

Blessings Part 1 The Blessings And The Woes of Wealth

Today, we will return again to chapter 6 of the Book of Luke, where we find that immediately after choosing the twelve of His most faithful disciples, Jesus began to teach them about some of the most essentials of life.

And while it should be no surprise to us, we can't help but realize that Jesus was the best communicator this world will ever know. As He preached and as He taught the people, Jesus' words were always "rich with meaning", able to describe matters both in a very literal sense, but also at the same time, by using allegories and symbology, He was able to express deep truths of the Spirit.

As we know, Jesus especially like to use "Parables", stories with "word pictures" that described very ordinary circumstances of life, but at the same time, His words expressing deeply Spiritual contexts and meanings, what these scriptures call, "secrets of the Kingdom".

And we can see that taking place in these words of our passage today. Turn with me to Luke chapter 6, where Jesus is teaching His disciples using familiar words that bible scholars often refer to as "Be-attitudes".

Here, in verse 20, Jesus began His teaching with the simple, but very profound words, "Blessed are you poor". And again, note that Jesus is able to use words both in their literal sense, while at the same time, the same words having a very deep and profound Spiritual meaning.

Follow along as I read these words for us, beginning with verse 20.

²⁰Then He (the Lord Jesus) lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said:

"Blessed *are you* poor,

For yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹Blessed *are you* who hunger now,

For you shall be filled.

Blessed *are you* who weep now,

For you shall laugh.

²²Blessed are you when men hate you,

And when they exclude you,

And revile you, and cast out your name as evil,

For the Son of Man's sake.

²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!

For indeed your reward *is* great in heaven,

For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.
24“But woe to you who are rich,
For you have received your consolation.
25Woe to you who are full,
For you shall hunger.
Woe to you who laugh now,
For you shall mourn and weep.
26Woe to you when all men speak well of you,
For so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:20-26)

In an earlier message, as we were studying about the ministry that Jesus came to earth to carry out among the people, we read from chapter 4 of this Book of Luke, beginning in verse 18, where Jesus, quoting the words of Isaiah the Prophet, said about Himself . . .

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

In that message, we acknowledged that while much of the matters that Jesus taught and preached about centered in and around some of the social and cultural issues of that day, He was far more interested in eternal matters of the souls of those who were listening than in their physical and emotional needs.

We said at that time that those words “preach the gospel to the poor” were not just making reference to those who are economically poor but that those words also spoke about those who were “poor in spirit”, the ones who knew that they are “needy” in matters of the soul.

Again, God's words are so very “rich” in meaning and application. And as we can see from the words in today's passage, His truth is able to say many things, all at the same time. Here, His truth is able to speak not only to the practical and physical and emotional needs of the people, they are also able to speak to the deeper needs of their Spirit.

Here in this passage, as Jesus traveled about the countryside, teaching and preaching, the people were hearing and learning new and different things about God, different from the things they had been taught by the priests in the synagogues.

Having no bibles to study at home, as we do, the people knew only those things that were taught to them by the priests. And it seems that very little instruction was given about the common and ordinary matters of daily life. And they especially knew very little about the more deep and intimate truths within the heart of God.

And that is why Jesus came to live among them, and us, to reveal the heart and the person of God the Father, and to give us a deeper, more intimate understanding of His desires and purposes for us.

Here in these words, Jesus invites us to look below the surface of the written words, and to allow the Holy Spirit the freedom to reveal the way that we should respond to some of the common matters of daily life.

So, for the next three, perhaps four weeks, I'd like for us to take a very careful look into these special words of Jesus, and from these words, ask the Holy Spirit to show us more of the heart of God.

Firstly, bible commentators differ as they read these words about whether this is the same sermon that Jesus preached in Matthew chapter 5, there called the "Sermon on the Mount". I don't know, but I do believe that Jesus probably spoke these words, or words like them, often as He traveled about. And so, because these particular words seem to refer to some of the more practical matters of life, I'll assume that this is probably a different message from that given as the "Sermon on the Mount".

Here Jesus begins with the simple words of a very profound blessing. And as is so often the case within these scriptures, it is the words left "unspoken" that bear the greater blessing.

