

## “Say Whaaat?”

1 Corinthians 15:17-20; Luke 6:17-26

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Okay, all you Bible scholars out there, as you heard me read the passage from Luke, did it sound familiar? Did it remind you of another Gospel reading that features repeated references to the phrase, **“Blessed are you...”**? Very similar language to that famous portion of Matthew’s Gospel, in Chapter 5, known as the... **“Beatitudes.”** Or, as I like to call them, the ‘BE-ATTITUDES.’ This was part of the larger body of the teachings of Jesus known as the **“Sermon on the Mount.”** Do you know WHY Matthew 5:3-11 are called the ‘Beatitudes?’ Because each statement begins with the Latin word *“beati”* ... which means ‘Blessed,’ or ‘happy,’ or ‘rich.’

That word ‘blessed’ really should represent something much deeper than the words ‘rich,’ or ‘happy,’ however. ‘Riches’ are usually associated with financial, *material* wealth and possessions. To be ‘Happy’ is much more transient, superficial, dealing with the ups and downs of emotion... whereas ‘blessed’ is more lasting, deeper... it has much more to do with *spiritual* well-being than *emotional*. It is such a faith-filled aspect of this word that when I ask someone how they’re doing, and they say ‘blessed,’ I know that he/she is most likely a person of faith. I would encourage you to try it: when someone asks you how you are, reply **‘blessed!’** OR, if you want to really ‘take a walk on the wild side,’ try saying my favorite, **‘Too blessed to be stressed.’** And SEE what the response is. But be careful... they *just* might ask you WHY you are so ‘blessed’...

Back to our passage, there are those who think that here Luke was actually ‘retelling’ that same experience on the mountainside described by his fellow disciple. But there are distinct differences in the two. For one, in *Matthew* Jesus left the crowds to go up the mountain with the disciples... to ‘get away.’ In our reading from *Luke*, Jesus is surrounded by **“a great crowd”** that had come to Him for healing, and in the midst of doing so, **“he looked up at his disciples,”** and begins speaking. Perhaps the clearest way to know that these are not one-in-the-same is that Luke makes a point to say that **“He (JESUS) came down with them and stood on a level place.”** (*Luke 6:17*) He was coming ‘down’ from the mountainside after having taken a BIG step in choosing His 12 disciples. And He **“stood on a level place.”** That would be why that this passage is also known as the **“Sermon on the Plain.”** The similarity

between the 'Sermon on the Mount' and the 'Sermon on the Plain' is NOT because they are the same story repeated, but because the point they BOTH make bears repeating...

As we consider some of the seemingly minor opening details of this story, I think that it reveals some aspects of the **character**, the **nature**, of Jesus. After the 'lofty' task of 'commissioning' his first leaders... those who will be at this side for the next 3 years, learning and preparing for the life-changing journey ahead of them... Jesus comes down from that 'mountain-top experience' to minister to the people. Jesus always made time to be on that 'level plain' with regular folks, not just his elite circle of leaders. He always made a point to come down to the level of common folk. Particularly ones that would be 'marginalized' in that society: women, children, those who suffered with physical or mental illness. ***"A great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon."*** (Luke 6:17)

Not only had a large number of people gathered, but those four cities would tell us that they were both Jews and Gentiles. We are reminded that Jesus' message was not just for his own countrymen, those with the same background as His, but for ALL people. In the same way that WE must remember that the Good News of the Gospel is not just for those who look just like us, or have the same background or ethnicity. Like Jesus told His disciples... US... as He was to physically leave the earth... ***"Go and preach the Gospel to ALL..."*** (Matthew 28:19)

And Jesus, of course, led by example the importance of 'preaching and teaching.' He, in the later words of Paul, was always ***"prepared to give the reason for the hope"*** that He embodied. AS SHOULD WE. It says that those great multitudes had gathered ***"to hear him... AND be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured."*** (Luke 6:18)

The people came to HEAR what Jesus had to say... but they also wanted to SEE His words in **action**. They had real needs for healing. Illnesses of body, mind, and spirit. And while it doesn't say anything about any **words** that Jesus spoke to those hurting, 'huddled masses,' it DOES describe his **deeds**. Jesus put his '**ministry** where his **mouth** was.' He went right to work... ***"for power came out from him and healed all of them."*** (Luke 6:19)

More than TELL of God's power, Jesus SHOWED God's power. That it's hard for others to understand the deep spiritual truths of knowing God when they are experiencing such physical

and mental pain. Just as Jesus showed his concern for their needs in REAL, tangible ways, so too must we. Like that saying goes that I've shared with you before... even though learned in a sales context, it certainly applies to our ministry experiences... 'people don't **care** what you **know** until they **know** that you **care**.' It is hard for people to HEAR us when they can't SEE past their own circumstances. Most often, others must SEE our faith in action, showing concern for their needs, before they will LISTEN to what we have to say.

