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Luke 6:12–26

17th Message

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FOUNDATIONAL MOMENTS

SERIES: LUKE

I Intro

When I was a boy, my hero in life was a football player – not a player for the Niners though – sorry to say. My hero was a player for the Cowboys. His name was Roger Staubach, the quarterback. He was a great hero. I pretended to be like him every chance I got – with my #12 jersey and my Cowboys helmet. The joy of being a boy in the 20th century.

Now, if I had been a boy growing up in the 1st century, I would have had a very different kind of hero to idolize. In the first century, the hero of the day could only have been one person – none other than Julius Caesar, the notorious Roman General who summed up his march across Europe by saying, “We came. We saw. We conquered.” And man, did he conquer! He extended the Roman Republic through present-day France all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, conquering anything that stood in his path. He was the first Roman leader to invade Britain. Many consider him the military genius of his day. He was indeed the hero of the day, laying the foundation of perhaps the greatest kingdom known in the ancient world.

Now, you can read about all of that in any history book or on Wikipedia. The problem is that a lot of times, the Roman Empire is romanticized and Julius Caesar is made out to be some kind of superhero. What you don’t usually read about is what kind of hero Julius Caesar really was and therefore what kind of kingdom this kingdom really was. What you’ll discover if you dig a little deeper is that Caesar, the hero of the day, was a downright nasty person. He simply killed anyone who got in his way. If you’re a little person, you have no chance in his kingdom. In present-day France, he killed a million people, sold another million into slavery and left over 200,000 people homeless for the coming winter. That’s the foundation of this “great” kingdom that is Rome. It is said that when he came to Alexander the Great’s tomb, he got to his knees and wept because he hadn’t killed as many people as Alex had.

Against that brutal culture, where leaders destroy everyone and kingdoms are built on the power of the sword, comes Jesus, a different kind of leader who builds a kingdom like no other. A kingdom that I like to refer to as an upside-down kingdom. Today we are going to look at foundational moments of this different kind of kingdom.

We are making our way through the book of Luke, and we pick up the story today after Jesus has just finished having a few run-ins with the Sabbath police, i.e. the religious authorities. This causes some intense discussion which Bernard taught on last week. The scene ends with these authorities plotting on how they might get Jesus. At this point, we get a break from the controversies, which allows Jesus some time to begin constructing his kingdom, a kingdom like no other. We are going to look at these foundational moments today. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Luke chapter 6, verse 12.

II The Foundation

In these days, he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12 ESV)

The Cornerstone

One verse, but a very powerful one. Jesus begins the scene by praying. How different is this picture from Caesar, a leader who forces the little people to their knees in surrender to his almighty sword? Jesus, our foundation – the chief cornerstone of our faith – a sacrificial leader on his knees in surrender to the Father. This is truly a kingdom like no other and it begins with him and his example. He is our cornerstone, the very foundation of our faith. Just as the cornerstone of a building in the first century provided structural integrity for the building, so Jesus gives our faith credibility and integrity. We are on a solid foundation.

The Example

What about his example? What we see over and over again especially in this Gospel is that the foundation of Jesus’ life is dependent prayer. He shows us that a life lived in this kingdom has a foundation of dependent prayer especially during crucial times. For Jesus, this was a crucial time. As we will see, he will be selecting the 12 apostles the next day. So he goes off to pray. Here is the eternal Son of God and even he needs a foundation of dependent prayer. How much more do we? Especially in crucial moments.

We’ve been talking about this a little bit in our Junior High group, and I just received this email from one of them this week:

On Friday, there was supposedly a gunman on my school campus and we went into lockdown for the day. During the Code Red, I was really scared and prayed to God that no one would be killed or seriously hurt, or even hurt at all. God answered my prayer and no one was killed or hurt at all other than a small injury to a student at the high-school who attempted to climb a fence to escape. I wanted to tell you about my experience in the lockdown.

