

Lesson 24
The Pronouncements of Joy vs Woe
Luke 6:20-26

Last week we studied the context inside of which Jesus called His twelve apostles. The context was that opposition to Jesus and His disciples was increasing. He chose the twelve in order to train them and send them out to stand against the opposition. Luke 6:12 describes Jesus' first action as going off to the mountain to pray. There He spent the whole night in prayer to God as to which twelve He should choose to be His apostles. In verse 13, when day came, He summoned a great number of His disciples to Himself and then went up on the mountain and chose the twelve. In verse 14 we have Simon, whom He also named Peter, and who is also called Cephas elsewhere. He was the first among equals. Then his brother Andrew. Also two other brothers, James, who is really Jacob, and John. These four formed the first group. Then Philip, the head of the second group, Nathaniel Bar Tolmai and verse 15 Matthew and Thomas. Those four formed the second group. Then another James, who is really Jacob, as the head of the third group, this one the son of Alphaeus, along with Simon who was called the Zealot, a member of an extremist Pharisaic party that opposed Rome with violence, and in verse 16, Judas the son of James, who was also known as Thaddaeus, and lastly, Judas Iscariot, probably from the town of Kerioth, the one who became a traitor. These four formed the third group. Henceforward, these twelve men would now be Jesus' closest companions. One of them was a traitor, chosen for the express purpose that Jesus be betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified. After appointing them apostles on the mount, verse 17 says they came down and stood on the side of the mount on a level place, like a plateau, where a large crowd of disciples, mostly from the Galilee, were gathered along with a great throng of people from throughout the southern portion of Israel as well as the Gentile coastal regions of Tyre and Sidon. The reports of His words and works had spread widely. They wanted to taste of the good things to come. In verse 19 He was casting out unclean spirits and healing them of their diseases, for all the people were touching Him and power was coming forth from Him and all who touched Him were healed, regardless of faith, for this was a simple demonstration of who Jesus was by what He could do. And now having displayed grace, the stage was set for what He really wanted to emphasize, His teaching and what they should do.

It's at this point that we come to what is known traditionally as *The Sermon on the Mount* and we want to make some initial observations, **First**, perhaps the most controversial issue is whether the sermon in Luke is the same as the one in Matthew or a different sermon given on a different occasion to a different audience. One reason some distinguish them is the difference in length as recorded by Matthew and Luke. Matthew records 111 verses while Luke records only 29. However, this may be explained by simply pointing out that Matthew is writing to Jews and recorded a much larger body of material related to the Pharisees and their teachings, while Luke is writing to Gentiles and didn't need to develop so much material related to the Pharisees. But the main reason is due to the description of the location the sermon was given. Matt 5:1 says, "He went up on the mountain," while Luke 6:12 and 17 say that He was on the mountain and "came down...and stood on a level place." Therefore, some have concluded that Matthew describes a sermon on the mount and Luke a sermon on the plain. J. Vernon McGee said, "Now we come to the so-called "Sermon on the Mount," which is not a sermon on the mount as it was delivered on a plain. Of course, the Sermon on the Mount was delivered on a mountain, as

recorded in Matthew. The similarity in content indicates that the Lord gave His teachings again and again. We do not need a harmony of the Gospels as much as we need a contrast of the Gospels. The remarkable thing about this sermon in Luke is its dissimilarity to the sermon in Matthew. There are omissions, certain inclusions, blessings and woes, attitudes and judgments.” However, D. A. Carson “...points out that the Greek word translated “plain” can mean “a plateau in a mountainous region.” And A. T. Robertson said, “The going up into the mountain of Matt. 5:1 may simply be a summary statement with no mention of what Luke has explained or may be a reference to the elevation, where he “sat down” (Matt. 5:1), above the plain or “level place” (ἐπι τοπου πεδινου [*epi topou pedinou*]) on the mountain side where Jesus “stood” or “stopped” (ἔστη [*estē*]). It may be a level place towards the foot of the mountain. He stopped his descent at this level place and then found a slight elevation on the mountain side and began to speak. There is not the slightest reason for making Matthew locate this sermon on the mountain and Luke in the valley as if the places, audiences, and topics were different.”²¹ In fact, there are many reasons to identify them as the same sermon given on the same occasion. A. T. Robertson said, “The reports in Matthew and Luke begin alike, cover the same general ground and end alike. The report in Matthew is longer chiefly because in Chapter 5, he gives the argument showing the contrast between Christ’s conception of righteousness and that of the Jewish rabbis. Undoubtedly, Jesus repeated many of the crisp sayings here at other times as in Luke 12, but it is quite gratuitous to argue that Matthew and Luke have made up this sermon out of isolated sayings of Christ at various times. Both Matthew and Luke give too much that is local of place and audience for that idea. Matt. 5:1 speaks of “the multitudes” and “his disciples.” Luke 6:17 notes “a great multitude of his disciples, and a great number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon.” They agree in the presence of disciples and crowds besides the disciples from whom the twelve apostles were chosen.”

