

Woe Unto You – Jesus: Blessings and Curses

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MAIN VERSES

[Luke 6:20](#) • [Luke 6:24](#) • [Matthew 5:1](#) • [Matthew 5:3](#) • [Matthew 5:6](#) • [Exodus 21:23-25](#) • [Leviticus 24:19-20](#) • [Deuteronomy 19:16-21](#) • [Deuteronomy 28](#) • [Habakkuk 2](#) • [Jeremiah 10](#) • [Romans 1](#) • [Jeremiah 4](#)

Welcome Home

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love? A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God? Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home.

Yeah, so we just said the Lord's Prayer with all the kids, and you noticed what happened. Some of us were trained up in the Bible that Jesus used, the King James Version, but we also wanted to be kind of hip and modern, so we used the ESV, and so that messed us up.

Shavuot and Community

Shabbat shalom, everybody. Shabbat shalom. So excited to be here today. I cannot get over the event that took place last week out in the property here at Shavuot. Did you guys have a good time with the community celebration?

I want to revisit that. That was an exciting time to see so much dedication put towards the children—to where when they show up for Shavuot, they're like, "It's something that they're going to remember is associated with blessing of the community and surrounded by people that love them and people that are mentoring them about the God of mercy and grace and the God that loves."

And so I just so appreciate you guys being that community for my children. And it was just such a blessing for me to see that. I'm selfish of the reasons why I enjoy being part of this community, and it's because of you guys. So thank you so much.

Blessings and Curses of Yeshua

I titled the message for today "Woe Unto You: The Blessings and Curses of Yeshua." And the idea is, of course, we're going to take a look at Luke's portrayal of the Sermon on the Mount. And of course, whenever you go to a different author—because usually when we read about the Sermon on the Mount, we go to our favorite gospel writer, Matthew—this is a different writer, right? And of course, there's different intentions. And there's a different artist painting their portrait of who Yeshua is to them, which is why all of the gospel writers have these little unique differences between them. And it's beautiful and it's intentional.

And he includes not just the blessings, like the Beatitudes that Matthew does, but he also includes this set of antithetical warnings, right?—to those who may not realize they are heading away in the wrong direction, down the wrong road of the covenant blessings and covenant relationship of God.

Luke's Different Portrayal

And obviously we've spoken about this intentional setup in the Gospel of Matthew. When Matthew describes the Sermon on the Mount and we see these elements that hyperlink us back to Moses, of course—and I'm going to hammer this every chance I get because it's so important. According to Matthew, Yeshua goes up the mountain and teaches the ways of God, which kind of gives us this familiar image of Moses going up the mountain and giving the oracles of God to Israel. And here Yeshua is presented as the greater Moses who gives the greater application of Torah. And Yeshua demonstrates and lays out how Torah is supposed to be actualized and walked out with the kingdom ethic in mind.

And we have this verse right here, and I'm going to show it because we're going to flip over to Luke, and I want you to see this difference. So we have Matthew chapter 5, verse 1. And here Yeshua begins the Beatitudes, but then goes into a deeper teaching about what it looks like to actually live out a life where you pledge allegiance to Yeshua and his kingdom.

How Radical and Controversial

And Yeshua references the Torah a lot during his teaching. This is the actual fulfillment of the Torah, how the heart of the Torah is actually supposed to be lived out with the purest ethic of God. And he brings a better way to keep it. Can you imagine in the first century, like that was so scandalous, right? Like you have Pharisees and rabbis and teachers teaching all different

interpretations of Torah, but here comes Yeshua and what he said was absolutely scandalous. "You know you've heard it said, 'Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth,' but I say don't."

Who does he think he is, right? That's a big deal in the time that he was teaching. There was a way of interpreting the Torah in the first century. And like I said, it was taught by many rabbis, many teachers. And this teacher goes up and just says, "Yeah, no, no, there's a polar opposite understanding of how to live out that commandment that you can't even comprehend because it actually reflects the heart of the Father." This is how radical and controversial Yeshua was. He ticked off a lot of religious folks.

