

LUKE 6: 12 – 7: 50

6: 12-16 – Jesus Chooses the 12 Apostles

The names are less important than the number 12. 12 represents the 12 tribes which make up all of Israel. Jesus is starting a renewal movement to create a new, redeemed Israel within Israel. He will save the people from the inside outward. They will be a holy remnant unless they are able to affect the wider population into joining the movement.

6: 17-19 – Jesus Teaches and Heals

'He came down' (17) with them. Like Moses coming down the mountain, Jesus will now teach them, and instead of tablets of stone, he is God's Word in what he will teach. Around him are the 12 apostles, a larger number of 'disciples' and a great multitude of people. It is tempting to see Jesus' healing of bodies and minds as his primary work. As we will see, tangible healing is a sign of inward healing which is much more primary for how people will live and what kind of relationships and society they will build.

Openness of faith for healing prepares people to be open to spiritual teaching which will be far more controversial and difficult to understand, accept and obey.

6: 20-26 – Blessings and Woes

Luke's version of the beatitudes and the teaching that follows is more cutting than Matthew's version. Yet the message is similar. Jesus would have taught like this on more than one occasion and could have varied his teaching according to the crowd or situation.

The blessings or woes are based on how much listeners welcome the 'kingdom of God' Jesus is establishing. Those who are victimized by the current social order based on oppressive ways, will be supported and comforted in a kingdom that is based on God's justice. Those who profit and benefit from an oppressive social order now will be judged and condemned in the future kingdom Jesus is establishing beginning now.

Those blessed are poor in tangible terms but also humble in spiritual terms. The words can refer to both aspects. The hungry and the sorrowful will also be blessed with satisfaction and comfort. Those who are mistreated for aligning themselves with Christ will be vindicated. They fall in a long tradition of being persecuted like prophets of old.

Conversely, the rich who live excessively now and laugh because they have the power and control that cuts others out and silences all opposition, will eventually fall and they will be condemned in the coming kingdom.

The question for the listeners is this: Will they live according to kingdom values or according to the oppressive social order values? Jesus' message confronts people with the need to make a choice.

6: 27-36 – Love for Enemies

What is the most difficult kind of love? It's the kind of love that gives and shares without expecting or receiving anything tangible in return. It's about refusing to hate or strike back those who are against us, curse us or abuse us. Jesus' words are not an invitation to be passive. They make a call to a different kind of resistance and victory over enemies. To pray for an enemy and turn the cheek is a form of spiritual victory against those who want to draw us into a vicious cycle of hatred, retaliation and bitterness.

And the most radical teaching of all is that Jesus declares God's nature to be such love: even to the ungrateful and the wicked. God forgives as a first move, because only such love has a chance to save those who may respond with openness of faith and a commitment to love as they are loved. Repentance that is a grateful response to the offer of love is very different than repentance out of fear of judgement and damnation.

6: 37-42 - Judging Others

A judgemental spirit and hypocritical self-righteousness are great obstacles to the kingdom of God advancing. Tilting judgement on oneself and compassionate generosity of judgement toward others is the corrective.

6: 43-45 – A Tree and Its Fruit

While good fruit does not always reveal to us the inner working of a tree, it does tell us that the tree is sound and good. Fruits of compassion and generosity reveal a compassionate and generous heart.

6: 46-49 – The Two Foundations

What is the foundation of your soul built on? Is it external security, status, power and control? Or is it compassion and generosity of spirit? One is truly solid if more vulnerable in the world's eyes, while the other may seem solid on the outside, but totally unstable and bound to fall apart when the true storms of life strike.

7: 1-10 – Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

Healing happens according to faith. The irony in this story is that a Centurion is not only a gentile, but a Roman gentile of authority. Yet he is also a kind and respected man in the Jewish community and a man of incredible faith. His servant is healed at a distance because he believed such healing was possible with Jesus. Jesus also points to the faith of a gentile more astonishing than what he is too often finding among his own people. Righteous gentiles are being welcomed into the kingdom, while resistant Jews who are Jesus' own people are staying out.

