

Your Reward is Great in Heaven February 13, 2022

Luke 6:20-26

20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. 24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25 "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. 26 "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Today's Scripture parallels Matthew 5:1-12. It occurs during the famous Sermon on the Plain. Jesus spent night on the mountain in prayer. On his way down from the mountain he stopped at a level area where a large crowd had gathered and he began to preach. This part of his sermon includes what is known as the Beatitudes and woes. I am reminded of a situation many years ago when I was teaching Sunday school to middle school aged students. This age group is easily distracted, likes to cut up and have fun, and is easily bored. So, when we got to a lesson on the Beatitudes and I referred to it as "beat it dudes." Most of the children laughed as expected. However, one spoke up and said "it's Beatitudes." Oh well, some get it and some do not.

When Jesus recruited his disciples, he selected twelve that got it. Twelve that were willing to follow, listen, observe, learn, and apply. These are not just followers but those that are willing to apply his lessons in daily living. He needs to introduce them to what is in store for them. While it is the disciples that are addressed, a great multitude had gathered to hear Jesus and so the lesson is given in the hearing of all.

The foundation of this sermon from Jesus is ethical righteousness. What we have here is some good news. It is a contrast from world expectations as God's way is a reversal of humanistic values of wealth, materialism, power, and success. The blessings and the woes parallel each other, follow in sequence, and state the inverse of the other: poor and rich, hungry and full, weeping and laughing, rejected and accepted. The blessings are a pronouncement of God's favor and the woes are a pronouncement of God's disfavor. God's favor goes out to the poor, hungry, weeping, and hated. They are blessed and theirs is the kingdom of God. This is the best case scenario.

The declaration from Jesus is God's commitment to those that are on the fringes of society. Jesus is not glorifying poverty but declaring God's commitment to bring about a reversal of fortunes. Jesus addresses inequalities that are applicable then and now. Inequality is of human origin and goes against the will of God. The Lord supplies us with abundant resources that are to be shared by all. We have hope in God's redemption and Jesus is the promised redeemer. Jesus ends up having troubles from the powerful elite because he overturns conventional expectations and associates with outcasts. From the view point of the religious institution they have received God's blessing because they are descendants of Abraham. However, Jesus proclaims God's blessing is going to the oppressed; the ones that they have rejected. This sermon of Jesus is consistent with Old

Testament teaching and prophecy that calls for justice for the poor and promises that the hungry will be fed.

We all need to practice looking at the life that we live and make adjustments to any disparity between the life that we live and biblical lessons that are taught. Like the twelve disciples we are not just followers but actually apply his lessons in daily living. Disciples are to become like their master, to not only hear the words of the Lord but also to respond to it. Jesus biggest criticism is to hypocrisy. There was obvious hypocrisy in the realm of the religious leaders of the day. However, there is also hypocrisy within the realm of his followers. Jesus is tough. In the Gospel of Luke Jesus asks “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?” Jesus repeatedly insists that his followers have to obey his lessons in their daily lives.

In preparing for today’s message, I found something interesting in the Interpreter’s Bible Commentary. The author stated in regard to the woe’s “People who are content to satisfy only their physical needs in the present age will experience a time when God will send “a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”” When I read that, I got goose bumps as I realized that is applicable to us here and now in contemporary society. Then I noticed the quotation marks. The author was quoting Old Testament prophecy. “The time is surely coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). The danger is in the soul of the person. When people have what they want, they are satisfied but desire more worldly goods for more satisfaction. They are full now, they laugh now. Our society idolizes the rich and famous. Now that they are full, they no longer hunger for the word of God or the fruits of the Spirit. When Jesus teaches this lesson, he sets a standard for his followers to strive towards. The Bible teaches us that God redeems and blesses us. God reverses the fortunes here on earth and extends to us a great reward in heaven.