



# Central Peninsula Church

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Luke 6:17-26  
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## Blessings & Woes (Things Are Not What They Seem)

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

Sometimes things aren't what they appear to be. And when we look a little closer we discover a different reality below the surface of things. Patrick Lawler is a construction worker who thought he had a toothache. For almost a week, he tried painkillers and ice packs to reduce the swelling. When nothing he did brought relief, he finally went to the dental office where his wife works. Only after the dentist took an x-ray did Patrick learn the true source of the toothache. He had a four-inch nail in his head! The nail had entered through his mouth, just missing Patrick's right eye.

The incident occurred six days earlier. Patrick was working with a nail gun that backfired. Although one of the nails shot into his mouth and embedded itself, Patrick didn't realize it. He merely complained of a toothache and blurry vision, and even tried ice cream to soothe the pain. This is yet another reason why women live longer than men. After the nail was discovered, surgeons at a Denver hospital successfully removed it. One neurosurgeon admitted, "This is the second one we've seen in this hospital where the person was injured by the nail gun and didn't actually realize the nail had been embedded in their skull."

Things aren't always what they appear to be. And as with Patrick we often need the wisdom and skills and diagnostic tools of the experts to give us a vision of what really is. The problem with self diagnosis is that we're limited to our own view of reality. We might think it's a toothache but in fact it's something far more serious. One physician said "He who has himself as a doctor, has a fool for a patient."

Over these next few weeks we're going to look at Jesus' teaching in Luke chapter 6 which parallels much of what is known in Matthew's gospel as the Sermon on the Mount. And in this sermon Jesus takes our spiritual x-ray. He probes around in our souls and with the wisdom of the ages He confronts us with the values of the Kingdom of God, reminding us again that as we face into the priorities of the Kingdom, things really aren't what they appear to be. So let's read together this morning beginning with chapter 6 verse 17.

**"Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all. And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you,**

**and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way"** (Luke 6:17-26).

Not a very comfortable passage, is it? Words of blessing upon the poor, the hungry, the hurting and the hated. And then there are these words of "woe," these warnings to the rich, the well fed, the happy and the popular. But don't we all want a piece of the good life?. And we might ask: Who is this Jesus anyway? What gives Him the right and authority to speak into my life like this? So before we hear Jesus' words, Luke gives us a kind of summary of His credentials in verses 17-19. He reminds us that Jesus is the great physician who has the skill and authority that we can trust even when the truth He tells us is disturbing.

Remember Jesus had climbed the mountain where He spent the whole night in prayer and in the morning He called His twelve disciples—now He's going back down the mountain to a level place; where all of the frailty and need of humanity greets Him again. Multitudes, crowds of those who are hurting, sick, deeply disturbed, from all over; and not just the Jews; but they even came from the Gentile coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. It says they came to hear Him, to be healed and to be relieved of the power and influence of the demonic in their lives. And Luke tells us that "power was coming out from Him and healing them all." Jesus is the real deal. That's better than calling 1-800-dentist, isn't it? What an amazing scene. And it's in the midst of this frenzy of healing and deliverance and release that Christ the healer, with the wisdom and authority of the ages speaks. As Jesus turns His gaze towards His disciples we immediately see things are not as they appear to be. Jesus takes four well placed shots, directed at our values and priorities as He pronounces a blessing on the desperate and the needy. *Blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, blessed are the hurting, blessed are those who are hated because of me.*

Now you may be more familiar with the Beatitudes from the gospel of Matthew, where it says blessed are the poor (in spirit), blessed are those who hunger and thirst it says (for righteousness). But here Jesus seems to be speaking clearly of those who are materially in great need, those who are literally poor and without enough food. Most scholars agree that these were themes that Jesus spoke about on more than one occasion. So He pronounces a blessing on the spiritually poor in Matthew's account, while here in Luke He speaks of those

who literally live in poverty and in great material need. He says: Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the hurting, and the hated, And so we ask: what does Jesus see that I don't see? And just as we are caught off guard by these blessings, He comes at us from the other side. *Woe to the rich, woe the well fed, woe the happy and the popular.* But isn't that what we all want? I mean, nobody wants to be on "Lifestyles of the Poor and Hungry." What is Jesus getting at?

