

“The Counter-Culture of the Kingdom of Christ: Part 1”

Luke 6:17-36

Intro: Ken Myers says that “Culture is what we make of the world.” When we talk about culture we think about the shared values, customs, and perspectives of a given people in a particular place. Moving from suburban NC to the global city of Boston in NE. Communication Culture: The wave. The honk. Lifestyle: Pace of life. Eating Habits: not only is there more seafood, an incredible amount of pizza, but people eat much healthier here, exercise more, and thus, obesity is more rare. Values: education, degrees... There were some similarities, but when it comes to . . .

The Point: Disciples of Christ are called to live as a distinct counter-culture in the world.

Before we begin in verse 17, I want you to look back to verse **12-14**.

- Do you remember when we asked the question a couple of weeks ago: Will we be dependent on ourselves or desperate for the Spirit? Here is a picture of desperation. “Jesus you’ve got a huge mission ahead, and yeah tomorrow you’re going to select twelve out of a great number of your followers to be your special representative. What’s your approach?” Prayer, all night. That’s desperation. Anybody up for that?
- These twelve apostles he selects represent the new nation of Israel Jesus is forming. Just as the nation of Israel had twelve tribes, so Jesus’ has chosen twelve leaders whom he will use to build his new people, the church, as Paul tells us in Ephesians 2. By the way, the church is simply a community of disciples.
- App: Covenant membership. (Connections Class...) Same faith. Same mission. Let’s go.

Verses 17-20 tell us what happens next.

- What we are about to absorb over the next two weeks is the most famous sermon Jesus preached. If you have ever wanted to know what Jesus taught, listen up. In Matthew’s gospel, this is known as the “Sermon on the Mount.” The fact that Luke tells us that Jesus stood on a level place doesn’t mean that these were two different sermons but likely indicates Jesus stood on a plateau as he was coming down. We can’t be 100% certain, but most scholars today believe Luke and Matthew package the same sermon in different ways to make their points to their respective audiences.
- Remember, Jesus’ ministry was one of Word and deed, but his deed ministry was always pointing people to his word ministry. And he came primarily to proclaim the good news to the poor in the words of Luke 4:18, or as Luke 4:43 says, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well for I was sent for this purpose.” This is why he came, to preach the good news of the kingdom of God.
- So what we have in Luke 6 is a sermon on the distinguishing marks of the community of Jesus. He gives a picture of “the counter-culture of the Kingdom of Christ,”
- We see this counter-culture in two ways in the first half of Luke’s account of Jesus’ sermon. #1

I. The counter-culture of Christ calls us to a life of humble reliance (6:20-26).

- What Jesus is about to proclaim is a description of real Christianity, true discipleship, what a person’s life look like when they live under the rule and reign of God.
- And here’s a warning: if you put these into practice, you will be “out of step” with the values of the world around you. In fact, at every turn, Jesus declares a remarkable reversal in values with what people were accustomed to, so much so that some scholars have spoke of the “upside-down” kingdom of Christ. It is a counter-culture.
- Verse 20 tells us that he primarily addresses the disciples. This is a message for them about what life in the kingdom looks like. At the same time, the great crowds of v. 17 were hearing these words, and they contain instruction for them to heed as well.
- Many in the great multitude were no doubt very religious people. They wanted to hear what this great prophet had to say. So it is helpful for us to remember that some of Jesus’ first words in Matthew’s version were: “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” These words would have shocked all who heard. After all, you could not be more religious, more devoted in appearance, more seemingly righteous than the Pharisees. They were so meticulous in keeping the law that they would even tithe, not just their money and larger material possessions, but their mint, dill, and cumin, little tiny spices... Matthew makes it explicit by quoting Jesus’ formula: “You have heard it said, but I say to you.” Jesus calls his disciples to something much more radical than religious conformity. He is calling for an internal revolution of the heart that will manifest itself outwardly in distinct kingdom living.

Beatitudes

- He introduces his sermon with a series of statements on the “Blessed” life. These are known as the beatitudes. The word “blessed” can be translated “happy.” I have heard some preachers say that the beatitudes are the “be happy” attitudes, and I can understand why some are tempted to call them that. After all, everyone wants to be happy, but these are not prescriptions for how to feel good or happy. These truths run so much deeper. To be blessed is to have the favor of God resting upon you, and to experience the favor of God produces great joy.
- A great example of blessing is found in the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26: **“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”**
- These beatitudes address one group who possesses all four characteristics. . .
- And they should be understood as words of encouragement and comfort to his disciples. In other words, these things are true of my disciples, and you are blessed both now in this life and will be more fully blessed in the age to come.
- There is an implicit invitation here: Follow me and I will flip your life upside down so that you might experience true blessing. **Verse 20**

