

The Sermon on the Plain: Discipleship U.

Scripture: Luke 6: 45-49 And Jesus said, A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words *and puts them into practice*, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words *and does NOT put them into practice* is like a man who built a house on the sand. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed, and its destruction was complete.

Subject: How do I *know* that I am acting like a disciple of Jesus?

Object: You LEARN these teachings, and you DO them.

Christ Focus: This is what it means to follow Jesus

Title: Discipleship U.

The first sermon series that I preached when I came to the Driftless churches was on the Sermon on the Mount. That is the longer version found in Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Now, at the end of Chapter 6, Luke presents *his* version. It is shorter and has some notable differences. Don't think that this is some cheap rehash, though. Jesus likely preached this sermon MANY times over His ministry. After all, it is the CORE of what it means to follow Him. For Matthew's Jewish audience, the material was presented one way. Here in Luke, Jesus is in the north, near Capernaum-- Gentile territory. Luke takes the time to tell us that there were people listening who were from Tyre and Sidon. Those were Gentile cities renowned in Old Testament history for idolatry and wickedness. They were wealthy Phoenician cities that were often in conflict with Israel. If you check your maps, you will find them on the coastline north of Galilee. They represent the unclean or Gentile world, but they also demonstrate greater responsiveness to Jesus' teachings than do some of the Jews. They were there to hear Him. A lot of the Jews were there to find something to use against Him. *Luke's* version of Jesus' teachings includes those followers outside of Israel who have traveled a long

way to see Jesus and are interested in following Him and not condemning Him. In the Kingdom of God, everyone is included.

These verses and the parallels in Matthew are the essence of Jesus' teaching throughout His ministry. He taught these principals over and over and supplemented His teachings with many illustrations and examples. He was teaching the Apostles here, and it was IMPORTANT material. But if you transcribed this sermon, it would have lasted only five minutes. Do NOT expect that from me! I was trained by the Baptists, after all!

The sequences of teachings between the two Sermons agree. Most of what is included in Matthew concerns the relationship between Jesus' teaching and the Law—which mattered a LOT to the Jews and not at all to the Gentiles. For Luke, the focus is on the poor and the use of money. Gentiles, you see, had a lot of poor AND a lot of money. In Luke's gospel, relationships do NOT involve just two parties. They must ALWAYS involve God as well. Whether it is two people or one person and money or some other object. It is not a line, it's a triangle. Luke makes clear that the kingdom Jesus is talking about will replace the present corrupt and evil world. The present kingdom and the Kingdom of heaven are OPPOSITES! What is good in this world is bad in the Kingdom. To be blessed and declared awesome in this world is to be cursed in the Kingdom.

And that brings me to the next difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain. In Matthew, we have Beatitudes—blessings. Here in Luke, we have blessings and *Woes*. And keep in mind, by now, Jesus is teaching the Apostles primarily. Others can listen in, but these words are for the twelve FIRST. Jesus starts with, "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." He does NOT say 'blessed are the poor IN SPIRIT'. For Luke, those blessed are just POOR. Now to be clear, He is NOT saying blessed are the bankrupt and He is not telling us to burn our money and live with nothing. He is focused on our *attitude* toward the wealth of this world. ALL those things that may be lumped under the category of 'riches'. You are blessed when you empty yourself of the wealth of this world and instead, depend on the riches that God will provide. Again, it is a triangle. Man—money—and GOD. For Luke,

those who don't have a lot of stuff are blessed. So, how poor do you have to be? This is where we wrestle with Scripture. How RICH do you have to be before you start to want MORE and MORE or start to depend on your personal finances and the riches of this world. How poor do you have to be before the stuff of this world no longer matters to you. There are poor people who spend their entire lives in the pursuit of wealth. Money is what will solve all their problems. They are not poor enough, according to Jesus. Then there are those who are rich but do not look to their riches to give them security. They look to God. They are poor enough. It is a warning for all of us. How poor do you have to be? Where do you count your riches?

In the second blessing, Jesus tells us that if we hunger now, we'll be satisfied in the Kingdom of God. Filled to overflowing. Those who long to do the Godly thing will be satisfied and more as time goes on. Those who hunger after wealth and health *will ultimately have neither*.

