

Weekly Encouragement

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Real Rewards

By Rev. Peter Eng



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"Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6:23)

You probably don't like Luke's version of the Beatitudes. We can understand "Blessed are the poor in spirit" ([Matt 5:3](#)), but Luke's account says "Blessed are you who are poor" ([Lk 6:20](#)). Just in case we misunderstand him and wish to say what is meant is "poor in spirit," he added, "Blessed are you who are hungry now ... who weep now ... when people hate you ... exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil."

Really? What is so blessed about all that? I hear myself say, "Jesus, if it is all the same with you, I will pass on this set of blessings... OK?"

I don't think we should spiritualize the poverty here. It is real physical privation, hunger, weeping and loss of reputation. But

we also need to understand what was happening. Luke was writing to people who lived under Emperor Domitian – persecuted Christians. Earlier, Emperor Tiberias had passed a law saying that if anyone discovered a treasonous plot against the Rome (principally meaning the emperor), the estate of the traitor would be confiscated and the whistleblower would get 25% of the confiscated estate.

Christians were considered treasonous because they would not worship the emperor and would not sacrifice to the gods, causing the gods to bring calamities on them. Christians were charged under this treason law, call the *lex maiestatis*. Those who reported them were getting rich from the confiscated estates of Christians. This is why there is a blessing on the poor persecuted Christians, and woe on the rich persecutors.

This passage is specific to Christians who became poor "on account of the Son of Man" ([Lk 6:22](#)). It is not a commentary on the virtue of poverty or the curse of wealth in themselves.

But it is still difficult to understand why they should or could, "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy." Is there really so much to be happy about when we are persecuted?

This takes us to the second point we need to appreciate. Jesus is not saying we should be giggling our way out of the courthouse when we have been bankrupted on account

of his name. He says, "For behold, your reward is great in heaven." ([Lk 6:23](#)).

Jesus makes it clear that there is a heaven with rewards we cannot imagine. Peter, the ever candid disciple asked, "*See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?*" Jesus explained that the disciples would sit on thrones, and "*everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life*" ([Matt 19:27-30](#)).

It stretches my imagination to think of what might possibly be so worthwhile that our sufferings would seem like nothing when we meet God in heaven.

Allow me a silly analogy.

How much time do we spend preparing for a career? In today's world, a professional career can take a person up to 20-30 years old. And that career provides for about 30 years of productive work, and another 20-30 years of retirement. We spend about one-third of our lives preparing for one-third productivity and one-third retirement. Not very productive really.

Now imagine a one year investment that can generate 100 years of productivity. Would that be a great investment?

We have a few short years on earth. Our actions invest for all eternity. Jesus explains to Peter that his reward will be a hundredfold (not literally). But my feeble mind will use that paltry sum to imagine. The reward will be qualitatively different and it will increase 100 times. So this copper coin I choose not to spend on myself and to invest in the name of Christ, will produce 100 gold coins, with maybe a margin of error plus a million or two.

I dare not call that sacrifice, would I?

God is no man's debtor.

While it is hard to imagine the rewards Jesus expressed to his disciples in words that cannot essentially explain them because they are beyond our experience and vocabulary, they are real rewards.

When we look at the years we have on this earth in the light of eternity, how can we adequately use this time to prepare for what is to come? When we meet in heaven, if commiseration were possible, we might be sitting around asking why we have squandered our time and resources on the ephemeral, and deprive ourselves of rewards that are eternal.

Our time is short. Our resources are few. But when we invest in eternity, we invest in real rewards.

Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.