Eye for Eye, Tooth for Tooth

And when he's speaking about that commandment specifically—eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth—there are three times in the Torah that this commandment is brought up. The first is in [Exodus 21](#), the second is in [Leviticus 24](#), and the third is in [Deuteronomy 19](#). And we're going to read these real quick just to see how radical this is, right?

So [Exodus 21:23](#) says, "You must give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, and wound for wound." This is the Exodus eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth commandment.

[Leviticus 24](#), very similar: "Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner. You break their arm, we will break your arm." This is justice. "Fracture for fracture, pinky, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth commandment. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury."

And then you have [Deuteronomy 19](#), which is interesting because the context concerns false witnesses—these people who come and they put their fingers in the court case and they manipulate it for whatever goal they have, but it is not ethical. As that witness intended to do to the other party.

Can you imagine going to court, and if you're going to argue a case for a client as their attorney, the risks are quite high. You're going to argue and say, "No, we need a bumper car accident or whatnot. Maybe they got whiplash, maybe they didn't." \$50,000.

Justice and the Death Penalty

If it comes out that some of the things you said in the case didn't happen, happened, it's a high price to pay. You must now pay \$50,000. Death penalty. You must purge the evil from among

you. The rest of the people will hear this and be afraid and never again will do such an evil thing be done among you. God gets real serious when it comes to accusations towards people.

Verse 21: "If this happens, you are to show no mercy, show no pity. Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot." Pretty serious commands.

Now verse 19, like I said, it's interesting because you guys know the topic of the death penalty. Have you ever known someone that didn't agree with it? It's a debatable topic, especially in Christianity, depending on where you're from and whatnot. But it's debated, and you have many Christians and believers who are opposed to the death penalty here in the United States for a variety of reasons, right?—that they find in scripture.

But this verse is the one that really highlights how as Christian Americans, we have this sense of pursuing justice. As Christians, we need to find a way that we can pursue justice in a way that reflects the ethics of God so that bad people don't get away with bad stuff, right? And that's exactly what we should be doing.

And so we tend to take verses like "eye for an eye" and "tooth for a tooth" and "life for a life" and use that as the lead filling for the ammunition to pursue the death penalty for horrible crimes. And that makes absolute sense. But as American Christians in our pursuit and zeal for justice, we sometimes ignore the rest of the scripture here that we claim to follow in our pursuit for justice.

So verse 19 here is about if anyone goes to the court seeking retribution, including the death penalty. And it says here, if their pursuit lands someone in being charged, but it comes out after that they were false or they lied or they fabricated evidence or manipulated the case in any way, or they did something fishy to sway the court in charging an individual, then—which I'm sure our legal system is totally not vulnerable to something like that, right? Like ever. You have safeguards against that, right? Some of you have never been in a court hearing.

The Tap-Dancing Attorney

What's that movie? There was a movie that came out, it's a musical, in 2002: Chicago. I don't remember the movie, so I may have just referenced a horrible movie to use in a sermon. And if I did, I'm sorry. I just remember watching it when I was younger, and there was one part where—there was a scene, there was an attorney, and it was Richard Gere, right? He was an attorney in the movie, and he devised a plan with the evidence he had that he was going up against the witness at the end, and his plan was to pitch this strategy and to draw the witness out and push

him back and so on and so forth in such a way that he would win the court case. He would sway the entire case.

And it's a musical. And so the movie depicted—as soon as he went up there to question the witness, the lights came on and he began to tap dance around the courtroom. And I thought that was so appropriate. Has anyone ever seen an attorney tap dance around the courtroom when they have something in their back pocket and they pull it out and it's like, oh, bam? And you can see it on TV shows, just tap dancing around the courtroom as he dismantles the witness, manipulating the conversation and swaying the judge and jury.

Just seems so appropriate—tapping around the courtroom. And the Bible says that if anyone does something intentionally manipulative or fabricates evidence or lies, they themselves must take upon themselves the charges and penalty. And the debate, if you're unfamiliar, among Christians, about the death penalty and so on and so forth, is that we love to pursue biblical justice, but sometimes we would kindly ignore this commandment. That's the claim: we're not pursuing biblical justice if we ignore this commandment. We have a reputation in this nation of putting the wrong people in prison as well as killing the wrong people in capital punishment cases. And this verse is one of the verses that some Christians would cite in their view of not being pro-capital punishment in America.

