

Jesus' Great Reversal – Understanding What's Important

6th Sun. after Epiphany – 02/13/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 6:17-26 Pastor Keith Besel (PWAP #2)

Introduction

- ✘ Understanding the context of whatever Biblical text we consider as we study it or proclaim it, is of course one of the foundational principles for the proper interpretation and application of God's Holy Word.
 - ➔ Today's text is no different, especially because this account in the Gospel of St. Luke sounds so much like the one in Matthew's Gospel that comes from Jesus' famous *Sermon on the Mount*. There is a section there in Matthew that is famously known as *The Beatitudes* – that is a list of “blessings” that Jesus says are given by grace to those who believe and trust in Him as their Savior and God.
- ✘ But here in Luke today we have the account, not of Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*, but what has become known as His *Sermon on the Plain*. You might say, “So what. Who cares whether He's preaching from up above the people or on a flat spot?” And technically, you'd be right; the elevation of His “pulpit” doesn't matter at all.
 - ➔ Yet the smaller details and differences between Jesus' two sermons shows that He understands, as of course the Son of God naturally would, that His subtle body language here helps to reinforce among His hearers, including us, the proper application of His message directly into their, and our daily lives.
- ✘ Here's what I mean by that: the Gospel Reading begins by saying that Jesus “came down with them and stood on a level place...”. So instead of speaking to the people here as one from above the people as we get the sense in Matthew's account of the *Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus is physically situating Himself as one who has humbled Himself to come down and be among His hearers, even as the least of them.
 - ➔ And why has He come down among us? What is He trying to make sure that we understand? It is what theologians have often called Jesus' “Great Reversal”, that is the crucial distinction between the blessedness God bestows upon the things that endure – namely, the things of the Lord, and His curse, or woe upon those things that are only temporary in nature – namely, the things of man or this earth.
 - ➔ We see this contrast laid out for us in two sections of our text. In verses 20-23 we're told that Jesus “lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said: “Blessed are you...”, followed by a list of blessings. But in verses 24-26 Jesus says, “But woe to you...”, followed by a list of woes; that is, warnings.
- ✘ Why does Jesus give us this contrasting list of blessings and woes? As with all things, it's because He loves us. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:7-8 that Jesus, “made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”. We Christians know that as a fact from this side of His death and resurrection. It's His primary purpose; His ultimate gift of blessing for each and every soul here on earth.
 - ➔ At the time of our text, Jesus is pointing forward to the blessings that His death and resurrection will soon bring about and bestow upon His disciples. But their eyes are clouded and confused right now. They see a miracle worker who turns water into wine and as verse 18 says, “healed (them) of their diseases” and rescued many of them from evil and unclean spirits, but at the same time they see an obvious inequity (a catch word still today as it has been throughout the ages); a supposed inequity between the poor, hungry and oppressed people and

the rich, satisfied and “happy” people around them. And they are struggling to figure out what’s really important in this life as well as the life to come.

- ✘ Jesus, of course, knows the answer to that concern. So, to get them and us to understand and see that answer, He “comes down” among us today in His *Sermon on the Plain* and shows us the difference between those who are brought into God’s kingdom by His grace and those who reject Him and His kingdom in unbelief.

→ To do that, Jesus reverses that which we know from the world completely around. It’s not as we often think of it as Jesus turning the way of the world upside down, but more accurately it is Jesus taking the way of the world and reversing things so that now we perceive and know them to be “right side up”.

- ✘ When you get down to it, this blessings-and-woe teaching of Jesus fits well, not only as a lesson of Law and Gospel, but also as a foundational lesson about the proper understanding of Christian stewardship – how Christ has saved us and gifted us now to bear fruit as His *People With A Purpose*.

I. “Woe to you” who see as the world sees.

- ✘ But the way that we and our world sees things from the human perspective can be so deceptive, can’t it? And Jesus understands that struggle. He lived it while He was here on earth among us. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was, in fact, tempted “in every respect...as we are”, but while you and I far too often fall in to sin when we are tempted, that same text says that Jesus did not. He remained “...without sin”.

→ That’s why He “came down” among the people that day; to help them – and us – see that the earthly view of things in life does not accurately display the reality of a person’s internal spiritual reality.

- ✘ There are those, as Jesus says in His list of woes, “who are rich” (v.24) and “full” and who “laugh now” (v.25). These are the ones about whom verse 26 says, “all people speak well of you”. They are the ones whom the world defines as “having made it in life”.

→ And let’s just be honest folks, these are the ones that we envy, at least from an earthly point of view. I know, the more pious ones among us, are still saying, “Oh no pastor – not me. I don’t want to be rich or have a full stomach or be well-liked”. Give me a break. You really want us to believe that you wake up in the morning and say, “O goody, I want to starve today. I want to be so poor that I can’t pay my bills. I can’t wait to have everyone treat me like they hate my guts.”

