

Joy in the Wealth of Poverty, Part 2

Luke 6:20

I'm going to give you some outline points just up front and we'll walk through them one by one, okay? The poor are blessed, number one, because they fear God. The poor are blessed because they fear God. First point. Second point, the poor are blessed because they rejoice in God. The poor are blessed because they rejoice in God. And thirdly, the poor are blessed because they obey God.

So they're blessed because they fear God, they rejoice in God, and they obey God. It's about what you might expect, right? That is how you know you're numbered among those poor, and that is how you practice this poverty gospel. That is how you practice this Christian life, and you find a hundredfold blessing right now, with persecutions.

So first point: The poor are blessed because they fear God. They fear God. According to Scripture, the fear of the Lord is paramount because it's only by the fear of the Lord that someone will be saved, reconciled to God, listen obediently to God's word. There is no salvation apart from the fear of the Lord, which is why those who have been reconciled to God can be simply called God-fearers.

So what are they like? First of all, the poor are blessed because they fear God and those who fear the Lord heed God's word. What does it mean to heed? It's not something, necessarily, we give a lot of thought today, maybe a word that is out of vogue, but you might say the word, heed, means, to pay close attention to or to listen with a view to immediate, wholehearted, and full-on obedience. That's the concept biblically of heeding. We listen. Why? Because we want to obey. We listen because we want to do. We listen because we want to practice, because we want to please our father in heaven.

Psalm 1:1 and 2. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of

the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." They don't walk in the counsel of the wicked, they don't stand in the way of sinners, they don't sit down in the seat of scoffers. They've said, Goodbye. They've shut that entertainment off. Instead, they use the time to delight in the law of the Lord. They meditate on it day and night. Or Psalm 112 verse 1, "Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!" That's the attitude right there. Psalm 119 verses 1-3, or you could read actually all of Psalm 119 and it'll say the same thing.

I don't have time to do all 176 verses right now, but we'll do three of them. "Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways!" Psalm 128:1-2, "Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you."

A couple of encouragements from the Proverbs, as well. The Proverbs are full of encouragements to heed the good, perfect,

wise words of the living God. Those were the blessed. Proverbs 3:13-14, "Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her," that is wisdom, "is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold."

Proverbs 16:20, "Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord." All of those passages, and there are so many more, but all of those passages about heeding God's word, encouraging God's people to listen to, and pay attention to, and obey God's word, they go back to Israel's national constitution called the Law of Moses. And in the book of Deuteronomy, in particular, the final book in the Pentateuch, take the time someday to read through that amazing book and just take note of how many times Moses calls Israel to listen, to hear. That's what loving devotion to God looks like.

And it's the first mark of those who fear the Lord. They possess an internal desire and delight in hearing and obeying God's word. It's the heart of David who said in Psalm 40 verse 8, "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law lives within my heart."

If any of you are saying, You know what? I'm not sure I have that. I'm not sure I have this, I'm filled with this desire and longing for God's word, and if you understand and recognize that, then blessed are you in a sense, because it just shows you need to be regenerated by God's grace. The Holy Spirit needs to come into your heart and turn the lights on. You need to hear. Because those who truly belong to God who are the poor. They love God's Word. They have a deep affection for truth, affection for righteousness. They hate sin. They hate evil. They love the truth, and they fear the Lord. Obviously, if they have a heart to heed God's word, they're also going to be marked.

Secondly, by submitting to God's authority and by submitting to his correction. Submitting to authority and correction. So the poor are blessed because they fear God, and those who fear the Lord heed God's word and then go further and submit to its authority. So it's heeding God's word, it's the desire to obey it, a longing for it, but then it's actually lived out practically in submitting to it.

They consider themselves accountable. It's not a deism view of God, it's an eminency, where he is near. They submit to him eagerly, cheerfully, heartily. They are the blessed. Psalm 33 verse 12, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage." The nation that submits to God's authority and correction, in this case speaking of Israel as a nation, those people are blessed.

