

# Redefining Blessedness

## The Blessedness of Being a Disciple of Jesus

### Luke 6:17-28

<sup>17</sup> He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, <sup>18</sup> who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, <sup>19</sup> and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

<sup>20</sup> Looking at his disciples, he said:

*“Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.*

<sup>21</sup> *Blessed are you who hunger now,  
for you will be satisfied.*

*Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.*

<sup>22</sup> *Blessed are you when people hate you,  
when they exclude you and insult you  
and reject your name as evil,  
because of the Son of Man.*

<sup>23</sup> *“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.*

<sup>24</sup> *“But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have already received your comfort.*

<sup>25</sup> *Woe to you who are well fed now,  
for you will go hungry.*

*Woe to you who laugh now,  
for you will mourn and weep.*

<sup>26</sup> *Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,  
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.*

<sup>27</sup> *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,*

<sup>28</sup> *bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

## Context

Sometimes we find it difficult to understand the Bible. When we do not understand the context, we tend to misinterpret what the Bible says. The writers and their audience lived in a different time of history than us; and they understood what was written, because they understood the context.

Below is an excerpt of ‘I have a dream’, a well-known speech by Martin Luther King Jr.:

*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."*

*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*

*I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.*

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

We, the hearers who are acquainted with American history, understand what is being addressed. America was a nation that practiced slavery in the past. There were white Americans who believed the African American community should not be treated as equals. As a superior race, they believed they had a right to mistreat African Americans. (This is a very, very short description of the evil of racism. Unspeakable evil was done in the name of ‘White Supremacy’.) In the given context, we know Martin Luther is challenging his listeners to carefully consider where they stand on the matter. He is inviting them to work together to end the evil of racism. We also understand the present-day relevance of this speech; racism is still a problem that must be addressed.

**Luke 1:46-55**

<sup>46</sup> *And Mary said:*

*“My soul glorifies the Lord*

<sup>47</sup> *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

<sup>48</sup> *for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.*

*From now on all generations will call me blessed,*

<sup>49</sup> *for the Mighty One has done great things for me—*

*holy is his name.*

<sup>50</sup> *His mercy extends to those who fear him,*

*from generation to generation.*

<sup>51</sup> *He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;*

*he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.*

<sup>52</sup> *He has brought down rulers from their thrones*

*but has lifted up the humble.*

<sup>53</sup> *He has filled the hungry with good things*

*but has sent the rich away empty.*

<sup>54</sup> *He has helped his servant Israel,*

*remembering to be merciful*

<sup>55</sup> *to Abraham and his descendants forever,*

*just as he promised our ancestors.*

In Luke 1:46-55, Mary speaks of God overthrowing the rich and powerful who have exalted themselves (proud in their inmost thoughts). The powerful and arrogant have denied **justice**

to the faithful. They have distributed wealth and power among themselves and have oppressed the poor.

In this passage, Jesus is addressing this evil. He is mocking the arrogant and proud who are persecuting the faithful. He is overthrowing the boastful claims of this world.

Jesus states that His Kingdom will not tolerate such evil. Those who are His disciples will stand with the oppressed and suffering; committing their lives to be God’s agents of change believing that God will uphold **justice** and **mercy**.

It is important for us to reflect on the teachings of Jesus so that we may not give in to the subtle influence of this world. The Lord seeks to liberate us from these destructive forces.

## Disciples and Opponents

### 1. **Difference: Disciples vs. Opponents**

Jesus was highlighting the difference between His disciples and His opponents. The **disciples** are equated with “**true**” **prophets** (v. 23); the **opponents** are equated with **false prophets** (v. 26). It invites the listener to carefully consider which side is he/she standing.

### 2. **New Reality**

Jesus is redefining what blessedness is all about. He is redefining the realities that people hold on to. There will be a reversal of expectations. God will correct all forms of injustice and He will set things right.

