

“This Is Jesus: Thought Provoking Preacher”

¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. ²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

²² Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

This is Jesus: Thought Provoking Preacher. Before we talk about Jesus thought provoking sermon let’s consider some background context. First, take notice of who was present to hear Jesus sermon. **“A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon,”** (Luke 6:17). This crowd contained a good mix of people – disciples of Jesus and those who were seeking to learn more; Jews and Gentiles; people from all over Israel. I suppose that shouldn’t really surprise us since Jesus is Savior of all and his thought provoking sermons are for everyone to hear, including a mixed group of people like us who have different backgrounds. Secondly, consider some of the events leading up to this sermon. Jesus had been selecting people to be his followers – some to be laypeople and some to be public ministers of the Gospel. These followers had a certain vision of what that would mean for their lives and that vision was definitely too earthly focused and not enough spiritually focused. Is it any different for us as followers of Jesus? Jesus spent a great deal of time healing people of their health problems. In fact, we are told that people **“had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases”** (Luke 6:18). Were they more concerned about listening to Jesus or being healed by Jesus? That’s a good question for us as well. Are we still willing to listen to Jesus even if he doesn’t heal my

health problems, give me solutions for my earthly problems in the way I want, or just generally follow my plan for how I want things to go in my life? So Jesus, the thought provoking preacher, offers us 8 statements, in a point/ counterpoint style, to get each of us thinking about our own lives. These 8 statements go against what people, including us, generally think. These 8 statements help us realize that the way worldly people think and the way Jesus wants his followers to think is way different. Let's look at these 8 statements, in groups of 2, and ponder their meaning.

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God...But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort” (Luke 6:20,24). Jesus isn't encouraging us to take a vow of poverty. Martin Luther tried that when he cut himself off from the outside world and joined a monastery. He found that made him feel farther away from God than closer to God. And Jesus isn't saying the rich can't be in Heaven. If that were true then we won't see Job, Abraham, or David there. As we look at the world around us don't we see examples of well-to-do people leading Christian lives and examples of less-well-to-do people who do not. There are plenty of poor people spending eternity in Hell and there are plenty of rich people spending eternity in Heaven. So what does Jesus mean by these statements? There are always exceptions to the rule, but in a general way, those who have less earthly wealth and comfort are more likely to see their need for God's help and look forward to Heaven than those who have more earthly wealth and comfort in this life. As Jesus once said, **“it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven”** (Matthew 19:23), but not impossible. Jesus wants each of us to give some thought to this question: “On a scale of 1-5, how focused are you on accumulating earthly wealth/possessions? On a scale of 1-5, how focused are you on being ‘poor in spirit,’ bothered, sorrowful, desiring to change your sinful life and focused on your greatest treasure Jesus for comfort, forgiveness, and eternal life in Heaven?”

“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry” (Luke 6:21, 25). Hunger and thirst are expressions that signal a serious craving, a strong desire that is accompanied with a feeling of emptiness and pain if my craving and desire is not fulfilled. Jesus wants us to wrestle with this question: what is the strongest craving and desire that you want fulfilled? Is it being healthy, advancing your job, saving for retirement, being a good parent, meeting someone special to share your life with, or your next fun recreational experience? Those are all good priorities, but they are earthly priorities that are focused on now and not the life to come. Jesus once said, **“do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life...I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty”** (John 6:27,35). That doesn't mean we spend every waking minute in the Bible. God wants us to live our lives and care about earthly priorities (some of which were just mentioned). But we should constantly be asking ourselves these questions – is knowing Jesus, sharing Jesus, living for

Jesus my first priority? Is Jesus a part of every priority I have and every decision I make in my life?

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep” (Luke 6:21, 25). Jesus is not encouraging us to be grumpy and depressed. In fact, many times our grumpiness and depression is sinful because it is weeping over earthly things. We selfishly brood over things that didn't go our way. We cling to bitter grief acting as if my greatest gift isn't my Savior Jesus, but rather the health, the person, the lifestyle that is now lost. That's not the weeping Jesus is talking about here. The weeping that Jesus is talking about is grieving over how many have contempt for the Word of God. Grieving over the daily examples of evil that happen in our world, like when police officers are killed while trying to make this world safer. Grieving that the masses embrace sinful activities in order to experience temporary earthly joy. Blessed are those who have been led by God the Holy Spirit to say with the Apostle Paul, **“If I am to go on living in this body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet...I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far”** (Philippians 1:22-23).

“Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets” (Luke 6:22, 26). November 2018 Christian Missionary John Allen Chau made an attempt to visit North Sentinel Island in order to tell them about Jesus. North Sentinel is a small island near India where a few dozen Aboriginal people live. The residents have closed themselves off to the rest of the world and when John tried to evangelize them they killed him. On the one hand what John did was extreme and not the best plan for trying to share the Gospel on that island. On the other hand, you have to admire his zeal. And what John did is a great example of what Jesus is talking about today. Is Jesus the #1 priority in your life? Each of us knows people who don't believe in Jesus. Each of us knows people who are living their lives in ways that are spitting in God's face and leading to Hell. God wants us to live our Christian faith in front of them and speak to them, tactfully and lovingly, about the Christian faith. Do you have people in your life that try to watch their mouth and clean up their act in front of you because you are a Christian? Do you have people in your life that mock you, even if it's in a playful ribbing way, for being a Christian? Do you have people in your life where your relationship is a bit strained, awkward, and tense because you had a thought provoking spiritual conversation with them. If you do be comforted because Jesus is pleased. On the flip side, if you get along with everybody, that might mean your Christian faith isn't standing out as different.

This is Jesus: Thought Provoking Preacher. He is asking today, what is the main focus of your life? We live in a world that worships and adores physical, earthly things. The Word of

God, the death and resurrection of Jesus, my future existence in Heaven – these are things that the world shakes its head at. And that affects us. It affects the way we think. Your priorities and my priorities in life are quite often upside down, backwards, worldly – God is at the bottom. If we are honest with ourselves, we must confess that at times, we have sinned this way. “Woe to you,” Jesus says this morning. But that’s not the only thought provoking word Jesus has for us. “You may not be rich materially, but you are spiritually because I deposited my righteousness in your spiritual bank account, enough to cover every one of your sins from God’s sight. Go home today well fed and filled with peace because I forgive you of your worldliness and all of your sins because I paid the punishment of Hell for them when I suffered and died on the cross. Go home today filled with joy and happiness because the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to you and that is a place of joy and happiness and laughter forever. Recommit yourself today to being focused on Jesus, to spiritual poverty, to spiritual hunger, to Godly weeping, to being persecuted for your Christian faith. And then prepare yourself to **“Rejoice... and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven”** (Luke 6:23). Amen.