

Sermon on **Luke 6:17-26** for the 6th Sunday after the Epiphany

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We all need that friend, sibling, parent, coach who will tell it like it is to us and give us advice we need to hear, even when it's hard to hear. They do it because they love us, and sometimes with some fear and trepidation. They love you enough to say something. You respect them enough to listen and not get too defensive. We need someone who loves us to level with us regularly. Today Jesus finds a level place where he levels with his disciples on how it really is with them, with us. Listen. He loves you.

You are Blessed to be with Christ.

1) Jesus shows you what makes you truly blessed.

2) Jesus warns us about the world's ideas of "blessed."

Where does it hurt? When you were little and fighting back tears, the teacher or parent would ask, "Where does it hurt?" You pointed to the skinned knee with blood running down. As you get older and sit in the doctor's office you might point to your knee, a vertebrae, the area of your head where migraines hit, or all over, or to your heart. Jesus cares about our physical welfare. We pray to him for healing and he answers by taking the pain away, or giving us the strength to bear up under it, or leads us to rely on him and trust his promises and purposes with our suffering, even if we don't understand. Jesus cares about our bodies.

The crowds of Jew and Gentile alike came from all over to "*hear him and to be healed of their diseases.*" Jesus revealed so much power and authority over disease and even demons. People just got near enough to touch him and they were healed. "*Power was coming from him and healing them all.*" Jesus is truly the Son of God and True Man, the Savior of all. Is God approachable? Look at Jesus with people clamoring to be near him. Does God love us and care for every detail of our lives? Look at Jesus welcoming the crowds with all their physical problems. Jesus cares about our souls too. Jesus levels with his disciples, with you and me at just how blessed we are, "**Blessed to be with Christ.**" **He shows you what makes you truly blessed. Jesus warns us about the world's ideas of "blessed."**

"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 people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man." Jesus addressed his disciples, believers, Christians who followed him. He had just selected the 12 out of the group. They knew his love, his purpose to save the world from sin and eternal hell. They knew he is the Son of God in the flesh.

When you have something difficult to hear, do you like people to sugar coat it, or lie to you? Out of love they need to tell you what is really going on. Jesus loves you enough to tell you that the life of the Christian is not easy. It is the only way. You have eternal life in Jesus. But it's not always easy following him. Christians are poor in spirit, but sometimes Christians suffer poverty because of their faith, or give up of their time, or finances because they belong to the kingdom of God and follow Jesus. Jesus isn't saying we should all take a vow of poverty. The disciples had resources – John and James had a fishing business with their dad. But we dare not look to finances as the key to happiness or as the solution to all our problems. If we place our confidence and our trust in money or love of money and things, they will dominate our hearts so that there is no room left for Jesus and his kingdom. To them Jesus says, "*Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.*" Who is first in your life? Jesus and his kingdom of grace and mercy ruling in your hearts by faith, or money, possessions, or pleasure?

Jesus was surrounded by his disciples who he loved, for whom he was going to suffer and die on the cross and rise again, but as they followed him Jesus knew there would be many temptations to take Jesus for granted. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh try to push their way into our hearts and push our faith and life lived for Christ further and further down the priority list, and if possible push Jesus all the way out. In Jesus you have everything! This world won't stand for it and the devil will try to rob you of everything you have in Christ. Trust in Jesus even in persecution.

Jesus warns about the world's ideas of "blessed." Judas was a dearly loved disciple of Jesus, and it happened to him. Maybe it was pride – that he felt he deserved more and resented, and greed – so he helped himself to the money bag, but somewhere along the line he bit on the hook of the devil's bait and was hooked so that he lost his faith and couldn't see Jesus' love and forgiveness and that it was there even for him. He was lost.

Whether you are financially rich or poor as a child of God, what is the devil trying to use to lure you away spiritually from Jesus and following him? Is it pride – that you feel you know all this already, you've heard it all before and you don't need be in God's Word or in his house much if at all, that more and more you don't really need Jesus and his love, his forgiveness, or his advice? Is it the pleasures of this world – you feel like there are so many opportunities for you and the kids to have fun and experiences that time with Jesus or time in his house is a once in awhile thing or if we have time, or maybe there is no time left in the week or the month. Is it greed for just a little bit more and we start to find our success, our security and comfort in how much we can accumulate or make. So work and things become our status, our identity, even our idol. Money, laughter, pleasure in God's good gifts are not sin in themselves, but when we put them ahead of God they become our goal in life, the idol in our hearts. Jesus is pushed to the back or out. To this Jesus says, "*Woe!*"

If you've lost Jesus, you've lost everything! All the riches of this world will not satisfy. All the pleasure and lust of the flesh this world can throw at you will never quench your thirst for more, and in the end without Christ, there is only eternity in hell. Jesus loves us enough to say these things because he knows what's at stake – your soul. And he loves you. You are his. Don't buy the devil's lies.

Jesus shows you what makes you truly blessed. God's Law shows us our lost condition, our sinfulness, our failures, our falling short. It makes us fearful of God's judgement, afraid and downcast. We are truly *poor in spirit* because we've all too often bought the devil's lies and we see our failures, our sins, the void in our hearts. We hunger for God's love and approval. We weep over what we deserve. And people mock us for caring about all this as though this is misplaced guilt or some weird religious exercise that is a waste of our time, "and too much negativity if you ask me." (Hermann Gockel devotion). But we feel it because we belong to Jesus. When we are poor in spirit, hungering for righteousness, empty, then there is room for God's great gift – Jesus. And what does Jesus fill us with?

He fills us with his forgiveness which he won on the cross as he suffered for each one of our sins and failures. He fills us with joy as we realize our sin is forgiven and **we are Blessed to be with Christ**. He satisfies our every yearning whether our belly is full or growling. He brings laughter after sorrow here in time and every moment of eternity. He releases the burden of our guilt and shame because he bore it to the cross once for all so it can't stick to us. If we are hated and mocked for our faith, for the exercise of our faith, that's ok because we have everything we need in Jesus, and heaven is ours. Jesus has made us partakers of his kingdom. He rules in our hearts. He made us not subjects, but gives us the kingdom and has made us priests to serve him. You are truly blessed because you have Christ Jesus the Savior. You are truly blessed because the life you live for him is worth it. It's our thank-you for all that he has done for us. And as you suffer, as you are ridiculed for keeping Christ first in your life, you are in good company, "*that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.*"

The world can never understand how life-changing and eternity changing Jesus is, but by God's grace we do. Cling to the Word of God and his promises. Know how blessed you are even when you are poor, hunger, weep, and when people hate you because of Jesus. "*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.*" God gives us his blessings here and now alongside the hardships, the crosses we must bear. He calls us blessed when we suffer in our soul for being Christians as we struggle with our sinfulness and look to Jesus for forgiveness. He calls us blessed now and has perfection, joys without end, and life eternal waiting for us in heaven – rewards of his grace. No one can outgive God. Know this and live this dear forgiven and loved children of God who are **Blessed to be with Christ**. Amen.