

Life in the Upside Down Kingdom

Luke 6:17-26

A few weeks ago, the Illinois power ball lottery winnings reached a billion dollars. How many of you were tempted to buy a lottery ticket? Maybe you're thinking, I was more than tempted, I still have my losing ticket in my wallet. I didn't buy a ticket, but I did momentarily dream about what I would do if I won a billion dollars.

Why do people play the lottery? Many people play because they believe having a lot of money is going to make their lives better. They believe that money will enable them to live what people call the good life or a happy life.

But happiness has nothing to do with money. Money will not solve all your problems. In fact, sometimes our problems grow as our wealth increases, especially when we lack the inward character, joy, and contentment which money can't buy.

Too often people spend much time and energy making money to obtain things they don't really need while neglecting to seek the Lord for what only He can provide. 1 Timothy 6:10

How many of you know, all the money in the world will not give you peace or hope when you're diagnosed with terminal cancer. As Tony Evans put it : "There are so many things money can't buy. Money can't buy health. It can't buy relational harmony. It can't buy respect, honor, or character. When things go south in any of those areas, if money is all you got working for you, you'll discover the actual value of money. You'll learn that money isn't all it's cracked up to be. There's so much that matters more than how much money you have in your wallet or your bank account. But it's very easy to forget that."

The world tempts us to live for what's temporary. Jesus makes it possible to live for something greater than ourselves.

What is your view of the good life? As we will see, the good life, or the blessed life according to the author of life is totally upside down from the point of view of most people in our world.

But it's the inverted way of life in the kingdom that will not only allow us to experience the truly good life, but it's through embracing it that we, as representatives of God's kingdom, can make an eternal difference in this world.

Main idea: Living by the inverted values of the kingdom will bless our lives and enable us to be a blessing.

Now, before unpacking the upside down values that Jesus outlined in His sermon, it's important to note where the sermon took place and who it was directed to. After choosing His twelve apostles on the mountain that he had been praying on all night, Luke records beginning in verse 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.” Luke 6:17-19

In this passage, Luke give us an account of the first time that Jesus stands with the twelve apostles by His side before a large crowd. In this crowd, there was not only a large contingent of His other disciples, but also a great number of people who had come from surrounding regions. Luke emphasizes in verse 18 that they were there *to hear him and to be healed of their diseases*.

And what followed was a demonstration of the authority and power of Jesus which revealed that the kingdom of God was present. It was present because Jesus the King was present.

Later in Jesus' earthly ministry the hostile religious leaders asked Him when the kingdom of God would come. After noting that the kingdom could not be observed through their hostile examination, Jesus responded: *"for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."* Luke 17:21b

What is the kingdom of God? Again, Jesus is the King of kings. Therefore, "the kingdom of God is where the rule of Jesus Christ is recognized and submitted to, and the benefits of His reign are received." Guzik

The religious leaders in Jesus day did not observe the kingdom because you can't want the kingdom and reject the King. The same is true today; many want the benefits of the kingdom, but they don't want to submit their lives to the King.

Let me add, that there is a sense in which the kingdom of God is already present now, and it is also coming. It is present now among God's people, and it is also coming in all its fullness over all the earth.

Moreover, because Christ is present in us through the Holy Spirit, we can bring the presence of God's kingdom wherever we go. "If you are a teacher in a classroom, Christ's presence in you means that God's kingdom is there. Wherever you may be vacationing this summer, you are bringing a part of that kingdom. Whether you spend your days driving a truck, working in an office, or providing health care in a hospital, the kingdom of God goes with you. If you are confined to a bed, God's kingdom is present there." Arthur Schoonveld

Now although there is a sense that the kingdom of God is present in the lives of those who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, this doesn't mean that we are guaranteed health and wealth this side of heaven, as the prosperity preachers falsely claim.

Nevertheless, churches are, or should be, "outposts" or "embassies" of the kingdom of God where the presence and power of Jesus is manifested. And as we will see, the kingdom of Christ is best seen through an upside-down way of life.

After coming down from the mountain with the 12 apostles unto a level plain and ministering healing to many in the crowd, Jesus gives a sermon about life in the kingdom.

Luke's account of Jesus's sermon begins with these words: "*Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*" Luke 6:20

Before we examine the first beatitude, it's important to note that there has been some debate among bible commentators about whether the sermon recorded by Luke is the same sermon in Matthew known as the sermon on the mount.

There are some similarities between the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5 and the sermon in Luke 6 which bible scholars call *the sermon on the plain*. The sermon on the plain and the sermon on the mount both lists a number of beatitudes. But there are also a number of differences. For example, Matthew lists nine beatitudes while Luke lists four beatitudes.

In case you are unfamiliar, the term beatitude, which is commonly used to describe the characteristics of the kingdom, comes from a Latin word that carries the meaning "blessedness" or "happiness." The word "beatitude" does not denote rules or commands. Rather it signifies a state of blessedness or supreme happiness.

