

Blessings and Woes

(Luke 6:20-26)

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In Luke 6:20-26 Jesus pronounced blessings and woes in a teaching that many of us will find to be baffling. At the time that He gave this teaching, a large group of His disciples and many others had gathered to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. As we study this passage, we can begin to see that the ways of God are contrary to the ways of the world and the understanding of men. Beginning in Luke 6:20 we read:

And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, “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 joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. (Luke 6:20-23)

“But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way.” (Luke 6:24-26)

Curiously, Jesus pronounced woes upon those who are rich and well fed now, who laugh now, and who have their comfort and consolation during this present life. Many of us might reason that things appear to be backwards in this passage. Contrary to what Jesus taught, most of us will see no blessing at all in being poor, hungry, or in mourning. And at the same time, we would consider that

those who are blessed would obviously be those who are rich and well fed, and who enjoy their comforts and consolations in this life. However, in Jesus' teaching here, we see that such is not the case.

So, at this point we must ask ourselves: Why would Jesus characterize blessings and woes in a way that is so contrary to the understanding of men? The answer is given in several of His teachings, and in several other Scripture passages as well.

In John 12:24-26, Jesus used a grain of wheat as an analogy to symbolize His life and the lives of all who serve Him. He taught that unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and "dies", it remains only a single grain of wheat, but if it "dies", it will bear much fruit.

In this passage, Jesus taught He and all those who follow Him will experience, in some measure as God has ordained for each of us, the "death" of our own hopes, plans, aspirations, and desires for our life, in order that God's will for our life will be accomplished (consider Mark 14:32-36). As these "deaths" occur, we will suffer because of them, and through these sufferings we will bear fruit to the glory of God, just as Jesus did in His life.

These are among the hardest things to consider in the Scriptures. However, as God's people we should all understand that ***this process of fruit bearing through the "death" of the grain of wheat that Jesus revealed in John 12:24-26 will be at work in the life of every genuine believer.***

This is exactly why Jesus, looking at His disciples, proclaimed that those who are poor now, who hunger now, and who weep now, during this present life, are those who are truly blessed by God. It is because these present sufferings will, according to John 12:24-26, bear fruit in our lives, which will bring about for us a share in Christ's eternal glory.

This also the same message that Paul brought to us in Romans 8:17, where he taught that we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings, in order that we may also share in His eternal glory. And then Paul encouraged us in the very next verse where he taught that the sufferings of this present life are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.

In John 16:20-22 Jesus gave a teaching that is completely consistent with His teaching in Luke 6:20-23. Jesus said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. (John 16:20-22)

In this passage, Jesus taught that now, during this present life, we will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. This will be our experience as we share in His sufferings, becoming in some measure as He was, a man of sorrow who was acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:2-3).

He then compared these sufferings to the pain of a woman in labor. In the process of childbirth, she has pain, but when she gives birth, she no longer remembers her anguish because of the joy that her child has been born. In the same way, we experience our grief as we share in the sufferings of Christ, now, during this present life, but the time will come when the fruit born through our sufferings will bring us joy that no one will take away from us.

Contrary to the way men understand and perceive what it is to be blessed by God, Jesus taught His disciples that even when they are poor, either poor in spirit or poor in material possessions, they are blessed by God. Even when they experience hunger for things that God their Father has withheld from them, they are in fact blessed. Even when they weep and mourn as they share in the sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, they are blessed. And even when they are ostracized and ill-treated because of their faith in Him, they are blessed.

How can these things be? How can these things which bring sorrow and grief into our lives possibly have anything to do with the blessing of God? The answer begins to become clear as we begin to understand from the Scriptures that everyone who serves Jesus must follow Him, sharing in His sufferings in order to bear fruit according to the principle that He taught us in John 12:24-26. And the fruit born through our sufferings will produce for us an eternal glory that far exceeds the weight and burden of our sufferings during this present time of our lives here on earth. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Romans 8:18).

In contrast to the blessings that Jesus pronounced upon His disciples who will all share in His sufferings now, during this present life, He pronounced woes

upon those who are rich and well fed now, who laugh now, and who have their comfort and consolation during this present life. Most of us would look at these people, and we would consider them to be blessed by God because of the many benefits they enjoy in life.

As we try to understand why Jesus pronounced woes upon those who have so much of the gratification in life that we would all like to have, let us also consider the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Here Jesus gave us another very similar lesson about those who are eternally blessed by God and those who are not. In this parable, we see that the poor, miserable, and afflicted beggar Lazarus was known and accepted by God, despite the many hardships he endured in life. On the other hand, we see that the rich man who fared sumptuously and lived in luxury every day was ultimately rejected by God, despite the many comforts and benefits he enjoyed during his lifetime. (Consider also Psalm 73.)

Jesus' pronouncement of blessings and woes as they are given in Luke 6:20-26 and the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus are both to be understood through the lesson that He gave to us in John 12:24-26, as we have discussed in depth before. Every one of us who serves Christ must follow Him, sharing in His sufferings (John 12:26, Romans 8:17), as God has ordained them for each of us individually. This share in His sufferings, sufferings that came about through no wrongdoing of His own, but nonetheless sufferings that came about according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23), is the necessary path that God has ordained whereby we will bear spiritual fruit to His glory, and thereby share in the eternal glory of His Son.

On the other hand, unbelievers are not able to bear any good fruit at all (Matthew 7:15-23, John 15:1-8). They have been granted no share in the sufferings of God's Son, and no share in His eternal glory. Therefore, the sufferings that believers will endure according to the principle that Jesus taught us in John 12:24-26 will be absent in the lives of unbelievers, because this principle is not at work in their lives but only in the lives of God's people.