

Luke's Beatitudes And Woes

Luke 6:17-26

We have heard the Beatitudes many times some of us might even remember them. Someone gave me an interesting article about the Beatitudes. It is titled: "The Lesson."

"Then Jesus took his disciples up the mountain, and gathering them around him, he taught them saying:

" 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are they who thirst for justice. Blessed are you when you suffer. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is great in heaven. Remember what I am telling you.'

"Then Simon Peter said, 'Do I have to write this down?'

"And Andrew said, 'Are we supposed to know this?'

"And James said, 'Will we have a test on it?'

"And Phillip said, 'What if we don't know it?'

"And John said, 'The other disciples didn't have to learn this.'

"And Matthew said, 'When do we get out of here?'

"And Judas said, 'What does this have to do with real life?'

"And the other disciples likewise.

"And Jesus wept."

We still have not learned the lesson. Jesus reverses the standard of value around which the kingdom of God is built. Jesus' love is radical, embracing everyone. Behavior is the natural expression of an inward goodness. You do as you believe. Oswald Chambers in his devotional writings says, "The characteristic of a disciple is not that they do good things but that they are good in motive because they have been made good by the supernatural grace of God." The kingdom of God is not a place, but a condition.

Today we turn to Luke's set of Beatitudes. They differ from those in Matthew's gospel. Matthew lists nine beatitudes, while Luke provides only four. Then Luke follows them with four "Woes."

Dr. Fred Craddock has suggested there are times when it seems altogether appropriate and important and valuable for the church to gather and plan to do nothing else but to be instructed in the Word of God.

There are some biblical texts which should be read and left alone, says Dr. Craddock. Texts to be released into the room and let them do their work. To let them speak for themselves. To let them introduce us into a world of values and experiences about which we don't talk very much.

The Beatitudes cast their blessings into the room. They say their words. The blessing goes to anyone in reach of it. Hear the Word of God as recorded in Luke 6:17-26:

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.

In direct contrast, Luke continues:

Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you for, so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Notice how scattered upon all of us are those blessings and woes.

The blessed: the poor, the hungry, the sad, the oppressed and scorned whom the world pushes aside with contempt or cruelty, are within the compassion and eternal love of God. God will right their lot.

The woes: those who are content to satisfy only their physical needs will experience a terrible “famine.” Not a famine of bread, not a thirst for water, but a famine of the soul. We who have so much may no longer be eager for the gifts of God. We do not hunger for the invisible because the visible possessions seem to be enough. Thus, the world’s needs go untended. Jesus remarked one day that for us who have so much to get to Heaven is about as easy as a Cadillac to get through a revolving door.

The Beatitudes of Jesus contain no imperatives, no exhortation, no “let us go and do,” no “ought’s,” no “musts,” except by implication. It’s there! They bring us into the realm of the true and the valuable, the eternal and the good.

As always in the presence of the true, the right, and the eternal; we feel the imperative. We hear the command. It’s like being in the presence of somebody of extraordinary value, someone whose life counts for something. You know people like that. To be in their presence makes a difference. The world will be different because they live. They don’t have to say what we should do. We know it. We feel it in their presence.

We leave their presence feeling small and guilty and restless. We purchase a little peace by promising ourselves that tomorrow our life will amount to something. It will amount to more than dealing with those questions, what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and what in the world are we going to wear?

Rev. Bob Waters, a friend and a retired minister of the United Methodist Church, told of a little oak tree in his front yard. Well, it was little, but it’s growing like a weed now. It’s the third one planted in the same spot. Upon moving into the parsonage, someone convinced his wife there ought to be an oak tree in that spot. She never gave up on the notion. Bob managed to mangle a couple of her efforts with the lawnmower. She threatened him about this third one, even as Bob told her over and over the tree wasn’t going to grow in that spot. The tree took root. It grew broad and leafy after a couple of years. One day someone came by and said, “You know that thing would grow a lot quicker if you would prune some of the lower limbs.” So, they did that. The tree leaped up quickly. The reason for its great growth is the pruning -- the removing of some of the branches that were sapping its energy and contributing nothing to its height or beauty.

Jesus taught us to prune down, so we have energy and wisdom enough “to be” as well as “to do.”

Jesus follows the Beatitudes and Woes with a suggestion:

Do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you; to the one who strikes you on the cheek offer your other cheek; and as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

You take the initiative... You take control of your life; don’t let someone else determine it for you... Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.

God’s love mirrored in human beings is a superior level of living. It reaches out to all without ulterior motivation or the expectation of any return... But Scripture promises an intoxicating joy. They will eat and laugh at a great feast!