

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes

Lesson Text: Luke 6:17-31

Lesson Title: Living as God's People

Introduction

After Jesus' confrontation with the Scribes and Pharisees on two different Sabbath's, "*...he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God*" (Luke 6:12). After a night in communion with His heavenly Father, "*he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom he named apostles*" (Luke 6:13). With a hand-picked group of disciples and apostles by his side, Jesus began a tour of the northern region around the Sea of Galilee.

Our Lord's purpose in this teaching tour was to correct people's perception of God. The common people needed to know that the heavenly Father was not the legalistic God portrayed by the religious leaders. Jesus continually taught and showed the people the true nature of His Father. God was glorified not by the keeping of tradition and man-made law, but by man being in a right relationship with God and his fellow man.

Luke 6:20-49 is the same sermon recorded in Matthew 5-7 called, "The Sermon on the Mount." Matthew records more words from the sermon that did Luke, but the heart of the message is the same. Jesus' sermon is not about ethics or how to live socially. It is about salvation. This teaching is not about who is super spiritual. It is about who is a true child of God.

To the average person, Jesus' teaching sounds absurd. Since when is it a "blessing" to be "poor, hungry, weeping, and hated?" Since when is it a "curse" to be "rich, full, laugh, and spoken well of?" Even the health and wealth preachers are telling you it is a sign of God's "blessing" to be rich! That's Jesus point in this sermon. The world and much of professing Christianity in its thinking and teaching is exactly opposite the truth.

In our lesson text, Luke 6:20-31, Jesus quoted no one. He spoke authoritatively as God and defines clearly who is "blessed" and who is "cursed." Again, this is exactly opposite of conventional thinking and teaching today.

The Setting (Luke 6:17-19)

Verse 17-19

"And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."

This "great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem" indicates that several thousand people had come "to hear" Jesus teach and "to be healed of their diseases." The picture Luke gives us here is that this gathering of people included the believers and unbelievers and people from all walks of life. Luke tells us the "whole multitude sought to touch him" which indicates the magnitude and energy in this setting.

The "company of his disciples" was those "learners" now following Jesus. They were all on different spiritual levels and from different backgrounds. They were students of Jesus. He was their chosen leader and they were there to learn and watch as he taught and worked miracles.

It is obvious from Luke's use of the words "diseases" and "unclean spirits" that these people had legitimate physical and spiritual needs. These people needed Jesus. While the diseased needed a touch and healing, all of them needed truth. Truth is still the greatest need for man today. Healing doesn't save. Casting out unclean spirits doesn't save. Miracles can't save. Truth saves!

The Sermon (Luke 6:20-31)

Jesus' sermon includes two key words, "blessed" and "woe." The Jews listening to Jesus on this occasion knew the difference in those two words. Although historically and intellectually the Jew understood there was a life of blessing and a life of cursing, their religion had taken them so far from the truth that the secular and spiritual could no longer be separated. They desperately needed to hear the truth that Christ's kingdom and the kingdoms of this world were profoundly different.

As Jesus explained the implications of being His child and following Him, it is as if to say, "If you want to follow Me, this is what you can expect." While the fullness of blessings in Christ's kingdom are yet future, He invited those listening to be a part of His kingdom then through saving faith. However, Jesus wanted

them to understand that if they embrace His kingdom, it would put them at odds with this present world.

Verse 20

"And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God."

"And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples" indicates that Jesus' sermon was primarily for His disciples. These "disciples" were a mixed crowd who had seen Christ's miracles and were following him. There were some among these "disciples" who were sincere and probably others who were just along for the ride. Either way, they all needed truth.

"Blessed" means "most favored." It speaks of someone who is in the most beneficial condition possible. A "blessed" person possesses what we would call "joy."

The first blessing taught by Jesus has nothing to do with financial concerns. Jesus was not saying, "Blessed or happy" are those who are bankrupt! "Poor" means "to cower and cringe like a beggar." People who understand their spiritual poverty and the fact that they have no spiritual resources to bring to God are "blessed." They understand that no matter how religious and self-righteous they may be, none of that saves!

