

## **‘Blessed are you who are poor’**

Jesus said some incredibly insensitive things at times – or so it seems – and surely Luke 6:20 is a prime example: “Blessed are you who are poor.” So Jesus reckons it’s good to be poor; more than that he saw blessedness in hunger, bereavement and persecution. How can he say these outrageous things?

Surely poverty is a worrying, crushing, humiliating experience? In our world to be without money is to be without power. With £100 in my pocket I can, if I choose, catch a bus to Manchester, I can grab a bite to eat in a restaurant, I can watch a show, I can have an ice-cream at the interval, I can get the bus back to Burnley and even phone ahead for a taxi to meet me at the station and so be tucked up in bed soon after mid-night. Without money I can do none of that; I have to stay at home all evening. Surely to be poor is to be without power – without freedom – without choices – without fun. So how can Jesus say, “Blessed are you who are poor”?

Later in Luke’s Gospel (12:13-21) Jesus tells the story of a rich man with a large farm who enjoys a bumper harvest. So the man asks himself, “What shall I do?” You’ll notice he offers no praise to God for his unexpected bonanza, and no prayer as he decides what to do with the mountain of grain.

Instead he relies entirely on his own wisdom and rips down his old small barns and replaces them with much larger ones. The plan is not to flood the market with a glut of cheap grain but to control the supply and keep the price high. And so with self-satisfaction and self-confidence he looks forward to a long retirement in which he can eat, drink and be merry. Mornings on the golf course? Long cruises every year? He’s got life sorted.

And God says, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded of you.” (12:20) In other words, not only has he lived his life without reference to God, he’s also forgotten the fundamental truth that life itself is on short-term loan from God. That night he’ll leave behind all the wealth that gave him so much confidence and security.

We learn that riches come with spiritual snares. Which is why Jesus says, “Blessed are you who are poor.”

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22 February 2019