

Since September our Wednesday Night Bible Study has been doing an overview of the gospels. We are currently discussing the Gospel of Luke; so this morning let's look at this writing and see what the Apostle Luke has to tell us. Luke has the unique distinction of being the only writer of the New Testament who was not a Jew. Luke was a doctor and his writing tends to show the human side of Jesus more than the other three gospels. He focuses on the need of the outsider, not only by race, but also those on the fringes of society because of economic and social status. For example, on the night of Jesus' birth, Luke has the angels appearing first to the lowly shepherds, while Matthew focuses on the wise men and kings. Luke also focuses on salvation being available to all people. The Gospel of Luke has been called "the gospel of the underdog."

This morning let's look at Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount that Barry/Lisa read to us earlier from the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. This is found in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 17 through 26.

Read Luke 6:17-26

In the verses preceding our text, Jesus had gone up on a mountain to pray. He spent the whole night in prayer with God. Jesus was seeking God's guidance regarding the selection of His disciples. No doubt, He also asked for strength for the ministry that lay ahead of Him. Jesus sets an example for us; He was in constant communication with His Father. He took not only His concerns and problems to God, but also sought His guidance.

The next day, Jesus chose His twelve disciples. Once the disciples were chosen, it was important that they should be thoroughly trained in Jesus' teachings. The rest of the sixth chapter is devoted to a summary of the type of character and behavior that followers of Jesus Christ should exhibit. These verses in Luke are the first teachings of Jesus to His new disciples and are also handed down to us today for our guidance.

This passage is usually referred to as the Sermon on the Plains, and as I noted earlier it is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. One was delivered on a mountainside and the other one on the level plain. Although Luke's version is much shorter than the one in Matthew, they both begin with a series of beatitudes and blessings, with Luke adding four woes. Some of Matthew's sermon is found in other portions of the Gospel of Luke suggesting that the material may have been given at other times.

While there are differences in these two accounts, they both contain some radical statements. They are very different from the sayings of a philosopher or a typical wise man of that time period. Each one is a challenge. They take the accepted standards of that time and turn them

upside down. For example, the people whom Jesus called happy, the world called wretched, and the people whom Jesus called wretched, the world called happy or blessed. Just imagine someone saying today: "Happy are the poor, and woe to the rich!" Talk about turning the world value system upside down, especially at this time of year!

One of the keys to understanding our text is found in verse 24 where Jesus says: "Woe to you who are rich because you have all the comfort that you are going to get." The *Message* paraphrases it this way: "But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you'll ever get." The word that Jesus uses here for "have" is the word for receiving payment in full. What Jesus is saying is this: "If you set your heart and spend all your energy to obtain things which the world values, you'll get them, but that is all you are going to get." Your temporary desires will be satisfied, but not your eternal.

If on the other hand, you set your heart on and put your energy into God's work, you may have trouble since you are going against the standards of this world, but in the end, you will have joy that this world cannot ever produce. The key to understanding the beatitudes in Luke is found in the phrase "on account of the Son of Man" in verse 22. Things that in themselves would be considered a curse become a blessing when they are willingly endured for Christ's sake; when they are done for the right motive, out of love and obedience for Jesus Christ.

Reversing the acceptable standards of society, the Beatitudes introduce a new way of looking at the world, of seeing the world through the eyes of God. They remind us of what we would call "lifestyle issues." They are not only promises, but also standards that we, like the disciples and the Early Church, are encouraged to recognize and practice.

As human beings, we are faced with an eternal choice which begins in childhood and doesn't end until death. Will we take the easy way which may yield immediate pleasure and profit? Or will we take the hard way, the narrow path, which can sometimes be rough and difficult? Will we focus on the temporary rewards of this world or will we focus on the eternal rewards of Jesus Christ?

A guy dies and goes to hell. The devil tells him that he has to spend eternity there, but he gets to choose how he will spend it. He can choose from three doorways; but once the decision is made he can't change. The devil opens the first door and the man sees people standing on their heads on a concrete floor. He says no way. So the devil opens door two and the man sees people standing on their heads on a wood floor. Again the man says no. As the devil opens door three, the man sees a bunch of people standing knee deep in cow manure drinking coffee; so he tells the devil he liked this one better. The devil says he will go get his coffee. The guy settles in with his coffee thinking that this is not so bad. After ten minutes a voice comes over

the loud speaker: "Coffee break is over, back on your heads!" It may look good at first, but not in the end.

The Bible tells us that the people came from all over the countryside to be healed and to hear the Good News, the gospel of salvation. Now those who came were the people who recognized their needs both physically and spiritually. Those who did not come were the people that Jesus singled out in His four woes: those who believed that they had it made; that money could buy happiness; the popular eat-drink-and-be-merry crowd. Which crowd do we belong to; do we think we have it all or do we recognize our weaknesses and need for God? Do we come to Jesus out of curiosity or to be healed and saved?

If you take the world's way, you must abandon the values and teachings of Jesus. If you follow Jesus, you must abandon the values of the world. The challenge of the Beatitudes is: "Will I be happy in the world's way or in Jesus' way?"

