

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Pronounces Woes

Luke 6:24-26

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Scripture

Last week we began studying Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain" that is recorded for us in the Gospel of Luke 6:20-49.

Jesus' sermon was about the kingdom of God. He drew a contrast between two ways of life. He explained the difference between those who belong to the kingdom of God and those who do not belong to the kingdom of God.

Jesus began his sermon by teaching about the blessings of those who belong to the kingdom of God, and warnings to those who do not belong to the kingdom of God.

Last week we looked at the blessings of godliness, and today I would like to look at the warnings against worldliness, which Jesus did through his pronouncement of woes.

Let's read the beginning of Jesus' sermon where he taught about the blessings and the warnings in Luke 6:20-26, although our focus today will be on the warnings in Luke 6:24-26:

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.

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

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

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.

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

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.

²⁶ **“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”** (Luke 6:24-26)

Introduction

When a person loves earthly things so much that he can't get along without them, he opens himself to much suffering, both physical and mental. Some people, for example, have taken foolish risks to keep their riches intact. They have died rushing into burning houses or were killed because they stubbornly resisted armed robbers. Apparently they felt that without their material possessions life would not be worthwhile.

Others, when forced to part with their wealth, have been thrown into agonizing despair, even to the point of suicide.

In 1975, six armed gunmen broke into the deposit boxes in a London bank and stole valuables worth more than \$7 million. One lady, whose stolen jewelry was appraised at \$500,000, reportedly cried, “Everything I had was in there. My whole life was in that box.”

What a sad commentary on her values!¹

Jesus' “Sermon on the Plain” began with a declaration of the values that are important in the kingdom of God. In the sermon Jesus taught what life was like for those in the kingdom of God in contrast to those who were outside of the kingdom of God. He taught that there are blessings that come from godliness and woes that come from worldliness.

But what is so astonishing is that what brings blessing or woe is so completely different than what most people think. The world values what Jesus does not value. And Jesus values what the world does not value. In the “Sermon on the Plain” Jesus gave four woes to serve as warnings to all who find ultimate satisfaction with present pleasures.

¹ Galaxie Software, *10,000 Sermon Illustrations* (Biblical Studies Press, 2002).

Lesson

Jesus teaches us in Luke 6:20-23 that the woes serve as warnings about finding ultimate satisfaction with present pleasures.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Warning to the Rich: Present Consolation (6:24)
2. Warning to the Full: Future Hunger (6:25a)
3. Warning to the Entertained: Future Weeping (6:25b)
4. Warning to the Popular: Present Deception (6:26)

I. **Warning to the Rich: Present Consolation (6:24)**

First, Jesus gave a warning to the rich.

Jesus said in verse 24, **“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.”**

The Greek word for **woe** (*ouai*) is “an exclamation of pain and pity for the misfortune that awaits someone in a certain condition.”² So, when Jesus spoke about **woe**, he was not so much warning people about impending judgment as he was expressing his sense of sadness over the way that they were living. According to commentator Leon Morris, **woe** means something “like ‘Alas’ (*NEB*) or ‘How terrible’ (*TEV*). It is an expression of regret and compassion.”³ Jesus saw how tragic it was for people to live their own way rather than God's way, which is the only of blessing.

Now it is important to note that Jesus was not speaking about everyone who has money or is rich, because there are

² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 583.

³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 127.

some godly rich people in the Bible. For example, Luke has already mentioned Levi who was a wealthy tax collector. Jesus called Levi to follow him, and Levi left everything to follow Jesus (Luke 5:27-28).

Jesus' warning to the rich in the "Sermon on the Plain" was a warning to those "who seek their life and happiness only or primarily in material things, who do not realize their souls' need and do not acknowledge their dependence on God."⁴ They are all about gaining more financial security and enjoying the finer things of life. But, if that is all they are living for, that is all the consolation they will ever get. As Jesus said, they have already received their **consolation**.

The Greek verb used for **receiving** (*apēchō*) "is one often used in receipts with a meaning like 'Paid in full.'"⁵ Jesus was warning people that money is a temporary blessing at best. It does not last forever, so rich people might as well enjoy it all now while they can. To put it another, as commentator Philip Ryken says, "earthly treasure always turns out to be a bad investment."⁶

George W. Truett, long-time pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, was invited to dinner in the home of a wealthy man in Texas. After the meal, his host led him to a place where they could get a good view of their surroundings.

