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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“GOD BLESS US”**

Luke 6:17-26

- ☑ Someone sneezes, and we say: “God bless you.”
- ☑ **“God bless us, every one!”** is one of the best known lines from “A Christmas Carol.”
- ☑ “God bless America” has been a favorite patriotic song ever since Irving Berlin released it in 1938.
- ☑ On April 30, 1973 Richard Nixon became the first American president to announce: **“God bless America and God bless each and every one of us.”**
- ☑ Seven years later in July 1980, Ronald Reagan concluded his nomination acceptance address with **“God bless America.”** Since then every president has uttered those words in at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of his speeches.
- ☑ People from every faith tradition invoke God’s blessing on their family, friends, church, community, nation, and themselves.

We tend to have sharply defined ideas of what this encompasses: bodily health, safety, security; success in every dimension of life; pleasant circumstances; and so on. Sometimes it is right to ask for these things. God is extravagantly generous. He showers us with many gifts.

? *But is this what God means by blessing?*

- ☐ Hear the Word of the Lord in Luke 6:20-26:

{Lk 6:20, 24} **“Blessed are you who are poor...”**;

**“But woe to you who are rich”**.

{Lk 6:21, 25} **“Blessed are you who hunger now...”**;

**“Woe to you who are well fed now”**.

{Lk 6:21, 25} **“Blessed are you who weep now...”**; **“Woe to you who laugh now”**.

{Lk 6:22, 26} **“Blessed are you when people hate you... because of the Son of Man”**; **“Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you.”**

Is this what we usually envision when we ask God to bless us? Not usually!

○ But this is no measly president doing the talking; he is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the King of kings and Lord of lords. His message has the authority of the Godhead behind it. As he himself testifies, {Jn 12:50} **“Whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”**

He is the One who declares: **“Blessed are you who are poor... woe to you who are rich”**; **“Blessed are you who hunger now...Woe to you who are well fed now”**; **“Blessed are you who weep now...Woe to you who laugh now”**; **“Blessed are you when people hate you...because of the Son of Man... Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you.”**

? *What does he mean?*

? *How can we embrace this?*

★ 1<sup>st</sup>, these are blessings of discipleship.

**“Blessed are you who are poor... Blessed are you who hunger... Blessed are you... Blessed are you.”** Who **“you”** are is no secret.

● In verses 12-16 Christ Jesus goes **“up a mountainside to pray... When morning [comes], he [calls] his disciples to him and [chooses] twelve of them, whom he also [designates] apostles.”**

■ In verses 17-19 he leads them down from the mountain and stands “**on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples [are] there**” as well as “**a great number of**” other people.

■ That brings us to verse 20: “**Looking at his disciples, he [says]: “Blessed are *you*... Blessed are *you*... Blessed are *you*... Blessed are *you*.”** The Greek literally reads: “**he, lifting up his eyes to his disciples, said...**”

In verse 27 he expands his aim to include everyone in earshot when he says, “**to you who are listening I say.**” Until then, in verses 20-26 he is speaking, not to the crowd in general, but to his followers in particular.

This has a couple of significant implications.

One is that although anyone can be blessed *in* or *despite* hardship, only Jesus’ disciples are blessed *because* of poverty, hunger, weeping, and being hated.

The other is that trouble is blessing only when it is the *consequence of following Jesus*. If I am poor for purely natural reasons my poverty is a curse, plain and simple. But if I am poor because I abandon my boat to {Lk 10} “**fish for people**” (like Peter), renounce fraud in obedience to Jesus (like Levi), or heed the call to {Lk 18:22} “**Sell everything [I] have and give to the poor**” (unlike the rich young ruler), or if my devotion to Christ triggers religious persecution (as it did for all the early disciples), then my poverty is a blessing.

This blessing depends not on hardship, but on discipleship. Yet it expands and intensifies when discipleship brings about loss and affliction.

“**Blessed are you who are poor**” *because of* Christ, “**yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you hunger now**” *because of* Christ, “**you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now**” *because of* Christ, “**you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you...because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.**”

These are blessings of discipleship.

