

October 7, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 6:20-36.

1. What is the Social Gospel?
2. How has the Social Gospel impacted American culture and the Church?
3. Explain how the poor, the hungry, the mourning, and the despised people are blessed?
4. What are the two sides of the “Golden Rule”?
5. How did Jesus apply the “Golden Rule”?

CAN “LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR” SAVE YOU? Luke 6:20-36

Last week while we were flying to Portland to visit the kids, I watched a documentary on Fred Rogers titled, “Won’t You Be My Neighbor.” I am quite sure everyone knows who Mr. Rogers is even if you or your children didn’t grow up watching at least some of the show that ran from 1966 to one month before 9/11/2001. Fred Rogers was an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church USA. Maybe you are aware that, by and large, that denomination is characterized by rank liberalism that denies the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the need for the blood atonement of Christ, and generally preaches a social gospel which assures that we all have a divine spark that we can by our own efforts fan into a flame

of goodness.

Fred Rogers did not disappoint his theological peers. In a very innocent and winsome way, he preached the social gospel of salvation by works for nearly 40 years. One statement in the movie about him spoke volumes. His wife confessed that Fred had made reference to Jesus’ promise that there will be a day when He would come to set up His kingdom and at that time would separate the sheep from the goats. Self-evident in that teaching is that the sheep go into the kingdom of God, heaven, while the goats are sent to everlasting punishment in hell. Fred’s wife, Joanne, said that shortly before he died he said to her, “I wonder if I am one of those sheep?”

It appears that maybe Mr. Rogers was also aware of another statement Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount. Near the end of that sermon Jesus warned, “*Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’*” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Our text in Luke’s Gospel almost appears to teach Mr. Rogers’ theology. It appears that Jesus was telling His disciples that if they were poor and hungry and disliked, not to worry because He was on their side and everything was going to work out just fine. It appears that Jesus taught that His disciples just needed to love the down-and-outers and always be kind to their enemies to guarantee that they would in turn receive His blessings.

Actually, much of this text that Bible teachers call “the Sermon on the Plain” sounds like parts of the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, much of the so-called confusion regarding Jesus’s statements in this sermon are made perfectly clear by comparing them with what Jesus taught at a different time in the Sermon on the Mount. Here we are reminded that people who are redeemed have come to realize that they are spiritual beggars, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and who will be put aside or persecuted by the enemy. Be that as it may, we need to love our enemies. We don’t show mercy to unkind people in order to be

redeemed from sin. We show mercy because we **are** redeemed from sin. The sermon on the plain will be a disaster for us if we do not interpret its teaching in light of the rest of Jesus's teaching.

Traits of the Blessed and Traits of the Unblessed (vv.20-26).

The "blessed" are the redeemed. *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets" (vv.20-23).*

Some interpretations of the text are illogical or unscriptural. To be blessed means to be happy or satisfied or, especially in the biblical context, to be blessed is to be the recipient of God's special favor. Neither of those definitions seem to fit very well with Jesus's statements here. It is illogical and unscriptural to conclude that if you are materially poor, you are happy and/or the recipient of God's special blessings. It is illogical and unscriptural to conclude that you should be happy if you are physically hungry. It is illogical to conclude that we should be happy and consider ourselves the recipients of God's blessing when we are being persecuted or shunned.

We must not miss the fact all of these conditions are predicated by spiritual realities not physical, earthly, mundane realities. Jesus was teaching the characteristics of people who are coming to salvation by faith in Him. There is nothing noble or attractive about being materially poor, physically hungry, or shunned and persecuted because you are foolish or a trouble maker — contrary to the teachings of various false teachings from the Monastery to the Buddhist monk.

As we have said, in these words, Jesus described the traits of regenerated people. Joy and the blessing of God is for those who recognize that they are spiritually destitute. *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for*

yours is the kingdom of God" (v.20). Listen to how Matthew gave a little more information from Jesus that helps explain the issue. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).*

Jesus taught that the sinner will only seek God's blessing when he or she recognizes spiritual poverty in their own lives. The default mode for us who are born in sin is to be quite sure that we are rich, well off, and quite confident of our direction in life. In His kindness and mercy, God opens our eyes to the reality that we are so poverty stricken spiritually that we cannot pay the first cent for our salvation.

When we have come to the conclusion that salvation costs more than we can possibly pay, then we will ask God to bless us with His free gift of eternal life. Happy are the people whose spiritual eyes God has opened to their pathetic spiritual condition because they receive the kingdom of God, eternal life.

Joy and the blessing of God is also for those who recognize that they are spiritually famished. *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied (v.21a).* In Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount we read, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6).* The great need is to hunger and thirst for righteousness. In our sinful condition we hunger and thirst for anything and everything that cannot possibly satisfy the deep spiritual need. God created us with a "God-shaped" void that only He can satisfy.

