



TOUCH POINT

Speaking on the Level – Touchpoint for February 12, 2025

Luke 6:17-26 (NRSVUE) Jesus Teaches and Heals

¹⁷ He 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. ¹⁸ They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases, and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Blessings and Woes

²⁰ Then 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. ²³ Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated 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 how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

Who is Jesus speaking to?

If he were talking to the apostles, it would be an easy out, because after all, they’d been chosen to be future regional managers of Jesus, Inc., better known as Christianity. No, Luke says he turned to the disciples, not just the apostles. Who are the disciples? The disciples are anyone who wants to follow Jesus.

Jesus is standing on a level place—a place where he would level with those who left everything to follow him.

Then Jesus drops some bombs on his disciples who declared they wanted more than status quo living.

Yikes! Or I should say, Woe! I think he is talking to me to.

Jesus's disciples numbered more than his apostles. The blessings and woes are not just for the ones sent out as apostles, but for anyone who wants to follow the way of Jesus, and live a life turned upside down. For them Jesus is saying, your version of happy, isn't what you think it is.

The woes are hard to hear. I do want to be happy, but everything I know about personal contentment does not include things like persecution, being ridiculed, bullied, rejected, and embarrassed. But Jesus tells his disciples the truth.

Why did Jesus pick this moment, this place, to level with his followers?

Maybe Jesus is asking the disciples to understand how to look beyond the euphoric experience of miraculous healings. Perhaps Jesus knows of the dopamine rush one gets with wealth, overfilling, and the foolish frivolity.

Jesus seems to be saying, "Stay spiritually sober because these moments of happiness, have an expiration date."

The atmosphere of the multitude must have been like a megachurch with a guest faith healer. But Jesus was not a faith healer—he was a healer of faith. That's why he leveled with them. It was because of compassion that Jesus healed, but it was his sober spirituality and immense love that caused him to level with them. He is leveling with me.

There is nothing cute about this message from Jesus. He's healing people and removing oppressive entities before a lot of excited people, and then, in the middle of this electric moment, Jesus turns to his disciples and drops these beatitude bombs.

Jesus levels with his true followers.

Jesus turns to his disciples and says, *if you have put all your energy in wealth, you'll be disappointed. It is a temporal reward whose roots are shallow.* The Psalms say the alternative is to be like a tree planted by living water, where the roots go deep and can withstand the winds of temporary euphoria and disillusionment.

Jesus had a lot of fans, so on this merit, he was a successful man. But he turned and spoke to his followers, not his fans. He spoke from a level place, a sober place. In the middle of His triumphs, Jesus leveled with them.

Jesus said the blessings and the woes must go together.

I gotta level with *you*—I feel like I'm being confronted every day with the blessings and woes, a constant choice between an easy way and a counterintuitive way.

I rarely pay attention to the woes. I like the blessings of following! Staying in the blessings seems to keep me protected in a twisted way. *Don't get your hopes up, Henry; we're all doomed anyway.* But I want to be an authentic follower of the way of Jesus!

The minute I think I'm on the truth telling path, I quickly fall into the way of the commentary culture. Perhaps I'm overwhelmed by the woes and I'm hopeful somebody influential will hear my rants and do something to change it all.

I'm not saying I do this deliberately, nor do I think others are allowing the status quo to be maintained with negative intention. But perhaps this is why Jesus picked this most unlikely moment to level with his disciples—us.

Oh, the moment of clarity!

If we truly follow the blessings and the woes of Jesus, my world would be turned upside down!

Here's a question I'm asking myself right now: "Where is my energy going? Is it motivated to follow Christ? Or for Christ to follow me? Do I seek happiness or unexplainable joy?"

According to these scriptures, we will find eternal joy in opposing the way of the world, which for me includes the way of the heaven-and-hell theology of American evangelical Christianity—the Christianity that doesn't have a stomach for inclusivity and belonging.

I often choose to parse my words for fear of ruining "my" ministry to all people. But is this the way of Jesus? Am I simply dabbling in the waters of the euphoric blessing? There certainly are reasons why we don't make the beatitudes—the blessings and woes—central to our lives. For me, I know what it's like to be stripped of reputation, belongings, and community. However, those also were the times when I truly experienced the joy of heaven.

Here's what William Barclay says:

"Jesus had no doubt which way in the end brought happiness. F. R. Maltby said, 'Jesus promised His disciples three things—that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble.'

G. K. Chesterton, whose principles constantly got him into trouble, once said, "I like getting into hot water. It keeps you clean!" It is Jesus' teaching that the joy of heaven will amply compensate for the trouble of earth."

As Paul said, 'This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison' (2 Corinthians 4:17). The challenge of the beatitudes is, 'Will you be happy in the world's way or in Christ's way?'"

Yes, our world would be turned upside down if we lived the beatitudes, but perhaps God gives us the capacity to walk upside down, until our lives are right-side up. Haha, now that brings me joy!

What would our lives look like if we let Jesus drop these bombs into our hearts?

Would we continue pouring energy listening to bad-news preoccupations and commentary, or would we begin advocating for others who are hurting and a new gospel of universal love contrary to today's Christianity? If inner joy is a result, then that is a life worth living!

Without joy, can we really make a difference in our own world anyway? Or am I just toggling between temporary happiness and momentary rants?

Jesus leveled with anyone who wants to follow his way—anyone who wants to experience something more than superficial happiness.

In the woes, Jesus tells the disciples to watch out when they live from a place of fullness, foolishness, and fame. Beware, People may think and speak highly of you, just like they did the false prophets.

Confronted with this moment of clarity, I am faced with all the things I can remember Jesus said. It's as if his life is passing before my eyes.

"If you want to follow me, you must pick up your cross and follow. You must say yes to denying yourself... You must say yes to coming as a curious, humble child whose values are innocent. You must say yes to being the least rather than the greatest. You must say yes to feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, visiting the widows, releasing the imprisoned, easing the suffering of others, housing the homeless, saying yes to peacemaking, forgiving each other, showing mercy, loving your enemies—and there's more."

I must confess I've never read the beatitudes and thought, *"What a fine read. What an inspirational monologue."* Because it frightens me. It's like Jesus turning to me in the middle of my extreme highs and deep lows and leveling with me. I like the beatitudes a lot, but it frightens me when I must think seriously about it as the text to write a touchpoint.

I want to have better options. Maybe I do cling to the status quo more than I realized. Maybe my following of Jesus is not what I thought it was.

I am reading the beatitudes differently today. I cannot answer an emphatic yes to the commands to embrace the blessings and the woes quite yet. Because it would mean letting go of control.

I've harbored too many no's and not enough woes in my following.

Why does the thought of following Jesus unabashed feel exciting? No wonder there was a multitude who were there to be healed but less to be disciples.

Amen

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

Prepare the Way

(Taizé)

Prepare the way of the Lord. And all the people will see the salvation of our God.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

My Soul Proclaims

(Marty Haugen)

My soul proclaims your greatness O God, and my spirit rejoices in you.

- 1) My being proclaims the greatness of God. My spirit finds joy in my savior.
For you regard me in my lowliness and every age shall call me blest.
- 2) Great and mighty are you, O holy One, strong is your kindness evermore.
How you favor the weak and lowly ones. Humbling the proud of heart.
- 3) You have cast down the mighty from their thrones. Raising up those of low degree.
You have filled the hungry with wondrous things and sent the rich empty away.

The Meal

Our Father (The Lord's Prayer)

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Benediction

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel

(Salt of the Sound)

O, Come, O, Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel.
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.