

Most athletes believe that god/fate is on their side Indeed... when they win a championship... talk of "destiny" fills the postgame locker room. What must be confusing to these highly trained... well-paid professionals is when they *lose* the game. ... Does it mean that God doesn't like them... that He wasn't for them... that they weren't as special as they thought?... Indeed... would any of them have the guts to admit they were destined to lose?

I'm sure many have noticed that we never hear athletes during the postgame interviews thank God for their loss. It seems the god of athletics only shows up when players win.... But ... [the apostle] Paul believed that the God of Israel delights in showing up in the midst of loss — the resurrection of Christ proves it. ... God turns losing into gain... death into life... sorrow into joy... weakness into strength, futility into glory

So I can imagine Jesus throwing his arm around the athlete who's just lost the World Series [or the Super Bowl] and saying ... "*Son of Adam, life is a game and we're all destined to experience disappointment. But the game has not yet ended. There will be a major turn around. Let's go celebrate this good news.*" ... This is what Jesus did in the beatitudes which He gave as He opened His sermon on the mount.

Do you sometimes wonder if God is on your side? ... It will serve us all well to be reminded that the game isn't over... and we need to continue playing by the right rules. Don't abandon God's way. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

As we come to our passage in Luke for today... let's realize where we have just been in the previous verses of Luke chapter six. ... Jesus had sent the religious leaders into a furious rage – because He had been teaching that the Sabbath was made for man – not the other way around. Now things

would be tough for Jesus. He needed to start training men who would carry on His ministry after He left. These men (working as official administrators) would also help ensure Jesus' ministry would move forth.

So Jesus climbed a mountain to be alone with His Heavenly Father. After an all night time of prayer... Jesus selected 12 men from those who had been following Him... and He designated them as His apostles... giving them special authority as His sent ones. ... Next Jesus and His 12 officials descended the mountain until they came to a level place on the mountain... where they met with the crowd... and Jesus delivered His famous "Sermon on the Mount" – at that level place on the mountain.

It is important to understand that the Sermon on the Mount does not deal with **salvation** (as such)... but it lays out for the disciple (and the potential disciple) - how following Jesus... translates into every believer's daily living. (Here is what is expected of you and I.) ... His newly appointed officials and all the rest of His followers (as well) needed this timely instruction. ...

The rules (or principles) for living that Jesus gives us here are revolutionary.

(You know) there is something fascinating about how we react to rules. ... As normal human beings... we resist and resent rules... and yet... something in us demands rules. ... Adults... children... students... or friends... (it doesn't matter)... we all usually meet them with a good deal of resistance. ... Have you ever passed by a sign that said "wet paint" and you just had to test and see if it was true? ... At a local department store... a teenager was overheard saying to a clerk: "*I am crazy about this outfit, but may I exchange it if my mother happens to like it?*" ... We all

know that feeling. Somehow when someone in authority wants to guide us in matters of dress or behavior... we're a little rebellious.

So I am going to pray... and ask that God will hold our hearts **open** to His instruction for us today. ... We will be studying the opening of the Sermon on the Mount... which is known as the "Beatitudes" ... as Luke has recorded them. (They are condensed... from how Matthew presents them in his Gospel... but they are the same.) ... Then (Lord willing) in the weeks to come... we will study the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

- PRAY -

Luke 6:20-26

We have only read the **opening** of the Sermon on the Mount. The entire sermon focuses on **attitudes**. Our passage today (what we just read... "the Beatitudes") deal with what is to be our attitude toward **circumstances**. ... (And just to give you perspective) - Next week we will study "what is to be our attitude toward **people**?" (Luke 6:27-38). ... Then we will deal with: "What is to be our attitude toward **ourselves** (in Luke 6:39-45)... and finally: "What is to be our attitude toward **God**?" (in Luke 6:46-49). ... So... that is the break-down of Jesus' entire Sermon. ... Today we are only dealing with the 1st section: "What is to be our attitude toward our circumstances."

(Now)... Luke gives us just four Beatitudes here... whereas in Matthew's account there are nine. ... Here in Luke's condensed version... Jesus said: "*Blessed are you who are poor*"... "*Blessed are you who are hungry now*"... "*Blessed are you who weep now*"... and "*Blessed are you when men hate*

you and when they exclude you.” ... Then... to make sure we don’t miss the meaning... Jesus adds the four “Woe to you” statements that deal with the exact opposite behaviors to these blessings.

As we work our way through this passage... I am going to present the four blessings **with** each counterpart (it’s woe.) So we will read the blessing and then drop past the other blessings to it’s correlating opposite...

skipping over a verse or two (which we will come back to.) We will take them in their natural pairs (the blessing then the woe that is related to it.)