Tough decision isn't it, especially considering all the temptations and pleasures of this world? But I believe that our text offers a very convincing reason for choosing the way of Jesus. Luke's version of the Beatitudes brings them down to our level. Jesus did not deliver these sayings only from the mountaintop, but from level ground. He came to where the people were. He taught them, touched them, and healed them. In Luke, Jesus reaches out to all, coming down to our level to establish a personal relationship and to be our teacher.

God took the initiative and sent His Son into the world out of love for each one of us; to save and heal us. Now unless I have missed something, I have not seen the world taking any initiative to help me. On the contrary, what I have seen is the world always taking; my resources, my strength, my enthusiasm, my happiness and my values; and not giving me anything back in return. It's a give-me, give-me world we live in; which we especially see during the Christmas season.

Anything you get from the world always seems to have strings attached; nothing is free. On the other hand, Jesus came and turned the world upside down. He offers us love, grace, and salvation; free with no strings attached. He offers us a way that will lead to a certain joy that the world will never be able to match; all we have to do is accept His offer and walk in faith with Him. You don't have to give in to the world with its false promises, low morals and temporary pleasures. The underdog can win and come out on top if you put your trust in Jesus Christ. He is the true champion of the underdog.

Jesus came into the world to show us the way back to God. His vision turned the world of His Jewish contemporaries upside down. And hopefully, His teachings continue to turn our world today and our individual lives upside down. They tend to go against everything that we have been taught to believe in this world, where wealth, fame, popularity, comfort and material

possessions are sought after goals. The underdog still has a special place in the heart of Jesus, and hopefully the Church.

One of the amazing benefits that we receive when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior is that we become citizens of this “upside-down kingdom.” According to Romans 12:2, this citizenship does not allow us to be conformed to this world. Rather, it is a citizenship that calls us every day to be transformed by the renewing of our minds; by becoming more like Jesus each and every day.

A man approached another man playing *Amazing Grace* on the bagpipes and asked if he was from Scotland. “No,” replied the man, “I’m from heaven and I’m just passing through.” We are just passing through; as one author put it, we are “Resident Aliens” in this world.

As Jesus came down from the mountain to heal and minister to the less fortunate and outcasts of the world, so are we called to come down from our mountain and enter the real world in service and ministry. And by mountain, I mean this sanctuary and our comfort zones. As Christians, we sometimes hide out in the safety of the sanctuary and not venture out into the world for fear that we might have to really demonstrate Christ’s love, by going places and doing things that are uncomfortable; we might have to get our hands dirty.

Believe me I know this from first-hand experience having been isolated for many years in the comfort of my career and home, and the safety of the walls of the church. But over the past seventeen years of ministry, God has torn down these walls and opened my eyes to the needs around me. The more I have studied the Bible and Jesus’ ministry here on earth, the more I realize that Jesus met the people at their point of need; He went to them. That’s why we distribute food through the Meadowlark Methodist Food Pantry; serve meals to the homeless at Community of Hope; provide food packages to children over the weekend through Feed New Mexico Kids; and prepare Thanksgiving Food Boxes for Haven House.

On a hot spring day in 1968, Bobby Kennedy, fighting for the Democratic nomination for the presidency, crisscrossed streets in some of the poorest neighborhoods in Spanish Harlem. Lester and Irene David write in *Bobby Kennedy: The Making of a Folk Hero* that after five hours, Kennedy was caked with dirt and soaked in perspiration. His guide that day was former boxing champ Jose Torres. Torres wondered why this rich man’s son came to the ghettos and worked so hard and long, often 16 hours a day. So he asked Bobby: “Why are you doing this? Why are you running?” To which Bobby replied: “Because I found that my world wasn’t the real world.” I wish more people, especially politicians realized this.

Jesus calls us to service in the real world; the world outside the doors of this church and our homes. At times we tend to be selective in who we associate with and who we help. But we need to follow the example of our Lord and Savior. Jesus never met a person that He didn’t

love, have hope for, or wanted to help. He ate dinner with Zacchaeus the tax collector; healed the bleeding of a woman rejected as unclean by the church; cast a demon from a man called Legion; healed a crippled woman on the Sabbath; healed ten lepers with one being a non-Jew; restored the sight of a beggar; and forgave the sins of a thief on the cross beside Him.

Are our times any different? There are still people all around us living on the edge of society; wanting to hear the good news and to be healed. Do we go to where Jesus is leading us? Do we stay in our safe comfort zones? Do we serve from a superior attitude and privileged position? Or do we serve Jesus on level ground?

Bruce Thielemann, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, told of a conversation he had with a lay person, who said: "You preachers talk a lot about giving, but when you get right down to it, it all comes down to basin theology." Bruce asked what he meant by basin theology. The lay person replied: "Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus the night before His death called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of His disciples, even the one about to betray Him?"

It all comes down to basin theology. Which one will you use? Will you wash your hands of the needs of your fellow human beings, or will you follow the example of Jesus and go to meet and serve them on level ground? During this holiday season, we are providing many ways for you to reach out in love to those in need; be like Jesus, grab a basin and look for ways to serve and give. Amen