

"THE HARD LIFE"
LUKE 6:24-26

"In *A View from the Zoo*, Gary Richmond, a former zoo keeper, offers this warning about raccoons:

Raccoons go through a glandular change at about 24 months. After that they often attack their owners. Since a 30-pound raccoon can be equal to a 100-pound dog in a scrap, I felt compelled to mention the change coming to a pet raccoon owned by a young friend of mine, Julie.

"She listened politely as I explained the coming danger. I'll never forget her answer. *"It will be different for me...."* And she smiled as she added, "Bandit wouldn't hurt me. He just wouldn't." Three months later Julie underwent plastic surgery for facial lacerations sustained when her adult raccoon attacked her for no apparent reason. Bandit was released into the wild. Sin, too, often comes dressed in an adorable guise, and as we play with it, how easy it is to say, 'It will be different for me.' The results are predictable."

"It will be different for me." That might have been said before. And a variation of that saying might have been said many times in the context of evangelistic discussions: "I'm fine with God..."

At the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers a warning: not everyone who thinks he is fine *is* fine.

This well-known sermon by Christ is not about ethics; it is a gospel message. The opening section affirms the blessings and troubles that come from accepting or denying the gospel, and the bulk of the sermon focuses on the work of the gospel in the believer's life. Last week we saw that Christ offers blessing and favor to those who follow Him — *to receive the blessing of Christ's good life, be humbly dependent on Him*. This week, in the following section, Christ reveals the opposite reality —

TO RECEIVE THE WRATH OF CHRIST'S "HARD" LIFE, BE PRIDEFULLY SELF-RIGHTEOUS.

Jesus is exposing what is perceived to be the blessed and good life (by the world) and revealing that it actually is the hard life — He is demonstrating the principle of **Prov. 13:15** — "the way of the treacherous [sinner] is hard [unrelenting, *LSB*]" (*NASB*; the *NET* — "the conduct of the treacherous ends in destruction"). There is no good end for sinners. And in these verses (vv. 24-26, the "woes"), Luke reveals **four attributes of the kind of people who will experience Christ's wrath and "hard life."**

These verses are warnings for us (don't be deceived by the sinner's "good life") and warnings for unbelievers ("don't ignore the end of what you are doing").

1. Christ's "Hard Life" is For **SELF-RIGHTEOUS** People (v. 24)
2. Christ's "Hard Life" is For **SELF-SATISFIED** People (v. 25a)
3. Christ's "Hard Life" is For **SCORNFUL** People (v. 25b)
4. Christ's "Hard Life" is For **PRAISE-SEEKING** People (v. 26)

1. Christ's "Hard Life" is For **SELF-RIGHTEOUS** People (v. 24)

- In the Beatitudes (vv. 20-23) we saw God's dramatic transformation for those who believe in and follow Christ now — and the blessings they will ultimately receive. Those are "redemptive reversals."
- In these woes (vv. 24-26) that follow those beatitudes, we see God's retribution against those who reject Him — His "wrathful reversals." These woes serve as a great warning.
- The word **blessed** refers to happiness, contentment, or favor (grace) that will come from God.
- The word **woe** is the opposite of that. It is word that denotes pain and displeasure. More than just "pain," it refers to the pain that results from a pitiful circumstances and misfortune. It is the worst of possibilities that produces a "deep and inconsolable misery." [Edwards]
- ✓ "Woe" statements were common in the OT — threatening Israel with judgment; e.g.,

- *Jer. 22:13 "Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness And his upper rooms without justice, Who uses his neighbor's services without pay And does not give him his wages,...*
- *Jer. 23:1 "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!" declares the LORD.*

- ✓ The NT picks up that same idea, using the word 46x (almost all in Gospels and Rev.; 15x in Luke — e.g., **Lk. 11:42-44, 46-47, 52**, where Jesus particularly warns the Pharisees and scribes).
- ✓ These woes are in direct contrast to the blessings of vv. 20-23. Everything that was hard there is easy here and everything that was a blessing there is a wrath here.
- ✓ While the sermon on the mount is for **the disciples** (v. 20; the Twelve and the extend group of followers), there were crowds of curious and skeptical people also present (vv. 17b-19); these words are likely largely for them. (Though it also serves as a warning to Jesus' disciples.)
- The first woe is **to you who are rich...**
 - ✓ Luke addresses the theme of riches and wealth repeatedly in the book (at least 9x).
 - ✓ But the wealthy aren't condemned just because they are wealthy (e.g., Levi, 5:27-28; tax collectors, 3:12-13; Mark's mother, Acts 12:12ff). But the wealthy are warned about the dangers of wealth — *Riches can choke out the message of Christ* and the Kingdom so there is no desire for Christ (**8:14**).
- The second half of the clause indicates the problem of wealth —
 - ✓ Wealth entices people to pursue **comfort** now, without consideration of one's heart or the future.
 - There are "comforts" that wealth can bring — the problem is not in enjoying those benefits.
 - The problem is in assuming that those comforts are all you need.
 - If one pursues the comfort of wealth, that is *all* they will receive — it will be payment **in full**.
 - And that is a terrible benefit — it is an eternal "loser's trophy" (e.g., **12:15-21**).