(But... FIRST... let me point out something that you have probably already noticed.) The Beatitudes **contrast** *false* earthly understandings (they are un-written earthly rules)... that are distinguished from **true** heavenly principles. They teach us how we can be **truly** blessed. ... We see a reversal of common human values. ... (And perhaps most important – notice that...) the Beatitudes contrast our current circumstances *with what our future holds*. (The game is not over yet!)

(Now) here is the first pair (blessing and its woe)... which are in contrast...

Luke 6:20b, 24

Even the Twelve newly selected apostles had to **un**learn many things before they could effectively serve Jesus. ... Furthermore... they had left everything to follow Jesus... and (no doubt) they were asking themselves: “*What is in store for us?*” ... The Lord explained in this teaching... that **the truly blessed life comes not from getting... or from doing... but from being**. ... The emphasis is on Godlike character.

Life was difficult for the people of that day... and there was not much hope that their circumstances would be improved. ... (And) just like people today... many of them thought that happiness came from having great possessions... or holding an exalted position... or enjoying the pleasures and popularity that money can buy.

Imagine how surprised they were when they heard Jesus describe happiness in terms just the opposite of what they expected! ... They discovered that what they needed most was not a change in their circumstances... and what a lesson this is for you and I!

In teaching this lesson... Jesus made an aggressive assertion that **poverty** is blessed. (Boy! What a bombshell that must have been!) ... This is followed by a woe (a stern warning) to those who are rich. ... For the meaning of this bombshell... we must turn to the Old Testament... because Jesus dramatically stated a principle that is rooted there.

Though the Old Testament does not see poverty (per se) as a blessing... Proverbs 30:8-9 **does** say it can be a “curse” or a “blessing”:

Proverbs 30:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ ... give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, ⁹ lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the LORD?” or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

Historically we know that God at times gave wealth to Israel as a blessing. When he delivered His people from Egypt... He blessed them by making the Egyptians’ willingly send them away with tremendous plunder (Exodus 12:35-36)... and then He brought them to a land “flowing with milk and honey”. By the time of King David and King Solomon... national wealth was seen as a sign of divine blessing (1 Chronicles 29:13–16).

Some of the godliest men and women of the Bible were wealthy including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Daniel, David, Job and Lydia. ... (And) There are many godly... wealthy people today... whom God has used in a powerful way because they followed the Lord's leadership about their finances.

(So) in addition to the Scriptural evidence... we also have human experience to teach us. ... Being poor is a miserable situation. ... Anyone who has known genuine poverty will testify that it is a humiliating experience. ... The poor are regularly exploited. ... Ask any of the world's poverty-stricken if it is a blessed state ...and see what they say.

So... how are the poor blessed? Is this just senselessness...? ... No! Let's examine this through the lens of Scripture. Here is the context to these statements.

There were "blessed poor" in Old Testament times. (You see) after the fall of the nation (when God's people were carried into exile in Babylon) the "blessed poor" were the dispossessed... exiled people of God. ... (They were stripped of all their wealth and possessions... but not all of the exiles remained poor in Babylon. Some managed to do very well for themselves... and they did so by compromising. Those who sold out to Babylonian culture... who adopted their way of life... were able to become quite wealthy. ... Those who did not - were the "blessed poor." And when it came time to return to Jerusalem... the uncompromised poor did... while the compromising wealthy stayed.

This is the context for to the most prominent Old Testament quotation that we saw earlier in Luke's Gospel. Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1-2... when

Jesus began His public ministry. ... Its opening line reads, “*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor*” (Luke 4:18a). ... The poor in Isaiah 61 were the exiled people of Israel who had not compromised with the pagan Babylonians. ... They knew that compromise was wrong... and they remained poor... while they longed for the Messiah and His reversal of their condition. They were content to live without immediate pleasures – because they had their eyes fixed on the future – **God’s** promised redemption!

Though several hundred years had passed by the time of Jesus... Israel still was suffering from a succession of foreign oppressors — Persians... Greeks... and now Romans. ... And there were still uncompromised “poor” who longed for the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise. Jesus came to these... and now speaks to them. ... Jesus’ apostles gave up everything to follow Him. They were the uncompromised poor!

Significantly... when Jesus came... He gave the poor good news and established His kingdom by becoming poor Himself. ... His life as an itinerant preacher was singularly poor. Jesus said of His life, “*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*” (9:58). ... Paul said of him:

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)

⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

A disciple of Jesus will not compromise with fallen culture... in order to gain wealth ... Their belief system is firmly rooted in Christ and His divine Word – even though it means that they might remain poor. ... They stand true in

their relationships... and in their public conduct. ... Whatever wealth they have... does **not** come through ethical compromise or the adoption of “*everybody is doing it*” business practices. ... They do not love money. ... They do not hold their earnings tightly... for they have given everything to Jesus.

