

"A FAITH-SHAPED LIFE: BLESSINGS AND WOES"

Luke 6:17-26

I know some of you wonder what I do with my time during the week, especially since you have heard that "us preachers" work just one hour a week. But every once-in-a-while someone has surgery early in the morning, so I am up and at the hospital when they arrive, or close to it. And then I try and stay with them until they are swept off to surgery and then I might stick around and visit with the family, that is, unless I have to work overtime and do some other church work. But if I stay on, and it is early, I might get a cup of coffee, just to stay awake. Over at one of our local hospitals they give to those who are waiting in the waiting room tokens to be used for hot drinks. And so I usually take a token and go to the vending machine and press the buttons labeled, "coffee, cream, and sugar." Let's just imagine something that has yet to happen to me, but what if, after pushing all the appropriate buttons, no cup came out but everything else works sending my coffee, cream and sugar into the drain of forgetfulness, never to be seen by

me again? Now I could feel one of two ways: cheated that I did not get my drink, or I could say, "My, what wonderful automation. The machine even drinks it for you." Well, let me use this illustration to make a point- **The Christian life cannot be lived out for you. You have to drink it for yourself.**

A few weeks ago, and maybe you read the same article in the Tuesday, June 24 edition of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, it was reported that 92% of Americans believe in God. So we can conclude that America remains a nation of believers. But a new survey finds most Americans don't feel their religion is the only way to eternal life, even if their faith teaches otherwise. Now I am not going to get into the second part of what I reported- that is for another day. But that 92% of us believe in God is well and good, but making a transition in belief from a creator God to a personal God is a huge leap of faith.

And what is huge is coming to the realization that the God who created the universe has reached out to us in the life of His only Son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

Two Sundays ago we talked about having the foundation stones in place when it comes to our spiritual life- those foundation stones being Jesus Christ, the Word of God, the Christian community called the Church, and Christian friends to accompany us on this journey called life, this journey of faith. But for us to have a "faith-shaped life" we have to be in shape. And being in shape takes work.

A few weeks ago when I found myself turning on the TV to watch the US Olympic trials: Track and Field came from Eugene, Oregon and swimming from Omaha, Nebraska. Now do you think those athletes woke up one morning in early June and decided that they were going to compete in the 2008 Summer Olympics over in China? No way. There was 4 years and countless hours of preparation- running, lifting, practicing, competing.

Time spent working on technique, watching films of themselves and others, being instructed by coaches. When I think of these and all the other athletes who will compete in the Summer Olympics the word that comes to mind is DISCIPLINE.

Max Anders, a pastor, college and seminary professor once said, "Only the disciplined ever get really good at anything." And how true. Let me ask you, does the name Jack LaLanne mean anything to you? Jack is an American fitness, exercise and nutritional expert, celebrity, lecturer, and motivational speaker who has been referred to as "the godfather of fitness." Now at age 93, he continues to work out every morning for two hours. He spends one and a half hours in the weight room, and half an hour swimming or walking. LaLanne and his wife Elaine, who is 80 years old, live in [Morro Bay, California](#). When interviewed a few years ago by [Katie Couric](#) on NBC's *Today* show, LaLanne declared that his two simple rules of nutrition are, "if man made it, don't eat it", and "if it tastes good, spit it out."

He often says, "I cannot afford to die, it will ruin my image." Interviewed on his 93rd birthday, he said his feat of strength was going to be "towing my wife across the bathtub". In a June 2007 interview, he claimed that for his 95th birthday, he'd like to swim to [Santa Catalina Island](#) from the coast of California, a distance of approximately 20 miles. And he probably will.

To truly live out the Christian life takes discipline. Oh, that we all had the spiritual discipline like Jack LaLanne's physical discipline. As you and I know that if discipline is involved there are rules to follow. Jesus, in our passage today, gives us rules for living a faith-shaped life. But let me ask you- how many of you like a list of rules and regulations handed to you and told you are to follow them? Some might, because they want to know the expectations, they have a goal in mind and they want to achieve it. Others might not be so thrilled because they do not, under any circumstances, want structure and definitely do not want to be told what to do or how to do it.

