

What would you say is your best life now? Back in 2004, Joel Osteen wrote a *NY Times* best-selling book bearing that title and he offered 7 easy steps to live at your full potential and find blessing, wealth, health, satisfaction, happiness, and popularity.

But what if seeking to live your best life now according to Joel... meant you would live your worst life imaginable in eternity. A better question to ask is this: ***What does Jesus say is your best life now in light of the world to come?***

We find the answer to that question this morning as we continue in our studies of the Gospel according to Luke. Please open your Bibles to **Luke 6:17-26**. Last time we considered a decisive turning point in Jesus' public ministry: After spending all night long in prayer, Jesus chose His twelve apostles. Then in **Verses 17-19**, Luke sets the scene for us:

17 And 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 and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, 18 who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.

Right after Jesus calls His apostles, He comes down to a level place on the mountain and begins to minister to a massive crowd of people from the far ends of Palestine: they came from **Judea and Jerusalem** in the south, and even as far away as **Tyre and Sidon** to the north.

Luke tells us this great crowd is a mixed crowd, composed of two groups: His disciples and "*a great multitude.*" In other words, some in the crowd, including His apostles, were already His followers; but others had simply come to hear Jesus teach and to receive healing. Luke tells us simply in **Verse 19** "*All the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and He healed them all.*"

After ministering to the sick, the possessed, and the afflicted, Jesus begins to preach. This "**Sermon on the Plain**" is similar to the "Sermon on the Mount" recorded in **Matthew 5-6**. Many Bible teachers consider this to be a shorter version of that sermon. We'll spend the next few weeks working through Jesus' sermon together.

What Jesus says in **Verses 20-26** at the outset of His sermon is nothing short of astounding. What He says remains shocking 2,000 years later. What He says destroys all worldly expectations of following Him. What He says shatters all conventional thinking. What He says flips entire views of the world upside down.

20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. 22 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! 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for

so their fathers did to the prophets. 24 But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25 Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

In a series of shocking paradoxes, Jesus describes for us two things:

1. **The Blessed Life (Verses 20-23)**
2. **The Cursed Life (Verses 24-26)**

My prayer for each one of us is this: that we all would seek and find every blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus alone.

I. What is the Blessed Life according to Jesus? (Verses 20-23)

Jesus reveals His radical vision of the blessed life in a series of four beatitudes. A beatitude is just a fancy word for blessing. (“Blessed” = 4X) What was referred to as a **benediction** in the Old Testament is often called a **beatitude** in the New Testament.

You’ll remember how Moses instructed Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel saying: “*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*” (Num. 6:24-26)

Usually preachers **end** their sermons with a **benediction**. But Jesus isn’t your usual preacher! He **begins** His sermon by addressing this series of beatitudes to His disciples. “*He lifts up His eyes on His disciples and said...*” This vision of the blessed life only applies to those of us who are trusting in Christ as one of His disciples.

To be blessed by God in the Bible is to be the focus of His favor. According to Jesus, the poor, the hungry, the weeping, and the hated, are blessed by God.

Instead of thinking of these as four distinct groups of people, Jesus wants you to think of them as one group. All of these descriptions refer to **Jesus’ disciples**.

Luke has already used the term “**poor**” and defined it for us according to Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah 61. You’ll remember when Jesus preached His sermon in His hometown synagogue in Nazareth (4:18), He quoted from Isaiah 61: “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to **the poor.***”

In other words, the Messiah came into the world to bring good news to the ears of those who are spiritually bankrupt, spiritually destitute, to the wretched, to the poor, to spiritual beggars.

By “**poor**” Jesus doesn’t mean **only** those who are financially poor, but rather all those who are poor in spirit, that is, the **spiritually destitute**.

It’s often the case that followers of Jesus face extreme economic distress in this world. This distress often comes about because of oppression or persecution.¹ **But Jesus isn’t thinking primarily about economic poverty, but the spiritual poverty of His disciples.**

Part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus is to realize that you’re a sinner, to recognize that you are **morally and spiritually bankrupt and destitute in the eyes of a holy God**. The poor in spirit realize that their own righteousness before God is as filthy rags. The poor in spirit realize that apart from Christ we can do nothing.

Illus.: The last words Martin Luther spoke before he died were these: “*We are beggars. That is true.*”²

But to those who know they have absolutely nothing to commend themselves before God, to those who know they humbly stand before God, with empty hands, as spiritual beggars, Jesus preaches good news and says to the poor: “**You are blessed by God!**”

The same blessing is pronounced by Jesus to the **hungry** and to the **weeping**. The **hungry** are believers who seek help from Jesus because of their own helplessness and because of the spiritual satisfaction promised them by God. “*The LORD satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*” (**Psalm 107:9**)

The **weeping** are those who encounter heartache and pain because of their faithful following of Christ.

