

Luke: Connected to Jesus
Sermon 1-27-2019
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Luke 6:17-26

¹⁷He 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, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

²⁰Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²²“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ²⁴“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Message:

(Play video at <http://www1.cbn.com/whatever-it-takes-survive>) Dorris looked to everything else to cure the pain in her life. The pain of her father’s death. She looked to drugs and alcohol. She hoped that having a family would cure her pain. She even knew all the right stuff about God and church. She had that knowledge. But what was missing, was experiencing the healing power of being connected to Jesus. She found the high that she was longing for all her life. The high to cure all highs and all lows and all wrongs.

When we look at our passage, I really love this beginning portion. It may just feel like transition in the narrative, but I think it really informs our understanding of the rest of the passage of the Sermon on the Plain. “¹⁷He 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, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.” Focus on verse 19 there, “¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power

came out from him and healed all of them.” These people who were full of diseases, unclean spirits and every other ailment understood something. They understood that Jesus had power. They understood that Jesus could possibly heal them. Think about how desperate you might be if you were in their situation. Have you ever been so sick to the point where you would do anything to feel better? Now, yes, some may just be exploiting Jesus in this moment for their own selfish reasons, but imagine all those who come to believe because of Jesus’ healing power. I could see someone with the skeptical mindset touching Jesus “I doubt this will do anything, but I guess it’s worth a shot?” I could also see those who have witnessed Jesus’ teaching and healing and they believe that Jesus will heal them. We see both scenarios in the Bible. Some are in disbelief, but when they experience the healing power of Jesus, they believe. We also see those who believe very devoutly in Jesus and they, too, are also healed. So it’s not that one is better than the other. The common denominator is that no one will experience the healing power of Jesus unless they get connected to Him.

You may be familiar with the next section of our passage. In the Gospel of Matthew it’s known as the “Beatitudes.” The biggest difference in Luke’s version is that Luke includes a list of woes. ²⁰“Then he looked up at his disciples and said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ²¹‘Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. ‘Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. ²² ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. ²⁴‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. ²⁵‘Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. ‘Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. ²⁶‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.” Just to refresh your memory, in Old Testament theology it was very common to believe that if you were poor or you had a disease that you were not blessed by God. In this theology, it was believed that you committed some sort of sin to deserve the punishment of enslavement, destitution, disease and homelessness. And of course, if you were rich, had good health, owned your own land and house, then you were believed to be blessed by God. Because you followed the commandments/the laws very well, you received wealth. And what Jesus does in this list of blessings and woes is that he flips this whole theology around, upside down. If you think God favors you because you’re rich, you’re wrong. If you think God favors you because your belly is full and you have got storage to spare, you’re wrong. If you think that you can laugh at the expense of someone less fortunate and mock them because they don’t have what you have, you’re wrong. If you think that God favors you because of your fame and prestige,

you're wrong. God actually favors the poor, the hungry, the ones who suffer much and those who especially suffer in reputation because of their belief in Jesus. Why? Why does God favor these people? You actually don't have to look very far to understand why. If we return to our previous paragraph, verses 18 and 19, who are the ones who are reaching out to touch Jesus? It's not the wealthy. It's not the healthy. It's not the ones who are fat. It's not the ones who have fame and prestige. It's not those who mock others. It's the diseased, the troubled, and the unclean. So just think of this logically, who are usually the most sick and the most often sick in our society? The homeless. The poor. The less educated. Now, of course, there are exceptions to that. But hospitals will tell you that their most frequent flyers through the ER are those who are poor and/or homeless. They often don't understand the importance of a healthy diet, the importance of regular check-ups with their primary care provider, they don't have the social/family/friend support and they may not have one of the most basic needs of a roof over their heads. So why are these people favored by Jesus? Because these are the ones who reach out to touch Jesus. They understand their need for Jesus. And therefore they typically have a stronger connection to Him than the rich.

Some of you may be saying, "What's wrong with being rich? Why is Jesus so against this?" I don't think Jesus is against being rich. I think Jesus is against the dangers of being rich. When we seemingly have everything that we need, then why do we need God? We might not consciously think about this, but subconsciously we start to take comfort and safety in what we provide for ourselves. And it doesn't happen in an instant. It's not that jarring or eye-opening. We take comfort and safety in our wealth gradually over time. Gradually, we depend less and less on Jesus as our true source of power, provision and healing. I know many of us don't think of ourselves as wealthy. But, by comparison, we have a roof over our heads, and many of us have full bellies with storage built up, if you know what I mean. By most standards of the world, just having those two things, we are considered wealthy. Think about it, when was the last time you had to desperately cry out to Jesus for healing power, for provision, for food and shelter? Another test is the one Jesus gave the Rich Young Ruler, if Jesus were to ask you today to give up all your possession, sell them and give the proceeds to the poor, would you be able to do it? I'm not saying that's what Jesus is asking of you, but what I am saying is are you so dependent on Jesus that you can trust him to provide for you even if you give up all your possessions? It's a good way to measure your connection with Jesus. And maybe where some more heart-work/relationship-work needs to be done with Jesus.