Illus. Hymn writer and pastor, Augustus Toplady, wrote the famous hymn, "Rock of Ages." One stanza reads, "In my hand no price I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

The Apostle Paul was certainly "blessed" because he realized he was "poor." Prior to his conversion on the Damascus Road he viewed himself as "*blameless*" (Philippians 3:6). Then he realized he had no basis for "*confidence in the flesh*" (Philippians 3:4). There are people in the world and the church who think they have no spiritual need. They are not "poor" but like the church at Laodicea, they are "rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17).

"For yours is the kingdom of God" means that those who know they have nothing and come to Christ for salvation get the "kingdom." "Yours" means "it belongs to you." Once a sinner is saved by grace he becomes an heir and joint heir with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:17). Although the kingdom of heaven will not be fully realized

until Christ returns to reign upon this earth, the believer can now experience the joy of being a part of God's kingdom through Jesus Christ.

Verse 21

"Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh."

"Hunger" is a powerful reality. Food is necessary for life. Jesus is not teaching that a man is "blessed" because he is without physical food. Jesus is speaking about an intense hunger and desire for righteousness (Psalm 42:1-2). If a man does not "hunger" after a right relationship with God he will never have one.

When Jesus said, "for ye shall be filled," He is promising delayed gratification. "Filled" means "to be foddered up." It is a word used of animals that stuffs themselves until they can't eat anymore. The idea is complete satisfaction. Jesus' point is that while the world seeks inward satisfaction through physical and external things, God calls His disciples to seek spiritual satisfaction first (Matthew 6:33).

"Blessed are ye that weep now" refers to people who are sad about their spiritual condition. Those who "weep" do so because they realize they are spiritually "poor" or bankrupt and have no righteousness. This "weeping" is pleasing to God (James 4:9). Those who see their spiritual condition so desperate as to cause them to "weep" are more likely to turn to Christ for salvation. The Apostle Paul said, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10).

"For ye shall laugh" means that upon trusting Christ as Savior, the "weeping" will be changed to "laughter." True "weeping" will give way to the "laughter" of being set free from sin. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, *"Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow"* (Jeremiah 31:13).

In the first three "blessings," the result has been a positive result. The "poverty" of our spiritual condition is changed into the blessing of the "kingdom." The "hunger" results in being "filled. And the "weeping" turns into "laughter."

Verse 22

"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake."

While the first three blessings had a positive result, the fourth blessing offers no specific promise of vindication. The first three blessing, "poverty, hunger and weeping," deal with how the sinner sees himself before God. The fourth blessing, "being hated" deals with how the unsaved world sees the sinner. Jesus used four verbs, "hate, separate, reproach, and cast out" to describe how the world treats sinners who have realized their sinful condition before God.

One might think the whole world is thrilled when people trust Christ as their Savior and decided to follow Him. Jesus wanted His disciples to know the truth about a relationship with Him. Put bluntly, Jesus promised His disciples they would receive "hatred, separation and reproach" simply by associating with Him.

These "men" that would "hate" Jesus' disciples did not "hate" them because of things they did wrong or for personal things. They "hated" them because of "the Son of man's sake," or Jesus. Jesus said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:18-19).

The evil of this world is never seen more clearly than when Christians are "hated, socially rejected and verbally reproached simply because they belong to Jesus. And those of us who are saved must remember the words of Jesus when He said, "*The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord*" (Matthew 10:24). The point is, don't expect any different treatment from the world if you are a true Christian and preaching the gospel.

Note: Tolerance is the hot word of the day. And it seems that governments and social groups press for tolerance for everyone except Christians. And the issue is not about issues! The issue is about Christ!

Verse 23

"Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."

