

QUALITY OF LIFE

LUKE 6:20-26

M.I. FOLLOWING CHRIST IS THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES LIFE WORTH LIVING.

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Quality Of Life

Luke 6:20-26

You will remember from last time that Jesus has just selected the 12 Apostles. He and the 12 came down from the mountain and came to a plateau where a large group of His followers and others had gathered. In other words, there were all three groups present; the 12 Apostles, the disciples, and the multitudes. Jesus was ministering to them all. People were being healed and demons were being cast out. It was a tremendous display of healing power. This morning will pick up the story as Jesus begins to preach. Before we get into the teachings of Jesus here in the Gospel of Luke, I want to state this yet another time publicly. Lest anyone think I'm smart or creative, let me set the record straight. Anything that I preach or teach, you can be sure I read it in a book or commentary, heard another preacher preach it, learned it in a classroom, or picked it up unconsciously. So basically everything I preach or teach, I've stolen from people much smarter than me. Our study through the Gospel of Luke will be no different. As we study through Luke, especially through the parables, I will be drawing heavily from Klyne Snodgrass' book entitled *Stories With Intent: A comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. I will be sure to mention this periodically as we study through Luke. As we study through Jesus' teachings, we must understand some of His techniques. One of His techniques is to shock us into the truth. In other words, He will take something that is accepted as common knowledge and state it to be false. The interesting thing is that it shocks us even today. For example, in today's text Jesus will say, "Blessed are you who are poor and hungry." Huh? In what culture, country, or universe can those who are poor and hungry claim to be blessed? Jesus is the master of this technique.

It seems to me that if we read the Bible honestly and carefully, we will be as shocked as the people who heard it the first time. If we read our Bibles carefully, we should be doing double-takes all the time. In today's text Jesus is going to challenge our value system. So many times we learn the truth about ourselves as we listen to little children. A five-year-old boy had a very precocious interest in motorcycles. Whenever he saw one, he would let out a howl of joy, accompanied by animated remarks like, "Look at that! Look at that! I'm going to get a motorcycle someday." His father's answer was always the same, "Not so long as I'm alive, you won't." One day, while the boy was talking to his friend, a brand new stylish bike zoomed by. He excitedly pointed it out to his friend and exclaimed, "Look at that! Look at that! I'm getting one of those - as soon as my dad dies."

It's sort of funny when children say those things because they don't know the value of anything. But it's sad when adults put anyone or anything above their relationship with God. Jesus invites us in this morning's text to evaluate what we think is important.

Over the years I have seen people put all sorts of things above their relationship with God. When a Christian marries a non Christian, he or she has put that man or woman above God. When people chase after worldly things such as money, power, or fame, they have put these things above God. When we put our personal comfort or pleasure as a first priority in our lives, we have put ourselves above God. We think there are so many things in this world that can make us happy but the main idea of this morning's text is this. FOLLOWING CHRIST IS THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES LIFE WORTH LIVING. If that's not our first priority in life, then we will never find lasting peace and happiness. I know there are many who believe that marrying the person of their dreams will bring them happiness. Some believe getting another job will make them happy. Some believe buying a certain car or house will bring them satisfaction in life. Jesus makes it clear that only following Him as our Lord and Savior is what brings meaning and happiness to life. Any other pursuit is to chase after idols.

A MESSAGE TO WOULD BE FOLLOWERS (VS 20)

In the first half of verse 20, Jesus address a message to would be followers. In other words JESUS CONSTANTLY INVITES US TO EXAMINE OURSELVES TO DETERMINE IF OUR FAITH IS AUTHENTIC OR COUNTERFEIT. If we don't value the things that Jesus values, then there is no reason to think we are Christians. Again, I'm talking about the Jesus of the Bible, not our made of version of Who Jesus is. I would like to challenge all of us as read through the Gospels to listen honestly to what Jesus is saying. I can tell you that in my personal study, it is not often that I can come away feeling good that I have been faithfully submitting to God's Word. And today's passage was no different.

