

Sermon: Words of Blessing and Warning

Text: Luke 6:17-26

Gary L. Wackler

July 12, 2009

Introduction: Even though we may not have what some call empirical evidence of God's working in his creation, I have seen him. Even though I have never seen Jesus, I have seen his people at their very best. Even though I have never physically heard Jesus speak, I am simply taken by his words. What a gift we have been given by the writers of the Bible. You will notice I did not say authors because that is God's domain. You have heard the old expression: "deeds speak louder than words;" yet, only words truly speak.

We have before us this morning a similar passage to Matthew's *Sermon on the Mount* ([Matthew 5-7](#)). Many have called this Lucan passage the *Sermon on the Plain* (**explain what some see as a discrepancy or error**). Luke's account of Jesus' teaching is much shorter than Matthew's (30 verses compared to 107), but both start with beatitudes and end with a story of faith needing to be practical. Our text today adds four warnings or woes to the opening blessings. Both the beatitudes and the warnings call into question man's values both then and now.

Jesus continues his healing ministry, but his primary vocation is to share the Good News. Jesus is speaking to certainly his apostles whom he has recently selected, but also other disciples, and a crowd that had assembled from a wide region more than likely both Jew and Gentile, and finally to us.

Luke 6:17-19 (NIV) ¹⁷He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, ¹⁹and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

I learned many years ago of the danger and power of words, and when they are first spoken by God and repeated by his creation they still retain their power to transform. That is why Jesus preached, and that is why I spend a majority of my life preparing to speak. I write it down because it is important. Understand, I am not important; God is! I have seen what the Word of God can do in people's lives. I know what it has done in mine.

Fred Craddock said, “I recall preaching in a university church in Norman, Oklahoma, some years ago, when a young woman came up after the service. I had preached on Mark 1, the call of the disciples. She came up and said she wanted to talk with me and said, ‘I’m in med school here, and that sermon clinched what I have been struggling with for some time.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Dropping out of med school.’

‘What do you want to do that for?’

She said she was going to go work in the Rio Grande Valley. She said, ‘I believe that’s what God wants me to do.’ She quit med school, went to the Rio Grande Valley, sleeps under a piece of tin in the back of a pickup truck, and teaches little children while their parents are out in the field. She dropped out of med school for this, and her folks back in Montana are saying, ‘What in the world happened?’

And I was saying to her, ‘Well, now, I was just preaching. I didn’t mean to, you know.’”

- *Craddock Stories*, pp. 52-53

In a world that is obsessed with itself, and thinks little about others we need to review:

I. What Jesus Values (vv. 20-22)

Luke 6:20-22 (NIV) ²⁰Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²Blessed 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.

“Jesus promised His followers that they would be absurdly happy; but also that they would never be out of trouble.” - Leon Morris, *Luke*, p. 127 (IVP/Eerdmans)

To those who *would* follow him, Jesus says you will be happy if you are poor. Matthew’s account adds poor “in spirit” (**Matthew 5:3**)

A. The poor (**πτωχοι**). This is a quality that can certainly be spiritualized like Matthew has done, but it is also true that these disciples Luke tells us about had left everything to follow Jesus (**5:11, 28**). This word Luke uses describes extreme poverty, poor as a beggar (Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek NT*, p. 12). It is the kind of life that depends on God for one’s very survival.

B. The hungry (πεινωντες). This is a strong desire to receive sustenance. Many of the poor that followed Jesus were fed by his hands. His disciples learned to pray to God (Jesus) for their daily bread.

C. The mourners (κλαιοντες). Those who are weeping are saddened by their present condition. This is true physically and spiritually. There are people who cry themselves to sleep at night because there is nothing in the refrigerator - nor is there going to be tomorrow. A lament directed to God is a completely appropriate response even as the psalmists clearly demonstrate.

D. The outcasts. There are three Greek words used here to describe this blessed person by God. They are hated (μισεω), avoided (αφοριζω), and insulted (ονειδιζω). The word in the NIV translated “exclude” you, means “to mark off from by boundary (like camps or the poor side of town), to separate, excommunication from the congregation as well as from social intercourse.” - Reinecker, p. 154

I used the term “outcasts” because of a Greek word in the text (εκβαλλω) which literally means to throw out or cast out with regards to your name. There are people who will have no use for you if you are a Christian.

When is the last time we invited a truly poor person to eat with us or join us in meaningful conversation. Have you ever been in a large city and had people approach you for money, food, shelter? People react in different ways, but only God and his people can truly help.

Finally, in Jesus’ day when a Jew would become a Christ-follower, he would be considered “dead” to his family. No one would speak the person’s name.

Even in the latest global economic downturn we can gather a picture of:

II. What the World Values (vv. 24-26)

Luke 6:24-26 (NIV) ²⁴“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

It is not that God is for the poor and against the rich. It is clear, however, that the rich are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to trusting in God.

The World Values:

A. Affluence (the rich ones, **πλουσιους)** - The world has a way of measuring wealth. They have their real estate portfolios, stocks and bonds, and 401Ks. They have more than one of everything and more than they need. They find comfort in the material things of the world. A man of the world is measured by what he accumulates and then leaves behind.