Consequently... they live under His blessing. “*Blessed are you who are poor*”... says Jesus as He looks directly at His disciples. ... They have His approval... His smile — “*The Applause of Heaven.*”

(But lets be perfectly clear) Jesus does not criticize riches themselves - but their **effect** on people. ... Riches have a common tendency to cause people to feel self-sufficient... and to feel that they have found the happiness for which they were seeking.

Those who try to find fulfillment through wealth from compromise... will find that wealth is the only reward they will ever get... and that it does not last. ... On a receipt they can write the words: “Payment Received in Full.” That is their one and only “happiness.” For their **everlasting** future they have provided ... exactly **nothing!** ... (They have nothing of real value to look forward to.) ... [P A U S E] ...

I believe Jesus is targeting those who are wealthy... and that have become self-dependent... instead of God-dependent people. ... These folks have made their gains to be their god. ... They were callous and lived for themselves... (they have no second thought about compromise)... instead of living for the Lord and helping others in need. ... People that make the mistake of leaving the Lord out of their lives for the sake of money have their only “comfort” now... (and ONLY for the short time they are on earth.)

Jesus' word-bomb must have left His disciples reeling... and the onlookers in shock. ... But before they can recover and adjust - another bomb comes flying.

Luke 6:21a, 25a

The promise to the hungry... (who are also the pious poor)... is the promise of satisfaction from God. ... The promise is also a hope of comfort extended to those who elect to participate in God's plan. ... He leads them into righteousness... while promising to care for them.

The point that Jesus is making... is that the key to the **present**... is the security of our relationship to God as we believe what He says about our future. ... This promise would appeal only to those who have a spiritual perception of reality... and a deep sense of God's being alive and sovereign.

Jesus promises delayed gratification for those who wait. In the literal sense... those who choose not to nourish themselves on ill-gotten food suffer the pangs of hunger in the short term... but will feast on God's provision in the kingdom to come. ... It is the promise of God's (eventual) reversal. ... (Therefore) God calls His disciples to seek spiritual satisfaction above physical satisfaction.

Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

In the figurative sense... those who long for righteousness will be satisfied in time. They will receive righteous standing before God and will witness the Lord flooding the world with His righteousness. "Hunger" is a powerful

description for what our longing for spiritual satisfaction should be. Hunger always drives us with a single focus. We should focus on Christ and His righteousness like a hungry person focuses on food. This passion is *intense*... just like hunger is. ... This passion can be *painful*... just like real hunger can cause pain. ... This passion is a *driving force*... just like hunger can drive a person. ... This passion is a *sign of health*... just like hunger shows health.

God is asking us to hunger for spiritual satisfaction (or righteousness.) Oh! May we never become so packed with plenty... may we never be so satisfied with the things of this life... that we no longer hunger for the “things above.” ... This is the issue that I believe Jesus is addressing here.

Jesus warned that terrible problems and pain were coming for those who were full of temporal delicacies. You will hunger. ... Wait! ... Is it wrong to be full? ... No... of course it's not wrong.

I believe this is a reference to people who are settling for “good” rather than the “best.” They are “carnally full” and “spiritually empty.” ... They are so full of themselves... their own desires and will... or the earthly delicacies that are offered by society... that they have no hunger or thirst for righteousness or the Lord Jesus Christ. (This may include a lot of people who go to church every week.) ... These folks are filled or content which may be good... It might not be wrong or spiritually unhealthy... but they have no desire to pursue the things that will strengthen them spiritually. They have no spiritual hunger.

(LISTEN!) when you allow something in your life... even good things... to consume and become so important to you that you no longer feel you have

no need for the Lord... you no longer have that desire to serve and be close to Him... and you have a satiated sense that you are doing just fine without an earnest seeking of His leading in your life... you are the foolish (“full” person) being addressed in the first part of verse 25.

Luke 6:21b, 25b

This is not an attack on laughter. Jesus does not mean: “*Blessed are grim, cheerless Christians*”... (although some believers have apparently interpreted it this way.) ... Christ certainly is **not** pronouncing a blessing on those who keep a **miserable** disposition.

Actually... humor and laughter are good and necessary for the believer. Solomon says that “*a cheerful heart is good medicine*” (Proverbs 17:22). The need for laughter in the church was underlined by missionary statesman Oswald Sanders with these questions:

Should we not see that lines of laughter about the eyes are just as much marks of faith as are the lines of care and seriousness? Is laughter pagan? We have already allowed too much that is good to be lost to the church and cast many pearls before swine. A church is in a bad way when it banishes laughter from the sanctuary and leaves it to the cabaret, the nightclub, and the toastmasters.

So... what is this beatitude getting at...? ... What Jesus assaults (here) is the superficial... shallow **mirth** that characterizes the world. (It is the inability to weep at the **right** things...and the **ability** to laugh at the wrong things.) ... (The popular television sitcoms clearly demonstrates this.)