- ✓ *The desire for comfort tempts the heart to disregard one's spiritual condition* and assume physical wealth means spiritual wealth. E.g., a couple of decades ago, investor Warren Buffett made a contribution of about \$1.5 billion a year to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to seek cures for the world's worst diseases and improve American education. At the news conference announcing the gift, he said, "There is more than one way to get to heaven, but this is a great way."
- ✓ Jesus' warning is against *self-righteousness* — the idea that don't need a Savior because they don't have a significant sin problem (contra v. 20; 18:11-12). They believe they are self-sufficient.
- ✓ Wealth won't keep one from Christ, but believing the tempting promises of wealth will (16:13; 18:25).
- ✓ Those who trust their spiritual self-righteousness are those who will know Christ's woes (Js. 5:1).

2. Christ's "Hard Life" is For **SELF-SATISFIED** People (v. 25a)

- The second woe of Christ is against those **who are well-fed now**.
 - ✓ They believe they have plenty (spiritually) — they are "satiated" on themselves and their works.
 - ✓ They are spiritually smug and so they don't yearn for anything else. It is the opposite of v. 21a. There, one realizes he has nothing spiritually, so he hungers for God (Ps. 63:1; Jn. 6:35).
 - ✓ These believe they are righteous on their own (v. 24), so they have no desire for Christ — He has nothing to offer them that is of interest to them. "Christianity is for weak people..."
 - ✓ It is like knowing there is a good meal (smoked tuna!) waiting for you when you get home, and eating two peanut butter sandwiches at 4:30, right before you leave to go home.
- Those who are satisfied with their self-righteousness **shall be hungry** — their self-satisfaction is temporal — it is **now**, but it won't be "then." There will be nothing in the future.
 - ✓ When the nutrition of the peanut butter sandwich is gone, there will be nothing else to eat.
 - ✓ What they think they have now will be wholly unavailable to them in the future (in eternity).
 - ✓ They will yearn for satisfaction and there will be none to be found (cf. Lk. 16:24-25).
 - ✓ This is what Mary spoke of in her hymn of praise — 1:53 (both as promise and warning).
 - ✓ There is nothing inherently wrong with pursuing satisfaction — just don't be confused about the difference between gold and fool's gold. Anything but Christ is fool's gold.
 - ✓ 70's author and cartoonist Ashleigh Brilliant once said, "All I ask of life is a constant and exaggerated sense of my own importance." That sounds amusing. But it's a real pursuit and it's deadly.
 - ✓ Nothing you are and nothing you can do will have any permanent satisfaction. But *Christ is all*.
 - ✓ "The first great and primary business to which I sought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord." (George Mueller). And, "I am persuaded that all of our problems are conceived and born in the sinful belief that something or someone other than Jesus Christ can quench the thirst of our souls." (Sam Storms)

