

## A Sober Warning to the Worldly-Contented

Luke 6:20-6:26

August 13, 2017

Take a look He this morning at the four woes in Luke 6:20. This is ah four corresponding woes to the four beatitudes he gave in, we'll look at that whole section, Luke 6:20 to 26. Interestingly, this is how Jesus finishes his introduction to his sermon with four woes, which really you could consider a, a gospel call to all the non-disciples in the gathered crowd. Each woe that he gives matches or corresponds directly to a beatitude and provides, really, a warning. A warning to the lost.

So let's take a look there in Luke 6:20 and following. It says, "Jesus 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 and 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 you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."

As an introduction to a sermon, that introduction certainly arrests the attention, doesn't it? I have no doubt that for those who originally heard this message, this was shocking. This, this introduction is so completely opposite of all human worldly expectation. Everyone wants to be rich, not poor. Everyone wants to be full and happy, not hungry and sad. Everyone wants to hear good, favorable words from other people. Nobody wants to be despised and rejected and castaway, but everyone wants to be rich. That is such a common sentiment that it's all almost axiomatic among mankind that everybody wants wealth.



From the beginning of time all the way to this present moment, and I can assure you all the way through the Book of Revelation. I see in Revelation Chapter 18, when God brings judgment on Babylon, the woes that come on Babylon are the woes of those who are losing their wealth. They're sad because the world and its economic system is judged.

So it's axiomatic among mankind that everybody wants to be rich. And I, I find it actually ironic, maybe. You could say that all the rebellious rock bands of the sixties, seventies, and of every decade, really, they, they became popular by decrying and denouncing the wealthy establishment, yet they become the wealthy establishment. Once they gain their wealth, they don't hand it all away and say, "Oh no, no, no, this is what all my rock music is all about." No they take it for themselves, and they go buy their toys, do their vacations. Why? Because as much as we like to say that money doesn't matter, it does matter. It matters to many, many people. And it touches us here in the church as well, and that's why we need to listen carefully to what Jesus has to say in these four woes.

I'm reading a fascinating book called *The Silk Roads* by Peter Frankopan. It's a retelling of the history of the world from the perspective of the economic interests that created and established the Silk Road. You may have heard of the Silk Road. It's the ancient trade, refers to the ancient trade routes that used to connect East and West, from China and Japan on the east all the way into Europe on the West. And that is what drew the world together. And what drew the world together really from a Biblical theological perspective was really greed and covetousness. As the West cast its greedy eye on the East, desiring things like silk and spices, the East did the same to the West, wanting all the things that it didn't yet possess.

In fact, while Jesus was preaching this sermon, Tiberius was on the throne of the Roman Empire. And it was only called the Roman Empire because of his predecessor Caesar Augustus, who died in AD 14. He rose to prominence by seizing and annexing Egypt. By taking Egypt, Augustus was the hero of Rome. He was no longer called Octavius, the Roman general. He's Caesar Augustus.

The Roman Senate was all too pleased to bestow upon him the title emperor, bringing an end to the Republic and establishing the Roman Empire. Very pleased with the annexing of Egypt. Frankopan writes this, he says "The capture of Egypt transformed Rome's fortunes. Now that it controlled the vast harvests of the Nile Valley the price of grain tumbled, providing a major boost to household spending power. Interest rates plummeted. This in turn quickly fueled the familiar boom that accompanies a flood of cheap capital, a surge in property prices. Disposable income increased so sharply that Augustus was able to raise the financial threshold for qualification for members of the Senate by 40%. As Augustus himself was fond of boasting, he found Rome a city built in brick, but left it in marble. This surging wealth," the result, "was the result of Rome's ruthless expropriation of Egypt's tax revenues, and of its enormous resources." End Quote.

Not only did Augustus tax Egypt and turn Egypt's wealth into Rome's wealth but, as Frankopan acknowledges, the process of appropriating revenues was repeated elsewhere as the tentacles of Roman economic and military expansion extended further. Just north of Egypt he extracted taxes from Judea,

which Luke recorded in Luke 2:1 through 3. He extracted taxes from Syria as well. And those revenues funded his desire for even more, more, and more, and more, for the fortunes of the empires to the east, like the Persian Empire.

At the same time, rulers in China were expanding their economic interests as well, coming east toward Persia. Merchants brought their coveted silk to trade creating new markets along the way that they themselves could supply. Which would increase not only their own wealth but also increase the wealth of the rulers who sent and subsidized those expeditions. So thus the trade routes were created by the expansion of empires driven along by the desire for more, and more, and more. And you might think that all this empire expansion served the interests merely of the rulers and the super-rich. And that's certainly true, it did that. They were all increasing their fortunes to a ridiculous degree.

But, back to Ronald Reagan's trickle-down economics. Though there was still a vast divide between the rich and the poor, there was a growing middle class. The potential for many for

upward mobility in society. The rising tide of surplus lifted all the boats. For those who listened to Jesus that day pronounce his woes on the rich, they themselves were at that time being tempted toward the pursuit of wealth. There's a poignant excitement in the air beckoning to them from the culture in which they lived. Come, get your fill. Come, fill your pockets. The desire to pursue the, the wealth, the ostentation, the extravagance of the super-rich, was a powerful elixir that summoned all classes of people.

