



***“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way.” Luke 6:24–26***

Luke 6:20–49 offers us a shortened version of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew’s Gospel. Luke’s version of this sermon takes place on a plain, “a stretch of level ground.” The teachings in the two Gospels are very similar, despite their difference in length. Luke’s teaching on the Beatitudes adds the “woe to you’s” quoted above, which are not found in Matthew’s version.

The early Church Father Saint Bede comments that Saint Luke’s version of the “woes” are meant for those who are “uninstructed hearers” because they “must first be brought by terrors to good works.” He goes on to say that the first part of the Beatitudes, the “blessings,” are meant for the “perfect” because they “need but be invited by rewards” rather than fear of punishment. The fact that Saint Luke includes a teaching for both the sinner and the saint should lead us to the conclusion that we can benefit from both approaches in our spiritual lives.

When your spiritual life is strong and you are consistently avoiding serious sin, it might be more helpful to reflect regularly upon the blessings found in the Beatitudes. This will have the effect of drawing you into greater perfection as the desire for the reward of holiness becomes the object of your hope.

When your spiritual life is weaker and you are regularly struggling with more serious sin, it might be more helpful to reflect upon the woes of the Beatitudes. This will have the effect of deterring you from the cycle of sin you struggle with, on account of the fear of the consequences of those sins.

In the end, the Beatitudes and their subsequent woes are meant to point us interiorly to the desires of our hearts. We must become more and more aware of what occupies our thinking and desires. Ultimately, wealth or poverty, hunger or satisfaction, worldly praise or persecution do not matter. What matters is that our hearts are detached from the desires identified in this sermon so that we more fully desire only God and His holy will, regardless of the circumstances of life we find ourselves in.

Reflect, today, upon your own spiritual and moral life and first consider whether you are blessed to be living a life that more imitates the saints or whether you more often reflect the serious struggles of the sinner. From there, try to choose which form of teaching you need the most. Do you need to ponder the rewards of seeking even greater beatitude in life so as to grow deeper in holiness? Or do you need Jesus’ clear condemnations to help you break free from the cycle of sin with which you are struggling? Humbly identify that which is most helpful to you right now in your spiritual life and allow this full sermon of Jesus to help you on your journey to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Father Victor Mendez Cano C.R.