

His Eyes Are On His Disciples

I want you all to take the next few moments to reflect on a vitally important question: where do you wish to be in 10 years? What do you hope to have accomplished by 2026? What is the most important dream in your life? We all have life goals of where we want to be. These goals are not unimportant or merely an exercise in day-dreaming. They illuminate for us what are our core principles, convictions, and most important beliefs, which guide our behavior every day of our lives. Where we want to be in the future decides how we live today.

If you are honest with yourself this morning, maybe you would say that you want to be well-off, financially secure. If you are getting close to retirement, you would say that you hope to be able to retire at an early age, so that you can get on with what you really want to do in life.

I find myself reminding my children often throughout their lives that their dreams of the future affect how they live today. As they head off to college, perhaps their goal in life is to have graduated with honors with a Master's degree and secure a good job. Or perhaps they want to be married and start a family. Trenton recently started classes to learn martial arts and before he attended his first class, I sat down with him to remind him that even as he is going to learn many wonderful things like discipline, respect, and courage, that the most important concern of his life is not to merely train his body but to grow into a man of God, who will love and serve Jesus Christ every day of his life.

Coming from last week's sermon, where the main theme of **2 Corinthians 4**, is that we were created to see the beatific vision of God, but as sinners we are no longer committed to see God. But God, in His grace toward us, has accomplished the impossible: He has shown His light into our hearts so that we are now once again able to see the glory of God. But what is that light? Where do we see the glory of God? In the face of Jesus Christ. It is through the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ that God has made Himself once more fully known to man so that we can have the greatest gift God could ever give us: Himself!

Our goals in life often far fall short of this preeminent purpose for our lives. You might confess that your goals today fall far below this purpose for your life. Whatever your earthly goals are, Jesus has a way of permanently reordering what we live for – to raise our goals from the temporary to the eternal, from those whose ending is surely to pass away to those which will last forever.

This is certainly His goal in Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount, which has often been called the greatest sermon ever preached. Listen to how Jesus opened that sermon:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (**Matt. 5:2-6**).

The focus of these opening words is that for those who long for – desire with all their being for, passionately driven towards - the kingdom of heaven in such a way that they would readily admit that their life is truly empty – vacuous, meaningless - without it will be given that eternal kingdom. Each person who is “poor in spirit” or humbled, those who mourn for it, those who are meek without it, those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness will freely be given it through Jesus Christ.

Have you ever been truly hungry or thirsty? The rest of the world often laughs at us as Americans when we speak of hunger and thirst. Who among us has truly ever really known real hunger and thirst so that we would be happy with a mere slice of bread or a cup of cold water? Further, who among us, in the quietness of our hearts, would confess that we have ever hungered to that degree the righteousness God requires of us? Who of us would say that there was ever a moment that the burning passion of our hearts was to gain true righteousness before God so that our every desire was to be holy before a Holy God, to be like the man or woman He created us to be, fully reflecting His perfect glory before Him?

But Jesus goes on in the sermon to press us even more deeply: In **5:48** He tells us that we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. In **6:33** He says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added.” Jesus is not saying that we are to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness first chronologically but holistically as the preeminent desire of our hearts in everything we are and do. Only those who seek God's kingdom and His righteousness with constant and complete hunger and thirst will be given it.

Here Jesus wonderfully reorders our goals in life. He takes our merely earthly desires and sets them atop a higher plane of existence. It is as C. S. Lewis once said in a sermon entitled “The Weight of Glory”:

It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum

because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

As we turn to the second sermon recorded in Luke's Gospel, we find Jesus' words are slightly different from Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount. We start with the crowd once again pressing upon Jesus (**Luke 6:17**). Further, we are told that they came to hear Him and be healed by Him (**v. 18**). The crowd sought to touch Him – Why? Because they were aware that Divine power was pouring out of Him (**v. 19**). After Jesus healed them, now it was time for Him to teach them. So He turns to His disciples and says (**READ vv. 20-26**).

Now, you will notice that there are differences in this sermon, recorded by Luke, from the sermon recorded by Matthew. For instance, Jesus preaches this sermon on a plane rather than on a mountain (**v. 17**). Also, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor" rather than "the poor in spirit" or "Blessed are you who are hungry" rather than "who hunger and thirst for righteousness." There appears to be a different focus in this sermon than the one recorded by Matthew and we need to be sensitive to these differences rather than explain them away by simply harmonizing the two sermons. The differences may simply be that this is a different sermon preached by Jesus from the one recorded by Matthew, which sounds similar to the Sermon on the Mount, but is being preached to a different people at a different time in His ministry.

