

THE REAL JESUS: HIS MINISTRY

Week Five | June 17, 2018 | Jesus is Sovereign Over Morality

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 6:20–36. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The Real Jesus didn't just teach about the kingdom of God, He is the center of it.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus takes our human idea of morality, or what it means to be a good and happy person, and flips it on its head to show us that true morality is Christlikeness.

MEDITATE

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *From the perspective of secular society, was Jesus a good moral teacher?*

In a lecture delivered by atheist author and religious critic Christopher Hitchens, he admits that there is less historical evidence that Socrates existed than that Jesus existed. However, Hitchens argues the greater amount of historical evidence does not matter much to him. Unlike Jesus,

“[Socrates] never said, ‘You’ve got to believe everything I say or go to hell. And here’s why you’ve got to agree with me. Because my mother never went to bed with anyone! And that proves the truth of what I say. Or, I must have looked really dead when they took me down from the cross even though I didn’t really die! And that’s why you’ve got to agree with me.’ I’m willing to grant it all: the magnificent conception, the virgin birth, the resurrection, then the ascension. I’m willing to grant all of it, but it doesn’t prove the truth of the proposition that you should take no thought for the morrow. [This is] the central doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth. No investment, no thrift, no care for your children, you should abandon your family, not worry about construction, about investment, about anything. Just follow me. A ridiculous moral proposition...Unless you believe Jesus was divinely mandated, his words would not have been inaccurate or false, they would have been wicked.”

Hitchens concludes that Jesus existed as an historical figure, but he was a “deluded rabbi.”

Many like to express respect for Jesus as a “good, moral teacher.” However, those who have actually studied His teaching recognize that, from the perspective of secular society, it is actually pretty terrible. It goes against everything contemporary society teaches about how to live a good life. If you take seriously what Jesus says and honestly compare it to the way the world thinks, you have to agree with Hitchens that Jesus is a terrible moral teacher, unless He is Lord. Though they come to different conclusions, Hitchens echoes Christian theologian and philosopher, C. S. Lewis, who says:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Q: *Can you think of examples of Jesus' teachings that would be "offensive" to the world's idea of how you should live a good life?*

Q: *Discuss Lewis' quote and why you cannot be a person who has tremendous respect for Jesus just as a moral teacher.*

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

As we have seen in this series, encountering the Real Jesus means being honest about Jesus rather than imagining Him in a way that feels comfortable. In today's lesson, we will consider the claim that Jesus is a great moral teacher. But we will find that if we really listen to His teaching, it goes against the morality of the world and requires you to make a choice. You cannot add Jesus as an inspirational teacher to an otherwise secular life. You must either consider him a complete lunatic or you must worship Him as Lord.

1. JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOUR MONEY OR POSSESSIONS

2. JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOUR OWN POPULARITY

3. JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE

4. JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOU MAKING SURE OTHERS GET WHAT THEY DESERVE

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOUR MONEY OR POSSESSIONS

■ LUKE 6:20-26

Q: *According to society, what "virtues" come from having money or possessions?*

Q: *How do people view someone who has been very successful monetarily?*

Q: *What do you think the word “blessed” means in these verses?*

In these six verses, Jesus overturns the world’s idea of goodness and redefines it in an entirely different way. Money often plays a key role in the way we view people. When we see someone who is well off, we often think of them as responsible, hard-working, mature individuals. We assume they are able to take good care of their families by giving them a comfortable life and all kinds of opportunities. We see their ability to give large sums of money to good causes and imagine that they have all the resources they need to live a truly respectable life. They, we believe, are truly blessed.

But in these verses, instead of using the word “blessed” to describe the rich, Jesus says they are “cursed.” How does this make sense? This great, moral teaching goes against what we would consider to be common sense. To be sure, Jesus does not teach that it is a sin to have money. However, He does teach that you can have lots of money and even use it in good ways, but if you find your “goodness” in it, you are ultimately cursed. You have no future. Your comfort and enjoyment is right here, right now. From the perspective of eternity, your reward is short-lived. In contrast, a blessed life—or a “happy” life—comes when you find your “goodness,” your sense of fulfillment, your self-worth, and your success in Christ alone.