Well, in Jesus' day a "blessing" from God was always thought of in terms of earthly benefit and comfort. This hasn't changed all that much at the popular level even in our day. Hillary Swank in her Academy Awards acceptance speech said, "I don't know what I did to deserve such a wonderful life." The answer of course is nothing. But this theology persists. It's the idea that if you are rich and well fed, if you have a big bank account, drive a fancy car and are well liked in the community, it's because God is pleased with you. And conversely if you are among the poor; if you went to bed last night without enough food, if your tears flowed from the pressures you faced then it must be because you had done something to disappoint God. Steve Stirling, who was with us a few weeks ago, expressed this so well, especially when it comes to the disabled. The idea that God was displeased with you or your parents or someone in the family line and your misfortune was a direct result of His displeasure.

So just imagine how startled these new disciples must have been. I bet they were wondering if they should be hanging out with this guy. Jesus seems to be going in a very dangerous direction.

But the word "blessing" is really a statement of advantage or privilege. Fortunate are the poor, advantaged are the hungry, privileged are those who weep, which makes no sense from our vantage point. But apparently things are not what they appear to be. You see, Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor," not because poverty brings with it comfort and ease, but because "yours is the Kingdom of God." Now it's important to say here that Jesus is not elevating poverty and physical need as a spiritual blessing in and of itself. In the face of disaster, people don't run around and say "yeah, all right! I just lost everything I ever owned. What a spiritual blessing that is." But there is something about actual physical need that prepares the human heart for the treasures of the Kingdom. There's something about human hunger that predisposes the soul to be desperate for Kingdom priorities and values. There's something about weeping and rejection that marks the human spirit with a longing for something more, something beyond, something that this world can never give.

As He often does Jesus is taking the physical reality (in this case poverty and hunger & need) to illustrate the spiritual principle. A kind of desperate readiness for the God's Kingdom. I've really had to wrestle through this one. How is it that the poor are privileged? What advantage is there to hunger and hurt? Certainly there are those in poverty who are bitter and hardened to the things of God. But the principle still remains. Listen to what Monika Hellwig writes as she describes this curious privilege of the poor:

"The poor are blessed because the poor know they are in urgent need of redemption. The poor know not only their dependence on God and on powerful people but also their interdependence with one another. The poor rest their security not on things but on people. The poor have no exaggerated sense of their own importance, and no exaggerated need of privacy. The poor expect little from competition and much from cooperation. The poor can distinguish between necessities and luxuries. The poor can wait, because they have acquired a kind of dogged patience. The fears of the poor are more realistic and less exaggerated, because they already know that one can survive great suffering and want. When the poor have the gospel preached to them, it sounds like good news and not like a threat or scolding. The poor can respond to the call of the gospel with a certain abandonment and uncomplicated totality because they have so little to lose and are ready for anything."

Through no choice of their own—they may urgently wish otherwise—the poor find themselves in a posture of weakness and vulnerability that corresponds to the values of the Kingdom of God. In their state of neediness, dependence, and dissatisfaction with life they may well have a readiness born out of desperation for the things of heaven. In a sense the poor reveal to us the desperate state of our own lives and the need to come with our own poverty before the King.

Jamie Reid is one of the Word Made Flesh team members that Steve Aurell and I met with on our trip to Lima, Peru last year. She recently wrote: "There is no pretense on the streets. I ask a street child how he is doing and he replies, 'How does it look like I am doing?' gesturing to his dirty body and clothing. There is no sense in hiding it, a street child is well aware of his suffering and need. I however, have expended much energy in trying to cover up and ignore my poverty. I created a closet where over the years I hid away the things in my life that I did not want disturbed... I feared the moment that someone might turn the wrong doorknob and all my messiness would spill out...What I found when I entered into community with the poor was that my own poverty was quickly unmasked. The closet door was wrenched open. I could no longer disguise the wounds that were touched by the suffering of the street children."

So blessed are the poor, the hungry...unlike the rest of us...there is no hiding or pretense. Their lives are lived in the grinding reality of weakness and need, pointing each of us to our own desperate need for the King and His Kingdom. Blessed are the poor, fortunate are the hungry, privileged are the hurting. This is how we all must come; without pretense, in our dirty clothes, desperate for the King, eager for His Kingdom. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the hurting and the hated: In verse 22 Jesus says:

**"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy for behold your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."**

He says: if you are hated because of your faith, because of your stand for Christ...leap for joy, because you're in good company. That's exactly the way they have always treated the prophets of God. They may ridicule and abuse and even take your life but you'll take your seat with the heavenly heroes... great is your reward in heaven.

