

## **Series Gospel of Luke**

### **This Message The Radical People of God's Kingdom**

#### **Scripture 6:17-38**

In chapters 4 and 5 of Luke's Gospel account, the emphasis was on the self-revelation of Jesus as the Messiah. In these chapters Jesus revealed His deity and authority through a sequence of public presentations. As explained by Luke, these presentations began in Nazareth, where Jesus identified Himself with one of the prophecies of Isaiah. Subsequently Jesus revealed Himself through teaching, through a series of miracles of healing and exorcism of demons, by demonstrating His power over nature, and, in a dramatic episode in the presence of religious leaders, over sin.

The miracles were visible proofs of Jesus' authority and power, but Jesus' priority was "to preach the good news of the kingdom of God." He said "that was why He had been sent." Jesus' preaching and teaching was focused on the reestablishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

The portion of Scripture we will think about today is Luke's version of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. This is the portion in which the laws of God's kingdom are proclaimed, and in which the characteristics of people who are members of the kingdom are described. A longer version of this teaching is in the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus presented variations of the same material about the kingdom on many different occasions. After all, the proclamation of the kingdom of God was the reason He was sent to earth. The text for today will be divided into two parts.

#### **Read Luke 6:17-26**

In setting the scene, Luke mentions two groups of people. One group was comprised of "disciples." This included the twelve men Jesus had selected to be His close companions, along with others who at that time wanted to be closely identified with the Messiah. The second group was the multitude of individuals who had come from near and far to "hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases." Jesus directed His teaching primarily to the disciples, although everyone could hear His words.

Verses 20 through 24 describe the “blessedness” and “happiness” of individuals who have a share in the kingdom of God. These beatitudes have a spiritual, not a material, orientation. The Greek word translated “blessed” or “happy” describes the person who is uniquely favored by God and therefore, in some sense, satisfied, joyful, and content. These verses do not explain how to become blessed and happy. Rather, Jesus was describing the character of people after they had come under the gracious rule of God and who were already experiencing the benefits of the kingdom and, hence, “blessed” and “happy.”

Jesus emphasized that the citizens of God’s kingdom were to be very different in attitudes and behaviors from people who were outside the kingdom. The good news was that a transformed life, a new “character,” was available to those who belonged to the kingdom of God.

The word “poor” in the Greek language indicated people who had to beg for whatever they needed. They were people who understood their total dependence on God for the ultimate blessings of life. Because they were without resources of their own, they could only plead for God to be merciful to them. Poverty of spirit is an absolute prerequisite for everyone who wants to enter the kingdom of heaven. If we cling to illusions about our own spiritual resources and merit, we will never receive from God what we need in order to be saved from our sins. Kingdom people must look to God for all their needs, especially spiritual, but also physical. When we pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth” ... and “Give us this day our daily bread,” we must think of ourselves as beggars, asking God for help.

Notice that the verbs in verse 20 are in present tense: “Blessed are you,” and “yours is the kingdom.” Jesus did not say “yours will be.” The point is that kingdom blessings begin in this life and carry over into eternity. Hence, those who are “poor” are able to rejoice even in the midst of their earthly destitution because they are already experiencing the benefits of the kingdom.

In verse 21 Jesus mentioned two other categories of people — those who were hungry and those who wept. Individuals who are “hungry” in a spiritual sense have an appetite for God’s provisions, and they are eager to receive the gifts of God’s grace. Jesus assured His listeners that they would be satisfied. Those who “weep” are those who grieve over their circumstances, perhaps over their own sins, perhaps over the injustices and wicked behaviors of people in the world.

Weeping is here associated with prayer — a pleading that conditions might be better. Parents weep over their disappointments concerning their children. Jesus wept over the pride and arrogance of the people of Jerusalem. Believers weep over the dishonor shown to their God. Jesus promised that people who presently weep over spiritual conditions will (future tense) “laugh.” Circumstances will someday change to become what God wants them to be, and that will be an occasion of laughter and rejoicing. Both parts of verse 21 emphasize the contrast between present day situations and future blessings.

