

Epiphany 6 February 16, 2025

PS 1 1R Jeremiah 17:5-10 2R 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 GS Luke 6:17-26

Did he Really Say That?

The Gospel reading that we just heard is Luke's version of the Sermon on Mount that in Matthew's Gospel. Luke records it as the Sermon on the Plain, on a level spot. Gathered there was a great crowd composed of three distinct groups according to Luke. There was a great crowd of disciples, people who had heard him teach and came to learn more from Jesus. The twelve apostles, a special group of disciples named in the previous verses. They were the ones called to catch people. They were called to be special ambassadors of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. The third group was defined as a great multitude of people. These were Jews and Gentiles, not necessarily believers, who came to hear Jesus and be healed. They were healed of their physical diseases and any unclean spirits that troubled their souls. There were old and young, diseased, depressed, and damaged people, and Jesus healed them all.

Then he began to speak to his disciples, the ones who came to here his teachings:

How blest are those among you are the lowly poor, yours is the Kingdom of God.

Woe to those of you are rich. You already got yours.

How blest are those among you who are hungry, you ill be filled.

Woe to those full now, you will be hungry.

How blest are those among you who are weeping, you will laugh.

Woe to those among you who laugh now, you will mourn.

How blest are those among you who are being persecuted because of me, soon you will leap for joy.

Woe to those among you that everyone speaks well about, you did same for the prophets of old.

I wonder how those words were heard among the apostles gathered there on that day.

Imagine:

Simon Peter – "Are we supposed to write this down?"

Andrew – "Are we supposed to remember this?"

James – "Is there going to be a test on this?"

Philip – "Do those other disciples have to learn this too?"

Bartholomew – "What are your real your goals and objectives?"

John – "How much longer is this going to take?"

Matthew – "He can't really be serious, can he?"

Judas – "What does this have do with real life?"

One of Pharisees who was present – "We've never done it that way before!"

Their reactions probably are the same as ours would have been. The times haven't changed much. Our reactions would probably not been much different than those.

Recently an editor of a Christian Evangelical publication lamented that the leaders in his congregation had come to him and asked that he not preach on the Sermon on the Mount, because those statements were antiquated and would not work in today's world. Now those folks pride themselves on being Bible believing Christians who accept every word in the Bible as God's exact words. But they want to overlook and exclude these words of Jesus! And they not alone. Here we are two millennia after Jesus spoke these words, and we still scratch our heads in shock when we hear them. Did Jesus really say that? By our standards those principles just won't work. That's not the way to success in our world. The poor, the hungry, and the weeping are losers. Recently one of our politicians called them parasites on our society. In our world it is the rich, the famous and the successful who are the glorified winners.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow developed what he called the "Hierarchy of Needs". He described it as a pyramid toward self-fulfillment. The most basic human needs, food, water, shelter, safety, and community (family, friends, intimacy) were at the base of the pyramid. He posited that we can't be happy and blest if we are struggling just to survive. We see that every day. Maslow reminds us that we need more from life than just simply survival to be fulfilled. We need meaning in our lives. We need to contribute, to accomplish, to succeed. We need to grow and evolve. We have a need to love and care for others.

From the opening chapters of his Gospel, Luke writes about the revolutionary spirit of Jesus' mission. Luke writes that Jesus came to challenge our value system that the world has adopted since the dawn of

time. Jesus challenged the principalities and powers of his day, just as the prophets of old did in their day. Jesus challenged the idea that power and domination was the way to success. That's what these Beatitudes are all about.

A world where trillions of dollars are spent for weapons of war, is not the world God envisioned for us. A world where its rich resources are exploited purely for profit is not the world God envisioned for us. A world where hunger and disease are spread while available aid is denied is not the world God envisioned for us.

Jesus tells the crowds that blessedness is not found in wealth, self-satisfaction, or public opinion. Blessedness, contentment, fulfillment, and peace are found in loving, caring, sharing, and forgiving. True blessedness is found in stripping away the things that insulate and isolate us from one another and the pain that surrounds us.

Discovering God, who cares enough about us to call us to a more excellent way, is the path to being blessed. How much of our lives is consumed in pursuit being comfortably numb. Drugs, alcohol, the internet, sports can all be used to shield us from the harsh realities of life. Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, and others all recognize our desire to numb the pains of reality. Jesus recognizes the brokenness of our world and calls us to follow him to true blessedness. He reminds us how God uses broken things to bring hope, healing, and abundant life. God takes broken soil and produces a crop, broken clouds to bring rain, broken grain to bring bread, broken bread to bring strength. Remember that today as we gather together to share the broken body and shed blood of Christ given to us that we might know how blest we are. Amen.