

Blessed are the Poor

Luke 6:20

June 4, 2017

We are back in the Sermon on the Mount in Luke's account, so go ahead and turn there to Luke 6:20. We're going to read that introductory portion again. As we've said, the Sermon on the Mount is the most widely known of all Jesus' teachings. A very profound teaching, very searching, provoking in our hearts. Because of its significance, we've taken a couple of weeks to introduce it, but now we're ready to take the plunge and get right into it. We're going to benefit from reading the opening section here, the Beatitudes, for our time together here this morning.

Let's start by reading Luke 6:20 to 26. 'And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 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,

leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven: for so their fathers did to the prophets.

“‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to our who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all the people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.’” As you can see there, as we read through that, there are four ascriptions or pronouncements of blessedness by our Lord.

And you can see, as we pointed out in one of the introductory messages, the first three are connected, blessed are the poor, those who are hungry now, those who weep now, that's all tied to their condition. Then that last beatitude ties the condition of that poverty and hunger and weeping, ties it to being hated, and that is tied to the identification with the Son of Man, and thus, if you're identified with the Son of Man, and thus, if you are identified with the Son of Man, then that is why people are hating you, “Blessed are you when people hate you.”

The four ascriptions of blessings are followed then by four corresponding pronouncements of woe, all parallel. Again, the first three woes are connected. Woe to you who are rich, you who are full now, you who laugh now, and then the final woe is about one's identification. Again, here, they are not identified with the Son of Man, but with the world. "Woe to you when all people speak well of you." That is to say, "Woe to you when you're liked by the world."

As we mentioned last week, the thesis verse for the section on blessedness is verse 20. The thesis verse for the section on the woes is verse 24, "Blessed are the poor," and "Woe to you who are rich." Of those two thesis verses, it's the beatitude of verse 20 that sets the course for not only the entire section, but for the entire Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." That's what makes Luke 6:20 such an important verse because it contains that seminal concept that divides humanity into those who belong to God and those who do not.

James, the half-brother of our Lord, wrote in James 2:5 that God chose "those are poor in the world to be rich in faith

and heirs of this kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him." That's a reference right back to here in Luke 6:20. That's why James 1:9 he says, "Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation," because he is the blessed. He is identified with Christ. So James says you are to exalt over that.

We realize Christ himself, according to 2 Corinthians 8:9, Christ was rich, and yet, for our sakes he became poor so that we by his poverty might become rich. And if Christ was rich, we need to understand right here the outset of a beatitude pronounced or ascribed to the poor, we need to realize right here at the outset that there is nothing inherently evil about wealth. Christ was wealthy. Abraham was wealthy. David was wealthy.

Conversely, there is nothing inherently virtuous about being poor either, per se, but there is something about the condition of poverty which allows us to see clearly, which allows us to look at life from a certain perspective and understand what is truly important in life. There is something about poverty that enables us to more quickly, maybe, identify ourselves with Christ unashamedly because he, for our sakes,

became poor. We can find ourselves in possession of God's eternal kingdom.

So that is where we're going to start today. We're going through a little outline. You'll find in your bulletin some questions that we'll ask and answer from the text. Wasting no time, let's get to the first question: Who are the poor? Who are the poor? Let's first identify our terms, define our terms. The word Jesus uses for the poor, which we find in both Matthew and Mark, they record this word for this beatitude, it's the word *ptochos*. *Ptochos*. Write it down in your English P-T-O-C-H-O-S. *Ptochos*. *Ptochoi* is the plural; *ptochos* is the singular.

It's a word that is virtually synonymous with a beggar, someone who is utterly and absolutely destitute. The adjective *ptochos* came from a verb that means "to bow down timidly," which referred then in the culture to someone who is utterly destitute, a mendicant, a beggar. The *ptochos* in Jesus' day were true beggars. These were people who were often crippled in some way, incapacitated, unable to work and thus, they couldn't provide any income for themselves or their family.

So these are truly poverty-stricken people, truly without hope. They had to rely on the charity of other people. Not for, for their bank account, not for their 401k, they had to rely on the charity of other people for their daily bread. That's how *ptochos*, that's how poor they were. If no one gave, they starved. If no one had pity, they died.

That is true destitution of a kind that most of us living in this country here in America have never ever faced. My wife and I, in the early years of our family life, we lived beneath the so-called poverty line. Back in the mid 90's, we discovered that we did our taxes I think it was for 1996 and we discovered our, the income for our family that year, family of four, it was less than \$12,000 for the entire year. We have no idea how we made it that year. Looking back at that income level, and we didn't even hardly notice.

The federal poverty level for a family of four in 2017, this year, is \$24,600. That's the federal poverty level for a family of four. Then, in 1996, it was \$15,600. So we had been living, not known to us, we'd been living more than \$3,500 underneath the federally, federal poverty level in that year.

As I said, we had no idea how that could be because we never went without a meal. Our kids were well clothed. We paid our rent. We paid all of our bills.