But what really struck me about this whole experience is not simply what Jesus did in 'showing the love' to that 'great crowd of witnesses.' It's what happens while He is in the very MIDST of healing those who were suffering. I have this image of Jesus kneeling down, laying his hand on a crippled man, a sobbing woman, offering them a healing touch of God, and in the very midst of that He enters into a 'teachable moment' with his 'newly-minted' apostles.

Luke says that "**He (Jesus) looked up at his disciples and said: 'Blessed are you who are poor... hungry...weep... when people hate you, exclude you, revile you, defame you...'**" (Luke 6:20-22) Here we have these followers of this miracle-working man of God, who has just anointed them with the lofty title of '**apostle,**' whom they are watching perform incredible miracles of healing. They are basking in the Leonardo DiCaprio moment in "Titanic"... '*We're on top of the world!*'... and here Jesus tells them that as a result of their being such 'men of distinction,' they will be 'blessed'... BLESSED to be 'poor,' 'hungry,' 'weeping,' 'hated,' 'excluded,' 'reviled,' and 'defamed!' SAY WHAAAT?!

When we consider their backgrounds, their vocations, obviously many of them were fishermen. Perhaps not the *most* prestigious job, but certainly not the *least*. Others included a tax collector (the least admirable, but most lucrative), probably a few tradesmen, and a religious 'zealot' (member of a religious sect). The only one who apparently had real financial issues was Judas... yes, the keeper of the 'treasury' for Jesus and his disciples. (And we SEE where HIS mismanagement of funds got him). My point is that these were folks held in fairly high regard, for the most part. Yet Jesus is saying to them, 'WOE unto you because you have some money... WOE unto you because you are pretty well-fed... WOE unto you because you're generally in good spirits... WOE unto you cause people respect you.' Say WHAAAT?

And in comparison to THOSE guys, we are REALLY well off! Everyone in this room is QUITE **rich** in comparison to the rest of the world. I sure don't miss many **meals**... do you? (I know that I could sure *afford* to!) I most certainly do a lot of **laughing**. (Hey, 'fat, dumb, and happy'... that's ME!) Knowing what fine, upstanding citizens you all are, I think that most people **speak well of you**. And these are BAD things? Say WHAAAT?

Well, I don't think that Jesus is saying that it's 'bad' to have some degree of possessions, to have adequate food, to have a good nature, to be respected. But in general, we DO have much more than we NEED. As I said, especially in comparison to the rest of the world. How conscious ARE we of how much good some of our 'embarrassment of riches' could do for others... across town, or around the world? As readily as Jesus would give of himself for the benefit of others, how do WE compare? Yes, I know... not a fair comparison, is it...

Perhaps Jesus is, in the words of Psalms, "**searching and testing us**" to see where our heart is. What is our 'end game?' Are we more concerned about building an 'earthly kingdom' to leave behind for our family, or how what we do here contributes to a 'heavenly kingdom' for God? How are you and I leaving a **lasting legacy** that God will be pleased with? How are our daily actions done "**on account of the Son of Man**"... or, simply 'on account of our bottom line?'

We are called as present-day apostles not because we have lived, or seek to live, exemplary lives as Jesus did. We are not to be followers of Christ because of what we might gain in the 'here and now.' In Paul's words, "**If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.**" (1 Cor. 15:18) It is that resurrection hope that WE are to have that should guide our daily lives, and our interaction with others. Whatever sacrifices we are called to make today will be MORE than made up for in our life in the world to come. **Ultimately, what is most important in our lives is not the reward we receive on earth, but what is to come in heaven.** More than anything we can do for ourselves, let us remember the words of Jesus in *John 14*: "**Trust in God. Trust also in me.**" BECAUSE, the absolute last thing any of us wants to hear, when God is asked if we can enter into our heavenly reward, is... "**Say WHAAAT?**"

**CHARGE/BLESSING:** Today we considered that *'beati'*-ful word that could be translated 'Happy' OR 'Blessed.' 'HAPPY' in a more earthly, present sense... and 'blessed' in a more heavenly, eternal sense. Here's a final Scripture using that 'beati-ful' word: *"Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods."* (Ps 40:4)

As you and I seek to 'put our trust in the Lord' ... NOT in our own pride or 'false gods' of this world... may we KNOW that we can experience BOTH 'happiness' in an 'earthly, present' sense... and 'blessings' in a 'heavenly, eternal' sense.

HOW? All because of the "Spirit of the living God..."