

BLESSINGS OF CHRIST

Some of the most puzzling Bible teachings are what we call "the beatitudes" or "blessings" from Jesus' sermon on the plain in Luke 6 and the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7.

Jesus speaks words of grace to His followers. He talked about "the great reversal" that those who seek things of the world will likely get what they want, but that's it. In contrast, those who seek His kingdom first will be rewarded with both earthly and eternal blessings. The poor have the kingdom. The hungry will be satisfied. Things are not as they seem to worldly eyes.

SAD OR GLAD? - In Luke 6:21, Jesus continues making His hearers think. He says, "*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.*" When you're crying you can hardly imagine joy. Matthew 5:4 says, "*blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.*" It's an echo of Psalm 34, "*the Lord is near to the brokenhearted, He heals all their wounds. O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him.*"

Our lives seem to experience seasons of God's promises. "*The Lord God will wipe away tears*" (Isaiah 25:8). "*I will heal, and restore comfort to the grieving*" (Isaiah 57:18). Jesus echoes Isaiah 61-62 in Luke 4:18 when He declares He is anointed by the Holy Spirit to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim good news, liberty to the oppressed, and the Lord's favor.

LAUGH OR WEEP? - In verse 25 Jesus presents the other side of the oracle: "*Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.*" Those who reject Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior, because they love this world rather than Him and His kingdom, will despair of what they've chosen. Because with the coming of Christ's kingdom comes not only blessing but judgment.

"*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*" says James 4, therefore "*draw near to God and He will draw near to you; humble yourselves before the Lord.*" Ask God what grieves Him, and turn away from those things. Do what you can to remove them from your life and community. Be salt that can be tasted and light that can be seen.

REJECT OR REWARD? - Then Jesus says, "*blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.*" We want His blessings but we don't want it to cost us anything.

John 15:19 says "*if you were of the world, the world would love you as its own, but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, the world hates you.*" Colossians 1:13 says God transferred believers out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son. James 4:4, "*you adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*"

BLESSED OR NOT? - When God's people go along with worldly ideas to avoid persecution of any kind or level, they are asking for trouble. Verse 26, Jesus says "*woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.*" Matthew 10 spells it out, "*I am sending you out as sheep amidst wolves, and you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But those who endure to the end will be saved.*" Because a disciple becomes like his Master.

Jesus said, "*If they persecuted Me they will also persecute you*" (John 15:20) and "*I have said these things that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). Believers are united with Christ and safe serving Him.

YOUR RESPONSE? - "Jesus knew thousands in the professing church would never give up anything for His sake and warns, Woe," notes JC Ryle. "The conditions of life which the world reckons desirable are the very conditions upon which the Lord pronounces woes." Poverty, hunger, sorrow, persecution are the very things man labors to avoid. Riches, fulness, merriment, popularity are precisely things which men are always struggling to attain, he says.

The very ones to whom Jesus says "woe" are those the world admires. But only Jesus will bless, and only those who follow Him. Do we really think that the favor of Christ, along with trouble, is better than anything else? This is a serious question that you must answer! □