

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Luke 6:17-31

Verses 17-19

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place. A great crowd of disciples were with him; a multitude of people from Judea and Jerusalem, also from the coast, from Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear him, to be healed of their diseases and those troubled by unclean spirits were being cured. The throng were trying to touch him because power was coming from him to heal all of them.

Luke's careful research records that Jesus had descended from a higher place (12) where he had been praying before he chose the 12 apostles. **He came down with them** and his disciples were beside him as he prepared to receive the multitudes. This was the typical way a rabbi taught; disciples lived with him and copied his behaviour and memorized his words. **The level place** was unlike Matthew's mountainside (5:1) but not hugely differently. It still may have been elevated and was not necessarily the valley floor.

Jesus was ministering in Galilee but news about him and his miracles reached more distant places: **Judea and Jerusalem...Tyre and Sidon.** His work consisted of teaching and healing and so we hear that **they came to hear him, to be healed of their diseases and those troubled by unclean spirits were being cured.** Luke switches from the crowd's intentions before they left home to the present when some were being exorcised. **Unclean spirit** was a common designation in the synoptics, particularly of Mark. The demon defiled a person. **Uncleanness**, then, was a religious term associated with Old Testament cultic practices. The Jewish people were to be clean and separated from the nations. They were to be holy to God and anything that brought a person into contact with the profane rather than God's created domain or the locus of his covenant, people and temple, made then religiously unclean.

Clearly, Jesus succeeded in **healing** all who were afflicted, comprising many in the crowd. Literally, **he healed many** but this should not be seen as quite a lot were healed but not all. Rather, the many in the crowd who were sick or demon possessed, were healed by him. Luke understands this to be a result of the **power that was coming from him.** It is a curious expression. As a man, Christ healed by faith, for faith can move mountains (Matt 17:20). The expression may still mean this because in 5:17, power is attributed to the Lord, that is, to his Father (cf 4:1,18). Luke attempts to understand the miracles as the action of God's power in Christ flowing out to others. He locates the source of power in Christ himself because he is viewing him from the perspective of his divine nature.

Verses 20-23

**When he raised his eyes at his disciples he said,
"Blessed are the poor because theirs is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are they who hunger now because they will be filled.
Blessed are they who weep now for they will be glad.
Blessed are you when men hate you, bury you in insults and discard your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and skip for look, your reward in heaven is immense because their ancestors did the same things to the prophets.**

The words of Jesus are directed to the disciples and all who would later follow him, for **he raised his eyes at his disciples.** But the expression hints at our Lord bestowing a blessing on his children, not too dissimilar to 24:50. In a spiritual way, **by lifting his eyes,** Jesus also saw into the future the great troubles his saints would have.

Blessed are the poor is the gospel. In a general way, those dispossessed by economic systems or by corporations or by self-serving politicians, by the corrupt land and asset owners of society, have the good news of Christ: **because theirs is the kingdom of God.** The Lord, however, is directing his

attention to those believers who suffer privation for the sake of the gospel. The kingdom of God becomes their possession. They miss out on food but inherit more than 100 universes. In Luke, the kingdom of God is especially associated with the person of Christ (17:21) and is seen as a gift flowing from God's kindness and grace.

The same can be said of **those who hunger now**. One would think that this **filling with food**, promised by the Lord, will also take place in the kingdom.

Blessed are they who weep now for they will be glad, like poverty and hunger, this generally refers to the evil conditions and systems in place that disadvantage so many. However, in light of the context of a sermon to the disciples and then what follows this concerning the persecution of Christians, this hunger and mourning are the result of loss and great hardship occurring through dislocation caused by persecution and the extremes of mission to be encountered by the saints. Gladness will come and tears will end (Rev 7:16; 21:4).

Verses 24-26

Woe to you who are rich because you are receiving your comfort in full.

Woe to you who are now well-fed because you will be hungry.

Woe to you who are laughing now because you will grieve and weep.

Woe [to you] when everyone speaks well of you for their ancestors did same things to the false prophets.

The four woes correspond to the four blessings. There is no future in God's kingdom for the people Jesus addressed. Riches, food, happiness and popularity do not comprise the kingdom. Jesus advocated the spending on one's wealth on the poor in relation to the gift of the kingdom, in fact, because the kingdom was a gift (12:32-34). Riches are the chief impediment to entering the kingdom according to Jesus (18:24).

As for food, disciples were to trust that they have a heavenly Father who cares for them because they have the Son (12:22-31).

Laughing was associated with success, popularity and partying (12:19) but Jesus said that only a fool does not recognize the fragility of life.