Look at the beginning of verse 20. It says, "Looking at His disciples, He said." Jesus is talking to those who have committed themselves to following Him. It would include those who wanted to join Him, those who wanted to learn from Him, and those who dedicated themselves to Him wholeheartedly like the twelve apostles. I think that it is important that we understand that Jesus is talking to His disciples. We know that Peter, Andrew, James and John left their business behind in order to follow Jesus. Matthew left behind his lucrative tax collection business in order to follow Jesus. In addition, they also left their families behind. So in the crowd, there are disciples at all levels. There are people that range from a basic interest to people who have given up everything to follow Jesus.

In addition to the disciples, we learned last time that there were the multitudes present. Luke tends to describe this group of people as people who simply are there for curiosity. They have come to see Jesus do something spectacular. Some come to be healed. And some come just because they are interested in His latest teaching. And I'm sure some came to see the debates between Jesus and the religious leaders. We could describe them as spectators.

All of us here this morning could easily fit into one of the many categories we just described. Where are you? Are you just here to check out if what you have heard

about Jesus is true? Are you here searching for faith of some kind? Perhaps you are a disciple of Jesus, but have not yet seriously begun to grow. Or maybe you are here this morning because you are a follower of Jesus who has given up everything in order to follow Him. Whatever category you fall into, you are welcome into the examination. But I do want to emphasize this point or the passage may not make sense. Even though the multitudes are invited to listen in, Jesus is addressing His disciples. If you are a believer, then Jesus is speaking to us. Here is what He is doing. **JESUS CONSTANTLY INVITES US TO EXAMINE OURSELVES TO DETERMINE IF OUR FAITH IS AUTHENTIC OR COUNTERFEIT.**

FRUIT OF AUTHENTIC FAITH (VS 20-23)

Another thing I'd like us to notice as we study through the Gospel of Luke is that Jesus talks a lot about parties, feasts, celebration, rewards, banquets, and joy. We often find Jesus at these occasions. In verses 20-23 Jesus describes the fruit of authentic faith. This is something for us to truly understand and never forget. **TRUE JOY AND LASTING SATISFACTION CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN FOLLOWING JESUS.** First of all, let me deal with a few issues as to the fact that a lot of this material is found also in Matthew. Matthew devoted 3 chapters to Jesus' discourse. Luke's is abbreviated. We have already said that they could both be describing the same event. But it is also possible that Jesus preached this sermon many times and He may have changed it up depending on who He was speaking to at the time.

Do you remember earlier that I said Jesus often wants to shock us into the truth? In the second half of verse 20, Jesus describes Kingdom citizenship in a very strange way. He starts out with this incredibly insensitive statement. He says, "Blessed are you who are poor." Huh? What in the world is He saying? The word in Greek means happy. Maybe that's the problem. Let's change blessed with happy, "Happy are you who are poor!" No, that didn't seem to help. Can you see the confusion in everyone's eyes? Let me confuse the issue a little bit more. For Jews, being poor meant that you weren't being blessed by God. For them, a sign of blessing was that God gave you riches and land and children. These were all blessings from God. People who were poor, sick, and childless were considered to be under God's punishment.

So when Jesus and the disciples happen upon a blind man, they ask Jesus whose sin the blind man was being punished for; his own sin or that of his parents. The Greeks and Romans would also think that the gods were blessing you if you were rich, powerful, and successful. Slaves were poor and cursed. And society at large would certainly think that a person was really lucky if they were rich and really unlucky if they were poor. There was no one in Jesus' crowd that was ready to hear that. If we were honest, it probably shocks us as well. Let's say you didn't know where your next meal was coming from and Jesus blurts this out, "Be happy poor person, because yours is the Kingdom of God!" I would be asking questions like, "Are they handing out food and clothes at the kingdom? Are they handing out cash, paying rent and light bills there? If not, what use is it to me?" And it doesn't get much better from there. He will go on to say, "Blessed are those of you who

are hungry and blessed are those of you who weep and are persecuted.” If I were the Apostles who just gave up family and jobs to follow Jesus, I’d be getting more than a little bit nervous now. What is Jesus talking about?

