

Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are. ²⁷ Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. ²⁸ But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a virgin marries, she does not sin. Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that. ²⁹ I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, ³⁰ and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

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²⁰ Then 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. ²³ Rejoice on 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.

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Prayer: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

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The context of our reading is that Jesus had chosen 12 to be close to him and that people had flocked to Jesus to hear Him teach, be healed by Him and to be spiritually set free...

In today’s reading we hear Luke’s version of the Beatitudes. These are not conditions for entering the kingdom of God but blessings pronounced on those who have already entered. The main theme of the Beatitudes and the following “woes” involves what many call ‘the great reversal’ The great reversal is when the first are becoming last and the last are becoming first, the proud are being brought low and the humble are being exalted. In the great reversal it is the poor, the tax collectors, outcasts, sinners, women, Samaritans, and Gentiles that are shown to be loved by God; it is not only (as was thought by the

Jews) the rich, the privileged, the distinguished, the men and the Jews that God loves.

Jesus taught: Blessed are you who are poor, meaning “blessed are those of you who are poor in material things and who are also my disciples because you have chosen to put your trust in God and not things.” Jesus was not saying that poverty in itself is a state of happiness or blessing; it is a blessing only when accompanied by a trust in God. Those who trust in God belong to the kingdom and will receive the blessings of the kingdom. Jesus consistently gave special care and attention to those on the fringes of society—people who bore God’s image but were treated as inconsequential and were the objects of oppression.

In a similar way Jesus taught ‘blessed are you who are hungry now’. This referred to the disciples who were physically hungry, and also to those who were hungry for God’s help and presence. Their hunger would not last forever; they would be satisfied. God would supply their needs, first with His abundant spiritual presence on the earth, and later also by meeting their physical needs. They would never hunger in God’s kingdom that was to come.

‘Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh’.

One day those, who had or were suffering much, would come to be in a place where there would be no tears or pain. For them, instead of weeping there would be laughter.

For those who had already decided to follow Jesus, He went on to say that whenever they were hated, excluded, reviled, or spurned they should rejoice because those very circumstances showed that their trust in God was making a difference in the world. The truth of the love of God was causing reactions amongst those who were setting themselves against Jesus and His love. Their negative reactions were a proof that Jesus' followers were on the right track and would without a doubt go to be with God in heaven. God's followers were not called to rejoice that they were being treated badly for their faith in and of itself, but that the bad treatment they were receiving pointed to the truth and reality of their future life that would come when they would be with God in the new heaven and the new earth.

The other side to Jesus teaching for His followers was that those who lacked nothing now and had no faith in God would lack the wonders and blessings of God after death. The great reversal for them would mean spiritual poverty, they would not receive blessing and fullness in the life to come and their future would be one of sorrow and lament.

The final verse of our gospel reading says:

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

This verse reminds us that you truly cannot please all the people all of the time. The true prophets of the Old Testament were hated, excluded, reviled, spurned, beaten, tortured, and killed because they spoke out the truth that God gave to them to say. The false prophets were well spoken of, for they prophesied not the words of God but what the people wanted to hear.

Jesus’ words are a strong warning to us today against seeking the approval of the world rather than being faithful to God and they are also an encouragement that Jesus knows all that we face and go through. He knows when life is tough for us, but it will not remain that way forever. The best is yet to come.