Second observation, the exact location the sermon was given is not known. Roman Catholics hold to the location as being on the NW banks of the Sea of Galilee, and if you tour the land of Israel you will likely be taken to this location because it is so convenient to access. Protestants, on the other hand, hold to the location as being at the Horns of Hattin, a bit farther to the West. At any rate, both locations fit the description of the text that it was given between Gennesaret and Capernaum, and from a plateau on the side of a mountain. Therefore, neither location can be proven over the other and we don’t really know exactly where it took place. Third, some Bible teachers have sought to rename this sermon based on the content. They reason that since the location tells us nothing about the sermon then it is befitting to study the sermon and give it a name that describes its contents. As such, Pentecost called it *Christ’s Authority to Interpret the Law* because in it, Christ shows the true intent of the Mosaic Law over and against the Pharisees interpretation. I prefer to call it *The Discourse on Kingdom Righteousness* because in it Christ describes the kind of righteousness necessary to enter the kingdom, which is a righteousness through faith and not works. At any rate, the important thing is the content, not the location, and so some renaming of the discourse is in order. Fourth, in particular, the audience of the sermon are His disciples, which included His apostles, as indicated in Luke 6:20 where He turned **His gaze toward His disciples**. But in general, the audience includes unbelievers as well, as indicated by Luke 6:17 where “a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon” are mentioned. Pentecost agreed, saying, “While Matthew’s record seems to indicate that the Lord withdrew from the multitude so as to minister to the twelve apostles privately, Luke’s record makes it clear that Christ found a level place from which He could address a great multitude of disciples... These multitudes were curious and desired to see and hear for

themselves the things about which they had heard. Thus far they had come to no conviction about the person of Christ and the truth that He proclaimed. Christ viewed them as outside the kingdom....He warned them against trusting in the teachings of the Pharisees.”ⁱⁱⁱ Fifth, the dispensation in which this sermon was given is the dispensation of law. Therefore, the interpretation is relative to the Law of Moses and not the dispensation of grace. As a result, the direct application is to those living under the Law of Moses, not the Church. Nevertheless, for us there is secondary application of the principles found in this teaching and we will highlight those as we go through. Sixth, Luke organized vv 20-26 into a pattern that we might call contrast. In verses 20-23 he describes four “blessed’s” and in verses 24-25 four contrasting “woes.” For example, the first blessing in verse 20 is **Blessed are you who are poor**...and the first woe is a contrast in verse 24, **Woe to you who are rich**...In verse 21 the second blessing is **Blessed are you who hunger now** and the second woe is a contrast in verse 25, **Woe to you who are well-fed now**. And this pattern continues for the remaining blessings and woes.