Pointing to oil wells punctuating the landscape, the host boasted, "Twenty-five years ago I had nothing. Now, as far as you can see, it's all mine."

Looking in the opposite direction at his sprawling fields of grain, he said, "That's all mine."

Turning east toward huge herds of cattle, he bragged,

⁴ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), 210.

⁵ Leon Morris, 128.

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, Vol. 1 in Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 264.

“They’re all mine.”

Then, pointing to the west and a beautiful forest, he exclaimed, “That too is all mine.”

He paused, expecting Truett to compliment him on his great success.

Truett, however, placing a hand on the man’s shoulder and pointing heavenward, simply said, “How much do you have in that direction?”

The man hung his head and confessed, “I never thought of that.”

Although that wealthy Texan had succeeded in making money, he had failed to prepare for eternity.⁷

It is much better for us to recognize our true spiritual poverty and put all our stock in the kingdom of God. Consider the epitaph of Thomas Lowes, who is buried in Holyrood Abbey in Edinburgh:

One instance among thousands of the uncertainty of human life and instability of earthly possessions and enjoyments. Born to ample property, he for several years experienced a distressing reverse of fortune, and no sooner was he restored to his former affluence than it pleased Divine Providence to withdraw this together with his life. READER, be thou taught by this to seek those riches which never can fail and those pleasures which are at God’s right hand forevermore: the gracious gift of God, and to be enjoyed through faith in Jesus Christ our Savior.⁸

So, Jesus gave a warning to the rich.

II. Warning to the Full: Future Hunger (6:25a)

Second, Jesus gave a warning to the full.

⁷ Roy B. Zuck, *The Speaker’s Quote Book: Over 4,500 Illustrations and Quotations for All Occasions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1997), 257–258.

⁸ Quoted by Ligon Duncan in *First Epistle* 32.28 (July 26, 2001), n. p.

Jesus said in verse 25a, **“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.”**

Jesus was speaking to those people who were spiritually satisfied in this life. They did not have a hunger for God and the things of God because they believed themselves to be satisfied regarding eternal things. They felt that they had gone far enough in order satisfy their spiritual appetite. They may have gone to church religiously and performed their religious rituals. They did not want to get too radical. They had no thirst for God and his Word. And they had no desire to pray or to fellowship deeply with God.

Jesus was warning that they may feel spiritually satisfied now, but they will experience a future hunger when God calls them to account.

This dangerous condition may be illustrated by the story that is sometimes attributed to Soren Kierkegaard:

A duck was flying with his flock in the springtime northward across Europe. During the flight he came down in a Danish barnyard where there were tame ducks. He enjoyed some of their corn. He stayed, for an hour, then for a day, then for a week, then for a month, and finally, because he relished the good fare and the safety of the barnyard, he stayed all summer. But one autumn day when the flock of wild ducks was winging their way southward again, they passed over the barnyard, and their mate heard their cries. He was stirred with a strange thrill of joy and delight, and with a great flapping of wings he rose in the air to join his old comrades in their flight. But he found that his good fare had made him so soft and heavy that he could rise no higher than the eaves of the barn. So he dropped back again to the barnyard, and said to himself, “Oh well, my life is safe here and the food is good.” Every spring and autumn when he heard the wild ducks calling, his eyes would gleam for a moment and he would begin to flap his wings. But finally the day came when the wild ducks flew over him and uttered their cry, but he paid not the slightest atten-

tion to them.⁹

This same thing can happen to anyone who starts gorging on what the world has to offer. You may fully intend to take off and fly again with the people of God. But you decide to stay a little longer in the world and taste the sweet corn of worldliness. For a while you are still willing to go to church to hear what God has to say, but eventually you decide that it is hardly worth the effort. People who do not have a craving for God no longer feed on his Word. And soon they go starving for lack of fellowship with him.

So, Jesus gave a warning to the rich. And he gave a warning to the full.

III. Warning to the Entertained: Future Weeping (6:25b)

Third, Jesus gave a warning to the entertained.

