

Preaching Through The Bible Michael Eaton

Luke's Gospel

Part 26 The Character of the Kingdom (Luke 6:20-38)

• A Godly life

There is blessing in the kingdom of God if its members are free of snobbery and class-consciousness

• It is the poor, hungry and sad who experience the kingdom

1. Poverty in itself is not a blessing

2. Luke is certainly talking about real poverty and real hunger

3. Financial need can drive us – if we are trusting God – into a deeper experience of the kingdom

The 'Sermon on the Mount' (as it is generally called) was a lengthy piece of teaching that Jesus gave to His close disciples and followers about living a godly life.

First of all Jesus gives a basic description of the character of the kingdom ^{☐1}. **There is blessing in the kingdom of God if its members are free of snobbery and class-consciousness.** The disciple who is truly 'blessed', the person who is happy, the person who is to be congratulated, is described in Luke 6:20–35. Jesus says he or she is poor ^{☐2}, hungry ^{☐3}, sorrowful ^{☐4} and persecuted for the sake of Jesus ^{☐5}! It is a very surprising way of speaking. Not many people think there can be much blessing in being poor, hungry and sad! Most people dread the thought of being persecuted. Yet such people, says Jesus, experience the kingdom of God ^{☐6}; they are satisfied ^{☐7}; and they will soon be laughing with joy ^{☐8}; they will leap for joy at the privilege of suffering for the sake of Jesus ^{☐9}. Is Jesus talking purely about spiritual things or is He referring to literal poverty, and literal hunger? Matthew put the matter more spiritually: '*Blessed are the poor in spirit ... Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness*' ^{☐10}. Yet it is fairly obvious from a study of the gospels that Matthew and Luke are giving their account of the same 'Sermon on the Mount'.

1. Jesus is not saying that poverty in itself is a blessing. The Bible never says that. Luke does not say 'Blessed are the poor...'. He says 'Blessed are you poor...'. It is not any poor person who is blessed. It is people like the disciples who had little wealth yet had trusted their life to Jesus; those poor people are blessed.

2. Luke is certainly talking about real poverty and real hunger. Nothing in Luke's words encourage us to 'spiritualise' them. Luke has a special interest in the socially deprived. It is he who tells us of Mary's words: '*He has scattered the proud . . . He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent away the rich empty-handed...*' ^{☐1}. Luke shows special interest in outcasts, in the poor, in widows. The weaker people in society are specially invited to find exaltation in the gospel of Jesus.

3. It is worth remembering that Jesus spoke for a lengthy time but the two versions of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew and Luke, take only a few minutes to read. Even in Matthew's report it is clear that Jesus said a lot about worrying over material things and about coveting ^{☐1}. Jesus' original preaching obviously was concerned both about spiritual character, and about how poverty and deprivation affect spiritual character. Matthew and Luke are both summarising a lengthy quantity of teaching. Luke's summary concentrates on the way in which financial need can drive us – if we are trusting God – into a deeper experience of the kingdom.

☐1 6:20-26
☐2 6:20
☐3 6:21a
☐4 6:21b
☐5 6:22-23
☐6 6:20
☐7 6:21a
☐8 6:21b
☐9 6:23
☐10 Matt 5:3,6

☐1 1:53

☐1 see Matthew 6:19–34

4. But Jesus predicts misery for the arrogant rich

4. Our attitude to the poor people, our experience of need, our attitude to wealth or the lack of it have a lot to do with our experience of the kingdom. Matthew makes these points as well as Luke, but he mentions the matter elsewhere and in a different way. To emphasise the point Jesus put it the other way round. There is blessing for the needy person whose need drives him or her to Jesus. But Jesus predicts misery for the arrogant rich ^{¶1}, the well-fed ^{¶2}, the person who has no worldly cares ^{¶3}, the person who is careful to please everyone ^{¶4}.

Secondly, **there is blessing in the kingdom of God if its members are people of love** ^{¶1}. Luke is not giving a full report of everything Jesus said;

he is picking out the highlights of Jesus' description of the kingdom. Jesus asks us to show love for our enemies ^{¶2}, and to pray for people who mistreat us ^{¶3}. He asks us to 'turn the other cheek', which means to refuse showing resentment or using harsh words in reply to harsh words. When we suffer loss we accept it with a willingness to suffer greater loss ^{¶4}. These instructions are not legislation for society. They are not to be used as part of a national law-code. No society would survive long if it used these words in that way. Nor does it mean that when some con-man wants to defraud us we have to yield to him.

The Sermon on the Mount is not a law-code. It is a description of the attitude, the heart, the spirit, of the member of the kingdom of God. The principle of love is summarised in 6:31. In one sentence: it is treating others the way you wish to be treated. It is only this kind of love that goes beyond the way in which others may live ^{¶1}. You can find plenty of nice pagans. They are sweet and kind to their fellow sinners! If Christians are only sweet-natured to others who are sweet-natured, what is so special about that? If you are only generous to people who will repay you, what is remarkable about that? ^{¶2}. Christians are to live at a miraculous level. We are to get to a style of living that can be explained only by the amazing grace of God. We need to be brought by God to a level of miraculous love ^{¶3} which is practical ('do good'), considerate ('lend'), God-like ('son of the most High'), merciful ^{¶4}, non-judgemental ^{¶5} and generous ^{¶6}. Perhaps we have not got very far in living such a life. But men and women who know the grace of God in Jesus can live in such a way and Jesus asks them to do so. We need to get there – fast!

There is blessing in the kingdom of God if its members are people of love

• *The Sermon on the Mount is not a law-code. It is a description of the attitude, the heart, the spirit, of the member of the kingdom of God*

• *Living in miraculous practical love*

¶1 6:24
¶2 6:25a
¶3 6:25b
¶4 6:26

¶1 6:27--35

¶2 6:27
¶3 6:28
¶4 6:29b-30

¶1 6:32-33

¶2 6:34
¶3 6:35
¶4 6:36
¶5 6:37
¶6 6:38

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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His expository commentaries are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.

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