Blessed are those who weep now, for you shall laugh. This can be interpreted as a blessing for those who weep now because the world is such a mess, but I don't read it that way. I think it is simply a blessing for those who weep. Those who have lost a loved one, or who have wept because of illness or loss of health. In the Kingdom of God, the dead will be raised, and we will DANCE with them! In the Kingdom of God those who are ill will be healed—better than ever. And we can laugh in joy with them. The Joy we will find in the Kingdom of God will be beyond our comprehension because all the things that make us weep in this world will be gone. Next time you weep, remember that.

And then, "Blessed are you when men hate you..." Your reward will be great in heaven, and you are NOT alone. People have been doing that since God first started to create a people for Himself. Remember how all the Apostles died? Jesus *promised* His followers that this world would dump on them. Period. But being cut off from the world frees us to enjoy fellowship with God. For the Apostles, it gave them an opportunity to honor their Lord and Savior. THAT is a blessing that never fades. It is a *privilege* to be reviled by mean and godless people.... Talk about an upside-down place for a disciple to be!

And now, Woe to the rich. How rich? Well, will you sacrifice doing God's will for getting a promotion or more wealth? Will you cheat to win a trophy or set a record? Where do you look for your security? In what do you take pride? Those who value trophies, and medals, and money and fame already have their reward—earthly 'wealth'. *What comforts you?* Is it your medals and your credit cards or is it God's Word and the Holy Spirit? One is a woe, and the other is a blessing. We have been warned.

"Woe to you who are well fed, for you shall be hungry." Umm...OUCH. "Woe to those who laugh now, for you will weep. Those two are the *opposite* of the second and third *blessings*."

The fourth 'woe' speaks to all who seek the acceptance and admiration of godless people or the people of this world. Be careful with 'people pleasing' Unless the 'people' is Jesus, you are in danger of going wrong. Happiness and peace in this world have nothing to do with one's external circumstances. It ONLY has to do with God. So, who is well off? The world values the WINNERS, but Jesus loves the losers and those on the margin. If we aren't asking ourselves where the source of our security is on a regular basis, we are in danger of drifting off course quickly because those things that the world values are so much at odds with the Kingdom of God. And we LIVE in the world!

The state of being blessed is tied to your relationship to the Son of Man. Whatever happens in this world, if you have Jesus, you will have everything you need. Jesus says that they will "spurn your name as evil." (verse 22). But the 'you' in that phrase is PLURAL! The name doesn't refer to Sandy Conrad; it refers to *Christ followerS*. *Christians*! Relationships in the Kingdom are different from those in the world—and they include our fellow believers! Stay tuned, there will be parables on this later!

Jesus tells us to LOVE our enemies and do good to those who hate you. This is called 'agape love'—that selfless love of others that mirrors the chesed of God. The word 'agape' in Greek *got its meaning from this form of love demonstrated by Christians*. Bless those who curse you and do NOT put anyone down. I would add,

beware postings on the Internet. Very few uplift others and most either want applause or the condemnation of others. *Neither* is seen in the Kingdom of God.

Regardless of what others do to us, we are to do good. There can be no expectation of return and no resentment or retaliation for bad. This is GRACE—a gift, present, pardon, or concession that is granted freely—out of goodness alone. This command to love our enemies is repeated twice because it is THE command that is the basis of every other command in this section of the Sermon, AND it is what distinguishes disciples of Jesus from the ‘world’.

Pray for those who mistreat you. Remember, by praying for them, you may succeed in blessing THEM, but you will surely succeed in opening the door for God to work in YOUR life and bless YOU! Respond to aggression with gentleness. Be generous to those who are selfish. In God’s Kingdom, physical possessions are easily replaced—with something WAY better!

Are you noticing the opposites here? Figure out what the world does and expects and then do the exact opposite and you will be in line with what Jesus is teaching. It is a terrifying demonstration of how far away we have fallen from God.

And now, *treat others the way you would want them to treat you*. It is the Golden Rule and if your children cannot repeat it today, make it a priority to teach it to them. Remember it. Confucious said, “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.” Aristotle said, “Behave to your friends the way you want them to behave to you.” Plato said, “May I behave to others as they should do to me.” It is a famous concept. But they do NOT have it right. Here’s the difference. *Loving others in the hope of receiving love in return isn’t a sacrifice, it’s an INVESTMENT. Jesus calls HIS followers to give love to EVERYONE without expectation of a return!* Why? Because our focus must be on GOD and what He wants and not people. As we extend kindness and grace even to the worst of people, the grace of God comes to us in even greater quantity.

Let’s examine the Golden Rule a bit more closely. It teaches us about *Mercy*. We have received mercy from God and THAT should motivate us to extend mercy to others.

