

The Way of Christ

Luke 6:20-49

Today we reach the point in Jesus' ministry where he preaches one of his most famous sermons – the Sermon on the Mount. By this time, Jesus was incredibly popular in Galilee. He had done enough ministry that people from all around that region knew about him. People were drawn to his teaching because of the authority with which he taught, but they were more widely attracted to him because of his healing ministry and ability to cast out demons. With just a touch he could change someone's life and set them free. So huge crowds would gather to see him.

I don't know what the occasion was, but one day there was a particularly large gathering of people to hear him preach and be healed of their diseases and both Matthew and Luke recorded parts of his sermon – Matthew recorded more, but we're going to look at Luke today. We're going to try to capture the heart of what Jesus was saying.

It's important to know the context and the audience Jesus was speaking to so we know how it compares to our situation and how to accurately understand what Jesus was saying. He wasn't doing an outdoor church service for a huge group of mature believers; it was more like an evangelistic crusade – a huge community event. A big group of his disciples were there, but the vast majority of people weren't committed yet. They were curious and caught up in the hype and popularity of Jesus' ministry, but would they really want to follow him?

This sermon is mostly for people on the fringe to show them the way of Christ and invite them to follow. Much of the sermon is a contrast between his way and the way of the world and we're going to see that his way is very different. It is a difficult road at times and includes suffering and hardship, but it also leads to great reward and blessing.

Most of us are not on the fringe like the people he was speaking to, but the application of this sermon can be the same because whether we're on the fringe or not, each of us must continue to submit to Christ and follow his way. So this sermon will be another invitation for us to follow and we need to make that our serious consideration.

What Luke records of Jesus's sermon can be divided into four sections and that's how I want to present it this morning. In the first section he brings comfort to his disciples, in the second he extends a call to a radically different way of life. The third is a confrontation of hypocrisy. And the fourth is his conclusion. 4 "C" words for those of you who like that kind of thing. Let's read through the first section.

Read Luke 6:20-26.

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ *"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.*

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

²² *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.*

²⁴ *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*

²⁵ *"Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.*

"Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

²⁶ *"Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.*

You can see that Jesus begins by comforting his disciples who had taken a huge step of faith to follow him. They had already made up their minds – they were in. They were leaving their old way of life behind, believing him to be the Messiah, and they were committed to him. Jesus knew that this would mean hardship for them. There would be times when they would be poor, hungry, overcome with grief, and persecuted. But this would all be worth it for there would be tremendous blessing for them that would completely overshadow their suffering. This is similar to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: *"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."*

A disciple of Christ must look beyond the present circumstances in this world and put their hope in the promises of God and his coming glory.

Christ's words of comfort are accompanied by 4 corresponding woes – or statements of doom. In order to emphasize the blessing of following his way, he reveals what will happen to those who don't – those who chose the easy road and way of the world and sin. Those who forsake the narrow road of Christ in order to pursue their own achievement, pleasure, and popularity in this life will end up with nothing. They will face future misery and judgment.

So it is a good thing – a blessed position – to be a follower of Christ. Even if you suffer for it in this life, you will be richly blessed. This was a comfort to his disciples. The next section is a call to a radically different way of life.

Read Luke 6:27-36.

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. ³² “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. ³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Jesus made it very clear that to follow him would mean a profoundly different way of living. This section focuses on how they were to respond to being mistreated. Jesus calls his disciples to be overflowing with mercy. Instead of hating those who hate you and cursing those who curse you – which would be their natural responses – they were to love their enemies, bless them and pray for them. They were to show unusual kindness and generosity to oppressors as if they were their friends. Rather than giving them what they deserved they are to

follow the golden rule: As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them... even if they're nasty to you. That's a radical calling.

Why did he want them to live that way? He explains in the second half of these verses. Part of it has to do with receiving reward. There is no reward from God for those who do what every other sinner does – sinners hate their enemies and love their friends, but a disciple of Christ is to love their enemies. That's what God rewards. And why does he reward that? Because by loving their enemies they become like him. They do unto others as God has done unto them.

They were no longer to live for themselves, but for the glory of God. That's the way of Christ and that's the calling Jesus placed in front of the multitudes of people that day. I imagine it was hard to hear. Jesus didn't beat around the bush or sugarcoat his calling. It wouldn't be easy, but there would be great reward and blessing.

The third section is a confrontation of spiritual pride and hypocrisy. There would have been self-righteous religious leaders in the crowd that day, and perhaps this was directed toward them, though it can be a challenge for all of us.

Read Luke 6:37-42.

Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

³⁹ He also told them a parable: "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and spiritual pride was a big problem then, as it is now. We are good at seeing the problems in others while overlooking our own. But Jesus tears that down in this part of his sermon. The reality is that all of us

have sin in our lives. It might or might not be blatant, willful and visible sin, but the deep-rooted sins of the heart are there, underneath the surface, often invisible to us, and God, by his mercy and grace through Christ is not counting any of our sins against us. In Christ he has forgiven us and given us amazing mercy and doesn't judge and condemn us.

Yet our tendency is to judge and condemn others and not show forgiveness and mercy. There's a parable Jesus tells of a servant who was forgiven a huge debt only to turn around and demand repayment of small debts that others owed him. It highlights what Jesus is getting at here. We need to see and address the reality of the log that's in our own eye before we go to point out the speck in others. In fact, if we deal with our own log, and are humbled before the Lord, we will often see that we no longer need to point out the speck in the other person.

Christ calls his disciples to follow a path of humility and gratitude before God and then be generously gracious and merciful to others as God has been with us. If we treat others like that, we can expect to be treated the same way in return.

So Jesus has given comfort to his disciples, he's laid out his calling to a radically different way of life, and he's confronted hypocrisy and self-righteousness, and now he gives his concluding remarks in two parts. The first has to do with self-examination.

Read Luke 6:43-45.

⁴³ "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

After all that Jesus has spoken – which is much more than we've seen here in Luke – he presents the people with an easy way to see where they're truly at. In the same way a good tree produces good fruit and a bad tree bad fruit, their lives will reveal what's in their heart. If their heart is good, goodness will overflow in the way they live their life. If their heart is bad, evil will come out. It isn't a mystery, look at your life. What you see will tell you where you're at.

His final conclusion is about the outcome – what will happen for those who listen to him and obey and those who don't?

Read Luke 6:46-49.

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

There's no explanation needed here. After hearing his sermon, the multitudes gathered before Jesus were faced with a choice – would they obey him or not? And that's the same choice we're faced with every day in our lives.

It's not just about whether or not we believe in Jesus, it's about whether or not we'll obey and follow him. Everyone in that crowd believed in Jesus to some degree – that's why they were there. They wanted to hear his preaching and have him heal their diseases. They were riding the wave of excitement. But Jesus' sermon would have cut through all the hype and brought them to a place of decision – do I want to follow this man or not? Do I really trust that he's the Messiah? Do I want to drink the cup he's offering? Do I want to follow his way of life?

As we've heard what Jesus said today we have an opportunity to ask ourselves the same questions and recommit our lives to him. Do you want to follow Jesus? Do you trust that he's the Messiah? Are you willing to drink the cup he's offering? Will you continue to follow him? Talk to him as we move into a time of worship and recommit your life to him.