7: 11-17 – Jesus raises the Widow’s Son at Nain

In this case, Jesus heals not because of the woman’s faith, but because of her love for her son. Her tear-filled grief reached Jesus’ heart as deeply as openness of faith could do. The young man is resuscitated, a prelude to the greater miracle of resurrection to come. The astonished crowd call him a great prophet, rather than the messiah. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha were great healers also. So far, Jesus’ teaching role as Messiah/Son of God has not been understood by the majority of people. His more dramatic healing miracles are easier to recognize, although the message behind them is missed.

7: 18-35 – Messengers from John the Baptist

Jesus is not the messiah people have been expecting. Even John who is now in prison questions whether Jesus is the one. He sends disciples to ask Jesus. Jesus’ answer is frustratingly vague. He tells them to observe what he is doing. His healing miracles and proclamation of liberation to the poor and oppressed (Luke 4) should be evidence enough. But John is not the only one who is confused. Jesus is not landing hard on the judgement of God unless it’s directed to the religious and political rulers. And even then he is preaching forgiveness and love, even toward enemies, the wicked and the ungrateful. How is that going to induce repentance and change? Unless... unless forgiveness is the seed for a different kind of repentance and change. Let’s see where this goes...

Jesus, on his part, has some amazing things to say about John. John is the real deal. He’s not in it for the money, privilege, power or acclamation of people. He lives like an ascetic out in the wilderness, away from any spotlight. And yet, he is the greatest of prophets.

But the age of Jesus is the age of the kingdom of God coming. John’s message is the greatest kind of message as preparation for the age to come. Once the door has been opened to the new age, anyone who enters it is already ahead of John. The next story will give us a clue as to what this age of the kingdom is all about.

But Jesus has one more thing to say in this section. He and John are different. John is an ascetic out in the wilderness, living a sparse life of self-renunciation. Jesus goes to where the people are and cavorts with all the worst kinds, even sharing their food and drink at parties. The one thing John and Jesus have in common is that they are criticized by the authorities and the crowds that take their cues from them. John is criticized for living like a grieving hermit. Jesus is criticized for partying with sinners like a sinner himself.

Clearly Jesus’ strategy is different than John’s. In the age of the kingdom it is time to laugh, sing and rejoice, not mourn. But rejoice about what?

7: 36-50 – A Sinful Woman Forgiven

Party time is always at the breaking of the Sabbath - Saturday night. Jesus doesn't discriminate as to where he ends up – at a tax collector's house or a Pharisee's house. The Pharisees have good food just like Tax Collectors and other more prosperous 'sinners.' Pharisees believe they are well to do legitimately whereas the others make their money illegitimately. The Pharisees focus on living religious lives, whereas the others are disqualified by their lifestyles. Jesus, however, has a very different standard of righteousness. And he teaches that the kingdom of God (the fellowship and rule of God) is governed by a very different kind of religion.

The kingdom is alive whenever and wherever people experience the powerful love of God which changes their hearts and their lives. The Pharisees have hard hearts. They are too proud to recognize Jesus as having something to teach them, and they have a lot to lose if they follow his program for change. Tax collectors have hard hearts as well because they cannot gouge people by their greed without hardening their hearts. But whenever one or two come face to face with their guilty conscience and the call of God in Jesus, change happens. Jesus refuses to discriminate on the basis of who keeps the religious law faithfully, who is clean and unclean, who observes the Sabbath rules and all that. He judges people purely as to their openness to the love of God. Evidence for the experience of God's love is a loving, open heart to anyone and everyone, even enemies, and profound, heart-felt gratitude and generosity.

The woman who just walks into the Pharisees house uninvited is a woman who is judged a bad Jew by the host Pharisee. She represents all that is wrong with Israel and all that makes God angry with the people. They are suffering as a people because there aren't enough Jews committed to living religiously faithful lives. But Jesus measures her righteousness quite differently. She is full of love, humble, grateful and heart-felt. She has a lot more love than the Pharisee, and therefore, she is that much more righteous before God. The righteousness of the kingdom is based on a very different foundation. Sinners can end up much higher than even the chief priests and head Pharisees.