These rules for living that Jesus presented were seen and are seen as revolutionary. If you turn to Matthew 5, 6, & 7 you will read the more familiar version of the Sermon on the Mount. And if you are into comparing and contrasting Matthew, Mark, and Luke's versions of the Sermon on the Mount you will find differences, and that's OK. But let me just make a few observations. Luke's sermon is given on a Level Place and not on a mountain, as found in Matthew. Matthew and Luke appear to be making a theological use of geography. In Luke's case, the mountain is a place of prayer, and it is here that He chooses the 12 disciples. But we read that Jesus moves to the plain below to be with the people, those with whom Jesus identifies, as at His baptism. The people on the Level Place are made up of three groupings: the apostles, the disciples, and the people (v.17). With Luke indicating that the people came from as far as Jerusalem and Judea to the south and Tyre and Sidon to the north, he might be saying that Jesus' ministry and message are for all people.

So there is a large group of people who are gathered and the sermon seems to be for the disciples, for it says in vs. 20, "he looked up at his disciples and said." And yet at the close of the sermon in Luke 7:1 Jesus says, "After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people." What could these two audiences, the disciples and the people mean? Maybe Luke means that these teachings are for Jesus' followers, the disciples, and for all who would be disciples, the people.

This sermon, and by the way, we are only looking at a portion of it today, is made up of five parts: 1) blessings and woes (vv.20-26); 2) on love of enemies (vv. 27-36); 3) on judging (vv. 37-42); 4) on integrity (vv. 43-45); and 5) on hearing and doing (vv. 46-49).

Today, we will begin this series from a Level Place and look at the first part: BLESSINGS AND WOES. What Jesus has done is take the acceptable standards of the day and turn them upside down. Think of it this way- the poor that Jesus called happy the world would call pitiful; and the people

Jesus called pitiful the world would call happy. I mean, think about it, if you heard someone say "Happy are the poor, and, Woe to the rich" you would think they were nuts. But Jesus turned the values and the standards of the world upside down and inside out.

What exactly are we to make of what Jesus is trying to say in the Blessings and Woes? One scholar believes the key is found in verse 24 where Jesus says, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation." Another way of saying "you have received your consolation" is "you have all the comfort you are going to get." In verse 24 Jesus uses the word "have" and the Greek word He uses is the word for receiving payment in full of an account. What Jesus might be saying is something like this to the modern-day person who is all-consumed with "getting" those things that they desire to accumulate in this life- like the big house, car, bank account, whatever it is that they have set their eyes on- here is what Jesus might say, "If you have your eyes and your mind and your heart and your energies

set on getting the things that our world values, well, you might just get them- but that is all you might ever get.” But is that going to be worth it in the final analysis? Jesus would ask. And Jesus might say, “But if you set your eyes, heart, mind, energy on following me and being loyal to God, you will, more than likely, have all kind of problems and issues, and the world might look at you as unhappy, but guess what? Much of your payment is still coming, as a matter of fact, it will be an eternal joy.”

I think that as soon as we are able to know the difference from right and wrong we begin our dilemma that will last a life time. The question is will we take the easier way which has the potential to bring immediate pleasure and gain or will we take the hard way which might bring struggles and suffering and pain? Will we “go for all the gusto” and take the golden ring of pleasure and the proceeds found in the moment or will we look at the bigger picture, will we look to the future and be willing to sacrifice the instant gratifications for the greater good?

Here is the bottom-line question: **will we go after the rewards of this world or will we focus on Jesus Christ?** Think about this- if we choose "the world" we will have to give up the values of Christ and if we choose Christ, we must give up the world.

This the heart of the discussion Jesus had with the rich young ruler who comes to Jesus asking how to inherit eternal life. And Jesus told him in Luke 18:22, "Sell all you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." And verse 23 says, "But when he heard this, he became sad; for he was very rich." The world or Christ? This is a choice we all must make.

You see, Jesus knew which choice, in the end would bring happiness. F. R. Maltby once said, "Jesus promised his disciples three things- that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble." The great English writer of the early 20th century, G. K. Chesterton, whose principles were always getting him into trouble, once said, "I like getting into

hot water. It keeps you clean!" When you think about it, the teaching of Jesus are revolutionary and it is true, that the joy of heaven will definitely compensate for the troubles we experience here on earth. Why, even the Apostle Paul said in II Corinthians 4:17, "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." So the question and the challenge from this passage for us is this: "The world's way or Christ's way? Now which do you think will bring us ultimate happiness?

Amen.

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_____ it for yourself**

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