Mercy DELIBERATELY withholds punishment for wrong. It teaches us about *Judgment*. Judging belongs to God alone. It teaches about *Gratitude*. We should be grateful that God has not condemned and punished us for all the bad stuff we've done. And gratitude inspires compassion and compassion makes condemnation unthinkable. The Golden Rule teaches us about *Forgiveness*. Remember, when you forgive someone, YOU accept the debt they owe *and then close the books!!* Lastly, it teaches about *Giving*. Give to the sinners of the world and your reward will be great. "Pressed down, shaken together, and running over. That is one of my favorite illustrations that Jesus uses. Anyone who has ever measured flour for a recipe knows that you level it off—but you also make sure there are no air pockets, and your cup is indeed full of flour. Pressed down and jiggled. But then, RUNNING OVER! You don't just get what you'd expect, you get MORE than you would ever have dreamed—and then more than that!

A. W. Tozer, in his book *That Incredible Christian* puts these blessings into a list that marks a strong spiritual life. Have a desire to follow Jesus rather than to be "happy". Contentment should come from being right with God and NOT from having the perfect circumstances, body, or stuff. You are on the right track if you want to see Jesus proclaimed through your life. We must be willing to *die right* rather than *live wrong*.

The first part of the Sermon on the Plain has described the difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of this World. And Jesus has told us clearly how the citizens of God's kingdom should behave. Now He moves on to discipleship and spiritual leadership. They were apostles now, and they needed to know this stuff!

First, He points out that there is no point in the blind leading the blind. If *nobody* can see where you're going, then you are sure to go wrong. Matthew uses this illustration to point out that the Pharisees were behaving as though they knew *everything* about God and what He expects of us. In fact, they did NOT. At ALL! Spiritual leaders do not lead by making more and more rules and sitting in an ivory tower. Spiritual leaders lead by example and not by self-appointed authority. Followers of Jesus must lead in *service*.

The 'speck and the log' speaks against hypocrisy – and judgment. ALL people stand before God with GIANT logs in their eyes. You cannot escape it. All we can do is lead each other to Jesus. Then HE IS THE ONE WHO CAN remove the Log and lead us to the Kingdom.

Healthy trees produce healthy fruit—not decaying fruit. What is inside a person determines what he or she produces in the world. This concept also works for families and churches.

Jesus goes on to ask, “Why do you call me “Lord, Lord”. In the Greek, the title of ‘Lord’ refers to someone having both power AND authority. Doubling the title emphasizes the emotion—it seems to imply double devotion. TRUE disciples do not shmooze Jesus with fancy titles. A true disciple HEARS Jesus’ words and then faithfully applies and performs them—in everything. And then expects TRIALS to produce the final exam. This points out, then, that the only difference between a wise disciple and a disciple in name only is the presence of a reliable foundation. I have heard this saying for a LONG time, and originally, I thought it had to do with hearing and knowing the things that Jesus said. NO. *It is those who put the Lord’s words INTO ACTION* that build their lives on a solid foundation. Not just hearing but DOING. The crux of Christianity is NOT what occurs in Church on a Sunday morning. Christ-following occurs during the WEEK. In the world! That’s when we truly obey the king and when Christians truly show who they follow.

Jesus is not interested in giving us a new set of morals or a higher plain of existence. He is *transforming LIVES* so that God will be honored by our behavior. When we love our enemy, it does not leave him as he is. It wants him NOT to go on being ‘the enemy’ forever, but to change him so that hostility will end. But hatred does NOT seek the end of conflict. When we hate, the picture of ‘the enemy’ must be kept in full view so that we never lose sight of how bad HE is and how wonderful WE are.

Disciples are people called out of the present world to become citizens of Christ’s new Kingdom of God. *Everything* is different there (praise the Lord!). To get the blessings of the Kingdom of God, you connect to Jesus because He knows the way to the kingdom. He is the LORD of the kingdom. There, Mercy replaces retribution. Grace

replaces justice. Giving, not earning, drives the economy. Jesus CAME as the Savior of all people everywhere, but NOT all people will be saved. To be saved, you must hear and OBEY the King. Discipleship is a long-term relationship—it is not a one semester deal. Discipleship is up close and personal—a personal relationship with the Lord. Discipleship is relational. It is NOT formal and NOT based on rules. Discipleship is practical, not theoretical. Discipleship is coaching—it is not controlling. And NO ONE EVER GRADUATES FROM DISCIPLESHIP U.