There's a man by the name of Lee Liddell who was convicted of the murder of his neighbor. He was arrested and charged in 1993 and was put on death row. Like, you did this. The evidence that we see, the attorneys came in and were pitching this scenario where he was obviously the killer. It was a cold case, but it got reopened a couple years ago. Someone had missed something. We have more technology now. Witnesses found someone else's DNA on the murder weapon. Not his—someone else's DNA. Okay.

Not only that, they realized that despite Lee needing to be in close proximity to the victim because of how up-close and intentional the killing was, expert pathologists testified there would be some type of blood on his clothing. You wouldn't be able to do this and clean it up. And there's nothing on his clothes. And it's always striking when you see court cases like this where the cold case comes out and now someone who, even if something's fishy, it doesn't seem like they were the murderer. They were the one that should have been charged. That comes out because then they get their life back, right? It's a big deal.

New evidence has arisen and Lee Liddell may not be the murderer in this case, but he'll never know because he was executed in 2017 in Arkansas. His last words when they went to inject those chemicals into his arms were: My dying words will always be, as it has been, I am an

innocent man. He was one of four men put to death in the span of a week because Arkansas wanted to be good stewards of the finances they're getting from the justice system. And they looked in their inventory and the chemicals used for lethal injection were expiring soon. We gotta do something. All right. So they hit the gas pedal and sent four men to death row. They accelerated the process to get these guys in the chair before these chemicals expired.

If Lee was innocent, if the witnesses that came forward and those who pushed the evidence will never be fined, they will never be put in jail, it's unfortunate. And that's about as much gravity as we give it. That's unfortunate. In fact, on average, four people are exonerated from death row each year in the United States for being wrongly convicted of a crime.

Biblical Justice and the Cost of Error

So yeah, that's the debate. I'm not here to choose a side. I just want you guys to be aware that that's one of the verses since we're here today. That's one of the verses that is particularly crucial to the debate. I find that helpful. But look at the wording here in Deuteronomy: Show no pity. You must do this.

And when Yeshua teaches, he says what? You've heard it said eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, but I say don't resist an evil person. And if they slap you on the cheek, turn the other cheek. You go ahead and walk the extra mile. Hand over your coat if you're sued. You know what? You pray for your enemies.

Now we have enemies today, and usually the people that pop in our heads are people on social media that we don't like. So let's go ahead and hop in a time machine and go back in this episode of Context Corner. We're going to go back to the first century. Who would an enemy of a poor first century Jew be? What would that look like?

These weren't simply people that called them names or didn't like their posts enough or something. These were most likely either Roman oppressors who did these things or who abused these people as a whole, or they were their own people who sympathized with the Roman oppressors, the people who beat them, who stole from them, who robbed them, who kept them in slave status, who killed them. Pray for those enemies. Are you out of your mind?

And what Yeshua means when he says pray for your enemies—he means that you pray they experience a greater revelation of God's love in their life than even you have. That's what you're called to do. Man, that's hard.

Enemies and Grace in the Kingdom

Yeshua is saying that is the kingdom response to people that hate you, who persecute you, who want to kill you. People who have harmed you, have called you names, belittled you, stolen from you. This section isn't promoting staying in an abusive relationship. Some people will try to pitch that. No, this section is laying out the ideal that his followers will be known for promoting both justice and absolute grace, and refusing to seek revenge. You do show mercy wherever and however you're capable of doing it.

That is why this was so radical in the first century, because many people took this verse and interpreted, no, you take the ax to everybody. Thus saith the Lord. And I bring up the death penalty issue because as Christians, we're called to support mercy and justice and be aware of the injustices around us. Believers are called to struggle with hard issues.