The first contrast that is most noticeable in the opening words of Jesus' sermon is difference between the poor and the rich (**vv. 20b, 24**). There is no doubt that Jesus is talking about the physically, materially poor in contrast to the materially rich. Jesus goes on to describe the poor as those who are hungry and who mourn while the rich are those who are full and who laugh (**vv. 21, 25**). Now, some have tried to turn Jesus' statements into absolutes saying things like "all poor" are going to inherit the kingdom of God, while "all the rich" are going to hell. They treat Jesus' sayings liberally as if the "poor" of the world have a special place in God's Kingdom while the rich are forever banished from God's love. Even the Roman Catholic Church requires their priest to take vows of poverty thinking that being poor is more blessed, closer to God, than being rich. But Jesus is not giving an economics lesson nor is he giving arguments here for socialism or communism.

It is clear that Jesus is speaking in a way that the Jewish mind would have readily understood and is not to be read anachronistically in twentieth century failed economic policies. Note first that Jesus is not making universal statements at all. He is speaking to those who He has chosen to be His disciples, who love Him and who have already given up everything, including their professions to follow Him (**v. 20; cf. 5:11**). Second, Jesus emphasizes that he is speaking of His disciples who have given up everything for Him when He uses the second

person, personal pronoun (v. 20 “yours”). Finally, Jesus makes an important qualification, which should be understood as qualifying everything Jesus is saying in v. 22. It is not simply all who are persecuted or who suffer indiscriminately who are blessed, but only those who are persecuted and suffer “on account of the Son of Man” – who suffer in their very union with Jesus Christ – who are blessed.

Another contrast Jesus makes further defines what He means when He speaks of the “now” in contrast with the “future” (vv. 21, 25). Jesus is describing the condition of His disciples when He called them to give them future hope in what He is giving them. And what He is promising to give them is not economic prosperity in this world but rather a Kingdom, which cannot be shaken or touched by man – the Kingdom of God. Let’s be clear – Jesus is NOT telling His disciples that He found them poor but now He is going to make them rich with the fading glory of temporal things. That would not be a blessing, unless you only have earthly eyes to see. In fact, as we will see, that would be a far greater curse than being poor in this world. That would simply be taking someone who is without more things in this world, yet lusts for greater material prosperity, to be filled with things that are temporal and are passing away, that which moth and rust can destroy and a mere robber could break-in and take away. No! What Jesus promises is to welcome you into His eternal Kingdom where you will be able to once again look upon the beatific vision of God and dwell forevermore in His glory, not the glory of mere gold and silver.

One way of getting at what Jesus is saying is to think about the kinds of people who have already been called to Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. The first person called to Jesus was a poor priest, Zechariah, and his wife Elizabeth who not only as a priestly family had no land of their own but were barren and had no child. To them, God gives not merely a child, but the greatest prophet who ever was born and who would prepare the way for the coming of God’s greatest deliverer, His own Son. Next, God reveals the Kingdom to Mary, a poor virgin girl, who upon hearing the news that she would bear God’s Son, proclaims in song:

My soul magnifies the Lord . . . (for) he has looked on the humble estate of his servant . . . He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty (**Luke 1:46-55**).

Further, He revealed His glory to poor shepherds, not kings, to poor old prophets who were near death – Simon and Anna, not to rulers. We have already looked at the kinds of men Jesus chose to be His apostles. Each of these people Jesus has called to Himself could be described as those who are poor, or who are hungry, or who weep, or who are the people

who are hated, excluded and reviled for the sake of the Son of Man. Those who are called by Jesus are described by Paul in 1 Corinthians as not being wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many of noble birth:

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

Jesus calls those who are sick and in need of physician, not those who are well according to the standards of this world. Why? So that we all know, and are humbled by the fact, that the power that redeems our life from destruction is the power of God and not our own. God will not share His glory with those who have something in themselves to boast about. He hides the treasure of the glory of God in the face of Christ in jars of clay not vases of gold so that we would know who to glory in, who to praise, who to love with our whole hearts, mind, and soul.

Jesus calls those whom He calls from the bottom of the barrel, the social outcasts, those who the society has rejected – blessed – not because of something within them but because of what He will do in their lives. He is describing the kinds of people He will raise up and give them His own glory and His own Kingdom. He tells His disciples who hunger and weep now that He is giving them a Kingdom where:

Revelation 21:4 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."

He tells His disciples who will be hated in this world for Him, spurned for their love for Him:

Revelation 21:5 "Behold, I am making all things new." **Revelation 21:6-7** "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷ The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

We are blessed! What does that mean? The quickest way to define the heart of what Jesus means when He calls us blessed is to look at two verses in **Romans (1:18; 5:1)**. There is no greater blessing in life than the fact that whereas we were once under the wrath of God (the woes of **Luke 6:24-26**) God is now at peace with us and sheds His love on us so that we sinners can now once again look upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

Amen! -SDG-