Now regarding the differences, unlike Matthew, Luke's beatitudes do not focus on the positives as do some of Matthew's, like "*blessed are the pure in heart.*" Also, the woes that follow Luke's beatitudes are not found in Matthew's sermon."

So, although there are similarities, there are also differences, which I agree are likely due to the fact that they were different sermons preached at different times in the ministry of Jesus.

Now concerning the sermon on the plain in Luke, it's important to note that although it was given before a large crowd, the first line in verse

20 which reads, “*Looking at his disciples,*” indicates that Jesus’ followers were the focus of His sermon on the beatitudes.

What’s more, the four beatitudes are also followed by four contrasting woes. So, as we unpack the beatitudes, we will do so by contrasting them with the woes that follow.

1. Blessedness of the poor.

Notice that as Jesus set His eyes on His disciples, He begins His sermon with the radical declaration: *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*” Luke 6:20

And a few verses later Jesus adds: “*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*” Luke 6:24

Remember, the word *blessed* from which the Latin word *beatitude* was derived, describes a state of being—a deep seated happiness and assurance. And what Jesus is saying here and in His sermon over all, is that for citizens of the Kingdom, blessedness is not dependent on favorable or unfavorable circumstances.

However, outward poverty more than outward prosperity may well be a means of spiritual blessing. This is so because poverty can more likely lead a man or a woman to discover their utter dependence upon God—not only for physical and material things but also for spiritual blessings.

Concerning these contrasting values, one bible teacher explains: “Jesus is describing a value system that is at total variance with that of the non-Christian world. We live in a contemporary setting that cries out for us to stand up for ourselves, be proud of ourselves, and elevate ourselves, and to be self-assertive in our pursuit of happiness. These values are what often lie behind our decisions to buy a new house or chase promotions or retire early. This is often the impulse that directs the choice to get married and then to have kids; its often why people choose to leave their marriages or neglect their kids. It’s called being true to yourself, finding your truth, and living your best

life, though in truth it's simply selfishness. Jesus says that the route to true happiness is very, very different. He says that the path to it involves exalting what the world despises and rejecting what the world admires." Alistair Begg

So, with the subversive nature of kingdom values in mind, what did Jesus mean by "*blessed are you who are poor*" and "*woe to you who are rich*"?

Again, Jesus does not mean that all the poor are saved and all the rich are doomed. Rather He's saying that the poor are less likely to be attached to money and less tempted to find their security in this world.

Now, during the sermon on the plain, there were those in the crowd besides His disciples who were allowing worldly wealth to blind them to their need for Jesus. Therefore, Jesus pronounced: "*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*" Luke 6:24

Keep in mind that Jesus is not speaking to all who are rich when He pronounces *woe to you who are rich*. Rather, "He is cautioning the [rich before Him], says one commentator, "that putting wealth before Him—allowing our hearts to be ruled by accumulating wealth more than worship of God—leads to *woe*. *Woe* is the opposite of blessing. Why are those who are rich facing *woe*? It's not that everyone who is rich has received their comfort from the world and can receive none from Christ. But Jesus is warning that if we are rich, we will find it hard not to look to our wealth for our comfort, to our money for solutions, and to our bank balance for security." Alistair Begg

Beloved, blessed is the man or woman who enjoys all things as a gift from God but does not lose sight of their greater need to know Christ and trust in His saving grace. 1 Timothy 6:17

2. Blessedness of the hungry

Now the next beatitude of the kingdom Jesus highlights is: "*Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.*" And in

contrast He wrote a few verses later: *“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.”*

Again, Jesus is not saying here that only those who are physically poor and hungry will enter the kingdom of God. Rather, there’s a hunger that is characteristic of those who have tasted the goodness of God which both satisfies and keeps them coming back for more.

What do you hunger for the most? Jesus said to another crowd who came to Him for physical bread: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.”*³³ *For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”*³⁴ *They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.”*³⁵ *Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”* John 6:32-35

When Jesus, the bread of life says whoever comes to me shall not hunger, He doesn’t mean that in this life you will not hunger anymore. What He means is that all who receive Jesus by faith as Savior and King—who seek first His kingdom will always be satisfied because Jesus will always be there to meet your soul’s greatest need. When you know Christ and His promises you will hunger for Him and He will always be there to satisfy your deepest desires.

On the flip side, there are those who are so full of this world that they don’t hunger for the true bread from heaven. Thus, they will be left with an insatiable appetite and an unquenchable thirst that cannot be satisfied—that will keep them searching for love and happiness in all the wrong places—that will leave them discontent and empty.

You know, when a person is really hungry they will be determined to satisfy that hunger. But when a person is stuffed, say after feasting on a thanksgiving meal over a relative’s house, it’s very unlikely they will stop at a drive-thru restaurant on the way home. But if they had some leftovers of the food they enjoyed at the thanksgiving feast, they may crave it at home after a little while. And it will satisfy them all over again.

O how many of you know that when you have Jesus you will be continually hungry and continually satisfied. And when you are, you won't be bored in church, you won't be like the religious leaders in Jesus day constantly finding fault. But when you don't have an appetite for Jesus, when you don't hunger for him, you will be constantly bored and continually finding fault.