First of all, let me just say that from the rest of Jesus’ teachings and from the rest of the Bible, Jesus is not saying something like poor people are automatically blessed by God simply because they are poor. In other words, simply because one is poor does not guarantee God’s love, God’s blessing, or God’s salvation. At Jesus’ death on the cross, He died in the middle of two petty thieves. We know that one went to heaven with Jesus. He didn’t get to heaven because he was poor. He went to heaven because He confessed Jesus as Lord. As we have seen already in Luke, he described being poor as having something in your life that prevented you from seeing God. It could be financial poverty, sickness, demon possession, or even riches that made one poor.

There is in no way that being poor is a good thing. Poverty brings misery. Nevertheless, Jesus said, the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor. If we were to take a peek at how Matthew recorded it, he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Okay, I think I can understand that much better. In other words, it takes humility to inherit the Kingdom of God. You see, there are rich people who are proud, middle class people who are proud, and poor people who are proud. It doesn’t matter how much or how little money one has. It all depends on their attitude. Pride is the one characteristic that makes us enemies of God. Pride says that I will do things my way. I will not submit to anyone. It is easy to see how rich people are often arrogant. They will not bow to anyone. But it’s shocking to see poor people who are proud. They only want you to help them the way they want to be helped. Think about this. The religious leaders that Jesus confronted the most were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees came from the middle to upper middle class and the Sadducees came from the wealthy class. But Jesus didn’t confront them about their money. He confronted them about their spiritual pride.

I don’t want to oversimplify this, but over the years my wife and I have talked about this a lot. Most times people are miserable. the cause can almost always be identified as some sort of pride they are holding on to. My wife commented to me once, “Life is easy if you can just kill your ego.” She’s right. And here, I think Jesus is saying that if we want to be a part of God’s Kingdom, we have to first die to ourselves. And it is something we have to be cognizant of every day. In modern day horror films, the villain is killed by the hero. It appears everything is fine, until we find the villain is not really dead and he comes to attack the hero one more time. The hero kills him and once again we are relieved; only to see the villain rise one more time in an attempt to kill our hero. I think this happens on average of three times in the movie. But in our battle against our prideful egos, it seems as if it has a thousand or more lives. We put it to death and it keeps rising again. It seems as if we have to kill it over and over again. But we truly will be blessed and we will enter God’s kingdom by humility. The Bible states it very clearly over and over again:

“God opposes the proud

but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6 / NIV) and:

“10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” James 4:10 / NIV).

In order for us to be saved and to become part of God’s family, we must acknowledge that nothing we can do, give, or be, will ever be of any use in gaining God’s love. We must admit that we are nothing and all our accomplishments are garbage. And humility is the way we remain in good standing in the Kingdom. The Apostles admitted how sinful they were and Jesus welcomed them into His inner circle. They entered through humility. It takes humility to receive grace by faith.

Next, in verse 21 Jesus throws out another shocking statement, “Blessed are you who hunger now.” How can someone who is starving consider themselves happy or blessed by God? There is neither blessing nor happiness in starving to death. If being hungry was truly the way to be blessed, then Jesus would not have condemned those in the parable where He said depart from Me you wicked ones because you did not feed My people when they were hungry. And He would not have blessed those who did feed His people when they were hungry. He would have reversed the blessing and curse if were truly a blessing to be hungry. Again, Matthew helps us out. He said that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be satisfied. So we can say again that Jesus is not talking about food here. In fact, Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard. Jesus often went to parties and ate good food and drank good wine. Again, Jesus is talking about the heart attitude of someone. Where it took a humbling of one’s ego to enter God’s Kingdom, it takes the ability to chase the right priorities in order to be satisfied. When we worry and stress over the wrong things which are worldly things, we never find peace but when we pursue holiness, God will make sure we are satisfied. Listen to how Jesus described it:

“33But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33 / NIV).

Let’s take a moment to examine our lives. Could I say that I am a humble person? Could I say that I am open to God’s conviction? Could I say that I am open to hear God speak to me through others? And can I say that when I examine how I spend my time and money, it would demonstrate that I am pursuing holiness? Or would I find that I am pursuing happiness in the world?

