

Luke 6:17-26 He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. ²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. ²³ "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. ²⁴ "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶ Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Would you be happier without Christ?

1. Discipleship means hungering
2. Discipleship means rejection

Don't you think what Jesus says here is a little strange? If you asked someone how their week was and they responded, "Well, I'm poor, hungry, sad, hated, excluded, insulted and rejected," you wouldn't respond with, "That's great to hear!" Yet, that's where Jesus says we are blessed. And it makes you wonder, doesn't it? Do you wonder sometimes if the whole Christianity thing is worth the hassle? Wouldn't you rather be rich, well-fed, laughing and having people say nice things about you? Wouldn't it be nice to sleep in on Sundays, keep your money for yourself, not worry about your language and party all you want? Would we be happier without Christ?

Three different groups were there that day. Jesus had just set apart the Twelve, designating them apostles. Then there was the larger group of Jesus' disciples, both men and women. Luke tells us there was also a large crowd of curiosity seekers, people who had come from all over the region to see Jesus and be healed by him. In his sermon here, Jesus is not speaking to the large group of the curious. He is speaking just to his disciples to those who already believe in him. He is explaining to them what discipleship all involves.

He said, *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* The word for poor here means "begging poor, destitute, having absolutely nothing." Were Jesus and his parents begging poor when he was growing up? No, Joseph had his own business. Peter and Andrew had a fishing business. Matthew had so much money he could throw a large party for Jesus. They were not poor in that sense. Jesus isn't saying that we earn the kingdom of heaven by being poor.

But they – and we – are poor. I possess nothing that can pay the price of my freedom from sin. We are spiritually bankrupt beggars. My good works and niceness, my patience and putting myself out for others, will never be enough to reach the standard of perfection that God requires for me to be part of his kingdom. It's only when I recognize my spiritual poverty that I can truly appreciate the riches of God's grace and forgiveness. It's when I realize that I cannot contribute even an ounce towards my salvation that I am blessed with the peace of knowing that Jesus has paid for my salvation in full. How blessed are poor sinners who depend fully on the riches of Christ's love and forgiveness.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. If you listen to someone talk about being "blessed," they will probably tell you about all that they have: wealth, happiness, satisfaction with life. There is nothing wrong with any of these things. God gives us material things for our enjoyment. But if someone thinks that having great success or having a lot of money are evidence that God approves of how they live, they are deceived. When a person uses those things as a gauge of success in God's eyes, they are much mistaken. These are the rich, who are full of themselves, not full of Jesus. In fact, those who are rich in their own eyes and don't really need a Savior, are lost.

Discipleship is not about what we have but about what we don't have. *Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.* We might not think of hunger as a good thing, until you are not hungry and don't want to eat. That happened to me when I had Covid. Besides being very tired, I had no appetite. I didn't lose my sense of taste or smell like a lot of people, but I just didn't feel like eating. I lost seven or eight pounds during those few days of being sick.

So, let's say you are invited to dinner. The food is fantastic and you eat yourself full. Then, at the end, the host brings out a wonderful dessert. You are so full, however, eating another bite does not appeal to you.

It's the same with weeping now. Tears recognize that something is broken – a relationship, trust, my body, my life, a friendship. We weep accepting that sin has broken us and our relationship with God. When we see that we have sinned, we weep now with repentance. Jesus tells us that when we weep or are hungry, we are blessed. The more we hunger, the more we are satisfied with Jesus' righteousness. The more we are satisfied, the more we hunger for his righteousness. It is a continuing growth cycle.

Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Unbelievers are full of themselves. Whether a hypocritical Pharisee or just your average Joe on the couch, they don't see how short of God's glory they fall. They don't see a need for a Savior. They do not hunger for the righteousness which only God can give.

We are blessed because we see how much we need a Savior who was poor. When Jesus died on the cross, he was penniless. Jesus suffered hunger and thirst on the cross. Jesus was hated, excluded, insulted and rejected. Why? His ultimate purpose was to be a sacrifice for sins. Early in his ministry, John the Baptist called him "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) His goal in life had always been the cross so that we could be forgiven and go to heaven. Jeremiah told us, "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him." (Jeremiah 17:7) May we see our poverty and trust in the Lord for forgiveness and life.

Discipleship means hungering, wanting, needing, begging before God. Discipleship also means rejection before the world. *Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.*²³ *"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.* What name is the world rejecting? The name Christian. We are ridiculed for what they call our blood theology. We are called homophobic and unscientific, even ignorant. The world rejects us when we live the Christian life. The woman who is bashed on Facebook because she said that life begins at conception. The man who loses a promotion at work because he wouldn't go to the strip club with his boss. The parents who are told by their child they are no longer welcome because they won't support his lifestyle. And we ask, where is the blessing in that?

The Apostle Paul helps us out here. He had a problem. Was it physical or was it something else? We don't know. He called it a thorn in the flesh, a burr under his saddle. He asked God to take it away and God said no. "My grace is sufficient for you." (2 Corinthians 12:9) So Paul accepted that and learned to rejoice about it. "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10) When we are rejected by the world, we are blessed. We are strong with Christ.

It's been said that a person may be known by the friends he keeps. It's also true that a person may be known by the enemies he has made. A Christian must have the right kind of enemies. Christians will always have enemies because the world hates Christ. Marching under the banner of Christ will always bring some kind of persecution. Or it should. *Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.*

So, would we be happier without Christ? Honest answer? Yes. Life would be much simpler and much easier. Those family conflicts that come up because of our faith would disappear. We could selfishly spend more money on ourselves without guilt. We could live for the day, live for pleasure, live for ourselves. Yes, we would be happier without Christ.

Jesus wants us to understand what discipleship costs. Discipleship brings rejection and hatred from the world. We need to understand that. But Jesus also wants us to understand the principle that it's better to give up immediate pleasures to have something better later. For example, long distance runners give up food and time to maintain a rigorous training routine, all for the joy of winning the race. That's what Jesus is saying here.

We are blessed when we are poor in this life because we are filled with eternal life, eternal joy and eternal glory. Would we be happier without Christ? No, not really. Not now. Not ever. Not forever.