

The Gospel Of Luke

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’²⁰

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’(Luke 4:16-21. NRSV)

Message 11

Upside Down Attitudes

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Luke 6:20-36

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Introduction:

Last week we talked about the in between kingdom. This is a very unique time that we are living in. We are living between the first and second comings of Christ, a time that the Old Testament prophets never even knew would exist, a time that the Apostle Paul called “a mystery”, a time that all of the Bible writers agree is short and could end at any time. This is today. This is not this week, this is not this year. Weeks and years have an assumed duration to them. Today is just today. It exists but there is no guarantee of tomorrow. This TODAY is the space where the in between kingdom is born. This is an unusual time. God has deferred his justice but not deleted it. A day will come, a day after today, when the wrath of God will break forth like a flood and overwhelm the earth and bring vengeance and payback, what the Bible calls “recompense”. Everyone who has suffered evil on God’s behalf will be paid back with comfort and blessing, everyone who has done evil in rebellion against God will be paid back with punishment and exile from God’s presence. But that’s not today. Today is the season of favour. Today is the age of grace when the priority, the emphasis is on the patience of God that all men might be saved. So, how do we conduct ourselves in such a strange and irregular day? That is

what Jesus gives us now, he gives us a set of upside down attitudes for the in between kingdom of today. Open your Bibles to Luke 6:20-36:

Then he looked up at 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 will be filled.

'Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² 'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors 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 will be hungry.

'Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ 'Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷ 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (NRSV)

I don't want to overwhelm you with background this morning because this material is so practical and so useful to us right now in this place where we live that I don't want to short change it. But to appreciate it you need to at least understand how counter-intuitive this all is. Put a tassel in your Bible and just quickly flip to Deuteronomy 28. We don't have time to read the whole chapter, but Deuteronomy 28 is the core DNA sequence of the entire Old Testament world view. Jesus was speaking to Jews and this was the fundamental lens through which a Jew understood reality so we need to get this. Let me read you just the first four verses:

If you will only obey the Lord your God, by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth; ²**all these blessings** shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the Lord your God:

³ **Blessed** shall you be in the city, and **blessed** shall you be in the field.

⁴ **Blessed** shall be the fruit of your womb, the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your livestock, both the increase of your cattle and the issue of your flock. (Deuteronomy 28:1-4. NRSV)

The basic worldview of the Bible is that if you walk closely with God, in his ways and in his word, you will know blessing after blessing because God's ways are good and lead to life, amen? Amen. Deuteronomy 28 goes on to list 6 blessings that you can expect that together represent the total breadth and all encompassing nature of the blessings of God. He's going to bless your family, your business, your health, your field, your animals etc. That's what the word "shalom" means by the way. We usually just translate it as "peace" but it really means "blessedness in all of life". All of these blessings have to do with prosperity and welfare. Now you need to understand that these blessings and the curses that follow were primarily understood by the Jews as SIGNS, as indicators of where they stood with God. If you were in right relationship with God, generally you will know this by the abundance of blessings in your life. Your kids will be well behaved and successful, your business will be prospering etc. If bad things start to happen, this is a SIGN that you have somehow lost your good relationship with God. That's why the Bible says:

They shall be among you and your descendants as a sign and a portent for ever. (Deuteronomy 28:46. NRSV)

Think of them as being like those rumble strips on the side of the highway. If your life starts to rumble you are in danger of leaving the road and entering the ditch. Right? Right. Now notice that it says that these signs are eternal, they will never be abolished. So we are not surprised that all of the descriptions of heaven, of the eternal kingdom are all about what? The total breadth of the blessings and the prosperity enjoyed by the people of God. Streets of gold, no tears or sadness, banquets, feasts and mansions. Total, all encompassing prosperity as a sign that we are living in the presence of Almighty God. These signs go on for ETERNITY. BUT. There is a momentary suspension of this reality. There is an in between kingdom.

So here comes Jesus and he says in essence: "the normal way of things is suspended. The justice of God is being partially deferred so as to extend the season of grace and Gospel so things will not work like they normally would. This is an in between kingdom and you will need to prepare yourself for some unusual realities. Now a sign that you are walking close to God in this season will be not prosperity, but poverty, not riches, but want, not fame, but infamy, not ease but affliction. This does not mean you are cursed. It means you are serving God faithfully in a very unusual time." Do you get that? Ok then, let's look at what Jesus says will be the signs that we are walking with God and serving him faithfully. These "beatitudes" as they are sometimes

called are the proper attitudes we need to have in this unusual time and they are themselves the signs that we are walking just where God wants us to walk. This is who we should be, and if we aren't like this, then we have crossed the rumble strip and we are face down in the ditch. There are six of them, just like in Deuteronomy 28, surprise, surprise and we'll hit each on in its turn. I've used two English words to translate each concept because English is nowhere near as precise as Greek.

