

Leveled Out

Luke 6: 17-26 (February 13, 2022)

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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.

Historical Context

This passage begins Luke's version of Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount." Like Matthew, it begins with beatitudes. Unlike Matthew, it is considerably shorter (Luke 6:20-46 vs. Matthew 5:1 - 7:29), and takes place on a plain. It is quite possible that Jesus told these teachings more than once. But both Matthew and Luke place their recollection of these teachings after Jesus has called together his group of disciples and before he begins his final journey to Jerusalem.

Theme: Leveled Out

In Luke, before Jesus preaches the Beatitudes he comes down with the disciples and stands “on a level place.” This Sermon on the Plain is set in a different context than Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount, and place matters. Jesus comes down and stands in the midst of those who have come to be healed and those who are troubled. He comes to a level place to bring the kingdom of God to those who are gathered. There is no space between those who suffer and those who rejoice; we all receive the gift of the one who brings God’s kingdom, and we are receiving it in the same place—a level place. When Jesus comes to a level place, we find ourselves leveled out. No longer do we grieve alone or worry alone. No longer do we celebrate alone or rejoice alone. When Jesus comes to a level place, he comes to level us with God’s kingdom and to level us with one another. This is both a comfort and a challenge.

By overturning the world’s ideas and expressions of strength, by lifting up the lowly and bowed down, Jesus levels us out. Jesus physically and verbally levels with us in the Beatitudes, and in this leveling out, our lives are never the same. We are not alone in our experiences and needs, and we cannot leave others alone in theirs.

When we look out the windows of our suffering and feel that we are alone, Jesus promises that we are never forgotten by him, nor do we live this life apart from each other. As the kingdom of God comes to us directly through Jesus, we are bound to one another in his grace, leveled out and loved.