

Worlds Colliding: Part 2  
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(READ Luke 6:20-26)

We began studying this section last week and my aim for that sermon was to give you a view from 10,000 feet so you could have a sense of the direction and movement of Jesus' teaching. I tried to highlight how Jesus was establishing a distinction between his way that his followers walk in versus the way of the world. His way is counterintuitive; it could be called "foolish" when analyzed from a worldly perspective. So, it's imperative to know as Jesus' followers that when we follow our master and lord we are signing up for a life that doesn't fit our world; we need to know that so we are not surprised when we encounter the obstacles and hostilities that come with following Jesus (If you didn't hear last week's message, you may want to pick it up so you have more info on the passage we are studying).

Today, I want to dig a little deeper into Jesus' opening words of this section. Because in them we find our hope. We need hope to live with and for Jesus. I don't know about you, but every time I read these words I do a doubletake; "Are you sure Jesus? This can't be! Blessed are the hungry and sad?" I need to know why this is the case to follow the words of Jesus. Why is better to be hungry now and satisfied later? How come it's better being rich later than rich now? Jesus has help for us.

From a textual point of view, notice how the blessings and woes (woes are just curses... maybe I shouldn't say "just" since curses aren't small, but very big and serious) are set as couplets or tandems. Each blessing has an identical woe. Blessed are the poor; woe to the rich. Blessed are those who weep now, but woe to those who laugh. There are four of them and they all have their counterpart. This reinforces what we talked about last week; Jesus is establishing a polarity between his way and another way (I call it the world's way). While it seems in our lived-in world that the rich, the joyful, the full and the accepted are blessed they actually are not. According to Jesus the opposite are blessed; the poor, the hungry, the sad and the rejected all in Christ are the blessed one. And those who find themselves in the opposite camp are the ones cursed by God. And obviously, Jesus is trying to convince you to adopt his way.

I want to highlight 3 important points I find from Jesus' teaching here that will help us better understand and apply his upside-down way. Here's the first one...

**Danger of Riches - Don't think of riches merely as economical. We talked about this last week. When Jesus speaks of the rich, the full, the joyful and the accepted he has a very broad idea in mind. Yes, it includes being rich economically, but it also includes being rich in power, joyful in your political or social position, maybe accepted because religious hierarchy or privilege. Those who fit. And, vice versa, the poor doesn't only mean poor economically, but empty of power and influence, poor in standing.**

When I read this passage along with many others in the Bible we have to be honest and recognize that there is a peculiar danger to being wealthy economically, socially and in power. Some people interpret Jesus' words here merely in spiritual categories, and by spiritual they mean nothing to do with everyday life. They say, "This is just Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew." And when you look at Matthew's account Jesus doesn't say, "Blessed are the poor," he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." He doesn't just say, "Blessed are the hungry," Jesus says, "Blessed are those hungry for righteousness." And they are right, Jesus does say that in Matthew. But he doesn't in Luke. Don't be so sure that this passage is just Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. There are good reasons to not think that. And, of course, there are good reasons to take Jesus at his words.

Just listen to some of these passages that echo the warning given by Jesus to those well off, those advantaged socially, economically and influentially.

- Matthew 19:23, "And Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.'"
- Deut 8:11-14, "Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Jesus in the Matthew passage warned about the danger again, just like we see the danger in Luke 6. What's so helpful about the Deut. passage is God helps us see how worldly status and wealth make faith in God particularly difficult. When we accumulate more for ourselves the temptation towards pride increases; the temptation towards forgetfulness of God increases.

The command from God to remember him, to remember his grace, his way, his truth, his justice and judgment is so very important for us FBC. Did you hear that in Deut. 8? In vs. 11 he says, "Take care lest you forget." Later in vs. 18 Moses says, "You shall remember the Lord your God." Friends, we need to take this command more seriously. Remember him, FBC, through his word. Remember him through the Lord's Supper. Remember him by gathering together. Remember him through song. Remember him as you admire his creation. Remember him.

When we cave to the temptation and pursue the satisfaction, joy, wealth of this world, we fail in being rich towards God. Tim Challies, a pastor and author, wrote this just a few weeks ago (READ EPM 11). Being rich towards God means you actually make a choice to suffer, to deprive yourself of things on this earth. Why would you do that? That's what the second point is about.

**Living for the Future** - Did you notice how the promise of future blessing is supposed to encourage you and invite you into this kind of life? Vs. 21, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." Likewise in vs. 22, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." There is a contrast between weeping now and laughing in the future; being hungry now and being full on a coming day. The last couplet gives us an idea of what Jesus means by "future." He says (vs. 23), "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven." So, Jesus has our eternal home, our eternal reward in mind when he speaks of this future satisfaction and wealth He wants you to hold out for something better in the future.

Of course, this is hard; it's hard to defer a reward now for a reward later: In the late 1960s and early 1970s at Stanford University, Walter Mischel famously conducted the marshmallow experiments with children (PIC). Would a child be willing to not eat one marshmallow now because she was promised to receive two later? Would she be willing to say no now so she could say yes later? Faith in Jesus is like that.