Attitude #1: Humility and Poverty

Jesus said famously: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." That Greek word *pto-khos* is trying to convey more than just material poverty which may explain why Jesus sometimes mixed up his wording when giving this teaching as he did in Matthew 5 where he says:

'Blessed are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3. NRSV)

Jesus is telling us to expect poverty and humble circumstances as proof that we are right where God wants us in the in between kingdom. He says: "If you are experiencing EXALTED circumstances and remarkable prosperity BEWARE! You are on the rumble strip and you are about to land face first in the ditch!" In the same style as Deuteronomy he presents positive and negative teaching for the first several markers. Blessed are the poor he says, and CURSED are the rich. Woe to you who are rich now, verse 24 says, for you are having your recompense. There will be nothing for you from God's hand at the last day, Jesus says, you are having your cake now. That's too bad for you, brother, because God makes really good cake.

Alright, that's what it means, now just sit back and settle under that for a minute. What does it mean then, that so many Christians today preach and believe in the prosperity Gospel? What does it mean when the best selling Christian books are by Joel Osteen who teaches that you can have your best life NOW, that you can have it all NOW and by Joyce Meyers who goes to the bathroom on a GOLD toilet seat that she bought with her millions of dollars in book revenue? It means that the church has danced right across the rumble strip and is face down in the ditch.

Why do you think God allowed the single greatest loss of wealth in the history of humankind in 2007/8? Was it perhaps to shake our tree a little bit church? Was it perhaps to remind us that we were not promised wealth and exaltation in this life, rather we were told to expect economic hardship and humble circumstances? In the Day of Wrath when God's judgement begins to fall on the earth and open warfare erupts between the coming kingdom of God and the dying kingdom of man, look at what the Bible says will happen to Christians:

¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that **no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark**, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. (Revelation 13:16. NRSV)

The Bible says that in the last days God will allow Satan to cut Christians completely out of the global economy. Everything the devil does in Revelation is prefaced with the words: "It was given to him". Satan can do nothing that does not serve the purpose of God and it serves the purpose of God in the last days to cut Christians out of the world economy because they have obviously fallen way too deep into it. We passed a rumble strip somewhere way back now church. Let's get out of the ditch ahead of the wrath. Let's learn to survive in humble circumstances. Let's stop demanding our best life now. My best life will be in the eternal kingdom. My life in the in between kingdom will be humble and lowly, of that I am sure.

Attitude #2: Restraint and Contentment

Jesus goes on to say:

²¹ 'Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

²⁵ 'Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry. (Luke 6:21,25. NRSV)

If you are in the middle of the road, exactly where God wants you to be, you will likely be hungry, take that as a good sign. If you are on the rumble strip, halfway into the ditch, you will notice that you are full and satisfied. That's a bad thing. What is being called for here is restraint and contentment. When fulfilling the appetites of the body is our primary concern we are not walking with God. The Apostle Paul says that this is the primary characteristic of pagans:

¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:19. NRSV)

This is why fasting is such an important activity for the 21st century Christian. We are the fattest, most gluttonous, sexually addicted pagans the world has ever seen. When a Christian fasts, he is saying to the Lord: “I am living for the next world father, even while I live in this one. Like Abraham I am looking forward to a city whose architect and builder is the Lord God. I am living with restraint and contentment Lord, focused on the task at hand.” The Apostle Paul lived this out, he said:

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:6-9. NRSV)

If you WANT to be rich, you are on the rumble strip. Be content with little. The Greek word in Luke 6 that is translated as “hungry” means “to have to toil for your bread”. It doesn’t imply starvation, it implies getting by with just enough.

