

GREAT REVERSAL ?

Blessed are the cracked for they shall let in light - *Groucho Marx*. Blessed are the sleepy ones, for they shall soon nod off - *Nietzsche*. Blessed are the young for they shall inherit the national debt - *Hoover*. Blessed are those who learn to laugh at themselves, for they shall never cease to be entertained - *Boswell*. Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed - *Alexander Pope*. Blessed is the man who's lost it all - *Switchfoot*. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall take flack from both sides - *UN (unofficial)*.

None of these quips made it into the beatitudes of Scripture. In Luke 6:20-26 Jesus' beatitudes are what theologians call "the great reversal." The first become last, the proud are brought low, the humble are exalted. Jesus calls His disciples "blessed" which they recognize from Old Testament teaching as "being graced by God."

INWARD TRUTHS - Blessed refers not to human emotion but to a state of spiritual well-being. Being blessed by God isn't about happy as much as being made holy. "Blessed implies inner satisfaction and sufficiency that doesn't depend on outward circumstances," notes Warren Wiersbe. Jesus describes attitudes that ought to be expressed in believers' lives today, as people in relationship with God experience His gracious provision, no matter their situation.

In Deuteronomy 27-30, Moses spoke blessings and curses. "God tells His people to love Him with all their heart and soul, but also that they cannot in their own strength obey," KA Mathison notes. "This points to promises of a new heart and a new covenant (Jer 31, Eze 36), because God will give them His own Holy Spirit and make them new creations in His kingdom."

WEAL & WOE - Jesus uses this Old Testament oracle motif. In verse 20 He says "*blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*" In verse 24 He says, "*but woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*" Is this a puzzling reversal?

Though poor now, disciples have His kingdom, but the rich have only their worldly wealth. JC Ryle notes that Jesus supplies His disciples with special comfort and consolation. They have the gracious sovereign rule and provision of God. But those who pursue possessions and pleasure, their own comfort and convenience at the expense of others, will only get what they want here.

Amos 6:1 says "*Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, who feel secure.* Jesus says "*So is the one who lays up treasure for himself but is not rich toward God*" (Luke 12) and "*it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.*"

WORLDLY WEALTH - Those who will not recognize their true poverty will not repent and believe in Jesus as Lord. They may even interpret "material blessings" as God's blessing on their lives. After all, many of the Old Testament saints were wealthy, and people saw this as God's favor.

People do today too. The average American lives beyond the dreams of ancient kings, even if you don't feel wealthy. "Prosperity in and of itself is not evil," notes RC Sproul, "but a particular temptation is built into it, as if you can be self-sufficient, rather than dependent upon God."

Moses grew up in the court of Pharaoh, and could have inherited vast wealth and power. Yet, Hebrews 11:25-26 says he "*chose to be mistreated with the people of God rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.*" He chose the eternal rewards of God's kingdom.

YOUR CHOICE ? - We must learn from the lives and examples recorded in Scripture, both positive and negative. Jesus expanded on these teachings in Matthew 6. It is clear that those who seek after reward in this life will likely get it. But His redeemed people, the disciples of His kingdom, whether poor in worldly terms or not, will receive God's blessings. Here and now.

And forever. The poor in spirit are filled with the Holy Spirit as they come to Christ in repentance and faith. They will learn Matthew 6:33, "*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*" God's eternal blessings will last forever! □