It's something that the older I get, as I mature in my relationship with God and faith, I realize I struggle more and more with harder issues that are real out there. And I feel like that's appropriate. That's what we're called to do. If you're not struggling with issues, something might be amiss because what the Bible says and what the world says are polar opposites. And where they meet is where you are. There should be a struggle with how these issues are addressed.

Matthew's Mountain and Luke's Plain

And the Sermon on the Mount starts out with the Beatitudes in Matthew, which we've already discussed a few weeks back. But today I want to shift over to Luke's recounting of Yeshua's words. And in Luke, he chooses to paint a little bit of a different picture, a different artist, right? You'll notice in the gospel accounts, each writer acts like their own master painter there.

And in Luke, it's not even called the Sermon on the Mount. Did you guys know that? It's called the Sermon on the Plain, the Sermon on the Flat Surface, right? Here's what it says in Luke chapter 6: So he goes up the mountain, 12 disciples are chosen. And he also designated apostles. Simon—Verse 17, this is neat—the plain. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon.

So Luke here seems to be painting his own greater Moses, greater Exodus account or motif, much like Matthew. But instead of Yeshua going up to the mountain to teach the ways of God, Luke describes Yeshua going up to the mountain to pray and be with God. Then Yeshua

establishes his disciples, the 12, symbolizing what? The 12 tribes of Israel. So you have a man on the mountain with God and you have 12 tribes. And then you have this man that comes down from the mountain to teach not just the 12 tribes, but people from all over the place. That's kind of neat. It's kind of a slight riff on the story of Moses. Just enough to pique your interest to see that overlay.

Luke's Beatitudes and the Woes

And here's what he says in Luke chapter 6, verse 20. Looking at his disciples, he said the Beatitudes of Luke. Now again, in Matthew it goes how? Blessed are the poor in spirit. Yeah. Not so here. Blessed are the poor, period. Matthew really strives to spiritualize it. Oh, that's so deep! But Luke—period. Blessed are the poor, period.

Blessed are the hungry now. Like, for righteousness? No, like hungry. You want a burger? Hungry. In Matthew, you're blessed for those who thirst and hunger for righteousness, right? Not here. Blessed are those who mourn now.

And then after this section, Luke includes something that Matthew does not: the woes. Everybody say the woes. That's right. Luke includes a section of what blessing looks like in the kingdom of God and gives comfort to those who suffer in the present, and be it partial blessings in the present, in the future your blessing will come. But then Luke shifts to the antithesis, turning to warn people in verse 24.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and you will weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you. Anybody well fed in here? Don't laugh. If you laugh, then it's, whoa.

Who does this apply to? And I love this because most of us here today would not consider ourselves rich. Can we go back to the context corner, right? Oh, no. That's me. And that's the thing—you could make it even more. If having access to conveniences defines your level of wealth, everyone in here is richer than King Herod. Oh man, let's just keep moving. Let's just move on, right? Woe to you who are well-fed.

Darn it, I'm well-fed. The pandemic did a lot of well-fitting for a lot of us. You stay at home longer, you eat stuff, 10 pounds later. Does this mean woe unto me? Man, I like to laugh. Am I part of the woes because I like to laugh? I got these videos on YouTube with the cats. I like to laugh. Woe unto me. Woe unto those who speak well of you or who are spoken well of. You do something well at work and someone gives you props, last week, "Matt, great job on the

message today." Stop it. No, woe to me. And I really want to address this because I would struggle with this.

Understanding the Woe Oracles

What is the context here? What Luke is doing is he's furthering a writing style. He's taking something that's already embedded in the Old Testament called the woe oracles. And in the Old Testament, specifically in the prophets but also in the wisdom literature, we have a genre of writing known as the oracles of woe. Sounds like a TV show. These are woes. Whenever you see woes in the Old Testament, "woe unto you for X, Y, Z, woe unto you for X, Y, Z," and so forth. And so when we're reading the writings of the first century Jewish follower of Yeshua, who was steeped in the Old Testament, that brings relevance to something like this. And the woe oracles were a covenantal concept in the Old Testament. Whenever they were spoken of, whenever you saw that, it was always in the context of covenant. What it's saying is if you break covenant with God, which is going to go hand in hand with breaking covenant with other people, that's how that works, you are heading down a road in the wrong direction, the road of woe. You need to stop. You need to evaluate your life. And it's not saying if you trip up here and there, boom, broken covenant, going to hell. No, but if you deliberately continue going down the road of woe, it's not going to end well for you. This isn't going to end well. God wants you to turn around and come back. Why? Because if you continue walking down a way of life that is contrary to the covenant of God, the prophets would announce a woe over you. It's not that you're doomed forever. It's that it's a warning. These are signals. God is pleading for his people to turn around.