“Blessed are the poor”:

- Life was difficult in that day. Many people in that day, like many people in our day, thought happiness came from our material possessions and the benefits wealth often brings: status, pleasures, creature comforts, but a trip to the third world will quickly show us that a happy life is not dependent on accumulated wealth.
- Now, while Jesus displays a great concern for the poor and distressed, we should understand his use of the term “poor” in more of a theological than economic sense. This is what Matthew means when he says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Sure, the physical poor are often more humble and open to the work of God, but everyone must be spiritually poor, whether you are in the 1% or the 99%, which by the way, Americans, from a global perspective are the 1%. You may not like that, but that’s the facts.
- The spiritually poor are those who see their great poverty before God in light of his great abundance. In every case, he has what we need. To put it more directly, he is what we need. The OT uses the term this way numerous times. Take David for example, as in King David, materially rich, but spiritually poor. In Psalm 40, 86, & 109, he says, “I am poor and needy.”
- The poor in spirit We recognize that we are in desperate need of God. We need his wisdom. we need his goodness. We need his mercy.
- In the words of the great hymn: “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.” – This is the only way to live, not simply enter, but live and experience blessing in the kingdom of God.
- Here’s a prayer to undercut self-reliance: “I am nothing. You are everything.” I am nothing. You are everything. And to that we could add... I am poor. You are rich. I am not good. You are good. I love myself. You have selfless love.”
- “This beatitude sets the stage for the three that follow.” – Bock & I cannot emphasize this enough..... (Hit Throughout),
- Now here’s some good news for the poor. . .

“for yours is the kingdom of God.”

- This is a present reality. All of the blessings, the great inheritance. The kingdom belongs to people like this, people who are poor
- App: Have you seen your great need? You will never have your life realigned with God until you see that you are empty handed before God and in desperate need of his mercy and provision. **Verse 21**

“Blessed are those who are hungry”

- Not only those who hunger physically, though we certainly want to meet those needs (provide Turkeys, clean water, etc), but also a spiritual hunger (Mt. 5:6)
- Fasting...??

“for you shall be satisfied.”

- Scholars refer to this verb as the “divine passive.” God is implied here. He is the one who will satisfy them.

“Blessed are those who weep...”

- Have you gone through great difficulty in your life? Are you going through difficulty?
- We live in a fallen world. Jesus told us plainly in John 16 that we would have trouble in the world, but to take heart because he has overcome the world.

- *By the way, Jesus is not teaching that poverty, hunger, persecution, and tears are blessings in themselves. If that were true, how do we make sense of vv. 18-19 and the rest of the gospel? He is not telling us to pursue martyrdom, though he may call some of us to that privilege.
- What he is saying is that that God will meet your needs and his favor rests on you as you are poor in spirit and look to his ultimate provision.
- Those who endure and persevere through trials and hardships and difficulties in this life will laugh. "for you shall laugh."
- You will have joy, so much joy that it will cause you to laugh.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted"

- Jesus says, "when you are hated, excluded, reviled, and spurned as evil on account of me, you are blessed!" Not exactly how we would typically view it. And then he turns it up a notch in v. 23 and says, "Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets."
- This is exactly what the apostles did. Acts 4....
- Why? Because they had so completely identified with Jesus, that he was really all that mattered. He will take care of us. He will see us through. I love the words of Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God: The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever."
- TCF
- Evangelism Strategy...When will RHC become an unstoppable force for Christ? When we get this deep down in our souls. The fear of God and our love for God is so supreme that even in the face of opposition

Do you see how counter-cultural this is? Completely upside-down. We are told, be strong, be rich, pursue power. Look down on the weak. Do whatever you need to do to get ahead. Be a self-made person. You don't need anyone's help. Laugh now. If this is your perspective, your life, receive the warnings of 24-26

- Woes: if you pursue wealth and fullness and laughter and the praise of men for this life only, you better enjoy it because that is all you are going to get. "you have received your consolation." Woe to the rich: the proud, arrogant, self-sufficient. Why? They have received their consolation. Woe to those who are full now, for they will be hungry. Woe to those who laugh now, for they will mourn and weep. Woe to those who seek the praise of men and soak in the compliments when people praise them, why because what really matters is that we receive the praise and commendation of God, not man. [Go back and read Matt 6...]

