

Luke 6:20-21
November 25, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Where do people who are not connected to God think their happiness comes from? [Let people engage, e.g. Many of them think that happiness comes from having great possessions, or holding an exalted position, or enjoying the pleasures and popularity that money can buy.]

Q: How is a Christian supposed to view great possessions, positions of influence, or popularity among the people? [Let people engage]

Transition: If you were with us last week, we read that Jesus picked His 12 disciples and then led them down the mountainside, only to see great crowds following Him. While a large crowd gathers to see Jesus, Jesus looks at His disciples to begin teaching what is commonly known as the “Sermon on the Mount,” which deals with life circumstances. Let’s listen to Jesus’s teaching because as we disciple others, we should be teaching the same message while **living out** the message! Let’s pay close attention so that **all of us CAN successfully disciple newer believers BY teaching the WAYS to live as taught by Jesus.** Let’s start with v.20-23 and look for the first three WAYS in which people are blessed or happy when we are following Jesus.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.20:

- Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

V.21:

- Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.20: What is the first WAY in which we are blessed? [“Blessed are those who are poor (in spirit), for yours is the kingdom of God.”]

Q: Was Jesus teaching that mean by that poverty, hunger, and persecution were blessings *in themselves*? If no, what was He saying? [He was describing the *inner attitudes* toward circumstances we must have if we are to experience the blessedness of the Christian life. Jesus was not glorifying material poverty. Instead, He was calling for that brokenness of heart that confesses spiritual poverty within. **The emphasis is on the condition of the heart.**]

Observation: Since the Beatitudes are worded differently in Mt and Lk, some have claimed that Luke was focusing entirely on socioeconomic categories, as opposed to Matthew’s more spiritual focus. However, the word for “poor” (Hb *anawim*) is used in the OT (and first-century Judaism) to describe pious people (e.g., 2 Sm 22:28; Ps 12:5; 69:29; Is 49:13; cp. 1 Co 1:26–29; Jms 2:5). The “poor” are those who have God as their only resource. Thus, in Lk 6:20–23, they are

associated with the Son of Man and the prophets and expect end-times vindication on the one hand and are identified with Jesus' disciples on the other. Matthew's use of the phrase "poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3) makes this nuance explicit. Jesus probably said something much as Luke has recorded, and Matthew paraphrased it to bring out this nuance.

Q: So to make sure we have an accurate understanding of "poor," what is the tie between the poor and God's kingdom? [The kingdom is given to the poor in spirit, i.e. to those who in humility accept the gospel.]

Q V.21: What is the next WAY in which we are blessed? ["Blessed are those who hunger now, for you will be satisfied."]

Q: Is He talking about a physical hunger? [No – He's talking about those who are hungering and thirsting *after righteousness*. Those who seek His righteousness will be satisfied. Other commentators believe that Luke is also addressing apostles who would hunger because they followed Jesus but would be eventually vindicated for their faith in Him.]

Q: What is the next WAY in which we are blessed? ["Blessed are those who weep now, for you will laugh."]

Q: If you're a newly appointed apostle, how do you think you would be looking at the road ahead? [Let people engage; apostles are getting a picture that following Jesus is not all fun and games. At the same time, they are hearing that they are much better off being poor, following Jesus, and having a part of the kingdom of God than being rich and not having a part of the kingdom.]

LOOK:

Jesus was not teaching that poverty, hunger, persecution, and tears were blessings *in themselves*. If that were true, He would never have done all He did to alleviate the sufferings of others. Rather, Jesus was describing the *inner attitudes* we must have if we are to experience the blessedness of the Christian life. We should certainly do what we can to help others in a material way (James 2:15–17; 1 John 3:16–18), but we must remember that no amount of "things" can substitute for a personal relationship with God.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 192–193). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A New Blessing (Luke 6:20–21)

This sermon is probably a shorter version of what we call “The Sermon on the Mount” (Matt. 5–7), though some fine evangelical scholars believe these were two different events. If they are the same event, the fact that Matthew locates it on a mountain (Matt. 5:1), while Luke puts it “in the plain” (Luke 6:17), creates no problem. Dr. D.A. Carson points out that the Greek word translated “plain” can mean “a plateau in a mountainous region” (*Exegetical Fallacies*, Baker, p. 43).