Surely the words of Jesus must have raised some eyebrows among those listening to His teaching. Their faces must have revealed their shock. Added to their shock

is Jesus' dual command: "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy." "That day" indicates the believer is not hated and persecuted every day but when "that day" comes, "Rejoice" and "leap for joy." The dual command literally means "be glad" and "spring about."

If you have truly seen the condition of your sinful heart as Jesus taught and are telling others about their true condition, then "Rejoice" when they criticize you and hate you because of salvation truth. People usually "rejoice" and "leap" when they win the lottery or some good thing happens in life. So, how is it possible to "rejoice" and "leap" when people "hate" you and separate from you?

The answer is that as a true disciple of Jesus Christ you must realize that you live in an upside down world, a world in which good things are called bad and bad things are called good. It may be a shock to us but it's a privilege to be reviled by godless men.

"For, behold, your reward is great in heaven" is a reminder that Christians will not always be subject to the hatred, bigotry and intolerance of this world. Thank God there is a great day of reward ahead for the child of God when we will be delivered from this present world evil, hatred and discrimination.

Jesus gave another word of encouragement to those who were truly being persecuted. He said, "for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets." Jesus' disciples were not the first to be persecuted, nor would they be the last. To receive mistreatment on earth is to wear a badge of honor in God's kingdom and to be identified with God's "prophets." Being mistreated places us in the same category as martyred Old Testament prophets (1 Kings 19:10; 21:12; 2 Chronicles 24:21; 36:16; Jeremiah 26:23; Hebrews 11:37).

Verse 24

"But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation."

"But" marks a distinct change in mood and indicates that something is added that needs to be considered. "Woe" is a mourning sound, a deep moan uttered in response to personal pity on the part of another. Jesus is saying, "I deeply pity you if you are "rich."

In similar fashion to the word "poor" in verse 20, Jesus isn't speaking about the "rich" here as those who are wealthy in finances. The "rich" are those who think they are spiritually wealthy enough to earn their salvation or acquire it by their

own works. Jesus deeply pities a man who believes he can be saved by works of his own righteousness (Romans 10:3; Philippians 3:9).

"For ye have received your consolation" means "what you have is all you're going to get!" Earlier in his gospel, Luke referred to Messiah as Israel's "consolation" (Luke 2:25). This is the same word used here in verse 24. If man trusts in his "riches" then that is all the "consolation" or comfort he will ever have. There is no comfort or hope now or in the future for the man who trusts in his works.

Question: Which "consolation" would you prefer in the long run? What you have done or what Christ has done for you?

Verse 25

"Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep."

The second and third "woes" contrast the second and third blessings in verse 21. Jesus pities those who are full of themselves now and have no "hunger" for God. They "shall hunger" but it will be too late. "Hunger" is a need and Jesus pities the man who doesn't see he has a need. He also pities those who "laugh now" for the day will come when they will "mourn and weep."

Jesus point is clear. If you trust only in yourself, you will eventually find yourself in needs to the point that you cannot overcome.

Verse 26

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets."

This fourth "woe" deals with those who seek the acceptance and admiration of lost people or the people of the world. Again, Jesus is not teaching that we deliberately make lost people angry with us or offensively attack the world system. On the contrary, believers are "...to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:2). However, if a true disciple of Jesus Christ doesn't ruffle a few feathers along the way, there's something wrong!

Too many professing believers compromise the gospel message in order to be politically correct or for social gain. If that is your situation, Jesus said, "woe." You are to be pitied!

"For so did their fathers to the false prophets" can best be explained using the words of Jeremiah. He said, *"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"* (Jeremiah 5:31).

Verse 27-28

"But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you."

After a clear explanation of the difference in the kingdom of God and this present world, Jesus taught how this truth would personally impact His disciples in practical terms, mainly relationships. Again, Jesus used the conjunction, "but" to mark a change in thought and mood. The word "but" also was used to show that relationships in God's kingdom and family are altogether different from those in the world at large. It doesn't matter what the world teaches and what the world says. It all takes second place when Jesus says, "But I say unto you..."