In verse 20 we read, **And turning His gaze toward His disciples**. The turning of **His gaze toward His disciples** indicates that His teaching is primarily aimed at His disciples. At the time verse 17 indicates this was “a large crowd.” Since disciples were learners, Jesus had a large following at this time. The great throng of others had come to hear His teaching and see His miracles. Having turned toward His disciples, **He began to say**, or more accurately, **He was saying, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for you, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets**. These first words are traditionally known as the **Beatitudes**. The term “beatitudes” is from the Latin translation of the Greek *μακαριος* which is translated into English as “Blessed” all four times in vv 20, 21 and 22. These fall into **two categories**. First, verses 20-21 where blessing is pronounced upon those characterized as poor, hungry and weeping; characteristics describing their relationship to God. Second verses 22-23 where blessing is pronounced upon those who experience hate, ostracism, insult and scorn for the Lord’s sake; experiences describing their relationship to men. But what exactly are these blessings? What is being pronounced? Some scholars highly favor the translation “blessed,” but others, like Fruchtenbaum highly prefer “happy.” He writes, “*Blessed*...is not the normal translation of the Greek word. A better translation would be *happy*.” However, ultimately he admits, “...that the modern English word *happy* may not be equivalent to the Hebrew word behind the Greek, but it is still more appropriate than *blessed*.” What he is struggling with is finding an exact English equivalent to the Hebrew word behind the Greek word. The Hebrew word behind the Greek word is *ashrei*. Its root refers to “joy and happiness.” What Jesus is doing is pronouncing joy and happiness on believers who face difficulty now and by contrast pronouncing trouble on unbelievers who have it easy now. It is a reversal of fortunes.

Let’s look at the first category in verses 20-21, and understand that these characteristics of being poor, hungry and weeping are depictions of a believer. In verse 20, Jesus says, **Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God**. The poor are poor spiritually. The parallel in **Matt 5:3** confirms this, saying, “Blessed are those who are poor in spirit.” So this is not a reference to material poverty but spiritual poverty. What does it mean to be poor spiritually? It

means to recognize one's lack of spiritual worth and need for the righteousness of God. The Pharisees did not sense their need for righteousness. They considered themselves as righteous and presented their righteousness to God. Pentecost said, "...the righteousness of the Pharisees made them exceedingly proud and they offered their righteousness to God. But the truly righteous are people who have recognized that they have no righteousness and turn to God to supply their need." And how does God supply their need? God supplies their need through faith. Righteousness before God is always by faith.

While it may be difficult now, the ultimate outcome for those who have faith is a good one. Jesus says, **for yours is the kingdom of God.** Those who are counted righteous have possession in **the kingdom of God.** What is the **kingdom of God?** The **kingdom of God** is the future kingdom that was prophesied to be restored by all the prophets and will be established on the earth. In the parallel in Matthew it says, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What is the kingdom of heaven? Past dispensationalists often distinguished between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. For example, Walvoord said that the kingdom of heaven as the sphere of profession and the kingdom of God as the sphere of all genuine believers. However, this is inaccurate because the parallel passages use kingdom of God as a substitute for Matthew's kingdom of heaven. Therefore, both the kingdom of heaven and kingdom of God refer to the same future kingdom prophesied by all the prophets that will be established on the earth. In the grammar the two expressions "of God" and "of heaven" are objective genitive's. The objective genitive identifies the source. Therefore, the meaning of kingdom of God is that the kingdom is sourced in God. In Matthew the phrase kingdom of heaven means that the kingdom is sourced in heaven. But this is really saying the same thing since God dwells in heaven. The reason Matthew almost always uses kingdom of heaven rather than kingdom of God is because he was writing to Jewish believers and Jews were sensitive to the overuse of the name of God. By referring to it as the kingdom of heaven he connected with them in the same way the expression was used in the Mishnah, but without offending them.

With that clarified, verse 20 is teaching that those who had recognized they were poor spiritually are those who had recognized their need for righteousness from God and put their faith in the Messiah to receive it. The ultimate outcome for them is joy and happiness because when the kingdom comes it will belong to them.

In Luke 6:21 we come to the **second characteristic.** **Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.** This is another description of a person's spiritual relationship with God. The parallel in Matt 5:6 elaborates, saying, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." The hunger then is not for physical food, but for spiritual righteousness. These people desire that righteousness fill the earth. They can be joyful and happy **now** because they **shall be satisfied** in the future kingdom when righteousness is the rule of the day. "The Pharisees had no such desire for true righteousness, for they were **satisfied** with their experience and consequently never sought the righteousness that comes from God." But there were people who were not satisfied with the injustices of our world. Amos 5:24 described them as saying, "But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Only when the kingdom comes will righteousness fill the earth and their hunger **will be satisfied.**

In Luke 6:21b Jesus gives the **third characteristic**, **Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh**. The reason for weeping is difficult to determine. The parallel in Matt 5:4 doesn't help much because it uses a synonym for weep saying, "Blessed are those who mourn." However, because these are all in relation to God, it seems that those **who weep** are those who are sensitive to their personal sin against God and therefore confess their sin. The outcome is a good one for them, **for they shall laugh**. One day in the kingdom the Spirit will have been poured out on them and they will no longer sin. Thus, there will no longer be a need to confess sin. The struggle with sin will be past. All of life will be full of joyful laughter.