Proverbs 28 verse 14, "Blessed is the one who fears the Lord always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity." Rather than hardening the heart, stiffening the neck, they listen. Job 5:17, blessed, "Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproveth; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty." They don't despise God's correction and discipline, they long for it. The humbly receive his correction.

It says there in Hebrews 12:5, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastens every son whom he receives." Is that you? It's not a performance thing; it's a devotion thing. It's not a works righteousness thing; it's a longing to please a heavenly Father thing.

So who are the poor? Who are the blessed of whom Jesus speaks? They're those who fear the Lord, which means they have a heart to heed his word and to obey it and to submit themselves to its authority and to its correction. And the poor count themselves as nothing. They count themselves as veritable beggars before God, and they rejoice that God himself, the holy God of heaven, would condescend to discipline them, to reprove them, to chasten them for their good.

This leads us to a second mark of the poor Jesus speaks about. Again, remember Jesus is being very biblical in his Sermon on the Mount, using biblical language to introduce his sermon because he wants people to understand in his hearing that he's not disconnected with the Old Testament. He's united and in firm continuity with what the law and the prophets spoke. He wants everybody to understand that. He's not some maverick. He's the servant of God.

The second point: The poor are blessed because they rejoice in God. Why do they rejoice in God? Because he is, first of all,

their Savior. He's their savior and deliverer. There are a lot of passages in the Old Testament about talking about "Blessed are you, the nation of Israel because God has delivered you from all your trouble and affliction." He's talking really about deliverance from Egypt or deliverance from enemies. But David used the same language in Psalm 32:1 and 2, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

You know who our greatest enemy is before we come to Christ? God. What can man do to me? God is the one who has the power to kill both body and soul in hell. But when our transgression is forgiven, when our sin is covered, when our iniquity is taken away, you know what? God no longer counts us an enemy; he counts us as a friend. God has delivered these people from their sin, reconciling them to himself. God has forgiven their transgression. He's counted none of their iniquity against them. All has been forgiven for the one who puts his faith in God through the now revealed atoning work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.



Again, the poor, poor are poor not because they have no money, but because they, like the poor, have found no resources within themselves whatsoever, nothing at their disposal that is going to secure a right standing before a holy God with a penetrating gaze. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." They recognize they have nothing. They recognize they have no money, no resources, no self-reliance, nothing whatsoever that can make the acceptable to God, so they reach out for God's mercy and grace with the hands of a crippled, destitute beggar, and the only hope they have is in God's pity, and his mercy, and his charity, and you know what?

When God sees that lifted crooked, crippled hand, he is so pleased to run, like he did to the prodigal, like the father lifting up his garment there and running in a way that would be mocked at in that culture, scorned. He threw away all dignity and ran after that prodigal. God looks upon the faith of the poor, and he is so pleased to rush to their aid, to save. He opens the floodgates of the storehouses of heaven and he pours and dumps on them rich spiritual treasures that are filled to overflowing.

That's why Paul tells the poor they are truly and eternally blessed; they're irreversibly blessed because God has poured out his riches upon them in Christ Jesus. You're familiar with Ephesians 1: "In him we have redemption through this blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he," gave us just a little bit of, no! "He lavished upon us." Lavished! Love that word. In Ephesians 1:18, God has called the poor to receive and enjoy, quote, "the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints," and that inheritance is guaranteed by his immeasurable greatness and almighty power. Who's going to keep God from blessing the people he wants to bless?

James sounds that call; and he sounds remarkably like his half-brother Jesus, he sounds very Sermon-on-the-Mountish, and he wants the rich not to trust in their wealth, because it's so temporary. "Don't give yourselves to treasures and pleasures," he says. James 5:1-3, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted." He's pic, you know where he's picturing them? At the judgment seat. Your riches have rotted, your garments 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 done the stupidest thing in the world. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

As Jesus said, Luke 6:24, "Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." But the poor, they have abandoned the pursuit of treasure and pleasure in this life because they sought one thing and one thing only, the forgiveness of sins that they might be reconciled to God and have him and him alone as their treasure and pleasure forever. And you know what? God rejoices to give them what they seek: himself.