Hidden within these words is a "covenant" regarding the manner in which our hearts and our minds are supposed to deal with the need for and the desire for money. Note also that no particular amount of money or wealth is mentioned. That's because the words "poor" and "rich" are truly relative to each person's individual circumstance.

Jesus is instead getting down to the “heart attitude” that a person might have towards any amount of money or wealth they might have. Verse 20,

²⁰Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said:

“Blessed are you poor,

For yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)

Much in the same way that some of the popular television evangelists of today preach a “prosperity religion”, the Scribes and the Pharisees in Jesus’ day often taught a very similar message.

The belief was that if a person did right things, then God would be pleased and bless that person financially. And that has some truth to it, but not always. Armed with only that misguided belief, many people and churches and Christian ministries have gone astray, down wrong paths.

I can recall during the days that I worked in the ministry at French Camp, that I heard someone say, “God is blessing us financially, that must mean we are doing something right.”

Again, sometimes that may be true, but the reality is those two matters, “our finances” and “our doing something right” are mutually independent of one another. Yes, God can and often does work the two together, but not always.

Sometimes, it is better for a person, or a church, or a ministry organization to barely scrape by financially, because even a slight amount of extra money can become a distraction and lead them down wrong paths.

I have found that to be especially so in managing my personal and family finances. Extra money in our pocket can cause you and me to dream dreams that we should not dream, dreams about another car or a bigger house or some “toy” that we always wanted. And we forget the “cardinal rule” about owning something, and that is that “everything you own owns a little bit of you”. If we have a camper, or a bass boat or a four-wheeler, we feel compelled to use them, sometimes when we ought to be doing something else far more important.

And it is not as if those things are, in themselves, sinful. No, sin is far more subtle and sinister than that. Sin simply uses the money and the things money can buy to “distract us”, to turn our eyes and our hearts away from a far better thing that God would have us to be doing.

Distraction is part of the basic nature of wealth, and again, it does not matter the level of the wealth that we are enjoying. Wealth does not have to be big to captivate our imagination. Even a very small amount can make strong demands on us.

And again, wealth itself is not the problem. It is the manner in which our heart, our mind and our soul deals with the ownership of that wealth that gets us into trouble.

God has chosen the simple words, "lusts of the flesh" to express the troublesome problems we have with many temptations, and especially regarding money. We don't like that expression. It sounds too harsh. It sounds like something vile and vulgar. And it often is! But "lust of the flesh" does not have to be the kind of lust that you and I might imagine. Lust of the flesh can be as simple as an inordinate desire for a new easy-chair to sit in as we watch our new "high-definition" television.

Lust is a response of the heart. It is a "want", a "desire" that goes beyond "reasonable boundaries".

Yes, you need a house, but do you need that expensive one that you are about to buy. Will the purchase of that new house be a thing that will bring happiness to your family, or will it bring strife, even heartbreak? Lust of the flesh is a powerful and very sinister adversary.

Here, Jesus is dealing specifically with the "lustful" way in which we deal with any form of wealth or ownership. Here He tells us,

"Blessed are you poor,
For yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)

But in verse 24, He gives us a contrast. He tells us

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich,
For you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)

Note first, that in these words Jesus is personalizing His blessings and His warnings. He intentionally addresses the words to "you" and to "yours". Verse 20,

"Blessed are you poor,
For yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich,

For you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)

Folks, we really must take heed! God is intending for you and me to take these words very personally. He is speaking directly to you and to me.

In our finances, God truly does want to bless you and me personally and individually. And He truly will, especially if in our wealthy condition, we still remain “poor in spirit”, if we do not value our money beyond its intended purpose, if we see money simply as a provision to enable us to carry on forward the plans and the purposes that God has for us.

If we can keep that “right perspective”, then “blessed are we, for ours is the kingdom of God”.

Those words call to mind the words in the Lord's Prayer, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. Those words tell us that the “kingdom of God” actually begins now in our living years, and then continues on into eternity.

