

Lesson 20 – Luke 6:37-49
 “*The Character of New Life*”

EASTER SUNDAY
 April 12, 2009

Introduction

Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

We are here to celebrate the foundation stone of Christian faith. Without the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus we would be, as Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 15, ‘of all people most miserable’. Why does Paul say this?? Let us think of the magnitude of what Jesus did in these terms...

- The normal course of human life without God is birth, life, and then death.
 - The Story of Scripture tells us that this course is a direct result of sin in the world.
- Jesus comes to flip that final state right on its head! He comes to experience life and also to embrace a horrific death at the hands of mankind; but then He breaks the power of death by rising from the dead!
 - By doing this He comes to offer to us something that would not otherwise be possible – In the place of death, He offers us new life; resurrection life!

I love the season of Spring because it give us so many pictures and analogies of the wonder of new life. I have a series of pictures I would like us to watch. As you observe just one of the many wonderful indicators of the genius of God’s creation. Let us marvel together at the emergence of beauty out of the cold and dark of winter.

[show series of slides here – automatic transitions]

What an amazing God we worship!

Let us look at the 2 states of life for this little chick and use it as a bit of an analogy. He starts in the darkness (**egg**). Let this be a picture of our life without God in this world. We have what we need to survive for a while, but unless we are freed from this dark place we will most certainly die. The Bible describes our condition as being ‘dead in our sins’ and ‘without hope in the world’. By the grace of God, however, the chick emerges to **new life**! Let this be a picture of the new life which Jesus came to bring us! Jesus said to His followers that He came to bring life ‘to the full’ or ‘abundant life’!

The Apostle Paul expresses it this way:

Colossians 1:12-14

“...giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of light! The question we need to ask at this point is: **what does life in the kingdom of light look like??** It is precisely this question that Jesus is addressing in our passage in Luke that was read to us earlier.

Today is lesson #3 in our examination of this ‘sermon on the plain’ which Luke records Jesus preaching in Luke 6. We observed a couple of weeks ago that the primary focus of Jesus’ teaching is on what life in the kingdom of God is like. He’s trying to paint word pictures for His followers so that they would get an idea of what it means to fully enter into the experience of the new life, the kingdom life that Jesus came to bring.

Our passage today contains **5 marks / characteristics of kingdom life.** I’ve entitled this message ‘the Character of New Life’ because I want us to observe that the marks of the kingdom described here highlight the need for us to be people of character if we are to embrace what it means to live fully in the kingdom of God.

We might ask our question another way: if you are a follower of Jesus – how do people know that? What do they observe in your life that shows that you belong to this kingdom of light? Do they know you’re a Christian by the fact that you go to church most Sunday mornings or by other religious practices that you keep?? Jesus is talking about something much deeper. Life in the kingdom of God is abundant life; it is life which transforms us right down to the core of who we are!

Our time this morning will permit us only to glance briefly at each of these 5 characteristics or signs of resurrection life...

1. **Forgiving / Giving NOT Judging / Condemning (37-38)**

- a. We ought to be deeply challenged by the juxtaposition of these 4 words:
 - i. Do not judge

- ii. Do not condemn
 - iii. Forgive
 - iv. Give
 - b. We need to be very careful to hear what this means. Does this mean that we put on rose-coloured glasses and simply turn a blind eye when someone falls into sin or does something damaging to the community? No! Jesus says very clearly in other places that if your brother sins against you – go and talk with him about it!
 - i. In fact, it is in the very act of confronting sinful behaviour that we observe in the lives of our brothers and sisters that we move from living in the place of ‘judging’ and ‘condemning’ to living in the light.
 - c. Jesus is saying here that the nature of the kingdom of God is such that NOTHING is allowed to live between me and you. We confront issues when they arise; we do not sit back and allow judgement, condemnation and bitterness to build up in our hearts. This is the nature of life in the Kingdom!
 - d. Just this past week a brother came to me and said that he had been carrying a burden because of something I had said to him some time ago. He felt offended by my comment and felt I was not accepting his point of view. I had no idea I had caused this offense but I was so thankful that he came to me so that I could apologize for my hurtful comments and help to release him from carrying that burden.
 - e. There are some of us sitting here who are holding things against a brother or a sister – perhaps even right here in this room. According to Jesus, we are given this gift of new life are called to take action; to take initiative; to go to that brother or sister and to confront the issue and press it forward until it is resolved.
 - f. The character of New Life does not allow us to sit back and judge and condemn; but rather to take action to forgive and give.
2. **Careful Learning (39-40)**
- a. There are a number of proposed ways to take what Jesus says in these 2 verses but I believe at the heart of His words is the injunction to be careful who we learn from.
 - i. If you are blind and you choose another blind man to show you how to avoid the holes in the road, you will likely both fall into the hole!
 - ii. Be careful who you choose to be your teacher because if you fully embrace the learning process you will become like your teacher!

