

February 16th, 2025

Luke 6:17-26 “Filled to Overflowing”

For the last few weeks, we’ve been focusing on the early days and years of Jesus’ ministry. We started out with his baptism, moved on to his first miracle – turning water to wine. Then we spent some time talking about how a visit to his hometown synagogue didn’t work out so well. Then last week we learned about how he called his first disciples by telling them that they’d be fishers of people. For the next two weeks, we’re going to be digging into his “sermon on the mount.” Today’s scripture starts out with what most people call “the beatitudes” which is a list of virtues that begin with the words “blessed are.” Some English translations use “happy are,” which is a legit interpretation, but the earliest English translators used “blessed” because they felt that word was better suited for the occasion. Many people consider the sermon on the mount the best example of Jesus’ core values and what he expects from those who follow him. These teachings are foundational to our faith.

As we’ve learned, Jesus was gathering quite a following during this time. He was attracting crowds that were so large that he had to find places with the right kind of acoustics for everyone to hear him. Here’s a little Bible trivia for you – Two of the four gospels include what we call “the sermon on the mount.” Matthew’s gospel says, “Seeing the crowds, he went *up on the mountain*, and when he sat down his disciples came to him.” Luke’s gospel on the other hand says, “And he came down with them and stood *on a level place*, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people.”

Okay, so what is it? Is it the “sermon on the mount” or the “sermon on the level place?” Which is it? If the gospels chronicle the ministry of Jesus, then it’s got to be one or the other, right? When I came to faith and was looking for a church, I ran into quite a few traditions who taught that the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God. What does that mean? That means that everything you read in the Bible, right down to

its last detail, is without error or contradiction. Here's how some people who believe in the inerrancy of the Bible determine if you do too. They'll ask, "So, did the axe head float?" You ever run into a person who considers themselves well-versed in the Bible and they throw out obscure scripture references to see if you know them too? They'll say, "Oh, you know, it was one of those Genesis 4:19 moments. You know what I'm talking about, right?" They know good and well that you probably don't know what they're talking about, but they say it anyway, just to make themselves look -- I don't know, "holier" than you. "Did the axe head float?" Ah ... I don't know what that means. "Well, you know the story of how Elijah and his disciples were building a house and one of the workers' axe flew off its handle and the axe head fell in the river?" Okay, sure. Whatever. "Then Elijah threw a stick in the water and the axe head floated to the surface? You know, right?" Sure. Fine. "Well, did the axe head float?" Well, yeah, that's what the story says. Now, if you say that, you're in trouble and have lost the battle already, because they'll say, "This isn't a story! It's not a fable! This is truth! It's historical fact. So, *did the axe head float?*" And if you say something like, "who the heck cares?" you're also in trouble because it shows that you don't believe in the inerrant and infallible word of God in the way they do. I hope you realize that I don't make this stuff up. It's real.

So how do you suppose someone who insists that the axe head did float deals with what appears to be incongruity like we see here between Matthew and Luke's gospel? Simple. They confidently claim that it was two separate occasions. Matthew gives the account of the time that Jesus taught the beatitudes on the mountain, and Luke tells about the time he taught the beatitudes on the plain. I mean, each gospel writer has a different list of beatitudes, right? Sure, they're similar, but Matthew has nine and Luke only has four. Also, Luke has four "woe to's" that go along with his four "blessed are's" which is kind of cool because if you're going to list some virtues that inspire happiness, it doesn't hurt to list some vices that inspire sadness too. But which version is more authoritative? Which one should we consider the better example of what Jesus taught? I've discovered that a lot of folks prefer Matthew's version

because he says, “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*” instead of “blessed are you poor” like Luke. I guess it’s more palatable to think that people who are going through a bout of depression are entitled to more happiness than someone who doesn’t have any resources. Honestly? I like both versions. They both contain some sayings that are hard to swallow. Matthew has “blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.” A lot of people aren’t crazy about that one because that sounds -- weak. But I suppose you could say the same thing about Luke’s “blessed are you that weep” too. It makes it sound like Jesus wants you to be a wimp, so of course he wouldn’t say that, right? And there’s no way that he’d say, “Blessed are you poor” because that’s not in God’s design! If you’re faithful and doing everything right, there’s no way that God would let you be poor! See last week’s reference to the “health and wealth” gospel heresy. And yet, here it is in both Matthew and Luke’s gospels. Blessed are you poor. Blessed are you that hunger. Blessed are you that weep. Blessed are you who are hated and reviled. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are the merciful. Wait until next week when we dig deeper into his sermon and start talking about loving your enemies!

