



ROSE
HILL
CHURCH

Luke 6:12-26
The Path of Jesus' Life
An Upside Down Vision

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January 29th, 2017

Well, I hope you were here last Sunday and got to hear Becci Curtis-Lillie preach. It was a great message that dovetailed well with the sermon I gave on the 15th, serving almost as an un-intended 2 part miniseries on what Jesus' mission is for those who follow him and how to carry out that mission.

Today we continue our series looking at the life of Jesus and some of the events that highlight the path of his life and shed light on his ministry, his vision, and more. And today we come to the assembling of his closest twelve followers, and then the vision that he has for what the Kingdom of God would look like. And we see that: **This Kingdom vision is completely upside down from what we would expect, from what the world tends to lean toward.**

In the verses prior to today's passage, we get a hint of how things are going to be different than anticipated. Jesus' disciples pick some heads of grain on the Sabbath, which goes against the bloated Sabbath rules that had been developed over the centuries. Then he heals a guy on the Sabbath as well, which also goes against the Sabbath rules. It's a signal that change is coming; that Jesus isn't about maintaining the status quo; that a new sheriff is in town; that a new set of rules are going to be established; and that a new vision will be cast for what it means to be in relationship with God and a part of His Kingdom.

Somewhere in the midst of these two Sabbath rule-breaking events, Luke tells us that **Jesus spent a whole night praying to his Heavenly Father.** That's a long time to pray. Undoubtedly it was not just Jesus doing the talking, but Jesus doing a lot of listening, doing a lot discerning. We aren't told what, exactly, he was praying about, but we can take a pretty educated guess that it had to do with selecting the 12 disciples who would be his closest followers and friends in ministry, since that is the thing he does the very next morning.

Now, when we speak of Jesus' disciples, we often mean that in reference to

the 12. And I think there's nothing wrong with that. **But, we must never forget that these 12 were chosen from a much larger collection of disciples.** In that larger collection, undoubtedly some were really captured by his message, devoted to his teaching, committed to living by faith the way Jesus called them to. Undoubtedly, many others were there simply as consumers – see a miracle, be impressed by a good teacher, or be entertained. Jesus welcomes them all. But his ministry to people – from the miracles to the teachings – is always a sign of something bigger that he's a part of.

And so to help carry out that message to the people, Jesus appoints 12 of the disciples as Apostles. **“Apostle” simply means “sent ones.”** It's not explicitly a religious word; it was a common word of their day, and it means that someone is sent as a representative, as an ambassador, as an example of the one who is doing the sending.

The story is told of a young girl – maybe preschool or kindergarten age – who went to her Sunday discipleship class where the teacher taught on this very subject. And the teacher used the words apostle and disciple and ambassador and example somewhat interchangeably. Well, on the ride home from church, her parents asked her what she had learned in her class. And she couldn't quite remember any of the words. So she said, “We learned about the 12 samples of Jesus.”ⁱ

It's actually not a bad way to think of the apostles, and even the larger crowd of disciples including us. **A sample is a representative thing that is part of something larger.** You go to the paint store and get little cards that show the color of the paint. They're samples, so you can see what the whole can of paint is going to look like. Similarly, we are “samples” of Jesus to the world around us, with the idea being that when people interact with us, they get a sampling, a small picture, of what Jesus is like. Would you say that's the case when people interact with you, or with us together? Are you and I good samples of what a relationship with Jesus is like, of what his love, his grace, his truth, his joy, his abundant life, are like?

Now, one really interesting facet of this is to look at the 12 disciples and who they were, especially in light of Jesus spending all night in prayer over this 1st

Century version of the Apprentice that happened the next day...except instead of hearing “You’re fired” it’s “you’re hired...with no monetary compensation.”

First, the 12 he selected were significantly different from one another.

Matthew and Simon – not Simon Peter, but the other – are a great example. Matthew was a tax collector, essentially considered a Jewish defector to the Roman government. Then you’ve got Simon, who Scripture elsewhere calls, “Simon the zealot.” “Zealot” was a term that referred specifically to guys who were Jewish nationalists, whose mission in life was to try and protect and promote the nation of Israel, and to rid them of the Roman rule. So those two are at complete odds, with Matthew hitting for the wrong team, and Simon trying to strike out anyone playing for that other team.