What our kids go through these days! Here’s a Junior Higher who understands that a life lived in this kingdom is a life whose foundation is dependent prayer. Why? Because prayer is the surest sign that we actually trust and depend on God. But, the opposite is also true; lack of prayer is the surest sign that we think we can do it on our own, that we don’t need God. A life lived in this kingdom is characterized by dependent prayer

Thanks be to God for our prayer team and Moms in Prayer and all the other sometimes spontaneous prayer groups in our church for reminding us how important prayer is.

Well, after a night of praying, Luke says this:

III The Founding Fathers

And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: Simon, whom he named

Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:13-16)

Well, Jesus calls the 12. Thus far, Luke has told us about the callings of Simon, James, John and Matthew. But, these new followers have had almost no role within the narrative. So far, the focus has been on Jesus, the shape of his ministry and the division that has happened around him. But, here Jesus enumerates all twelve. These twelve are the founding fathers of the church (Eph 2:20).

The New People of God

Why twelve? The number is obviously the number of Israel. As Israel began with 12 tribes and had their identity fixed for thousands of years, so now Jesus comes along and redefines Israel. This is the new Israel – the new People of God, centered around Jesus. This is God's new humanity. This is the new wine that won't fit into those old wineskins. If Israel's official leaders are not interested, which we've seen to be the case, Jesus will find a new group that is interested.

Ordinary Nobodies

So, who is this new group? Well, it's a pretty ragtag group and disparate group to say the least. All except Judas Iscariot were Galileans, "country boys". You have an optimist in Peter, who says, "Jesus, we can do anything". A pessimist in Thomas who says, "Jesus, we can't do anything". You have a zealot in Simon, which essentially means he's an insurrectionist and hates paying taxes. A tax collector in Matthew, who is collecting all the taxes from Simon and giving them to the hated Romans. Politics and economic policy were definitely off the list of potential discussion topics.

This is certainly a motley crew that Jesus puts together. But, what is maybe more amazing is the fact that these men are ordinary people. This is certainly not how I would do it. In fact, they are remarkably ordinary. There are no CEOs or CFOs or COOs (or even C-3POs). These men are not well-known or rich or noble men. Not one is a priest or rabbi or scribe or religious leader. As Acts 4 says, these are "unschooled, ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). It seems, at least in our view, to be a pretty risky strategy by Jesus. There's no backup team – no B-team, nobody on the bench – this is it. This kingdom hangs on the risky strategy of these 12 remarkably ordinary men.

But, Jesus takes this ragtag group of ordinary nobodies, trains them for half as long as it typically takes to get a seminary degree today and simply conquers the ancient world, not with a sword, but with grace, truth and love. The kingdom of Rome is long gone, but not this kingdom! It is still going strong today, fulfilling His prophecy "I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it." (Matt 16:18).

We stand on this foundation today as another group of ragtag, remarkably ordinary people 2,000 years later. As Abraham Lincoln said, "God must have liked ordinary people because he made so many of them." We are just like them. It's a pretty risky strategy by Jesus to use us ordinary people. But, let this be an encouragement to you today. You don't have to be popular or perfect or a prophet. You just have to be ordinary. When the enemy tells you you're worthless and useless because of your ordinariness and brokenness, don't listen to him. Because worthless nobodies, like the original 12, are just the kind of people God uses to change the world. "...Our ordinariness

makes room for His extraordinariness."¹ In our weakness, He is strong (2 Cr 12:9). Be encouraged today.

Next we'll look at verses 17–19.

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 from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. (Luke 6:17-19)

Well, Jesus now comes down off the mountain. The text says that he came down with his apostles and stood on a level place and a large crowd gathered with a great number of people from all over. They had gathered to hear him teach and to be healed of their diseases. Luke tells us that power was coming from him and healing all of them. This is a different kind of power. It's not the power of the sword which destroys. It's the power to heal, make whole and give hope. That's Jesus and that's what this kingdom is all about.