★ 2<sup>nd</sup>, these are blessings of the Kingdom of God.

■ Verse 1 makes this explicit: “**Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.**” The Gospel of the Kingdom is the framework for all of Christ’s actions, miracles, relationships and teachings, including this one.

And so poverty, hunger, weeping, and rejection of the blessed sort are signs of God’s kingdom as it breaks into the world. Not only so, they are part of its substance.

○ In the kingdom of the world people manipulate, lie, cheat, throw their weight around, and claw their way to the top of the heap. But {Mk 10:43-44} “**whoever wants to become great**” in God’s kingdom “**must be [a] servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.**”

○ In the kingdom of the world people {Mt 6:19-20} “**store up for [themselves] treasures on earth,**” as though he or she “**who dies with the most toys, wins.**” In the Kingdom of God people “**store up...treasures in heaven.**”

○ In the kingdom of the world people mostly love their friends and hate their enemies. In the Kingdom of God people {Lk 6:27-28} **“love [their] enemies, do good to those who hate [them], bless those who curse [them],”** and **“pray for those who mistreat [them].”**

○ In the kingdom of the world people cling to the old self for dear life. But {Lk 9:23} **“Whoever wants to be”** with Jesus in God’s kingdom **“deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow”** him.

■ The woes of verses 24-26 are in that same vein: **“Woe to you who are rich... to you who are well fed now... to you who laugh now... when everyone speaks well of you.”**

○ But from where we stand in the Kingdom of God it is folly to {Mt 6:29} **“store up... treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”** It is madness to {Is 55:2} **“spend”** one’s life **“on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy.”** It is lunacy to {Lk 9:25} **“gain the...world... yet lose or forfeit your very soul.”**

The biggest problems with present riches, abundance, gratification, and reputation are that, a) they entice us to give our faith, hope, and love to the kingdom of the world; and, b) they are temporary. Give them your soul, and it will die with them.

These are blessings of the Kingdom of God.

★ 3<sup>rd</sup>, these blessings mean union with Jesus.

The Lord says, **“Blessed are you who are poor.”**

○ {2 Co 8:9} **“You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he**

**became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”** To be poor because of obedience to God is to be united with Jesus.

The Lord says, **“Blessed are you who hunger now.”**

○ {Lk 4:1-2} Jesus **“was led by the Spirit in the desert ... for forty days... He ate nothing during those days, and...he was hungry,”** so hungry that the devil seriously believed he could use that hunger to defeat him. To be hungry because of obedience to God is to be united with Jesus.

The Lord says, **“Blessed are you who weep now.”**

○ {Is 53:3-4} Jesus **“was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.”** {Jn 11:35} **“Jesus wept”** when his friend Lazarus died. {Lk 19:41} **“He wept over”** Jerusalem when he foresaw its destruction. Surely he wept in Gethsemane and on the cross. To weep because of obedience to God is to be united with Jesus.

The Lord says, **“Blessed are you when people hate you... because of the Son of Man.”**

○ {Is 53:3} Jesus **“was despised and rejected. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised,”** misunderstood by the crowds, misconstrued by his family, betrayed by Judas Iscariot and denied by Simon Peter and abandoned by all of his disciples, resented and reviled by his religious enemies, feared and tortured and executed by the Roman government. To be hated because of obedience to God is to be united with Jesus.

Please, hear me: this is not an exhortation to devote ourselves to poverty, hunger, grief, and rejection for their sake. That is unhealthy, and it ends only in poverty, hunger, grief, and rejection.

○ This is an invitation: to {Mt 22:27} **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind”** whatever the cost; to {Mt 6:22} **“seek first [your heavenly Father’s] kingdom and his righteousness”** without worrying about riches, abundance, gratification, and reputation; and to {Lk 9:23} **“deny [yourself] and take up [your] cross daily and follow”** Christ even when that leads to poverty, hunger, weeping, and being hated now.

Do this, and ours **“is the kingdom of God,”** we **“will be satisfied,”** we **“will laugh,”** for **“Great is [our] reward in heaven”!**

May **“God bless us, every one!”**