

THE SHAPE OF THE KINGDOM LUKE 6:20-49

Who is your role model? (*I showed pictures of David Beckham and a poor person!*) If we were to do a straw poll in Church, which of these would you most like to be?

- Why might we want to be like Beckham? He is rich and will have no more financial worries ever in the rest of his life, he has a glamorous lifestyle and all the trappings that go with it, houses, cars, clothes; he is a famous footballer who is feted wherever he goes; he has a glamorous wife; 3 children.
- Why might we want to be a poor person: I can think of very few reasons off the top of my head; poor people have nothing going for them at all, nothing that we would want or admire? I can think of all sorts of reasons why we would not want to be the poor person: life is a struggle, he has nothing to eat, he depends entirely on other people for food, help, medical aid, etc etc etc.
- Why might we not want to be Beckham? Wealth doesn't come alone (strangely, our Ecclesiastes passage this evening is also challenging us to look at what being rich and wealthy means! Come to take it further!); the danger of this lifestyle is that it is shallow and superficial, complacent, self-centred and 'I'm in control' with the danger of missing out some deeper qualities of life.
- If we were to take that straw poll, Beckham might come out on top in Church, but there is a real possibility that if we changed the poor person for Mother Teresa, then she would come out on top in here today. If, on other hand, we were to take that straw poll out into the street today or into school this week, then I have little doubt that Beckham (or what he stands for) would come out on top in most people's eyes; some might have a sneaking admiration for Mother Teresa, but none would want to be poor.

In Luke 6, we come to a whole section of Jesus' teaching to His disciples. He had just chosen 12 of them to be apostles and it seems as if either just these 12, or others with them, had gathered around and He began to teach. It is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel though there are some differences and some of these differences make us pause. The theme of Jesus' teaching is "The Shape of the Kingdom". To His disciples He says 'this is what the Kingdom of God looks like, or should look like. This what you have to be and do as people who are part of that kingdom.' He turns values upside down: many of the qualities and states that world thinks are great and to be valued and sought after are shown up to be empty; many things that our world thinks pitiable, Jesus says are to be valued and prized! We can't deal with all the issues raised here, but there will be an opportunity to go into the whole piece in more detail on Wednesday at the Discovery Groups; if you have any questions, either come and ask, or there are 2 books on Luke in the library, books that I'm using and you can refer to them there if you want.

This begins with a set of 8 sayings, 4 promises and 4 warnings and these 8 sayings paint a picture of life for the disciple, but we need to tread carefully. What does Jesus mean? "*Blessed...*" (6:20) Who are the poor? Matthew's version talks about 'the poor in spirit', people who have spiritual needs. But in

Luke it is simply 'the poor' and some people have made great play of this; that here Jesus is talking about those who are materially poor, that as victims of injustice etc, God has promised to bless them for their material poverty, that He has a special interest in the poor. However, those who are poor will say that their poverty is a curse not a blessing and that heaven tomorrow is not what they need; they need relief, development, and dignity today. Equally when we come to the warnings, Jesus is warning against being rich, being well-fed and laughing – if we take these as simple descriptions of physical states, then Jesus forbids us to be rich, to eat well or to laugh and that simply doesn't make sense in the light of other things that He says. We ought not to take these sayings as describing physical conditions.

It seems more reasonable to me that Jesus is describing the spiritual state of His disciples. 'Poor' is about having no resources of your own to call on, feeling weak and vulnerable. 'Hungering now' is about sensing that need and longing for that need to be met. 'Weeping now' is about being sensitive to what is wrong with ourselves and with world and sensitive to consequences of these wrongs in sin and suffering. 'Being hated and excluded' is not a general ban, but is about being persecuted for Christian faith, pressured, oppressed for being Christian. Jesus paints a picture of people who have this sense of need, people who feel these kinds of weakness and to people like this He promises God's blessing. God will bless people who are poor, who feel weak, who are hungry for peace and grace, who see their needs and feel these needs, who are rejected by others. They will belong in His kingdom, they will be satisfied, they will laugh, they will be blessed. Here is Part 1 of turning values upside down.

