

BLESSINGS AND WOES



Scripture:

Psalm 98

¹O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory. ²The LORD has made known his victory; he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations. ³He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

⁴Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

⁵Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. ⁶With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

⁷Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. ⁸Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy ⁹at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Luke 6:20-31

In the book of Luke chapter 6, verses 20 to 31, Jesus is teaching his followers how to live lives of blessedness. At this point in his ministry he has a great crowd of followers who want to learn from him and be healed. So he goes up on a big hill to speak so all can hear. He begins with blessings and closes with woes and commands.

Let us, his present day followers, apply this lesson to our lives today.

²Then he looked up at 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 will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

²²“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors 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 will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



BLESSINGS AND WOES

Jesus came to show us the way to abundant life, and he starts his ministry with a big sermon. In the book of Matthew, it is recorded as the Sermon on the Mount. In the book of Luke, it is recorded a bit differently. Luke’s sounds a lot like Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount,” but Luke’s rendition is shorter. He includes half of the Beatitudes found in Matthew. But Luke adds something along with his short list of blessings. Luke includes a list of woes.

One commentator I read said that any pastor preaching on this text should put on a hard hat and protective gear, because there is no way to approach these blessings without hearing the woes that go with them. And the woes are powerful!

CHRIST’S FIRST SERMON

This was Christ’s first sermon. He preached it soon after recruiting his main disciples of women and men. Already, the word had gone out about Jesus that he could heal and that he spoke with courageous authority, as if he was speaking from the mind of God. So multitudes came to listen to these words on the day they were spoken.

At first, I’m sure the people were confused. The Jewish Roman way of understanding the poor was that they were cursed and would remain that way, so why bother with them? Yet, here, Jesus is saying the poor are blessed. How strange! Then he adds that the hungry are blessed. How can those who are starving and those who weep be blessed?

Imagine the confusion on the faces of the people in the crowd listening to these

words as Jesus is turning upside down their understanding of the plight of the people in their society. The poor, the hungry, the mournful were all looked upon with pity and indifference. Never before had someone challenged them to see their plight as blessed.

I’m sure they were wondering, “Who is this guy?”

BEATITUDES AND “WOETITUDES”

Pastor JoAnne Taylor suggests that we “Look carefully at what Jesus is saying in these Beatitudes and their matching “woe-itudes.” What do all the blessings have in common? Seeking God. What do all the woes have in common? Seeking ourselves.”

**The message is pretty simple:
We are blessed when we seek God.
But often it takes some hardship
to happen before we truly realize
we need God. Right?
And then the rest of the message
is: We are full of woe whenever we
are full of ourselves and think
we are not in need of God.
When we go through life focusing
on fulfilling our own needs,
(oblivious to the needs of others),
that is a “woeful” way to live
in the eyes of God.**

SEEK GOD AND BE HUMBLE

When Jesus blesses the poor, the hungry and the mournful, he knows that those

people going through those struggles are more in touch with God than those who are going through life thinking they are doing fine without God. There are great blessings in seeking God and being humble enough to be aware of our need for God. Being poor and hungry, mourning and feeling persecuted are all states of being that humble us, and that humility often paves the way for an opening to God.

The rich and self-serving find no need for God in their lives, until they realize the world doesn't have enough riches to fill that empty place in their soul waiting to be filled with faith in God. When we take material blessings for granted, or think that we have acquired our many blessings by our own efforts alone, we forget to give thanks to God. Our prideful self-reliance will eventually bring us woes.

SOME FINAL COMMANDS

And in the grand finale of this sermon, Jesus gives some final commands to help us all avoid the woes.... *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.*

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

It's an easy list to accomplish, right? You might even listen to this list and just dismiss it as impossible. But remember, with God, nothing is impossible, and Jesus spoke these words very seriously.

If you truly seek abundant life, this is how you live it. If you want to understand what it truly means to be blessed in this world and avoid the woes he warns us of, then you do all you can to keep these commands and try your very best to live in this way as a follower of Jesus Christ.

PROTECTIVE GEAR AND HARD HAT

Now this is where the protective gear and hard hat comes in handy, because Jesus is saying to us today: If you are not making an effort to accomplish this list in your own life, then you can not honestly call yourself a Christian. These are the basics of being a follower of Jesus Christ. They are the essentials and commands that can't be ignored or put aside. (Are there rocks coming at me?)

THE GOOD NEWS

The good news is: When we fail we are forgiven because Christ died on the cross for each one of us. And the abundant life that comes from trying again to live this way of Christ is full of blessings.

When we bless those that curse us, turn the other cheek, and give away more than people ask for, we receive that heavenly peace from God that surpasses all understanding. When God's peace fills our souls, it strengthens our faith and makes us resilient people better able to deal with the stresses in our unpredictable world.

SURVIVING TRAGEDY

I recently read an amazing story from Rwanda that illustrates how deep faith can help us survive tragedy. A pregnant Christian Rwandan mother was caught up in the 1994 genocide when the Hutus and the Tutsi's were fighting. Her village was destroyed in a massacre. Among her family, she was shot first, and then was buried under the bodies of her six children who were killed and left for dead.

From underneath the pile of her dead children she dug herself out. Eventually she buried her children properly, gave birth to her new child, and as she was recovering, she adopted five children whose parents had been killed in the same massacre. When asked how she could survive such a tragedy, she expressed her belief that her life had been spared by God so that she might care for the orphaned children after losing her own.

Rather than mournfully withdrawing into herself and focusing on her own individual suffering, she demonstrated the generous, loving way of Jesus. Christ's way promoted her own healing by helping to heal others who also suffered great loss. By opening her heart and being as Christ-like as she could be, she experienced new life by giving life and love to other children.

When we focus on spiritual wealth rather than material wealth, when we practice generosity rather than hoarding our money, when we stand up to injustice wherever it is happening, and when we forgive rather than plot revenge, we affirm that every human being is worthy of God's love, including ourselves. Amen

Live your life following the abundant way of Jesus, in your home, at work, at play, and even in the voting booth on Tuesday.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**

Benediction:

So be the Beatitudes in this world and avoid the woes.