God provided for us. He provided for us not just faithfully, but abundantly often through the generosity of the people around us. But even at that income level, we never truly qualified for what the Bible describes as *ptochos*. We didn't even come close. I never once thought of hiring out my children for our daily bread. Maybe for other reasons, but not for that.

But if you want a picture of the *ptochos*, think about the opposite picture of verse 24, the rich, the *plousios*. They are the rich, the wealthy. You can imagine in today's terms the billionaires like Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg. You can think of Oprah Winfrey, Jeff Bezos of Amazon. And for all the money they have, for all the wealth and privilege, all that their money can buy, sense of security, the ability they have to project power, to increase their wealth because it takes money to get money, right? The access the privilege, the ability to buy influence and even friendship or at least buy interesting companionship around you even if you suspect all those people's

friendship because they just want you for your money and all the rest, but imagine them on one end of a spectrum.

Now go to the complete opposite end of the spectrum. Imagine the diametric, polar opposite of all that and you're starting to get close to the idea of *ptochos*. There is no security. There is no power. There is no access. You don't have any influence over anybody. People walk by and dismiss you, or they might pity you, put a coin in your pocket. No influence, no relationships, no friendships. That's *ptochos*.

It's the beggar, Lazarus, in Luke 16:20. He's covered with sores. He's waiting at the gate of the rich man. Why at the gate of the rich man? Because he's got extra. Could he just throw a little my way? Jesus describes that poor wretched soul as longing to be fed with what fell from that rich man's table and the only relief he had in his horrible suffering was when the dogs, stray dogs, came and licked his sores.

You can think about the poor *ptochos* widow of Mark 12:42. She had been stripped penniless by the cruel religious system of Judaism that extracted her last two pennies as she put them in

the coffer, all she had to live on. That's *ptochos*. So that's a definition, maybe a description also, of who Jesus has in mind when he says, "Blessed are the poor." They are the absolutely destitute, the beggars with absolutely nothing.

Secondly, let's clarify Jesus' meaning because that's important here. What did Jesus mean by referring to the poor when he said, "Blessed are the poor?" Is he talking about poverty, financial poverty? Because if that's the case, you know what? All of us are without hope. If "Blessed are the poor," if that's absolute destitution we are talking about, we're all counted out, right?

By the definition I just provided, the truly *ptochos* of this world would be relatively few, very, very few. And you have to ask, is that what he is saying? That only the crippled beggars, the truly indigent, the financially destitute and desperate are the blessed and them and to them alone belong the kingdom of God? It's clear from the context that financial poverty is not what Jesus means when he describes the blessedness of the poor. He is using the poor in some ways as a

picture here of what we're to think about, something we are to think about. We'll get to that concept in a moment.

But look at the corresponding woe. It helps instruct us on what Jesus' meaning is. The rich have their consolation now. They are those who are full. They are those who are satisfied. They are prosperous. They are, they're the ones laughing now. They are the ones at all the parties, going to all the dances, enjoying all the right people and the fine company. They're laughing. They're the ones who pursue comfort and security and happiness in temporal wealth. They've got very little thought, very little concern for eternal wealth, for kingdom concerns. All their interests and their efforts are in this life and this life alone, not in the life to come. Also notice the explanation Jesus gives for ascribing blessedness to the poor in verse 20, "For yours is the kingdom of God."

In contrast to any temporal state of poverty, the true wealth of those described as *ptochos* is the infinite, eternal wealth of the kingdom of God. It doesn't have to do necessarily with what they have or don't have in their bank account. It has to do with where their real wealth is found. There's a lot of

confusion, I think, about this concept of poverty, especially today when I find a lot of people in evangelicalism talking about social justice, wanting to eradicate poverty from the earth and taking an interest in the poor.

I'm sure this is your experience, too, but I've met plenty of people who are poor, whether it's due to economic background, their upbringing, maybe unwise choices, maybe personal sin or whatever, but they're poor. And these poor have no interest whatsoever in eternal things. It's hard to say that to them belong the kingdom of God when they have no interest in the kingdom of God. Some so-called poor people are as materialistic and preoccupied with wealth as the rich people of this world. And they add another sin, covetousness. Maybe they're worse. Contrary to the super rich, they're absolutely consumed with their greed and their longing for what they don't have.

You see some of the so-called poor, fake beggars I like to call them, who are standing at our freeway off-ramps. They look at you with pitiful eyes and they have very abled bodies to hold with those very abled, strong looking arms signs, and they're able to take your handouts. Most of those people are not the

poor described by the word *ptochos*. Don't make any mistake about that. They're just lazy and unwilling to work. Or they're enslaved to some sin and the enslavement to that sin doesn't allow them to work and keep normal hours.

