

Luke 6:17-26

Theme: Jesus clears things up

To see clearly is a good thing. It's important to know you're taking the right exit because you've seen exit sign, that you're taking the proper medication because you've clearly read the label, and that you're putting toothpaste on your toothbrush – not triple-action antibiotic cream. Seeing clearly spares you the embarrassment of wearing one navy blue and one black sock or waving overly enthusiastically to the person who, up close, turned out *not* to be your friend.

God often works in ways that leave us scratching our heads because we don't always see clearly what he's doing. His methods and choices can confuse us. But God explains why: **I Corinthians 1:27-29**, "*But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.* ²⁸ *God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are* ²⁹ *so that no one may boast before him.*" God's will is beyond us and he operates on grace. That's why we can't always understand what he's doing or why he chooses the people he does to work in his kingdom. Think of Moses, David, Gideon, the prophet Amos, Mary, and the disciples – fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots – called to do the major kingdom work. Why them? God sees things we don't clearly, so part of what Jesus came to do what clear things up for us and help us see because what's near and dear to God's heart is often very different from ours.

When ridiculed for eating with sinners, exactly what God sent him to do, Jesus explained, "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*" (**Luke 5:32**) The sinners were the ones Jesus came for, so he chose to spend his time among them. Why? To love them so much they'd see their need for him. A little bit later, with a huge crowd of disciples, curious onlookers, those seeking healing, people from Jerusalem and from Tyre and Sidon all pressed around him. Anyone who touched him was healed. Jesus decided this was the time clarify some common misconceptions. They were just healed, had just seen his power and love, they were ready to listen!

The world often operates under the tyranny of merit and morality believing that if someone works hard and makes morally upstanding choices, they'll be rewarded with equivalent success. This leads us to assume that the poor are poor because they're lazy and make bad choices while the rich are rich because they're industrious and make good ones. We distill this into a simple and false equation: poor = bad; rich = good. This simplistic thinking is wrong, but often we think this way and even refuse other and better ways of thinking. Jesus clears it up by blessing people and situations we often think of as bad and warning those we often think of as good. As we talk about these blessings and warnings of Jesus, the phrase, "more than figurative, less than literal" is helpful in understanding them. Is Jesus speaking literally or spiritually? With the spiritually being ultimately more important, the answer is, "Yes."

Jesus begins, "*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.*" (**Luke 6:20-21**) Jesus blesses those who lack, who know their need, because their hope is in the kingdom of God. He blesses the poor, not their poverty. Poverty is stressful and anxiety-inducing. The fear of not having enough and the constant burden of financial strain are heavy. But Jesus sees you. He holds your needs close and promises something greater than everything here: his very own kingdom. Jesus doesn't hesitate to bless, though we often hesitate. "Should I help? What if I enable? Are they really deserving?" Sometimes God gives us people who can't care for themselves as a test of mercy. How we treat the most vulnerable among us, those who have the most difficult time caring for themselves, speaks volumes. A lack of care may indicate spiritual poverty, but not the kind Jesus blesses, but the kind which shows a lack of understanding of our deep need for him, how richly and undeservingly blessed by him we are, and what his will for us.

Jesus then shifts to the hungry. Again, hunger itself isn't blessed, but those who hunger, especially who hunger spiritually, are held dear by Jesus and satisfied when they look to him. Realizing how hungry you are is a true blessing. Why say, "Blessed are you who weep"? Seems cruel! Ecclesiastes reminds that wisdom's found in the house of mourning. Sorrow teaches us, refines us to hope in Jesus for what we can't find here. Jesus promises to transform sorrow into everlasting joy.

In contrast to these blessings, Jesus gives warnings, "*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.*" (**Luke 6:24-25**). What do we make of this? Wasn't Abraham wealthy? Didn't Paul tell the Corinthians we can be content when well-fed and the Thessalonians to rejoice always? I don't mind a lil' extra pocket change, a full tummy, and a joke to chuckle about so much myself. Not wrong to enjoy blessings, but when earthly needs are consistently and comfortably met, it's easier to rely on them and seek satisfaction only in them. That's when we risk becoming like the fool in Jesus' parable who only stored up wealth for himself but wasn't rich toward God.

Finally, Jesus gives an encouragement about something no one thinks is good, "*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.*" (**Luke 6:22-23**) This he pairs with a warning, in **6:26**, "*Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.*" The truth of God's Word isn't always popular, so those who speak it will not always be popular also. But if you're hated for loving Jesus and sharing his truth in love, you stand in the wonderful company of prophets, apostles, and Christ himself! You have God's approval and blessing because the truth you've shared has already set you free.

The ultimate truth is this: Jesus loved your life more than his own. He love his Father so much that he died for you, giving up his life on the cross in bloodied shame. It wasn't a blessed thing by worldly standards but commonly understood that the person was crucified as a result of bad decisions. Jesus' death was the result of the most blessed, excellent, loving, and wonderful decision because it gives you forgiveness and salvation, his kingdom with its never ending feast of the best of everything with the best company to laugh and sing and dance with for eternity.

Jesus flips things upside down. Jesus blesses those the world pities and warns those the world envies because he's teaching us to see clearly as God sees. The world says, "Blessed are the powerful." Jesus, "Blessed are the weak." World, "Blessed are the wealthy." Jesus, "Blessed are the poor." World, "Laugh now, enjoy life." Jesus, "Blessed are those who mourn and weep, they will laugh." Jesus calls us to trust him. The Jesus who heals bodies also heal souls, completely. If you feel weak, poor, overlooked – know Jesus sees you. Feeling comfortable? Be careful comfort doesn't lull you spiritual apathy. Mainly, remember that Jesus became poor, a person of sorrows, so we could inherit his kingdom, be filled with his righteousness, and share his eternal joy. Trust him. He sees what we don't. Jesus blesses in ways, through situations, and at times, we don't expect. Amen.