3. Christ's "Hard Life" is For SCORNFUL People (v. 25b)

- The third woe doesn't sound problematic — *woe to you who laugh now*.
 - ✓ Jesus said that laughter would be the comfort of those who grieve over their sin (v. 21b).
 - ✓ We noted that laughter is a picture for joy — it is the outward manifestation of inward peace/joy.
 - ✓ But that's not the kind of laughter Jesus alludes to here. This laughter is boastful and condescending.
 - ✓ This is the kind of laughter that mocks truth (Eccl. 7:6) and scorns other people (Ps. 126:2; Js. 4:9).
 - ✓ This is the laughter of the self-satisfied self-righteous who scorn those who love Christ and pursue obedience to the Lord (Lam. 1:7).
 - ✓ This is the kind of laughter that mocks the severity of sin and indulges it brazenly (Rom. 1:29-32). They don't examine their hearts and grieve; they indulge their sinful desires and flaunt their sin.
 - ✓
- In exchange for a "laugh" *now*, these will *mourn and weep*.
 - ✓ Jesus uses two different terms to refer to the reality of grief. He uses them to intensify the emphasis on grief. There will be greater grief in the future for these mockers than the grief the repentant experience today (because grief over sin today actually produces freedom and joy, Jn. 8:31-32).
 - ✓ Because these people self-righteously believe they have no need of Christ, in the future (soon) they will have only "spiritual darkness and hopeless sorrow." [Geldenhuis]
 - ✓ This is also a comfort to us who are mocked and scorned for faith in Christ (v. 22). The hatred now is short; the blessings are long. The "laughter" of the mockers is short; their grief is long.
 - ✓ Don't despair that the mockers seem to "succeed" (Ps. 37:1ff). They don't. Christ will avenge.
 - ✓ If you are one who mocks; don't think that you will get the last laugh. Your laugh is first. God's laugh is last — and He will mock you permanently (Ps. 2:4). Cf. Lk. 16:23, 27-28.

4. Christ's "Hard Life" is For PRAISE-SEEKING People (v. 26)

- The final woe is *when all men speak well of you...*
 - ✓ The obvious contrast is to v. 22 — there the believer is hated, ostracized, and scorned because they have followed the Son of Man. Here the unrepentant man receives adulation of the world because he refuses to follow the Son of Man. He is a people pleaser and he lives in fear (worship) of man.
 - ✓ The problem is not that some men speak well of you (thankfully we speak well of one another).
 - ✓ The problem is when *all men* speak well of you, because of what you must do to be accepted by the world. To have a good reputation in the world means you will have the worst reputation with Christ.
 - ✓ [Everyone is susceptible to this temptation; if you are young, you are especially likely to crave this kind of attention: "everyone is doing this, dad..." If all your non-Christian friends are embracing something as good, it is probably bad — *really* bad. Don't look for their approval; look for Christ's approval. Remember "bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33; Is. 5:20).]

- What's the problem with seeking praise from all others? ***Their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way*** (Jer. 5:31; 20:6; 23:14).
 - ✓ The nation of Israel not only tolerated, but followed and spoke well of the false teachers.
 - ✓ They wanted prophets who would give them “happy” messages rather than true messages.
 - ✓ E.g., the Levite who served as priest for Micah in Ephraim in exchange for wealth (Jg. 17:10ff).
 - ✓ The Levite wasn't a prophet, but this was exactly the problem in Israel — give us a pleasant message so we can be self-satisfied in our sin.
 - ✓ While Jesus says that they used to treat the false prophets in the OT with favor, He leaves unsaid what God said about the false prophets: Jer. 23:32 — “I am against [them]...” (29:23; Ezk. 13:6-9).
 - ✓ The Lord is against those who are against Him. He punished both the false prophets and those who embraced the false prophets (allowing themselves to be deceived).
 - ✓ That same end will be for those who rejected Christ in the first century A.D. — and today.
 - ✓ If you seek the adulation of man and worship man's estimation of you, you will forfeit God's pleasure in you and for you. It's a disastrous trade and only leads to harshness from Him.
- Notice the **contrast between blessings and woes** (belief and unbelief) —

BLESSING	RESULT	WOE	RESULT
Spiritual poverty	Kingdom	Self-righteousness	Eternal dis-comfort
Spiritual hunger	Satisfaction	Self-satisfaction	Eternal hunger
Spiritual grief	Laughter	Scorn and derision	Eternal weeping
Temporally hated	Eternally rewarded	Seeking praise	Eternally hated

CONCLUSION: Jesus offers blessing to those who follow Him (vv. 20-23). But not everyone will follow Him. Some will pridefully believe they are fine without Him. Those people will have a hard life:

- ✓ The Self-Righteous (v. 24)
- ✓ The Self-Satisfied (v. 25a)
- ✓ The Scornful (v. 25b)
- ✓ The Praise-Seeking (v. 26)

If this is what you believe, it won't be different for you.
Believe the gospel: repent and believe (v. 46)

Jesus speaks these words as a warning to you — if you pursue that kind of life, it may seem to “work” for a while; but its end is disastrous. And it is a warning to us who believe as well — beware of believing the temptations of the world that assert the goodness of these ways of living. It won't end well.

And for those of us who follow Christ, it is also a means by which we can discern who is following Christ and who is not — the gospel is for people like this.

BENEDICTION (David L — Pastors @ back): Jude 24-25