

Reconsider What It Means to Be Blessed

- That day in our gospel must be an awesome day for apostles! In the morning, they're up on the mountain with Jesus; he specifically appoints them to be his apostles, the 12. So now they get to follow Jesus, hear teachings, see miracles, learn from him. Then in the afternoon (where today's gospel picks up), Jesus takes them down the mountain little by little to level ground; a huge crowd gathers; talking to 1000s! **Vs. 17b**. They've travelled from all over Palestine to hear Jesus preach; it's a massive crowd – pretty awesome. Even more awesome: **vs. 18-19**. Jesus is going: "Disease cured, demon gone, leprosy healed, sight restored, you walk/talk again." Healing people like crazy; touching the robe; almost seems like power emanating from his body! And as an apostle: "Yeah, I'm with him." Awesome day; apostles must have felt so blessed!
- When do you have days that are just awesome, when you look at life, say "I'm so blessed"? Is it when you hold a little baby in your arms, or when you hold hands with your Valentine's Day sweetheart, or when you're together with all your grandchildren – is that when you feel blessed? Is it when your family's all healthy, you're in decent health, that you feel blessed? Is it when you look at your home/garage, all the stuff that fills your home/garage; or when you look at your job, retirement plan, all the abundance God has poured out on you – is that when you say, "This is awesome; I'm just so blessed"?
- Yes. Those are definitely all blessings from God to be thankful for. But, is having all that wonderful abundance really what it means to be blessed? Is family, health, wealth the highest form of blessing God gives his people? And if you don't have those blessings, are you not truly blessed? Sometimes that's how we feel. Even talk about it that way: here's a wealthy person, say very blessed; here's a family struggling financially, say not as blessed – because in our minds: more is better, less is worse. Even for apostles that day: more people, miracles, glory – this is what it means to be blessed.
- But today Jesus: "No. You've got to think differently about that; you've got to reconsider what it means to be blessed." Today Jesus, who is the source of every blessing, who knows things/two ways how to bless people, challenges that thinking that more/better, less/worse. Challenges us to reconsider what it means to be blessed.
- **Vs. 20a**; what follows are 4 blessings/beatitudes, followed by 4 corresponding woes/curses. With these 4 pairs of blessings/woes, Jesus completely overturns the way we usually think about what it means to be blessed. **Vs. 20b, 24**. Usually we think of wealth as a blessing; but here Jesus curses wealth, calls poverty a blessing. **Vs. 21a, 25a**. Have you eaten a meal yet this weekend? Used to eating food at least once a day? Jesus curses that; says it's better to be hungry. **Vs. 21b, 25b**. What's so bad about being happy, or so good about being sad? That's exactly the opposite of how we think. **Vs. 22**. Really? How can that be good? And **vs. 26a**. Really? How bad? But that's what Jesus is saying here; turning our conventional way of looking at blessings upside down, teaching us to reconsider what it means to be blessed.
- Now, let's clear up a few possible misunderstandings, right off the bat. 1) Jesus is not saying that being rich, well fed, happy, or praised is wrong or sinful. Not wrong. Jesus himself fed people, laughed with them, praised people. And there are many believers in the Bible who are wealthy. So these blessings are not inherently sinful. 2) Jesus is not saying that only poor, hungry, sad, disrespected people get into heaven, as if entrance to heaven depends on how bad you had it here on earth; or as if your poverty somehow earns your salvation. That would fly in the face of everything else the Bible says about how we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, who died on the cross to save the world from sin. Fact is: there will be some people in heaven who are rich on earth, others poor on earth; and there'll be some in hell who are rich on earth, others poor. Not your health, wealth, happiness that determines your eternity – only your faith in Christ.
- BUT (and this is Jesus' point here), do not think that being rich, well fed, happy, praised is what it means to be truly blessed. And on the flip side, do not think that being poor, hungry, sad, disrespected necessarily means you're less blessed. Rather, realize that God may actually use hardships/setbacks/sad times to bless us. Sometimes the troubles we face in life may actually be blessings from God. And so, what may seem bad to us from a worldly perspective (we're poor, hungry; we weep, we hate; we face any number of troubles) – those may actually be blessings, sent from God, in love, to us! And not accidentally either (as if God: "Oh, rats; sorry that happened; I'll fix that, work it out), but purposefully/lovingly!

- This reminds me when J said: **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mk 8:34)**. It’s blessing to bear cross. Why before sermon we just sang, *“Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken”* – which, by way, if didn’t notice, actually has line, *“Go, then, earthly fame and treasure! Come, disaster, scorn, and pain! In your service pain is pleasure; with you favor loss is gain” (CW 465:3)*. Part of mature Xianity is understanding that when God places a cross of setback or trouble into our lives and asks us (as indivs/fams/cong) to go through diff times, that cross is not necessarily curse. That cross, those troubles, may actually be blessings from God.
- Now I know that right now, there’s part of everyone us that’s screaming: that’s crazy; ridiculous for J to ask us to live in this topsy-turvy world where bad-good, good-bad. How in world can these crosses and troubles actually be blessings? How can J actually say that you’re blessed when you’re poor, hungry, sad, hated? How can any good possibly come into my life through these sufferings that J wants me believe are blessings?
- Know what I’d say: I don’t know. Don’t know how God will work good from: mom dying, kid dying, wife getting cancer, you losing job, getting bullied school, folks getting divorced. Don’t know how that can be good, or why God would let it happen. And I’m not in position to guess why either. In fact, the answer why is probably best left behind the curtain, in holy/holies of mind of God. And notice: in this passage, J doesn’t say why; doesn’t explain how our life on this earth is more blessed bec of sufferings, crosses we endure. He just doesn’t give us the answer!
- Instead, redirects us to the future, to our future in heaven. **Vs. 20b-23a** – in heaven. J redirects our attention to our future in heaven. And that ultimately is his goal: that we get to heaven. That’s why he came earth, died on cross, rose from dead in first place – to get us to heaven. And if (and know something: this may be part of reason why) – if there is anything in this life that is strangle-holding our faith or obstructing our path to heaven (such as being rich, well fed, happy, praised); if there’s anything tangling up our feet as we run that race to heaven; and if J takes that away, for purpose of strengthening our faith and getting us to heaven – call that a cross, or call that a blessing.
- Today J challenges us to reconsider what means to be blessed. And if: you have J, believe in J, know sins been washed away in blood J shed on cross, know you have home waiting for you in heaven, are thankful for God’s gifts but don’t let them get in way of your faith, immerse yourself in God’s word and meditate on his law day/night like tree planted by streams water (Ps 1) – if Christ is your everything, then you are, right now, no matter what crosses you’re bearing, truly blessed.
- That’s what means be blessed. So thank God for awesome days; and thank God for awful days, too – bec if God uses either a good day or bad day to draw you closer to J and to your heavenly home, then that’s a blessed day! **“Blessed are you.” Vs. 23a.**

Luke 6:17-26

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.