When you come hungry for Jesus you'll find Him. But when you come looking for something to criticize, you'll find what you're looking for. It all depends on the appetite you bring to church.

As I heard Adrian Rogers share: One lady said to her Pastor, "I don't like the way you preached this morning." He said, "what was wrong." She said, "it was your language. It was very inelegant. In the course of your sermon you said, pants. You should never say pants; you should say trousers. It's much more elegant." He replied, "I'll try to remember that. But what else did you think about the sermon? What else do you remember?" She said, "very frankly, I don't remember anything else." He said, "if I hadn't said pants you wouldn't have gotten anything out of the message."

Beloved, if you are hungry now, if you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness you will be satisfied. Your deepest soul need will not only be met, but you will enjoy all of God's gifts in this life so much more.

3. Blessed are the sorrowful

Now being satisfied with Jesus doesn't mean you'll never know sorrow in this world. On the contrary, the more you know the satisfaction of His love, the more you will know His sorrow, grief, and anguish. Grief and tears is the price of love.

Notice the next beatitude in Luke 6:21b: "*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*" And in contrast Jesus says in verse, 25b: "*Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.*"

Years ago, I was at a church picnic with family. At one point, my mom, who was a senior, attempted to sit down on a lawn chair and it collapsed and she fell to the ground. There was a young lady there who when she witnessed my mom fall, began to laugh hysterically. She kept laughing uncontrollably which hurt my mom even more. How many of you know, we live in a world that laughs at what's not funny, and weeps over things that don't matter.

Again, when you know the values of the kingdom, in particular God's love, you will hurt with those who hurt, and rejoice with those who rejoice.

Have you ever said, or heard someone say, "I don't feel sorry for him because he brought that on himself"? But I wonder how many times we've prayed, "Lord, don't have any mercy or compassion on me, don't help me because I brought this on myself."

I know that sometimes we have to exercise tough love and not enable people in their sin. But there are a whole lot of people who if we loved them with a tangible love, if we weep with them in their pain, whether they brought it on themselves or not, if we would be there to lift them up rather than kicking them while they're down, many will be restored.

When we possess the values of the kingdom of God, namely love, and are filled with the hope of the coming kingdom of Christ, we will have both the heart to weep over things that break God's heart and also to laugh with joy in a world that's filled with sorrow.

Again, Jesus is not saying it's wrong to laugh in a world of sorrow. Rather, as Kent Hughes put it: "What Jesus assaulted is the superficial, shallow mirth that characterizes the world—the inability to weep at the right things, and the ability to laugh at the wrong things."

But when the opposite is true, when we have the ability to weep over a broken world and rejoice when others are eternally blessed even at our expense, the true riches of God are upon us and we will make a difference for Christ.

4. Blessed are the hated

Now in Jesus' final declaration of blessedness, He said in Luke 6:22: *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets."*

And in contrast to this beatitude, Jesus said in verse 26: *"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."*

In our American society, most of us will probably not go hungry. What's more, compared to many in our world, the average American could be considered rich. We should consider this a blessing, but also keep in mind that our blessings can become a curse when we look to them to find what only God can give.

But although most of us will not be worried about where our next meal will come from, we can expect that if we stand with and for Christ, we will be rejected in our society.

Now there is nothing necessarily wrong with wanting people to think well of you. As Christians, we should desire to have a good reputation before others.

So when Jesus' says, *"Blessed are you when people hate you..."*, He is not speaking of situations when you have been obnoxious, rude, or unkind, but rather when your allegiance and devotion to Him causes others to reject you.

Again, it's natural to want others to think well of us. But if we live our lives in such a way so as to not offend anyone, even when that means we have to compromise truth to do so, we will make little difference for the kingdom of God.

Living lives of compromise does not just forfeit the blessedness that comes when we stand for Jesus, it's an indication that we are not

availing ourselves of the blessedness that comes from making time to grow closer to Him.

Because the more we hunger for Him, the more satisfied we will be in Him. And when we are satisfied with Jesus our great aim in life will be to please Him. It's rightly been said: "If we please God, it doesn't matter whom we displease. If we displease God, it doesn't matter who we please."

Christians who truly have this countercultural mindset not only live supernaturally different, but they make a supernatural difference for the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

As one Christian author put it: "The genuine Christian is poor, hungry, crying, and hated—and they have found blessing, for with these things come satisfaction and joy. These are the marks of life in the kingdom of God. Which would you rather be? Poor, hungry, crying, and hated OR rich, well fed, flippant, and popular? True happiness does not lie in the obvious and natural choice but in the countercultural and Christian one." Alistair Begg

Beloved, with our eyes on the far greater Kingdom which is ours by the poverty that King Jesus accepted on our behalf, let us gladly choose the blessedness of the upside kingdom.

Let us embrace the blessedness of spiritual poverty, hunger, sorrow, and rejection with the sure hope that the reward of knowing Jesus by sight, whom we comprehend now by faith, is just around the corner. It will be worth it all.