If we are honest with ourselves, wouldn’t we have to fall on our knees before God and say, “Have mercy on me O God, a sinner?” Once we measure ourselves according to the standards of God, how can we not be broken hearted? To think of how Jesus died for our sins and how pathetic we are in our following Jesus, should bring us to tears. That’s what Jesus is talking about when He says, “Blessed are you who weep.” He is not saying that people who are sad and depressed are blessed. He is not saying that people who are grieving over the losses of life are

blessed. Christians and non Christians alike grieve and cry. Jesus is talking here about grieving over our sin. Let me read the whole passage I quoted earlier from the book of James:

“7Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” James 4:7-10 / NIV).

The Bible is equally clear that when we truly repent, God is a faithful God and Jesus keeps this promise. The Apostle John said:

“9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9 / NIV).

I'd like you to notice this for a moment because so many people are living defeated Christian lives. If it is true that we enter God's Kingdom by grace through faith, and if it is true that we have exercised this faith and entered the Kingdom, then it seems to me that Jesus is saying here that we should be experiencing joy and lasting satisfaction.

But there is one more benefit Jesus wants to put out there. Again He shocks us in verses 22-23 by identifying us with the greats. He starts out again, “Blessed are you when men hate you, ... exclude you, and insult you.” Who could ever think of this as a means to happiness or blessing? Too many Christians say they are being blessed by God because people insult them or hate them because of their faith in God. Let me just say this up front. Some people who claim to be Christians are disliked by people and shunned because they are obnoxious and stupid. There will come a time when we will be persecuted for being faithful to our following in Christ, but most people who suffer today suffer because they are proud and obnoxious.

But when that time comes that we will need to suffer for Christ, we can do it with joy and expectation because we know that Jesus is comparing us to hall of fame players. Look at verse 23 carefully. When I hear Christians whine about how they are suffering for Christ, if it didn't seem so insensitive, I'd turn them to this verse. Jesus says that we should rejoice and leap for joy. I don't see that in Christians' lives today. The usual case is they will start by saying how they are working for God's glory and how people are persecuting them for it. And then will go on with the “woe is me” attitude. Listen, if we are suffering for following Jesus, a good test is the joy we express in it. If we make decisions in life, then we need to be adult enough to live with the results. If we are indeed suffering for Christ, then we should be experiencing peace and joy because God has considered us worthy enough to be compared to the hall of fame prophets. After the Apostles were arrested, jailed, beaten, and threatened, listen to how they were described right after:

"41The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41 / NIV).

Jesus shocked us into the truth that His kingdom values are much different than this world's. As we studied through this section, could we say that we are in tune with Jesus? Could we say that we value what Jesus values and we are living the way Jesus wants us to live? If we are then we should be some real happy people because TRUE JOY AND LASTING SATISFACTION CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN FOLLOWING JESUS.

FRUIT OF DISBELIEF (VS 24-26)

In verses 24-26 Jesus paints a bleak picture of the fruit of disbelief. Jesus goes on to shock us into the truth that **THOSE WHO REJECT JESUS BY CHASING AFTER THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED AND END UP MISERABLE.** Once again, I'd like us to slow down and see how shocking Jesus is. He uses this word of grief that just sounds painful. He uses the word ouai. That just sounds bad. The NIV translates the word woe. But I guess without being sacrilegious, we could translate it "bummer." So Jesus is saying, "Bummer, you guys who are rich, eat gourmet food, and enjoy the best entertainment; your life is going to be miserable." In what world does that make sense? It didn't make sense in Jesus' world and it doesn't make sense in ours. Again Jesus intended to shock His disciples into the truth. What He wanted them to see is that there are all sorts of gods competing for our attention. The world has convinced us that worshiping one or more of these gods will bring us happiness and fulfill all our desires for life. First of all, let's talk about the god of money as addressed by Jesus in verse 24. We have been taught the lie over and over again that money will make us happy. Usually it's some poor preacher like me talking to poor people like you. And when I say that, I'm sure there are a lot of you that would want to respond, "Maybe it won't make me happy, but it sure would help me look in a lot more places. I'd like to be the judge of that."