The great danger is discovered when we realize that human religion tries to fill God's void. Human religious teaching all sounds so good and right, and it feels somewhat satisfying for a time. But human religious discipline is not the same as righteousness. Righteousness is the character of our Creator and Savior. God created us with a natural hunger for Him, but sin, Satan, and the world distract us from that hunger. We amuse ourselves to spiritual death chasing what cannot satisfy.

Happy is the person who experiences the driving hunger for the righteousness of God and being fed as we dine with Him at the banquet of His Word. If you just do not have a taste for God's Word, if there is nothing in your life that at least nudges you to read it, that is a sign that you are spiritually sick. You need for the

Spirit of God to stir you to hunger for God's righteousness or you need the Spirit of God to open your spiritual eyes to your need of salvation.

Third, Jesus taught that joy and the blessing from God are for those who weep because of their sin and failure. *"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh"* (v.21b). Matthew wrote, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* (Matthew 5:4). When we truly see the righteousness of our God contrasted with the abominable filth of our sinful lives, we will mourn. How can a person who comes face to face with his offense, his attacks against God's character, his slavery to that which God hates, not mourn? Sorrow and weeping ought to be our response when we see how sinful we are.

When Isaiah saw the vision of God's glory and holiness in the temple His response was "Woe is me." To announce woe on yourself is to mourn. Isaiah was probably one of the most righteous persons in his society. But compared to God's holiness, Isaiah the prophet was worthy of woe.

The promise is that God comforts sinners who come to Him in self-renunciation. Where do we find words to express the comfort, the rest we experience when we come to Jesus empty of self? How odd it is that in our human nature we resist being associated with the righteousness of Christ, because it is associated with the shame of the cross. But in reality, resting in the shadow of the cross of Christ is the most comforting place in eternity.

Fourth, Jesus taught that joy and the blessing of God are for those who endure shame and reproach because of our association with Christ's character. *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets"* (vv.22-23). According to Matthew's account, Jesus also explained more details by adding, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account"* (Matthew 5:10-11).

When God snatches us out of the family of Satan and places

us in His own family through salvation, it marks us as belonging to Him.

As Satan's family members treated our Savior and Divine brother Jesus, they will treat us. Remember what Jesus told the Pharisees who persecuted, reviled, and lied about Him: *"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies"* (John 8:44).

This truth is as relevant as tomorrow's news. Much of what goes on from Washington, D.C. to your workplace is characterized by this very truth. Try to live out the principles of Christ's character and it is very likely you will be treated as sinners treated Christ. Rejoice, be happy, because that is an indication that you are "IN" Him.

Recently I heard a great illustration of the concept of being in Christ. I flew to Portland and back in a jet. When I walked down the jet way and entered the jet, I was now **in** it. Wherever the jet went, I would go. Whatever effected the jet effected me. Therefore, on the return trip when we hit a bit of turbulent air, when the jet was buffeted by the winds, I was buffeted by the winds. I found it interesting that the pilot apologized for the buffeting winds as though he was responsible for them.

Jesus promised, *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you"* (John 15:18-19). When you begin to feel the pain and uncertainty that the politics of America are inspired by Satan and hell itself, rejoice. You are exactly right. But ours is the Kingdom of Heaven!

In contrast to the recipients of God's joy and blessing are the unredeemed. Jesus had only woe to offer to them (vv.24-26). He did not say, "Woe to all who are rich," but "Woe to those who are consoled by riches." *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation"* (v.24). Actually there is much consolation in riches. Money does buy pleasure. Money buys assurance and confidence. Money buys influence and friends.

But we all know that riches are temporary. The moment you breathe your last breath, the consolation of your portfolio ceases. Learn from the rich man who concluded that he had been a smashing success and decided to build huge storage units in which to store all his riches. Jesus called him a fool because He was willing to be consoled temporarily not eternally.

Nor did Jesus teach, “Woe to all who are full,” but He taught, “Woe to those who are satisfied with unrighteousness.” *“Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry” (v.25a)*. God does not despise people eating the fruits of their labors. In fact, a blessing God promises to those who trust and obey Him is material sufficiency. God gave the great blessing of a land flowing with milk and honey to His people Israel.

But God’s people were more focused on the land, the milk, and the honey than they were on God the giver of blessing. God’s plan is for us to seek Him and His righteousness first and foremost. Let everything else in life become secondary. Compared to God’s righteous character, everything else should be second best.

The picture throughout these woes is of people who found much satisfaction and joy in the passing things of earth, only to stand before the eternal Judge naked, poverty stricken, hungry with no means of being secured.

Third Jesus did not teach, “Woe to all who laugh,” but rather, “Woe to those who do not weep for sin.” *“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep” (v.25b)*. The mourning and weeping in the “blessing section” was regarding sin. Contrasted to those who mourn for their sins and find comfort in Christ are sinners who take sin lightly. “You who laugh” is a fair description of most of the people of our culture. Watch television, go to a sporting event or any public event and watch the multitudes of people who are walking the road to eternal condemnation laughing and enjoying themselves all the way.

