

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Luke 6:17-31

Verses 17-19

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place. A great crowd of disciples were with him; a multitude of people from Judea and Jerusalem, also from the coast, from Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear him, to be healed of their diseases and those troubled by unclean spirits were being cured. The throng were trying to touch him because power was coming from him to heal all of them.

Luke's careful research records that Jesus had descended from a higher place (12) where he had been praying before he chose the 12 apostles. **He came down with them** and his disciples were beside him as he prepared to receive the multitudes. This was the typical way a rabbi taught; disciples lived with him and copied his behaviour and memorized his words. **The level place** was unlike Matthew's mountainside (5:1) but not hugely differently. It still may have been elevated and was not necessarily the valley floor.

Jesus was ministering in Galilee but news about him and his miracles reached more distant places: **Judea and Jerusalem...Tyre and Sidon.** His work consisted of teaching and healing and so we hear that **they came to hear him, to be healed of their diseases and those troubled by unclean spirits were being cured.** Luke switches from the crowd's intentions before they left home to the present when some were being exorcised. **Unclean spirit** was a common designation in the synoptics, particularly of Mark. The demon defiled a person. **Uncleanness**, then, was a religious term associated with Old Testament cultic practices. The Jewish people were to be clean and separated from the nations. They were to be holy to God and anything that brought a person into contact with the profane rather than God's created domain or the locus of his covenant, people and temple, made then religiously unclean.

Clearly, Jesus succeeded in **healing** all who were afflicted, comprising many in the crowd. Literally, **he healed many** but this should not be seen as quite a lot were healed but not all. Rather, the many in the crowd who were sick or demon possessed, were healed by him. Luke understands this to be a result of the **power that was coming from him.** It is a curious expression. As a man, Christ healed by faith, for faith can move mountains (Matt 17:20). The expression may still mean this because in 5:17, power is attributed to the Lord, that is, to his Father (cf 4:1,18). Luke attempts to understand the miracles as the action of God's power in Christ flowing out to others. He locates the source of power in Christ himself because he is viewing him from the perspective of his divine nature.

Verses 20-23

**When he raised his eyes at his disciples he said,
"Blessed are the poor because theirs is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are they who hunger now because they will be filled.
Blessed are they who weep now for they will be glad.
Blessed are you when men hate you, bury you in insults and discard your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and skip for joy, your reward in heaven is immense because their ancestors did the same things to the prophets.**

The words of Jesus are directed to the disciples and all who would later follow him, for **he raised his eyes at his disciples.** But the expression hints at our Lord bestowing a blessing on his children, not too dissimilar to 24:50. In a spiritual way, **by lifting his eyes,** Jesus also saw into the future the great troubles his saints would have.

Blessed are the poor is the gospel. In a general way, those dispossessed by economic systems or by corporations or by self-serving politicians, by the corrupt land and asset owners of society, have the good news of Christ: **because theirs is the kingdom of God.** The Lord, however, is directing his

attention to those believers who suffer privation for the sake of the gospel. The kingdom of God becomes their possession. They miss out on food but inherit more than 100 universes. In Luke, the kingdom of God is especially associated with the person of Christ (17:21) and is seen as a gift flowing from God's kindness and grace.

The same can be said of **those who hunger now**. One would think that this **filling with food**, promised by the Lord, will also take place in the kingdom.

Blessed are they who weep now for they will be glad, like poverty and hunger, this generally refers to the evil conditions and systems in place that disadvantage so many. However, in light of the context of a sermon to the disciples and then what follows this concerning the persecution of Christians, this hunger and mourning are the result of loss and great hardship occurring through dislocation caused by persecution and the extremes of mission to be encountered by the saints. Gladness will come and tears will end (Rev 7:16; 21:4).

Verses 24-26

Woe to you who are rich because you are receiving your comfort in full.

Woe to you who are now well-fed because you will be hungry.

Woe to you who are laughing now because you will grieve and weep.

Woe [to you] when everyone speaks well of you for their ancestors did same things to the false prophets.

The four woes correspond to the four blessings. There is no future in God's kingdom for the people Jesus addressed. Riches, food, happiness and popularity do not comprise the kingdom. Jesus advocated the spending on one's wealth on the poor in relation to the gift of the kingdom, in fact, because the kingdom was a gift (12:32-34). Riches are the chief impediment to entering the kingdom according to Jesus (18:24).

As for food, disciples were to trust that they have a heavenly Father who cares for them because they have the Son (12:22-31).

Laughing was associated with success, popularity and partying (12:19) but Jesus said that only a fool does not recognize the fragility of life.

Being liked because the message suits the audience is a great danger in a society that demands conformity to its corrupt values. See Jeremiah (23:14; 26:9; 28:10).

One assumes that the future spoken of in first three woes refers to the Parousia (16:25). Suffering, loss and anguish are typical states in hell.

Verses 27-

But to you hearing what I am saying to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you. To him who strikes you on your cheek offer him the other and he who takes away your coat do not withhold [your] shirt. To everyone who asks and whoever takes from what is yours do not demand back. As you wish people treat you, do to them likewise.

Jesus followers are to love, not merely their fellow believers or friends but also their enemies.