So the blessed, the poor. They are those who trust, and rejoice, and hope in the goodness of God. Listen to this sentiment, the cry of the heart that comes in these psalms. Psalm 34:8, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him." Taste, find out he's good. Psalm 40 verse 4, "Blessed is the man who make the Lord his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!" What's the lie? That this world can satisfy you.

Psalm 144:15, "Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall! Blessed are the people whose trust is the Lord, whose God is the Lord!" The Lord is good, and we don't know the half of it. He is wise beyond all wisdom we can know. He's, he's our trust, he's our strength, he's our hope. We love his goodness. We're completely satisfied in him. And we rejoice to sing his praises because his name, that is his character, his essence, his glory, his name is excellent. His name is wonderful, and so we exult in his name all day long. It's what really fills us all the day. We're the blessed because we've become the poor of this world; we've cut the cord with the world that we might become rich, truly rich. Blessed are we because our God is the Lord. What more could we want?

So the poor fear God. They are the blessed. They enjoy the kingdom of God now, that is, the rule of God. They will enjoy the kingdom of God in its fullness when the Son of Man returns and all the world, all the earth is doing his good pleasure. The poor rejoice in God and they are the blessed, and nothing can take away their joy in the Lord. They rejoice to grow in their knowledge of him, and that brings us to a third and final

point: The poor are blessed because they obey God. They fear God, they rejoice in God, and they obey God.

Why do the blessed, the poor, delight to do or to practice or obey the Word of God or the will of God? Answer: Because you're never more like God when you imitate him, when you're actively practicing doing his will. When we imitate him, we're like him. When we're like him, we know him. Paul said, Ephesians 5 verse 1, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love."

That is not the love that's defined by this world, very self-seeking, really a synonym for lust. Many people use it that way, the word, love. We need to define the love that he's describing here biblically. It's a sacrificial, obedient, pleasing-to-God love. That's what it is in context. And we're to walk in love, living lives of love, giving ourselves up for the glory of God and the spiritual good of others around us. If we're to do that well, we're going to need to understand what God has said and what he meant by what he said.

Ephesians 5:8-10 says we're also to, "walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and," we're to, "try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." God doesn't leave it to us to self-define how loving somebody else looks like. No, he gives us a whole Bible that we might learn and grown in wisdom, so that we can wisely love other people.

The poor rejoice to do the will of God, to obey him, to give themselves to one another in love and wisdom, the wisdom of God, loving one another. They rejoice. They find themselves blessed possessors of the kingdom of God, the present rule of God on earth. And they rejoice in doing his will, in practicing the wisdom of the living God. They're those who practice righteousness with one another, showing fairness, impartiality, caring for people.

We're to "Keep justice," says the Lord God, Yahweh, in Isaiah 56:1-2. And we're to "Do righteousness for soon my salvation will come, and my righteousness be revealed. Blessed in the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from

doing any evil.” How do you treat the Sabbath? It’s a principle we now observe on Sundays. But how do you treat the Sabbath? Do you treat it like any other day after you leave here? Or do you treat it as the Lord’s Day, as in a possessive, Lord’s, it belongs to him, devoted to him, for our spiritual refreshment and good.

Listen, by coming into the house of the Lord week after week, it refreshes your soul in the truth of your God. It reminds you to stand firm in that truth. As the writer to the Hebrews constantly was reminding them, Don’t leave. Don’t be discouraged. Stay strong. Stay encouraged. Hang in there. We need to do that with each other day after day, right? Certainly, week after week. By honoring that Sabbath principle, obedient to attend church regularly, it informs your understanding. It gives you wisdom from God on how to walk in love, on how to walk in the light, finding out what’s pleasing the Lord, to the Lord, so you can obey him in wisdom.