Jesus went “into the hill country” with His disciples. After a night of prayer, He came down to a level place, ordained the Twelve, ministered to the sick, and then preached this sermon. It was His description of what it means to have a life of “blessing.”

To most Jewish people, the word “blessing” evoked images of a long life, wealth, a large, healthy family, a full barn, and defeated enemies. God’s covenant with Israel did include such material and physical blessings (Deut. 28; Job 1:1–12; Prov. 3:1–10), for this was how God taught and disciplined them. After all, they were “little children” in the faith, and we teach children by means of rewards and punishments. With the coming of Jesus, Israel’s childhood period ended, and the people had to mature in their understanding of God’s ways (Gal. 4:1–6).

Jesus was preaching to His disciples as well as to the multitudes (Luke 6:27, 47), for even the Twelve had to unlearn many things before they could effectively serve Him. Furthermore, they had left everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:11, 28), and no doubt were asking themselves, “What is in store for us?” (see Matt. 19:27) The Lord explained in this sermon that the truly blessed life comes not from *getting*, or from *doing*, but from *being*. The emphasis is on Godlike character.

This sermon is not “the Gospel” and nobody goes to heaven by “following the Sermon on the Mount.” Dead sinners cannot obey the living God; they must first be born again and receive God’s life (John 3:1–7, 36).

Nor is this sermon a “constitution” for the kingdom God will one day establish on earth (Matt. 20:21; Luke 22:30). The Sermon on the Mount applies to life today and describes the kind of godly character we should have as believers in this world. Certainly, our Lord describes a life situation quite unlike that of the glorious kingdom, including hunger, tears, persecution, and false teachers.

What Jesus did was to focus on *attitudes*: our attitude toward circumstances (Luke 6:20–26), people (Luke 6:27–38), ourselves (Luke 6:39–45), and God (Luke 6:46–49). He emphasized four essentials for true happiness: faith in God, love toward others, honesty with ourselves, and obedience toward God.

Circumstances (vv. 20–26). Life was difficult for the people of that day and there was not much hope their circumstances would be improved. Like people today, many of them thought that happiness came from having great possessions, or holding an exalted position, or enjoying the pleasures and popularity that money can buy. Imagine how surprised they were when they heard Jesus describe happiness in terms *just the opposite of what they expected!* They discovered that what they needed most was not a change in circumstances but a change in their relationship to God and in their outlook on life.

Jesus was not teaching that poverty, hunger, persecution, and tears were blessings *in themselves*. If that were true, He would never have done all He did to alleviate the sufferings of others. Rather, Jesus was describing the *inner attitudes* we must have if we are to experience the blessedness of the Christian life. We should certainly do what we can to help others in a material

way (James 2:15–17; 1 John 3:16–18), but we must remember that no amount of “things” can substitute for a personal relationship with God.

Matthew’s account makes this clear: “Blessed are the poor *in spirit* ... Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst *after righteousness*” (Matt. 5:3, 6, italics mine). Jesus was not glorifying material poverty; rather, He was calling for that brokenness of heart that confesses spiritual poverty within (Luke 18:9–14; Phil. 3:4–14). The humble person is the only kind the Lord can save (Isa. 57:15; 66:2; 1 Peter 5:6). If you compare “The Beatitudes” with Isaiah 61:1–3 and Luke 4:18, you will see that our Lord’s emphasis was on the condition of the heart and not the outward circumstances. Mary expressed this same insight in her song of praise (Luke 1:46–55).

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 219-220)

2. THE BLESSINGS AND THE WOES (6:20–26)

Jesus began His sermon with a series of blessings and woes on His listeners. The items are placed in two sets of four—four blessings and four woes which parallel each other.

a. *The blessings (6:20–21).*

6:20–21. The term “blessed” (*makarioi*) was common in the Gospels; it occurs more than 30 times. All but 2 of the occurrences are in Matthew and Luke. Originally in Greek usage the word described the happy estate of the gods above earthly sufferings and labors. Later it came to mean any positive condition a person experienced. Unlike the biblical authors, the Greek authors drew happiness from earthly goods and values. In the Old Testament the authors recognized that the truly blessed (or happy) individual is one who trusts God, who hopes for and waits for Him, who fears and loves Him (Deut. 33:29; Pss. 2:12; 32:1–2; 34:8; 40:4; 84:12; 112:1). A formal beatitude was an acknowledgement of a fortunate state before God and man (Ps. 1:1; Prov. 14:21; 16:20; 29:18).

