

## **Luke 6:12f The Sermon on the Plain, part 2**

### **Part 1: Preliminaries, Blessings, and Woes**

Several weeks ago, we began working our way through the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:12-49). In verses 20-23, we have four blessings, often called “beatitudes,” which we looked at last time. Following the Beatitudes is a corresponding and opposite set of woes that befall those who reject Jesus’ teaching.

Interestingly, Matthew does not record these woes. It’s a good thing we have both accounts. Both M and L include things the other writer doesn’t.

Jesus promises blessings for one group and woes for another. Many people today focus on the blessings and ignore the woes. But the Bible does not give us the option of picking those parts that we like and ignoring those parts that we don’t like. The woes are just as true and pertinent as are the blessings. Many today want to believe that everyone will be blessed and no one will suffer woe. Not according to Jesus. Those who obey Jesus’ teaching here will enjoy a blessing. Those who ignore these teachings will suffer woe.

Let’s take a moment to look at a warning about woes.

#### **A. The woes .24-26**

Jesus was speaking primarily to his followers, but among the great crowds were many who were not believers. That’s whom Jesus is warning here. Unless they repent and turn in faith to him, they’ll experience woe, not blessing.

What is a “woe”? A woe is the opposite of a blessing. A woe is a pronouncement of a curse; we might say “alas!” or “too bad.” These woes are appropriate because God’s judgment will fall on those who reject Jesus’ teaching.

These woes stand in direct opposition to the blessings that come before. As blessings confer God’s favor, woes confer God’s wrath. The blessed will experience eternal rewards; those under God’s wrath, although enjoying life now, can look forward to nothing but eternal punishment.

One writer noted that even as the blessings of the beatitudes reverse the present negative circumstance of [suffering believers], so the woes reverse the present positive circumstances of [prosperous unbelievers].<sup>1</sup> From Jesus' point of view, his suffering disciples have good reason to rejoice as they consider the future, while prosperous unbelievers have good reason to worry about the future if they don't repent.

1. *.24 But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.*

a) Just like the word “poor” referred to those who are poor in spirit, so “rich” refers to those who are arrogant and proud. Perhaps he's describing those who trust in their riches instead of trusting in God. They lay up treasure for themselves but are not rich toward God (Luke 12:21).

**Quote:** “Rich” is *not* simply a declaration of economic class; it ... [describes] arrogant self-security apart from God.<sup>2</sup>

b) The rich have their reward—cold, hard cash. That's their consolation—a big bankbook, a nice house, luxury living, life in the fast lane.

c) But that's all they get. No eternal rewards, no treasure in heaven. They got what they wanted—money and material possessions here on earth. They'd better enjoy it now, but this is the only joy they'll ever experience. Their consolation is their money and what they can do with it.

d) Jesus tells us that it's foolish to gain the whole world and lose your own soul (Mt 16:26). The enjoyment that money brings is shallow and temporary.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 204.

<sup>2</sup> Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 267.

**Illus.:** Perhaps you heard about the apparent murder-suicide of Canadian billionaire, Barry Sherman, and his wife, Honey, on 15 Dec 2017. Police think that Mr. Sherman may have killed his wife, and then himself in their lavish Toronto home. The investigation is ongoing.

Even a billionaire may find his life unsatisfying, even to the point of committing murder and suicide.

- e) Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven (Lk 18:25).
- f) Paul tells us that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6).

It's not sinful to be wealthy, but it is sinful to be greedy. Greed and materialism result in woe.

If riches produce a sense of arrogant self-security, then this woe applies to you. Your only consolation in this life is your money, so you'd better enjoy it while you can.

2. *25 Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.*

- a) A blessing goes to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, but woe is for those who are full.

(1) Full of what? He's not speaking in terms of physical hunger but in terms of spiritual desires.

(2) So those who are "full" are liable to woe because they are full of everything the world has to offer but care nothing for the things of God.

Instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, they seek everything the world has to offer.

(3) For many years, Xns have talked about a "God-shaped hole" in human life that only God can fill.

Augustine: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you."

Blaise Pascal: "... this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."

- (4) People try to fill their lives with all sorts of things just to satisfy the spiritual hole in their lives that only God can fill. E.g., excitement, recreation, drugs and alcohol, physical pleasure, etc.
- b) Eventually all that they are filling themselves with will be taken away, and then they'll experience true hunger. They'll experience this sense of unfulfilled hunger for eternity.

**App:** Can you say that the God-shaped hole in your life has been filled? Are you still trying to fill that emptiness/restlessness with things the world has to offer? Do you find satisfaction in what the world has to offer? I hope not.

The things of this world can never provide true and lasting satisfaction. Those who seek satisfaction from the world will only experience woes.

**Illus.:** Recently saw a picture of a former church member at a casino. Very disappointing to see a professing Christian seeking entertainment/excitement in a place like that.

