

Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon for 6th Sunday after Epiphany 16 February 2025

Text: Luke 6: 17-26

Have you said of yourself, or heard others say, "I am so blessed." What do you mean, when you say I am blessed. Are you grateful for all you have in life, good health, a job you enjoy doing which pays well, you are loved and supported by family and friends.

Then that leads to the question, what about all those people who don't feel blessed? What about you and others who are sick? What about people who are not so successful in their work? What about those who feel alone? What about those who feel oppressed and trapped by what is going on in their lives? Are they not blessed? Are they not loved by the same God above?

Jesus teaches of course they are loved and cared for. Jesus teaches to be "blessed" does not mean an absence of struggle. To be blessed is to live, knowing God does care even as you struggle with all that can bring despair and anxiety in your life. Jesus teaches, your struggle is temporary, and your reward is great in heaven. But when you are going through really tough times, wouldn't it be nice to feel blessed now? To feel the weight of what ever it is that burdens you lifted from you by God, where you can say, I am blessed.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. So why does Jesus say the poor are blessed? I wonder if the homeless feel blessed. How can you feel blessed when the cost of living is driving people to despair? This can even lead to spiritual poverty as you question the goodness of God.

Matthew wrote the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. So, why is "poor in spirit" something God wants us to be?

The reason is, to be poor in spirit is to recognize your physical and spiritual dependency is on God. Being poor in spirit is admitting that, because of your sin, you have absolutely nothing of worth to offer God, as Paul writes in 2 Cor. 8:9, "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*" It is only because Jesus paid for our sins and cancelled our debt by his dying on the cross that the kingdom of God becomes ours.

Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied".

Are you hungry? How many of you know what it's like to go hungry? I know I haven't. But is Jesus talking about just physical food? To hunger is to desire. Matthew's gospel says blessed are those who "hunger and thirst for righteousness. Meaning you are blessed when you hunger and thirst for God's kingdom and his righteousness above everything else. You are blessed because that is how you receive a satisfied heart. Even in the midst of everything else that tempts you to hunger and desire it for temporary satisfaction, you can say "It is well with my soul, because you are content with what God gives you.

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh".

King Solomon wrote, there is a time to weep and a time to laugh. Sorrow and happiness, crying and rejoicing, mourning and laughter are all part of life. Feelings of disappointment, loss, and rejection are inevitable. Paul writes in Romans 12:15, *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* When we identify with one another in our joys and sorrows, weeping and laughing together, we prove the genuineness of our heartfelt affection and love to each other, which is the love that Christ has for us.

What are those things that make you weep? They can be tears of joy. Often tears are from things that overwhelm us, emotions, pain and death. And why do we die and even suffer pain?

In Romans 6:23, Paul says that the wages of sin are death. According to Romans 5, sin has reigned from the time of Adam, and no one has been able to escape sin's power. So, where is our hope.

Well as we heard from the apostle Paul 1 Corinthians 15, it is in Christ's resurrection. For Paul, belief in bodily resurrection is not optional. To the church in Corinth who question bodily resurrection, Paul writes, ¹³ *If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.* ¹⁴ *And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.* That is why we confess, we believe in the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come.

Jesus continues: "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets" (Luke 6:22-23).

Have you felt excluded and left out because of your faith? If you have, how did that make you feel? It hurts to be excluded and left out. In 1 John 3:13, *"Do not be surprised, my brother and sisters, if the world hates you."*

The servant is not above the master, and if they nailed our Master Jesus to the cross, what do you think they will do to us? How do your unchristian friends react, if you start talking about your faith? Yet Jesus assures us that we are blessed because our reward will be great in heaven even though we may suffer ridicule, and in parts of the world arrest, torture, imprisonment, and even execution, because we follow Jesus.

At this point, Jesus' shifts from beatitudes to woes, from pronouncing blessing to calling down curses upon his hearers: The four woes Jesus speaks are the complete reversal of the four beatitudes mentioned earlier. Jesus announces judgement to those who look out for that which is not of his kingdom.

"Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort" (Luke 6:24). Wealth, in and of itself, is not condemned, but the pursuit of wealth and the reliance on material riches is. Riches become an idol when we worry more about money than how we use it to bless others. Jesus teaches material wealth is temporary, and those who seek it will not find lasting fulfillment in God's kingdom.

"Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry, speaks to those who hunger and are satisfied with their current worldly comforts and pleasures. Just as the hungry will be filled, those who are full now will find themselves spiritually empty. The reversal is stark. What satisfies in this life will fail to satisfy in the next.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep, is a warning for those who live in constant enjoyment, seeking the pleasures of this world. In the end this joy is fleeting. What seems like happiness now will be replaced by sorrow later.

Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets, is a warning against seeking the approval of others, at the expense of faithfulness to God. Jesus warns that the false prophets of history were often praised by the people, even while leading them astray. To be popular in this world may be to miss the approval of God.

Which means, Blessing doesn't come from anything that we say or do. Blessing comes by the Word of God on the lips of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. We're not blessed because of good works. "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" You are blessed because of God's mercy and the cross of Christ. You are blessed because God promises that the hurts of this world will not last forever. You are blessed because God never breaks a promise and always keeps his Word. You are blessed, because Jesus says you are blessed. Amen.