People like that in Jesus' day, by the way, abled-bodied people who refused to work or made excuses for not working, people like that would have been the scorned and disgraced of a society that valued hard work. No one would give them what they were unwilling to work for themselves. Those kinds of false beggars contact our church office all the time, thinking they can prey upon the kindness of Christians, or prey upon misguided compassion or in some cases just pure gullibility.

If any of today's fake poor, those who are lazy, those who are committed to sin they refuse to change so they can eat, if any, if any of today's poor if we were to transport them back into the first century and let them listen to the apostle Paul, if they called him up looking for handout, do you know what he'd say? "If you won't work, you won't eat." They say, "Where's the love, Paul?" "I am loving them. I'm telling them to get to work."

How do I know he'd say that? Because that is exactly what he told the false indigent people in Thessalonica. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 says, "For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living."

I want to begin by pointing this out as we talk about poverty and wealth, to correct any false, romanticized notions about the condition of poverty, or that there be any virtue in begging in and of itself. One of the more popular Roman Catholic interpretations of "Blessed are the poor," makes an ideal out of the condition of poverty. One of the better known Roman Catholic saints you've probably all hear of is Saint Francis of Assisi. He attempted to live out "Blessed are the poor" in a very literal way. He was the son, Francis was, of a wealthy silver merchant, and he lived out his early life, as many wealthy kids did, a spoiled rich kid.

At one point in his life, his young life, he became extremely ill. He had a religious vision, and that sent him on a pilgrimage to Rome. Once in Rome, he got on the street with the beggars. He hung out with them. He joined the ranks of the poor begging on the streets even though he was very, very wealthy. Francis believed that Jesus told him in a vision to, "Go repair my house," which he took to mean "Contribute to the dilapidated church building you're in."

Church, church buildings fell into disrepair in those days, so he sold some of his father's silk fabrics without permission— which is stealing, by the way. It's violating one of the Ten Commandments in order to do God's work. I don't think that was God's work. He gave the money to the church. His father was obviously quite upset, so Francis renounced his wealth. He renounced his father, which is yet another violation of the Ten Commandments to honor father and mother. He renounced his wealth, renounced his father, renounced his inheritance and in a dramatic fit of religious fervor, Francis supposedly stripped off his fancy clothes in public, thereafter, wandering around the countryside as a beggar.

He counted poverty as a virtue, marrying himself to what he said was "Lady Poverty." The monastic order that bore his name, the Franciscans, were known as mendicant. Mendicant friars, they were beggars. They expected others to demonstrate their own religious devotion to God by funding their misguided zeal.

The current head of the Roman Catholic Church, by taking the name Pope Francis, he's trying to renew in the Catholic Church the concern for social justice and social poverty. He said, "How I would like a church that is poor and that is for the poor." He chose to be named Saint Francis after Saint Francis of Assisi, whom he called the man of poverty, the man of peace because he considers him to be the model he wants to follow, the way he wants his papacy to be characterized and remembered. That is an idealization of poverty that is based, at least in some measure, on a misinterpretation of what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the poor."

Jesus is not glamorizing poverty here. Poverty is bad. He will one day make all of those who are poor and trust in him. He will make them to be rich. Verse 21 says they will be filled with sustenance, satisfied. Also in verse 21 they will be

laughing. Do you know where they will be laughing first? Around his banquet table. We're not to take this "Blessed are the poor," this issue of poverty. We're not to take this literally and go sell all our possessions and go beg on the streets. That is not what this means.

So, what then did Jesus mean? And whom did Jesus refer to when he said, "Blessed are the poor," when he's not strictly referring to material poverty? If you have in your mind, you don't need to turn there right now, but in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, you can get a clue to maybe what is the more fundamental concern that Jesus is identifying about those who are *ptochos*.

Remember in Matthew 5:3, Jesus said not just "Blessed are the poor," but "Blessed are the poor," in what? "Spirit." And here we need to stop and ask, "What did Jesus actually say on this occasion? Did he say, 'Blessed are the poor,' or did he say, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit?' Did Luke just drop off a couple words at the end there?" The answer is that Jesus said both.

Matthew recorded Jesus saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," because that saying that he took from Jesus' actual sermon pertained to his purpose in writing his gospel. Remember Matthew wrote to his fellow Jews with the intent to unseed the confidence that his fellow Jews tried to find in, get this, the wealth of their spiritual heritage. The Jews believed they were spiritually superior to the Gentiles. Spiritually speaking, the Jews thought they were the wealthy.

The Gentiles and all the other scum of the earth were the poor. They were the offspring of Abraham. They were the recipients of the promises. They were the recipients of the holy law and the Scriptures. The law, the prophets, the writings. They were participants in the covenants, and they were, even then in Jesus day, being restored to the promise land again and they were simply waiting around in their spiritual wealth for God to fulfill the rest of his restoration promises to them as a people. So what need did Jews have to repent? That's how they thought of themselves.

So Jesus spoke to the Jews who came that day. If you look back at verse 17, there was "a great multitude of people from

all Judea and Jerusalem." And he said to those multitudes of Jews, "Blessed are the poor [comma] in spirit." That is, blessed are those who have no spiritual privilege, who rely on no spiritual advantage.