Fourth, Jesus did not teach, “Woe to all who are well spoken of, but, “Woe to those who do not have the Lord’s favor.” *“Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets” (v.26)*. God desires for us to strive to be well spoken of in our circles of influence. Peter wrote, *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak*

against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Peter 2:12). But we dare not sacrifice the righteousness of Christ for the praise of a sinful society.

So which group characterizes you best? Are you among the redeemed who, through God’s mercy, recognized your deplorable spiritual condition and came to Christ in faith for eternal satisfaction?

Or are you among the people who should be pitied and warned because they only desire temporal satisfaction from a passing world?

If you are among the redeemed, you will discover that God expects us to respond uniquely to common difficulties of life.

Responses of the Redeemed to the Unredeemed (vv.27-36).

Since Jesus just drew a very clear line between those who receive His blessing and those who are fit for “woe,” we might wonder how we should respond to the various groups of people. The answer to that question is: respond with the Golden Rule (vv.27-31).

We are familiar with the statement of the rule. *“And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (v.31)*. However, we do well to point out that many rules have both a positive aspect (blessing for obeying) and a negative aspect (consequence for not obeying).

Positively this rule means that we should treat others the way we want to be treated. We are all familiar with the “golden rule,” having been taught it since childhood. The rule of thumb is so simple and commonsensical. And yet it is like the principles of wisdom we find in Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. They are not laws that must happen but general rules of pithy wisdom. Generally it is true that others will respond to you with the same kindness and consideration you show. But not always. Who could have possibly been kinder, nicer, and more gentle than Jesus? The Pharisees and hypocritical leaders did not respond to Him in kind.

The other side of this coin is also very important. Though not stated explicitly, there is a corresponding implicit law which says,

“You will reap what you sow.” That is actually another of God’s laws that we find stated repeatedly in Scripture: God’s law of sowing and reaping. Generally speaking also is the truth that if we sow deception, wickedness, false accusation, slander, etc. that is precisely what will come back on our heads. Today’s politicians and news media don’t understand that. What is worse is that when they do reap what they have sowed, they will feign innocence and act like they don’t understand why people are against them.

How does Christ expect us to use the Golden Rule in life? The application is the text of verses twenty-seven through thirty. *“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back”* (vv.27-30).

Christ does not teach us to embrace, encourage, or tolerate wicked people who are enemies of the culture. That is, people who attempt to destroy innocent victims. Or we might include in the description sinister people who seek to do harm (emotional, physical, spiritual) to others. We know instinctively that we should defend the needy, helpless, and innocent against such fiends.

Nor does Christ teach us to embrace and show mercy to the enemies of the Church He is building. Jesus gave clear instruction that we are to expose theological error, rebuke false teachers, and correct error. The false teachers in Jesus’s day were quite sure He was not a nice guy. No one could ever be nicer or more merciful.

While we are not to be protective of dangerous and evil people, at the same time, we should show kindness and mercy to our own personal enemies. Some people just don’t like you or me. Because of their attitude, they might say nasty things about us. We are to respond to them in kindness and love, desiring for them to love Jesus too.

In a word, the Lord’s mandated response for His people is for us to be merciful (vv.32-36). Mercy is to show love without strings (vv.32-34). *“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For*

even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount” (vv.32-34).

This is what agape love looks like. The love of Christ is a conscious decision to help the recipient of love achieve the very best (which is ultimately the righteousness of Christ) even if we have to sacrifice to help them to that end.

That means that we will love like God. *“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”* (vv.35-36).

This is the love Jesus demonstrated on the cross when He prayed for the Heavenly Father to forgive the people who were killing Him. In His mercy and kindness God the Father could have opened the murderers’ eyes to help them see who Jesus really was. There is no record that any of the executors for whom Jesus prayed actually confessed their sins and were forgiven. But that is what the mercy of God looks like. We do not **become** sons of the Most High by showing Christ’s love. We show Christ’s love **because** we are already His children.

To the world, Christianity looks like a bad deal. Why would anyone want to be humble, cower to the enemies, turn the other cheek, mourn, be hungry and poor? Obviously, there are many false teachers who have concluded that if a person does such things consistently, they will be ushered into heaven. The text we have just studied from Luke’s Gospel does not affirm the error of false religion.

True Christianity requires that we sinners come to a full understanding of our incredible sin and spiritual poverty before God.

To be born again requires that God opens our eyes to our need and gives us hunger and thirst for righteousness which He assuages Himself. Then, because God gives us a new heart shaped like righteousness of our Savior, we are able to love our enemies like He loved His own enemies. We will not love and embrace error or danger. But we will respond with mercy toward those who despise us.

We don't do these good things in order to be born again but because we are born again.