

## A Bible Lesson on Luke 6:20-36 (ESV<sup>1</sup>)

This is a Bible lesson on Jesus's "sermon on the plain." It shares much with the better known "sermon on the mount" found in Matthew 5-7. But it is shorter and the some of the meanings of the parallel verses are shaded differently. It is important to note to whom Jesus is speaking here. Note the first part of verse 20. Jesus is speaking to disciples, not pagans He's trying to attract. These verses contain material that is absolutely contrary to our natural minds. But such He says we must be and do. Our fallen human nature would like to duck and qualify most of what is here. But we'll be wise if we don't try to make excuses or take the edge off of it.

Verses 20 through 26 consist of 4 "blesseds" set in contrast to 4 "woes." They turn upside down our natural thinking about what is to be valued and sought after. Taken together, they essentially say that we have our choice. We can either seek the comforts and blessings of this life and in the end have nothing, or we can be prepared to have nothing in this life, but in eternity have the greatest of blessings. It seems that Jesus is essentially warning us that we can't have it both ways. We can't seek to have it here and have it there as well. Verses 20-26 deal with how our lives in this world affect eternity.

**Luke 6:20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.**

The parallel verse from Matthew says "poor in spirit." We typically hear the Matthew verse to mean "Blessed are those who recognize their spiritual poverty before God." In Luke Jesus simply says "poor," and in this sermon He is saying something somewhat different from what He's saying in the Matthew verse. He's aiming at our desire for material well-being here and now. The corresponding "woe" in verse 24 clearly is talking about material wealth and our attitudes toward it. This one is too.

This verse is not a maudlin thing that says there is innate virtue in poverty. Nor is Jesus some kind of populist/liberal rabble rouser here who is saying "power to the people." What He's saying is much sharper and harder to swallow. He's commending the heart that is willing to choose relatively poor economic circumstances here and now for the sake of the Kingdom. This is the spirit of the Moravian missionaries, who in order to take the Gospel to slaves in foreign lands, were willing to sell themselves into slavery to secure passage to those lands. There's no virtue in unavoidable poverty, but there is virtue in (and in fact we're called to) taking a lower economic station in this life than might otherwise be possible if we gave ourselves to the pursuit of wealth.

Jesus is talking here to people who have given up whatever temporal economic security they had in order to follow Him. They've left their jobs and businesses to follow Him. We're fooling ourselves if we think we can or should be as wealthy as we would be if we weren't His. The fact is that we're called to put energy into the Kingdom of God. And if we do, that's energy that won't go into an IRA.

**<sup>24</sup>"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.**

Do you really want to seek the comfort that wealth seems to bring? Recognize then, that "here and now" is the end of it. This is not condemnation of accidental or inherited wealth. It is a warning that if

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the pursuit or preservation of wealth is what drives us--is our main concern in life--then an eternity of torment awaits us.

**21" Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.**

In Matthew Jesus says "Blessed are you that hunger and thirst for righteousness." Here Jesus says "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied." Again, there is no special virtue in unavoidable hunger and this is not some call to take from the rich by force and distribute to the poor ... it's much sharper and less pleasant than that. We have a choice, we can choose to pour our energies into taking care of our physical needs and wants, and end up like the statement in verse 25. Or, we can voluntarily lay that aside, and perhaps even end up hungry, but gain eternity. Do we want it here and now? Or will we delay for eternity?

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." The Matthew passage says "Blessed are they that mourn." We usually hear this to say "Blessed are they that mourn over their sin." But again, Jesus is saying something different in this sermon. Look at the contrasting woe in verse 25. This has to do with plain old crying and laughing! Do we want a life that is free of sorrow, always gay and merry? Is that what we're going to seek? Or will we voluntarily choose, for the sake of Christ and the Gospel, to allow unpleasantness, pain, and heartache into our lives? Are we going to follow the American Declaration of Independence and pursue happiness? Or are we going to pursue Godliness? We can pursue only one. Think of the work of a Pastor. If you want a merry existence, free from heartache and any hint of sadness, do something else. If you never want to experience pain, then don't care about people or get involved in trying to help them find the Truth. But, Jesus is saying, the eternal blessing comes with the willingness to bear sorrow here for His sake. We cannot pursue both happiness and the Kingdom of God. Which will it be?