We are called to weep over lost souls... over people who will go into eternal darkness without Christ. ... We are to weep over the world’s misery... over the injustice that falls on so many helpless people... over the unfairness that victimizes the weak... over child abuse... over battered

women... over adultery... over divorce... over betrayals... over rejection... over loneliness... over those who now laugh but who... unless they turn to Christ... will suffer God's condemnation forever.

The regenerated learn to love God to such an extent that they weep because of "all the deeds of ungodliness which the ungodly have committed in such an ungodly manner." Their weeping is God-centered. It grieves them that God... (*their own* God whom they love)... is being dishonored.

We weep now... but look forward to the eternal joy that will be ours in heaven... because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Luke 6:22, 26

The fact is... everyone who lives like Jesus will be persecuted. ... Jesus stated in John 15:20:

John 15:20 (ESV)

²⁰ *Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.*

Paul advised Timothy:

2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

¹² *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*

Paul also warned the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 (ESV)

³ *that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.* ⁴ *For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.*

Likewise, he and Barnabas told the Christians in Antioch and elsewhere:

Acts 14:22 (ESV)

²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Few people in our time have understood and expressed this better than Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master ... that is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the church as the community of those "who are persecuted and martyred for the Gospel's sake." ...

Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ... and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. (In fact) it is a joy and a token of His grace.

During a stressful time in Charles Spurgeon's life when he was depressed by criticism... his wife took a sheet of paper... printed the eight beatitudes on it in large... old English script... and tacked it to the ceiling over his bed. She wanted the reality to saturate his mind morning and evening: *everyone who lives righteously will be persecuted.*

On the flipside... Jesus tells us: "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you.*" ... This cannot happen to a Christian - apart from some sacrifice of principle. (Yes... we should be well thought of by "outsiders" - 1 Timothy 3:7)... but that is different from having an all-consuming **drive** for universal popularity.) ... If we live for acceptance and popularity with people who live according to the spirit of the present evil age... we belong to that evil age...

and (consequently) share in its judgment. ... The desire for popularity can become a self-focused spiritual anesthetic.

(But) a believer who is persecuted because of Christ - ***is truly alive***. ... There is an old saying: “*Even a dead dog can swim with the tide.*” To swim against the tide you must be alive and kicking. (LISTEN!) Being yes-men and yes-women of ungodly culture... means drifting with the dead.

Jesus warned against people-pleasing. (Consider this) - If a disciple’s perspective on God... morality... spirituality... and how the world should work... *doesn’t ruffle some non-Christian feathers*... there is something terribly wrong. ... It is quite possible he or she has compromised the message or watered down the gospel for the sake of political or social gain. ... Woe to that person!

Have you ever been *hated* for Christ? ... Have you ever been *excluded* for Christ? ... Do you ever suffer *insult* for Christ? ... Then you are blessed with special benefits of grace from Him.

(LISTEN!) ... ***When the world treats us the way they treated Jesus... it is evidence that we are starting to live as He lived... and that is a compliment.*** ... [P A U S E] ... All of the saints of the ages were treated this way... so we are in good company! ... (Furthermore) God promises a special reward for all those who are faithful to Him. The game is not over and the best is yet to come!

Luke 6:23

“*Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy.*” ... There are four things we need to see here. This is **(1)** a surprising command—“*Rejoice.*” ... You would expect to see “*pray*” instead of “*rejoice.*”

It is **(2)** a strenuous command. “*Rejoice in that day.*” Any other day would be easier in which to rejoice. God does not pamper us and make us soft by giving us easy-to-do commands.

It is **(3)** a strong command. “*Leap for joy*” which is more than just a casual enduring smile once in a while... and it is **(4)** a sanctifying command. (This is the one that I most want you to recognize.) ... **Rejoicing will honor God more than rage.** ... In the Greek this is what is called an “aorist imperative.” ... (You see) Luke puts a note of urgency to the command (“do this now!!!”)

God... (Who is in heaven)... knows what we are suffering... and honors such faithfulness. ... The promise calls for us to look beyond our present circumstances... and it encourages us to see God’s perspective on suffering. ... The game is not over. ... Jesus says that commitment will be vindicated and rewarded. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

The Beatitudes show that the world’s values and God’s values are very different (indeed.) ... Where is the best place to rest your sense of well-being: in the short-term present... or in the eternal future? ... That is the issue Jesus raises with His beatitudes. ... He says that His followers are to be dependent on God... believing His way is best. ... It may mean poverty... rejection... persecution... and pain now. ... But you and I must rest assured that God will bless us abundantly... in our future. ... So... delay your need for immediate gratification. You have a much greater satisfaction coming.

Stay in the game. Place your faith in Jesus. Play by His rules. The game is definitely not over! There is a tremendous reversal coming.