

Radical Discipleship

Luke 6:20-42

Encountering Jesus Today

By Dave Urbanski

Recently two different individuals on different occasions asked me for food when I was driving near a local McDonald's.

The encounters occurred just a few days apart — which, as you might guess, led me to consider whether God was trying to show me something. (Ya think?!?)

As we all know, it sure does feel good to help people in need like that. But something much better than that happened within me: The moment I agreed to buy these folks food, I felt absolutely FREE. The sensation lasted only from the time I said “yes” through the time when I handed them their bags and cups of soda.

Nothing else happening in my life at the time — good and not so good — affected me in the least during those moments. I was all about this relatively tiny (and admittedly easy to fulfill) mission, and I felt completely untethered from worldly cares. Then, when I drove away, my worldly cares returned!

That makes sense, because I believe the Lord was giving me a taste of something wonderful coming in heaven — and a taste of the goodness he's waiting to give me right here and now. I believe he was showing me that abandoning my wants and needs in favor of another's wants and needs can result in a kind of heavenly blessing that melts away what weighs me down in life. Not once in those brief moments did I think about filing my tax returns, my son with autism, challenges at work, or my aches and pains. All that was on my heart and mind was joy that I was in God's will — and a determination to get this mission accomplished. How wonderful could it be in the here

and now to be that FREE much more often — and how wonderful it will be to experience that kind of eternal freedom and bliss when my time here is done.

Also not likely a coincidence was that our message last Sunday covered Luke 6:20-42, and Pastor Scott emphasized that one of our missions as Christians is to receive God's blessing so we in turn can bless others.

Are you receiving the blessing of God?

In this passage Jesus repeats the word “blessed” numerous times to his listeners. Pastor Scott said the word literally means “to be happy.” But that might seem confusing because Jesus in this passage rattles off four quite negative scenarios in which he declares that were “blessed”: When we're poor, when we're hungry, when we weep, and when people hate us and revile us because of our faith in him.

It's a challenging declaration from our Lord. He promises us not only that we will be granted a future glory because of our faithfulness in him — but also a PRESENT state of blessing even WHILE we lack finances and food and when we're sad.

Pastor Scott called this a “deep satisfaction in your soul.” That despite tremendous pain and brokenness, God empowers us to rejoice. And even when our current situation is hard, he emphasized that “it's about the conclusion.”

Indeed, in verse 23, Jesus tells the crowd that faith in him places us in good company because the prophets also were hated and abused even while they obeyed God.

Jesus isn't done, not by a long shot. He goes on to switch around his previous four points by creating “woes” for those who are rich, possess full bellies, who laugh, and receive positive vibes from others — because it all will be coming down like a house of cards.

Pastor Scott gave us a great explanation of what Jesus likely was driving at with the woes: If your “god” is your money ... your satiated taste buds ... your good times ...

and the approval of others, you're not following in Jesus' footsteps very well, and you'll come up short even in THIS life. You won't be satisfied or enjoy any of that stuff.

Jesus follows that up with his authoritative (not "Rabbi X says" but "I say") commands in verses 27 through 31 which should be repeated in full: "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."

In verses 32 through 36, Jesus tells the hard truth that it's easy to love those who love us, *et cetera*. But he adds that God indeed is "kind to the ungrateful and the evil" — and we must do as the Lord does. Carrying out that challenging mandate shows that "we think differently than nonbelievers," Pastor Scott said. And that can be a witness to others, who are watching our lives VERY closely, he added.

Finally, Pastor Scott reminded us — in keeping with Jesus' instructions in verses 39 through 42 — that people we hang around with influence us. Not only those folks, but also the things that we choose to read. The things we choose to listen to. The things we choose to look at. They all have an effect whether we want to admit it or not. So, Pastor Scott said, let's watch out lest we fall into the pit that Jesus describes (v. 39) — and even better, let's surround ourselves with good influences. In keeping with that, let's not be hypocritical and point out others' faults before we acknowledge our own.

All of this will go a long way toward our mission of receiving the blessing of God so we can pass on his blessing to others.