The Five Woes of Habakkuk

One example of woe oracles is the five woes of Habakkuk. They're in chapter two of the prophet Habakkuk. And we're going to read these woes. You guys ready to read some of the word? Good, because we have a few verses to read. So bear with me. If you want to turn with me to [Habakkuk 2](#), starting in verse six, I want you guys to see this.

Verse six says, "Woe to him who multiplies what is not his—how long?—and who loads himself with pledges."

Verse 9: "To put his nest on high, to be delivered from the hand of calamity. Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with violence. Woe to you who make your

neighbors drink." God's wrath is typically described as this big cup, and we'll talk about that in a minute. It's this cup that we generally end up running after instead of getting forced upon.

Verse 19: "Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, awake to a mute stone, arise. And that is your teacher. Behold, it is overlaid with silver and gold and there is no breath in it."

So this last verse here is neat because it's the same language that's used in another prophet, [Jeremiah 10](#), when Jeremiah tells the people to stop being afraid of pagan idols. For they make them out of wood and deck them with silver and gold. And of course, because the King James Version says "deck with silver and gold," everybody says that's a Christmas tree, and that's an anachronism. There's no evidence that Christmas trees existed when Jeremiah was writing this. This is not what he's talking about. He's talking about literal idols, and it's the same language that Habakkuk is using here. Overlaid with silver and gold. There's no breath in it. Habakkuk and Jeremiah were contemporaries, by the way. They lived around the same time and they're talking about the same issue. So it's kind of neat to have that connection between the two prophets. They're speaking about the same thing. But here are the woes. The warning. Stop heading that direction or you will be handed over.

The Wages of Our Choices

And how God's wrath tends to work throughout the Bible is not necessarily that God is in heaven and he's gonna pull a Zeus if he gets too mad and he's gonna throw lightning bolts down. In the post-Exodus narrative of Israel in the Old Testament, when the cup of God's wrath is drunk, it's generally because Israel or the nations, whether knowingly or not, wanted to drink it. They wanted it. They wanted to continue down that road. They got the wages of their choices drunk. The Psalms speak about the cup of God's wrath a lot, and it's described as this huge goblet that has high-gravity foaming wine in it, just this high-gravity alcoholic beverage. And the people or the nations, they drink of it. And after they drink it, if you've ever had a party day in your life, you'd always go for the alcohol, right? And this is what the biblical authors are picking up on. Yeah, they run to it and they drink it, but then they stumble and they fall. This is how God's wrath is presented. This is how Paul speaks about God's wrath in Romans chapter one. If you continue down this path that is opposed to the righteousness of God and his kingdom, you will be turned over to what you want. You will be turned over to a reprobate mind. These paths have products associated with them. This is the destiny these life pursuits will bring upon you.

Sometimes God's wrath is simply that he allows you to destroy yourself. If you really want it, he holds you back. He pleads with you, "Turn around, come back to me." But at some point, he lifts up. Remember we spoke about the decreation account in [Jeremiah 4](#) when Judah just would not respond to God's calling to repent. And it's not that God sent the Babylonians in to destroy them. He allowed their pursuit to produce the wages that it does. And that's how Paul talks about this in Romans chapter 1 as well.

At Sukkot, if you make a choice to eat Brad Bermeli's Carolina Reaper hot chili, there will be a destiny that was produced in your life. You will endure the wages of that result in the port-a-john. You know from Sukkot. It's awesome chili. He won the trophy last year, by the way. It's amazing chili. He deserved it for sure. If you smoke all your life, what happens? You might get cancer. Wages of your choices. And God in his mercy is always calling us back. "Come back to me." But there comes a point when you're released to your choices. And that's what Paul says. God's wrath is being revealed, and this is what it looks like. This is being turned over to the consequences of your choices and sin.

