

February 16, 2025
Luke 6:17-26

“Blessed in an Upside-Down World”

Perspective matters. In fact, our perspective colors everything we see in life. We tend to look at life like a pyramid. If life is like a pyramid, where on the pyramid do we want to be? At the top, right? Everybody wants to be at the top. It doesn't matter who you are. Sports teams want to win championships. Businesspeople want the most successful businesses. Politicians want the most power. Parents want the best kids. Isn't this our perspective on life? By nature, we look at life like a pyramid, and we make life a fight to get to the top!

And Jesus turns all that upside-down. Jesus has a completely different perspective on life. Jesus takes that pyramid, flips it upside-down, and says, “Do you know the best place? It's not at the top. It's at the bottom.” Huh? Jesus' whole life, from his birth in a manger to his death on a cross, flipped everything upside-down. And not just for Jesus. For you and me.

At the start of his ministry, Jesus preached his most famous sermon: The Sermon on the Plains. It starts with these upside-down words: “*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.*” And we say, Huh? Blessed are you who are poor?” That goes against our perspective on life. Maybe people were different back then. Maybe people looked at life differently. No, they didn't! In Jesus' day, do you know who was considered blessed? The rich and the powerful. Sound familiar? In Jesus' day, if you were poor, you were considered rejected by God. Sound familiar? Jesus turns our perspective of blessing upside-down.

Notice that Jesus isn't talking about money. There are rich and poor believers in Jesus. He says, “*Blessed are you who are poor.*” What does that mean? When Martin Luther died, they found a piece of paper in his pocket. Can you guess what that piece of paper said? *Wir sind alle Bettler*. That means, “We are all beggars.” That's what Martin Luther carried around in his pocket, “We are all beggars.” What do you think he meant? We bring nothing to God. We bring nothing to God but our sins. We are all beggars. Are you ready to admit that? Then you're poor in spirit.

Jesus has used poverty as a metaphor for those who are true citizens of the kingdom of God, because they, and they alone, have recognized their spiritual destitution before God. They have realized that the world has nothing to contribute to them, and so they come to God, before him as beggars. Having let go of the world completely, they've extended empty hands up to God, reaching out to him for mercy, for divine mercy, and God is very pleased to give it to them. When God gives, he gives without measure. He doesn't hold anything back. He lavishly supplies them with the entire kingdom, which is a complete reversal of fortune.

But these poor, as you see in verse 20, even as actual possessors of the kingdom of God right now, they have not yet entered the full inheritance of that kingdom, and that's what verse 21 is talking about. This is the already / not yet aspect of these kingdom promises, which is a common theme throughout the New Testament. Jesus

had already, he has already inaugurated the kingdom of God, but he has not yet introduced the fullness of the kingdom of God in all its power. So, verse 21 pictures the current condition of the poor as those who are hungering now and those who are weeping now.

This group of people are those who *are* hungering. They are those who *are* weeping. That is present tense, means like a continuous state of being. It's an ongoing condition of their experience. And that means, at present, for those who are, the poor, there is no lasting relief here in this life, here, now, from hungering and thirsting. Their full consolation and the permanent change in their condition, that's not yet. But it will come later.

And then, Jesus communicates to us the full assurance of our hope which is this: The present conditions of hungering and weeping, those conditions will one day be completely erased. Those conditions will one day be utterly forgotten in a total eclipse of God's abundance. The magnitude of future blessing is so staggering and the reversal of fortune, here, is so drastic. It's almost like a reversal of what Joseph interpreted for Pharaoh. It's like the seven fat years swallowing up the seven lean years. And those years of plenty are not just seven, but they will never end.

Jesus gives not just confident hope; he also gives abundant hope. Our current condition of hunger is going to be swallowed up by full satisfaction, and our condition of weeping will be engulfed in pure delight, in righteous laughter. And when the kingdom arrives in its fullness, fortunes will be reversed, as those who are now hungry are filled with complete satisfaction, and those who are weeping now are overcome with joy.

You also love future tense verbs. Future tense verbs like, "You shall be satisfied." And "you shall laugh." You love future tense verbs! Because with them, Jesus communicates to us the full assurance of our hope which is this: The now conditions of hungering and weeping, those conditions will one day be completely erased. Those conditions will one day be utterly forgotten in a total eclipse of God's abundance. The magnitude of future blessing is so staggering and the reversal of fortune, here, is so drastic. It's almost like a reversal of what Joseph interpreted for Pharaoh. It's like the seven fat years swallowing up the seven lean years. And those years of plenty are not just seven, but they will never end.