- 3. *.25b Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.*
  - a) When I was growing up, a popular song said, "I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints; sinners are much more fun...."
  - b) The composer of that song has a point. Sin is fun. The Bible admits that there is pleasure in sin. Many people would rather enjoy the pleasures of sin than live righteously.
  - c) But fun, amusement, and entertainment provide temporary laughter at best. Those who seek pleasure in this world may certainly find it, but only temporarily. And worldly fun is often accompanied by its own set of problems.

**Illus.:** In fact, the composer of those lyrics (Billy Joel) has overdosed on drugs, been married four times, struggled with depression, tried to commit suicide by drinking furniture polish, and has been in treatment for alcoholism—sounds like a really fun life.

**That's exactly what the world, the flesh, and the devil offer**—they promise great fun and excitement, but in the end, you find yourself like the Prodigal Son, stuck in the pigpen. You find yourself addicted to alcohol or drugs, thinking about killing yourself because you are so depressed.

Studies have shown that the most satisfied and happy people are godly Christians. The world and all it offers can't provide what God provides.

- d) For those who don't know the Lord, all the fun and games will come to an end. Even if you laugh all the way through this life, the fun and games will only be temporary. No one who experiences the wrath of God will laugh about it. Their eternal experience will be mourning and weeping. No one is laughing in hell.
  - e) Do you know who will have the last laugh? Believers—the blessed (vs. 21b). We'll be enjoying heaven eternally while those in hell will be weeping and gnashing their teeth in eternal, unrelenting torment.
  - f) The unsaved may laugh now. They may even laugh at us. Maybe their lives are filled with fun, pleasure, and excitement. But mourning and weeping will be their ultimate and eternal experience if they don't turn to Christ in faith and repentance.
  - g) We admit that sin may be pleasurable, but we should be pursuing a deeper, inner joy and blessedness that comes from knowing and serving God. Indulging in sin can never produce true and lasting joy.
4. *.26 Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

- a) The world thinks highly of worldly people. Those enjoying the highest approval are sometimes the worst offenders, the most immoral, oppressive, and arrogant.

**App:** When the world approves of someone, beware! Today's culture thinks more of Beyoncé and Barak Obama than they do of Washington, Jefferson, or Lincoln. Culture is often upside down in what it approves.

- b) The false prophets of the OT enjoyed great approval from wicked people. They tickled the ears of their audience just like false teachers do today.

We know that reputation is important. We should strive to have a good name, even among unbelievers. *But* we should not strive for worldly approval. We should have a reputation for honesty and reliability, but also for godliness and for upholding the name of Christ.

2 Timothy 3:12 *all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

It's getting more and more difficult for godly Christians to find approval in this culture. The culture speaks well of those advocating the LGBTQxyz lifestyle, those promoting abortion and euthanasia, those producing ungodly movies and music, those living "alternative" lifestyles, and those promoting socialism. They are the leaders in our world today. But try to stand against those cultural trends and see what happens. As long as you go with the flow, you are fine. But take a stand against unrighteousness, and you'll be thrown under the bus.

Like the apostles, we should rejoice if we are persecuted for the name of Christ or for righteousness' sake (Acts 5:41). When the ungodly people of our world speak well of us, we know we are headed in the wrong direction. The Bible talks about the "offense of the cross" (Gal 5:11). Jesus Christ and his message will always be offensive to the unsaved world. Those who follow Jesus and bear his cross will also be offensive. We should expect hostile opposition from the unsaved world, not acceptance and friendly approval.

This set of blessings and woes in the first part of the Sermon on the Plain demonstrates the great reversal that comes with the kingdom of God. Blessings await the poor, who hunger, weep, and are hated; for God's kingdom belongs to them, and God will one day wipe away each tear. This momentary ("now") affliction will soon give way to glory (2 Cor 4:17). On the other hand for the arrogant rich, who are now satisfied with riches, laughter, and approval, there is in store for them the woes of eternal punishment.<sup>3</sup>

What if these woes are true of you? The purpose of these woes is to warn people about what will happen if they don't repent and turn to Christ in faith. Believers are blessed; unbelievers suffer these woes. So the best thing to do is to become a disciple of Christ. Repent of your sins and believe in Jesus. Then you won't have to worry about any of these woes.

Believers should be encouraged by this part of Jesus' sermon. We may suffer opposition, insult, and abuse for our loyalty to Christ, but such mistreatment is only temporary. The reward in heaven is great for those who endure the offenses of the cross. Like the prophets of old, God's people often suffer unjustly. But in spite of all the opposition, God's favor rests on his people and eventually they will enjoy the glories of the kingdom of God.

So the encouragement here is to persevere under harsh conditions. In this life, as followers of Jesus, we may be poor, hungry, sorrowful, and despised. But that's OK. All our troubles will end one day, and then we'll experience all the blessings God has in store for his people.

1 Corinthians 2:9 *But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

On the other hand, those seek satisfaction in what this wicked world has to offer will ultimately experience eternal woe.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 205.