The idea of laughter and joy is carried into the next two verses in which the theme is persecution. Jesus expressed the radical idea that hatred, exclusion, insults, and rejection, when directed at those who follow Him, was a cause for rejoicing. The rejection of individuals who are identified with the “Son of Man” will be proof of their relationship with God. Such individuals will relive the experience of the Old Testament prophets, who were also persecuted and rejected. According to Jesus, there are rewards awaiting those who endure persecution. Jesus was promising His followers two seemingly contradictory truths: they would be very happy because of their kingdom membership and they would also be often in trouble, having to endure persecution.

Verses 24 through 26 are the point-by-point contrast of the section we have just been thinking about. “Woe” is a term meaning “affliction” and “distress.” It is the opposite of “blessedness.” “Woe” comes to the “rich” because of their self-centeredness and pride. “Rich people” are described in Scripture as self-sufficient, and as disregarding spiritual realities in favor of material possessions. The implication is that they have chosen immediate gratification of their desires over any concern about future consequences. They do not acknowledge their need of God. Rich people often have a high degree of popularity in the world, but this only proves that such people are not at peace with God. They might “laugh” and “be happy” about their exalted position in this life, but there will be a day of reckoning.

Jesus was using sarcasm when He said that such people “have already received their comfort.” In other words, they have nothing better to look forward to. They can only experience what this world can offer. By focusing only on the competitiveness of life in the world they will miss out on the benefits of the spiritual realm. Most wealthy and powerful people will admit to an inner emptiness and a lack of real happiness because worldly possessions are never completely satisfying.

The final point concerns the popularity of prophets. In the Old Testament, the only prophets who were popular with the people of Israel were false prophets because they only spoke the things that people wanted to hear. The prophets who listened to God and lived in obedience to God were invariably at odds with the general population because their task was to call attention to evil behavior and to warn people about approaching judgment. Theirs was not the way to be on the good side of their listeners. Just like the prophets of old, people today who seek to please God will be at odds with those who do not follow the ways of God. This, of course, was the situation with Jesus. Like all the true prophets, He was repudiated by His own people.

To summarize this first section, Jesus' words in verses 20 through 26 described, first, some of the characteristics of individuals who were admitted into the kingdom of God, and secondly, the fate of those who, on account of their attitudes and lifestyles, could have no part in the kingdom. In the next section of this teaching, Jesus described the attitudes and behaviors which kingdom people must have as they live out their years here on earth and interact with their fellowmen.

### **Read Luke 6:27-38**

The foundation of all the instructions in this portion of Scripture is "love." The kind of "love" that Jesus described was "agape love," which is defined as "a Godlike concern for someone irrespective of his or her attractiveness and irrespective of the likelihood of any reciprocation in kind" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary, page 893*). In simpler terminology, God's love is given whether there is any hope of response or not.

In His teaching, Jesus mentioned some specific methods to show "love:" "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you." There was no doubt about the quality of love to which Jesus was referring. It was definitely of a higher quality than that of humans.

As radical as these statements seem to us, the Jews would have considered verses 27 through 30 totally "off the wall." The Jews understood the divine commandment to love one's neighbor (*Leviticus 19:18*), but they had a very narrow definition of who a neighbor was. For them, a neighbor was a fellow-Jew who was in good standing in their community. The self-righteous Jews looked down on sinners, publicans, Samaritans, beggars, lepers, etc.

Jesus condemned the narrow interpretation the Jews had about the meaning of “love.” According to Jesus, even one’s enemies should be treated with affection and good-will. Even if a bad person acted with injustice and committed an act of violence, no revenge was permitted. Genuine love means that the member of God’s kingdom must always do what is best for the enemy. And to close the argument, Jesus cited words which we now refer to as the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do to you.”