And living in accordance with his thinking, his wisdom, that is the true joy of life, isn’t it? Again, listen to some of these Psalms, all of them highlighting the concept of

blessedness. All of this, I will tell you, is on Jesus' mind as he's preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Psalm 41:1-2, "Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the Lord delivers him; the Lord protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies."

Psalm 106, verse 3, "Blessed are those who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times." Proverbs 14:21, "Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor." Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor," "yours is the kingdom of God." We're blessed because we fear God, rejoice in God. We obey him.

At this point I want you to take a deep breath, because having taken all of this in, we need to ask ourselves some probing questions, don't we? If I was to actually live like that, would my life look the same as it is right now, or different?" I hope you have practiced, or you are trying to practice, the habit of honest self-examination and self-assessment, because that's what's called for now. I think we can



honestly say Jesus' words strike our modern comfort, ease-loving ears as radical living. It ought not to be that way.

I'm afraid these words of Jesus have become so familiar, so common that for many they've lost their meaning. Oh, we may be familiar with the Beatitudes, perhaps even quote some of them from memory, but we need to ask, "What weight does this really have on our lives? Our decision making? Does God and his word fall heavy on us? Is there gravity to it? Do Jesus' words carry actual authority or just potential? Do they command our consciences? Do they dictate how then we shall live?" If people listened in to our conversations, what would they hear? Would they hear a lot of talk about our family? About vacation? About financial or health issues?

Or would they hear something else? Something like what Jesus is saying here, other-worldly? Would they, like this from the Sermon on the Mount, would, would they hear something that is very different from what they've heard anywhere else? "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." "Someone slaps you on the cheek, turn to them the other also." What is that?

We start living this way. Radically different, right? If people listened in, what would surmise from our speech? What would they hear that really matters to us? For many professing Christians today, I believe, they're just unaware of how far afield they live from what Jesus actually taught. And they're puzzled when their children or their grandchildren profess Christ, but have no interest in practicing what he actually taught. They're surprised when their children follow the creed of moralistic therapeutic deism, seemingly satisfied with themselves, relatively unconcerned about the issues of sin and righteousness, hell and heaven, fearful judgment and amazing grace. They don't know anything about that.

I'll sometimes listen to sermons from other pastors, other preachers, and I hear a lot out there who seem intent on building a church that caters to exactly that kind of constituency, the moral, moralistic therapeutic deism. They want those kinds of people in their church, because it's easy to flatter them; build up crowds of twenty and thirty somethings, teaching them that Jesus is all about making you the best, you, possible. How is that radical in this age? In fact, you hear

that message in this age, you just yawn. It's boring. That's what Oprah is saying.

It's not what Jesus said, is it? He said it's not all about you. It's all about losing you. It's all about God, his kingdom, his righteousness. And to come to God, you must see yourself as God does, a destitute beggar looking up to him from humbled hearts, bowed knees seeking his mercy and grace. And you know what? Those who do so, who lose themselves for the sake of finding his kingdom and his righteousness, they become possessors of that kingdom and are actually quite rich, not poor. Though hungry now, they look to God to satisfy. Though weeping now, they look to God for joy. Though rejected by this world and all its moralistic therapeutic deists, let them reject, because God is pleased to call them friend.

If we're to live like the poor, the blessed professors of the kingdom that we are, if we fear God, always heeding his word and submitting to his authority and correction, if we rejoice in God with nothing else holding our hearts, if we obey God immediately wholeheartedly, full on walking in his love and his wisdom, if we're to live like that, what would that look like

practically? Think about that for yourself because I'm thinking about it for my life and my family as well. Do you think that kind of living would make an impact on other people? Do you think it would change our conversations? Our speech patterns? Do you think it would change the way we spend our time? The way we invest our energy and our resources?

You know what, if we take it seriously, I'm certain it would. I can't wait to see the results of what God will do through that, in our church, in and through our church. Because others are watching our lives, and rather than leading them astray with any hypocrisy, we want to lead them to the Savior with our lives, to the Savior who said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." There's joy of salvation in him and in him alone. That's the Gospel we have to share.