



## Sermon, Sunday February 23, 2025 "Blessings and Woes"

**SCRIPTURE: Luke 6:17-26** <sup>17</sup> He came down with them and stood on a level place with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>18</sup> They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. <sup>19</sup> And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. <sup>20</sup> Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. <sup>21</sup> "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. <sup>22</sup> "Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. <sup>24</sup> "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. <sup>25</sup> "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. <sup>26</sup> "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

### Introduction: Jesus' warning about the blessings of poverty and the wealth of money

Today is the seventh Sunday after the Epiphany. Today's text is like the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12, which we know as the Sermon on the Mount. However, in the Gospel of Luke, the four blessings and four woes appear in a contrasting way. The Gospel of Matthew is the Sermon on the Mount, but the Gospel of Luke is the Sermon on the Plain. Although the two texts are slightly different in format, the content regarding blessings is the same.

Of the four blessings in today's text, the first blessing is poverty. Verse 20 of today's text says, **'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'**

Today's text declares that the poor are blessed, but it is not easy for us, who know how difficult it is to live poorly in a capitalist system, to accept this statement.

However, in today's text, a verse that contradicts this verse appears in verse 24. According to this verse, woe comes to those who are rich. The reason woe comes to those who are rich is because they have already received comfort from the world. Those who are rich cannot feel the more fundamental and essential joy that the Lord gives because of the comfort they receive from the world. So the Kingdom of God, which is meant for those who are poor, is closed to them. This is the woe that today's text is talking about.

During his public ministry, Jesus often spoke about the dangers of money and wealth. In Luke 12:13-21, there is 'The parable of the rich fool.' According to this parable, a rich man farmed well and reaped a great harvest. When this rich man ran out of barns to store his grain, he decided to build a bigger barn to store all his grain and goods. In this parable, the rich man's inner thoughts are expressed as follows: **"I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'" (Luke 12:19).**

Jesus told this parable and said the following: **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:20).**



Additionally, there is a story about a rich man in Luke 18:18-25. Jesus said here: **'How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'** Furthermore, Jesus said in Matthew 6:24: **'No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.'**

But why did Jesus view the fate of the rich as dangerous and the fate of the poor as hopeful? And are these thoughts of Jesus, correct?

### **Body: The true power of life that only the Lord can give**

In today's text, the saying that those who are poor will gain the Kingdom of God and the saying that woe will come to those who are rich are closely connected.

For those who are rich, the enjoyment of life provided by wealth is so intense that it is difficult to find the Kingdom of God. Of course, some people will argue that we need money to live happily and even get the bare minimum of daily bread. This idea certainly makes sense.

However, the closer our minds and hearts are to the pleasure and joy that wealth brings, the less likely we are to reflect on the true meaning of the Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of.

Because the Kingdom of God mentioned by Jesus in the Gospel is the true power of life that only God can give us. These abilities manifest in our lives as freedom, peace, joy, and rest. We would be happy if we could enjoy freedom, peace, joy, and rest in our lives. In contrast, wealth only helps us live comfortably in the world but does not give us these fundamental life abilities.

So, if we are to receive what only God allows us, we must be able to completely reject what the world has to offer. But herein lies our difficulty. We want to enjoy the material comforts the world provides and want to enter the kingdom of God. We want to live a free and abundant life while being recognized by the world. But the problem is that this is not possible for us. In the end, we will one day come to a point where we completely lose the comfort and fun the world gives us. What is important for us is how we can experience it here and now before we die.

If we can completely entrust our daily lives and destiny to God, like the poor mentioned in today's text, amazing changes will occur in our lives. In fact, there are so many things we must go through in our daily lives that it may not be easy to completely entrust our lives to the Lord, but we must not forget what direction our lives should be heading towards.

Today's text also talks about the blessings received by those who are hungry and those who weep. Those who are hungry may be hungry now, but in the future they will be full. Only when we are hungry can we know the true meaning of being full. In today's text, those who weep are those who are sad. Anyone who knows the meaning of life's sorrows will find something to laugh about.

Everyone in the world will face death. And one day, we will part ways with the people we are close to forever. However, those who know how to cry in the face of this unstable human existence will live life to the fullest.

However, many modern people live in the opposite way. They have too much woe and complaints. They will only be satisfied by defeating their opponents. And they live in such a way that they force themselves to find something to laugh about right now. So it's unfortunate. In the second half of verse 25 of today's text, **'Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep'** is a paradoxical expression of this kind of life.



However, the explanation of the fourth blessing in today's text is unique. Verses 22-23 of today's text said the following: **'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.'**

Who are the people this verse describes? They are disciples who follow Jesus. Just as Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, which includes the Beatitudes, is directed to the disciples, today's Luke's Sermon on the Plain is also addressed to the disciples. At that time, the disciples were ignored by people and suffered various economic disadvantages because they believed in Jesus. In some cases, disciples suffered martyrdom.

However, according to the above passage, the basis for the happiness of the disciples' lives is that the reward in heaven given to them is great, like the prophets who were persecuted in the history of the Old Testament. However, on the contrary, verse 26 said that **'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.'** The false prophets those who gain political and economic benefits by stimulating the public's desires. There is no reward in heaven for these people. That means there is no peace and rest in their souls.

### **Conclusion: Reward in Heaven**

Now let's summarize today's sermon. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ! How can we distinguish between those who are blessed and those who are woe? Distinguishing these is not easy. But there is already an answer in today's text. When we know what the 'reward in heaven' is given to us, we can distinguish between blessing and woe. In other words, knowing how to be satisfied with God alone here and now is the 'reward in heaven.' For people like this, even poverty is a blessing. People like this can be happy even if they are ignored by the world. We are blessed that all of us who stand in this faith tradition can look forward to the 'reward in heaven' and live each day with joy. **Amen!**