Beatitudes in the New Testament have an emotional force. They often contrast a false earthly estimation with a true heavenly estimation of one who is truly blessed (Matt. 5:3–6, 10; Luke 11:28; John 20:29; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:14). All secular goods and values are subservient to one supreme good—God Himself. This is a reversal of all human values. The Beatitudes present the present in the light of the future (cf. Luke 23:29).

Jesus spoke of four conditions in which people are blessed or happy when they are following Him. **Blessed are you who are poor ... blessed are you who hunger now ... blessed are you who weep now, and blessed are you when men hate you** (6:20–22). In each case a clause is added that explains why such a person is blessed or happy. A poor person is happy because his **is the kingdom of God**. Matthew referred to “the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3), but Luke simply wrote “poor.” Jesus’ hearers were physically poor. Luke already mentioned twice that those who followed Jesus left everything (Luke 5:11, 28).

Jesus’ explanation about their inclusion in “the kingdom of God” is mentioned because they were following the One who was proclaiming His ability to bring in the kingdom. They were staking everything they had on the fact that Jesus was telling the truth. They were following His new way (5:37–39). Jesus’ words were not a promise that every poor person had a part in the kingdom of God; instead His words were a statement of fact for His followers. They were poor and theirs was the kingdom of God. They were much better off being poor, following Jesus, and

having a part of the kingdom of God than being rich and not having a part of the kingdom. That is why they were blessed.

The next two explanatory phrases have future fulfillments. The hungry **will be satisfied**, and the ones who weep **will laugh**. The apostles who would hunger and weep because they followed Jesus would eventually be vindicated for their faith in Him.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1524). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

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Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, pp. 197–202). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

At this point Luke introduced a second sermon of Jesus. The first was recorded in 4:16–30 and was addressed to the “crowds.” Here in 6:20–49 he addressed his disciples (6:20). The parallel to Luke’s Sermon on the Plain (6:17) is Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount (5:1–7:29). Luke interestingly enough also mentioned a mountain in 6:17. The Lukan sermon (30 verses) is much shorter than the sermon in Matthew (107 verses), and much of the material in Matthew’s sermon is found elsewhere in Luke.

The beatitudes in Luke 6:20–23 possess both similarities and dissimilarities with those found in Matt 5:3–12. The similarities involve: the same audience—disciples; the same basic form—“Blessed are . . . poor, for” (the first three words in Greek are identical); a reference to the kingdom of God/ heaven in the first beatitude of each; the use of the divine passive (“you will be satisfied”) in each; shared material—three of the four Lukan beatitudes are found in Matthew; and the same concluding beatitude in Luke (6:22) and in Matthew (5:11) using the second person plural. Finally, each list of beatitudes ends with the same entreaty to “Rejoice” because the disciples stood in the company of the OT prophets.

On the other hand, there are dissimilarities. The most striking is the difference in number. Luke has four beatitudes; Matthew, eight. The order of the beatitudes is also somewhat different. Luke’s four beatitudes appear as numbers one, four, two, and nine in Matthew. Matthew’s beatitudes are also more developed. Finally, Luke’s beatitudes are followed by four corresponding woes, whereas Matthew’s are not.

Several attempts have been made to explain why these differences (and the difference in scene—mountainside versus level place) exist. Augustine suggested that the differences are due to

their being two different sermons uttered by Jesus at two different times and places. Others, like Calvin, have argued that they are two versions of the same basic sermon of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–7:29) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20–49) are literary creations of Matthew and Luke in the sense that they are collections of Jesus’ sayings that were uttered at various times and places and have been brought together primarily due to topical considerations, i.e., in order to have an orderly account (1:3). There is no need, however, to deny that a historical event lies behind the scene. Jesus’ teaching on a mountain/plain has been used as an opportunity by the Evangelists (or the tradition) to bring other related teachings of Jesus in at this point.

Today most commentators see the sermons as two versions of the same teachings of Jesus, so that the beatitudes in Matthew and Luke are two forms of the same beatitudes of Jesus. Much debate has arisen about which of the two sermons (and beatitudes) is more like Jesus’ actual words, i.e., which is more “authentic.” Since Jesus taught in Aramaic, each of the sermons is a translation into Greek; and the process of translation, of course, requires interpretation. In the comments it will be suggested that the beatitudes in Luke are more of a word-for-word translation (like such translations of the Bible as the KJV, RSV, and NASB) whereas the beatitudes in Matthew are more of a thought-for-thought translation (like such translations as the NIV and NEB) of Jesus’ teachings.

