



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## Kingdom Blessings and Woes (Luke 6:20-26)

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In choosing the Twelve, Jesus makes a clear break from the religious establishment and lays the foundation of a new community that will be built upon common and ordinary men who have been called, trained and transformed by Jesus himself. He then illustrates the heart of this new community by giving himself freely to the multitudes as they pursued him to be healed of their infirmities. In this, he sets the example for his disciples and models the manner in which all those who would call him Lord are expected to live. The narrative now shifts to an extended period of teaching by Jesus. This is the second recorded teaching in the Gospel of Luke, the first was in Luke 4:18-27 where he reads from Isaiah 61 and announces the fulfilling of this passage. Through its reading, he identified himself as the one through which the poor would receive the proclamation of good news. He makes this announcement to those gathering at the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. In our account, Jesus shifts his attention to the audience of his disciples and reveals what this message of the good news is to the poor, broken, and hurting. What we find in this teaching is not a treatise of ethical behavior that precludes the follower of Jesus from receiving the afore mentioned blessings, but we find the pronouncement of blessing upon the disciples of Jesus in the midst of being poor, hungry, sorrowful, and persecuted. This is the blessing that brings courage and resolve to those who seek after Christ and hope to those who, as of yet, have not responded to his call.

*Luke 6:20-26 - (20) And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. (21) "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. (22) "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! 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets. (24) "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. (25) "Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. (26) "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.*

### JESUS' AUDIENCE

*He lifted up his eyes on his disciples* – In the previous account we find the multitudes swarming Jesus in the hopes of touching him to be healed. As those with diseases and unclean spirits were cured and the pandemonium begins to die down Jesus sets his attention on his disciples. Up to this point one can imagine them being thrust away from Jesus by the sheer frenzy of the crowds. These are the same disciples that sought to corral the little children from coming to Jesus (Matthew 19:14). However, the sheer

numbers of the people must have overwhelmed them and they found themselves pushed away from their teacher. Luke makes this statement in Luke 6:19 that Jesus “healed them all.” Jesus does not stop until every single person who sought him left that encounter healed of their maladies. As the buzz of the crowd settles down due to the contentment of having their needs met, Jesus lifts his eyes to his disciples. It is to this audience that he will communicate what is recorded next. What he reveals is kingdom truth which takes the form of promises (6:20-26), principles (6:27-38), and parables (6:39-49).<sup>1</sup> While these truths are not spoken in secret, these blessings only have eternal value with those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. It is a message directed toward all those who would make it their ambition to be followers of the Messiah.

### KINGDOM PROMISES

*Blessed are you* – The word “blessed” in Greek is *makários* which is a poetic word used in literature and refers to the blessedness of the gods, but later came to be used for the freedom of the rich from the normal cares and worries of this life.<sup>2</sup> Jesus uses the word “blessed” to describe the favor that comes through participation in the divine kingdom. These are not words of condemnation in which a person is not blessed until he perfectly fulfills these expectations. No, these blessings are the heart of the gospel message, they are the blessings of the kingdom showered upon all those who see themselves as poor, broken, and oppressed. These blessings are for those who turn to Jesus with nothing but a hope that in him we have found the one who grants liberty to the captives and freedom to the oppressed.

*But woe to you* – In contrast to blessings that are showered on those who find their security in Jesus, there is woe for all those who seek to live this life apart from him.. The word “woe” in the Greek is *ounai* and is used to convey pity for those who stand under judgment and are excluded from divine salvation. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus will pronounce woe on the cities who have rejected him (Luke 10:13), woe on the Pharisees and scribes (Luke 11:42ff), and woe against his betrayer (Luke 22:22).<sup>3</sup> By this we understand that the gospel is not a neutral message. It is a truth claim in which those who believe its message are granted entrance into the eternal kingdom and receive its lavish blessings showered upon them. However Jesus words are clear, there are eternal consequences for all those who reject his message and place their confidence in anything other than him.