Breaking Covenant in Luke's Teaching

This is the background I believe we need to understand, or at least it helps us understand Yeshua's teachings here in Luke. This is not saying that there's anything intrinsically wrong with being well-fed or wealthy or having someone give you a compliment and speak well of you. This is speaking in covenant context, that if you are wealthy or you are well-fed or you are laughing or you are well-spoken of in a way that is breaking covenant with God or other people, you are on that road. These are signals.

We Become What We Worship

Scholar and author J.K. Beal has a book called **We Become What We Worship**. It's an amazing overview of this topic. And he makes the assertion that at its base, anything that causes us to break covenant with God is through the means of idolatry. He generalizes idolatry in a way that really impacts the reality of the world we live in. If we worship God, we become and imitate him in his ways. But when we worship something else, we become and imitate that. We become what we worship. This is why Isaiah, in the Hebrew Bible, accuses or refers to Israel as being blind and deaf despite their ears and eyes being wide open. Why does he do this? Because they're blind and deaf just like the blind and deaf worthless idols that they worship every day. They're blind and deaf just like what they worship.

You can be wealthy and use that wealth for kingdom purposes. Many people did that in the New Testament. There's nothing inherently wrong about that. But what happens when you begin to worship the wealth? Let me rephrase. What happens when you view your wealth as the source for your life? Oh, that just got applicable, didn't it? Well, a few things happen. You definitely are not generous at all. And that's human nature at that point. If this is your life source, you're not going to be generous with that. You may let it seep out every once in a while, but no, you're not generous inherently. So instead of being generous and using the wealth for kingdom purposes, you do what? What do we do when we start getting a lot of money? We hoard it, right? And that already begins down the road of woe because we're told not to hold up our riches, but to live generously just like our Lord Yeshua. And so we begin to yield to the false God called mammon. Because once you have the money, then what do you got to do to it? You got to protect it, right? Secure it. It's your life source. Now you need it to grow, to continue giving your life. And the degree that we give our allegiance over to wealth and this type of life pursuit is the degree that we don't give our allegiance over to God.

Idolatry and Hunger

The degree that you are creating riches now here on earth is the degree that you're not going to be concerned about being thirsty for the riches that God promises will come. There's no beating around it. That's what it says. Your hunger drives your lifestyle. How many of you guys know that? If you are hungry for riches in the here and the now in this life, then you will not be hungry for the coming kingdom of God and his righteousness, or as some say, his right relatedness. You're not gonna be hungry for that. Why would you? You're eating it now. You're getting it now.

Same thing with being well-fed. In the ancient world, being well-fed was kind of a big deal. It was like an extra cushion, pun, extra cushion of security. You got it, thank you. You're able to provide for you and your family. Man, those of you who may be the main provider of your homes, y'all know about that. You know about the yearning for that, having that extra comfort of knowing that you haven't failed or you're not going to fail your family. People back in the first century were very poor, very poor indeed. This was a huge blessing to be able to have an extra layer of security.

But every blessing can become a curse if you begin to worship it as an idol in your life. We begin to idolize our security, making it our false god instead of devoting ourselves to our true security that God wants to provide here and now and at the end of the age. So Yeshua is saying, woe to you. Warning, warning sign. Watch out.

Laughter and Humor

Same thing can be said about laughter. I love humor. I really do. Humor brings people and relationships together. I love laughter. And many of us actually, the older we get, do you ever realize that you've started using laughter and humor inappropriately to cover up trauma and depression in your life or past offenses? No, no, no. Just me. Okay, never mind. No one ever went to a funeral and just didn't know how to respond to this awful light play? And you start telling jokes and people are like, what's wrong with you? A couple of you. Okay, we're there. We're here. Okay, not just me.