Jesus taught those who heard him to "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you." These are what we might call "the commands of the kingdom." These commands are not easy. Only those who truly "hear" what Jesus is teaching will "love, do good, bless, and pray" for those who "despitefully use" them.

First, "love your enemies." "Love" is the Greek word *agape*. It is a distinctly Christian kind of love that seeks the greatest good of another. Agape love is rarely found outside the Bible. It has nothing to do with fleshly love or even the warm and noble affection shown by those who have a deep friendship or common bond. This type of "love" is a selfless kind of love that can only be shown by those who know Jesus Christ as their Savior. And oddly enough, it is to be shown to our "enemies." The word means "hostile ones." It refers to people who act on their intentions.

Christians are to "love" those who actively and intentionally seek our harm. When they do, we are to respond with Christlike love in action (Proverbs 25:21; Romans 12:17).

Second, "do good to them which hate you." "Good" is the Greek word *kalos*. It means "beautiful, excellent, what is right." Jesus is saying that when people hate me I'm to respond with something so beautiful and excellent that it allows me an opportunity to share the gospel with them.

Third, "bless them that curse you." The word "bless" comes from the Greek term *eulogeo*, from which we derive our word "eulogy." Literally, it means "good-talk" or "to speak well about someone." On the other hand, to "curse" someone was "to call down divine affliction on them." Jesus wanted His disciples to speak well of everyone before God, including those who reviled them in public and wanted to see divine calamity come down upon them.

Fourth, "pray for them that despitefully use you." The natural response when someone treats you wrong is to get even or find some form of retribution. That may be the way the world works but it is not the way the kingdom of God works. When Christians are despised, we are to "pray."

Christ's commands us to "pray for them." "Them" makes this a personal prayer. This prayer is to be more than a general request for God to deal with people. It seems as if Jesus commands us to pray like Stephen. While being stoned, Stephen prayed, *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep"* (Acts 7:59-60).

It's not easy to pray for those who abuse us. But that is Christ's command.

Verse 29

"And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also."

Fifth, respond gently to aggression. "Smiteth" refers to any kind of a blow ranging from a backhand slap to a sharp punch. It is likely Jesus had in mind an insulting slap on the face. Christ isn't teaching that Christians be a world punching bag or that we should never defend ourselves or our families when threatened. What He is teaching is that when we are threatened or even physically assaulted by an unbelieving world for Jesus' sake and the gospel, we must lay aside our pride and desire for revenge.

If someone "taketh away thy cloke," that would be an action of selfishness. The "cloke" was the outer garment worn by the Jew. If someone steals our outer garment, Jesus said, "forbide not to take thy coat also." The "coat" is the inner garment. Jesus is commanding us to exhibit generous behavior when such cases occur. Certainly the world would not expect that kind of response. Remember, we aren't talking about the world. We are talking about God's children.

Verse 30

"Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again."

Sixth, "give to every man that asketh of thee." This speaks of generosity on the part of the believer even when his possessions are taken away. Everything we have ultimately belongs to God anyway. Physical possessions are merely a means to an end, and can be easily replaced by God when taken by non-believers. Jesus' point is to value people more than things.

Verse 31

"And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

Seventh, "as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" means believers are to treat others the same way they want to be treated. This has been called the Golden Rule but it must be remembered this command is uniquely Christian. Although the world may want to treat each other as this verse teaches, it is impossible unless you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

This is truly a high standard of kindness toward others that Jesus requires. But it is a must if we are to live as God's people.

Conclusion

Living as God's people is based on a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is more than one Sunday school lesson on the Sermon on the Mount. It requires a loving and growing relationship. It requires an ever increasing knowledge of God's Word.

Every day the child of God finds himself in a different or unique situation that calls for a response as Jesus taught. As long as we live in this world there will be enemies, hatred, and opposition to the gospel. But as long as we live there will also be strength in Christ to do as He taught us.

It is a challenge to live as God's people. It is also the greatest joy of life!

Amen.