Then there are 4 warnings: 'woe' seems a dreadful word, a threat! In fact, it is an expression of pain and regret. Jesus looks at people who live in these ways and feels the pain that comes from seeing how empty that lifestyle will ultimately be. Those who are wealthy; those who are well-fed; those who laugh; those who are popular – what's wrong with any of these? These are qualities to which many of us might actually aspire; these might be our ambitions. What these 4 warnings do is paint a picture of life that can be shallow, superficial, even complacent. Here is a man who has everything that he needs; he is self-sufficient; he needs nobody else and he certainly doesn't need God. His material possessions are his all-in-all and he can rely totally on himself, thank you very much! Everything is just a laugh and he takes nothing seriously. Jesus teaches us that ultimately this lifestyle will be shown to be valueless and empty and the man who has gone through life with this sense of complacency will find that in the ultimate reality he will have had it! Ultimately, before God, his treasure chest will be empty of qualities that have real value. Here is Part 2 of turning the world upside down.

The challenge for us is about what we really value. This is all about kind of people we are and the way we think, and that has an impact on the way in which we behave, as we shall see in moment. Jesus challenges us to "prize what the world calls pitiable and suspect what the world thinks desirable." (Wilcock) This is the shape of His kingdom; this is what life is like when Jesus is in charge. We say that so easily, but as Western Christians in the 21st

century it is so easy to take on board the way the world thinks. So we value wealth and prosperity above faith; so we give our time to all kinds of things and the work of the kingdom, and faith, and Church gets what is left over; so we are much more enthusiastic about everything other than nurturing faith. That is a caricature, but not by very much! Jesus gets what is left over from our life, our time, our energy, our money, once we are wealthy, well-fed, and entertained. Do we run the risk of making our lifestyle superficial and open to these expressions of pain and the warnings of Jesus in Luke 6? Don't dismiss that challenge too quickly or think too easily that we have it sorted! We need the right kind of attitude that is based on faith, trust and a sense of depending on God.

There are all kinds of other qualities here that we can only really mention now:

- *“Love your...” (6:27f)* “the heart of the sermon is the need for love.” (Morris) There is a whole big challenge here about who we love and how. Love is different from like; love in Jesus' eyes is about caring for people in need. ‘Be a loving person’ is the way Jesus wants us to be and that regardless of who we might see in need. We will come back to this later when we reach the parable of Good Samaritan which is all about who!
- *“Do not...” (6:37f)* You're at a stall at the farmers' market and are buying some loose flour or fruit and the person behind the stall is measuring it out into a bag. You want the full measure, the whole kilo that you're paying for; you don't want her to stop short, or you would complain about short measures! Jesus says ‘Be openhearted!’ The measure of open-heartedness we give to others is way it will be measured back to us. We are to be open-hearted in as full a measure as we can be to give to others, to the community, to our family, to Church, to Jesus, and the reassurance is that the measure we use to give is the measure with which we will be given.
- *“why do...” (6:41f)* Have you noticed, many of us know someone else's faults and mistakes very well. We can do a first-class character assassination of someone we know and their faults, mistakes etc. But our own? Well, no! We don't see them at all. Jesus gives this wonderful cartoon picture of a person trying to perform eye-surgery to remove a speck of dust from his friend's eye while all of time he has a dirty great plank in his own eye. It is so incongruous; it just doesn't fit. Yet so often we meet people like that; sometimes we are these people!

Here is the shape of God's kingdom; this is what people are like when Jesus is king and Lord of our lives; this is a set of instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples about the kind of people He expected them to be. It's when we deal with this kind of teaching that we are most challenged about kind of people we are. How much are we shaped by Kingdom values and how much are we shaped by the values of the culture and society around us? Kingdom values are very different from society's values; the kingdom of God prizes what our society despises; the kingdom challenges what our society holds dear. Which set of values do we treasure most? The answer to that question will become obvious and plain and apparent in one very simple way: by the kind of people we are.

The tree: the fruit is the giveaway; plums tell you it is plum tree; good fruit will tell you that the tree is healthy and strong, but poor fruit will tell you that the tree is sick! The house: the foundation is unseen, but give the house a knock: if it falls down, you know that the foundation is not good, if it stands firm the foundation is good. The kind of people we are will tell the world how good our roots and foundations are. People who love what Jesus loves, who value what Jesus values – that's what should be; people who love others and care for those in need, no matter who they are; open-hearted people; people of integrity. That's what Jesus wants of us. Who now is role model? It is all a question of values: do we simply want to be rich, well-fed, and entertained? Is there a danger of our becoming complacent, shallow, superficial? Are we people who know our needs, but who depend on God in faith; people who know our weaknesses, but look for God to make us strong? It is all a question of values. What kind of people will we be?