

This Sunday's texts:

Daniel 7:1-3; 15-18

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:17-26

Living in Light of Eternity

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The Gospel reading for today is from the Gospel of Luke, chapter six:

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of His disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. Looking at His disciples, he said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 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. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. 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. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets."

Good morning and greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. "[T]he holy people of the Most High will receive the Kingdom and will possess it forever – yes, for ever and ever."¹ Great words for us today as we recognize All Saints' Day in the life of the church, a day that we remember those who have gone before us, those that we will one day join for all of eternity in His perfect kingdom. And today's texts, the Gospel, in particular, are perfect for us on a day like this. They are because they help us who are still here to reorient our lives in light of eternity. It is a call to live today with a heavenly perspective.

You see, in this text today, we are looking at these words of Jesus where He lays out a description of what it means to be "blessed." A word that, in both Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek, would translate well

¹ Daniel 7:18

as both “blessed” or “happy.” And along with this series of *blessings*, He includes a series of *woes* - challenging words of Jesus that remind us of something that those who have gone before us know full well. There is so much more to life than just this life. The years we have on this earth are but a small part of something much bigger.

And I hope that we would remember as we get into this text today that the point of the Gospel is not to make you comfortable, but to give you the life that is truly life. This world that we live in, wants you to calibrate your life for comfort, for pleasure, for security, for today. We’re bombarded with messages over and over again, wherever we look, wherever we go, promising that this product you buy or the next experience you pursue is going to be the thing that makes you happy, the thing that you’re missing. It’s something like this: Blessed are you who buy what we are selling. And yet, woe to you who do not receive a Lexus for Christmas this year.

Jesus invites us to calibrate our lives, not for today, but for eternity, and in doing so, be ready and available to receive the blessings of His Kingdom here today. So let’s get into the text.

Jesus says ... blessed are the poor..., blessed are you who the hungry..., you who mourn..., blessed are you when you are treated poorly...² These words of Jesus seem ... not ... quite ... right. If I had to pick today: rich or poor, would I rather be hungry or well-fed, laughing or crying, hated or well-liked, the answer seems obvious to me. Right? We’re going to come back to this. We’ll do it shortly, but before we do, I want to keep going with the text and I think when we come back to these words of Jesus, we’re going to see that they make an awful lot of sense.

Jesus goes on to say, woe to you who are rich, woe to you who are well fed, you who laugh, woe to you when everyone speaks well of you...³ These words seem backward too. Right? But I think if we sit with them for a second, actually they make a lot of sense.

Think about it. If Jesus was wrong, then the richest people among us would be the happiest. If Jesus was wrong, then those who are the most famous would be having the best experience of this life. But we know full well that no matter how good the food is or how much of it there is, eventually,

² Referencing parts of Luke 6:20b-22

³ Referencing parts of Luke 6:

you're hungry again. No matter how good the party was, you still wake up the next morning and gotta clean up the mess. We know that those who spend themselves to earn the love and affection of others are on the fast track to being unhappy with themselves.

You see, here's what Jesus is getting at. He says how sad is it to be in a position where you are convinced that *that* is as good as it gets in this life. That chasing money and people-pleasing is the best that this life we have been given has to offer and that when you get them, you will be happy and that happiness will last. Yet, we know these things are fleeting. They come and go, and when we die, they don't go with us.

A few years ago, I heard an interview with somebody that really stuck with me. It was with a guy named Mike Posner. Maybe you've heard of him, maybe you haven't. He's a famous, young Santa-lookalike and hip-hop artist. Over the last decade, he has had his hands on some of the biggest songs in rap, hip-hop, and pop music. I won't blame you if you haven't heard of him. Not long ago, he had the song that was the single most viewed video on YouTube, with 1.5 billion views. And not two years later, he describes the experience of struggling to get people to call him back. He talked about this experience of achieving wealth, fame, and everything he ever dreamed of at the age of 22 and what he learned from that experience. I want you to listen to what he has to say today:

In hindsight, I feel really blessed to have had that experience at that age, and I'll tell you why. Before that, I thought success, popularity, attention from the opposite sex, I thought these things were going to make my experience of life better and so I set about acquiring them and I was pretty good at acquiring them. And what happened was, I'm 22 and I get all that stuff and I realize I'm 0% happier, 0% more comfortable in my skin, 0% more secure. So if it's not that stuff, then what?⁴

"If it's not that stuff, then what?" That's the big question. So many of us spend our lives chasing "that stuff." But what if Mike is right? What if *Jesus* is right? That we might be pursuing those things to fill a void, a need deep inside that they ultimately can't because they were never intended to.

⁴ Harbinger, Jordan, interview with Mike Posner, The Jordan Harbinger Show, *Mike Posner: 31 Minutes to the Other Side of Fame*, podcast audio, March 4, 2019. <https://www.jordanharbinger.com/mike-posner-31-minutes-to-the-other-side-of-fame/>.