Jesus makes this clear in Verse 22: *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!*

Notice, what you can expect if you are a faithful follower of Jesus in this world. People will **hate** you. People will **exclude** you. People will **revile** you. People will **spurn** your name as evil. **Why?** “**On account of**” or “**because of**” the Son of Man. Do you see what Jesus is saying? If we are to be His disciples, He wants us to know, right at the very beginning that we will be treated by the world in the same way the world treated Him. We can expect to face the same kind of rejection from others that our Master experienced. We can expect to face the same kind of rejection and hatred that the OT prophets experience: “*for so their fathers did to the prophets.*” (**Verse 23**)

Jesus says: “*The world will hate you, but you must know that you are blessed by God now... and forever!*”

¹ D. A. Carson, Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 17–18.
² Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 476.

Illus.: If Jesus is trying to rally a huge following, this doesn't seem to be a right message! Jesus really needs to hire some knew PR people. There's this huge crowd from all over Israel... and He says this?! Apparently, Jesus never read **How to Win Friends and Influence People!** He certainly didn't read **Your Best Life Now!** Jesus isn't into seeker-friendly recruitment!

The key to understanding the blessed life is noticing the **contrast** that runs right through these verses. Jesus contrasts the **present** and the **future experience** of God's favor. Did you see it?

*"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours **is** the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who are hungry **now**, for **you shall be satisfied**. Blessed are you who weep **now**, **for you shall laugh**. 22 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! 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward **is** great in heaven.*

You may be **poor** in the eyes of the world, but right now in Christ the kingdom of God belongs to you! You may be **hungry** now, but Jesus promises to give you perfect and eternal satisfaction. You may **weep** now, but Jesus promises a day when weeping is gone, tears are no more, and the bitter sound of crying will be replaced with an eternity of joy and laughter. And even on the day when you're **hated** and **excluded** and **reviled** and **spurned** for the sake of following Jesus, you are blessed... because your reward in heaven is great.

App.: Brothers and sisters, Jesus reminds us to seek and to set our hope not on this world, but on the world to come. **Hebrews 13:14:** *"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."*

Illus.: One of my heroes was a man named **John Bunyan**. He was a poor man, an uneducated tinkerer, who repaired metal pots for a living. But he was also one of the greatest preachers of the gospel in all of England. Even when he was mistreated and imprisoned for 12 for preaching the gospel, he refused to stop preaching. He simply preached in the jail-yard. People came from miles around to hear him. While he was in jail, suffering alone for the sake of Christ, he wrote a book, called **Pilgrim's Progress**, which became the most widely published book in the English language after only the King James Bible.

Bunyan persevered through his hunger, his heartache, his hardship by setting his heart and his mind on the glorious and gracious blessings of God's kingdom in Christ, the joys awaiting him in the Heavenly City to come: *"The pilgrims spoke about the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, and the beauty of it was inexpressible. The angel said to them: 'You are going now,' they said, 'to the Paradise of God, where you shall see the tree of life and eat of its never-fading fruits. You shall have white robes given to you, and you shall walk and talk every day with the King, even all the days of eternity. There you shall not see sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death, 'for the former things are passed away.' You shall receive the comforts of*

*all your toil and have joy for all your sorrow; you must reap what you have sown, even the fruit of all your prayers, tears, and sufferings in your journey for the King. In that place you will wear crowns of gold and enjoy the perpetual sight and vision of the Holy One, for 'there you shall see Him as He is.' There also you shall serve Him continually with praise, shouting, and thanksgiving, Him whom you desired to serve in the world, though with much difficulty. There you shall enjoy your friends again, those who have gone before you, and there you shall receive with joy all those who follow you to this holy place. There your eyes shall be delighted with seeing, and your ears shall be delighted with hearing the pleasant voice of the Mighty One forever."*³

When we arrive at the heavenly city, that ancient benediction will finally come true. "**We shall see His face.**" (Rev. 22:4) His face shall shine upon us and He will be gracious to us and give us His peace forever.

II. What is the Cursed Life according to Jesus? (Verses 24-26)

In Verses 24-26, after pronounces four blessings, Jesus pronounces four woes, four words of judgment or condemnation, upon the rich, the full, the laughing, and the liked.

Verse 24 *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. 25 Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets."*

It's clear from the sudden contrast, that Jesus has in mind those in the crowd who claim to be His followers... but in reality are not true disciples of Christ. There's no mention in these woes of those who are suffering persecution because of Jesus like we found in the beatitudes. Just the opposite: "All people speak well" of those to whom Jesus directed these frightening words. You can also see a change in audience by looking down at **Verse 27** where Jesus will make yet another contrast.