b. I believe we may take this challenge in 2 ways:

i. Always maintain a learning attitude

1. We become very dangerous when we think we have ‘made it’ or that somehow we are superior or that we no longer need to apply our hearts to learning.
2. The beauty of Scripture is that it is a Living Word and there is always more to learn as we absorb the story of Jesus and the salvation He came to bring.
3. Never give up the pursuit of learning more!

ii. Be careful who you choose to learn from.

1. Ultimately we learn from Christ – He is the only infallible Teacher!
2. But He has placed us in the Body to learn from one another. Look for mentors who exhibit the characteristics of the Kingdom of God!

3. **Healthy self-awareness (41-42)**

a. Jesus employs a very humorous word picture to get his point across. You can imagine the chuckles as Jesus would say this... **(picture)**. “*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*” We likely imagine it in our minds differently from 1st century Israel, but the idea is the same.

[one more click here to get rid of picture]

b. Once again we need to understand carefully what Jesus is trying to say here. Is He saying that we should never be discerning about the destructive patterns of behaviour that may be present in the life of my brother or sister?? No, we reflected on this when we spoke about not judging.

i. Notice here as well that Jesus does not say that we should never attempt to take the speck from our brother’s eye – He says that we need to pay careful attention to our own selves before we do.

c. I believe that Jesus is calling us to a humble perspective on our own brokenness; our own inability to fully live out the values of the Kingdom of God; our own vulnerability to the temptations of sin that are still all around us in this world.

i. Jesus is calling us to humility, to confession and to a place of vulnerability where we don’t try to hide or ignore our faults and our weaknesses but where we take them and place them at the cross which is the only place where we can find healing and wholeness.

- ii. As we stand together at the foot of the cross and hear the cleansing words of Jesus saying to us ‘you are forgiven; you are My special child’ then we can look towards one another and look with discernment for signs of deception and sin – but we do it with His eyes instead of our own clouded eyes.
- d. Brandon Heath has written a song which has become very popular:
 - i. *“Give me your eyes for just one second
Give me your eyes so I can see
Everything that I keep missing
Give me your love for humanity
Give me your arms for the broken hearted
Ones that are far beyond my reach.
Give me your heart for the ones forgotten
Give me your eyes so I can see”*
- e. We need healthy eyes as we look toward each other – we need to see ourselves as broken but forgiven and very special children of God and look towards one another and towards the world with the eyes of Jesus.
- f. So far we’ve seen 3 characteristics:
 - i. Forgiving / Giving NOT Judging / Condemning
 - ii. Careful Learning
 - iii. Healthy self-awareness
- 4. **Healthy Heart (43-45)**
 - a. Listen carefully to the word picture here once again:
 - i. *“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.”*
 - b. This is a very powerful word picture – it is one that calls us to a deep place of authenticity.
 - c. What is one of the most common accusations that non-believers have against the Christian church in the world? The cry is often that we are hypocrites...
 - i. Are they justified? Sadly, we have to admit that sometimes they are.
 - ii. It is so easy to fall into the trap of doing Christian things without really allowing the Spirit of God to transform our hearts at the deepest level of who we are.
 - iii. In our Western culture we can often get away with this and have people think we are pretty good people until one day we get rubbed the wrong way and out of the deepest place inside of us comes gushing out some junk in the form of anger, rage,

lust, foul words, criticism, bitterness – stuff that we thought we had buried pretty well, but which is obviously still there.