I guess the point I’m trying to make here is that these principles are not easy. They make some folks squirm. I mean, not the poor, the hungry, the merciful, or the peacemakers – I’m pretty sure *they* think it’s great news. But the rest of us? Those of us who are more privileged and who were taught from an early age that if you want to get anywhere in life, you need to stay on top of the food chain might hear these virtues and say, “Yeah, well this just doesn’t fly in the real world.” Okay. Fair point. But again, this whole section is about the core values and teachings of Jesus. And what’s odd is how in some churches you don’t hear these things preached very often. You hear a lot of things from the Old Testament about God judging and smiting and thou shalt nots. You hear a lot about Paul telling the early church how to behave and live a virtuous lifestyle. “Don’t smoke, don’t drink, and don’t chew, or hang out with those who do.” Then there’s the whole, “women should be silent” thing that at least a *certain* percentage of the population likes to hear. And then when you do come around to Jesus in the gospels, you

hear quite a bit about Jesus' death and resurrection. But sometimes all these core value teachings get set aside in favor of his crucifixion and his resurrection. It's like we don't want to hear about *why* Herod and Caesar wanted to crucify him in the first place. We just want to get to the good part where Jesus overcomes the powers of sin and death so that we can claim our heavenly prize and be forgiven for all the bad things we've done. But the beatitudes? The sermon on the mount, or level place or wherever? Well, sometimes preachers get in quite a bit of trouble for shining a spotlight on those inconvenient passages. In fact, there's been two or three high-profile cases recently that have received quite a bit of attention. Imagine that. Preachers who get in trouble for quoting Jesus. It's like we're so quick to point to how we're on Jesus' team and lift up how Jesus' path is the best way. We feel a need to impose Jesus on everyone else whether they want to hear it or not. Well, except for his Sermon on the Mount or the beatitudes or anything else he said or taught between the temptation in the wilderness and the night he was betrayed arrested. That all seems to get lost in the shuffle. Jesus died for your sins. Heck yeah! Jesus told us to be peacemakers and love our enemies. Eh, I don't know. Sounds too squishy.

I've been thinking a lot about this idea of posting the ten commandments in court houses and schools and municipal buildings. I like the ten commandments. They're quite concise compared to other ancient middle-eastern laws like the Codes of Hammurabi. They cover the basics, and for the most part they're fairly universal virtues, at least the last four are. A lot of people who oppose placing the ten commandments in public places will say, "Well if you're going to do that, you should post the Code of Hammurabi too" which is an intentionally ridiculous thing to say because that would take up way too much space. What about the Beatitudes though? I mean, if you really want to lift up Jesus why not find something that Jesus said to post on the wall or carve into stone? Why not the beatitudes? I mean, those are Jesus' core values, right? Yeah, but that's still a lot to put up on a wall. Besides, which version do you use? Matthew's or Luke's? Fair point. I have an idea, but I've got to jump ahead to next week's lectionary passage which picks up

where this one leaves off. How about we use, Luke 6:31? You know. Right? Sorry. Bad joke. Luke 6:31 says, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?” Also known as “The Golden Rule.” It checks off a bunch of boxes – These are Jesus’ words. It’s from the sermon on the mount, so it reflects and summarizes Jesus’ core values. For practical purposes, it doesn’t have to take up that much space on the wall. I mean, you can make it big enough to cover an entire wall if you want, which might be a good thing, because it would make it easy to memorize. I mean, as succinct as the ten commandments are, comparatively speaking, how many people do you know who’ve memorized them? And which version do you use? The one in Exodus, or the one in Deuteronomy because there are some differences between the two. The other great thing about this Golden Rule is that Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, the Baha’i faith, Hinduism, Daoism, and Confucianism all have it in their holy writings too, so you can’t say you’re disrespecting or excluding other religious traditions. And best of all, it is an easy measuring tool. If someone does something foolish or outrageous or dangerous or puts somebody down or slanders them, you can say, “Would you want that to happen to you?” You could even borrow some concepts from Luke’s beatitudes. If you catch someone hating, or excluding or reviling or “casting out another person’s name as evil,” you could say, “Why are you doing this? Would you want this to happen to you?” The Golden Rule. Wow. The more I think about it, the more I like this. I could get behind this idea. The problem is, I wonder if there are other Christians out there who would go along with it, or would they label Jesus’ words as offensive or even un-Christian? I’m glad that later on in his gospel Luke writes about a time when Jesus tells his disciple John, “blessed is he who takes *no* offense at me.” May the words that proceed from Jesus’ mouth inform and inspire the words that come from our mouths.