### THE GOSPEL PROCLAIMED

*Blessed are you who are poor* – What is Jesus seeking to communicate by the pronouncement blessing for the poor? In Luke 4:18, Jesus identified himself

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as the one through whom good news would be proclaimed to the poor. Later in Luke's narrative, we find that he makes the following statement, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32)." From this we learn that his message has no value for those who do not see their sin or poverty before God. Those who have all they need, have no need for a God who invades humanity to secure freedom from oppression and captivity. In this message to his disciples, he calls them to embrace the insufficiency of their means. For in their poverty they are freed from the self-reliance that prevents our utter dependence on God. In seeing their need, God is able to shower his blessing through the method he has ordained, the people of his kingdom, the body of Christ.

*Who are poor, ... who are hungry, ... who weep* – Scholars disagree whether the message recorded by Luke is the same message that Matthew records as the Sermon the Mount. One reason is because Matthew's verbiage for the beatitudes might contain additional commentary with the inclusion of the phrases "in Spirit" and "for righteousness" to the plain statements of being "poor" and "hungry" respectively as recorded by Luke. It must be remembered, the author is seeking to communicate a specific message to a specific audience which can cause difficulty in harmonizing these accounts.

Let us focus our attention on the concept of the "poor" from the understanding of a 1<sup>st</sup> century mind instructed from the bible of their day, the Tanakh. The term poor used in Psalms describes a pious person who calls on the Lord for help and considers himself poor and needy. David does this often as seen in Psalm 40:17, 86:1, 109:22, and so, when considering that David wrote these Psalms when holding the position of king, it seems clear that he was not experiencing economic poverty. What David is communicating is the concept of worship and what occupies the throne of one's heart. What is it that ultimately bankrupts an individual, is it the depletion of their economic resources or a separation from their savior? If Psalms reveals the poor as those who see their need for God, Luke expands this understanding by tying it to the phrase "hungry now." For even if the poor is understood to be any man who sees his need before God, one cannot minimize the difficulty that remains for the economically secure to acknowledge their poverty and their utter dependence upon God.

### OPPOSITION ON ACCOUNT OF JESUS

*Blessed are you when people hate you, ... on account of the Son of Man* – The final blessing recorded by Luke is tied to the treatment of his disciples at the hands of the world. Jesus is declaring a future reward to his followers on the basis of being hated, excluded, reviled, and spurned as evil because of Jesus and the transformation that has occurred in their lives. He does not shy

away from this proposition; everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. This should be a basic understanding of all those who seek to follow him because, as we consider the biblical narrative and as Luke states explicitly; the prophets were treated in the same manner. Those who seek to follow Christ must come with their eyes fully opened to this potential, as sadden as we are by people's opposition to the truth. It is persecution in all its forms that reveals we are on the right path; we trod the same road that Jesus walked. It is time to move beyond our naivety and accept the promise of a great reward awaiting those who hold to Jesus in the midst of great opposition.

Besides the shock of opposition, the other obstacle that keeps us from rejoicing in the midst of persecution is the ferocity in which we hold to our rights. When wronged, our natural reaction is to defend ourselves, to right that wrong and set the record straight. As a disciple our call is to be like our master, how we are accepted as a member of society is secondary to the priorities that exist as citizens of his eternal kingdom. The complexity of decision-making which faces the New Covenant believer must not be minimized. However, the follower of Jesus must always put to death self-interest in order that He might be exalted and others served through the emptying of ourselves for the glory of God and the advancing of his kingdom.

### APPLICATION

Jesus begins teaching his disciples by declaring blessings for all those who in their poverty, weakness, and need turn to him for his provision. We find in this passage the fulfilling of the promise Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah in Luke 4:18. First, he identifies himself as the one through whom good news will be proclaimed to the poor. Then, through following Jesus the poor find the blessing of the kingdom: satisfaction, laughter, and reward in heaven because of their unflinching devotion to their master. In seeing our need before God we set our hearts on Jesus, the means through which God provides for his people. In holding to him alone, we are showered with blessings of the kingdom of far greater value than any worldly treasure.

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1 – I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978). 247.

2 – Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985). 548.

3 – Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-). 540.