→ But you see, Jesus isn’t saying any of us should desire that kind of life. What He’s giving us is a set of very important “Woes” – that is warnings. In your own personal scale of what’s important to you; when you set your priorities in life and figure out what, or who it is that you are really trusting in for this life now, and for your life to come in eternity, what is it that comes out on top? Who is it you cannot do without?

- ✘ Those who focus their purpose upon saving and building earthly wealth; who fall day after day to the temptation of gluttony and center their lives upon self-gratification, as well as basing the determination of whether or not their life’s purpose is about how popular they are or whether they are always “happy” from an earthly point of view – these are the people to whom Jesus issues a strong word of warning here today.

→ Because all that they have here and now in this temporary world is all they are ever going to have, and in the end it will all be taken from them. In eternity, when Jesus returns, He says that they will actually be “hungry” and will “mourn and weep” because their earthly gods will be

shown to be nothing at all. Everything that they believed was important will be revealed as having no importance at all.

II. Jesus Comes to Bless Us

- ✘ That's the warning; the woes. But Jesus has “come down” friends to shower us with His blessings here and now, AND eternally. You see, each one of the blessings that Jesus pronounces upon us in verses 20-23 have both a temporal and a spiritual reality; both a present and a future promise attached to them.
 - ➔ And all of them already have been given to each and every member of God's kingdom of believers. We didn't and we couldn't earn any of them. They are ours exclusively by the gracious, saving work of Jesus – even before He went to the cross and paid for the sins of the world.
- ✘ Notice in verse 20 that He says, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours **is** the kingdom of God”. That's a present tense promise to those people there among Him, even before He suffered on the cross for their salvation. How could they have that blessing already? By the certainty of God's gift of faith! Verse 20 tells us these were Jesus' “disciples”; His followers by faith.
 - ➔ And He wants them to see and know that however the world might have viewed and judged them, it did not determine their reality in God's eyes. On the outside they might have looked like “poor” (v.20), “hungry”, “weeping” (v.21) people. They may even face, as Jesus says in verse 22, “people hating” them, “excluding” them, “reviling” and “spurning” them as being “evil” because they follow and believe in Jesus above all that the world thinks should be important, but those things are NOT what really matter in God's eyes; in the grand scheme of His purpose and plan for us in this life and into eternity.
 - ➔ No, Jesus says their reality – our reality as His people redeemed by the blood of His sacrifice in our place “is” that we belong to “the kingdom of God” (v. 20); that we “will be satisfied” by the bread of eternal life and we will “laugh” for joy because of our release from the bondage of sin and death with which the devil holds those who reject Jesus in hell forevermore.
 - ➔ Yes, even when things are difficult in this life right now; filled with hunger and weeping and grief and persecution, Jesus says we already have our reward!
- ✘ In fact this is how He calls us to use His gifts even now as His stewards, so that others may see and believe and be blessed as well, “Rejoice...and leap for joy,” He says, “for behold, your reward **is** (present tense) great in heaven...” (v. 23).

III. Living now as the “blessed”

- ✘ Our Old Testament Reading today uses a similar method of teaching by way of a contrast. Jeremiah gives us the LORD's list of curses and blessings by using the image of a shrub in the desert versus a tree planted by water.
 - ➔ The person who trusts in the things of “man” is the one “whose heart turns ways from the LORD” (Jer. 17:5) and ends up “parched” in a barren wilderness in the end.
 - ➔ But the person who “trusts in the LORD”, even more it says, “whose trust **is** the LORD” is “like a tree planted by water” (Jer. 17:7-8). He/she is established and firm in this life because of the spiritual roots that are constantly being fed by the Word of God and His gifts of spiritual strength like Christ's body and blood given and shed for our forgiveness and offered here in His Holy Supper.

- ⊗ In fact, the last verse of our Old Testament Reading says, this person is one who “does not cease to bear fruit” (Jer. 17:8). Why? because of God’s grace teaming through our veins, not because of anything we’ve been able to conjure within ourselves.
 - ➔ We are blessed by Jesus, because of Jesus’ work and power, to share the blessings we’ve received from Jesus far and wide, for the good of those around us and the glory of God!

Conclusion

- ⊗ So, no matter what you’re going through in this life – at this moment or the next – you are blessed (present tense). You are a part of His kingdom today and forever! The God who created the heavens and the earth has promised never to leave you; never to forsake you in a promise that is not dependent upon money, food, happiness, or fame. No, it is a promise made sure by the blood of His Son, Jesus.
 - ➔ That means it is a promise of forgiveness, life, and salvation that can never fade; never change; never decay with time. His promise and blessing upon you is sure today and remains sure forever!
- ⊗ As long as Jesus lives, you will live. And as long as you have Him, you have His gifts for eternity. Only in Christ are our lives, as His *People with a Purpose*, today and forever reversed. Yes, in Jesus everything is turned right side up. Amen.