- d. C.S. Lewis helps us understand what is going on here:
 - i. *“Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is. If there are rats in a cellar, you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats; it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way, the suddenness of the provocation does not make me ill-tempered; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am.”*
- e. My friends, life in the kingdom of God is a whole life transformation – it is NOT about simply coming to church and trying to be a good person. We will fail miserably if we try to do this on our own strength.
 - i. Jesus is calling us here to pay attention to where our hearts are at – the deepest place of who we are as people.
- f. D.L Moody once said, *“Character is what you are in the dark.”*
 - i. Proverbs 4:23 says, *“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”*
- g. Life in the Kingdom of God is marked by a healthy heart.
 - i. But HOW do we get a healthy heart??
 - ii. I believe Jesus gives some practical suggestions in the final section.

5. Humble Obedience (46-49)

- a. This last word picture is probably the most well-known of the whole sermon as it has been certainly popularized by songs like *‘The wise man built his house upon the rock... etc.’*
- b. The whole picture brings 2 verbs into focus:
 - i. Hearing
 - ii. Doing (putting into practice)
- c. Jesus says, the person who is wise (the one who is seeking the kind of heart transformation we just spoke about) will do 2 things: hear and do; hear the Word of God and put into practice.
- d. The principle here is very simple and may be illustrated by considering the responses of young children to their parents.
 - i. If a loving parent is clear in their instructions to their children, the child in response has 2 alternatives – to do or not to do.
 - ii. “Johnny – please put the dishes in the dishwasher”
 - iii. Why wouldn’t Johnny just go ahead and do this?

1. There may be multiple complicating factors that lead to his decision to not obey his parents, but fundamentally we can boil it down to one main question – ‘who’s in charge here?’
 2. From a neutral outside perspective we can look into this situation and see that if Johnny chooses not to obey, he is fundamentally exerting his authority and will above that of his loving parent who loves him and actually knows what is best for him.
- e. We can hear an almost plaintive tone in Jesus’ voice here, “*Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’, and do not do what I say?*”
- i. You see, for you & me it is exactly the same question: who is really the Lord in my life?? Is it me and my way that rules, or is it the way of my loving Heavenly Father who made me, who loves me, who rescued me and saved me and who knows exactly what is best for me??
 - ii. Of course it makes sense that if I want to live in the fullness of the kingdom of God which Jesus is describing here, then I need to submit myself to His way.
- f. And so into our lives we need to take this 2-fold challenge
- i. Am I hearing the Word of the Lord in my life??
 1. We hear by means of Holy Scripture and by listening prayer
 2. Are we taking time to hear?? 30 minutes on a Sunday morning does not cut it! Are you taking time and putting effort into the discipline of absorbing the Word through your week??
 - ii. Having heard the Word, am I living in humble obedience?
 1. We live in a world where Satan is alive and well and he is continuing to say as he did right back in the Garden – as you hear the Word of the Lord in your life – he will say, ‘did God really say...?’
 2. In a conversation with someone this week, I was reminded just how beautiful sin is... the devil is the father of lies and he makes that which is contrary to God look oh so attractive.
 3. The lust of the eyes is a beautiful thing, but we know that it leads to destruction.
 - iii. Jesus says to us – the way to keep your life on a solid foundation is to hear the Word and put it into practice.

Conclusion

And so we have 5 indicators / marks of the character of new life:

- Forgiving / Giving NOT Judging / Condemning
- Careful Learning
- Healthy self-awareness
- Healthy heart
- Humble obedience

These are issues of character. Life in the kingdom of God is about transformation at the very core of who we are as people in this world.

“Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are.”

John Wooden, former coach of the UCLA Bruins basketball team, quoted in Sanctity of Life, C. Swindoll, Word, 1990, p. 91

Let us pray...