Frankopan writes this as well. He says quote, "This is captured perfectly in Petronius' *Satyricon*, whose most," that's a that's a work of literary fiction, "whose most famous scene is the dinner party of Trimalchio, a former slave who had gained his freedom and amassed a fortune. Trimalchio wanted only the best that money could buy. Pheasant brought in specially from the eastern coast of the Black Sea. Guinea fowl from Africa rare and expensive fish, plumed peacock, and much more besides, presented in excess. The grotesque theatre of presenting dish after dish. Live birds sewn inside a whole pig, that flew out the moment the ham was carved, or silver toothpicks being given to the guests, was a remorseless parody of the vulgarity and

excess of Rome's new wealth. One of the major booms of antiquity, produced one of the great literary expressions of bitter jealousy toward the nouveau rich." End quote.

Gaius Petronius' book *Satyricon*, it demonstrates that even back then, in the 1st century when it was written, the modern tabloid interest to provide common people with a glimpse into the lifestyles of the rich and famous. That's nothing new. It's ancient. Every common man wants to see how the rich live. As the character Trimalchio, though he's mocked in the story, his rags to riches story, being a former slave and now a man of ostentatious wealth, provides the common people with an opportunity both to judge the rich for their excesses and ostentation, but also to tempt the poor to want that kind of wealth for themselves.

As I said, everybody wants to be rich and that's why Jesus' introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, with these beatitudes favoring the poor and pronouncing woes upon the rich, they reach so deeply into the covetous desires of the human heart, for rich and poor alike, and everyone in between, Jesus has flipped the



world and its aspirations on its head. Those who enter the kingdom of God are not the rich but the impoverished. Those who will be satisfied and laughing in the kingdom are those who are currently languishing and weeping.

Those who will be accepted and embraced are not those with stellar reputations among people of this world. Instead, it's those who are the excluded, the reviled, the spurned of this world. They are the ones, and they alone, who have a reward in heaven, a great reward. And one day they will meet the God who will crown them with exceedingly great reward when they arrive there. Total reversal of fortune. Total reversal of expectation, and acutely convicting to Jesus' original audiences. Especially, especially because in their heart of hearts his words resonated in their conscience. They knew he was right. He'd exposed them as covetous and jealous, longing for riches, just like everyone else.

Now, as we've said before, the main targets of Jesus' sermon are the disciples. We've pointed this out before, but look back at verse 20, Jesus lifted up his eyes, on whom, on his

disciples. He's speaking to them. They are the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the despised. But, keep in mind, while the poor and the rich provide vivid illustrations, it is not financial condition, per se, that Jesus is talking about here. Jesus is here confronting and exposing a spiritual condition. Rich and poor has to do with one's attitude toward wealth or the lack of wealth.

Whether in plenty or in want, everyone is tempted toward greed. Everyone is tempted to trust in money to solve problems, to satisfy desires, to buy your way out of things. So Jesus is confronting and exposing the very truest desires of everyone's heart. So 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 spend your life trying to find happiness in the stuff that money can buy. When he says, woe the rich, he's confronting that tendency. All the while ignoring spiritual realities that lie in wait around the corner of a very few short years, that's the rich. They ignore that. They indulge in what their money can buy.

The poor of whom Jesus speaks. We said that's the word *ptochos*. As we said, it's not just a matter of money, how much someone has, or does not have, his bank account. The condition of being a *ptochos* person is about one's attitude toward money. The poor person has cut off and given up all hope in money. He puts no trust in money, but he looks upward to God, like a beggar, looking for nothing but mercy.

That is a perfect picture of God's people and of Jesus' true disciples. The poor here, that Jesus ascribes blessedness to, this is the kind of person who, like a destitute beggar, he possesses no self-reliance whatsoever. The rich, all self-reliance. The poor has no reliance on material or financial advantage. The rich, that's what he hopes in. That's what he relies on. For the poor, in his heart, everything has been stripped away. He relies upon God and God alone. But the rich, the rich is clouded in his judgment, in his thinking, because he doesn't just rely upon God, he doesn't just desire God and God alone. Everything has not been stripped away. He has other little idols. One in particular called Mammon. The poor realizes though that all his joy, all his future, all his satisfactions

are found in God and God alone, and he will only gain them in right relation to God. That is the poor.

Now in contrast to the poor are the rich, and theirs is a sad, sad condition. You're probably not accustomed to thinking about the rich and the super-rich as being in a sad, lamentable, pathetic condition, but I want to disabuse you of that notion Biblically. And I want you to think about the rich in a much different way than you have in the past. I want you to lament and be sad over their condition, in hopes that they might be saved, even though it's like a camel through the eye of a needle, that they too might be saved and to come into full possession of an eternal kingdom while their earthly wealth burns and is destroyed. I hope you think that way about the rich after this sermon is over.

So as we get into our outline for this morning, that's really the first point. You can write this down. Notice the sad condition of the rich, the sad condition of the rich. Just going to give you two points this morning, but the first one I can just guarantee you is a long point, Okay? It's a long point. The

sad condition of the rich. Again, we're talking about a spiritual condition. The super-rich, their extravagances provide us with an illustration. They expose the desires of the heart, but really this is about the heart, not about the bank account. Okay? After all there were wealthy people in Scripture who belonged to God, weren't there?