Blessed are those, basically, who recognize their spiritual bankruptcy, their true spiritual destitution. "Blessed are you Jews who basically put yourself, yourselves on the same level as pagan Gentiles before God," simply have their hands up before God. They don't consider themselves as having any merited favor from God, but instead they're beggars like the rest of the earth, looking to God for divine grace.

But in addition to saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," Jesus is speaking to the Jews as he preached the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also said on the same occasion simply, "Blessed are the poor." He said both phrases. Who was that message for? That was for the Gentiles, right? Because the Gentiles, they already knew they were foreigners and strangers to Israel's Messiah. The Gentiles didn't consider themselves as having any spiritual privilege before God, no spiritual wealth before Israel's God.

But they did tend to, like all of us do, like all of humanity Jew or Gentile, they did tend to put their trust in material prosperity and temporal wealth. Ignoring the fact that temporal material wealth can never ever ever advantage anyone when it comes to final spiritual realities, issues of eternal significance. Jew and Gentile alike, together, like all humanity, they ask the same perplexing questions of worldview. How did I get here? What is my purpose? What's wrong with the world? And how do we fix it? What's wrong with me in particular? Where's everything headed? More specifically, where am I headed? Where will I go when I die?

Jews, they had a number of those questions already answered because God had revealed himself to them in the Scripture. All those worldview questions they understood. They just wrongly believed they could be with God when they die simply because they were ethnically related to Abraham. They needed to hear Jesus' confrontation, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," because they thought of themselves as so spiritually rich and superior to the Gentiles.

The Gentiles, they needed to hear, "Blessed are the poor." And Jesus said that, too, directing that saying, that phrase, to the Gentiles, which is why Luke has recorded this saying for us, for us Gentiles. The Jews tended to rely on riches of spiritual privileges, struggled with coveting material prosperity, but the Gentiles were utterly lost in darkness. Paul describes them in Ephesians 4:17 and following that they're trapped in the "futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."

Boy, we see that all around us, don't we? Get this, though. Gentiles saw money as the key to their happiness because money, wealth, riches, that's the means for getting them what their greedy heart's desire; being rich, not being poor, but rich, that's what enables me as a Gentile to fulfill all my lusts and desires. And it's the same thing we see today. It's always been that way.

When Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor," he's confronting the human tendency to rely on material privilege, to look to things to satisfy, to look to material privilege, to look to happiness and joy in stuff. Or in Colorado terms, to find happiness and joy in stuff we do in the mountains, stuff we do outdoors. Basically all that money can buy. Whatever your flavor is, whatever part of the county you're in. All the while, ignoring the looming spiritual reality of the afterlife, of the coming judgment, of accountability to our Creator.

So the poor of whom Jesus speaks, the *ptochos*, it's not a matter of money, how much someone has or doesn't have. The condition of being a *ptochos* person has to do with the attitude one has toward money. Being a *ptochos* kind of person is not about a financial condition, it's about a spiritual condition. The kind of person is like a beggar. This *ptochos* person, it's one who possesses no self-reliance whatsoever, no reliance on the flesh, no hope in the flesh, no hope in any material or financial advantage whatsoever. Everything is stripped away in the heart. All reliance, all joy, all satisfaction, all contentment are found in God and God alone. That's the *ptochos*.

So now that we've clarified the word and clarified Jesus' meaning, let's get some examples. Thirdly, of the kind of person Jesus is talking about, let's illustrate it by going back to Matthew's Gospel. Matthew 15. Matthew 15. Remember the Syrophoenician woman? She had a demon possessed daughter. She came to Jesus in exactly this kind of *ptochos* attitude, this *ptochos*-like beggar.

Keep in mind, as you are turning to Matthew 15 to look at this dear woman, according to Luke 6:17, it was some of her people. Gentiles from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon who came to hear Jesus preach on the occasion of the Sermon on the Mount. She may even have been one of them, or at least heard the report from her countrymen.

Look at Matthew 15:21 and notice her sense of spiritual privilege as a Gentile talking with Jesus. That is to say, she had none. Look at Matthew 15:21 "Jesus went away from there and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying [the verb tense there indicates she was crying out repeatedly, following Jesus just crying out, crying out], 'Have mercy on me,

O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.'

"But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him saying, 'Lord, help me!' And he answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.'"

That's a reference, "Children's bread," that's a reference to the people of Israel. He was sent to feed them; he was sent to feed the children of Israel. And the dog is a reference to the Gentiles. It sounds really cruel, doesn't it to say that about her, right? Here's this dear woman with a demon possessed daughter. She's begging, she's crying out, she's got the right identification. "Have mercy on me, you Son of David." The word for "dogs" there is not like a mangey scavenger dog that roams the streets and you want to throw rocks at it.

