

Transcript

The Jesus Story - The Sermon on the Plain: Part 1

Let me say something that may sound simple, but I really feel that it is profound. To be a follower of Jesus Christ, we need to be following Him. That is the benchmark for all of His disciples, and just how close we follow Him will determine just what kind of disciple we are.

A man by the name of Charles Sheldon in the last century wrote a novel entitled 'In His Steps'. Now this was just a novel but it was a fascinating read. He wrote the novel to try to find the answer to a question that he had heard someone ask. "What would Jesus do?" This gave him the idea for his novel.

The main character in this novel would start the following day by asking themselves a question before making any decisions at all, and the question was: "What would Jesus do?"

Well, to find the right answer to that question he would need to know an awful lot about Jesus, and if it is our ambition 'To be a follower of Jesus Christ'; if we are going to be a real disciple of Jesus then we need to find out all that we can about Him.

When we finished looking at the life of Jesus the last time, Jesus had just chosen the twelve who He called Apostles. We can understand why Jesus spent a whole night in prayer before He chose these twelve. As we saw, these men would play a significant part in the ministry of Jesus and the foundation of His church.

Now, we can carry on in the gospel of Luke chapter six, and this is what we read in verse 17:

17 And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases.

People were gathering from all over the place to come hear him. They are coming from as far away as Jerusalem in the south, and Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast, several days of determined walking had brought Jews and Gentiles alike to listen to Jesus.

Now, there are a couple of things we need find out. Where exactly this message was preached and who was the message was meant for? First we need to see just where this message was preached.

The sermon in Luke 6 is called the Sermon on the Plain. We find the contents of this Sermon, are very much like those we find in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew.

In fact, some Bible students believe that Matthew's and Luke's accounts, are different records of the same event. But there are a number of differences, and there seems to be enough difference to cause us to believe the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount were delivered at different times to different audiences.

Some commentators go to great lengths to explain how these two accounts could be a record of the same sermon, but it seems to be more reasonable to see them as two

different sermons preached on different occasions.

Like other preachers, Jesus would often repeat teaching because different people at different times and places would need the same teaching. And we should remember that Jesus was an itinerant preacher. In Luke 4:43 this is what Jesus told His followers:

43 “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.”

Itinerant preachers often repeat themselves to different crowds, especially when they were preaching on the same topic. This is probably the same sermon as Matthew’s sermon on the Mount, preached at a different time and in a different place. Jesus would speak on the same theme, on many occasions.

When we look at this sermon, what we also really need to find out is who this message was meant for? Now, there were two different groups here a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people. The apostles had been chosen from among the disciples. Jesus had chosen the apostles for special service but they were still all His disciples.

This is what we read: ‘That Jesus came down with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people.’

Now, notice in verse 20 that Jesus lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, the text is very clear about this:

20 Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said:

Jesus was looking at His disciples when he preached this message. This is not just the twelve that Jesus was speaking to, there is also the ‘great crowd of his disciples’. The message that Jesus is bringing here is a message for all His disciples. The teaching here is not just for the super-spiritual. This is meant for every follower of Jesus, including you and me.

Now, in verse 20, Jesus begins a very interesting and thought-provoking message. There are some very important statements that Jesus makes here in the first part of His sermon:

20 Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: “Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God.

21 Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh.

22 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man’s sake.

23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.

Although this sermon doesn’t cover every area of discipleship, it does lay out nicely some of Jesus’ core concerns that he wants us to focus on.

Jesus is speaking these words to his disciples. This means that he is not talking about the poor in general. What Jesus is saying here is: ‘You, my disciples, who hear

me, who are poor.’ These poor disciples are already in the kingdom of God at the very time that He is speaking to them. Many of the rich of this world will never even see it.

Disciples who are poor, hungry, weeping and rejected will be exalted with the coming of the kingdom. And disciples who are rich, well fed, laughing and socially accepted are brought low and judged.

Jesus, who had spent the previous night in prayer now looks at all of His disciples. The message that Jesus was bringing here was just for those who were truly His disciples, because what He was saying would only apply to them and they were the ones who needed to understand the meaning of these words.

Jesus is setting the stage for what is facing the disciples. The sermon on the plain, could well be described as ‘The Sermon on the Level’. It is as if Jesus was levelling with the disciples by telling them what was facing them.

Every Christian, no matter how low they get, no matter how they weep, no matter how hungry they may be, no matter how unpopular they may be, and men may insult them and say all manner of things against them falsely; but they can say, with confidence:

“I’m the happiest person alive because of my future. I may be hungry now, but I’m going to be filled. I may be poor now, but, my Father owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and the wealth in every mine. They are my Father’s, so, they are mine as well.

“I may be weeping now, but I’m going to laugh. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

“I may be unpopular now, but that puts me among the prophets in heaven. I’ve got a mansion, just over the hilltop. In that bright land where you never grow old.”