### 3. **Reflection**

- What are the differences between your beliefs and the opponents of Jesus? How is it different?
- Do you believe that God will set all things right in heaven (eg. Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus)? How does this change the way you choose to live each day?

## Blessedness

Jesus speaks of the reversal of expectations using 8 couplets (a pair of successive lines of verse, typically rhyming and of the same length).

v. 20	Blessed are you who are poor	for yours is the kingdom of God
v. 24	Woe to you who are rich	for you have already received your comfort
v. 21	Blessed are you who hunger now	for you will be satisfied
v. 25	Woe to you who well fed now	for you will go hungry
v. 21	Blessed are you who weep now	for you will laugh
v. 25	Woe to you who laugh now	for you will mourn and weep
vv. 22-23	Blessed are you when people hate, exclude, insult, and reject you as evil on account of the Son of Man	rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets
v. 26	Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you	for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets

Jesus declares the blessedness of those who follow Him because He has broken the power of all oppressive powers. We are no longer held in captive; we have been set free. Because we have freedom in Jesus Christ, oppression and injustice will no longer hold us under its power.

**Isaiah 61:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,*

<sup>2</sup> *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,*

<sup>3</sup> *and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

*They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.*

**1. The Contrasting Perspective**

The poor; those who hunger; those who weep; those who are hated and excluded	The rich; the well fed; those who laugh; praised by men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must depend on God because life is beyond their control</li> <li>• Face persecution and harsh treatment by people in power</li> <li>• Turn to God for provision, justice and comfort</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are at the top of the world</li> <li>• Live of the benefits of an oppressive system</li> <li>• Ignore God and take full advantage of the good life on earth (worldly)</li> <li>• Persecute true believers</li> <li>• False prophets</li> </ul>

Jesus tells His disciples that they live under His blessings: "Blessed are you who are poor." "You have My approval and favour," says Jesus.

Max Lucado puts it beautifully:

*This is cause for deep reflection, especially for those of us who are comfortably ensconced in a prosperous culture.*

*"We rich are constantly assaulted with the temptation to rely on riches. Can we not rely upon them and yet have them?"*

*"We rich are dulled to our need by our plenty. Can we have plenty and feel our need?"*

*"We rich tend to be proud of what we have done, to take credit for our comforts. Can we live a humble life?"*

*These are hard questions that we must each answer for ourselves. Let us not ignore Jesus' words: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Luke 6:17*

**2. God's Commitment**

God makes a commitment to bless those who would follow Him.

God's people will inherit the kingdom the of God; they will be satisfied; and there will be joy and laughter.

God will fulfil His commitment in the coming age.

Do you believe that God will keep His commitment to you?

## Spiritual People and False Prophets

<sup>26</sup> *Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.*

### 1. Spiritual People

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the people of God will be blessed. We will receive the fruit of the Spirit. We have been crucified with Christ and have put to death the flesh and its passions and desires.

#### **Galatians 5:22-26**

<sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

### 2. False Prophets

False prophets live for the passion and desires of the flesh. They do not represent God; nor are they led by the Spirit. Instead, they choose to manipulate others by enticing them to be more worldly and corrupt. Their hearts are far away from the Kingdom of God.

### 3. Love

The power that gives a Christian to rise above suffering and persecution is the power of God's love. His love fills our hearts and enables us to respond with love.

Luke 6:27-28, <sup>27</sup> *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

## Prayer Items

1. Commitment to be true disciples
2. Willingness to suffer with Jesus; pursuing His Kingdom values; and believing that He will bless us
3. Unity in the Church
4. God will deliver us from this pandemic
5. Front-liners: medical officers; armed forces
6. Leaders (government & companies): wisdom, compassion, righteousness
7. Economy: especially those who are badly affected: poor, homeless, more vulnerable people (refugees, foreigners)
8. Salvation of souls; opportunities & courage to witness
9. Binil, Asmita & baby Yohan: safe delivery