Trans: The counter-culture of Christ calls us to a life of humble reliance. In verses 27-36, we see that

II. The counter-culture of Christ calls us to a life of radical love (6:27-36).

Verse 27. Remember, this comes on the heels of v. 22

- Sometimes our lives can create friction. Why? Because when we live in this counter-cultural kind of way and show that our values or different, our motivations are different, and therefore, our actions are often going to be different, people are going to receive that as an implicit, silent rebuke to the way they are choosing to live their lives, and no one likes to be told they are wrong. It's that dirty little sin, which Winslow calls a "Protean evil," pride. (reword)

How do we respond? When we are hated, when we are cursed, when we are abused, how should we respond?

- **Love them:** Conventional wisdom tells us to not love our friends but certainly not our enemies. We should despise them. We should reject them. We should keep them at arm's length at minimum, if not find a way to retaliate and harm them.
- **Do Good** to them, Bless them Pray for them: This is where it gets difficult. If God instructed us to simply love our enemies, then we might be able to conjure up some feeling, even if it were false, that made us feel like, "hey, I'm not going to physically harm this person, so I must have some love in my heart for them (Maybe revise). BUT Jesus directs this love command directly at our will that will produce action. Love should always move us to a particular kind of actions. He gives us four illustrations in 29-30.

Illustration #1 -(29a) Turn your cheek

- a. Jesus is not commanding [absolute passivity or that his disciples should be a doormat for their enemies to walk all over.] He is teaching his disciples that love does not make use of its rights and is willing to forgive even if it means experiencing further insult and abuse.

- b. When we are insulted, we want revenge. You insulted me. You better watch your back...
- c. Do you want vengeance? Do you want to defame their character?

Illustration #2 – (29b) If someone takes your cloak (a robe-like outer garment), do not withhold your tunic also (which would have been the garment worn next to the skin).

- d. Pic... The temperatures are dropping: When you are chilling at the bus stop... Here's my jacket . . . and my shirt and gloves. But remember, that's not a friend, that's the dude that just stole your kid's snowmobile last weekend. What happens when we do this? Pour burning coals on their head...

Illustration 3 & 4 are found in v. 30- Give to the beggar & do not demand when someone takes your

- **Verse 31: Golden Rule**
 - a. **Interfaith PosterCommon Grace...**
 - b. We're not as good as our worldview should make us and nonbelievers are not as bad as their worldview should make them.
- Verses 32-34: Jesus teaches us to do good for the virtue of love, not because we expect something in return. Thus, he rips the self-centered tendency of our good works out from under our feet.
 - a. Illus. – "Hey, I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." I'll give you a ride, if you'll give me your notes from last week. I'll watch your kids, if you'll ____ I'll do the dishes if you'll _____. You know what I'm saying?!"
 - b. Reciprocal loans and reciprocal kindness is not really generosity or kindness at all.
 - c. Verse 35 serves as a summary statement on radical love. Love. Do good, lend. These are present imperatives, which emphasize our need to continually love, continually do good, continually extend generosity without reservation and without expecting something in return.
- Love? Do good? Bless? Pray? I mean, Jesus, could you calm down with the sermon just a little bit?" Here's the problem though: In the gospels, Jesus raises the expectation on what exceptional love looks like with not only his words but also his life.
 - a. Here's what I mean: John 13; John/Synoptics (dine with me)
- And how are we going to love our enemies? Poor in spirit...
- Now, if this is the expectation, the command, we could probably use a little motivation. And the only motivation we need is God himself!

What's the motivation? Verse 35.

- "Your reward will be great" (this is legit...) store up treasure in heaven... (Maybe quote matt 6). But even better than that.
- "You will be sons of the Most High..." what's the significance of this?
- "for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. **Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.**"
 - a. Imitate our Father in heaven. (Lev. 19:2 "Be holy, because I the Lord your God am holy") Here's the game changer... What religion motivates us to love our enemy in the way that Christianity does? This is not tolerance. This is not pacificism. This is not simple self-control. This is radical, world turned upside-down, kind of love.
 - b. Because this is exactly what God has done for his enemies! He is kind to everyone: Common Grace... & Especially to those who receive his saving grace.
 - c. So with the immeasurable love and mercy of God in view:
 - i. ["Freely you have received, freely give." (Matt 10:8)]
 - ii. **"We love because he first loved us." (1John 4:19)**
 - iii. **"For the Love of Christ compels us, controls us." (2 Cor. 5:14)**
 - iv. **"The aim of our is love" (1 Tim 1:5)**
 - d. May his love be the measure of our lives and the motivation of our ministry...??
- Do you know the love and mercy of God?

Conclusion:

Who can hope beyond our present circumstances? Who can rejoice in suffering? Who can love their enemies by turning the other cheek and doing good to them? The poor in spirit.

*Here's my problem. So often, I am not poor. So often, rather than relying on God, I live a life of self-reliance.