

A Warning to the False Prophets

6afterEpiphany

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Luke 6:17-26

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah to the Jews of his time: “‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘no disaster shall come upon you.’ For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? Behold, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked...I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet the prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. Am I a God at hand, declares the Lord, and not a God far away? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the Lord.”’”

These are the warnings God declared to the false prophets through His servant, the prophet Jeremiah. For proclaiming God’s Word, Jeremiah got thrown in a cistern, among other things. Today, God delivers a similar warning through His Son, Jesus, to the false prophets of Jesus’ day, and for all those who would follow His time. These warnings remind us not to listen to everyone but to test what they are preaching in accordance with the Scriptures, the full council of God—and to see that ultimately, Jesus will defend us from these false preachers by that same Word.

Verse 1

“(Jesus) lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.’”

Jesus is not saying that it is a blessing to be poor, as in destitute; He is saying that it is a blessing to be poor in spirit. And He is not saying that it is a blessing to go without food; He is saying that it is a blessing to desire to be fed with His Word. Each of the statements of blessing He uses are not referring to what we might think of according to worldly understandings. Rather, Jesus is proclaiming that those people are blessed who earnestly seek His Word and live for His sake.

The prophets of the Old Testament recognized that they were poor in spirit. Isaiah declared his spiritual poverty when he was before God in the throne room at the beginning of his prophetic journey. Ezekiel ate the scroll of the Word of God in Ezekiel chapter three. Jeremiah was considered the weeping prophet because of the harsh messages he had to speak to his fellow Jews. He was also certainly hated, excluded, reviled, and had his name spurned as evil. Each of the prophets were blessed, not because they did these things, but because they had faith in the Messiah to come, Jesus the Christ. It was that faith in Jesus’ coming which enabled them to do the things that they did and to speak the words that they did.

You, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, are also blessed. You are not blessed because you are such a good person or because of the works you have done. No, you are blessed in spite of those things. You are

blessed by the faith you have received through the Holy Spirit, the faith in Jesus, the Messiah who has come and manifested God among us.

Verse 2

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

Once again, Jesus is not saying woe to those who have many possessions, necessarily; He is pronouncing a woe to those who believe that they are spiritually rich without Him. Jesus is not saying woe to those who are able to have a full meal—after all, we pray to our Heavenly Father for our daily bread; rather, Jesus is pronouncing woe on those who think that they have already had all the food of His Word that they can handle. Just as with the blessings, Jesus utters these woes against those who do not seek out Him and His Word.

Jesus used parables in His teachings which demonstrated these concepts. There was the rich man who had so many goods that he tore down his barns in order to raise larger ones. His problem was not having so many crops; it was that he did not share with his neighbor. As we learn in the Scriptures, if you do not love your brothers, whom you can see, then you do not love God, whom you cannot see.

There was also the rich man who refused to share his goods with poor Lazarus at his very gate. He was also able to eat and have his fill daily. Yet when it came time for death, Lazarus had known who Jesus was in this life and believed in Him, as we can see because he is the one who went to heaven; whereas the man who was rich in goods and food did not know Jesus, and did not go to heaven.

Then there was the Prodigal Son, who enjoyed squandering his inheritance before his father had even died. He laughed and played until it all ran out.

In each of these parables, the characters were like us, sinful human beings. Yet unlike us, they did not know Jesus, God Himself their Savior. They had not received the teachings Jesus was now giving His apostles. In Matthew, earlier in His teaching career, Jesus had taught similar things in His Sermon on the Mount. Here on the Plains, Jesus teaches them again, but with His eyes focused on His apostles who had been with Him and who were ready to hear such teachings. Today Jesus has His eyes on us, who are ready to hear these teachings, after hearing about His travels from place to place throughout this Epiphany season.

Verse 3

Jesus, as we know and believe, came as the fulfillment to all of God’s promises. He would die on the cross to pay for the sins of all of us; and afterwards, He will return to complete the process, restoring the ability for people to understand one another, and reversing every other curse of the Old Testament back to how things should properly be. Every good pastor preaches these things.

Yet Jesus’ final woe is on those who do not preach His Word rightly. “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

In the Old Testament times, there were those prophets rightly called by God, who spoke His Word in its full truth and purity, even when it meant that people would not like them, hate them, or even do worse to them. Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, who taught God’s Word, but were rejected by the people. And why were

they rejected? Because there were false prophets at the times that they lived—prophets whom God had not sent, who were saying to go ahead and enjoy life, continuing in sin and not turning from it, because Egypt would save them from Babylon. The people wanted to believe this and happily treated the false prophets well while doing harm to God's true prophets.

Sadly even today there are false prophets, but as in Jeremiah God warned the people not to listen to them and spoke about the punishment He would bring if those false prophets did not stop, here Jesus pronounces a woe against those who preach falsely. If the goal of a pastor is to have everyone love him, even to the point of altering God's Word in order to keep that human love, woe.

Rather, a pastor has been called by God, through the Church, to preach and teach God's Word fully and truthfully, when the congregation eagerly desires to hear God's Word and they speak well of him for it, and when people don't want to hear him, whether people outside of the church or even those inside of it. He is God's servant in Christ, speaking to you God's Word for your benefit, even when God's Word may be hard to hear. So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, you may rejoice, knowing that the woes Jesus pronounced were not for you who have repented and been forgiven by God on Jesus' account; they are for those who are not in Christ. In Jesus' Name. Amen.