



Luke 6:20

20 Looking at his disciples, he said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

Reflection

In Luke 6, after descending from the mountain top with his newly appointed disciples, Jesus is healing all-comers. But his healing power is not the centrepiece of the day. Rather it is a prelude to something far

greater that is to follow, Luke's parallel to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, known in Luke's Gospel as the 'Sermon on a Plain'. Literally, in the original Greek, it's the sermon 'on a level place' and some have said that this is because Jesus is about to level with his disciples about the true nature of living as members of the kingdom of the God in the kingdom of this world.¹

Perhaps it is appropriate as the great numbers of those Jesus has healed press in upon him that Luke's version of the greatest sermon ever preached begins with the surprising words in our passage today, Luke 6:20,

20 Looking at his disciples, he said:

1 . Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Preaching the word; Wheaton, illinois: Crossway, 2015), 219–23.

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

With these words, we see from the outset that Jesus is addressing his followers, his disciples, members of the kingdom of God, with the crowds looking on and listening in, sifting and weighing to see if they too will bear the cost of following Jesus. You see, Jesus is not out to win people over, but to level with those who would follow him when it comes to what is in store for members of the kingdom of God living for a time in the kingdom of this world. Over the course of this week we’ll see Jesus turn everyday outlooks on life on their heads. Not ‘Blessed are the rich, for they have it all, and they have it now – for theirs is the kingdom of the world.’ But,

‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful and rejected – but woe to the rich, those who laugh, and are well fed and well regarded in our world; that’s how Jesus begins. This is radical preaching that blows away any shallow talk of discipleship, instead calling for true commitment. Jesus’ preaching is not, as it has been taken, a masterclass in humanistic ethics, or even religious ethics like the Ten Commandments or the Eightfold Path of Buddha. It is a sample of the sacrificial ethics expected of true followers of Jesus, beginning with verse 20, our passage today,²

‘Blessed are you who are poor,

² Ibid.

for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are the poor. Not those who are spiritually poor as in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount (likely another more expanded version of Jesus' teaching that occurred later in his ministry). But blessed are the actual poor. In the context of followers of Jesus, blessed are those who have given up everything and are persecuted for Jesus' sake. Our minds turn to Jesus' disciples, some of whom have left behind businesses and prosperous careers for Jesus. Our minds turn to Jesus himself. Luke 9:58, he says of himself,

'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

Or 2 Cor 8:9 where Paul says of Jesus,

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Jesus was poor. Our minds turn to those in our day who've left careers behind for the mission field or the ministry. Or to those who give sacrificially until it hurts. All for the cause of the gospel – to the ridicule of those around them and the 'applause of heaven' as Max Lucado so beautifully puts it.

'Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

In world terms, followers of Jesus are generally poor. Because they don't make compromises with our fallen culture. Their worldview, their belief systems, their outlook and goals in life are firmly rooted in Jesus and his Word and not in our material world. They believe that Jesus Christ is the only hope for our world, and that he is the only way to the Father, that his is the only name under heaven by which we can be saved. Whatever wealth they have doesn't come through ethical compromise or the 'everybody is doing it' mentality. They do not love money, or hold onto it tightly; for they have pledged everything to Jesus, who is their only hope, their only life; financial security is all well and good but their deepest security is found only in him.³

³ Ibid.

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for yours is the kingdom of God.

Think

Here’s another version for you, a version we’re all much more familiar with. ‘Blessed are the rich, for they have it all, and they have it now – for theirs is the kingdom of the world.’ ‘Blessed are the rich, for they have it all, and they have it now.’ This is the message of the kingdom of our world. It’s messages like these that the kingdom of this world is preaching to us every day. But the kingdom of God, through its spokesperson Jesus, is preaching to us a radically different message, a radically counter-cultural message. There is a cost to following Jesus and we cannot have a

little bit both ways.

Jesus' teaching in today's passage gives us cause for deep reflection, especially for those (I expect like you and I) who are quite comfortable in our prosperous culture. In world terms we are rich. Kent Hughes offers these questions for us rich to meditate over today,

1. We rich are constantly assaulted with the temptation to rely on riches. Can we not rely upon them and yet have them?
2. We rich are dulled to our need by our plenty. Can we have plenty and feel our need?
3. We rich tend to be proud of what

we have done, to take credit for our comforts. Can we live a humble life?⁴

These are hard questions that we must each answer for ourselves. But as we do so, let us not ignore Jesus' words, or set them aside as if they're somehow speaking about other followers of Jesus and not us too.

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.’

Pray

Thank God today for the blessing of living as Christian in one of the most prosperous nations on earth. Ask him for the wisdom to understand these costly words from

⁴ Ibid.

Jesus and to apply them to our context. Pray against the love of money, idolatry, materialism and waste. Pray for a generous spirit and a heart that longs for God's plans and purposes, for his will on earth to be done.

If you are rich in world terms, pray that you also would be righteous. Pray that God would make you increasingly generous and should he continue to give you more money than you need or can give away pray that your heart would stay constantly fixed on him and not the wealth he is blessing you with which can so easily lead us astray.

But pray also today for the vast majority of Christians around our world who are struggling to make ends meet, very often be-

cause it is God's ends that they are pursuing and not their own. Pray that this verse would be emblazoned on their hearts and minds by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray that they would truly believe it and deeply experience it. Luke 6:20, Jesus' promise to them and us,

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.’