

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

## Introduction

Over the past few weeks as we have journeyed through Luke's Gospel we have been following Jesus from his Baptism and the early days of his ministry and have seen him beginning to establish his kingdom on earth. The rule of God slowly beginning to be seen in the healings of many hopelessly ill and damaged people, through the casting out of demons as a sign that evil no longer holds sway on earth. We have seen him call people to follow him and gradually he gathered a group of people around him who responded to his teachings and began to learn this new way of living that he was offering.

The Jews were very conscious that God had called them to be his special people. They were descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, making the twelve tribes of Israel and through them God planned to fulfil his purposes for the whole world.

Jesus comes into a context where all sorts of people are trying out ways of being God's people.

- There were the religious establishment, the priests and Pharisees who were maintaining the old laws
- There were those who had plans for violent revolution
- Those who supported Herod and his regime
- Those who planned to withdraw into the desert to pray in private , like the Qumran sect

From the people he has met Jesus chooses twelve individuals, after thought and prayer, to be part of his inner circle. Luke calls them apostles, those who are sent. These were his team who were to be the nucleus, the centre, the starting point of what God was going to do now. This was the core of the renewed Israel.

Jesus, his new team and a large crowd of disciples – those who were following him and learning from him went down onto a plain and there they were joined by people from all over the region who had come to hear him and to be healed from their diseases, to touch him and receive power from him. So he began to teach them.

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The sermon, similar to some of the teaching from the Sermon on the Mount is the description of the life of the new Israel. It tells us what life would be like in the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus came to minister on earth he began to establish God's rule where people were to be released from the things that held them captive but in its fullness the Kingdom of God will not be fully established until the end of time when God's purposes are complete and he has fully established his rule on earth. Therefore throughout this teaching there runs a contrast between the conditions of the present and the conditions of the future. The Good news that Jesus proclaimed was that the kingdom was already breaking in upon the present so that people could here and now begin to enter into fullness of life in relationship with him.

The first characteristic of this new life is a complete reversal of the values the world holds. It asks the question, "What is the recipe for happiness?" "Well" says Mr Worldly wise man, "Prosperity, comfort, peace of mind and popularity". Jesus pronounces his blessing on those who have failed to find their satisfaction in these worldly values.

Don't misunderstand me he isn't giving a general blessing on misfortune, as if poverty, hunger, grief and public resentment were themselves guarantees of eternal bliss. In Matthew's version of this sermon we might imagine that Jesus was setting an ethical standard for entry into the kingdom of heaven and that people must earn their blessedness by being humble, merciful and pure in heart. Luke's simpler version guards against this misunderstanding. The one thing that Jesus requires from his disciples is an emptiness that he can fill, a discontent with what the world offers that will lead them to the wealth, the satisfaction, the consolation and the comradeship of the Kingdom. The great reward exists in heaven.

Jesus' words presuppose the Gospel. These things are not a way of salvation. We won't earn salvation by our poverty and humility. These words are addressed to people who already, by

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faith have become children of the kingdom. They are invitations to show one's faith by the way we live.

The beatitudes and woes are not blessings or cursings upon these different groups of people but are insights into their true condition. To one group the Kingdom will come as salvation, to the other as a destroying flood. By their present behaviour and attitudes the disciple shows to which group they belong.

To be rejected now for the 'Son of man's' sake is a sign that one belongs to the Kingdom. On the other hand for a disciple to be acceptable to the present age is a warning that they may really belong to it and will share its judgement when the kingdom of God arrives. For the true disciple the coming of the kingdom will mean fulfilment and blessedness. For those who only profess to belong, as for the world, it will mean condemnation.

So who are the people to whom Jesus says 'woe to you'? They are the people who refuse to seek treasures in heaven because they love the good things of this world more and will not give up their money and comfort if need requires for Jesus' sake. They put their own values before following in Jesus' footsteps. These are people who prefer the joys and so called happiness of this world to joy and peace in believing, and will not risk the loss of the one in order to gain the other. These are the people we read about in the gospels who said to Jesus, "Yes, I will follow you, but first I must..." These are the people who love the praise of men more than the praise of God and will turn their backs on Christ rather than be rejected by the world. They are those who, although convinced of the truth of the Gospel, would not give up everything for its sake.

So what does all of this mean for us?

Well I think that it challenges us to decide where our true allegiance lies. We are taught that as Christians we live in the world but we are not of the world. It is so easy to absorb the standards and attitudes of the world around us; to try and live

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in a kind of holy compromise where we change some things but cannot let go of others.

A scuba diver can exist under water in his wet suit and breathing apparatus but he is not of the undersea world. He must take his oxygen with him. It is the same for us. As Christians our nourishment and life giving energy come from God. If the diver throws off their breathing apparatus they will die and it is the same for the Christian. If the Christian identifies fully with the values and behaviours of the world and fails to allow the Holy Spirit to transform them and give them life then they will die spiritually.

This sermon of Jesus' is a call to examine our motivation and allegiances. Are we committed to following Jesus with the consequences and challenges that presents us with or are we trying to sit on the fence and becoming rooted in the earth