



Luke 6:17, 20-26

17 Jesus came down with the Twelve and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.

20 Then fixing his eyes on his disciples he said: 'How happy are you who are poor: yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Happy you who are hungry now: you shall be satisfied. Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh. 22 Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets. 24 But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. 25 Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep. 26 Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.'

Other readings: Jeremiah 17:5-8 Psalm 111 Corinthians 15:12, 16-20

Luke's 'Sermon on the Plain' is much shorter than the more famous 'Sermon on the Mount' in Matthew's gospel. Both these collections of Jesus' teaching begin with beatitudes, introduced by 'blessed' or 'happy'. In Luke there are four, and they are followed by four 'woes', speeches which begin in our translation with 'alas'.

It is quite clear from the beatitudes that Jesus challenges the opinions of his own day, and indeed of ours. We encounter here the mystery which lies at the heart of the gospel and at the heart of life: that suffering and loss are an extraordinary channel of blessing. How difficult it is for Christians to fathom this truth! The loving self-sacrifice of Jesus on the cross is the best aid to reflecting on this mystery.

Jesus was sent to bring 'good news to the poor'. He will show repeatedly in Luke's gospel that lack of attachment to the good things of the world leaves a person free to discover the values of God. At the same time, to bring assistance to those in material poverty is a gospel imperative. When he speaks of the persecution of the prophets, and foresees the sufferings of Christians, Jesus points to his own fate.

In what sense is poverty a channel of blessing in my life?

How do I view the abuse people suffer for being Christian?

Let us pray for a profound detachment from material things.

Let us ask for courage and love in our dealings with those who deride us.