I don't know if you feel that way. Sometimes boys feel that way, but this is a, this is like a little lap dog. We've

got a little lap dog in our house. They're very cute and fluffy and you want to pet them and cuddle them and stuff like that. That's the word he uses there so he's not being insulting. He's just talking about the vast difference between the children of Israel who sit at the table and all the Gentiles who are like those little lap dogs. She wasn't even offended.

Notice what she says in verse 27. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Incredible response, isn't it? She didn't walk away in a huff and say, "Call me a dog? I'll show you, you stupid Israelite. I'm gone." She didn't say that at all. You know, humility, a heart of faith makes very thick skin not easily offended.

Verse 28, "Jesus answered her, 'O Woman'" this is what he was getting to the whole time. He was going to draw this out and teach his disciples. "'O Woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly." Look, she's not like the Jews coming to Jesus expressing and assuming he's going to see their spiritual riches. She's not like them expressing spiritual self-reliance.

She's not trying to purchase favor with Christ, manifesting any material self-reliance; Hey Jesus, heal my daughter and I'll give you a lot of money. I know some people and we'll make sure you get some cedars of Lebanon your way and some purple garments and stuff. We'll hook you up. Just heal my daughter. She's not doing any of that. She comes there begging with her hand out, reaching out for grace. What does Jesus say? What is his testimony of her? "O woman, great is your faith." She trusted him whom she had identified as Lord, Son of David. She believes here in Israel's Messiah, putting all her faith in the King for the kingdom of God.

And as we see from Luke 6:20, you can turn back there now, by the way, as we can see from Luke 6:20, Jesus' first beatitude, his first line in the Sermon on the Mount, that daughter of Tyre and Sidon was no longer defined as being a daughter of Tyre and Sidon. She had become a daughter of the kingdom of God because Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor for yours is," that is present-tense, current condition, continuing reality, "yours is the kingdom of God."

So the poor, the *ptochos* Jesus identifies here are those for whom God is their all. They are those for whom God is their only. They're best symbolized by pointing to the mendicants, the beggars among them. The beggars that don't have a penny to their name. And when that's your condition, or when that is your attitude toward this world and its wealth, then God truly is your only source of reliance. He's your only hope of provision. He's your only hope of advantage, of joy of privilege, of prosperity. When God is your all, what else do you need?

With that in mind, let's answer a second question for this morning: Why are the poor blessed? Why are they blessed? In word, we just said it, because God is. And because he is their only hope. Because God is, we can take his Word as promises. His Word's unshakeable. We can trust him because he is. If he is, his promises are true and we believe them, abandoning all in this world to believe and embrace them, you know what? He's our only hope. The poor are blessed because God is, and he is their only hope.

The poor have had all their earthly hopes, all their ambitions, all their aspirations, all their dreams stripped away completely, and all that's left for them is their Creator shining in glory before them. And once they see him, they realize: He's all I needed anyway.

Listen to David in Psalm 34. "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast," not in being the king of Israel. "My soul makes it boast the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, let us exalt his name together! I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him saved him out of all his troubles."

Think about that. David was one of the wealthiest and most powerful of all the ancient kings, and yet, look at how David described himself: "This poor man." Really, poor? Let's compare bank accounts with David. Yeah, according to Jesus' meaning, David was numbered among the poor. That is why he says, "Let the humble hear what I'm saying and be glad," and "Come join with

me" and "Let us exalt his name together." Me and you; all of us who are *ptochos*. All of us who are blessed by God.

The riches of the Davidic kingdom, even the riches of Solomon's kingdom that followed David, those golden years of Israel, they were nothing to be compared and less than nothing to the kingdom of God. I believe it's Isaiah who said take all the kingdoms of earth and put them in a scale, a balance and weigh them next to just one word of God. They are wanting, and more than wanting. They are lighter than air. That kingdom is the present possession of everyone who trusts in God, of all the poor, no matter what their current financial condition, all of them. They trust in him and him alone. If he's their hope and he is their joy and he is their reward, theirs is the kingdom of God.

That's why the poor are blessed. Because they look to God. Their faces are radiant. Radiant with what? With joy and contentment. They will never be ashamed. The rich, that's a different story. They better enjoy it now because it's in this life only that their riches will provide some level of superficial comfort. Woe to them. They have received their

consolation. But the poor, for them? The consolation of the poor is still yet to come.

Look at that word "blessed." Let's talk about that for a few minutes. Many have translated the word blessed, which is the word *makarios* in the Greek, they translated it as "happy." "Happy," it's not entirely wrong if translated as happy, as long as we understand biblically what happy means. It's just that "happy" as a translation to say, "Blessed are the happy," is kind of misleading today, especially in our country that has declared itself to be devoted to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Right?

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It's kind of a definitional statement about us, isn't it? The Declaration of Independence. And I appreciate that statement, as far as it goes. I appreciate the fact that all those rights are understood to be endowed on humanity by Creator God, not by human governments, and

governments are in place to be able to protect those rights for citizens. That's the job of government.