Another test that you could give yourself as you approach spring-time, is how hard is it for you to get rid of your possessions? For Spring cleaning, can you even part with stuff that you don't use? So the gluttony or rich mindset that Jesus

speaks to isn't just about recklessness with buying things and getting things. It's also in our inability to let those possessions go. If we are so attached to our things that we can't let them go, that's also an indicator that we trust more in our wealth, the things we've purchased and attained, instead of trusting that God is going to provide for us.

See, when we purge our possessions, we create a vacancy, a hole. Think about that piece of furniture that you need to get rid of. If you got rid of that piece of furniture, how would Jesus fill that vacancy? It's not that you have to have a plan to fill that empty space, it's that you need to be open to what God wants to do in that open space. Similarly, how many of us need to downsize with our homes, but the thing that's preventing us is all the stuff we own? How much more are we attached to those things than to Jesus? Now, I'll admit, I'm a bit bias here. Many of you have probably witnessed or know that I enjoy purging and getting rid of things. But it's not that I enjoy putting things to waste. It's because I enjoy making space for what God is going to do. What new thing is God going to do because we've made space for Him? If we don't make room, or we can't part with things, then we are already on the path of gluttony and attachment to our wealth.

Many of you have commented that Providence went through a season where you were full of activity, programming and events. But you found that all this activity made you exhausted and tired. If you were doing this for Jesus, why did this make you tired? It actually has nothing to do with the logistics. Yes, you were probably trying to do big church things in a small church that didn't have the man power. That certainly contributes to exhaustion. But it has much more to do with the power source. See, when we are doing things by our own strength and we think it is all about what we have accomplished or are going to accomplish, it has this detrimental effect on each and every one of us. It eats away at our soul rather than fills it. When we move out of our own power or we do programming and events out of our own striving, it might produce something, but it will more than likely produce something that is not of the Kingdom. That's why I think this message is so basic, but so important and often forgotten: we need to stay connected to Jesus. At this moment where all these people were healed by reaching out and touching Jesus, there was someone else with Jesus, the Holy Spirit. Remember, Luke, really emphasized the Holy Spirit being with Jesus in previous passages. And when Jesus ascended to Heaven, who did He leave behind for all of us, the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Spirit is in each and every one of us who believe in Him. We have that power. We have the power source. Right now as a church, we're not doing much. We're not doing a whole lot of activity and programming. It took me a while to get there, but I'm okay with that because what I see happening is that in that vacancy of activity and programming, the Holy Spirit is moving. As we worship, as we pray and as we study God's word, I see the Holy

Spirit rejuvenating each and every one of our hearts. It's like once again we're getting re-acquainted with the power source. So if we ever do any activity and programming again as a church it won't be out of our own striving, our own power, it will be by the power of the Holy Spirit. And that well never runs dry. The Holy Spirit is abundant in energy and power. Just one small example of that was on Wednesday night. So on Wednesday Christine and I signed off on an agreement to buy a home. We're first-time home buyers so we're not acquainted with all the things you have to do to get ready for closing. So I spent a good chunk of time Wednesday working on paperwork, got a crash-course on all things home-buying and what to get ready for purchase. I came home exhausted. And yet, I still needed to run the Acts Bible Study on Wednesday night. As I was driving to Donna's house, I just prayed for God to be my strength in my weakness. I prayed for the Holy Spirit to rejuvenate me and be my source of power as we studied God's word. And this probably doesn't surprise you, but God provided. The Holy Spirit gave me the strength and moved in the midst of our conversation and sharing on Wednesday evening. So much so that we didn't even finish studying Acts 3.

This whole thing of staying connected with Jesus includes keeping our attachment to wealth in check. It includes making space in our homes, our lives and in the church for Jesus. It includes doing the right practices of worship, prayer and study of the Word to maintain that connection to Jesus. With a baby on the way, it made me think of that umbilical cord attached between mom and baby. What happens if that umbilical cord gets detached, the baby loses it's life source. It's source of nutrients and good health. Likewise, wealth, gluttony and fame threatens our umbilical cord to Jesus. So what is your source of life and power? The poor, the hungry, the homeless, the diseased, the grieving and the rejected all get their need for Jesus in our passage. They get that their only life source is Jesus. They get that they need Jesus desperately for healing and sustenance. Do you understand your need for Jesus? The stronger the connection, the stronger the Holy Spirit flows with power and the more you will see God do magnificent things among you. There are many out there in the world who have not been exposed to Jesus. They have not been exposed to His healing and His power. They are reaching out longing to touch this source of power and experience incredible healing in their lives. And that's one of many reasons why Jesus is in you by way of the Holy Spirit. So that you may extend that connection, that you may extend that umbilical cord to the next person who desperately needs Jesus. But if you're not connected to the power source, how can the Holy Spirit's power flow through you to the next person? So let's get the first things right first, let's get you connected or re-connected to the power of Jesus. Holy Spirit, would you refresh our spirit here today and help us to connect with Jesus? Amen.