

Today, I want to speak to you about how to live in the now-and-not-yet. Because God’s Kingdom in the earth today is, paradoxically, now-but-not-yet.

Let’s turn to Luke 6:17-31. Before we read it, let me set the scene for you. Jesus was enjoying a season of popularity. Crowds were coming to hear Him—rich and poor, educated and illiterate, religious and secular—from all over the region (Gaza in the south to Sidon in the north, and area equivalent to eight California counties, from Ft. Bragg to Fremont).

*Luke 6:17When they came down from the mountain, the disciples stood with Jesus on a large, level area, surrounded by many of his followers and by the crowds. There were people from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from as far north as the seacoasts of Tyre and Sidon. 18They had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those troubled by evil spirits were healed. 19Everyone tried to touch Him, because healing power went out from Him, and He healed everyone.*

*“Everyone tried to touch Him.”* Let THIS define our spiritual posture and aim in 2020!

But what does it mean in 2020 to “try to touch Him”? Perhaps His teaching will illuminate the answer for us.

**The Poor Are Blessed**

*Luke 6:20Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said,*

*“You who are poor are blessed by God, for the Kingdom of God has been given to you.*

This was a radical thing to say! For Judaism had become so humanistic—with its rituals and regulations—that the poor were despised by the elite, as though God had cursed them with poverty.

While Jesus did not eliminate poverty, as some would suggest today, he elevated the poor by declaring that they were blessed (not forgotten or cursed) by God.

In what way were the poor blessed? What was previously considered to be out-of-reach or forbidden to them—the Kingdom of God—was now freely available to them!

In many parts of the world today, people live in what can only be described by us as abject poverty, yet they live happy and productive lives. They love their families, they play together, and they celebrate one another. “So much stuff” as we are familiar with isn’t required to be happy.

So, this is a message about more than a lack of stuff. It’s about what is really needed to make life complete. And that is the knowledge that the God who made us, remembers us and cares about us, that we can be included in His Kingdom.

Everyone needs to know that they are known and remembered by God. A major component of human depression, aimlessness, and despair (and a root cause of many addictions) is the sense of utter aloneness—that even God doesn’t see me or care about me. We need to spread this word: God knows you and cares about you!

**The Hungry Are Blessed**

*Luke 6:21aYou who are hungry are blessed by God, for you will be satisfied.*

We talk a lot about hunger, but few of us have ever experienced it. The hunger Jesus was referring to was not the “desire to eat.” It was something deeper, like a gnawing pain of emptiness, as one’s very organs and muscles and nerves cry out for sustenance. Many people in the world today live with that pain, every day. It’s just the way it is.

The thing that keeps them going is the hope of finding something to eat (if only a spoonful of rice when the day’s work is done).

Jesus amplified that hope: *“you will be satisfied.”* A spoonful of rice may quiet the inner storm for a brief season, but it cannot *satisfy*. Jesus promised them satisfaction. That’s the after-Thanksgiving-dinner feeling of complete fullness, when you don’t even want to eat another bite—you’re comfortable (satisfied) just to sit and relax in the afterglow of the meal.

Of course, again, this is about so much more than food on the table or in the belly. This is about what truly nourishes our lives, our souls. *“People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”* God’s words give *life* to those who take them in!

**The Mournful Are Blessed**

*Luke 6:21b You who weep are blessed by God, for the time will come when you will laugh with joy.*

There are so many causes of sorrow in the world, especially the losses we experience—whether beloved family or friends or pets, or opportunities, or privileges, or our sense of identity or purpose.

While it means little at the time of loss, the fact that laughter will return is a wonderful promise. *“Weeping may last through the night, but joy returns in the morning.”*

In some cultures it is customary to formally mourn and to wear black for a full year after the passing of a member of one’s immediate family. Some widows wear black for the rest of your lives.

But Jesus is addressing something even more persistent; something like the mourning over life as it is—with so much pain, so much grief, so much corruption, so many lies, so much oppression, so little hope. When life itself seems so miserable, Jesus reminds us that *“the time will come when you will laugh with joy.”*

**The Time Will Come**

A great morning is coming—“that great getting-up morning”—when the dead shall live again, when loved ones will be reunited, when every tear will be wiped away, when we will laugh together… forevermore!

Yes, you will laugh again tomorrow, and next year, but there is coming a day—an everlasting day—when joyous laughter will be commonplace and universal.

Now, we begin to see that Jesus isn’t just talking about the here-and-now, but about a season that swells, like the rising sun to the fullness of the day, and never, ever ends. This far look to a real and endless future becomes clearer in the following verses.

**The Persecuted Are Blessed**

*Luke 6:22What blessings await you when people hate you and exclude you and mock you and curse you as evil because you follow the Son of Man.*

*“Blessings await you!”* They’re being stored up for you. Apostle Peter understood this well, and he wrote about it emphatically:

*1 Peter 1:3All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, 4and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. 5And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.*

*6So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. 7These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*

**Be Happy Now, and Then**

*Luke 6:23When that happens, be happy! Yes, leap for joy! For a great reward awaits you in heaven.*

*“When that happens!”* In the midst of your pain, in the midst of your struggle. Let the joy of God’s promise, the hope of His full blessing, arise.

In the same way that God has prepared and reserved enviable happiness for this world’s poor, hungry, sorrowful, and persecuted, He has also reserved intractable sorrow for this world’s rich, satisfied, giddy, and celebrated people:

*Luke 6:24“What sorrow* ***awaits*** *you who are rich,*

*for you have your only happiness now.*

*25What sorrow* ***awaits*** *you who are satisfied and prosperous now,*

*for a time of awful hunger awaits you.*

*What sorrow* ***awaits*** *you who laugh carelessly now,*

*for your laughing will turn to mourning and sorrow.*

*26What sorrow* ***awaits*** *you who are praised by the crowds,*

*for their ancestors also praised false prophets.*

Fat and prosperous today does not guarantee lasting wealth. Giddy partying does not guarantee lasting joy. Celebrity status does not guarantee God’s approval.

Something awaits. There is more to come. This life, this world, this planet, this technology, this culture—is not the end.

Look up. And be prepared.

The blessings may begin NOW, but their fulfillment is future, as are the sorrows He predicted.

If you know you are a son or daughter of God, then you know you are blessed—already. And in the NOW, the instruction is to live as the Blessed Ones, in the following ways:

*Luke 6:27“But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies!*

*Do good to those who hate you.*

*28Bless those who curse you.*

*Pray for those who hurt you.*

*29If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also.*

*If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also.*

*30Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back.*

*31Do to others as you would like them to do to you.*

Here is Jesus’ proposed strategy for living the blessed life:

* *Love your enemies*
* *Do good to haters*
* *Bless and pray for hurters*
* *Offer more than asked*
* *Give without expectation*
* *Do to others as you would like them to do to you.*

The last point is the sum of all that precedes it. On this one instruction hang all the rest. Treat others the way you would like to be treated.

To live like this is to touch Him, to touch the heart of God. To live in this manner releases the blessings God has bestowed on us.

No one will do it perfectly. No one will do it consistently. But the more we do this, live this way, the more His blessings are released for their fulfillment. There will still be a waiting period (of unknowable length), but there will also be a certainty, a confidence, and a happiness as we do it.

Do this, and you will have a happy new year!