Q: *Discuss the social media trend to use #blessed. What types of things is it typically used for? [If you are not familiar with social media hashtags, consider this question—What do we mean when we use “blessed” in every-day conversation?] How is that use of the word different from the way Jesus uses it?*

JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOUR OWN POPULARITY

■ LUKE 6:20–26

Q: *As you read over this passage again, what does it say about what other people think about you?*

Q: *Why do you think we care so much about what other people think about us?*

Popularity is some people's greatest dream. A person is considered popular when lots of people think highly of them, speak well of them, and want to be around them. The desire for popularity lies at the heart of social media. Making a name for ourselves in the cyberworld allows us to acquire more friends or followers. Through technology we can make ourselves look and sound a certain way to gain the esteem, respect, acceptance, and even envy of others. We believe that popularity will make us feel worthy, loved, important, and connected, especially to important people. When we experience these things, we will be happy, or so they say.

But Jesus says truly happy people are not the popular or included people, but the hated and excluded people. This idea seems absurd to us, especially in the age of social media. People who have not centered their lives on the quest to advance their own name but seek to advance the name of Christ rarely rise to the top of the popularity chain. But Jesus says that when you lose your own popularity while seeking to make Him seen and known, you will not find yourself unhappy, as the world would have you believe. Instead, you will find true happiness.

In verse 26, Jesus cuts to the heart of our quest to have other people speak well of us. Of course, it is always nice to hear other people say encouraging things about us. However, Jesus says people speaking well of you doesn't really mean anything. After all, people spoke well of false prophets, and we know they were not worthy of praise. Constructing or gauging your sense of self-worth on what other people say about you is always a trap, and it is never accurate. The one whose voice matters most and is truly accurate is God's.

Q: *Do you consider yourself popular? What do other people say about you? Do you find your sense of identity in their words?*

Q: *Basing your identity on the words of others leads either to tremendous pride or hopeless despair. Why?*

Q: *Why do you think Jesus says we should not just let it go when others speak ill of us on account of Christ, but rejoice instead?*

JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE

☐ LUKE 6:20–26

Q: *According to society, what is “the good life?”*

Q: *As you read through these verses again, consider how the themes touch on what we would consider to be “the good life.”*

We are all about the pursuit of happiness. We seek money so we can be happy. We seek popularity so we can be happy. We seek comfort so we can be happy. We seek to fulfill our desires so we can be happy. According to ancient philosopher Aristotle, the search for happiness is the goal of human life. Jesus does not disagree, although He says that happiness is not found in the places we usually search. We could have every one of our dreams come true and still not be truly happy, because we were made to find our fulfillment in Christ.

In contrast to the world, which says, “Happy are those who have no problems and have gotten everything they want,” Jesus says, “Happy are those who suffer and lack. Blessed are those who face hardship in life, who suffer trial.” Or as James 1:2–4 says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” No TV commercial has ever sent that message. We aren’t really interested in a life of hardship, and we’d prefer a faith that is easy, not one that is tested. We want to lack nothing, but we don’t want to get there by going down the road of trial. We’d rather experience what is easy than become steadfast in suffering. But Jesus knows it is through trial that we learn He is enough. When all other things around us fail, we can really see Him as the One who never leaves us or forsakes us. When we are disillusioned by the world, we really find our hope in God. True happiness comes from finding your all in Jesus, and this usually comes on the road of suffering. So, “blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”

♀: *When you face a trial, how do you react? Do you pray God would free you from it as soon as possible, or do you pray first that He would use it to make your faith more steadfast?*

♀: *What do you think it means to count it all joy when you experience trials? Does counting it all joy mean being “happy-clappy” or having a positive attitude? What is true, profound joy?*

JESUS IS BETTER THAN YOU MAKING SURE OTHERS GET WHAT THEY DESERVE

■ ■ LUKE 6:27–36

♀: *From the world’s perspective, how should you protect yourself when others do you harm?*

♀: *Why does Jesus’ teaching in these passages seem so counterintuitive?*

Of course, you should love your friends. Of course, you should hate your enemies. After all, that’s the difference between friends and enemies, right? You love one and hate the other. What in the world could “love your enemies” possibly mean? Is that a death wish? Is that naiveté?