Jesus said in verse 25b, **“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”**

Jesus was not speaking against laughter. Jesus had a wonderful sense of humor, and it is seen throughout the Gospels.

But Jesus was concerned about people who never got serious about spiritual matters. When anyone spoke to them about spiritual matters, they laughed it off as a joke. They would take God lightly, poke fun at his Word and his people.

Jesus warns people whose purpose in life is to be entertained. They live life with gusto and run from one entertainment to the next. That is the great goal and purpose of their lives. They want to feel good and they do not want to examine themselves and discover the wretchedness of sin in themselves. They do not want to weep now over their sin.

Sadly, Jesus said that they will laugh now but they will

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 218.

mourn and weep in the future when God exposes and judges them for their sin. And even more sadly, at that time it will be too late for them to do anything about it.

So, Jesus gave a warning to the rich. He gave a warning to the full. And he gave a warning to the entertained.

IV. Warning to the Popular: Present Deception (6:26)

And finally, Jesus gave a warning to the popular.

Jesus said in verse 26, **“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”**

Now it is not wrong for people to speak well of us. In fact, God wants us to have a good reputation with unbelievers (1 Timothy 3:7). But he does not want us to be people-pleasers. He does not want us to say only those things that will cause people to speak well of us.

Jesus was warning believers not to seek popularity because that could result in being deceived. When believers don't speak truth to family and friends for fear of criticism, there is the danger of being deceived. When the church does not speak truth to a culture that is increasingly anti-Christian, it does not become more relevant to the culture; the church in fact becomes irrelevant and, worse, dishonoring to God.

Far too many churches in our culture try to please and accommodate to the culture in order to be accepted by the culture. Far too many ministers in our culture do the same thing, as Bishop J. C. Ryle observed, “It seems entirely forgotten, that to be liked and approved by every body, is to be of the number of those to whom Jesus says, ‘Woe unto you.’ To be universally popular is a most unsatisfactory symptom, and one of which a minister of Christ should always be afraid. It may well make him doubt whether he is faithfully doing his duty, and honestly

declaring all the counsel of God.”¹⁰

Frankly, if we are living like Jesus, then there are bound to be people who will not speak well of us. We will be hated, excluded, reviled, and spurned on account of our Savior. This should not discourage us; instead, we should rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for Jesus.

So, Jesus gave a warning to the rich. He gave a warning to the full. He gave a warning to the entertained. And he gave a warning to the popular.

Conclusion

Therefore we should heed the warnings about finding ultimate satisfaction with present pleasures.

By pronouncing blessings and woes at the beginning of his “Sermon on the Plain,” Jesus was doing something that the Puritan preachers used to call “dividing the audience.” In other words, he was putting his listeners into two categories. In the process, he was forcing them to choose which kind of life they wanted to lead.

We have to make the same choice:

- Do I want to follow God? And do I want to have God’s blessing?
- Do I want to follow the way of the world? Do I want to experience all the woe it will bring me in the end?
- Which kind of life am I leading right now?

One way to answer these questions is to look at the beginning of the “Sermon on the Plain” in Luke 6:20-26 and see whether the blessings or woes describe the way we live. Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I poor, hungry, sad, and rejected for Jesus’ sake?
- Am I rich, full, entertained, and popular?

¹⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 1 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 182.

Nobody wants to be poor. Nobody wants to be hungry. Nobody wants to be sad. Nobody wants to be rejected.

But, let us remember that Jesus was poor. He was hungry. He was a man of sorrows. And he was rejected to the point of death for the sake of our salvation.

When we think of what Jesus has done for us and for our eternal salvation, it is easy to trade riches, fullness, entertainment, and popularity for poverty, hunger, sadness, and rejection for Jesus' sake, knowing that we have his blessing now and for all eternity. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

Our Father in heaven, your kingdom is completely different than we imagine. Your values are different than the world's values. Your ethics are different than the world's ethics.

You sent your Son, Jesus, to call people to enter the kingdom of God. Help us to enter the kingdom of God.

Help us to heed the warnings about finding ultimate satisfaction with present pleasures. And help us to prize what the world calls undesirable rather than have what the world calls desirable.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!