We now move to our foundational faith. It's like Jesus says, ok, boys, you want to follow me, well this is what you signed up for and it's a doozy. Jesus looks at his disciples and speaks:

IV The Foundational Faith

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets. (Luke 6:20-26)

As you can see, there are four blessings and four woes. And, each blessing goes with a corresponding woe.

Poor/rich

Hungry/well-fed

Weeping/laughing

Hated/well-liked

This is the second teaching from Jesus in the book of Luke, but his first on discipleship, on what it means to follow him. I don't know about you, but this really jars me when I read it. No matter how familiar you are with this text or with its counterpart in Matthew, it's jarring. It seems to be absolutely counter to how I naturally live my life. At face value, Jesus seems to be exalting values that the world despises and seems to be rejecting values which the world admires. It appears that this kingdom is going to march to the beat of a different drum.

Every so often, I play this game with my Junior Highers – maybe you've heard of it – called "Would you Rather?" It's usually an ice-breaker to get boys talking because it's pretty tough to get teenage boys talking. The game is simply calling out two options – neither one is usually good – and let the person pick between them and listen to why they chose what they did. The "why" is always a treat from

a Junior High boy. An example would be, “Would you rather be lost in a jungle or lost in a desert?” Or, “Would you rather live with the Bonanza family or the Munster family?” Well, how about the options that Jesus poses to us today – Would you rather be rich, well fed, happy and popular (i.e. Comfortable) or poor, hungry, weeping and hated (i.e. Uncomfortable)? Quite the options huh? Don’t answer with what the teacher wants to hear... Answer honestly, as I tell my Junior Highers.

This is pretty tough stuff. How do we make sense of what Jesus is saying here. Well, my plan today is to spend the most time on the first two blessings then at the end, I’ll quickly cover the last two.

But before we get there, a few, quick sentences about these words. Blessed is a word describing God’s assessment of us. So, being blessed is living in alignment with God or living appropriately as a person of God.

What about “woe”? This word is not a word of condemnation; rather, it is a statement of sympathetic sorrow that is full of compassion. A way to translate it is “alas” or “how terrible”. How terrible is it if you go after riches now or how terrible it is if you go after popularity now. Even in pronouncing woe, Jesus is still full of compassion.

Blessed are the Poor and Hungry

So, blessed are the poor and hungry. What is meant by the terms poor and hungry? I think to understand these terms, we need to see how they are used throughout this Gospel of Luke. What we find is that Luke uses these terms to describe the marginalized and those on the outskirts of life. In fact, this is what the book of Luke is all about – this kingdom brings good news to all the lowlifes. This is the sinners, the sick and the status-less. This kingdom is for those with whom Jesus eats at Levi’s house – the sinners and prostitutes. This kingdom is for the widow in chapter 7 who, while weeping, pours perfume on Jesus’ feet. She’s called the great sinner of the town! These are the little people who Caesar tramples under foot so he can become great! But, this is who Jesus has come for – not the healthy but the sick, the sinners and the status-less.

On the other side of the coin, the rich and well-fed are the big people, the great ones. These terms are used to describe the people in control. Throughout this Gospel, these are the people with significant resources at their disposal, and, yet, they refuse to consider the plight of others.

So, why does Jesus bless the marginalized and pronounce a woe against the rich and well-fed? We’ll start with the blessing first – Is Jesus simply saying that one has to be poor and hungry to enter into this kingdom? No! If that were the case, then salvation would be based on our economic status, and that would be a perversion of the Gospel. No, the poor and hungry are blessed because of the resultant attitude. It’s a matter of the heart. It’s the resultant attitude of the heart that accompanies the poor, and the hungry. The marginalized know they need God and therefore live a dependent lifestyle in him. They have nothing else in which to put their trust. This is why they’re blessed! Their whole existence hangs on God. They are desperately dependent on God. As James says, it’s the poor in the eyes of this world that God has chosen to be rich in faith (James 2:5).