Second, notice that one of the people Jesus selected after praying all night, after seeking God’s will about who should be the 12...Jesus selects Judas, who would end up betraying him! Jesus’ heavenly father put him in relationship with these guys, brought them to Jesus, led Jesus to select these 12, and one of them is that guy. It’s one of the great theological questions to debate: **How was Judas an answer to Jesus’ prayer?** How are difficult people, difficult situations, even tragedy...how can they be a part of God’s plan? Jesus’ death gives us some insight in that without death, there’d be no resurrection. There are good things that can come from unexpected challenges. We grow in our character and learn to be a better team member because even the best teammates have idiosyncrasies, quirks, and issues that we have to be able to handle well. I think of the line from Morgan Freeman in the movie *Evan Almighty*, “If you pray for patience, do you think God’s going to just give you patience, or will He give you opportunities to be patient?” In response, we often find ourselves saying, “Yeah, so be careful what you pray for.” But actually, we should pray for those opportunities, so that we would better live as samples of Jesus, and demonstrate the power of the Spirit in us.

Once he has the 12 selected, **Jesus then moves into a time of vision casting for what it looks like to be his disciple.** This is spoken not just to the 12, but to all who were gathered there, which was quite a number, and many of

whom had come from some distance away. Now, in the Gospel According to Matthew, he says that this teaching took place on a hill – that’s why we know it as the Sermon on the Mount. And Matthew gives us 9 Beatitudes, the phrases that begin with “blessed are...” Luke tells us that Jesus walked down to a level place, and he only gives us four of the beatitudes, but then pairs each one up with a corresponding woe, or warnings.

There are a couple ways to account for this. First, it’s certainly possible that Jesus came down from a higher point on this mountain or hillside, to a flat spot that was still on the side of the hill, but was leveled out place where people could gather together to listen to his teaching a little more easily. The differences in teaching could be accounted for easily enough as well, when we consider that not every gospel records exactly the same thing, or even records all of everything Jesus said and did over the three years of his public ministry. It would be kind of weird, in fact, and discredit the authenticity of their writing and research into the life of Jesus, if all four gospels each were exactly the same.

The other way to view this is to consider the fact that Jesus probably gave many of the same or similar teachings throughout his three years. I know I’ve shared some illustrations more than once with you all, I’ve preached on some passages more than once, there are topics – like God’s forgiveness and love, evangelism, discipleship, and so forth – that we’ve covered several times and I’ve often said things that are very similar to one another. In fact, this very topic of the likelihood that Jesus taught some things multiple times I have spoken on here before, and probably will again!

So we all do this. In fact, I remember at my previous church, there was a guy who liked to tell me the story of the previous pastor and how when he (the pastor) first came to the church in the 1970’s that some people in the church were upset that he had a beard. I don’t know why, but they were. And this guy told me this story probably half a dozen times while I was there, that he would talk to those people, and point to a painting of Jesus with a beard that was there in the church, and say something along the lines of, “Seems to me he’s just being Christ-like.” I heard that story several times from him.

And, we all know that a message has to be communicated to people several times – six or seven at least according to marketers – before it registers with people. So, it makes sense that Jesus would tell many of his parables and other points he wanted to emphasize more than once. Or perhaps Matthew and Luke just give us variations of the same teaching.

So Jesus gets into casting a vision for the Kingdom of God. **Jesus' message, in a nutshell, is that things in the Kingdom of God – which is not just a heavenly kingdom, but an earthly one, too – things in this kingdom are different than they are in the Kingdom of humankind.** In fact, many things are completely upside down. I think that for many of us who have grown up as Christians, or been Christian for many years, it's easy for us to forget just how radical and groundbreaking these things are. It's not the wealthy, or the filled up, or the always happy, or the ones who have gained the approval of humankind who only have God's blessing and who are the A-list invitees into God's Kingdom. The invitation is extended to all. And in fact those who are poor, hungry, grieving, and face resistance because of their discipleship to Jesus are the ones who are actually more assured of being a part of the Kingdom of heaven in the long run. Conversely, those who by the standards of the world seem to have God's blessing, better watch out.

This is made most clear in verse 24 when Jesus addresses those who are rich, though it is kind of a summary of all the warnings of woe here. Jesus says, **“Woe to you who are rich (meaning: financially well off), for you have received your consolation.”** What this “have received” means more literally is, “Have received in full payment.” It was a business term for someone who had been paid in full. This is the only woe here that's worded this way, and kind of governs the way to understand the other three that follow after it.

The one that often kind of throws people for a loop, I think, is the one about people who laugh now, that pairs up with the Beatitude about God's blessing being with those who mourn. Jesus is not talking about people who have a good sense of humor and laugh at all the jokes in sermons...but more deeply, He's speaking of people who “laugh” at Jesus, who “laugh” at those who believe in Jesus, who “laugh” at the idea that there's more to life than this world, who laugh at people of faith, who laugh at the idea that there's more to

life than obtaining wealth and looking out only for oneself. It's a mocking kind of laughter he's referring to, that is born in pride and arrogance.