**25" Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.**

Is this a condemnation of gratefully appreciating the blessings that God gives us in this life? Is it a call to masochism and ill temper? Clearly not. But it *is* a warning that if comfort and mirth are what we seek in this present life, even if we do succeed somewhat in finding them, when this is over, they're gone and we'll spend eternity in torment.

**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.**

If there is anything we desire, it is to be well thought of. There is little that will make us any more indignant than to be unjustly vilified. We want our good intentions to be properly recognized and our good motives respected. But look at verses 23 and 26. We can't have it both ways! Gospel truth will not make us attractive to all people. It will repel those who will not give up their rebellion. This is not a call to be obnoxious or to attempt to become martyrs. But it is a statement that in the course of being true to Christ, some will be genuinely hated and persecuted, and that should not come as a surprise or be a matter of disappointment or sadness.

**26" Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.**

But haven't we convinced ourselves in our time that Christians can blend in and be prominent people in the community, loved by all? Aren't we over that uncouth, hick, Bible-thumping stuff, and just as hip and attractive as anyone else?

Now Jesus turns to our relationships with other people, in particular with those that would choose to be our enemies because of Christ. This too, is revolutionary stuff. It is not at all in line with our natural inclinations, and most of us have very little practice in doing it and very little experience in seeing it bear fruit.

**27" But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,**

**28" bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.**

Insofar as it depends upon us, there is only one reason for Christian people to have enemies. That is that unbelievers would hate the image of Christ in us. For those people, it is our duty to pray and do good.

But what about the public school officials that are assaulting our kids with their sex-ed, their sexual propaganda, and their Darwinism? Or what about the people that want to characterize us as cowardly bigots for holding to an absolute standard of morality? Surely this doesn't refer to them? My experience with me is that it is usually more than I manage to do to stop complaining about those who I think have wronged me on account of the truth. I have only a miniscule base of experience to talk from in terms of doing good to such people or genuinely praying for them. But that is what Jesus teaches and asks of us.

Isn't it amazing that if we defend the truth in un-Biblical human ways, we destroy it in the process? Isn't it something that our contending (supposedly for the Truth) becomes ugly and misrepresents the God we serve?

**29" To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.**

While this verse can be interpreted more broadly, the primary flow here is in terms of verses 27-29. In the context of persecution because of your faith in Christ, if you are to suffer loss, embrace it, don't try to minimize the loss! This doesn't amount to instructions on how to deal with a mugging or robbery. It is instead instruction on how to react in the middle of unjust persecution.

Jesus and the early missionaries did not go looking for persecution. Indeed, they did at times flee it. But when it catches up with you, the instruction is to not face it in the good old American way of demanding your rights. Instead, in humility, choose instead to be outwardly silent and be wronged.

Hear how crazy all this sounds. This is contrary to everything we are by nature, and everything we're taught to be as Americans. But again, we have a choice. We can do it our way, and have whatever benefits we can muster here and now. Or we can do it God's way, give Him the glory, and enjoy the rewards eternally.

**<sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back.**

Again, this may be interpreted more broadly, but the first meaning here is in terms of those who would hate you for the sake of Jesus. If they are going to demand that you jump through a hoop, jump through two. If they seize your property, don't demand your legal rights to get it back. Instead, cheerfully give it to them with a blessing and a wish that the property will serve them well.

This is not an instruction to send a check to every crazy group or person that sends a letter or phones during dinner. Instead, it is an instruction to hold lightly what we've been made stewards of, to not grasp it or spend our energies defending it. It is simply not our primary concern, and if it is required from us by those who hate the cross, we should turn it loose without remorse.

**<sup>31</sup>And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.**

Once again, this can be read quite broadly. In all things, to all people, at all times, do to them as you would have them do to you. But the first meaning here is in reference to those who would hate you because of Christ. Pray for them, do good to them, don't resist them, in fact love and bless them.

Why is Jesus giving us these incredible instructions? The answer is in these next few verses.

**<sup>32</sup>If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.**

**<sup>33</sup>And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.**

**<sup>34</sup>And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.**

**<sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.**

**<sup>36</sup>Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.**

We are to react this way because it is a proper reflection of how and who God is. God is merciful, and so should we be. He treats with grace and mercy those who hate Him. So should we. This brings God honor and us the promise of eternal reward.

We can pursue and perhaps have some of the "good" stuff now. Or we can pursue Godliness in ways that are totally contrary to our natural inclinations and find eternal reward ... which will it be???

**2 Cor. 4:17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,**