I love laughing. I fell off my couch the other night where my wife and I were sitting and I saw a little video on the gram. And it's Instagram reels. I don't know. They have little videos that pop up. People make these short, stupid videos. And it's a little video and this guy tells a joke. And he says, "A father-in-law." I fell off the couch. My wife—I've never seen such a look of shame. So intense, just lasers. I couldn't stop laughing so loudly. She got mad because I woke up the kids. It was night. I thought that was a close one.

My Father's Laughter

I think I get that from my dad. My father, for those of you who knew him, had the most authentic, cringeworthy laugh you've ever heard in your life. I heard it just recently coming from myself as I lay on the floor. If he started buckling, the world knew—that was the type of person he was. And I remember as a child, we were at Red Lobster—it was a long time ago—with those little cheesy rolls. He told the joke—okay, setting it up. And you know these kind of people. I'm one of them. They are so excited to tell you the joke, right? That when they finally get to the punchline, it's like a soda that's been shaken up and it's just so full of pressure and they just start. It just explodes.

My father told a joke at a packed Red Lobster restaurant on a weekend evening and he could not contain himself. His laughter was so loud it was as if Goofy had possessed my dear father. And the entire restaurant—not just our section, there were walls dividing the crowds of people. Full of people having pleasant conversations, minding their own business. Everybody in this restaurant was compelled to cease and turn and stare at this man who in the moment had zero control over himself. And there, his three children and loving wife were stuck sitting there, horrified, as the audience stared on. I love that kind of laughter.

Laughter as Gift and Curse

Laughing is not woe-worthy. Laughing in a way that breaks covenant with God and others is woe-worthy. Laughter is a gift and a blessing until you weaponize it. When you laugh in a way that belittles somebody or you use it for scorn or mockery, you're heading down that road, the road of woe. Some scholars—I found this interesting because I'd never noticed it—suggest that this specific woe is more than just that. They look at the other woes of Luke's woe oracles. And being well-fed, that's a lifestyle, right? Being wealthy, that's a lifestyle, right? And here, laughter.

Some suggest this too is meant to be in the context of a lifestyle of laughter. It would fit, I guess, the party life. The life where you ignore the pain and the suffering in the world and instead become a glutton of fun and laughter. Having time to relax is a blessing. But some would suggest this is speaking of forming a lifestyle where you don't care about anything. You disregard the suffering of others. You're only focused on making your life better and easier and carefree and just ignoring any calling or any purpose within your life. Living your life as if you were not formed and charged to be an image bearer of God. Live like there's no tomorrow because, well, it doesn't really matter. So I don't have to do anything.

And if you're getting your life source from that, then you will not be hungry or driven to walk out the hard path of God's calling. Not gonna be hungry for that. I don't want that. I've got my favorite meal in front of me now. You will not be willing to take up your cross. You will not be willing to endure hardship to face persecution. You will not be willing to give generously of your time and resources. Why? Because you're getting your fullness now despite knowing God is preparing a feast and a banquet that you can sample now and fully embrace at the end of the age. You're eating it now.

The Question of Hunger

Is that you today? How hungry are you to show the world the mercy of God through your own life? And some claim to be committed to God, but they aren't hungry at all. And Yeshua says they've been filled. They're getting what they want.

Being Well-Spoken Of

Being well-spoken of is awesome. Doesn't it feel good when someone gives you a compliment? That's good. It means you have a good reputation or you've done something that benefited or blessed someone. Yeshua had a lot of people that spoke well of him during his ministry. All those people he healed and interacted with. Nothing wrong with that.

When you become a person who is always trying to get everyone's approval, you don't want to rock the boat. These kind of people don't want to do anything that disrupts the flow. And when the time actually comes to stand up for truth and justice in the world, they will be the ones sitting by. We're supposed to have some backbone to things that actually matter. We're supposed to speak the truth in love as part of our calling as followers of Yeshua. If popularity is your idol here and now, then you're chasing the approval of everyone else in the world. And the more time and energy that you spend chasing everyone else's approval, that's the extent to which you won't be pursuing the approval that really matters in the end. That's what Yeshua is hammering here.