In the Old Testament, certainly Abraham, the father of faith, he was wealthy. Isaiah frequented the king's court, probably a man of means. Nehemiah, he was cup bearer to the king of Persia, became the Governor of Jerusalem. Go into the New Testament men like Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. Certainly not poor men. Levi and Zacchaeus, both of them had been tax collectors, made a fortune. We read of wealthy women, Mary of Bethany, holy women who accompanied Jesus and his disciples, probably provided some funding for that itinerant ministry. Women like Lydia of Philippi who was a wealthy textile merchant. These are all wealthy people. But they do not fall under the pronouncement of these woes, they're counted among the poor. Why? Because they put no trust in riches. Their hearts are not attached to what they have. They find no hope in wealth like the poor. They consider themselves destitute beggars before God.

They invest their earthly wealth into the advancement of a future heavenly kingdom.

But among the rich as a class of people, we do have to acknowledge, as Jesus said, there are very few Abrahams, very few Nicodemus. Remember Jesus' words to his disciples, Matthew 19:23, after the rich young ruler walked away from Christ? How difficult it is for wealthy people, for those who love money to separate from their money and to love Christ and Christ alone. Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again, I tell you, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." It's difficult. In fact, it's so, so difficult it's impossible. It's exceedingly difficult because it's impossible. Like the salvation of any of us, impossible. But it's not impossible for God because God can save rich and poor alike. He saves. His power is unlimited.

But for those whose hearts are fixed on riches, no matter what their bank account looks like, as we've said, some of those

greedy money loving people, or those who don't have it. Those who love money, that's something that doesn't pay attention to class. It doesn't pay attention to economic status. It doesn't pay attention to bank account. The love of money, the love of wealth, the love of riches is in any human heart, rich or poor. And that's why there are so many get rich quick schemes, multi-level marketing schemes, lotteries, gambling, Las Vegas. All of that is targeted not toward the extremely wealthy, but to the poor and the ignorant. All those schemes prey upon the foolish. Why do those schemes succeed? Because there are many poor who love money just as much as the rich love money.

The word here used for the rich is the word *plousios*. And you can think of them in stark contrast to the impoverishment of the poor, and that's, that's the picture. Think of the, the Bill Gates of this world, or the Jeff Bezos, or whoever is the next billionaire trillionaire, whatever, that's the idea here. The word goes beyond simply being well supplied and having enough. Refers to having an abundance of earthly possessions that exceeds normal experience. The rich are those who look to money to deliver them, to please them, to buy whatever they want, so they'll never have to want again. That's the idea.

This is in direct contrast, by the way, to the godly who say, along with Agur in Proverbs 30:7 to 9, he prays this very pious prayer, "Two things I ask of you God; deny them not to me before I die." He says, "Remove far from me," remove far from me, "falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God." That right there is the attitude of the Godly. Don't give me too much, don't give me too little. Give me this day my daily bread. That's the attitude of the godly. A singular concern to be in right relation with God.

In that passage, though, in Proverbs 30, we can hear that fundamental danger of pursuing wealth and riches. Because the rich, there's the danger of becoming full and denying God and saying, who is the Lord? It's called suicide by wealth, isn't it? One more thing to point out, before we get into some of the detail here. When Jesus described blessedness to those who are the poor, hungry, weeping, and despised, just to be clear, he's not talking about four different kinds of people here. He's describing one kind of person, the poor, hungry, weeping, and



despised, though, those are four related characteristics of the same person, his true disciples. And in the same way when Jesus pronounced woes upon the rich, the fool, the laughing, the, the popular, the well-spoken of. Again, that's not four different kinds of people, it's the same kind of person. Those are the people who do not possess the kingdom and never will. Thus the reason for the woe.

So for our purposes, we're just going to call these people the rich, having made our qualifications. These are the rich because their hearts are tied to this world. They seek wealth. They find wealth and contentment in this world, happiness, treasure on earth instead of treasure in heaven. They seek to fill their bellies now rather than wait till then. They, they laugh themselves silly because they love their fun. They want to avoid all kinds of pain, and hunger, and sadness, all emptiness and crying. In the words of one of today's false prophets, they want their best life now. They don't want to wait for it until later. They look for comfort, security, happiness, and temporal wealth with very little thought, or concern for eternal wealth, kingdom concerns, God's interests, not theirs. All their

interests and their efforts are in this life right now and not in the life to come.

Now if you look at those three verses, you'll see in verses 24 to 26 how Jesus describes the sad condition of the rich. The rich here love money. They love to be full. They love to be happy, laughing. They love flattery. Just briefly we'll walk through each one of these points to see why those descriptions there, describe the rich trapped in such a lamentable condition. And hopefully it will evoke your sympathy for them as well, a gospel-oriented compassion. Do you wanna bring them the gospel?

First of all, [you could say a] sub-point one [or A or whatever you want to call it,] the rich love money and that's very, very sad. Just on a human level, it's sad. Those who love money are enslaved to the pursuit of money and money is a cold, thankless, heartless taskmaster. You can pursue money your whole life long, and then suddenly, whether it's due to a change in the weather, a change in market conditions, a war, a newer or better product than yours, all that hard work vanishes into thin

air, along with all that money that you've invested and worked so hard to attain.