In fact, Jesus makes it really, really clear that if you choose to turn away from Jesus and his kingdom way because you want to be rich now, full now, happy now by the things of this world there is nothing but pain and misery waiting for you in the end. Look at vs. 24-25, "But woe (remember, that woe is a curse... But curse) to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." It's really clear; if you chose your blessing now, you will be cursed later. If you are willing to be cursed now on account of the Son of Man, you will be blessed forever.

The Marshmallow experiments were so influential, so popular that they have been analyzed year after year; they've been reconfigured and modified to see what children would do given other circumstances. In 2012 the University of Rochester performed the marshmallow tests, but with a twist. They separated the children in two different groups. One group of children were put in a very unreliable environment. The researchers would put the children in stressful situations; they would make promises to the children and then not keep them. The other group of children had a very reliable environment. The researchers kept every promise; the children knew they were stable and reliable. Sure enough, children in an unreliable environment didn't wait for the promised 2nd marshmallow and ate the first one right away; why would you think the researchers would keep the promise of a 2nd marshmallow when they broke other promises?. But those in a reliable environment more regularly waited for two marshmallows because they knew they would trust the researchers to keep their promises.

Can you see the connection? Why hold out hope for a future reward? Why wait to be rich, hungry, happy and accepted? Why not do whatever you can to be rich now, laughing now, full and accepted now? How do we know Jesus will deliver on his promise?

Just look to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. On that cross Jesus proved once and for all that you can count on him to deliver. Jesus lived his entire life with a view of the cross before

him and he didn't back down. All the suffering, the shame, the mockery, the rejection. And in the end when his suffering was upon him, when it was so close and so tempting to find another way, when Jesus himself said he could call on his Father to send 12 legions of angels to wipe out all of his enemies he said, "How then should the scriptures be fulfilled?" This suffering, this passion and sacrifice made by Jesus was promised and planned from the beginning of time. It was predestined; it was foreknown; it was prophesied. And Jesus made it happen. Jesus came through. Jesus made every one of God's promises sure. So, when you hear the promise of future happiness and joy, future satisfaction and the wealth of heaven, mark it down: it will happen. Endure the temporary hardship, the temporary struggles and challenges for a joy, for a satisfaction and wealth and acceptance that is eternal.

**For the sake of Christ** - There is one more important point we need to see and note from this section before moving on. Notice how Jesus connects these promises of blessing to knowledge and faithfulness to him. Or put another way: Jesus is saying those who find themselves poor, weeping, hungry and rejected on *account of him* will one day be rich, full, joyful and accepted in the kingdom. Jesus isn't commending or promoting hardships for their own sake; he's encouraging and strengthening those who find themselves in hardship on account of his name. That's a very big difference.

The evidence of that is two fold, I believe. The first piece of evidence is found in the introduction of this teaching in vs. 20; it says, "And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said...." These words of encouragement and instruction are directed to a particular audience; that audience are those who have chosen to follow him. Now, it's true that many, many of these followers will actually turn away from Jesus in the near future. Jesus knows this, of course, but for now they are identifying themselves as followers of Jesus. And being so, Jesus gives them this instruction.

The second piece of evidence is found in the last couplet. When Jesus pronounces his blessing on those rejected, on those mocked and excluded he adds a qualifier and says, "on account of the Son of Man." If the reason you suffer and struggle is because of your commitment and loyalty to Christ then you will be richly rewarded and blessed by the King of kings and the Lord of lords. If you suffer and struggle for your own foolishness and sin, then you certainly will not be richly blessed in the end.

Did you know the Bible makes that distinction? The Bible makes a distinction between suffering because of good and suffering because of evil. In 1 Peter 2 the Apostle Peter says (vs. 19-20), "For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? [There's nothing gained in that] But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God." Do you see the difference? It's a big difference. In fact, there's an entire book in the Bible (the book of Proverbs) dedicated to explaining the pain and misery we will find when we choose to live sinfully foolish lives.

Here's the truth: some people find themselves poor, hungry, sorrowful and rejected because they are trapped in a web of brokenness and sin. There's nothing inherently beneficial to that struggle. There's hope because Christ has come to save us from the wreckage of our sinfulness. But, when one suffers those same things on account of the Son of Man, Jesus will reward such people with the very kingdom of God.

We have much more to see in Jesus' teachings, but start asking yourself now: Am I aligned with Jesus and his kingdom? Do I see the particular dangers to my faith of present-day riches and happiness? Am I aware of the unique temptations of this opulent culture around me? Do I want to be rich in the Kingdom? And also, am I living for today or am I living for tomorrow? Is my goal to have it all now or all later? And do I trust Christ in such a way that I can let go of wealth and joy and satisfaction today because I know he'll deliver more in the future? And finally, is my association and allegiance to Christ defined enough that I can see how any travails I go through would be on account of his name?

#### Questions for the week

- Do you live with a vivid awareness of how earthly riches, advantages and happiness tempt you to forget the Lord? What can you do to counter these temptations?
- How hard is it to resist rewards today for better rewards tomorrow? What makes it hard?
- What might suffering on account of the Son of Man look like?