We do not have to wait until we reach heaven to receive God's blessings. They can begin now and carry right on into heaven. Here, Jesus says to us,

“Blessed are you poor,
For yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)

But again, here also, Jesus knows our hearts so very well. He knows how we can so quickly get caught up in the “lusts of our flesh”, and so He warns us in verse 24,

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich,
For you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)

Let me say all this again, and that you and I must take this warning very seriously. The manner in which we “enjoy” our money and our wealth during our living years really does matter even and especially for eternity. If we value our money and our wealth in the wrong way, if we spend our years being consumed by it all, trying to increase it and trying to protect it, the promise here is that whatever we get from all our efforts is all that we will get. There will be very little left in the “kingdom of God” here on earth for us to enjoy.

Isn't that a terrible thought, especially knowing that we are born-again believers who will spend an eternity with God in heaven? Consider for a moment what these words might mean.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich,
For you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)

God is telling us here that yes, in this life, I might enjoy the many indulgences of wealth, but that my wealth can go no further than these few days of this life.

What about eternity? Will the things I do in this life have an effect on my eternity with God?

Our usual thoughts about heaven do not allow for such considerations as those. After all, is not heaven a perfect place? And yes, it truly is, but that perfection all the more bespeaks the truth that God is expressing here in these words. If heaven is perfect, then the eternal life that we will receive and enjoy there will be perfectly commensurate with the life that we lead now in our temporal years.

That is exactly what God promises here in His word. And as we read other scriptures such as the “Parable of the talents” and the “Parable of the minas”, we can see clearly that the eternal life we will enjoy with Christ in heaven will be determined to a great extent by the manner in which we conduct our life while we live here and now. There will be both rewards and also a lack of rewards commensurate with the deeds that we do, or don’t do, in the flesh. Listen to the words of Revelation 20:12,

¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (Revelation 20:12)

In the “Parable of the Talents” and in the “Parable of the Minas” the servants received differing degrees of blessings for the works they had done with the gifts that the Master had left with them. And that will be so with you and me as we spend our eternity in heaven with Christ.

And there are other special blessings and rewards spoken about in these scriptures, especially “crowns” that we will receive or that we will not receive as we enter heaven.

Folks, God is truly just. And while yes, we will still get to go into heaven, and no we will not be sad or disappointed at the rewards that we will receive there, I am fully convinced that we will be very aware of what we could have had had

we been more diligent in our faith and in our works while we were still here in the flesh.

In this scripture text for today, you and I are being warned that we have a serious responsibility to deal rightly with the money and the wealth that we receive while we live here in the flesh. It all comes from God. And yes, it comes through the hands of our employer or our government or our retirement plan managers, or someone else, but it truly does come only from the Lord. It was His and it always remains His.

Before we close, let me give us the first test that God gives to each of us regarding money. God has established that we are to return a portion to Him as a "tithe".

And He asks us the question, "Would you be greedy and rob me by withholding your tithe?" Those words are found in Malachi chapter 3. Listen!

- ⁸ "Will a man rob God?
Yet you have robbed Me!
But you say,
'In what way have we robbed You?'
In tithes and offerings.
- ⁹ You are cursed with a curse,
For you have robbed Me,
Even this whole nation.
- ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse,
That there may be food in My house,
And try Me now in this,"
Says the Lord of hosts,
"If I will not open for you the windows of heaven
And pour out for you such blessing
That there will not be room enough to receive it. (Malachi 3:8-10)

Note in these words also, that this blessing is addressed personally to you and to me. God tells us here that He will "open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

If you and I can pass this first test of "tithing", then God's blessings will begin to pour out onto us for an eternity.

I'll need to close these thoughts for today, but may I ask that each of us stop for a moment, even right now, and consider our own heart attitude towards money and towards wealth? Are we covetous and greedy even with the little that we have? Do we waste our money on things or habits that distract us from the better things that God has for us? With whatever amount of money that we have, Jesus wants us to always remain "poor in spirit". And He says to us,

"Blessed are you poor,

For yours is the kingdom of God. (Luke 6:20)

²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich,

For you have received your consolation. (Luke 6:24)

May we pray!