Other beatitudes can be found in Luke. They frequently are found in wisdom literature. The eschatological dimension of our present beatitudes, however, is quite striking. The pairing of blessing and woe has already been seen in the chiasmic parallelism of 1:52–53, where we find woe (1:52a), blessing (1:52b), blessing (1:53a), and woe (1:53b). It has also been argued that Jesus’ baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire (see comments on 3:16) should be interpreted as referring to blessing (Holy Spirit) and woe (fire). The combining of blessing and woe is found in the OT (Deut 27:15–28:6; Isa 3:10ff.; 65:13ff.; Eccl 10:16ff.) as well as the intertestamental (Tob 13:12; 1 Enoch 5:7) and rabbinic literature (*Yoma* 87a; *Sukk.* 56b).

The key hermeneutical issue encountered in our passage involves how to interpret the beatitudes. Are the beatitudes to be interpreted as requirements for entering God’s kingdom or as eschatological pronouncements of blessing upon believers? In other words, are the beatitudes an evangelistic exhortation for salvation or pastoral words of comfort and encouragement, a kind of congratulation, to those who already possess faith? For several reasons they should be understood as the latter. For one, both in Matthew (5:1) and Luke (6:20) the audience to whom they are addressed is not the crowds but the disciples. Second, the concluding beatitude refers to those who are persecuted for the Son of Man (Luke 6:22; Matt 5:11). Third, the beatitudes end (Luke 6:23; Matt 5:12) with the statement that those to whom these beatitudes are addressed have a great reward in heaven. Matthew 5:12 also places the people to whom the beatitudes are addressed in the same category with the OT prophets (“the prophets who were before you”). Finally, the nearest OT parallel to these beatitudes are the words of comfort addressed to God’s people in such passages as Isa 29:19; 49:13; 61:1–2. The four beatitudes should not be interpreted as referring to four separate groups but to one group, God’s people who are the poor-hungry-weeping-hated. This is true of the four woes as well, although a different group is envisioned.

Therefore the beatitudes should not be read as words of condemnation—“You are not blessed unless you perfectly fulfill these beatitudes in your life”—but rather as words of encouragement: You who believe in Jesus—i.e., you who are the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated—blessed are you. God’s kingdom belongs to you. God will indeed comfort you and wipe away every tear. This, of course, does not mean that the beatitudes possess no hortatory significance. Words of comfort and encouragement do challenge believers to greater zeal and commitment, for they know

that their labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58). Yet the primary goal of the beatitudes is to encourage the disciples by telling them of the blessedness of the eschatological consummation that awaits them. Luke's readers were not to be deceived by the present appearance of things. The "now" may at times have been discouraging, but the "then" would more than make up for this.

Comments

6:20 Looking at his disciples, he said. Both here and in Matt 5:1–2 the beatitudes are addressed to the disciples, not to the crowds, i.e., to believers and not humanity in general. The beatitudes therefore are not addressed to the poor and hungry of the world but to the believing poor and hungry.

Blessed are you. Some translations use the term "happy" to express the Greek *makarioi*, but happiness tends to be associated more with feelings, and what is being referred to here is not the feelings of believers but their status and situation. (The difficulty of translating *makarioi* as "happy" is evident from The Jerusalem Bible—"Happy are you who weep now.") Perhaps "favored" is a better thought-for-thought translation. The poor of this beatitude possess the blessedness of being the object of God's favor. They may weep now, but theirs is a blessed state, for God's kingdom belongs to them.