One visit to a third world country will show you this immediately. Liberia shows this to me. The richness and depth of faith of the marginalized there makes me sometimes wonder if our riches really are a blessing.

So, then, why does Jesus pronounce a woe on the big people, the rich and well-fed? Not because they have money, have food and status. It’s because of the resultant attitude that goes along with being a big person. The attitude of independence from God, the attitude of self-sufficiency and the attitude that I can do it all by myself. We don’t really have to depend on God if we can do everything ourselves (at least that’s what we think). That’s why Jesus pronounces a woe against the rich.

Two stories that might help here: First, the attitude of the Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:17-25). He skips up to Jesus, seemingly wanting to trust him. The disciples are excited; here’s someone with status and riches. They say, “Jesus, we can use him to fund all of our activities. Come on, take him, Jesus.” But, Jesus doesn’t particularly care about his money or status. Above all else, he cares about this man’s heart. After their discussion and after the dust has settled, we find that this man doesn’t own the riches, the riches own him. His riches have a strangle-hold on his heart. He depends on them too much for his life! He likes the status of being rich, being young and being a ruler. That’s the temptation of earthly riches. That’s where we get the statement – “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.” (Mark 10:25) Why? Because where your treasures are, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21) and that’s what matters. It’s like a magnet. Where your treasures are – what you value the most – that’s where your heart is!

Compare that to this story:

A good friend of mine just came back from a missions trip to Cambodia where she worked in an orphanage full of mentally and physically handicapped kids. These kids have nothing and have been deserted and have ended up in this orphanage. The girl found this one toy that she loved to play with. My friend said she went over to the girl and the girl just gave the toy to her – just gave it away. The one thing she treasured in this world and just gave it away! Indeed it is the poor of this world – the marginalized of this world – who can be rich in faith because their hearts have not gone after other things.

So what do we do? We store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, not on earth (Matt 6:19-20). Because then our heart will be drawn to things of heaven.

So, the real questions from these first two blessings/woes are these: What do you value today? Where are your treasures? Because where they are, there your heart is.

Blessed are the Weepers and Rejected

A few quick words about these other two blessings/woes. Jesus says you are blessed if you are a weeper. Is He really blessing grim, cheerless followers? I don’t think so, although some have thought that. Charles Spurgeon once said that some preachers he knew appeared to have their neckties twisted around their souls.² No, Jesus is not against laughter. He is simply pronouncing a woe against this attitude that keeps us from weeping at the right things and causes us to laugh at the wrong things. Boy do I ever notice this a lot in our coarsening culture. Nothing is sacred anymore. Right?

Primetime TV, many times, celebrates evil and sin, and they disguise it and draw you in with jokes and laughter. Am I right? Check that out today during the Super Bowl commercials. We need to learn to weep at the right things, namely our sin and the brokenness of the world. This is why Jesus blesses the weepers.

The last one is the blessing of rejection. Blessed are you when you are hated because of the Lord. Notice it's not simply being hated; it's being hated on account of him. We shouldn't spend our lives seeking conflict and seeking to be hated. At the same time, we shouldn't treasure universal popularity, which he pronounces a woe against. The simple fact is, if we live righteously – if we live out these counter-cultural values – we will be rejected and persecuted. People don't like this kingdom that is the church. In that time, we should leap for joy, because this is what we signed up for.

V Conclusion

In conclusion, as Christians, we live in a kingdom like no other. First of all, we serve a leader who surrenders, who shows us how to pray. Secondly, we sit on a solid foundation of 12 remarkably ordinary nobodies who, in their ordinariness, have brought honor and praise and glory to God's extraordinariness. Thirdly, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we strive to live out values counter to the culture, affirming the heart attitudes of Christ Himself.

Now, this kingdom like no other actually rocked the ancient world and brought the great Roman Empire to it's knees. Within 400 years, it just fell to Christianity! May we do the same today. Amen.

1. R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know The Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), p 209.

2. Charles Spurgeon, as quoted by R. Kent Hughes, pg 218.

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