

“Good News and Bad News”

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based on Luke 6:17-26

When someone says to you “I’ve got good news and bad news” what do you want to hear first, the good news or the bad news? Personally, I always like to hear the bad news first, always the bad news. Why? Because the bad news is usually not as bad as it could be, and when we get past that, then there’s still the good news. But some people like to hear the good news first. So, what would you like to hear, the bad news or the good news?

The bad news is that we’re in trouble. There isn’t any doubt that we’re in the “woe” category. Face it, we’re rich. This congregation sits right next to one of the most prestigious golf and country clubs in the world, and in a few weeks people from all over the world are going to be coming here to watch some of the best golfers compete in the Bay Hill Invitational.

On top of that, we seem to be pretty well-fed people. As far as I know, everyone in our congregation has enough to eat, more than enough in fact. And still we often eat more than we should.

Then, we’re happy folks. We laugh. We smile. On the surface, at least, we’re doing well.

And finally, we seem to be rather popular people. We have good reputations and generally we're well thought of. And this is bad news.

Maybe you're thinking this in this way: "And this is supposed to be *bad* news?" But it is, at least according to Jesus, and the last time I checked he was definitely someone whose opinion we need to be aware of. The bad news is that if that's all we have, then that's the only reward we're going to get. And from a long-term perspective, that really doesn't sound so good.

Now, I could try to wiggle us out of it. I could try to rationalize about how it's not really that bad, and believe you me, there's a part of me that really wants to try. But I'm going to resist that temptation and trust, really trust, that Jesus knows what he's talking about. That's a radical concept, I know, but probably worth the risk.

Yes, our vast riches, our full pantries, our great happiness, even our sterling reputations, according to Jesus these things are deadly to our souls, and threaten our eternal salvation. Surely you understand why. There is a great temptation to make these things to be the most important things in our life, the pursuit of money, filling our bellies, making sure we're happy even at the expense of the happiness of others, and making sure people like us. Surely you know that at least one of these things is probably pretty important to you.

But the critical question is *how* important is it to you? Is it something you're willing to give up for the sake of the Gospel? Are you willing to part with some, or even all, of your riches for the sake of the Gospel? Are you willing to go hungry for the sake of the Gospel? Are you willing to sacrifice your own happiness for the sake of the Gospel? Are you willing to risk losing your fine reputation and to experience public humiliation for the sake of the Gospel?

The number one reason why there are hundreds of thousands more people not in worship than in worship this morning is that for them the answer to one or more of those questions is

“no!” They are *not* willing to risk their riches, or their food, or their happiness or their reputation for the sake of the Gospel.

So, are you ready for the good news yet? The good news is this: being poor, being hungry, being in mourning, being rejected and humiliated will not have the last word in your life.

Were you assuming that these things don't apply to you? Guess again. Considering how much people are in debt these days, when looking at the bottom line it turns out a lot of people are simply living like they're rich when they aren't. The good news is that this isn't a permanent status for you, because often it is possible with discipline and wise decisions to get out of debt, and for good or bad we can't take money with us when we die.

Second, while many of us continue to stuff our faces, nutritionally we're still starving. But again, this too can change with discipline and wise decisions. On the other hand, there are those who have plenty of food and nutrition at hand, and yet starve themselves based on the distorted value that the world places on body image. But while the world may judge based on body image, God does not, and as His people we would do well to remember that always.

Third, deep down many of us are simply not happy people. Often this has to do with being too caught up with possessions, food, selfishness, and/or popularity. Sometimes it has to do with medical issues such as clinical depression. And of course, it is normal and natural to be in mourning over significant losses in your life. The good news is that hope lives, and that the resurrection of Jesus is a promise of eternal joy even in the face of our deepest levels of sadness.

Finally, while it is true that too often what people say *to us* to our faces differs significantly from what they say *about us* behind our backs, many times this simply says more about them than about us. Ultimately the only one's opinion of us that really matters is God's,

and through the experience of Jesus on the cross God is personally experienced with public rejection, humiliation and defamation.

So in the end what do these blessings and woes mean for us? On one hand, they draw us deeper into the mind of God, bringing us closer to sharing his mindset regarding riches, food, happiness, and reputation. And we find that God doesn't view these things in the same way that the world does, which means that we are called to set an example through our own attitudes and choices regarding the importance of the Gospel relative to all these other things that seek our attention and loyalty.

Even if we have access to vast sums of wealth compared to most of the rest of the world, we are not rich if we realize that ultimately it doesn't really belong to us but to God and are willing to use it at a moment's notice to make a difference in someone's life for the sake of the Gospel. We are not really fed if we practice good nutrition and refrain from over-eating, while being willing to go a little hungry in order to share our food with those who truly do not have enough to eat. We are not really happy when we are filled with joy, realizing that worldly possessions, including our appearance, cannot bring us the deep and abiding joy that the love of God through the Gospel fills us with. And finally, living out our lives openly as Christians without caring what worldly people think about us does indeed run the risk of public or private humiliation and rejection.

And yet the example of all of those who suffered humiliation, rejection, or even lost their lives for the sake of the Gospel, including Jesus Christ himself, compels us to live lives of grace, forgiveness, and courage for the sake of the Gospel. The bad news is that there are many things trying to make themselves into our god, riches, food, happiness, and reputation are but four of them. The good news is that our salvation isn't something of ours to lose by slipping up here and

there, but that it's something that Jesus already won for us. All he asks is that we live our lives for him, being willing set aside the pursuit of our own personal happiness to put others before us, being willing to share our financial resources and pantries with those in need, without expecting public recognition or even appreciation and willing to endure public or private rejection, all for the sake of the Gospel. Amen.