

Pastor Writes

Greetings to you! The theme for our morning's meditation is, 'The difference between what the world values and God values.' In the reading from Luke's gospel we see the parallel to the Sermon on the Mount and we can probably call this as a 'Sermon on the plain' because Jesus stood on a level place. A large number of people came from Judea, Jerusalem and from the coast of Tyre in Syria to be healed of their diseases and be released from evil spirits as power was flowing from him.

Three groups of people are present here: Apostles, disciples and the people. Jesus teaches all who are willing to hear and challenges them to walk with God. The teaching counters the people's focus on healing and re-directs their attention to God. One comes to Jesus not only to receive from him but also to respond to him. Luke's focus is on how to treat others. This section contains a call to a gracious, loving and forgiving approach. The beatitude divides the people into two categories: the blessed are compared to the persecuted Old Testament prophets, and the cursed are compared to false prophets. The call of the sermon is that one should not be pre-occupied with the spiritual condition of others but be diligent about one's own righteousness.

Four blessings are promised for those who walk with God. Jesus begins by saying, 'Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God'. Luke talks about those who are poor both economically and spiritually. Those who realize that they cannot manage their lives without Jesus are the ones who realize that they are spiritually poor. The economically poor find it easy to believe in God because they have nothing to fall back on. The rich find it difficult to trust in Jesus because they have their wealth to depend on. The poor will be given the kingdom of God here and now.

The second beatitude is when Jesus says, 'Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied'. The hungry are people who are both outwardly and inwardly deficient in the essentials as God meant it to be. They cannot help themselves and therefore turn to God on the basis of his promise. The promise for the physically hungry and spiritually poor is the promise of satisfaction from God. This promise is not so much the physical feeding with food, as it is to the spiritual satisfaction of being received by God and welcomed as one of his children. The third beatitude is, 'blessed are those who weep now for you will laugh.' The mourning is primarily for suffering of painful injustice in a world where God's people are pressurized and persecuted and exiled just as the prophets were. This pain will be reversed on the last day when the trumpet will blow and there will be no more weeping and sorrow.

The fourth beatitude is towards the persecuted. Jesus says, 'Blessed are you when men hate, you when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of man because your reward will be great.' Jesus and his ministry were also rejected by many people which eventually led him to the cross. For a disciple to be on the side of Jesus- was to take a public and potentially offensive stand that would produce reaction and even hatred. The disciples would be excluded from the synagogue and they would reject their names as evil. Their names will be maligned and they will strike at the very person. The disciples however were to rejoice and leap for joy because their rewards would be great.

After the four blessings there are four woes. The first woe is directed towards the rich at present whose condition will be reversed. Secondly, to those who are full now, they will be hungry later on. Thirdly, for those who are laughing now- whose attitude is off derisive laughter- looking down on others - it will be changed to mourning.

Finally, for those who are well-spoken of now they will be considered as false prophets. This section clearly shows the world's values and God's values are very different. The disciple is to be dependent on God alone and stand up for him. It may mean poverty, rejection, persecution and pain now. But they can be assured of God's blessing. We are not to be deceived by the self-sufficient and indifferent way of the rich. They have much now but will have nothing later. An attitude of independence from God is the road to destruction. Its reward is fleeting limited to the present. May we truly follow the values of God.