But we, today, have become unmoored from a biblical framework. And our independent-minded fellow citizens, fellow Americans, have decided to abandon biblical definitions of words like "life" and "liberty" and "happiness," and they've decided instead to define them according to personal self-interest, which are sinful interests, especially the term "happiness." Happiness seems to refer to good feelings, pleasant thoughts, positive emotions. Our country is a very sensual people, isn't it, very feelings oriented?

Biblical happiness, biblical blessedness designed and given by God, has very little to do with feelings and everything to do with an advantage in God. And it's an advantage and prosperity that we don't fully realize here and now. It's delayed gratification. It's wait until the Son of Man comes. Now to the degree that our thoughts are God-centered and are meditative and reflective on the privileged place we have with God, certainly good feelings, positive emotions are going to follow from that.

We're not trying to deny the existence and importance of our feelings. But if you consider the one who had to be counted the most blessed man who ever lived, it would be Jesus Christ, right? Without a doubt. Many times his soul was in absolute agony. He cried out on the cross when the flesh had been torn from his back, when his brow was pierced with long, sharp thorns.

My wife and I used to live in El Centro, California. There's a little place protected by the Bureau of Land Management that we Border Patrol Agents couldn't drive all over. It was all fenced off and it was a place I'm glad they fenced off. It's called Crucifixion Thorns. These bushes that grew with thorns that were seriously about that long. And I'm told they are the same length and thickness of thorns you can find over in the Holy Land that were pieced together to build a crown and put on Jesus' head to mock him as king.

They were very very sharp. His brow was pierced, skull was probably pierced by those thorns. His hands and feet pierced with iron nails. The bitterest part of all of that was not the pain in his flesh. It was the pain in his heart. His heart was

broken by the abandonment of his God to the hands of injustice, and he cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Did Jesus at that moment cease to be the blessed? Never, never. Why not? Even as he died for a curse for all humanity, he was still the blessed of God. Why? Because of all people on the earth, His was the kingdom of God, present possession, as well. Of all people, surely, he will be filled and satisfied, as Isaiah says, Isaiah 53:11 says: "Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied." Jesus' sorrow, it has turned to laughing, rejoicing, overwhelming, exaltation. He's going to return one day to bring us to himself.

Jesus never ceased to be the most blessed of all because at no time did God cease to be his one and only hope. With God as his hope, everything else is fine. When God is your hope, nothing else can shake you, nothing else can rattle you, nothing else can cause you to fall. You stand firm, fixed upon God and his promises. You walk in obedience to his revealed will because you love him. It's how the poor are blessed.

A couple of terms to give you here, two from the Old Testament, two from the New Testament. All of them translated as "bless," or "blessed," but there are two basic meanings I want to pull out here. I'm being very simplistic here, so forgive that, if you know Hebrew or Greek or anything. But in the Old Testament Hebrew you have the words *barak* which means "to bless" or "to confer a blessing;" or even if it's directed man toward God, *barak* means "to praise."

When we say, "Blessed be God," it doesn't mean I'm going to confer on God a blessing he doesn't already have. No, I'm just going to recognize all the good he is and the goodness he's given and praise him for it. That's what *barak* means when I'm conferring it to God. But God is usually the subject of the verb *barak* and we are the objects. He blesses, he confers a blessing. The other Old Testament word is the word *ashar*, *ashar* or we might transliterate it into English as "asher." It means "to be blessed," "to be happy." It means "to be considered blessed or fortunate or happy or prosperous or well-situated."

There are two New Testament Greek words: *eulogia* and *makarios* and they roughly correspond to *barak* and *ashar* to

those Old Testament words. The word *eulogia* comes from the word *eulogeo*, *logos*, or *logeos*, meaning "to speak" or "to say," "eu" meaning to speak well of, that corresponds to the Old Testament word to *barak*, "to praise," "to bless." The word *makarios* means to, "to be blessed," "to be happy," "to be well-situated" or "to be counted so by others" and that can, corresponds to the Old Testament word *ashar*.

So *barak* and *eulogia* means "to confer blessing upon," as in God blessed us or we bless or praise God. *Ashar* and *makarios* means "to be blessed," "to be considered or counted as favored," or even "to be envied" because people recognize us for being so wealthy, so well-positioned, so well situated. That's what it means, that sense of satisfaction knowing we're blessed, knowing a blessing has been conferred upon us, but also knowing we're in that position of blessedness and that others will also recognize that as well. That's what it is to be blessed, *makarios*.

We're going to get into this in a little more detail in time to come, but for now let me illustrate what it is to be not *makarios* and then we'll contrast that to what it means to be *makarios*. You're in Luke 6. Turn ahead a couple pages to Luke

12, Luke 12, and let's look at Luke 12 and verse 13. Luke 12:13. We're going to consider or contrast two parables, or two stories Jesus told, and this is the first one in Luke 12:13.

"Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'" Where is his heart? It's in the wrong place, isn't it? "But he said to him, 'Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?' And he said to them, 'Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.'

"And he told them a parable, saying, 'The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, "What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?" And he said, "I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'" He's a hoarder, isn't he? "And I'll say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will

they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.'"

That's a clear case right there of being not *makarios*, not blessed, not well-situated. When God calls him to account one day, as we all will be called to account, this man was clearly in an unenviable position. Again, that's in spite of how apparently prosperous the man looks on the outside. There he is tearing down barns, building bigger barns. He's getting loans, if he even needs loans. He's just building, building, building, all the while unbeknownst to him, his life is ebbing away. Time is ticking.

He's engaged in entirely the wrong work. He's giving his life, his energy, his focus to the entirely wrong enterprise. He's got entirely the wrong concern. All his material prosperity, all his treasure did not profit him one iota when standing before Almighty God. That's why Jesus followed up that story, verse 22 all the way to verse 31, exhorting the people not to be anxious about material provision, but to trust God.

By the way, just a footnote, this is some of the teaching that is in Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount. We find here in this position in Luke's Gospel. So Luke has it, too. Just wanted to tell you that you are not missing anything by going through Luke, okay.

Jesus' point here, though, is that those who are truly blessed, they leave off all worrying about physical provision in this life, what we eat, what we wear, where we live, what we drive. Why? Because God is the one who takes care of all of that and we can entrust our souls to his care. Our sole focus must be, look at verse 31, Luke 12:31. Our sole focus must be "to seek his kingdom, and all these things will be added to you." So invest in eternity, lay up treasure in heaven.

That's why he ended this section here in Luke 12:32 and following, look at it there. He ended this section with this: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you," not just all these little things, what you shall eat, what you shall wear, where you shall live, what you shall drive, what job you have, all the rest. "It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and

give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

No fear for the little flock, the *ptochos* believers. No fear for those whose concern is about the things of the kingdom of God, which is their only inheritance, the greatest treasure they possess. And there at the center of it all is God and God alone.

Turn over to one more story to illustrate this in Luke 16. Luke 16. Take a look at Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus. In this story we see contrasting stations of poverty and wealth in a very extreme way. It's a familiar story, starting in Luke 16:19. "There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man." Notice the guy couldn't even get there, he was laid there. He was *ptochos*. He's crippled.

"At his gate was a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.'"

Why does he say, "Send Lazarus," but not, "Abraham" from yourself? Because even in torment, the rich man misjudges this *ptochos* believer. Lazarus has been raised to the same level as Abraham, but the rich man still can't recognize that. But he's envying him. He counts him now as blessed. "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that in you in your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'"

It's a harrowing story, isn't it? Who is the blessed one? Not the rich man, not the one who spent his life enjoying all his consolation and comforts that money could buy on earth. The

blessed one was Lazarus, the beggar, the *ptochos*. He's the blessed one. It's Lazarus whose, whose every comfort in this lifetime had been stripped away. His only hope was in God and in God alone to save him. Lazarus, not the rich man, was the blessed one. Lazarus, along with Father Abraham, who was materially prosperous in his lifetime.

It's not an issue of finances. Lazarus, along with Abraham, along with all of those who put no trust in riches but put trust in God and in God alone, that is all the *ptochos*. It is they and they alone who are going to enjoy the presence of God, who is their only treasure and they're going to enjoy him forever. No end. That's what makes heaven heavenly, right? It's not the sense of ease or peace, even though that's there. It's not the cessation of struggle that we all go through every single day. It's not the pearly gates or the golden streets.

It's not even the sense of escape from sin, which we struggle with and hate. It's not even the sense of escape from the wrath of God, as good as that is. What makes heaven heavenly is the presence of the living God, the one whom we love, the one in whom is all our joy and satisfaction because God and God

alone is our treasure and our reward. The heart of all those who are *ptochos* is the heart of the sons of Korah.

Psalm 84: "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God. For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trust in you!"

The heart of the *ptochos* is the heart of Asaph who says in Psalm 73:25, "Whom have in heaven but you?" That is, heaven is not heavenly if you're not there. "Whom have in heaven but you? And on earth is nothing that I desire beside you." Going to heaven is not about going to see dead loved ones. As good as dead loved ones are and we miss them, it's not about that.

Those dead loved ones are like us, fellow creatures, finite, and in the final analysis, relatively unimpressive in light of the glory of their Creator. The interest of our dead loved ones is our interest, too. They are now as we will one day

be, enraptured by the joy of their God and Savior. He is the one we all want to see and to worship and to know and to enjoy for all eternity.

For any who have any other motivation for being Christian, or any other motivation for going to heaven, I just encourage you if that's you to examine your heart seriously just to see if you're coming to Christ with the right motivation. Because it's only those with the heart of the Psalmist who are heading to heaven. Only they have the heart of the *ptochos*. They and they alone possess, present tense, present possession, only they possess the kingdom of God.