The real disciple is called to the next level of commitment.

Here we find that there were two groups in front of Jesus. When we get to verse 27 we see their end. This is what we find: a crowd of His disciples Building on the Rock, and a great multitude of people Building on the Sand.

The Sermon on the Plain begins with some beatitudes. Jesus pronounces a blessing, and blessed means more than happy. Happy depends on happenings. Jesus is speaking here of real joy, not just happiness. Real joy, that will carry us through pain. Real joy has nothing to do with circumstances.

We are blessed, because God thinks of us in a certain way. To be blessed means that you are favoured by God.

But let’s look deeper at these blessings and woes. What do all these blessings have in common? They all share the kind of poverty that depends completely on God. We are blessed when we are God-centred, regardless of our earthly circumstances. Now each of these blessings are compared with woes:

- The Poor are Blessed, but woe to you who are rich.
- The Hungry are Blessed, but woe to you who are full for you shall hunger.

- Those Weeping are Blessed, woe to you who laugh now for you shall mourn and weep.
- Those Suffering now are Blessed, woe to you when all men speak well of you.

After Luke describes those who are blessed he tells us just why they are blessed. What Jesus is telling His disciples here is. When you experience these things: Poverty, Deprivation, Sorrow and Persecution:

23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy!

And the reason that they are to rejoice is simply 'Your reward is great in heaven'.

Here in Luke, the content of this teaching is fairly easy to understand. We are dealing with real poverty, hunger, weeping, and rejection. There is no suggestion that any of this is figurative.

Jesus repeatedly teaches that happiness depends not on what you have but on what you are; not on outer circumstances but on inner character; not on what you get but on what you give. Anyone is blessed if their character results in a right relationship with God

To be a disciple of Jesus means that we are to follow His teaching, observe His commandments, and most of all follow His example. When we understand this we will have no problem in seeing just what Jesus is teaching in this Sermon on the Plain.

During His time on earth Jesus suffered everyone of the things that He describes here: Poverty. Hunger. Weeping. And, He was hated, reviled and excluded.

Poverty: Paul tells us in his second letter to the Corinthians 8:9:

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

This is what Jesus said about His own wealth, Mt 8:20:

20 "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

By the sea of Galilee Jesus had to borrow a boat to preach from. When Jesus fed the multitude He had to borrow the bread and fish. To hold that last supper with His disciples He had to borrow a room. Even the grave that He was buried in was borrowed. Jesus knew just what it was like to be poor.

In Luke 4:2, this is what we read:

2 Being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

After forty days of having nothing to eat, that is real hunger.

Matthew 21:18 tells us of another occasion:

18 Now in the morning, as He returned to the city, He was hungry.

Jesus experienced hunger.

This is what we read in Luke 19:41:

41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it.

And again in John 11:35 we see that Jesus wept:

35 Jesus shed tears

In Second Peter 2:21, Jesus left us this wonderful example:

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

22 “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth.”

23 Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

24 Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness by whose stripes you were healed.

Jesus knew just what it was like, to be excluded, to be hated, and to be reviled against. But just look at the way that Jesus handled all this; what an example this is. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, Heb 12:2:

2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Looking unto Jesus, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. That is what He went through for our sakes. Today is perhaps a good time to be asking ourselves: ‘Just what are we doing for His sake?’

Throughout the gospels, the emphasis is on God with us: Emmanuel. Jesus stands on a level plain with us, showing us God’s Kingdom in the middle of our chaos. The only question is whether we will reject such amazing grace, or be willing to stand in that level place with Jesus and receive God’s blessing.

God sees you and wants to bless you and there isn’t anything you can do to change that. Nothing that you do can make God love you less, and nothing you do can make God love you more. God will not give up on you. God’s blessing is for you whether you’ve been a Christian all your life, or you are just starting out on your Christian walk. Jesus pronounces God’s blessing on you.

This doesn’t necessarily mean you won’t struggle but it does mean you can live through whatever struggle life brings you, knowing that Jesus Christ is with you and your reward is great in heaven.

Throughout the Sermon on the Plain Jesus points to eternity and commands us to be far-sighted, to live in light of heaven. He points to Himself as the standard of righteousness and the very foundation of our lives.

This is far different from the prosperity gospel preached by some today. This is not a promise of health, wealth, and happiness now. This is a teaching so costly and so

unpalatable that most of us will do anything to avoid it.

But these are the ones that the blessings directed to: you who are poor, hungry, sad, and expendable. Why? Because you have everything to look forward to, because the Kingdom of God is yours, because God is the God of those who have nothing but him.

When talking to the disciples, Jesus is talking to those who want to hear Him, those who are seeking after Him. These are people who willingly set aside the hopes of financial gain in order to be servants.

Peter and John left their nets. Matthew left his tax-collecting table. They gave up everything to follow Jesus, and Jesus called them blessed.