How are we doing with that church? You see, this is why I get frustrated with most of the conversation around tithing in the church today. Most of the conversation about tithing today is really about answering the question: “How little can I give before God is angry enough at me that he will throw me into hell?” In the New Testament, when they knew God and when they knew the great salvation they had been given and the great riches that awaited them in glory, they asked a different question. If you listen closely you can hear their question in this story:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. ³³With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35. NRSV)

Do you hear the question? The question wasn’t “How little can I give before I go to hell” it was “How much can I give before my children starve to death? I don’t want my children to starve to death, but I would like to give as much as I can up to that point.” That’s a whole different place to where we are now church. The demographers tell us that the North American Evangelical church gives less money to the Lord’s work today as a percentage of income than their

grandparents did during the Great Depression. We're living for this world now and that has to change.

Attitude #3: Sorrow and Perspective

Jesus says next:

'Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

'Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep. (Luke 6:21,25. NRSV)

The word used for "weep" implies weeping for the dead. Jesus is saying: "If your heart breaks for the lost and dying of this world, you are right in the centre of where you need to be. If you are having a rip roaring good ride, you are face down in the ditch." Jesus was called a man of sorrows but a lot of us Christians don't seem to be too tore up about the state of the world. We take 6 weeks of vacation every year, pamper ourselves with every good thing, watch 3 hours of sitcom T.V. and then profess to care about the lost. I'm not yelling at you right now, I'm yelling at me. I hate that I lose perspective on this issue again and again over the course of my life.

There was a time when my heart had grown cold to the lost because my eyes had grown shut.

You can live in places where the lost are hidden away behind layers of wealth and hypocrisy and you can almost forget that everyone you saw today is hurting and going to hell. Then God fixed me by his grace. We started fostering. He brought me the casualties of a broken and lost world and he put them in my home. They slept in our beds and ate our food and they broke our hearts. We looked into the eyes of a man who had raped six of his children, one of whom we had come to love and we CRIED OUT TO GOD: "Why is the world like this? Why is it that a man can be abused and raped and sodomized by his father and then turn around and do the same things to his little babies? Why won't you even let me hate that man father? Why does he have to be a victim too? What can be done to fix this mess I spend so much time and money trying not to see? Use me Lord. Here I am, send me."

I don't want to ever feel my heart growing cold to the lost again. It's not as warm as it used to be, I'm a casualty of a busy schedule and a big flock that has many needs. I don't live with the lost like I used to. "Lord open my eyes to see this world, this city as you see it. Close my eyes to

distractions and deceptions. Break my heart for the things that break your heart, Lord Jesus I pray.”

Attitude #4: Infamy and Endurance

We’ll need to move faster now, but Jesus also says:

22 ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

26 ‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:22,26. NRSV)

“If people hate your guts, want nothing to do with you and have lots of bad things to say about, you are right where God wants you. If everyone loves you and thinks you are a rock star, you are face down in the ditch.” That’s counter-intuitive isn’t it? Remember that Jesus is teaching an unusual suspension in the way things normally work. Deuteronomy 28 promised:

⁹The Lord will establish you as **his holy people**, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. ¹⁰**All the peoples of the earth shall see** that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be **afraid of you**. (NRSV)

Or rather “they shall be in awe of you”. How’s that working out Christians? Jesus says: “In the in between kingdom, the peoples of the earth will not stand up and say: “Hey look everybody, it’s the HOLY ONES of God! Ooooooooooh! Awwwwwww!” They are more likely to throw dung at you.”

This one concerns me church. We seem to have an obsession with being well thought of, particularly in Canada. I’ve had people leave this church because they were worried that I might offend their friends. Not that they were offended, they would always tell me that they understood what I was saying, but they were worried how other people might hear it. What is this obsession with P.R.? It is a bad thing when everyone out there thinks were great, it is to be expected that we will be misunderstood, misrepresented and much maligned. We don’t get a ticker tape parade, we get a Roman cross. Take it or leave it, just stop complaining about “the persecution” we are experiencing. What did we expect? We are following a guy who was executed, we should expect similar treatment. Servants are not above the master.

Attitude #5: Grace and Benevolence

Jesus now adopts a more narrative style saying:

do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you ... ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31. NRSV)

We touched on this last week so we'll only summarise here by remembering that Jesus told us that in this season of deferred justice, the emphasis needs to be on grace, on LETTING IT GO and on winning others over with our good works of benevolence. I think we need to say "let it go" again, just to make sure we're still tracking with the work from last week. Ready? 1,2,3: "LET IT GO." Hallelujah! Doesn't that feel good? Leave room for the wrath of God! Free your hands for the work of the Gospel! Put down those offense and take up your cross and follow me! PTL! Now that your hands are free from all those heavy burdens of offense, you are free to give a cup of cold water in Jesus' name. You are free to be the Good Samaritan, free to GIVE people into the kingdom of God.