That concludes the first three pronouncements of joy and happiness for those characterized in relation to God as lacking spiritual worth, hungering for righteousness to fill the earth and sensitivity to sin, because when the kingdom of God comes they will participate, the world will be filled with righteousness and they will no longer sin. Their deepest desires will be fulfilled.

In Luke 6:22 Jesus turns to the second category; pronouncements of joy and happiness for those who experience poor treatment by men because they will have great reward in heaven. In verse 22 Jesus says, **Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets**. Four negative responses are aimed at believers. The **first** one is they **hate you**. The word **hate** means to have a strong aversion to, and can be translated "hate, detest." In this case they are hating them because **of the Son of Man**. The world hates the Son of Man without cause and they hate those who belong to Him because of their relationship to Him. But they can be joyful and happy because their **reward is great in heaven**. The **second** one is also in verse 22, **Blessed are you when men...ostracize you**. The word **ostracize** is self-explanatory, it refers to exclusion from a group. Here they are ostracized because of the Son of Man. Therefore, it probably refers specifically to being ostracized from the synagogue because they were following Jesus as the Messiah. However, it might apply to any situation where a believer is following Christ. The **third** one is **Blessed are you when men...insult you**. The word **insult** means to find fault by demeaning the other person. It is a way of shaming someone. Again, it is due to their association with the Son of Man. They are being shamed because of Him. The **fourth** one is **Blessed are you when men...scorn your name as evil**. **Scorn** is a good translation of this word here. It means to "disdain." In this case they are disdain their names **as evil**. The family name was very important. It reflected one's reputation among men. If their names were disdained it reflected poorly on the family. But Jesus pronounces joy and happiness on them because this is a result of being associated with the Son of Man and in the future their reward will be great.

In verse 23 Jesus tells those who are hated, ostracized, insulted and scorned because of Him to **Be glad in that day and leap**. Then two reasons are given. **First**, because **your reward is great in heaven**. The words **be glad in that day** refer to the day when they are hated, ostracized, insulted or scorned. When that takes place, they are to **be glad**. The reason given is preceded by the word **behold**. This is a special word that is designed to attract your attention. Jesus wants to arouse your attention to look at these words. Why be glad when you are scorned or ostracized? Because **your reward is great in heaven**. Reward is **μισθος** and means "recognition for the moral quality of an action." In light of the opposition that Jesus was now facing from the Pharisees, it would be difficult to stand up for Him and not deny Him. But the motivating factor

is that their reward would be great. The word **great** refers either to a sum or quality or both. Ultimately, your steadfastness, despite opposition will not be forgotten but remembered and recognized and recompensed. As such you can **be glad and leap** for joy because your testimony is being felt by the world and this pleases the Lord. **Second** reason they can be glad in that day and leap is because you are in good company. **in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.** The **prophets** were the mouthpieces of God. They were highly prized by God. They spoke the word of God to the people. But the OT **prophets** were not loved by the people because their messages were often negative. Instead of loved, they were hated, instead of befriended they were ostracized, instead of praised they were insulted, instead of spoken highly of they were scorned. But while that is how men thought of them, God thought very differently. He loved them, and so believers who face the same things the prophets faced are in good company. Therefore, **be glad...and leap.** All will be well someday in the kingdom. All that is wrong will be made right. Justice will prevail.

Those then are the four beatitudes or pronouncements of joy and happiness, three of which are descriptive of believers in relation to God and one that is descriptive of the experiences of those who are believers in relation to the world. And basically what Jesus is pronouncing is joy and happiness upon believers who face difficulty now for His sake because God has reserved for them a place in His kingdom and great rewards in that kingdom.