Now, in verse twenty four we look at the four woes immediately following the blessings. Jesus pronounces a series of woes (verses 24–26):

24 “But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation.

25 Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep.

26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.

The four woes must be understood in the light of Luke’s frequent contrasts between between time and eternity.

The things that Jesus pronounces woe on are the things that men value the most. To be rich, full, joyful and spoken well off by all men. These are the things that most men are striving for. But in the light of eternity, they are empty and meaningless. It is possible to have everything for time and nothing for eternity.

In this section of the sermon Jesus reverses the world’s way of looking at things. Heaven’s value system is far different from earth’s value system. We need to be very careful that we don’t get caught up in the world’s way of valuing things:

24 “But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation.

Woe unto you rich, the love of money is a snare. Money is a great servant, but a very poor master. It is hard for the rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

When Jesus announces woe to those who are rich, who eat well, and enjoy fame and admiration from people, He isn’t saying that wealth, good food, and popularity are bad things. What He is saying that when we are focused on satisfying our own appetites, we have turned our attention away from God, and our self-centeredness will be our spiritual downfall.

The bible says scary things about the rich, but there is absolutely no condemnation for being rich. The Bible does not say there is something evil about being wealthy.

Abraham was one of the wealthiest men in the world; Job was one of the wealthiest men in the world; Joseph of Arimathea was blessed of God with wealth, but wealth carries a peculiar danger, and it is this: when someone is really wealthy, it is easy for them to focus on the power of their wealth and on their independence when they

come to the place when they think that they can live without God.

But there comes a day when they come into situations where all the money in the world is not enough to get them out of.

Being rich is not the problem, the men in the bible that we mentioned who were very rich proved this. It was not their wealth that was the driving force in their lives. The thing that was most important to them was not their wealth, it was their relationship with God.

25 Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep.

‘Woe unto you that are full for you shall hunger.’ This saying points to men who used their wealth for self-indulgence, for the mere gratification of the senses. These are believers who eat in expensive restaurants, who live on the finest foods. Their motto is “Nothing is too good for the people of God!”

You that are full and careless of your poorer brethren’s needs, Jesus says that they will hunger in a coming day, that is, when rewards are given out for faithful, sacrificial discipleship.

‘Woe to you who laugh now.’ This woe is aimed at those whose lives are a continuous cycle of amusement, entertainment, and pleasure. They act as if life was made for fun and seem oblivious of the desperate condition of men and women outside of Jesus Christ.

Those who laugh now will mourn and weep when they look back over wasted opportunities, selfish indulgence, and their own spiritual impoverishment.

‘Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets.’ The true prophet speaks for God and is persecuted. The false prophet misrepresents God and is patronized by men. So if you’re going to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, all men will not speak well of you, and in order to be a Christian, you must do as Jesus did: make yourself of no reputation.

The false prophets were the most popular men in Israel. When men speak well of you. False prophets were often popular because they said what the people and the leaders wanted to hear. This woe is to you when everybody speaks well of you.

The only way to have a reputation where everybody speaks well of you is to wear two faces and to be a man pleaser; that is just a nice way of saying ‘You are two faced’.

Luke calls us to step aside from our preconceived notions of being blessed, and be willing to embrace the kind of upside-down reversals that Jesus presents. Luke’s version of the Beatitudes is meant to startle us out of our complacency, and inspire us to action.

When Jesus blesses the poor and hungry, the sorrowful and the ridiculed, he isn’t saying that we should all aspire to poverty, hunger, sorrow, or being verbally abused. What He is saying is that God is present with us, even when the world has abandoned us. That God loves us, even when everyone else hates us. We find blessing in seeking God, being hungry for God, and loving the people God loves.

I realise that it's difficult to feel 'blessed' when life is difficult; when bad and evil things around us seem to dominate everything, but all these things Jesus warned us about, Luke 21:9:

9 “But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.”

On to verse 26:

26 “Men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken.

27 “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

28 “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”

One of the promises God makes throughout the Bible is that He will bring judgment to the evil of this world. We find in the sermon on the plain there are promises made to those, who trust God. Jesus pronounces a blessing:

- on the poor (“yours is the kingdom of God”),
- the deprived (“you will be satisfied”),
- the sorrowful (“you will laugh”),
- and the persecuted (“great is your reward in heaven”).

When writing to the saints at Corinth, this is what Paul tells them, 1 co 2:9:

But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

In John 14 in the first three verses Jesus lifts the curtain just a little:

1 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.

Now listen to this:

2 “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

3 “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

That is the promise for those who are following Jesus. In Luke 17, Jesus gives this solemn warning to those who are not really following Jesus. The message translation brings this up in today's language

34 “On that day, two men will be in the same boat fishing one taken, the other left.

35 Two women will be working in the same kitchen one taken, the other left.”

We really need to check which group we are in; are we among those who will be taken or those who are left.