Matthew vs. Luke's Beatitudes

I mentioned how Matthew kind of spiritualizes the Beatitudes, which I think is neat. While Luke doesn't, right? Let's review it. Here we go. Just read it in this context now. Blessed is the poor in spirit, Matthew, but in Luke, it's this: Blessed are you, blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

Guys, Luke is not suggesting that being poor means you're poor, righteous, automatically. That's all it takes. Or if you're hungry, bam, you're now virtuous, right? If anything, these are things that we are called to fix in the world right now, not promote.

The Context of Blessings and Woes

But we see the same context here. See, if you are poor, then you aren't tempted to idolize how rich you are, are you? If you are hungry, you cannot get life from how well-fed and secure you are. Think about the people who are sitting around him right now. He's speaking to them. If you are in mourning, you can't get life from how easygoing life is. And if you're being persecuted and oppressed, you definitely are not worried about how popular you are.

What might rock the boat—these idols were not available to the people listening to him that day. In the first century, everyone on the Sermon on the Plain was poor. Slave status, most of them likely in the Roman Empire. They were hungry, they were persecuted, they were weeping. This must have been such an encouragement to them because they didn't have these direct temptations. Yeshua is saying, you are blessed today. You will have the things that have been taken from you, but you are blessed now. Could you imagine such a word of encouragement there? These people were not looking in the mirror when Yeshua was speaking about the woes.

They were thinking about other people. These things were not available to them in this time period.

But guess what? These things are available to us every day. We do have the temptation to idolize money. We do have the temptation to idolize that job, that career, that security.

We do have the temptation of storing up our riches, being well-fed. We do have the temptation of being the life of the party, wanting to please everybody. Ask leadership if we've ever been tempted to be a people pleaser. Y'all know, department heads, yes. It's hard in a fellowship setting. Man, man. Because you love your flock and you love your community. But the temptation is there universally among all pastors and congregation leaders.

And these things aren't just available to us, though. They're the monsters that chase us as adults. Through marketing and advertising, this is the way that you should go. This is what the world teaches. Every single one of us. These are the milestones of success in the West.

Yeshua's Torah

It's neat because we speak about the Sermon on the Mount being the Torah that Yeshua gives, Yeshua's Torah. He is the greater Moses giving the greater Torah, the greater fulfillment of how the Torah is actually supposed to be lived out in a way that actually blesses creation.

And some scholars have pointed out that the Beatitudes and the Woe Oracles and Luke may very well rift and hyperlink back to the blessings and the curses in Torah, the way that they're laid out in [Deuteronomy 28](#). This is how you live if you want to receive blessing in your life. This is how you live if you're going down the path of curses.

Blessing and Woes

And here Yeshua is saying, this is the lifestyle you live out if you want that blessing, a blessing that only can come from God. And it may not be what the world would call a blessing, but it secures your treasure in his kingdom. Or this is the road that leads to the woes. These are the indicators of a lifestyle that leads to breaking covenant with God and other people and leads to a life of instant gratification. Now, sure does taste sweet, but a forfeiting of greater blessings to come. A forfeiting to experience the embrace of God's kingdom now.

You forfeit because you take what you can now and forget the long game.

The Mission and End Game

And so I don't know where you're at today, but I really want your takeaway to be: What was Yeshua's mission? What was his mission? What did he teach? How radical was it? What is the end game for Yeshua and his mission? What is he trying to start right now for his disciples? How does he believe it's gonna end?

If this is how he is advising his first followers to carry out his kingdom ethic, and this is how he advised those followers to go and to teach all nations the same thing, what is the end game for Yeshua and his kingdom? And are you a part of it? Are you in it for the long term?

The Nonviolent Kingdom

Yeshua was not establishing an earthly army to overtake the world through violence and domination through force. He taught directly against that. He was establishing, at the time, a nonviolent, subversive army that bears the icon of God's kingdom and would have the ability to pass through all borders into all nations.

And this potential of this kingdom and what they're equipped with breaks entire systems because it is opposed to the worldly ways. This kingdom has the ability.

And I hope you enjoyed this message.

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