Jesus clearly isn't talking exclusively about the materially rich anymore than he was talking exclusively about the materially poor earlier. Jesus has in mind **the spiritually complacent**, the spiritually deceived, the spiritually self-satisfied, about those who have no sense of desperate and urgent need for God and for His saving grace in Christ.

At the conclusion of this Sermon on the Plain, Jesus will warn those who have built their house without a firm foundation, those who have simply heard Jesus' words but haven't believed them or obeyed them. "*When the stream book against it, immediately it fell and the ruin of that house was great.*" (6:49) **So Jesus once again uses four descriptions to refer to the same group of people in the crowd: the rich, the full, the laughing, and the liked. Jesus pronounces judgment upon them. "Woe to you..." Jesus says.**

³ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which is to Come*, Ed. C.J. Lovik (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1678/2009), 217-218.

Jesus has already said similar things to the **apostate spiritually leaders of Israel**, the Pharisees and the scribes, **the false prophets**. Remember He declared to them that He came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. He said to them that it's not the well who are need of a physician but the sick. In other words, you will not receive and follow the Savior of Sinners if you don't understand yourself to be a sinner. You won't seek forgiveness if you don't think you need to be forgiven. You won't look for and depend upon God for grace, if you think of yourself as spiritually Okay: that's who Jesus intends to warn with these words of woe.

Jesus says to those rich, the full, the laughing, and the liked, what the Apostle said to church of Laodicea in **Rev. 3:17**: *"For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."*

Mary: *"God has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty."* (**Luke 1:52-53**)

Later on, Jesus will say: *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in."* (**Matt. 23:13**)

Jesus warns these hypocrites and all hypocrites; Jesus warns all the self-assured and spiritually complacent: ***"Enjoy your consolation while it lasts because it's not gonna last past this life. You wicked rich you will outlive your money. Your consolation will end when your life ends. Your worm will never die. Your laughter will end when your life ends. You will have weeping and gnashing of teeth. Your praise will end when your life ends. And you will enter an eternity of hunger, an eternity of weeping, an eternity of mourning, and never-ending woe will be all that's left for you."***

App.: Christian, passages like this one are a reminder to us of what we can expect as followers of Jesus in this world. You will not be liked or loved by the world as a follower of Jesus. You will be slandered, you will be reviled, you will be mocked. You will not be liked by everyone. Yes, we should aspire to have a good reputation with outsiders. But when we hold firmly and humbly to what God's Word says about God, about gender, about marriage, about sex, about holiness, about salvation in Christ alone, we will not be praised by the world... we will be hated. But Jesus is reminding us: ***"A single day in Hell will be worse than a whole life spent in carrying the cross.⁴ And a single moment in the kingdom of heaven will be greater than any and all of the passing pleasures of sin."***

App.: If you're not a follower of Jesus, please know that these **future tense verbs** are pointing to a future reality for the wicked that the Bible calls **Hell**. ***Hell is real. Hell is horrible. And Hell is forever.*** The most loving person in the universe, the One who is love

⁴ J.C. Ryle, Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties and Roots (Carlisle, PA: @BannerofTruth, 1877/2014), 107-108.

incarnate, Jesus Christ, spoke about Hell more than any other person in the Bible. Friend, your life is a vapor. You are here one minute and gone the next. What you do now matters for eternity. Jesus is calling you to be wise... and to look to the end... look to the last day when we all will stand before a holy God either dressed in the rags of our own self-attempts at a good life... or clothed in the bright shining robe of Christ's perfect and spotless righteousness... a righteousness we did not earn for ourselves... a righteousness we received as a gift... through the empty hands of faith in Jesus Christ the righteous One.

The wonder of wonders for me as I pondered this passage is this: the very same One who spoke these blessings and cursings is the Blessed One who became a curse for us on the cross.

Even on the cross, as He hung dying, our dear Lord blessed the criminal who trusted in Him: *"Today you will be with me in Paradise."*

The One who spent His whole life blessing... the One in whom is hidden every blessing in the heavenly places... that One... went to the cross... and on that cross He bore the curses of God's wrath in our place... for our sins... so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. *"Guilty, vile, and helpless we; Spotless Lamb of God was He, Full atonement! Can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!"*

Brothers and sisters, as a church we have the joy of going to the Lord's Table together today. As we take the bread and the cup, we have a **token and pledge**, a sign and a seal, of our Savior's dying love for us. We have a visible sermon preaching the promise that Christ is raised from the dead and seated at God's right hand and coming again for us. The Supper is a reminder that we proclaim the Lord's death... until He comes.

And when He comes, we shall be gathered with all of God's people from every tribe and nation and tongue. And sin will be no more. And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.

And it shall come to pass what was written: ***"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken."***

The poor shall be made rich; the hungry shall be satisfied; the weeping shall laugh, and those who were hated for the sake of the Savior will say on that day: "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation." (Isa. 25:6-9)