

Message Reflections

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

Message Reflections accompany the [weekly message](#).

What do you gain when you follow Jesus? What do you lose? Wise people evaluate major decisions prior to making them. Which career path will I take? Who will I spend my life with? What things do I want to pursue? Where do I want to live? This is my default. I exercise this in a way not unfamiliar to many—I make pro and con lists. I do this so often in fact, that it would be embarrassing (hello dating years...yikes!). I have done this for years: made major decisions with lists. Who doesn't? Ok, maybe I am a little different, but you understand.

When we consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 5, these beatitudes could be considered the center of his teaching ministry. It is expounded upon in the rest of the sermon on the mount, and the rest of His life expounds upon that. What is found in this kingdom manifesto? Upside down logic. Things that do not seem to be how the world works. For Jesus, this is the point. Isn't a 'blessed' life what everyone seeks? Yes, but the question is not: will we seek blessings? Instead, it is: what do we think a blessed life looks like? We will seek what we believe a blessed life looks like no matter our race or religion.

So, what does a blessed life look like? What does it mean to be blessed? Can we pursue a blessed life? These are the questions Jesus addresses in these twelve verses that should bounce around the heads of followers of Jesus for their lifetime. These things are difficult for many reasons. I like to pursue things I can see. I like to make lists and evaluate choices on tangible items. It is hard to pursue the kingdom of God or even know when/what/where it is. When have I mourned enough or suffered enough or pursued righteousness? When am I pure in heart or poor in spirit? Do I just try to do these? Can I accomplish this? It is all so hard to see and hard to evaluate. Jesus, help?

Back to the lists...Jesus tells us the pro/con equation. Here it is in Matthew 16:26: *"And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"*

If the kingdom of God is on one side of a list and all the things of the world are on the other...what will I choose? What if the path to gaining what is most valuable is the most

counter-intuitive? I need help to choose the best because I sometimes choose what I can see over the good or godly thing I should do.

Taking some cues from others who encountered Jesus, one person, Zacchaeus, was able to focus on the PRO from knowing and following Jesus and His ways. The kingdom of God was worth losing things the world values (Luke 19:1-10). Another person, a rich young ruler, wanted to follow Jesus but couldn't see past the CON list in following Him. He only saw what he would lose or how he would be treated. He walked away (Matthew 19:16-30).

Maybe this is too simple. I see a list of pros and cons. Many before me have called this equation the "cost of discipleship." Your outcome and ability to live out these beatitudes may boil down to which side of the pro/con list you stare at the most. It is helpful to acknowledge the cost of following Jesus and acquiring the kingdom of God, but if I focus on it, I might lose what is most valuable. This cost is a cost I am gladly willing to pay—and the world will never understand.

Questions/Further Study:

1. Read the story about the "Rich young ruler" (Matthew 19:16-30) and discuss or think about how focusing on what we "lose" affects our desire to follow Jesus.
2. Read the story about Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) and discuss or think about how focusing on what we "gain" affects our desire and ability to follow Jesus.
3. What have you given up to follow Jesus? How has it been hard?
4. What have you gained from following Jesus? What has He done in your life?