Solomon warned in Proverbs 23:4 to 5, "Do not toil to acquire wealth; be," dizz, "discerning enough to desist when your eyes light on it," that is wealth, "it is gone, it suddenly sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven." And yet, people pursue wealth. And yet, people continue. They've taken a new approach to telling you that wealth buys happiness. People say, well, wealth doesn't buy happiness, but deep down you know that they really believe it does because they keep chasing it. But David Nield, he's writing for *sciencealert.com*, he published an article at the end of June entitled, here's the quote, "Study shows money really can buy happiness. If you buy free time."

Forgive me, but some editor should have caught that. If it's free time, um, why do you need to buy it? Mr. Nield goes on to report, quote, "New research suggests spending money really can make us happier. As long as we're spending it on making more free time for ourselves, by employing a cleaner, or paying to get the car washed, for instance. Perhaps it's a sign of our

increasingly hectic lives. But the study found that buying time with our money gives us a better sense of wellbeing than buying yet more material stuff. Studies conducted by an international team of researchers who surveyed 6,271 people across the US, Canada, Denmark, and the Netherlands, and found the same link between buying time and life satisfaction, irrespective of the overall level of income." End Quote.

Interesting, isn't it? That's the new mantra; buy time buy time. You gotta have money to buy people to clean your house right? In order to get rich, in order to be able to buy all that free time, you have to be busier than your competition to get the wealth. You gotta run faster, you gotta work harder, which is really counterproductive to your overall peace.

But even if you're able to make enough money to buy yourself some free time, you really cannot buy time, can you? You can use time in various ways, but you cannot buy it. Time is that one resource, that one commodity that does not replenish. Once you've spent time, it's gone forever. You cannot buy it

back, no matter how much money you have. And that's what's so tragic about those who love wealth, who love and seek after money. They spend their entire lives chasing the distraction of riches, only to spend their wealth on other distractions. And then they wake up one day and they realize that life, and relationships, and people, and God himself, all been pushed to the margins, left behind in greedy pursuits. They wake up and realize that they're out of time and all the money in the world is not going to buy them more time, no matter what those researchers tell us.

Paul told Timothy to warn the rich, those who desire to be rich. In 1 Timothy 6:9 and 10, he wrote this, "Those who desire to be rich" that transcends all kinds of people, right? No matter what your bank account says, "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

Notice those verbs there; desire to be rich, love of money, through this craving, wandering away from the faith, piercing themselves with many pangs. Folks, that's why it's sad, it's sad when people chase it. I cannot tell you how many times I've seen this, not just in the world but in the church. And it's so tragic.

There are men and women who could be so useful to the work of the Lord, so fruitful in the ministry of the local church. But because they love money, because they keep on chasing stuff, and vacations, and pursue, and on and on they go, they just wander away. Oh, they'll still attend church, but not faithfully, and not with interest. They're not involved in regular, sacrificial committed ministry. Their hearts always seem to be somewhere else. Even as they sit in front of you, they seem to be closing this deal in their heart or making this purchase in their mind or, or planning that next thing. I've even seen people surfing the web for stuff on their phone while they're sitting in, not this church, not, not you people. No, no, I'm not talking about, I'm talking about those people, those other churches. But what's so extremely tragic is that the rich do not realize what they're doing until it's too late for them.

Turn over to just an example of this. Turn over to Luke 12. Just a couple pages here, Luke 12 and verse 13, and take a look here at a person who tried to use Jesus, like modern prosperity preachers try to teach us to use him, to get what he wanted. Look at Luke 12 starting in verse 13. "Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'" Now listen, if this guy is the super-rich, he doesn't care about some inheritance, does he? No, this guy wants more. No matter what his economic status is, no matter what his bank account says, this guy wants more. And he wants Jesus, the miracle worker, the most powerful man they've ever heard, they want, he wants to leverage him into the situation. "Jesus said to him, 'Man, who made me a judge or an arbiter 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."'" That's one of the problems of the rich. You know, they just, they just run out of

room and they gotta, "So he said to myself, 'I'll do this. I'll tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods, and I will 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."

Listen, the man who asked Jesus the question, he's not the super-rich, needing to tear down his barns to build bigger barns. Jesus is confronting an attitude toward wealth here. And that's why sol, you can turn back to Luke 6, but that's why Solomon, he warned in Proverbs 4:23, "Watch over your heart with all diligence for from it flow the springs of life." Listen the love of wealth can be so blinding. Like it was for the covetous man in the crowd that day, who saw Jesus merely as a means to achieve his ends. Boy, did he miss the point. Jesus came to offer eternal salvation, forgiveness of sins, a clear conscience before God, and he wants an inheritance? Go to James Chapter 4. We'll come back to Luke 6 in a second, but in James chapter 4



James warns those who are blinded by wealth and interested only in making a profit.

Look at James 4 starting in verse 13 going into the next chapter. James provides this chilling picture of those who seek, strive after wealth. "Come now, you who say," James 4:13, "Today or tomorrow we'll go to into such and such a town and spend a year there, trade, make a profit." What's that, a business plan? He's plan, he's making plans to make money. "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live, and do this or that. But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him and his sin.'"

Look at Chapter 5, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming up on you. Your riches," he's picturing them in the end, right? "Your riches have rotted, your garments," yeah, even those silk ones from the east, "are moth eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion

will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days." Stop there. How foolish. Laying up treasure in the last days? That is tragic and terrifying. What good will all that money do when you stand before God to give an account for how you invested not only your life but all that money too? What are you going to say to him? If you store up earthly wealth like this rich man, it's going to be a testimony against you in the end.