B. Satisfaction (εμπεπλησμενοι**)** This is literally the “ones having been filled up.” “Beyond the present possession of riches these people have nothing to hope for (Arndt).” - Rienecker, p. 155

In Jesus’ time as well as in some settings today there are those who see ease, plenty, and good health, i.e. long life as a sign of God’s blessing. It has always been difficult to determine whether something is a blessing or a curse.

A new job with more money may ruin your health because of the added stress that comes with increased responsibility. Power and position may leave you susceptible to infidelity and lost time with family.

C. Entertainment (the ones laughing, **γελωντες).** Christians are more and more the butt of jokes and insults. The Church is more and more losing its influence. The culture has decided to make us a caricature of everything that is wrong, intolerant, and unloving. We even catch ourselves, if not careful, laughing at impropriety and immorality. Walt Disney is proud to organize parades to celebrate what some people call alternative life-styles.

D. Popular (everyone sings your praises and speaks well of you) I learned many years ago it is not what people say in your presence, but what they say out of earshot. And quite frankly as long as you are giving, giving to others who wouldn’t say kind words to his benefactor?

Some parents try to be popular with their children - always giving too much, never asking for anything. Yet, let a parent ask a child to do a chore without getting paid and he will see what his real relationship is.

A passage that Matthew includes in his *Sermon on the Mount* is found later in Luke, but is appropriate here: **Luke 12:34 (NIV)** ³⁴For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Whatever you treasure will provide:

III. Consequences for These Values (vv. 20-26)

Everything mentioned in our text is initially here on earth a:

A. Temporary Condition

Listen to a part of what T.S. Eliot shares with us in *Choruses from the Rock* (1948):

O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.

All our knowledge brings us nearer to ignorance,
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,
But nearness to death no nearer to God.
Where is the life we have lost in the living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?
The cycles of heaven in twenty centuries
Bring us farther from God and nearer to dust.

Luke uses a small word in his text of Jesus' sermon (v. 21). The word is now (vvv). He wants Jesus' disciples to realize that the cost of discipleship is not too great and that reward is coming. There will be a great reversal.

What appears to be permanent in this world is most certainly passing away. Those who suffer *now* for the Lord will find that God rewards those who are faithful.

I Corinthians 15:42-49 (NIV) ⁴²So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

Yet, everything that we experience now will change into a:

B. Permanent Condition (v. 23)

The poor will receive a priceless treasure in the Kingdom of God.

There will come a day when the hungry will sit down to a great banquet.

The mourners will not be able to hold back their joy in the future.

Our current reputation will be changed forever because of our association with Jesus, the Messiah.

Luke 6:23 (NIV) ²³“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

The rich, however, will have no further resources in the world to come.

The satiated will have no food that satisfies because only Jesus can provide that.

Those of the rich who laughed at our expense will be in an eternal environment that is no laughing matter, in fact, the gospel writers say there will be darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth.

All those who agreed with the rich person’s perspective on life will have long since turned on them.

These last few weeks there have been some very high-profile funerals. A lot of people have waxed eloquent in their eulogies. Many things that were said can’t be true. Steve McNair was not a devoted family man no matter who says so. And at the end of the day, it only matters what our Lord says and thinks about us.

Conclusion: “Rabbi Akieba took a trip to a strange land. He took *a donkey*, a rooster, and a lamp. Since he was a Jew he was refused hospitality in the village inns, so he decided to sleep in the woods. He lit his lamp to study the Holy Books before going to sleep. But a fierce wind came up knocking over the lamp and breaking it. So he decided to turn in, saying, ‘All the God does, he does well.’ During the night some wild animals came along and drove away the rooster and thieves stole *the donkey*. Rabbi Akieba woke up, saw the loss, but still proclaimed easily, ‘All the God does, he does well.’

He then went back to the village where he was refused lodging only to learn that enemy soldiers had invaded it during the night and killed all the inhabitants. He also learned that these same enemy soldiers had traveled through the same part of the woods where he lay asleep. Had his lamp not blown out he would have been seen. Had not the rooster been chased it would have crowed, giving him away. Had not *the donkey* been stolen he would have brayed. So once more he said, ‘All the God does, he does well.’ (*Storytelling, Imagination and Faith* by William J. Bausch, p. 72)

There are always events and circumstances in our lives that may cause us to question why this or that has happened. Faith is what is needed in every situation. Even though our lives may be less than what we would design for ourselves, Jesus' true followers have the sure promise of God's blessing.

Heaven is going to be a wonderful place for all those who do not trade away today for tomorrow. We dare not live like Esau. We must share the values of Jesus and the viewpoint of God. There are some results that are temporary and others that are permanent. Do you follow the perfect example of Jesus, or a world that does not recognize it is passing away? We should never be satisfied with what is a cheap illusion. We should only seek what will be eternal.

I have some practical advice for you, this morning: Invest in what is eternal and of God. "Jesus' promise of rewards proclaims that no matter how things appear, there is no future in evil, only in good." - Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, p. 112