

Luke 6:17-26
"Blessings and Curses"
Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 17, 2019
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

Who here doesn't like being puffed up? All of us love it when people speak well of ourselves. This makes us feel good. This makes us feel great.

But, when a person speaks ill of you, how do you feel? Do you still feel puffed up? No. We feel in the dumps. We feel depressed.

We oftentimes listen to what our fellow man says about us – for better or for worse.

For everyone on Facebook, when you see the thumbs up to your post, who doesn't feel joyous?

But, when you see the angry face along with negative comments attacking you – who doesn't feel depressed?

In our Old Testament and Gospel readings this morning, the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – reminds us on who we should trust in – and it's not our fellow man.

If we place our trust in man, we turn into a shrub in the desert that withers and dies, as Jeremiah says (Jeremiah 17:5-6). But, if we place our trust in the Lord, we will never wither, but remain luscious and alive. (Jeremiah 17:7-8)

[Our Daily Bread]

As 21st century Americans, we hear that and we likely agree that it is better to trust God, rather than man. But, we often forget that. Pastors even forget that from time to time.

We like to put our trust in fellow man. As Americans, we like to think about personal responsibility. We go to work or school and we receive payment for what we have done, either with money or a grade. We think we earned this or earned that. How many of us forget to give thanks to God for His daily bread given to us – with our food, lodging, transportation?

Instead, we thank and praise ourselves. Now, everyone receives the temporal blessings of daily bread. It doesn't matter if you place your trust in God, in government, or in yourself. Everyone receives daily bread.

But, not everyone receives eternal blessings. For non-believers, their blessings end with their death. For believers, their blessings continue to eternity.

[The Christian Life]

This is what Jesus is talking about with His disciples and the great multitude of people from Judea and Jerusalem, Tyre and Sidon. He is telling the crowd of what is to come, rather than the present.

As we all know, being a Christian – a follower of Christ – is not easy. We are not guaranteed an easy life now. There is no promised prosperity as a disciple of Christ. We are not going to become millionaires by just posting a picture of a million dollars on the wall and praying for it. We are not promised the “best life now.” These are *not* promises of Jesus.

But, Jesus *does* promise that all followers of Him will be excluded, reviled, spurned as evil, on account of Jesus.

This is Satan fighting back at Jesus. You see, Satan knows how to use the English language into making good into evil and evil look good. We often forget that it is Satan who is the prince of this temporal world. This is why the world hated Jesus. This is why the world hates Christians.

A few weeks ago, I attended the MCCL March for Life in St. Paul. This was a great event. Everyone was smiling. People were praying. We all came for a common good – to preserve life from conception to natural death.

Following the rally, I turned on WCCO-TV and I knew what they were going to say about the pro-life rally. After all, I used to be a journalist. I know the *Associated Press Style Book* from cover to cover.

Instead of saying “thousands attended a pro-life rally”, they said “thousands attended an anti-abortion rally.” I knew that this was going to be said, for they are using the AP Style, but we are having a battle over words: good is bad and bad is good.

The entire news media has put a negative spin on pro-life. They say that anyone at the March for Life is extreme in their views. But, what is so extreme about life? What is so extreme about children? What is so extreme about the elderly? They find abortion – the murder of innocent, healthy babies – as normal. They find physician-assisted suicide – the murder of adults by doctors – as normal. According to God, this is far from normal.

Sadly, the report on New York legalizing abortion to just prior to birth is already yesterday’s news. The same goes for Virginia proposing abortion to even after birth, so the mother can choose with her doctor if she wants the child to live or die. All yesterday’s news.

Besides life issues, there is a battle brewing on our Christian faith in general.

It seems that every other month, there is a hearing in Washington, D.C. about approving another federal judge. For the past few years, more and more politicians have placed religious tests upon approving or disapproving a judge. So, our Christian faith and our morals based on Jesus’ teachings are under attack by the same people who swore an oath to defend our right of worship.

This is what Jesus warns His followers. We will be hated on account of following Jesus.

But this is the temporal world; we have eternity to look forward to.

[Sermon on the Plain: The Beatitudes]

So, Jesus tells us: ***“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...on account of the Son of Man! For behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets”*** (Luke 6:20b-23).

- As Christians in the temporal world, we are poor now, but later we will be blessed.
- As Christians in the temporal world, we will be hungry, but later we will be satisfied.
- As Christians in the temporal world, we will weep, but later we will laugh.
- As Christians in the temporal world, we will be hated for following Jesus, but later our reward will be great in heaven.

You see, our blessings are eternal, not temporal. We rejoice in tribulation, because through Jesus our faith is not in vain. And, when trouble comes, the faithful in Christ survive.

These beatitudes that Jesus describes are the Gospel gifts that every believer receives. The beatitudes function like a Gospel invitation, in which the blessings of the Gospel are held out as enticements to bring or keep the hearer in God's kingdom.

The beatitudes promise a future joy, but its effect is a present comfort, because of the certainty of the promise of Christ.

[Christological]

The most important feature of the beatitudes is that they are Christological. You see, all of God's blessings are found in Christ, and Christ is the source of every blessing.

Each beatitude does not suggest principles or guidelines on which to live, but instead shows us what has already been given to us through Christ. When we believe and trust in Christ, the life of Christ becomes the life of the Christian, and by grace the blessings of Christ become the inheritance of the Christian. In that way, the beatitudes come to describe each and every person in Christ.

Now, the blessings are *not* rewards for a Christian's supposed accomplishments, but rather are consequences of election in Christ. They are rewards that properly belong to Christ for His accomplishments in His perfect life, atoning death, and resurrection.

All of God's blessings are *in* Christ, and every believer receives all these blessings by virtue of being *in* Christ. There is no degree of blessedness for all who believe and trust in Jesus *alone* are blessed.

As I have already noted, being a believer in Christ gives us *no* guarantee of success in the temporal world. But, the Christian *is* guaranteed immense blessings in the world to come.

[Woes]

As for the unbeliever, they may enjoy temporal blessings now, but they have no positives in their future after death.

Here Jesus speaks of the woes, or curses upon the unbelievers:

“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” (Luke 6:24-26).

The future is not bright for the unbeliever and scoffer. Instead of receiving blessings, they receive eternal death apart from God. They will be poor, they will be hungry, they will mourn and weep, they will be all alone.

[Blessing or Curse?]

Our Triune God desires everyone to be saved, but some people want to go about life on their own. They want to go about life trusting in man, rather than God. This only leads to a desert wilderness.

But, for those who trust in the Lord, we are blessed.

We are reminded of how blessed we are when we remember of Baptism. We are reminded of how blessed we are when we hear the Word of God and that Word rightly preached. We are reminded of how blessed we are when we are forgiven of our sins at the beginning of each Divine Service. We are reminded of how blessed we are when we receive Christ’s very body and His very blood, which forgives our sins and strengthens our weak faith.

God gives us a freedom of the will. We can choose to trust in man apart from God and receive curses. But for everyone who remains in the Lord, we receive blessings from Christ, who is the source of every blessing. By His grace through faith, we receive what we do not deserve: eternal life, forgiveness of sins and salvation. And, we know that the Triune God *never* breaks His promises. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