Okay, well that's enough to help us identify who the poor are and why it is they are blessed. We'll introduce a final question, which we're going to answer more fully next week, okay. So don't look at your watch. How may we enjoy the blessedness of the poor? Bottom line: We will enjoy the blessedness of the poor because if we're truly numbered among the *ptochos* of the world, then Jesus' promise applies to us, as well, right?

Ours, right now, is the kingdom of God. That means God is our only treasure and, in this life, as we're merely passing through it, we're here to lay up treasures in heaven. We are here to invest in the kingdom, to do kingdom things, to invest in his church, give ourselves fully to God and his purposes.

So the bottom line is we'd better make sure we are numbered among the *ptochos*, right, numbered among the beggars, which we'll know if we think like the *ptochos* thinks, if we do what the *ptochos* do. So how do these poor beggars think? How do these poor beggars live? When we come back next week, we're going to try to answer that more fully, but probably in three parts, but maybe four. Maybe. I don't know. We'll see what happens between now and then.

But first of all, you can jot this down if you'd like as a kind of sub-points: How do *ptochos* people think? And say, first, poor beggars are blessed because they fear God. Secondly, poor beggars are blessed because they rejoice in God. And thirdly, poor beggars are blessed because they obey God. Fearing God, rejoicing in God, obeying God, that is the sum of what it means to be the blessed. And it's only those for whom this temporal

world, all its riches, are stripped of their significance, all the allurements, all the enticements. Those who are the poor are attached to nothing in this world.

So theirs and theirs alone is the kingdom of God. There are some for whom God has stripped away this world's goods and we call them poor in financial poverty. And they're actually favored by God because Jesus said it's so hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. Why is that? Because wealth has such a strong hold on the heart. Wealth is, is so deceptive, isn't it? It buys stuff that makes us feel good. And we are creatures with five senses that want to be pleased.

So wealth is a distraction, you might say. But for the poor, they're in kind of a unique and advantaged position to abandon hope in this world's goods. As I said, they can also covet them more than anybody. But they're in a unique position closer to looking upward, closer to finding all their hope in God.

Remember the people of Tyre? I introduced you to them and described that city a few weeks ago as we introduced the Sermon

on the Mount. They were once a very wealthy, very proud people. Phoenician rich heritage, access to the cedars of Lebanon, that purple dye they used to extract out of the shells and dye garments and transport them all over the world, having access right on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. They thought their wealth would bring them lasting happiness. They thought their position along the coast allowed them a unique position on Tyre, on that little island to rebuff all attackers.

And they were sitting in safety and in luxury in their island fortress laughing and scoffing at the attackers on the mainland. They mocked in their wealthy arrogance, their self-confidence until the day that Alexander the Great rolled into town. They didn't count on him. He built a causeway of dirt out into the, out to the island and then marched across. And he fulfilled what Ezekiel had prophesied centuries earlier. He destroyed the walls of Tyre, broke down her mighty towers. He scraped her soil from her, made her a barren rock.

That was judgment for Tyrian pride, but in God's judgment, there is also grace. You see, God had to strip away all the wealth from Tyre, literally scraping it bare to humble her that

she might look up from the dirt and the dust and reach out to God as her only hope. The Tyrians then came to Jesus, didn't they? In Luke 6:17, people came from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. And now stripped bare, very poor, they came to find hope in Jesus.

I said the Syrophenician woman is from that region, Tyre and Sidon. In Matthew 15, she's one of those who also looked up from the dirt and looked to Jesus the Son of David as her only hope. She had nothing, but she looked up to Christ like a little dog that is willing to eat the scraps that fall from the table, and thus great was her faith. Everything stripped away that God in Christ would be her one and only hope. She's among the blessed.

You know what the very first beatitude in the Bible is? It's spoken by Leah, Jacob's first wife, the older sister of Rachel. She spoke in Genesis 30:13. She spoke the Bible's first beatitude exclaiming at the birth of yet another son, "Happy am I!" That's the word *ashar*. "For many women have called me happy." And so she named the boy who was born Asher, which is

not only the Hebrew word blessed, as we've already covered, it's also the name of the tribe Asher, the location of Tyre of Sidon.

Interesting little fact, isn't it? Tyre and Sidon in the region of Asher stripped bare to poverty by the judgment of God that they might put their hope in him and him alone. And they have pronounced upon them, illustrated in this first beatitude, "Blessed are the poor." They came to Messiah Jesus. Those who forsook this world and embraced him by faith find themselves possessors of the kingdom.

Let's pray. We want to thank you, Father, for all of us who have been stripped bare in our hearts from this world, finding in the world all sin, all that offends you. As 1 John tells us, "All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life," and all that is in the world, "is not from the Father but is from the world," and so we hate it. We've been crucified to the world and this world is crucified to us. We no longer want it. We want you and you alone.