Well, that's the first reason the rich are in such a sad, sad condition because they're enslaved by the love of money, which is only going to rot in the end. In spite of all the warnings though they go their way, like the rich young ruler did, because in their hearts they don't really love God. They really love their money. So sad.

Secondly, the rich love to be full. They love to be full. Now, I like to be full, right? Don't you? In fact, after church services are over today, I'm probably going to get full. I like to be full. We all love to be well fed, satisfied after a good meal, but that's not the picture here. It's not just that kind

of a fullness. Again, this is a contrast to the beatitude verse 21, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." The rich are interested in being full. And in the pursuit of providing themselves with plenty to eat, never having a lack, never having a want, they want to do it on their own. That's the idea of the verb used here, *empiplēmi*, which, which means they, they fool themselves with no want, no lack, that is, they forget God, they deny him. And in the words of Proverbs 30 verse 9, they implicitly say, after all they have, "Who's the Lord?" Like, why do I need him? I got stuff, I'm well provisioned, well taken care of.

Remember back when we talked about verse 21, how we said that God he created us to hunger? He created our bodies to have mechanisms inside. I won't go through all the plumbing, but it's all there so that we, will process and digest food. We want food. We like eating food; it tastes good to us. He gave us, he gives us, gave us, sensory perception for that purpose. And our daily hunger is a daily physical reminder to look not to ourselves, but to God, who is the one who provides not only our bodies who want food, but then the food to satisfy it. He brings both together. It's a daily lesson. And that's why we

acknowledge him at every mealtime as we daily ask God, "Give us this day our daily bread." We work to be part of the means God uses to answer that prayer. Then we thank him for providing each and every meal, we take nothing for granted. Look to him for all satisfaction. That's the attitude of the blessed poor anyway.

For the rich though, they trust in themselves to get their food. They trust in their money to get them satisfaction by their own strength, their own ingenuity, intelligence, influence or whatever, they can feed themselves. Without a commitment to the daily habit of seeking God for food and sustenance, disconnected as they are from the daily joy of giving thanks to God for providing for every need, the rich are withholding themselves, from themselves, no pleasure. They gorge themselves in food and drink because for them, satisfying the belly, satisfying the tastes, satisfying their bodies, is the essence of the paradise that they have created for themselves on this earth.

Utopia for them is free food of all kinds of varieties. And as much as you can eat and drink, same thing as those ancient

Chinese and Persians and Romans and Europeans who all came together wanting the same exact thing. Paul wrote about that, lamenting in Philippians 3:18 and 19, "Many, of whom I've often told you now tell you even with tears, walking as enemies of the Cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." Notice Paul said, "I tell you now, even with," what? "tears." Tears. This is a sad thing. Because they're blinded by their bellies, their end is destruction. Which means they may very well enter into the fires of hell with a very full belly of food, and an eternity to regret it.

Well thirdly, sub-point here the rich love to be happy. They love to be happy. And not just happy but happy with this world. With happy with this life. They, they love to laugh. They love to tell jokes, listen to jokes, be at ease. They don't want to have anything heavy dropped on them. They just want lighthearted pleasure, entertainment, amusements of the world. Nothing to fear, nothing to worry about. Just ease and leisure and that is the pursuit of their lives.

The word for laughter that's used here was often portrayed in the Old Testament, according to several different commentators, as ironic or flippant laughter, even haughty or foolish laughter. Laughter could be an expression of superiority and scorn, could be displaying human self-confidence in the face of God. This is the attitude really of Psalm 1 like we talked about last week, the scorers, the mockers. This is them, the scoffers. They loved to laugh. They love to make fun. They love to make jokes. And again, laughter portrays the sense of being completely at ease. There's no worry about the future, no thought of God, no thought of accountability to him. Just lighthearted feelings of frivolity, just effervescent happiness, flippancy, indulging in the best and greatest things this earthly life has to offer. And why worry about anything else? Let's just laugh.

What's sad about the rich is that so many of them, they're not going to wake up until they're standing before God to give an account of how they've invested the life he gave them. And then the laughter stops, I promise you. All they'll be able to say is to acknowledge the pain, with the painful admission that God's word is true about them. "And although they knew God, they

did not honor him as God or give thanks to him. But they became futile in their thinking. Their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools, exchanged the glory of the immortal God," for what? "For the glory of self," for self-indulgence in the creature. How tragic. How tragic, but that's a description of the rich, the fool, the laughing, woe to them.

There's a fourth description here of the rich. And it's in their, this is what makes it sad too, they have a love for flattering words and for the approval of men. Take a look at the text again. A final verse in Luke, Luke 6, I gotta get back to Luke, so you get back to Luke, Luke 6 and verse 26. Look what it says there, "Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." It's subtle here, but in the original language, Jesus has put an emphasis here on the pronoun you and it's, it's written, the pronoun, as it's written, the pronoun's put upfront for emphasis. Literally it reads "Woe, when with respect to you all men should be speaking well." As in speaking positively of you, favorable things. That's what the rich want to hear, right? That's what they want to hear. Just on a human level, the rich are often surrounded by people who flatter them, who tell them everything is great. Oh,

you're wonderful. Oh, you're so handsome. Oh, you're so beautiful. Oh you're so, whatever, the fill in the adjective.

