

THRIVING IN THE MIDDLE OF CONTRADICTIONS

Luke 6:20-22 (NIV) 20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

This morning, I want to talk to you about **THRIVING IN THE MIDDLE OF CONTRADICTIONS**.

- How often have people called you terms such as different, weird, old school, not cool, unprogressive, rigid, boring and so forth.
- You are called all these terms because your life resembles something that is opposite to the norm.
- A follower of Jesus is called to be different; you are never called to blend in and be like a chameleon.
- In many people's eyes, your life is a mystery but very attractive.
- When people expect you to smile, you cry instead; when they expect you to cry, you laugh out loud. When you are expected to hold back, you go all out.
- It looks like you thrive and excel in the middle of those contradictions, and you need to realize that you will not thrive by going with the flow.
- A follower of Christ is fruitful when he successfully manage these contradictions.
- You will find that people like the way your life looks but don't quite like the way to get to it at the beginning. I was talking to someone I cycle with and they said to me "in my observation, it appears like men with stable lives have Jesus at the center as a common denominator".
- Lets go back to our reading. After Jesus chose His disciples, He began to introduce them to the new culture that comes with being a follower of Christ.
- When Jesus was walking with His disciples, He implemented a 2-prong approach in training them; it was a teach and show approach. Jesus took time to teach them what it means to be a student of Jesus but also, He showed them how it looks like to be His followers.
- Where we read, we are introduced to the famous sermon on the mount, probably one of the longest teachings of Jesus recorded.

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- The sermon on the mount, set the tone of the culture Jesus was introducing – it was counter current day culture, and it was counter the traditions of man.
- Jesus introduced four contradictions that His new disciples needed to grapple with to thrive in the kingdom of God (Matthew has more listed).
- The world views them in a negative way but Jesus sees them as keys to a fruitful life.

Luke 6: 20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

- Matthew gives us a clear picture of what Jesus is talking about; there is a phrase he adds, which is "in spirit".
- Jesus takes a natural phenomenon to explain a spiritual principle. Everyone knows what poverty in the natural world looks like.
- No one wants to be poor because the life of a poor person is hard. No one in his rightful state of mind would volunteer to be a poor person.
- In the natural, poverty is never a good thing, but Jesus comes on the scene and says that poverty in spirit is what you need to access God's kingdom.
- According to Jesus, any follower of His who wants to access the riches of the kingdom, ought to be poor in spirit.

1. Embrace poverty to access kingdom riches.

- The contradiction here is that by nature we are conditioned to avoid poverty at all costs and yet it is the very thing that Jesus is calling you to embrace to access the real riches of this life.
- To establish a new culture, Jesus did not give anything elaborate like another commandment but rather He asks them to adopt the attitude of a poor person.
- Poverty makes you humble; poverty creates in you a different value system when it comes to material things.
- Poor people value the presence of a plate of food in front of them. A poor person is grateful when they have a roof over their head.
- A poor person knows that they have nothing to offer and need help from others.
- In other words, a poor person does not feel entitled and is grateful for whatever assistance can come his way.

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- This is when a poor person has the right attitude towards their situation, but I have also come across poor people who don't want to be seen as poor people.
- There is nothing as distasteful as a person who is not so well to do who pretends as if they are well of. Many people pretend to be rich in the spirit and yet poor – like that poor person who pretends to be rich, they refuse to eat certain foods, they refuse certain discomforts and are not grateful for what they receive.
- This is the attitude that Jesus is asking you to adopt – to be poor in the spirit.
- It is only the poor in spirit who will look to God for His helping hand.
- Spiritual poverty, a heart that feels its need, is the first thing that makes you fit for the kingdom of God.
- It is the poor in spirit who will run to the great I am, it is the poor in spirit who relies on Jesus.
- The poor in spirit are humble and the kingdom of God can only be accessed by humility.
- The more you pursue God, the more you realize how poor you are and the more you want to pursue Him.
- The day you think that you are now spiritually rich is the day you stop pursuing God. No one can become spiritually rich to the point of not needing God.

Luke 6: 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

- Have you seen that food takes on a different taste when you are famished or hungry.
- People don't value food when they are full, but it is totally different when they are hungry.
- Again, Jesus gives a contradiction that His disciples needed to embrace

2. Embrace hunger to enjoy spiritual food.

- The contradiction here is that hunger is painful and can never be a sign of blessedness. For anything, hunger spells danger because if you don't satisfy it, you are headed for a crash in energy.
- The reason why you don't enjoy your walk with God, it is because you have been feeding yourself with all sorts of wrong food.
- Sometimes, I avoid eating junk food before supper so that I can enjoy the healthy meal that my wife is putting together. Sometimes I break that rule and the result is usually that by the time the food comes I am full and have no appetite for it.

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- There are things that you feed yourself that remove your desire for the things of God, there is a certain company you keep that discourages you from walking by faith.
- Hunger is an expression of a strong desire, and it is the best way to explain the strong desire you should have for God and His kingdom.
- Hunger demands satisfaction and hunger pangs will not stop until you eat something.
- Hunger happens every day and needs to be satisfied. If hunger is not satisfied for a prolonged period, death will occur at some point.
- The fact that you don't feel like eating spiritually does not mean that you are not hungry. Over time your spirit man will wilt and die.
- A deep desire for something is often represented by hunger and thirst in scripture.
Psalm 42:1. As the hart pants after the water brooks, so my soul pants after You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?

Psalm 107:9 For He satisfies the thirsty soul, and fills the hungry soul with good.

- The hungry soul will be satisfied, and it is God's desire to fill you up with His goodness.
- Never lose your desire for God and if that desire has waned, you need to cry out to the Lord to stir you up once again.

Luke 6: 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

- What makes you weep? What makes you sad these days? People weep over different things, some weep when watching a movie, some weep when they are happy.
- But by and large, we weep because we are sad, we are hurt and so forth and Jesus uses that as a key to accessing the kingdom

3. Embrace tears to experience true joy

- The contradiction here is that usually when some cries, it means that there is trouble and cannot be equated with blessedness and yet Christ advocates for weeping so as to access God's kingdom.

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- Blessedness starts when we realize how miserable we are without Jesus. A follower of Jesus knows that without Jesus a person is hopeless regardless of their social standing.
- It is those who grieve over sin, those who are troubled that they have offended God, who will find comfort in the gospel.
- Sin hurts God and we must mourn over sin because it is committed against a God of love, grace, and mercy. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit and dishonors the Gospel of Christ.
- Today, the gravity of sin has been underestimated to the point that we no longer seek for forgiveness from God. Our sins are like nothing before us and yet they separate us from God.

Isaiah 59:1 Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

- True comfort comes to those who are afflicted of soul, and it can only be found in God.
- Through the mercies of God, sinners are forgiven of grievous sins, sinners have a chance to experience peace with God and with man.

Luke 6:22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.

- It is human nature to want to be liked, to be accepted, to belong to the inner circle. Jesus comes again and throws in another contradiction and tells them that they must embrace rejection.

4. Embrace rejection to access acceptance in Christ.

- The Bible warns against being friends with the world because it says if you love the world, then the love of the Father is not in you.
- A follower of Christ will face rejection and exclusion from the inner circle.
- For Christ's sake, a disciple will experience persecution from family and friends. You don't have to look for it, if you are a true disciple of Jesus, persecution will find you one day.
- It is important to brace yourself for such eventualities because it will come.

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- Many people are not prepared to live for Christ – they want to go with the flow and not against the flow.
- May God change your outlook to life and remind you that though you are in the world, you are not of the world.