

Luke 6: 17 to 26, 9.30 am

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord our strength and our redeemer Amen.

Today I'm preaching on Luke chapter 6 verses 17 to 26, and verse 17 reads, "He came down with them and stood on a level plain."

This section of Luke's gospel is often referred to as the sermon on the plain, and because there are 4 blessings in the passage, comparisons are made with Matthew chapter 5, the sermon on the mount; but in my view this can be problematic, and can also be misleading.

For example, Jesus, as recorded by Matthew chapter 5 verse 3 was talking about the blessedness of the poor in spirit, that is, those who have confidence only in God, those who realise their sinfulness, their spiritual emptiness or poverty, and hence their total dependency on the grace of God.

But Jesus as recorded by Luke does not say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Luke records Jesus as saying, "Blessed are you who are poor." Luke does not record Jesus as saying "Poor in spirit." Also Matthew records "The poor." Whereas Luke records, "You poor."

Similarly "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled." Luke doesn't mention "Righteousness" which Matthew mentions in his equivalent verse. It is clear that the evangelists are emphasising different aspects of Jesus' teaching.

So today I'm going to concentrate on Luke's gospel and his sermon on the plain. But before we start I want to draw your attention to whom Jesus refers to as blessed.

When Jesus speaks of heavenly things he turns everything upside down, for example, blessed are you poor verse 20 and woe to you who are rich, verse 24, whereas the world, I'm sure you would agree, would refer to the rich as blessed, not the poor.

And again, the people whom Jesus would call happy, the world would call wretched, Just imagine anyone saying, "Happy are the poor and sad are the rich".

God's kingdom as stated in both Matthew and Mark, is the opposite way round to the way we think in the world. God's values and the world's values are not the same, in fact in these cases they are exactly opposite, so let us look at them in a bit more detail.

Verse 17 tells us that there was a large gathering of people from all Judah, Jerusalem and from the coastal areas of the west, a large and diverse gathering of people.

Verse 18 confirms that Jesus' reputation as a healer and preacher had spread far and wide, and that there were people there, who just wanted to touch him to be healed.

So while there were people who Jesus ministered to directly for healing, there were others who were cured merely by touching him.

But before he started to speak to people he did heal all of them one way or the other as we are told in verse 19.

Then after Jesus had healed everyone he looked up at the crowd, who Luke refers to as a great crowd of his disciples, and a great multitude of other people and said, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Jesus looked up and saw a vast crowd of people virtually all of whom were the poor, Jesus saw the farm labourers, the peasants and people from the fishing industry.

A number of them would indeed have felt blessed, because they had been miraculously healed of their diseases, and I'm sure that some of the diseases that Jesus cured would have been life threatening, and these people would have felt blessed beyond words.

But when Jesus looked up and said blessed are you poor he was also referring to those who hadn't just come for healing but to hear the good news of God; that's why they were blessed.

All of us here this morning are hearing the good news of God, and if we do not feel blessed as a result, then just think what our lives would be like if we hadn't heard of God, if we hadn't got Christ in our lives, knowing as we do the joy we get from knowing him, and having a loving relationship with him.

Before I continue there is an issue I need to address. Jesus looked up and said, "Blessed are you who are poor."

He did not say, "Blessed are the poor." Jesus looked up at the crowd and saw poor people, and he blessed them.

Conversely In verse 24 Jesus said, "But woe to you who are rich."
Why did he say that?

He said that, because the rich weren't there!

They were possibly too proud to come and mix with poor people and to listen to an upstart carpenter from Nazareth, so Jesus said, "woe to you rich people because you will not be hearing the good news of God.

Jesus was not saying that all poor people will be blessed and that all rich people will not be blessed; Jesus was not saying that.

Jesus was saying that everyone who hears and receives the good news will be blessed, whether rich or poor, and those who do not hear the good news of Christ whether rich or poor, will miss out on the blessing.

Moving on. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. I don't think Jesus was promising the hungry people food for their stomachs, and conversely in verse 25 he wasn't threatening to interrupt their food supply.

Jesus was saying that the poor people who came, and those who stayed after they had been healed were hungry to hear Jesus speak of the kingdom of God, and those who stayed and listened were blessed by being filled with stories about the kingdom.

Conversely in verse 25 woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

Again Jesus is talking about those who thought they knew it all and that there was no need to go and listen, or were too proud to go and listen to him, they would go hungry for the knowledge of the good news God. Jesus always spoke of heavenly things.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. The point here is that the people who Jesus says, “who weep now”, aren't people who weep for themselves, but people who weep for other people, people who put other people before themselves.

The only time that Jesus is reported to have wept was for his friend Lazarus who had died, and Jesus was weeping for Lazarus and his family who were mourning for him.

Jesus' entire ministry and indeed his whole life was dedicated to the salvation and welfare of other people, so much so that he knowingly gave his life for us, and that is the message for us, we are to put other people before ourselves.

In verse 25 Jesus went even further by saying, “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep”.

These are of course people who see other people going hungry or being subjected to injustice but ignoring them, because they are only interested in themselves.

And finally the last of the blessings in verse 22, blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on the account of the Son of Man.

Jesus also said as recorded by John in chapter 15 verse 18, “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own”.

And Jesus also said as recorded in Luke chapter 16 verse 13, “No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve wealth and God”.

To sum up verse 22, Jesus is saying that we have a choice, we either throw our lot in with Jesus, for which we will be blessed, or we throw our lot in with the world, and if we do the latter then there may will be a price to pay at the end, because in all probability the world will want us to denounce God.

And if anybody doesn't believe that, then remember the nurse who dared to pray for her patient, and the airline stewardess who dared to wear a crucifix round her neck.

Also many children in our schools dare not say that they are Christians, because the majority of children are not, and they have learnt that being different leads to bullying and other problems so they don't mention it.

This indeed may be why so many of us are reticent to mention our faith in our secular work places, because of our experience at school, and now we are not used to talking about our faith.

Finally verse 26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you”. Almost at the beginning I said that Heavens values are invariably the opposite to the worldly values, so who does the world speak well of.

I think I've already answered that question because sadly it speaks of the majority of people in this country who do not worship or know God and who have no relationship with Jesus, but who nevertheless feel blessed by their secular relationships and great wealth.

Jesus is speaking of those who in worldly terms are rich and successful and who think they are truly blessed when indeed we know that they are not, because worldly possessions and praises in themselves are transient, it is only the knowledge and love of God which is permanent.

As we sit let us pray,

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, increase in us a true and lively faith to your praise and glory.

Amen