You may have heard recently, or read about this recently, as the actor Johnny Depp is in financial hot water. I hate to go from the sublime to the ridiculous, but here goes. But a number of articles have been showing up since January of 2017, providing details of Johnny Depp's spending habits. He's buying very expensive toys, airplanes, private yachts, houses. He's got a French Chateau, a chain of islands in the Bahamas. I mean, who doesn't want that, right? Chain of islands? He stores all the junk that he's bought in 12 storage facilities. Talk about tearing down barns and building bigger barns. Well, now you don't have to tear down and build up. You just rent right? So he's got 12 storage facilities. He spends, get this, more than \$2,000,000 a month to maintain his lifestyle.

When his business managers and his financial advisors tried to talk with him about his finances, Depp ignored their warnings. When things really started going south, he just fired them, and then he turned around and sued them for mismanaging



his money. Allegedly they had lost track of about 650 million dollars, leaving the actor about 40 million in debt. You thought you had money problems? All joking aside here. I want to say this in all sincerity. Poor Johnny, right? His lifestyle, his constant purchasing of stuff, is indicative of a serious heart condition. This poor man is in trouble because idolatry is running out of control in his life.

But just back to the point here, how? How does 40 million in debt creep up on you all of a sudden? According to some sources, this is the other side of Johnny Depp's argument, many of the financial managers who serve these Hollywood stars are really nothing more than rapacious wolves, leeching off the actors to get a cut, get a percentage for themselves. So they ply their trade by using cunning, constant affirmation. They're experts in flattery, they're saying yes to everything. Telling them it's such a great decision. What a great purchase, what a great eye for art you have Mr. Depp, and all that other stuff. Finding a way always to get it done just to please the actors every whim and wish. Never telling him the truth. It's only when things get wildly out of control that they say hey, we tried to warn you. What, don't look at us.

And that beloved, back to our text, is the connection to false teachers. Jesus warned the rich, "Woe when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets." How so? The false prophets sidle up to the rich, to get nearer to them, to tell them what they want to hear. Why? So they can extract money from them. And they'll do it to rich and poor alike. There is, though, between the rich and the false prophets, a symbiotic relationship. The rich love flattery, and the false prophets love money. The two go very well together, well, destructively so.

Jude 11 says the false prophets abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error. That is like Balaam, who is the prototype of all false prophets, he intended to serve up false prophecies for King Balak. Why, because King Balak offered him money. He turned away from God's clear instruction, to chase money. That's Balaam. That's the false prophets. Parallel text, 2 Peter 2:13, says the false prophets revel in their deceptions while they feast with you. That is to say, they eat with you, but not outta friendship. They're only pretending friendship.

Their only interest is to satisfy their greed, to get what you have.

Peter continues with this warning. "They," the false prophets, "have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they've gone astray. They followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved to gain from wrongdoing." Paul, he concurred with Peter, Romans 16:18, "Such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive."

Listen, that's why a true ministry is always conducted with integrity. Telling the truth, never flattering people. Always telling the truth, he told the Thessalonians, a church who knew Paul's life. Why? Because he lived and worked among them. They had watched how he lived. Paul told them, "We speak not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. That's my major concern when we never came with words of flattery, as you

know, nor with the pretext for greed, something only God can see." And that's why he says God is witness.

Jude, Peter, Paul, they're only following the pattern of their Lord, Jesus Christ, whose spoke truth to the rich. He spoke clearly and straightforwardly to the rich. He was a true prophet, not a false prophet. The false prophets only want your stuff, and so they flatter you. They write books that make you feel good. They put on radio programs and television programs that affirm you. The rich love to be flattered. That's their downfall. Says in Proverbs 29:5, "The one who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet." Snaring him, tripping him up, snatching him. The rich man is caught in the trap, and he doesn't know it until it's too late. Just ask Johnny Depp. But his woe, if he doesn't repent, his woes are yet to come, aren't they?

Well, that's the sad condition of the rich. We haven't even talked about the significance of the word woe yet, we're getting there. But the rich love money, they love to be full. They love to be happy, and they love flattery. When we look at the

warnings of the Bible we realize they're ensnared by their love for money. They're enslaved by their greed, by a love for self and they're trapped like rats in a pathetic condition. And so so sad.

Let's consider though, how carefully Jesus warned them. How poignant, stark, is his warning to get their attention? But notice also, the tone of Jesus' warning. This is point two in the outline. Listen to the sober warning of Jesus. Listen to the sober warning of Jesus point number two. As Jesus speaks here such a mercy. In this section we already noted he's speaking to his disciples, but not only to his disciples. Though this warning is a protection for them, to guard them against the deceptive draw of earthly riches, but here you can see, he's speaking directly to the rich. Look what it says here, verse 24, "But woe to you who are rich... Woe to you who are now full... woe to you who laugh now..." He's speaking directly to them. That is, he's turned his attention from those whom he knows is, are his true disciples say, namely, the 12 apostles he just brought down from the mountain, naming them. And he turns to others in the crowd, who, this may be them. This is a gospel call. Speaks directly to the rich, the contented, the laughing, the

flattered. And to the worldly contented, Jesus says, "Woe to you." He's speaking to all of them as a group. Warning them, calling them to awake, calling them to repent before it's too late and follow him.