Peter was deeply impacted by these words for he later wrote:

**"To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed..."** (1 Peter 4:12-14).

I read an incredible story this week about a man named Paulus and his wife who were imprisoned in Siberia for their faith in Jesus Christ. After much brutality and days of intimidation his captors finally threatened him saying, "we will take away everything you own. We will put a bullet between your eyes." Paulus, with a broad grin, responded, "You will need a high ladder, Captain. My treasures are stored up in heaven. If you take away my life in this world, my real life of joy and beauty will begin. I'm not afraid of being killed."

So Jesus blesses those who are hated for their faith. Fortunate and privileged are the persecuted; for their reward is great in heaven. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the hurting and the hated. And if these words haven't disturbed you to the core then hold on for a moment because Jesus now comes at us from the other side with four corresponding "woes" or words of warning to the wealthy and comfortable.

Woe to the rich, woe to the well fed, woe to the happy, and woe to those who have accommodated their faith to the values of the surrounding culture. And the question we all ask is: Who are these people? Who are the rich? Who is it that Jesus is so concerned for?

Now I know I need to be careful here because wealth and riches are always relative, aren't they? There are folks here this morning who in the crazy economy of this valley are barely making ends meet. You're a single mom or an out of work dad and you're wondering how you're going to make it through another month. And some are barely getting by on incomes that would mean great wealth if you happened to live in Montana or Idaho. But here it's a struggle. So if that describes you today please know that God fully understands the anxiety and challenges you face. And He invites you to trust and depend on Him. But I would say that for many of us, maybe even the majority of us here this morning, the warnings to the rich and well fed are for us.

According to recent statistics, nearly 35 million Americans live in homes where there is a shortage of food. A survey of 29 major cities found that emergency food requests are up 16%. An estimated 1.1 million senior adults skip meals because there is no food in the house. Of course it's staggering when you look at the numbers outside of our privileged country. According to the United Nations reports, some 800 million people around the globe suffer from hunger and malnutrition. More than ten percent of children in developing countries die before the age of five, and according to the World Food Program 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 a day. Though we may not like the way it sounds; and I'll admit it is disturbing; these words are intended for us. Woe to the rich, woe to the well fed, woe to the comfortable.

And this is a word of warning that is echoed throughout the scriptures from the Old Testament right through to the writing of the apostles. The warning is this: **Don't let the comforts of this life or the affluence of our culture dull our appetites for the Kingdom of God.** Jesus Himself said, "where your treasure is there your heart will be also." And using an ironic word picture He said, "it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

Now to be clear, Jesus is not saying that we should live in caves and wear tattered clothes, rejecting the pleasures and comforts of this life. Remember, Jesus loved a banquet. He loved to be in the center of a party. I think He enjoyed laughing with His friends eating pepperoni pizza. Jesus had to be the most winsome and grateful, joy filled and compelling person that ever walked the planet. He wasn't some sour, dispirited, stick in the mud. He absolutely enjoyed living. But he wasn't dulled by the comforts and pleasure he so enjoyed. You see, in a way we fail to understand Jesus knew the destructive power of having everything we need. So Jesus (in His love for us) takes his shots; four powerful blows at the core of how we live. Woe to the rich...Jesus says that if riches are what you are living for then; you have your reward in full. Woe to the well fed and satisfied...if your appetite for comfort is what defines the way you live in this life; then you will go hungry in the life to come. Woe to you who thoughtlessly live for the laughs and pleasures of this life...you will mourn and weep. Woe to you who have won a popularity contest with the world...that kind of faith will do you no eternal good. From the vantage point of the Kingdom, things are not what they appear to be, are they?!

So where do these disturbing words of blessings and woes leave us this morning? How are we to hear and apply the values of the Kingdom in this crazy and complex culture we live in on the Peninsula? You need to know that I'm still sorting this out in my own life. I'm still wrestling through how to live in the gratitude and freedom of all I've been given while remaining desperate for the King, sold out to the priorities of His Kingdom. But I've come to believe that as hard as these words are, they are really given to set us free. Jesus speaks these warnings to the rich, not to restrict or inhibit but to deliver and release. Jesus wants to liberate us from the chains of our own appetites and our insatiable longing for more. Jesus wants to deliver us from the dangers of too much comfort and excess. Not because He's a cosmic killjoy, wanting to rob us of pleasure and ease; but because He truly is the shepherd of our souls who wants desperately to give us the freedom and joy and the fullness of life in Him. So He warns us that too much comfort and ease is a dangerous thing for the soul.