The beatitude that it is paired with: "blessed are those who weep" is challenging to get our heads around because we value happiness and joy so much. **Who likes to be sad? How could that be a blessing of God?**

Doesn't Jesus promise joy and abundant life? That doesn't sound like it jives with what he teaches here. Well, there's a little poem that helps us to understand this. It goes like this: "Have you been to the land of Happy, where everyone's happy all day? Where they joke and they sing of the happiest things, and everything's jolly and gay? There's no one unhappy in Happy, there's laughter and smiles galore. I have been to the Land of Happy—what a bore!" The abundant life that Jesus promises for those who follow him doesn't exclude grief or pain, but rather, they are a part of it, giving us the full experience of being human and the full experience of living by faith in relationship with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And so we see here that: **This is simply backwards and upside down from the world's view.** People laugh at the notion that the poor, the hungry, the sad, and the persecuted might actually be blessed by God. This is the way it is in the Kingdom of God for those who follow Jesus, who experience these things because of "the son of man" as Jesus refers to himself here. This is the vision that Jesus is establishing for His Kingdom. People who are otherwise at odds with each other – such as Matthew and Simon – people who seem to be the ones who don't have God's blessing upon them such as the poor and those who mourn...these people are a part of God's Kingdom as well. In fact, for those who are wealthy, who laugh at the world around them, who never know what it means to be hungry, who have the approval of humankind: for those people, they have to watch out that they aren't so centered on getting filled up by those things that they miss out on getting filled up by God. If we focus too much on that stuff, if we make that our goal and our god, those things will end up being our full payment, our only comfort, and we'll miss out on all that God has to offer – both here and now as well as in eternity.

So how are you, and how are we as a church, doing in living into this upside down vision for God's Kingdom? Where are our values and what

are our priorities? Given that our Annual Meeting is today when we talk about the state of our church and how we're doing in fulfilling God's mission for us, it's appropriate for us to consider this upside down vision that Jesus has for His Kingdom. And I think that as a church, we are pretty well aligned with Jesus' vision here. There's room for growth and improvement...but I think we have a fairly healthy attitude toward the things of this world – money, power, material stuff, and so forth. We keep a healthy perspective on those things as we seek to use them as tools for the glory of God. For instance, the perception many people have of churches is that they're just about building their own little kingdom, with impressive buildings, glitzy entertainment on Sundays, and no impact on the world around them. And we're talking about some pretty big changes to our facilities, and we'll discuss this at the meeting today. But after 40 years of the church building looking essentially the same, I don't think the building is what we're looking at, to fill us up. The building is certainly not an idol for this church. Making some changes there is a healthy thing to do, to improve our presence and ministry space here at the intersection of 122nd and 90th.

The heart of this church is to make disciples of Jesus...to build people up in faith...to reach out to the poor and the hungry through a variety of ways – both ongoing and seasonal at different times of the year with food baskets, we have people who volunteer at the food bank every month, we're constantly collecting for them. We minister to those who are grieving, lonely, hurting, and so forth in a variety of ways – through formal structures of the church such as our Deacons who do an amazing job of ministering to the lonely and the hurting, as well as through the relationships and connections that we all have simply by being a part of Rose Hill. I know there are people who have found a church home here at Rose Hill who were unable to do so in other places because they weren't very well accepted elsewhere. We're not a church that is unified by politics or economics or social status.

I believe we are a church that is focused on Jesus and finds its unity in Him. And that, in and of itself, is completely upside down in today's world. That's not intended as a critique of other churches, but a critique of the world around us. No one else is devoted to Jesus besides Christians, the people of the Church. No one else is promoting Jesus. No one else is finding

unity in Jesus. No one else is looking to Jesus for purpose and meaning in life, for abundant life, for eternal life except Jesus' disciples, except the Church. Oftentimes, being a part of that Kingdom feels really upside down. But Jesus says here, that that's how it's going to be for those who follow Him. So let's keep living this out together here at Rose Hill. In God's Kingdom, disciples of Jesus are right-side up, in a world that's upside down. We want to help others get right side up. So let's keep focused on Jesus' mission and vision, making disciples of Jesus Christ, finding our unity in him in spite of our differences, living as samples of Jesus sent out into the world wherever we are. Let's Pray...Amen.

ⁱ I can't remember where I came across this...I think it was in William Barclay's commentary on Luke, but I'm not sure.