

“Happy are those who do not follow
the advice of the wicked, or take the path
that sinners take.

Happy are those who delight in God’s law,
meditating on it day and night.

They are like trees planted by streams of water.”

AMEN!

It’s no wonder that we are confused.

In Jeremiah, we have the prophet
proclaiming God’s judgment.

“Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals
and make mere flesh their strength.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.”

The Hebrew Bible (our OT) is clear that
God’s people should do the things that get
them into the blessed category.

What was it they were doing that was cursed?

Well, quite simply, they wanted a king

to rule over them.

And when they got what they wanted,
society began to fall apart.

From the beginning God warned them
about the things a king would do,

and God's judgment was about to
reach it's terrible breaking point as they
saw and experienced God's truth. (Pause)

In the Psalm 1 we also read about "blessings."

"Happy are those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked and
do not walk on the path that sinners walk.

Those who delight in God's law (that is the Torah)
and meditate (that word is "chew") on it are
liked trees planted by streams of water
and they prosper.

But the wicked are blown away like chaff.

They cannot stand at the hard time of judgment
and they perish."

So there's the "happy" (or blessed) on one side

and the evil (or wicked) on the other.

Where do you want to be?

Now, in the gospel, Luke writes to us
his version of Jesus' Beatitudes.

Today is the first part and next week will
be the second.

In this section today, we have the same
sort of dualistic language.

The blessings and the woes, that's
the unofficial title of this section.

The Greek word for "makaria" is where
We get "blessing," in
our translation.

But, makaria is defined in the English as
"happy" or "fortunate" but the word
from where we get "blessed" in the Hebrew,

in Jeremiah, means "enviable."

"Enviably" is the one who trusts in the Lord.

See? No wonder we are confused!

Scorned is the one who trusts in
mortals the text reads.

Particularly, in Jeremiah's setting,
scorned is the one who puts trust in the king.

So, with the cursed (and scorned) from Jeremiah -
connected to the evil and wicked from Psalm
1,

and we tend to project those definitions onto
the "woes" that we read in Luke.

We tend to say that the rich are cursed and evil.

We tend to conclude that those who are
full now and laughing now are scorned and sinful.

Which they (we) very well could be, but
I don't believe it's helpful to
automatically conclude that with certainty.

For Jesus preached that those who are wealthy, full,
laughing now, will not always be that way. (Pause)

I do think it is helpful for us to recognize that
we want faith to be about the blessings.

And that, we want to believe that when
we do the right things and have the right thoughts

then, happiness, the fullness of having plenty,
and laughter will automatically flow into our lives.

Yet, the more we live the more
we understand there's no guarantee
there either, just as Jesus said.

Jesus today tells us to hold up a second on
jumping to our conclusions.

He directs us to see that we are not all put together
as well as we might think we are.

And that's pretty hard to hear. (Pause)

"There was a certain man in a certain town
who walked into a bookstore to return a purchase.

He was returning the Bible he'd bought.

"Was it a gift?" The clerk asked.

"No, I bought it for myself and
wish to return it," the man said.

The clerk asked further. "Was there a problem

with the translation or format?”

“No, no. It was all fine and clear.
I just made a mistake in buying it.”

The clerk pressed, “I’m sorry, I need to write
the reason down in order to process the return.”

“In that case,” the man said,
“I’m returning the book because
there’s a lot in there that’s too hard
to swallow.” (Story from William Carter)

These texts today are hard to swallow;
difficult to hear, but that doesn’t mean
they should be ignored.

You see, there are plenty of similarities with
Jeremiah’s day and ours.

We find many in our nation who are desirous of a king.

We find some extremely wealthy people
pulling the strings of societal privilege in order
to become even more wealthy and powerful.

Even to the point of pulling families apart.

We get an avalanche of rhetoric telling us

to be afraid of outsiders and immigrants.

A king has been elected and there's
the desire of many to heap a whole
lot of "curses upon those who trust in mortals"
as Jeremiah pronounced.

I am among them calling for God's curse!

But then, I recognize how easily
I fall into the status quo myself.

Perhaps you also put trust in secure borders,
fat bank accounts
(at least compared to the rest of the world),
and the elections of people.

We all really do put our trust in people,
even though they're (like us)
"mere mortals." (Pause)

Luke's version of the Beatitudes from Jesus
are hard to swallow.

Jesus came down to our level and
engaged with humanity.

He came down (with the 12 disciples
he'd just appointed) and

“with a great crowd of his disciples and
a great multitude of people,”
from all around the region
(insiders and outsiders)
who’d come to hear Jesus
teach and be healed.

“All in the crowd were trying to touch him,
for power came out from him and he
healed all of them.”

That first paragraph is so critical for us
to ponder before we get into the
blessings and woes.

For we see here, not only did Jesus have
12 disciples but a “great crowd of disciples”
with him and he engaged with them and
with the great multitude of people
from all over.

Not only “engaged,” but taught,
healed and cured them. (Pause)

The Bible then said, “Then Jesus looked up at
his disciples and said,”

the blessings
and woes to them.

That doesn't mean they are not
for us to hear though. :-)

We do need to take what he said to heart.

Jesus was using a skill much like
the one we use when
we have the children's time
part of our worship.

As the pastor or minister teaches the children,
it is not giving the rest of the congregation
the chance to check out or
check your Instagram feed. :-)

No, as the children are taught we are
also instructed as we "overhear" the lesson.

So what Jesus had to say to his disciples,
is for our ears, too. (Pause)

The same is true for the baptism of Zyphren Aurelius.

As we witnessed his baptism and
overhear God's claim upon him as a
beloved child of God.

We remember God's claim on us.

As we say the words of being marked
with the sign of the cross and
proclaim he's loved by God,
we recall that truth that it is for us, too.

A God that pours out blessings and a
Christ that wants us to pay attention to his "woes."

A Spirit that urges us to trust only in the Lord.

From Jesus, they are not curses but calls
for us to slow down, keep alert, look out!

And to be ready.

Today reminds us to put our trust in Jesus.

To slow down and pay attention to
the human beings with whom we put our full trust.

Today is the day.

AMEN!