

Question: When does a blessing become a woe and a woe a blessing?

Luke's Answer: When Jesus says it does!

The Sermon on the Plain really does turn one's thinking upside down. Well, it depends on the audience, if we're being honest about things.

Let's pretend you are poor. None of us are, you know. Even those in this room who might be struggling are in better shape than 95 percent of the rest of the world. But, Luke is a storyteller – so let's pretend.

You who are poor don't have any extras. No extra food. No extra clothing. No extra time. People pass you in the streets. You probably smell bad. No one invites you to their homes for dinner. You're nobody.

You've heard about this rabbi named Jesus. And, you make your way to the plain where he's teaching in order to hear him. When you get there, he tells you that you are blessed! You have a place in God's government.

There you are heard. There your tears are acknowledged. You are loved, seen, included. Jesus gives you hope.

Now, let's pretend you are rich. Most of us are in comparison to that 95 percent mentioned before. You're a good egg. You play by the rules. Your kids are well educated. You travel. You have influence. And, you are thankful for all your blessings.

You've heard about this rabbi named Jesus. He's a real sensation! So, you make your way to the level place where he's addressing the crowds. He tells you that you are burdened. Burdened is another way the Greek can be translated. Woe to you who are rich. Burdened are you who are rich.

Whoa....that's W.H.O.A. What's Jesus saying to me?

What is Jesus saying to us?

The poor are blessed because they have nothing?

No. Not really. The poor are blessed because they are unburdened by 'stuff'. Those who are poor can rely only on God for their daily bread, for shelter, for hope. They have no possessions, so they can't be weighed down by them. They rely on God and cling to each other, so they have no need to cling to the things that, eventually, don't matter.

Interesting, isn't it, to look at what we believe are blessings and consider them to be burdens? Of course, you only have to decide to 'downsize' or 'move to another city' or 'do a renovation' to come face-to-face with the fact that you really have much more than you need. Much more than you really want.

There's nothing like packing things into boxes to help you realize just how much you are dragging around with you.

When you are trying to be open to a relationship with God, you understand that God could ask you to do almost anything. The less you are dragging, the easier it is to be responsive to that call. People who are unburdened can be open to anything.

Blessed are you when life is difficult. Circumstances will change eventually. These are the times when you must rely on God to give you your identity, on community to give you hope, on faith to keep you strong.

Burdened are you when life is easy. Be careful to see your blessings as opportunities to make life better for those who aren't as fortunate. Be careful not to rely on possessions to give you your identity, on yourself to give you hope, on your reputation to keep you strong. All of these can be taken from you in an instant.

Rely on God now so that when circumstances change, you will not be brought so low that you cannot be raised up.

Reliance on God comes through practice. Don't just refrain from treating people the way you wouldn't want to be treated – go out and treat them the way you want to be treated! Love people you consider to be unlovable. Be kind to the people you consider to be undeserving of kindness. Don't act out of your anger. Acknowledge the beggar and help them.

No, it's not easy. Jesus never promised this was going to be easy.

What he did promise was the heritage of eternal life in the presence of God's love for ever. With our help, that promise is made real on earth today. Sincerely - Who could ask for more?