The word, woe, is really an interesting word. It's another one of those onomatopoeic words, one that sounds like its meaning. The lexicographer Ceslas Spicq says this, "woe," he gives it in the Greek as, why? "Why is a transliteration of the Hebrew Oy" or you've ever heard a Yiddish, Oy vey? You know they hit themselves in the head. That's the idea here. "It's a sort of an onomatopoeia, a cry of pain, terror, indignation, sometimes threat, a declaration of misfortune. A complaint against a certain person or group, given one's misery or privations. According to the context it must be translated as alas, ah, or as we have here, woe." Remember, Isaiah, "Woe is me"?

Jesus pronounces the woes on the rich, satisfied, laughing, the flattered, not as a, understand this, not as a curse per say. Not as a curse. But as the lamentable groan of pity and

sorrow. They are more miserable than anyone because their wealth has blinded their eyes. That was Jesus' point over in Matthew about those who, uh rich people, whose vision was completely clouded by money. He said, Matthew 6:22, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad," that is clouded with wealth, "your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other." Summary statement, "You cannot serve God and money." Don't think you can mix the two. One commentator put it well when he said, "When filled with earthly goods, what does one want from God?" Such a sad tragic condition.

Back to our example, in the rich young ruler, Mark records in his gospel and insight into Jesus' heart toward that man. Before confronting the young man about his worldly affections, Mark 10:21 tells us that Jesus looking at him, loved him. How did Jesus love him? He confronted his avarice, told him the truth. "He said to him, 'You lack one thing: go sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in

heaven; and then come, follow me.' Disheartened by the saying, the rich young ruler went away sad, sorrowful, because he had great possessions."

Look the woes here, while at times it's true, the word woe can convey condemnation and cursing, that's clearly the sense of Jesus' woes in Matthew 23 pronounced in anger toward the scribes and the Pharisees, "Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites." But that's not the tone here. The tone here is a tone of lament and sorrow. If you listen carefully, there's the sound of pleading, along with sober warning to the worldly contented. Listen, while there's breath for these people there's still an opportunity for them to repent, right? And our Lord's attitude toward the rich, the tone he uses here, that should be our tone and attitude as well.

Just quickly let's get some detail about the nature of Jesus' warnings to these worldly, contented. First, they have their satisfaction in full. They have their satisfaction in full, versus 24. These are sub-points again, verse 24, "Woe you are rich, for you've received your consolation." The word



consolation is the word *paraklesis*. *Paraklesis* also translated encouragement or, or comfort" Just a footnote, the personal noun of that word is *paracletos*. You probably recognize that as the word comforter, counselor, helper, advocate. Jesus referred to himself as the *paracletos* and he said he's going to send another *paracletos*, the help of the Holy Spirit. But the rich have forfeited any comfort or consolation from Christ. And they preferred instead to go it alone, to buy comfort with their money. Woe to them, for they have received, perfect tense by the way, they have received, completed action, results continuing, while they have life and breath on earth, they have received, a word that refers to a fitting payment, they've received their comfort. All that their money can buy, that is all that they get. Boy, that's a pathetic, small, comfort. Especially when it comes to the fires of judgment.

Second woe, the warning here is that the satisfaction won't last. The satisfaction won't last. Verse 25 says they shall be hungry first of all, they should be hungry. If you remember back when we covered blessed are those who hunger now, we talked about that that gnawing, painful biting pangs of hunger. We talked about the physical weakness and depletion, the need, the

even the madness that can ensue with the lack of satisfaction of bodily appetites. Look there is gonna be no satisfaction for the rich for all of eternity if they die in that condition. The satisfaction they sought through gaining riches is not going to fill them at all with laughter either. It's going to come to its full and final end at that judgment. All that's going to be left for them from then on is mourning and weeping. Those two terms, mourning, weeping, they look at a life saturated inside and outside in sadness and regret. The word, mourn, pictures an internal profound sadness. The word weep is what we looked at in verse 21. It's an outward, audible lament, a crying with tears. This is the most pathetic picture possible.

But all of that, thirdly, is combined with a sudden reversal, verse 26. All of the false teachers said and taught all their lies and flatteries, all their words of affirmation and comfort. All of it is nothing but wind. It blows away. As Asaph observed in Psalm 73:18, "Truly you set them...", We could just insert the rich. "You set the rich in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms."

It's all going to come crashing down. And there's gonna be a new reality in that day, that's gonna settle in on them. And the minutes are gonna tick by on day one of eternity, in the judgment of a holy God. Terrifying.

Now to picture this scene, to bring it into vivid, stark, poignant illustration. The reality, the really the whole of Jesus' introduction here, both in the beatitudes and the woes, but especially for the woes. Turn over to Luke 16:19 as we close, Luke 16 verse 19. This is really a terrifying scene. And it acts here, it should act for all of us, should act as a provocation to the righteous. To keep us turning away from the temptations to find contentment in the world, and to keep ourselves striving after Christ, looking, and striving toward righteousness. And yet this, with all its attendant pains and trials and sorrows and crosses, it's all worth it because for us day one of eternity in his presence, all that will be eclipsed and forgotten, won't it?