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Now, look at this, "He will wipe every tear away from their eyes. Death shall be no more, neither shall," they'll be, "there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." I love that promise, don't you? Jesus said, "Blessed are those who weep now, for you shall laugh." And when we come

to Revelation 21, we find out here that it's God himself who will personally wipe every tear of weeping, of crying, of sadness, of mourning, away from our eyes.

Consider this when we are hated, excluded and reject us as evil. We know following Jesus would always be a rejected counterculture. The values of the Kingdom are not the values of most people. The demands of the King are thought to be silly, harsh, or judgmental by those outside the Kingdom of God. Because many of us live in a watered down, pseudo-Christian culture, we are sometimes surprised when Christians are ridiculed, ostracized, and persecuted. Christians who truly seek to follow Jesus are frequently the objects of disdain. Let's make sure that if we suffer for the name of Christ, it is because we have been people of godly character and respect, not because we have been obnoxious or self-righteous. At the same time, let's also remember that suffering for the name of Jesus is part of being a Christian. We rejoice rather than being surprised, let's view these troubles as opportunities to show the character and grace of our Lord! When we do, we can be sure of God's blessing!

We rejoice, just like the ancestors treated the prophets. The prophet Jeremiah understands that *"blessed are those who trust in the Lord"* (Jeremiah 17:7) and this resonates with what Jesus is saying. Knowing God's presence should enable us to be less anxious and continue to bear fruit, especially if our spiritual roots are planted in God. Just like the "tree planted by water [whose] leaves shall stay green" (Jeremiah 17:8) God will nourish us even in the time of drought.

Are you starting to see Jesus' upside-down perspective?

Jesus changes us. Jesus changes our heart. Jesus changes our life. Jesus changes our perspective. You can't hear Jesus speak and walk out of here thinking we are special because of our money or our looks. It's all God's grace. You know God's grace! Jesus changes your perspective on everything.

In the 1930's in response to the emergence of the German Christian movement and the intrusions of the National Socialists in the life the church, an opposition movement emerged that called for a free and confessing church. Swiss born theologian Karl Barth was right in the thick of everything. It was in the context of these events in Germany that the Confessing Church called for a national synod of the German churches to be held in Barmen for the purpose of reiterating their common faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and declaring that this faith compelled their resistance to Hitler and the imposition of his National Socialist agenda on the church in Germany.

The heart of the declaration is found in the six theses. Each of the affirmations of the declaration are followed with corresponding denials to affirm that the "yes" of God in the gospel entails a necessary "no" to beliefs and practices that are contrary to Christian faith and life. The Declaration of Barmen is a modern blessings and woes, proclaiming what the reign of God should be, and firmly taking a stand against that which would threaten the very gospel Jesus proclaimed. The document turned everything upside-down.

Karl Barth contended that Nazi Germany was like the angel Lucifer, who desired glory, power and dominion, that belonged to God alone. As Lucifer is responsible and guilty for his sins against God, so also was Germany. Barth would not sign a loyalty oath to Hitler. After the war, Barth encouraged his fellow Swiss citizens to stand by no longer as spectators but to step up in Christian service, to reach out and become instruments of grace and mercy. In other words, to turn the lives of the people of Germany upside down. Barth reminds us today, that God grants new beginnings, that God grants mercy and forgiveness, regardless of past transgressions. Truly, blessed in an upside-down world.

In conclusion, we don't much like being at the bottom of the pyramid looking up, either. From the level plain, Jesus stands looking us in the eye. God sees us. God sees us, whether we are poor or rich, and Christ names our poverty or our wealth for what it is. Jesus isn't encouraging us to get rich or become poor. Jesus is inviting us to put everything at his disposal and follow him. He sees you. He knows you – the real you, not the good face you put on so others will think well of you.

Jesus stands on a level plain with us, showing us God's Kingdom in the middle of our chaos, in the middle of our need for healing. We are challenged every day to clarify our values and examine what are the things in life that we will take a stand for in relation to faithful living, just as the Christian leaders did in the 1930's against Adolph Hitler. Blessed be the ones who can live in the upside-down world of God, for them the kingdom of God is revealed. Amen.