

Jeremiah, like Jesus earlier, talks about being blessed. And he doesn't mention anything about rich or poor, full or empty tummies, or people being happy or sad. What does he mention? Trust. Trust in the Lord. The blessed are people who trust in the Lord. Whew. So maybe we don't need to give away our savings, sell the house, empty the freezer and fridge, donate the food, and purposefully find trouble!

The way Jesus describes who is blessed turns on two points. First, he gives us a real-life example of people who are blessed.

And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.

Luke 6:17-19

These are people who are blessed. They have a yearning hunger that that words of Jesus fill like no other. Their bodies are racked with diseases and infirmities that only Jesus can heal. Some have journeyed on foot for days that they might come and sit at the feet of Jesus and have their hearts lifted by his truth and grace. It says nothing here about the economic status of these people whether rich or poor. It doesn't say if they came with empty bags or 3 days' worth of steak sandwiches and beer. It doesn't even say whether they were happy

folks or sad. It just says they came to Jesus in physical need and spiritual want. And that's the ticket to be blessed. As we put aside all the other work and dissipations of life and come to Jesus, we are blest. The Bible says God is not a respecter of persons. That means it doesn't matter what your position or situation is in life. Jesus takes in everyone who comes to him in that same physical need and spiritual want.

The second way Jesus' teaching on being blessed turns is on Jesus' own life. It doesn't matter what our position or situation in life is in order to be saved from sin and death, because the main thing is the position and situation Jesus took upon himself. Like us, Jesus brought nothing with him into this world and he took nothing with him when he left. Jesus never owned a house or had a comfortable savings account. He lived out of a suitcase of sorts. It says Jesus went 40 days without food in the wilderness during his temptation. It says he was hungry. Even later it says Jesus didn't eat a lot because he said his food was to do the will of his Father in heaven. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus, and he cried over the abject unbelief of Israel. In Gethsemane he sweat drops of blood. In the end, they hated Jesus, said he was the devil, and nailed him to a cross. Jesus is everything he says to be in order to be blessed. Now he is the Blessed One in whom we have redemption from our guilt and the promise of heaven and everlasting life in the world to come. As Jesus is risen from the dead in all blessedness, so shall all of us be who believe and are baptized into his name. Thanks be to God! Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him. Amen.

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