Look, when you came to Christ, did your life get easier or harder? Harder, right? All of a sudden, all the sin that you

thought you didn't think about before as a non-Christian all of a sudden becomes apparent to you. And like the layers of an onion, what you're seeing is only what's on the outside. You peel that away and you, you put off that sin, you put on righteousness, and you find that, whoop, there's just another layer. And you mortify what's underneath, and you peel that off and peel that off and you find, well, there's, there's even more there. So for the righteous, life is even harder on this earth, isn't it? Because we see our sin, we see the world's sin. It makes us sorrow as we said, Luke 6:21. But is it worth it? Is it all worth it in the end? That's why Jesus told this story.

Look at Luke 16:19, "There was a rich man who is clothed in purple and fine linen," we might say he was clothed in silk from the Orient, "and he feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid 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, 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'm in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things...' In Jesus' words, "Woe to you who are rich for you have received your consolation." You've received your comfort, that's your full payment. What are you looking at me for?

That's what Abraham's saying here. "'Remember that you in your lifetime, you received your *paraklesis*, your comfort, your encouragement, your consolation, and Lazarus in like manner bad thing; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. Besides all this, between us and you, a great *chasma* has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you father, send him to my father's house-for I have five brothers-so that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' He said, 'No father Abraham, but, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they don't hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'"

Look, adding to Moses and the prophets, we can add Jesus' beatitudes and woes. Let them hear that. You need someone to rise from the dead? Well, Jesus did that too. Will you hear? Will you listen? Will you pay heed? It's a sobering picture, isn't it? And that's one motivation for evangelism here, to tell the rich, the worldly-contented people, in this city, in this community, in this region, to tell them that they can avoid the eternal sufferings of the rich like this man, they can enter into the blessedness of eternal life in Jesus Christ. But listen, as terrible as the judgment of God is, and it is terrible, as reasonable as it is for anyone who would want to avoid that judgment, the real tragedy of the rich, the most significant point of woe, is this; not only will the rich enter into judgment, but more profoundly and more eternally grievous and regrettable is that they're gonna forfeit Jesus Christ.

How tragic is that? They forfeited his riches for the scraps of this world. Nothing but pebbles of sand. They've forfeited the consolation and comfort of the divine comforter. For the cold comfort of money. Stuff that money can buy, stuff is nothing more than an interesting arrangement of atoms, isn't

it? Expensive stuff just adds the, the quality of uniqueness to that interesting arrangement of atoms. That's all stuff is. They forfeited eternal satisfaction and delight for a few pieces of meat and bread.

Like godless Esau, they sold their birthright for a mess of pottage. Though they cried tears of remorse, they found no room for repentance. They forfeited eternal joy and everlasting happiness for fleeting laughter and a few jokes. They forfeited the praise of the eternal God for the fickle praise of man. They forfeited the company of the Son of Man and the angels and God himself, for the company of the wicked. That's why Jesus said, to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?"

Well, listen. This is a section of Scripture that should stir our own hearts. Causing us to reflect, right? Examine ourselves to see if there be any wicked way in us. Asking God to

examine us, to see if there be any wicked way in us, to see if we have any covetousness in our own heart 'cause beloved, it affects us all, doesn't it? It visits us again even after we've repented, it comes back. But not only should it provoke us toward greater pursuit of Godliness and the kingdom of God, his righteousness alone should always also stir our hearts with compassion for the lost. All of those who, who fall into this category of the rich, no matter what their bank account looks like. That's not the issue, it's really their heart.

Those who are full and content now, those who are laughing now, those who like to be flattered and approved of by everybody else. Look, the good news is that by paying heed to Jesus sober warning to the worldly contented, we can be counted among the poor. We can be, we can cut ties with the deceptive and deadly ambitions of this world, chasing after riches. And by losing all, we can gain all, gain everything. By denying self by taking up our cross, dying to self, we follow Jesus Christ in the obedience of faith, and we come into possession of the eternal kingdom. We're going to receive an inheritance that's imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you



and oh, by the way we receive Christ. The most precious of all treasures.

Let the blessedness of the beatitudes woo you to Christ. And let the sober warnings of the woes provoke you. Let them, let them bother you. Let them search out your heart. To examine yourself and mortify any sin of greed and covetousness that occupy every heart really. Repent of the pursuit of this world's wealth. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. You will come into possession of the Kingdom of God. You'll be embraced by the Savior; arms open wide into eternal life.

Let's pray. Father, we want to give thanks to you for, for Jesus Christ. Without him, we would not have this word. But not only that, without him we would not have salvation. We're so grateful to belong to you to be counted among the poor, and not among the rich. And yet we do realize, Father, that like the rich, we have temptations, toward covetousness, and desire, not even desire for bad things, but even too many of good things, that we might be rich, and then forget you, say, "Who is the Lord?" Father may that, may that never be for us. May we always

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pursue righteousness and holiness in the fear of Christ. May we give ourselves wholly and completely to your kingdom, and your righteousness, trusting that you all these other things that we need, you'll add as well.

We pray for our witness to the people of this world. The wealthy, the rich, and those who have a heart like theirs, that we pray that you would help us in our outreach to them. Be compassionate, to be clear, not to be flatterers like everybody else in their life, but to be truth tellers, lovingly compassionately sharing with them, the gospel of your salvation. We love you; we give ourselves to you completely and wholly. And thank you for the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ. In his name we pray, amen.