John Stott writes: "Comfort is dangerous, and we should constantly be reexamining our lifestyle. The New Testament is beautifully balanced on this. Asceticism is the rejection of the good gifts of the good Creator. Its opposite is materialism - not just possessing material things, but becoming preoccupied with them. In between asceticism and materialism are **simplicity, contentment, and generosity**, and these three virtues should mark all of us. It's not a question of rules and regulations about our income, and how many rooms or cars we have. It's these principles of simplicity, contentment and generosity that we have to apply to our living all the time." And that's where I want to end this morning; by looking at these three Kingdom principles. Priorities that I believe if we take seriously can truly change and liberate us to live more boldly, joyfully and affectively for Christ.

**Contentment:** In Philippians 4:11-13 Paul writes on the quality of contentment.

**“For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”**

Contentment is the condition of the heart that is truly at rest no matter what the circumstances. It's that quality of life that is content and satisfied regardless of the surrounding pleasures or pressures. It's the conviction that Christ is adequate for each and every circumstance I might find myself in. The challenge for those of us who live in the context of the consumerism of our culture is that we are constantly bombarded with messages of discontent and dissatisfaction. All trying to persuade me that life would be better if I only had more.

John Ortberg tells this story about taking his kids to McDonalds: “When we take our children to the shrine of the Golden Arches, they always lust for the meal that comes with a cheap little prize, a combination christened, in a moment of marketing genius, the Happy Meal. You're not just buying fries, McNuggets, and a dinosaur stamp; you're buying happiness. Their advertisements have convinced my children they have a little McDonald-shaped vacuum in their souls: ‘Our hearts are restless till they find their rest in a happy meal.’ I try to buy off the kids sometimes. I tell them to order only the food and I'll give them a quarter to buy a little toy on their own. But the cry goes up, ‘I want a Happy Meal.’ All over the restaurant, people crane their necks to look at the tightfisted, penny-pinching cheapskate of a parent who would deny a child the meal of great joy. The problem with the Happy Meal is that the happy wears off, and they need a new fix. No child discovers lasting happiness in just one...But Happy Meals bring happiness only to McDonalds. You ever wonder why Ronald McDonald wears that grin? Twenty billion Happy Meals, that's why. When you get older, you don't get any smarter; your happy meals just get more expensive.” Contentment means fighting the messages of discontent that daily assault us by simply taking my heart and my circumstances to the Lord and saying “Thank You” and asking Him to give me courage to live in the liberty of His contentment not in the craving and discontent of our culture.

**Simplicity:** Simplicity grows out of contentment. It means that I honestly and regularly go over my lifestyle choices with the King. Here is where we take the example of Jesus we looked at last week. We pray for guidance, we pray for His voice to speak into our priorities. It means that I have a willingness to ask, Lord, does this honor you? Is this choice rooted in Kingdom Priorities, or have I bought into another McDonalds strategy for giving me happiness on earth? Simplicity will mean drastically different things to each of us. It's truly not about rules and regulations. And it is not found by comparing my lifestyle choices with the

choices that other people make. But it is built upon a willingness to honestly and routinely examine my priorities, to seek to use my resources (whatever they may be) in a way that reflects the values of the Kingdom and the heart of the King.

**Generosity:** Generosity means that I hold my resources lightly and look for ways to bless others through my abundance. It means I support my church fellowship, and I give to missions and ministries that seek to reach the lost with the good news of the gospel. But it also means to give generously to the needs of the poor. 1 John 3:17 says:

**“But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”**

In past generations it would have been unthinkable to say that you were a follower of Christ without showing compassion for the poor or without generously giving to improve the condition of those who suffer great need. Saving faith and social justice were long considered two sides of the coin of authentic Christian discipleship. Generosity involves the desire to actively be a part of God's blessing to the poor and hungry, those who are in great need.

I appreciate Gary Haugen's retelling of the feeding of the five thousand. Remember; the disciples brought complaints about the hungry multitude to Jesus and He responded compassionately by blessing the bits of food from a boy's lunch; five loaves of bread and two fishes. **“Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They ate and all were satisfied.”** What would you think if the disciples just kept thanking Jesus for all the bread and fish without passing them along to the people? It would all start to pile up; loaves and fish piled high all around—and all they did was yell out thank you, thank you. Then under the piles you could hear the multitudes complain that Jesus wasn't doing anything for the hungry and poor.

Do you see? In His kindness God has called us to be a part of His plan for caring for the poor and hungry. He could have done it differently but just as He used a little boy's lunch and the readiness of the disciples so He chooses to use us and our abundance and our freedom to be a blessing to those who are in need. Contentment, simplicity, and generosity. May we have the courage, the faith, and the grace to follow after Christ in these things.

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