Jesus said that would be what the church is all about in this in between kingdom, he said:

¹⁴ 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that **they may see your good works** and give glory to your Father in heaven. ⁹Matthew 5:14-16. NRSV)

Church, listen to me, good works have been given a bad name in the church over the last several years. We have so overdosed on the grace of God that we now think that God's grace frees us from the need of performing good works. "I'm saved by grace, baby, not by works. Don't try to hang me up on "DO" I am into "BE"." What does that even mean? I hear people spewing that kind of nonsense all the time: "Christianity is about being not doing". What an incredibly selfish and heartless thing to say. A person who says that is basically saying: "Christianity is about me BEING saved, it isn't about me DOING anything that might benefit another human being." That's why the church has become irrelevant over the last two decades because we don't DO anything, we all just sit around enjoying our salvation. It is our GOOD WORKS that will light up this city. The single moms of this city don't need to hear me say: "I'm praying for you today! I wish you well!" They need to see some action out of this church. They need some food for

their kids, some help with parenting and some money for hydro. They need the truth taught to them about relationships so that the next one can be the last one and they can build a stable home for their kids. All the great people in the Bible were BE-ERS and DO-ERS. Nehemiah prayed AND set a guard, he worshipped AND sharpened his sword. David trusted the Lord AND gathered five smooth stones. The Apostle Paul flowed in the Spirit AND worked his fingers to the bone making tents to support the work of the ministry. We need to focus completely on good works my friends, saved by God's grace, and we need to free our hands by releasing all offenses. We don't have time for them and the poor and the lost of this city cannot afford our distraction. And all God's people said, amen.

Attitude #6: Love and Charity

Finally, Jesus closes by saying:

'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. (Luke 6:32-35. NRSV)

This is typical Jesus! Jesus will often teach a bunch of things and then summarise and reiterate it by saying: "LOVE! Love! Do all of the things I've just told you and you will be doing love. Love is the fulfillment of the law." Do you want to know that you are on the centre of the road and not face down in the ditch? Love. But it isn't silly, sentimental love that Jesus is calling us to, it's crazy love. The kind of love where you give things to people who can't give you anything in return. It's the kind of love where you invite people into your home for dinner knowing that they will never be able to invite you into their homes to return the favour. It's when you help someone who will never be able to repay you. Why? Because you are hungry for the payback of God. Because you believe that this in between kingdom is not yet the forever kingdom, though it is the first act. The forever kingdom of God is coming and all that is freely given here, will be returned with interest there so LIVE LARGE and LOVE EXTRAVAGANTLY. Peter learned this math from Jesus in Matthew 19:

Then Peter said in reply, 'Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?' ²⁸Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold,* and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:27-29. NRSV)

It should be easy for us to LOVE like this church, giving it all away, living lives of dangerous charity because we know the math. We know the math and we're seeing the results. We've seen literally now, HUNDREDS of people come to Christ over the last few years and many of those people have been loved into the kingdom of God. Through Family Circle, recover, now the OLC program, Children's Ministry, Camp ministry and other programs we have extended LOVE to the people of this city. Not just the words of love, ACTS of love. Grocery bags of love, Christmas presents of love, MINIVANS of love, clothes of love, FOOD of love. And people have come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. More came last week and more will come this week by God's grace and through the extension of Christian love. That is what we need to be about. If you're on it, then you're in THE WAY of Jesus. If you are holding offense and withholding your gifts, you are face down in the ditch.

Conclusion:

I love this passage. God's Word is good. It doesn't get any clearer than this folks. We've got a job to do and a path to walk in this in between kingdom. Don't worry about finding it because it's clearly marked. You'll know you are on it if you are poor and experiencing humble circumstances. You'll know you're on it if you are practising restraint and contentment. If your heart breaks for the lostness you see all around you, you are right where you need to be. If your ears are stinging from all the bad things people are saying about you, you've found the spot. If your hands are free to do good works, you're there. If you are active in love and charity you have found the sweet spot. If that doesn't sound like you, than you're in the ditch and you need to go back and find the narrow gate. God is gracious, but time is short. Here is the path, walk ye in it. Let's pray together.