One thing is for sure, the world’s understanding of what love is and what it means is either superficial and cheap or overly idealized. Either way, it has become entirely subjective and dependent on an emotional experience rather than anything concrete or binding. Above all, “love,” by definition, must be something easy, not something hard—or so they say. But Jesus radically changes our concept of love both through His teaching and His ultimate demonstration of love on the cross.

In this passage, He says that we aren’t just supposed to love the people we like and the ones who are nice to us. We are also supposed to love those who hate us and do us harm. The world says you should, at the very least, have

nothing to do with your enemies and, at most, seek to get them back for what they have done to you. But Jesus says we should love them the way God has loved us. We were once enemies of God, and rather than hardening His heart against us and retaliating, He died for us. God did not just love us in word or in thought, He loved us in deed as well. He acted on our behalf. Loving like God loves us means when people do us harm, we do them good. When people speak poorly of us, we seek to bless them. When people trample on us, we pray for them.

🕒: *Who would you honestly say are your enemies? Who has done you harm, spoken ill of you, sought to impede you, etc.? How is God calling you to respond to them, both in the posture of your heart and in your actions?*

🕒: *There are situations of abuse that make it necessary to separate ourselves from the abuser for mental, emotional, and/or physical safety. In these situations, how can you still love like God loves?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

🕒: *How does Jesus' teaching on money give you a sense of freedom to practice good stewardship without finding your self-worth or "goodness" in money?*

🕒: *What are some things God says about you as one who is in Christ? How can you construct your identity and sense of self on His words rather than on the words of others?*

🕒: *Are you facing a trial right now? How does this change of perspective encourage you to persevere? How can you face it in a way that honors God? How can you grow in true happiness through this particular trial?*

Q: *What is the role of the Holy Spirit in learning to love as God has loved us?*

PRAY

+ *Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.*

- Father, remind me often that the world's idea of what it means to live a good life and be a good person is not always what You say. Help me follow Your Word rather than the world in how I view myself and how I live my life.
- Holy Spirit, reveal the false virtues in my life and the idols that control me. Lead me to repentance so I may walk in freedom to live in newness of life.
- Jesus, thank You that You are not like the good moral teachers of the world. Thank You that You are far better than anything the world has to offer. Teach me how to faithfully live in this world without being of this world.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 6:20–26 These “beatitudes” are not conditions necessary to gain salvation and enter the kingdom of God. Rather, they express the way of life inside the kingdom. They describe the people who have already entered the kingdom through faith in Christ.

LUKE 6:20 Jesus is not saying that being poor in itself is a state of blessedness. Poverty (having nothing in the world) accompanied by trust in God is a state of blessedness. However, Jesus' ministry does emphasize those who are the outcast or on the fringes of society. He reminds them and the broader society that they too bear the image of God and that He has come to preach good news to them as well. Instead of telling the poor they should learn from the rich, he tells the rich they can learn from the poor.

LUKE 6:21 Jesus is not saying that having an empty stomach is a more blessed state than having a full one. Instead,

He confronts those who expect to find heaven here on earth. They expect to have all their needs and desires met here and work hard to make that happen. They will never truly be satisfied and will find that the treasure they stored up here on earth will soon be gone. Instead, those who recognize that ultimate fullness and satisfaction awaits them in heaven can live with areas of emptiness and unmet desires here on earth because they know what awaits them for all eternity.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and Preaching the Word (Luke).*