Being liked because the message suits the audience is a great danger in a society that demands conformity to its corrupt values. See Jeremiah (23:14; 26:9; 28:10).

One assumes that the future spoken of in first three woes refers to the Parousia (16:25). Suffering, loss and anguish are typical states in hell.

Verses 27-31

But to you hearing what I am saying to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you. To him who strikes you on your cheek offer him the other and he who takes away your coat do not withhold [your] shirt. Give to everyone who asks of you and whoever takes what belongs to you, do not demand back. As you would like people to treat you, do to them likewise.

Jesus followers are to love, not merely their fellow believers or friends but also their enemies. The principle of non-retaliation, in contrast to Lev 24:20, is essential to love and authenticates the message of Christ. Jesus uses the verb often associated with the way God loves the world and each person unconditionally, according to his undeserved kindness towards the unworthy. **Love** ἀγαπάτε **your enemies** is a tremendous command to make (35). The verbs are in the present tense imperative and indicate an on-going gracious activities towards enemies and those taking advantage of Jesus followers. Enemies, no doubt refer to Roman occupying forces, though a more general application is also meant. It could include those persecuting believers (22) and personal enemies.

The force of the **but**, which begins the sentence in verse 27, supports Jesus' desire that his followers do not make compromises with those with status and authority, in effect joining them, but that they show a radical love whilst confessing their faith and allegiance to him.

There are eight verbs. The first group of five deal with adversaries who attack. **Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you** amplify further the kind of love that followers of Jesus are to have: **do good, bless, pray**. **Bless** is the opposite of **curse**, for rather than an act of damnation, which a person may do invoking various gods, the believer in the Lord, is call on the Lord to promote, to treat well and ensure the attacker prospers. **Love** is the opposite of **hate** but has already been used in relation to enemies. Rather than a godly and deeply spiritual emotion of love, Jesus commands actions of **doing good**. While a blessing is a pronouncement of peace and good, hardly used today, while cursing is more common, **praying for those mistreating you**, is an action of petitioning God to heal, help, guide and prosper persons who continue to treat believers in unjust and hurtful ways.

In addition to these radical responses to hatred and mistreatment, followers are to continue in the same vein with those who aim their intentions and malevolence on their property. As there were five verbs of attack, there are three verbs of taking but the fifth verb of attacking, transitions to the final three for the believer has to offer something, in the fifth case, **the other cheek**. When there is physical abuse, Jesus asks the followers to be prepared to continue to suffer whilst acting to do good to enemies. Today, we would think of medical staff, police, teachers, parents, aged-care workers, often facing physical abuse. This verse should in no way be used to re-victimise victims. Jesus was thinking about situations where there was no way of avoiding abuse or where legal means of redress were not available.

In a similar way, **not withholding your shirt** (the undergarment), **giving to those who ask of you and not demanding back what is taken**, can be considered requirements of the faithful during occupation. But the last verse in this section, **as you wish people treat you, do to them likewise**, indicates a more general application as well. This is love at its extreme. Such a response to Jesus' redemption entails on-going acts of kindness to those who are taking, demanding and despoiling. The first act of taking is the physical hurt and the taking of person's honour when **slapped on the cheek**. The next three involve the taking of clothing, the asking for other things and taking of various possession. Again, Jesus does not have in mind those who engage in scamming or other illegal activities that must be resisted by legal means. Rather, he has in mind situations of mission and outreach where great sacrifices lend power to the words of salvation being proclaimed. The believer is always one who represents Christ to others and whose reactions are motivated by love, trust in the supremacy of Christ and great courage in the pursuit of winning people for the Lord.

As you would like people to treat you, do to them likewise is somewhat misplaced here. It was indeed a proverbial saying in Jesus's circles and may have been used on a number of occasions. Verses 27-30 clearly support the sentiment of verse 31 but are much more specific to a situation of abuse, hatred and persecution. The preceding verses deal with people behaving wickedly; believers could not imagine themselves behaving in such a manner. However, where there is need, perhaps constant demands from the same person, followers are asked to imagine themselves in situations like these. This may apply to the last two commands which are slightly less unjust: **Give to everyone who asks of you and whoever takes what belongs to you, do not demand back**. Perhaps the connection is someone oblique and coherence not be demanded of it. Perhaps, also, Jesus is taking a common thought and inserting his radical message of love and generosity into it. He wants it to be understood as not a reciprocal arrangement by which human beings gain mutual benefits and their relationships are mere transactions. He goes deeper and demands that those who come after him are to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others and for the gospel (9:23-25).

Verses 32-36

Verses 37,38