

Transformed to Greatness

Oh Lord, we seek your wisdom now that we may understand your Word for us today.

Transform us by your love, mold us in your mercy, and guide us in your grace.

By the power of your Holy Spirit, shine a light that will illumine our darkness, that as the scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed that we may celebrate anew what you say to us this day.

And let God's people say... **Amen.**

Today's scripture comes from the Gospel of Luke 6:17-26 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at 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 will be filled.

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

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

The Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, today’s scripture is rather well known. I was reading it and was thinking about the idea of transformation and one thing stuck out more than the rest. “For surely your reward is great in heaven” just kept pushing to the front. I began to think about what it would mean to be transformed into greatness. Sometimes we think about being transformed as something that is instantaneous and extraordinary. Like it will just happen and BOOM, transformed! But what if Christ transforms us slowly by changing who we are by changing how we see the world? What if Christ transforms us to his greatness by transforming how we view the people and situations in our lives? Have you ever thought about that kind of transformation? The long game? And here we have a list of things that can transform our lives.

I’ve spoken before about how you can interchange “blessed” and “happy” pretty easily with this scripture. The “woe” is still about how terrible it is, but I like to drop the word “happy” in there so that we don’t just think about some sort of divine blessing that stands apart from our happiness. More accurately, it would be a divine blessing that enhances our happiness. But what should we do to be transformed by this? Feel that blessed happiness when you are poor, hungry, or weeping. Be happy when people exclude you and revile you on account of the Son of Man! Receive blessed happiness because people want to speak ill of you and insult you! How often do we do that? But we are supposed to leap for joy! Why? Because what we have is greater than anyone’s hate. We have God’s love. Which is greater than any wealth. It is greater than any food. It is greater than any party. It is greater than human praise. It brings us in and brings us together and transforms us.

IF, and that is a big IF, IF we are willing to follow. IF we are willing to do the work. IF we are willing to make that change in our lives to let ourselves be transformed. This is hard. Very hard. I mean, look at who has a hard time. Those who have. We might

wonder why that would be, as we live in a society where all these things are looked upon with favor. They are the ideal. Why wouldn't you want to be full? Why wouldn't you want to be wealthy? Why wouldn't you want to be laughing? Why wouldn't you want people to speak well of you? Well, it all has to do with how you get there. All these things can be fine, and if we get too caught up in only hearing the words, we will miss the meaning. Each of these is a response to the earlier reasons to be happy. And each has to do with how you get there. If you ignore the hungry so that you can be full, you have a problem. If you become rich on the backs of the poor, you have a problem. If you are laughing while others are weeping, there is a problem. If you do things simply to gain human acceptance without a second thought for God, then you're going to have a problem. Why? Because your focus is on self-preservation and self-gain. You aren't allowing God to work through you, you're working for yourself.

We might think about some of these things as "it is better to be poor than to take advantage of the poor" or "it is better to be hungry than to eat with no concern for others" or "think of others in all that you do." But the core of the message is that God will reward you for changing your life to think about the greater good. God will reward you if there is no earthly reward for your struggles. God will take care of you if nobody else will. Because Christ was often talking to the people who had nothing. But he gave them hope. He gave them a reason to be happy. He gave them something to believe in. That the world had failed them, but God would not. That people might have forgotten them, but that God did not forget them. And they will find that their situation is transformed in God's eyes. Their lack will turn into abundance, and their lowly status will become greatness.

Now, I'm sure at this point some of us are worrying about what is in store for us. If I just finished lunch, am I doomed? No. See, we have to get to the root, and again, it is the "how" of it all. Are you feeding the hungry? Are you caring for the poor among you? Are you loving and helping the outcasts? Or are you trying to push them further away? Are you building a wall or are you building a bridge? Is your emergency that there are people who need your help? Or is your emergency that there are people you need to

keep out? Is the top of your to-do-list “love others as God has loved me” or is it “look out for number one”? Because when we allow ourselves to live following Christ and following the example Jesus set, God will transform us into people who can always live seeking to love as God loves, forgive as God forgives, and care as God cares. We can stand up to oppression and sit down with the oppressed. We can put our foot down to say no to corrupt ways and put a hand out to the poor. We can give a blessing to those who curse us and be blessed by the presence of God’s people. We can do these things because God will help us. God will change our hearts and change our minds and change our lives to be more like him. Jesus shows us that the path to happiness isn’t things but is doing what is right in God’s eyes!

Can you imagine what the world would look like if we fought less and loved more? If instead of raising an angry voice to our critics, what if we prayed for them and explained ourselves in gentleness? What if instead of trying to come up with a better name to call the people to mock us, we offered them our prayers, our service, and our love? What if we met every evil with good? What if we met every hate with love? If you can see how much it can transform one life, imagine how much it could change the world! We live in a troubled world that needs love. How do we transform it? Well, we could run out and begin shouting at people “follow Christ or ELSE!!!” But from my experience, people don’t respond very well. But what if we transformed the world by humbling ourselves? What if we transformed the world by serving it in love? What if we transformed the world by setting aside our differences and loving as Christ loves us? And wouldn’t that transform our own lives as well? Wouldn’t others see the Gospel message, not by our words but by our lives? I could preach a thousand sermons and not be able to have the same impact as one person can have by really being there for another human being. This is that transformation we strive for, so that God can mold us into something greater, in this life and the next.

I know I fail in so many ways in this regard. I know that I fail to always do the right thing. I know I fail to always think well of others. But I also know that God hasn’t given up on me. God hasn’t given up on us. These changes can happen rapidly, or they can

happen slowly. They can change us bit by bit. God helping us grow, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year. But God continues to work in us as we work together in Christ. We are united in our love, united in our hope, and united in the Body of Christ. We are redeemed by one blood, baptized by one spirit, and serve one God. We are together that God may transform us together. That we may help each other to overcome our challenges. That we may help each other overcome our struggles. That we may together be transformed as the people of God, making disciples of Jesus Christ, for the transformation of a broken world. We do not do this alone, but we do this together, in Christ. Let us pray for one another. Let us love one another. Let us love God, and pray for his transforming love to help us, help each other, and help heal a broken world. Amen.