

17 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, 18 who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, 19 and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

20 Looking at his disciples, he said:

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

21 Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

22 Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.

23 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24 “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your comfort.

25 Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.

26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Good News and Bad News

I’ve got good news and I’ve got bad news. You’ve probably heard both good and bad news in your life sometimes first or second. You’ve probably had the option to choose what you want to hear. And sometimes people say that even if there is no good news. It’s at those moments when no news is probably the best news because the good rarely redeems the bad. So what should come first? Jeremiah puts the bad news first and foremost and then he follows it up with good news. Jesus on the other hand puts the good news front and center before moving on to the bad news. Jesus isn’t giving us a lesson on preaching, “Always end with the bad news!” This isn’t his full sermon. Nor is he telling us how to become blessed but rather he places his blessing on these people. That sounds like good news until we look a little closer at the blessings.

But I've got some bad news. It won't always feel so good. In fact there are time when you won't always feel so blessed but the good news remains true no matter how people treat you or whatever may happen to you: you are blessed and it is good.

Last week Jesus called his disciples into the full time ministry. Peter, James, and John left everything to follow Jesus. And now the crowds come to him from everywhere. A great crowd of disciples from the surrounding regions gathers around Jesus. They're from as far off as Tyre and Sidon, coastal communities, which indicates that Gentiles were there. We even know why they came. They came for to be healed and to listen to Jesus. They flock to him from all over. The people were poor, the hungry, the sick.,

It's great. Jesus is performing miracles. Power is emanating from Jesus and people just want to get close to him. Jesus is popular which means the disciples will be popular. Things couldn't get any better. That's good right? But Jesus doesn't want his disciples to trust in the size of the crowd or look to the outward success of the Word to see that it works. Jesus starts with the good news. *"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man."*

Jesus says, *"Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the hungry now. Blessed are those who weep now. And blessed are you when."* Jesus is a Hebrew scholar and he balances the blessings with the woes. They are parallel to each other. Four blessings are balanced by four woes in verse 24-26. Good news is right next to bad news and directed right at his disciples. The beatitudes have often been thought of as a how to manual. If you want to be blessed then you need to be poor, hungry, and hated. But Jesus isn't giving us any "If... then..." statements. He is pronouncing his blessing over those who follow him. They are the poor. They are the hungry. They are those who weep and are hated. Before any of his disciples question if they are included and maybe Jesus is talking about other people he says, *"blessed are you now."* Right now at this moment you are blessed. A blessing isn't anything you can take. It is given freely. It is the assurance that everything is perfect despite the chaos in the way the world around you. But you'll notice there's also bad news.

You will be hated. That is how their ancestors treated the prophets. Just think of Jeremiah, also known as the weeping prophet. He was thrown in a cistern and left for dead, placed in the stocks, mocked, ridiculed, carried off against his will. Nobody would listen to him. He's not the only one. Elijah was hunted down so as to destroy him. When Jezebel was killing the prophets of the Lord, Obadiah hid them in caves and provided them with bread and water. The prophets of the past were hated for their words, their message.

So what does that say about us? Maybe we should try harder to make people hate? There is such a thing as being a jerk for Jesus and then again we can never be sure if someone hates us because of Jesus or simply because of us. But what about us? We're not exactly poor. So far this blessing sounds like good news for Venezuela and bad news for America. Even the poorest of the poor in America have access to a wealth of resources. We live at a level far above the well-to-do in third-world countries. Luke's Gospel warns of the dangers of wealth, it's a theme carried throughout his gospel. Before we just spiritualize these blessings in our materialistic society and say, "Luke is referring to the poor in spirit." We should realize that wealth and riches should never be the end goal but only a means to the end. We use our time, talents, and money to serve God and are not to serve it.

Is that good news or bad news? Should we try to be poorer, skip a few meals, and mourn a bit? The poor are blessed because they can't do anything. They are completely dependent on God to provide. For those of us who have a three month supply of food in the pantry we don't have to worry about a famine or what we will eat. If something bad happens we just turn to our pantry rather than God. It's the temptation to self-sufficiency that looks away from God to self to provide for all that we need. It happens in our physical lives. It can happen spiritually as well. The *rich in spirit* are tempted to take pride in themselves, to think they don't need forgiveness. They are regarded as rich in works, have lost a hunger for God's Word, and think they have done enough to satisfy God. They are rich, they are proud, and they are cursed. I don't know about you but when I take a look at myself, that sounds like me. If ever we no longer mourn over sin and stand alone before God - there is no comfort. That's bad news.

But there is good news. There is nothing we can do to earn God's blessing, his grace or favor. But there is good news and there is something you can do. In Hebrew poetry the most important part, the area where the poet would have you focus is either at the extremities and in emphatic position or right in the center. Between four blessings and four woes is a single sentence of what you can do.

"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets." The disciples won't always be warmly welcomed. 10 out of 12 will be killed and suffer martyrdom. They won't be wealthy or well off, no yacht on the mediterranean, summer or winter homes. But, even lacking basic necessities they will rejoice and leap for joy. When Paul and Silas could not leap for joy because they're feet were bound in the stocks, they sang. Paul when he was imprisoned penned Philippians, *"Rejoice in the Lord always."* Paul proclaims while bound and waiting for what may be his last day, *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* In other words, "I can rejoice in this. I can get through this not because I'm strong and able but because God gives me strength to endure."

God has given us more than strength to endure and carry on. He has given us reason to rejoice and leap for joy. He has given us his Son who entered into the chaos of this dark world and blessed it with his presence. He brought good news, peace, joy. He brought the kingdom that is yours now by giving his perfect life for the world. And it is because of that, his work for you on behalf of you and your good that you are blessed. You can't change that. If you don't believe that, it's too late. It's already happened. You've been blessed by God and this news has come to you.

By faithful disciples who aren't always happily received but often rejected but even then they could rejoice not only because of the present reality of "*yours is the kingdom of God,*" but also because of the future reward, "*they will be satisfied, they will laugh, and they will be treated like Jesus.*" That's good news.

But the poor, the hungry, those who mourn without hope and find themselves hated by this world have nothing to offer God, are given the kingdom of God. That kingdom is often overlooked and yet it's present tense. It's yours now. That's good news even if you don't have riches or wealth in this world. The truth is money isn't all there is to life. Even if you don't have health, wealth, or happiness you are still blessed. These are blessings placed over us by God. There isn't anything you can do to earn them. Blessed because God has come down to you, died, for you, and came back to life for you.

There is good news and there is bad news. The good news is that your salvation is secured and all that you can do is rejoice and leap for joy. The bad news is that not everyone will love you for your faithfulness to Jesus. The bad news is that we're still waiting for the future fulfillment and it could be a long wait where everything is taken from us as children take away our wealth, old age takes away our health, but nothing can take away God's blessing. Nothing can change the fact that you are baptized and brought into his family.

So now what? Go back to the middle. Rejoice be glad. Yours is the kingdom of God. Even in a bad world there is good news. You are blessed - though poor, hungry, and mourning. You are blessed. Yours is the kingdom. That is a good news. That is God's promise. Amen.