Even those of us who are Christians have come to think that if we just had a little more money to pay off our bills or to buy this one more thing, we'd be happy. But once again, we need to know how false gods operate. An idol will tempt us into thinking that if I just have this, it will satisfy me and make me happy. That is the seduction part. We then chase after the idol, in this case money, only to find that when we have it, it doesn't satisfy us. We always want just a little bit more. And so we keep chasing after it. It makes us tired and since we are never satisfied with what we have, we often become angry and depressed. Jesus said that the comfort we receive from chasing after this idol is all we are going to get because Jesus is not going share our worship with an idol. So when we chase after riches, whatever we get is all we are going to get. That's depressing because we know even by the recession we are in now, we can lose all we have in a moment. Listen to what Jesus says about money and wealth on earth as opposed to the pursuit of holiness:

“19”Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. 20Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. 21Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be. ...

24”No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:19-24 / NLT).

Jesus makes it painfully clear. One cannot love both He and money. Jesus demands exclusive worship. Money cannot buy lasting peace, joy, or happiness. Only God can provide that. How we view and use money is a good indication of how our relationship with God is. As we study through the Gospel of Luke, I think we will be surprised as to how much Jesus talks about money. If we pursue holiness, God will continually add to what we have and provide for our needs. If we pursue the idol of money, what we have is all we will get. God will not add to that.

But there are other idols in our modern day society that we worship. In verse 25 Jesus warns us not to worship the god of indulgence. We are a society that chases good times. We want to eat gourmet food, drink gourmet wine, go to the best clubs, and enjoy the best entertainment. We want the latest toys and we want to live pampered lives. We want to chase after happiness. Jesus makes it abundantly clear that He will not join Himself to any of our worldly pursuits. I have said this many, many times before. We have become mesmerized by the world and the things in this world. But like all other idols, we will spend our time and energy pursuing them. They will leave us drained, broke, and unsatisfied.

The financial, emotional, and physical drain on us is depressing enough. But Jesus says in verse 26 that when we chase after the idols in this world, we will be identified with the cursed. For those of you who read and study the Bible, you will immediately recognize that the false prophets are enemies of God and His people. The false prophets lure God’s people away from the faith. They encourage them to chase after the false gods of this world. It’s not enough that enemies of God satisfy themselves by their own rebellion and idolatry, they feel compelled to lead God’s people astray as well. They are miserable and they want others miserable as well. Listen to how Jesus described the false prophets of His day:

“13Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. 15Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Matthew 23:13-15 / NIV).

Did you catch that language by Jesus? He used the same word there as He did in this morning’s passage. He used that word woe to you. It really is a bummer to be identified with God’s enemies. And yet, if we chase after the things of this world,

that's exactly who we are, God's enemies. God will not share His glory with anything or anyone. Here is the sad truth. **THOSE WHO REJECT JESUS BY CHASING AFTER THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD WILL NEVER BE SATISFIED AND END UP MISERABLE.** God will see to that.

As I read through these teachings of Jesus, it causes me to be shocked. I am shocked at how lightly I take some of these warnings. I am shocked at how seductive the gods of this world are. However, I am never surprised how empty and worn out they leave us after chasing after them for a while. The one thing Jesus will make crystal clear throughout the Gospels is that He is the only way to salvation. He is the only way to find true happiness in life. In other words **FOLLOWING CHRIST IS THE ONLY THING THAT MAKES LIFE WORTH LIVING.**

We already studied through the passages where Jesus said that He cannot be mixed with anything else. In other words, we cannot love both the God and this world. We cannot love both God and money. We cannot love both God and the indulgences of this world. Whenever we try to love both, we will lose Jesus.

There is an old Jewish parable that illustrates this nicely:

"There was a reed flute which was passed down from the time of Moses. Crudely made, the instrument nevertheless produced wonderful music which inspired thousands over the years. Then, the priests of the temple decided such an heirloom should be decorated with fine gold to reflect the majesty of its music. But after the gold was applied, the flute produced only flat, metallic notes." If we humble ourselves and pursue holiness, if we dedicate ourselves to following Jesus and leave the things of this world behind, Jesus will produce beautiful music in and through our lives. If not, we will be miserable and there will only be sadness and dirges that come from us. The choice is ours.