In vv 24-26 Jesus shifts to pronouncing four contrasting woes; three of which describe unbelievers in their relationship to God and one that describes unbelievers in relation to the world. And basically these pronouncements are of great pain upon unbelievers who are enjoying life now because they will be excluded from the kingdom and face total loss.

In verse 24 the word **But** signifies a contrast with the previous blessings. There will now be four woes that contrast with the four blessings. The **first woe** addresses the **rich** and contrasts with verse 20 the blessings upon the spiritually poor. **But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.** The word **woe** is οὐαί and refers to intense pain or misfortune that awaits someone. In this case it is the **rich**. The **rich** are materially **rich**, not spiritually **rich**. And, of course, it's the materially **rich** in general, or as a class, and not all individuals who are **rich**. But generally, the **rich** don't sense any for righteousness. They deem themselves as self-righteous. But Jesus pronounces **woe** upon them. Intense pain and misfortune awaits them in the future. And the reason why is stated to be, **for you are receiving your comfort in full.** They are presently **receiving** payment for what they have done. The description of what they have received as **comfort in full** is from the Greek word παρακλησις which means "consolation." It's actually more like a consolation prize. The riches they have now are like a consolation prize. Ultimately, they will lose because they will have no possession in the kingdom to come. Their riches now is all they will ever have and in the end they will lose everything.

In verse 25 we see the second contrast with the blessings. The **second** contrast addresses the **well-fed** and contrasts them with verse 21, "the hungry." **Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry.** There is a reversal of fortunes in the end. Those who are **well-fed now** will **be hungry** in the future while those who are hungry now will be satisfied in the future. The **well-fed** are physically **well-fed**. They have all the best food now, all the best wine, they are content. But that is only **now**. The **woe** is pronounced because in the future they **shall be hungry**. They

will not have all that they need because that is reserved for those who are hungry now, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. But they see no need for righteousness and feel that in their wealth and their food they have all they need. They are sadly mistaken.

In verse 25b we see the third woe contrasted with the third blessing. The **third** woe is upon those **who laugh now** versus those in verse 21 who “weep now.” This is another reversal of fortunes. Those who **laugh now** will **mourn and weep** in the future while those who weep now shall laugh in the future. The ones who **laugh now** are laughing in a condescending way. This is not the laugh of entertainment. It is the laugh of derision and scorn as they laugh at others less fortunate. Woe to these people because in the future they **shall mourn and weep**. The uses of two descriptors intensifies the **woe**. They will have intense pain and anguish because all that they have will be lost.

In verse 26, the **fourth** woe contrasted with the fourth blessing is the pronouncement of **woe** upon them **when all men speak well of you**. It is the way of the world to **speak well** of those who are rich, well-fed and look down on others by laughing at them. But **woe** is pronounced upon them because **their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way**. The **false prophets** were more popular than the true. Their messages were positive. They told men they were doing what God wanted. They were very popular with the kings and told them to keep doing what they were doing. But they were not prophets of God and they were not blessed by God.

In summary, Bock said, “The woes show that the world’s values and God’s values are very different indeed. In addition, whatever treasure one has briefly now may not equate with whatever loss one has forever later. Where is the best place to rest one’s well-being: in the short-term present or in the eternal future? That is the issue Jesus raises here. He says that the disciple is to be dependent on God and stand up for him.” It may mean ostracism, rejection, persecution and difficulty now, but one may rest assured that God will bless abundantly. Do not be deceived by the self-sufficient and indifferent way of the rich. They have much now, but they will have nothing later. One can have consolation now and lose it. Or one may lack now, only to receive abundant blessing later...here is the key to the pronouncements of blessing and woes: God’s blessing is on those who come to him by faith and those who do not will lose everything.

In conclusion, what can we learn? First, things are not what they appear. The rich and famous appear to be blessed, but ultimately it is the one who is poor in spirit, recognizing his spiritual need of righteousness, the one who is hungry for righteousness to fill the earth, the one who is sensitive to his sin, and is hated by the world, ostracized, insulted and scorned, who will be blessed, for the roles will be completely reversed and they will enjoy great reward in the kingdom to come. The application is to live with a future heavenly perspective, not a present worldly perspective. This is what results in great reward in the future; living with a future heavenly perspective.

ⁱ Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933.

ⁱⁱ J Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 171.