

Topsy-Turvy Blessings!

Luke 6:20-26

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St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

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 men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, 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 fathers treated the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." (Luke 6:20-26, NIV84)

Dear fellow disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior:

Who are the blessed? Last Sunday, the Philadelphia Eagles vanquished the Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl. As confetti flew, they grasped the Vince Lombardi trophy and got the glory of being the greatest football team this season. And all their players got hefty bonuses for winning the game too. I'm sure they consider themselves blessed!

We often look at the material side of things when we consider blessings. How blessed are the rich, the multi-millionaires and billionaires; how blessed are the well-fed, the happy, the popular and the successful. But in a sermon that Jesus gave to the crowds of disciples, Jesus taught them the opposite. Today let us look at Jesus' **Topsy-Turvy Blessings**.

First, Jesus compares those who are poor and rich: "Blessed are you who are poor...Woe to you who are rich." What? How can those who are beggarly poor, who don't have a penny to their name, be considered "blessed"? Matthew's gospel quotes Jesus as saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3). The poor in spirit are those who realize they are poor sinners, that we have rejected God by our thoughts that are filthy and full of hate, by our words and deeds that rebel against God. The rich, on the other hand, are those who are self-righteous, those who think they have it all now and think life is great.

Jesus says, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort." If we concentrate so much on worldly wealth, and think that life is all about having our creature comforts and the attitude, "He who has the most toys in the end wins," we will find woe, judgment in the next life. The one who dies with the most toys in the end, dies, and without faith will miss out on heaven.

But how blessed are the poor in spirit, Jesus says, "for yours in the kingdom of God." Ponder that. The Lord picks up us poor, miserable sinners and tells us, "I've got the keys to God's kingdom. And I'm giving them to you! You are rich in Christ!" The keys to God's kingdom give us spiritual riches beyond our imagination. The Apostle Paul describes it this way: God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Whether we're materially rich or materially poor is really immaterial: Having God's kingdom, with the spiritual blessings of being forgiven for Christ's sake and getting to rule in heaven is the greatest blessing!

The next set of topsy-turvy blessings have to do with hunger or being well-fed, mourning or laughing. We pity children starving from famine, and those in war-torn countries. We're moved to tears when we hear of people who have lost loved ones in a tragedy. But Jesus says, "Blessed are you who hunger now.... Blessed are you who weep now." In contrast, "Woe to you who are well fed now.... Woe to you who laugh now." What does he mean? I'm sure you're well ahead of me: He's talking about spiritual hunger, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who mourn and weep over their sins, as well as mourning over the consequences of sin and all the atrocities and horrors that happen as a result of sin.

Those who are well-satisfied now, who don't have any hunger for God, the unbelievers, will find woe. "For you will go hungry, for you will mourn and weep," in hellfire, which Jesus describes elsewhere as a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30). But those who hunger for righteousness "will be satisfied." Jesus provides the righteousness we need to belong in God's family; he won it for us when he paid for all of our sins on the cross and died for us. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). And when we mourn and cry over sin and its ill effects in this world, God promises "to wipe every tear from our eyes" when we enter heaven (Rev. 21:4). Even now, the Lord our God feeds us, and gives us comfort, when we hear and believe the gospel of Christ.

The last topsy-turvy blessing has to do with how people like us and what they say to us. Naturally, we'd consider it a blessing if people speak well of us, if we're "popular," like the song Glinda sang in the movie "Wicked": "Popular, you're gonna be pop-a-ular." But Jesus says, "Woe to you when all...speak well of you." As believers we are called on to speak the truth, to witness about Jesus, and that may mean saying things that people don't want to hear. If we treasure our name and our reputation ahead of Jesus' name, and stand silent while others are trashing the teachings of those "fuddy-duddy Christians," or to be popular we even join with them, then woe to us!

On the other hand: "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil." Jesus tells us why people will hate us: "because of the Son of Man." When we speak the truth and call sin a sin, when we point to Jesus as the only way to heaven, there will be people who reject us, who will hate us and insult us as "hatemongers" and "unloving." Speaking about Jesus and the truth is increasingly unpopular in this day and age.

But Jesus reassures us: "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets." Elijah was threatened with death; Jeremiah was imprisoned; Jesus himself was rejected and put to death. So as Christians, let's remember that being persecuted for the sake of Jesus is actually a blessing. It's a sign that we belong with him. But we won't always be hated. "Great is your reward in heaven," Jesus reminds us. Don't think of this reward as something we've earned, but as a gift of grace that God gives to us for Jesus' sake.

Yes, even when it doesn't seem like it, even as we go through spiritual poverty and hunger, even through our tears and our fears, you are indeed blessed! Thanks to Jesus, the kingdom of God is ours, we will be satisfied, we will laugh, and we have a gracious reward in heaven. Enjoy your topsy-turvy blessings in the Lord Jesus! Amen.