I want you to bear with me for a second. You probably thought, Pastor Jim, he doesn't preach in the pulpit, and then Joe is going to preach in the sacristy?! [Joe goes to the sacristy and returns holding one end of a long piece of rope. The rope is so long it trails all the way to the other end still in the sacristy.] I got this rope with me today. It's pretty long and I'd like you to imagine not that it ends in the sacristy, but that it keeps on going.



You see, this rope is your life. This little red part on the end [the end of the rope Joe is holding is taped together with about two inches of red tape], that's the years we have on this earth. So many people spend themselves on the little red part without too much thought about what happens in the rest of the rope. I understand why. Even Christians, it's not that we don't have faith, but it's that sometimes the things that are right in front of us, even when they're not the biggest or most significant. The things that are right in front of us seem like the most important.

Take a look at the wall behind me. You might recognize it. That is the sun. It is 865,370 miles across. You learn something every day. And this [pulls out a \$20] is a \$20 bill – six inches across and two and a half inches tall, about 15 square inches or so. Yet, here's what I can do. If I walk outside, I look up on a clear day and I could see that 865,370 mile-across sun burning hot in its blazing glory millions of miles away. And I could take 15 square inches [that \$20 bill] and [holding it up] block out my entire view of the sun. Things that are actually small when they're right in our faces can block out our view of the big things.

That's why we can get so focused in this life on what happens on the red part of the rope. When we get too focused on it, too focused on that little piece, we can miss that it is just one small part of something so much bigger. Jesus says woe to you who are living *like this* [pointing to that red part of the rope] is all that there is to this life. In another place, He says it in a different way, "What good is it for a person to gain the whole world, but lose their soul?"⁵

⁵ Matthew 16: 26

The words of Jesus today remind us to refocus our lives and to live in light of eternity. So here's where we come back to the beginning of the text today. Where Jesus gives this list of unpleasant things, poverty, hunger, weeping, being rejected. He gives this list and then He says if this is you, then you are blessed.

And here's why: when Jesus says that when you're in this place you are blessed, it almost certainly never feels like it. It's never a place that we want to be. And yet, He doesn't just say you are blessed *because* you are poor, because you're hungry or sad or rejected. He says that you are blessed in that space for a reason.

So I want to look back at the text again today. Read it one more time and see the reasons why. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you ... Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven."⁶

I won't walk us through each of these today, but I will point out something interesting about them. Each one of these things – poverty, hunger, sadness - puts us in a place of need, a place where we are aware of how poor and fragile we really are in this life. And it is when we are in that space, when we have nothing, when our hands are empty, it is that exact place that we are most ready to extend our empty hands and receive from God.

We receive from Him His offer of new life, abundant life, and eternal life that He offers to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. It is in that place of need where we're reminded that our hope isn't in worldly things, but that we have been "marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance..."⁷ which is the kingdom of God.

So when you've come to the end of your rope, when you're at the end of thinking that putting your hope in yourself and the things you can get for yourself is gonna work, then you can put your hope in something that is guaranteed.

That, my brothers and sisters in Christ, is the good news of the Gospel. It's the good news that our hope is not in things that won't last. It's not in things that are dependent on our own power, our own ability to achieve, our

⁶ Luke 6:20-23

⁷ Ephesian 1:13

own personal holiness. No. Our hope is in the generosity and love of a God who gives Himself wholly to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. The God who invites you to His table and to all who would come, He gives himself wholly and unreserved, His body broken and His blood shed, food and drink that truly satisfy. And Jesus says, “Woe to you who hear that invitation to the table of our Lord and says ‘No, thanks. I already ate.’” What Jesus offers, we could never afford. We could never earn and never deserve. It is too precious. And yet He offers it freely to all who would come.

I want to close today with a personal story. About nine months ago, I was sitting with my daughter, Kayla in the kitchen. She was playing and she kept pointing to something on the counter. She really wanted it. It turned out it was a ladle – your standard kitchen ladle, nice black plastic. She pointed at it. She needed it. So I grabbed it and I handed it to her, and she proceeded to delight herself in the inexhaustible wonders of the “ladle.” It was like the greatest thing she had ever wrapped her little fingers around. She waved it around and she played like it was the greatest thing she had ever seen.

And I remember, at that moment, having this thought that almost brought me to tears. I looked at my daughter and thought, “Kayla, you have no idea how much I love you, and no idea how much better it gets than just the ladle. One day, I’ll take you to Disneyland. I’ll hand you the keys to your first car. I’ll give your hand in marriage to the man who will be your husband. Kayla, I promise you, it gets so much better.”

Today, in the words of the Gospel, Jesus invites each and every one of us to let go of our white-knuckled grip on the ladle because your loving Father has so much more for you than that. Don’t just live for today, live in light of eternity.

Let’s pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for Your love for us, that there’s no end to it. There’s nothing we can do to deserve it and nothing we can do to spoil it. You pour it out on Your people and with Your love, You give us Your promises that our hope and our life are secure in Your hands because You are faithful and You’ll never let us down. And so, Lord, we pray that You would open the eyes of our hearts to see the ways in which You are blessing us, the ways in which You are drawing us to a deeper and deeper faith in You. Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord in whose name we pray. Amen.