In verses 32 through 36 Jesus gave a series of comparisons between kingdom people and people of the world. Jesus pointed out that there was nothing particularly praiseworthy about being kind and loving to those who were in a position to return love and reciprocate with kindness. Jesus said that even “sinners” did that. However, in order for a person to be an authentic member of the kingdom of God, he had to “love the enemy, do good to them,” and to meet their needs without expecting to receive anything in return. Jesus said that the person who would do this would prove himself worthy to be “the son of the Most High.” Such a person would be acting exactly like the Father acted toward His rebellious and evil creatures. Scripture informs us that God loved sinners, His enemies, so much that He gave the most valuable gift He could give, His Son to be a sacrifice to redeem them.

The kingdom person must be merciful, just as the Father is merciful. This means that the attitude and behavior of kingdom people is measured against the perfection of God Himself. Verses 37 and 38 give us more information about the kind of mercy which is expected of kingdom people. They must not judge or condemn others. Instead they must forgive those who are ungrateful and wicked. Only God knows and understands the circumstances of every person, and only He is in the appropriate position to determine the guilt or innocence of any person.

Individual humans do not have the right to appoint themselves as judges and juries over their fellow-men. This does not rule out the need for governmental courts of justice, nor does it rule out the need to oppose evil actions, but verse 37 does caution us to not encroach on God’s right to be the ultimate authority to judge and condemn people for their ungodly behaviors. Kingdom people are not to hold judgment against the person in such a way that ministry to them and reconciliation to God become impossible. Disciples are to bear good news to all people, not hold grudges. In place of judgment and condemnation of ungodly behavior, Jesus said that the kingdom person must be forgiving.

As a further expression of mercy, the kingdom person must be a generous giver. Jesus indicated that God responds to people in similar fashion to the way they treat others. If we are generous, then God will give back to us generously. Many years ago I heard the story about the gardener who, in spite of modest resources, gave generously to everyone who approached him for help. As he explained, "I shovel out my assets to others and God shovels His resources back to me, and God has a bigger shovel than I do." That captures the essence of verse 38 very well.

That's why Jesus said, "For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." That statement applies not only to giving, but to judgment, condemnation, and forgiveness. We must not judge so we will not be judged. We must not condemn so that we will not be condemned. We are to forgive so that we will be forgiven and we are to give generously so that we will receive abundantly. God does notice when we authentically live out His character in the world. When we faithfully follow His ways, He will honor us for reflecting His values. Our behavior will prove our identity as kingdom people.

The way in which Jesus lived on earth made it clear that he took the standards of the kingdom very seriously. He demonstrated "radical love" for mankind — He left heaven's glories for us. In being obedient to the Father, Jesus had to deny Himself for the sake of others. He was continually exposed to abuse. He was hated, excluded, insulted, and rejected. When his enemies unjustly nailed Him to the cross, He did not seek retribution, although He had the power to do so. Instead, He prayed for their forgiveness. Throughout His lifetime on earth, Jesus was more interested in giving something that would build up rather than in retrieving what had been taken. He was more concerned about the glory and honor of God than about Himself. He was more concerned about the restoration of the broken relationship between sinful, estranged humanity and God than He was in punishment and pay back.

Jesus understood that He was introducing new and radical ideas to His listeners. He understood that the culture of the Jews had been shaped by centuries of misinterpretations of the Old Testament Law and misrepresentations of the purposes of the Law. Jesus was trying to reorient His listeners to the truth of God and the reality of how things worked in God's kingdom.

The question we must ask ourselves is, “How radical is our lifestyle?” Do we think we can be happy in the world’s way, or in the way of Jesus? Are we genuine members of God’s kingdom?

Perhaps this week we should look for ways to demonstrate kingdom attitudes and behaviors to others:

1. By admitting our dependency on God,
2. By seeking to please God in every possible way,
3. By forgiving the person who offends us,
4. By not judging or condemning others,
5. By giving generously of our time and resources.