Who are poor. The term "poor" has more of a theological than an economic sense here. In the OT the term is used in Pss 40:17; 86:1; 109:22, where the psalmist stated, "I am poor and needy." These psalms are all psalms of "David." Clearly no reader of these psalms thought that King David was referring to his economic status, for, as a king, David was not economically poor. They would have interpreted this metaphorically along the lines of Matt 5:3, "poor in spirit." (Whether or not these psalms were originally Davidic is immaterial, since the first-century reader thought they were Davidic.) The term "poor" is also used in Prov 3:34; 16:19 antithetically to those who are proud, not to those who are rich. The religious nature of this term is also revealed by the fact that the members of the Qumran community referred to themselves as "poor." The term "poor" furthermore was "a traditional characterization of Israel understood in terms of its suffering and humiliation at the hands of the nations. The fact that "poor" is not qualified by "now," as hungry and weep are in the next beatitudes, also indicates that "poor" does not refer to an economic status that will change but to a permanent religious character. The believer will always be "poor" in that he or she will always be humble. It is clear that Matthew understood "poor" in this religious sense, for he qualified the term by adding "in spirit." Thus, Luke provided his readers with a word-for-word translation of Jesus' beatitude and Matthew a thought-for-thought one, but for both this term was understood as referring not to the economic poor of the world but to believers who are poor, i.e., the humble/ poor in spirit.

Having said this, it is also clear that Luke in his Gospel had a special concern for the economic poor. See Introduction 8 (5). He stated earlier that Jesus came "to preach good news to the poor" (4:16; cf. 1:52–53). He also pointed out that the disciples left everything to follow Jesus (5:11, 28; cf. also 18:28), and in their mission they would be dependent on the hospitality of others (9:3–5, 57–58; 10:8–11). Furthermore, such teachings as those found in 6:30, 35, if heeded, certainly do not lead to earthly riches. Nevertheless, Luke was aware both that there are "blessed" disciples who are not economically poor and that the term refers primarily to the believing poor (cf. Jas 2:5). As a result, whereas this beatitude fits especially well the believing poor, it also is a pronouncement of blessing on all those who, like David, have humbled themselves before the Lord. The latter are also the poor of this beatitude.

For yours is the kingdom of God. Already now and therefore in the future when the kingdom will be consummated (see Introduction 8 [2]), God’s kingdom belongs to the “poor.” The tie between the poor and God’s kingdom has already been alluded to in Luke 4:18, 43, where the good news preached to the poor is the good news of God’s kingdom. Thus, the kingdom is given (12:31–32; 18:16–17) to the poor, i.e., to those who in humility accept the gospel.

6:21 Blessed are you who hunger now. Unlike Matthew, Luke did not have “and thirst for righteousness.” The Lukan beatitude deals more with physical hunger than Matthew’s, the main emphasis of which is on spiritual hunger. Unlike “poor,” which describes a positive religious characteristic that will continue, the “now” of this “hunger” refers to an undesirable condition that will one day be forever changed when the kingdom is consummated. Although not all Luke’s readers hungered now, they nonetheless could identify with those who did; and, while seeking to alleviate this problem as much as their means permitted, they longed with them for the consummation when God would fill his people with good things.

You will be satisfied. This is an example of the “divine passive,” i.e., a means by which the devout Jew avoided the name of God in order to protect himself from breaking the Third Commandment (Exod 20:7). If the passive is not used, one would have to say, “God will satisfy you.” Another way in which the devout Jew avoided using the name of God was by circumlocution, or substituting another word for God. See comments on 15:18.

The portrayal of the age to come as a great messianic banquet where the redeemed would sit and feast with the Messiah was a common one in Judaism (Isa 25:6–7; 49:10–13; Ps 107:3–9) and occurs frequently in Luke. This banquet already is anticipated and realized in part, as Luke 9:15–17; Acts 2:42–47; 20:7–11 suggest; but the fulfillment of the beatitude is primarily future, as the divine passive and the future tense indicate.

Blessed are you who weep now. This corresponds to the second beatitude in Matthew, which speaks of those who “mourn.” The terms “mourn” and “weep” are used together in 6:25; Jas 4:9; Rev 18:11, 15, 19. This may refer to the weeping caused by the kind of oppression mentioned in the next beatitude. This is more likely than the view that this refers to the sorrow that comes from repentance of sin (Jas 4:9–10). The “now” fits the former better and alludes to the time when there will be no more weeping, for God will wipe away every tear from the believers’ eyes (Rev 7:17; 21:4).

You will laugh. Although this verb is not a passive, it functions like a divine passive for “God will cause you to laugh” and refers to the coming consolation of God’s people (2:25; 16:25). Although laughter is usually portrayed negatively as a sign of derision or joy over one’s enemies, in Ps 126:1–2 it is a positive expression of joy for God’s having brought his people back to Zion (cf. Gen 21:6; Job 8:21).