

West Valley Church
April Manning
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Epiphanies of *THE* Epiphany

Luke 6:12-36

Video Clip: *Gru's Lightbulb Moment*

Have you ever had a moment like Gru? A moment when you finally had an amazing idea on how to solve a problem or when some new information came to light that blew your mind and you have all these fireworks, or rainbows, or the hallelujah chorus playing in your head? My sister had one of those moments when she finally put together that the characters in Winnie the Pooh, Kanga and Roo, spelled "kangaroo."

The founder of Ikea also had a lightbulb moment, when, according to an Entrepreneur article,¹ he couldn't fit a table in his car so he took the legs off. Go-Pro founder had a lightbulb moment when he went surfing and couldn't take a picture of himself. Founder of Airbnb had a lightbulb moment when he rented his air mattress and made cash. The founder of whatsapp had a lightbulb moment when he could not afford to call his father internationally, and the founder of Gap, can you guess what his lightbulb moment was? It was when he could not find a store selling jeans that fit well.

In all these examples, the lightbulb moments didn't necessarily happen when people were looking for them, but when they weren't looking for them, and they occurred when a new perspective was taken, like when Gru figured out how to steal the shrink ray from his archnemesis, Vector, using 3 little girls selling Vector's favorite snack and weakness of coconutties!

In Jesus's day, this happened quite often. People had been waiting for a messiah, but not necessarily always looking for one or looking for the right one. They had an idea, a certain perspective, of what the Messiah would be like, which differed from how Jesus acted, so when Jesus was revealed as the Son of God, people experienced these lightbulb moments, or what we might call, epiphanies.

The epiphany of Jesus, the revelation of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, is described in several places throughout the Gospels. Mark chapter one, verses nine through eleven, describes what happened when Jesus was baptized and came up out of the water. It says, "Just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."" Several verses later in verse 24, Jesus is revealed by a man with an unclean spirit as "the Holy One of God." Jesus rebukes him and commands the unclean spirit to come out. Others who witnessed that were amazed and started to ask, "What is this? A new teaching with

¹Catherine Clifford, "The 'Aha' Moments of Famous Inventors," *Entrepreneur*, July 31, 2014, [http://https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/236098](https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/236098).

authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.” And in Matthew chapter seventeen verses one through five, we find Jesus on top of a high mountain with Peter, James and John where Jesus is transfigured before them; his face shining like the sun and his clothes white as light. A cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!”

In all these epiphanies, THE epiphany to be revealed is Jesus is the Son of God, but what does Jesus, the ultimate epiphany reveal to us? Time and again, Jesus announces the Kingdom of Heaven is near.² Jesus announces the inbreaking of God’s Kingdom on earth has come, starting with Him, and today we’re going to look at what it means to be part of that Kingdom. We’re going to look at what Jesus reveals to us, what epiphanies Jesus reveals to us about the Kingdom of God, in Luke, chapter six, verses twelve through thirty-six. I would invite you to turn to that chapter in your Bible, or in the Bible App, or just follow along with the screen, and stand in honor of the reading of the Word.

¹² Now during those days he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, and James, and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and Thomas, and James son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

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 all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

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 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.

²⁷ Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

² Matt 3:2; Matt 4:17; Matt 10:7; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; Luke 8:1; 10:9; 17:21;

³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:12-36)

Blessed Are Those Who Follow Jesus

In the first few verses of our passage, verses twelve through sixteen, we read of Jesus choosing his twelve disciples, and likewise his disciples choosing to follow Jesus, before Jesus mentions any sort of blessing, which reveals our first epiphany:

1. Blessed Are Those Who Follow Jesus

In the preceding chapter, in Luke chapter five verse one through eleven, we find the story of Jesus choosing his first disciples, which also reveals this truth. The story goes like this:

One day, Simon-Peter, a fisherman, is washing his net along the shore of Lake Gennesaret when a man named Jesus walks by, sees Simon-Peter's boat, sees the crowd that had been following him press in on him, gets into Simon-Peter's boat and tells Simon-Peter to pull away from the shore. Although a stranger to him, Simon-Peter does what Jesus tells him to do. A bit later, this strange man Jesus tells Simon-Peter to cast his net into the water for a catch. Simon, perhaps a bit bewildered right now, but hopeful in what this man says who has such a large crowd that follows him for some sort of reason, responds with, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.” When Simon let down the nets, so many fish entered the nets that the nets began to break, and when the fish were loaded into the boat, the boats began to sink! Once the boats had gone back to shore, Simon-Peter, along with his partners who witnessed the event, James and John, left their boats and their nets and followed Jesus.

In this story, it was evident that as Simon-Peter followed Jesus, he and his companions were blessed. They caught lots of fish and their boats didn't sink, but this blessing and many others they would experience later required a response. A response of following and trusting in Jesus; so when we look back to our passage for this morning, we see that Jesus first calls his disciples before pronouncing blessings upon them.

But before we get to that, we see another example of how those who follow Jesus are blessed. We see in verses seventeen through nineteen, the crowd who followed Jesus were cured of diseases and unclean spirits, which reiterates our first epiphany: Blessed Are Those Who Follow Jesus.

To be clear, the type of following I'm talking about is a committed way of following. Now, I know that the Seahawks are not in the Super Bowl, and neither are my Steelers, but how many in here kept cheering for the Seahawks or your favorite football team this season no matter

how awful they did or how great they did? Okay, now who in here watches a football team just for the good food and could care less who wins or only roots for those who win? Okay, those of you who are die-hard fans, you know your team, you put faith in your team, you watch every game you can, and you cheer them on through every loss and win, that is the following I'm talking about here. I'm not talking about being a fickle-fan, following those who win, following one game a year or following just to enjoy good food, or in relation to our passage, following for the blessing; I'm talking about following no matter what happens. Following Jesus in this way is how we need to follow, and those who do will be blessed.

Blessed Are Those Who Give Their Whole Selves to Jesus

As we have seen, Jesus blesses those who follow him. We saw that in the story of Jesus choosing his disciples and in the curing and healing of those who followed him. The blessings came after people chose to follow Jesus and believe in Jesus's power to heal, but the blessings were for a time, for a moment. The blessings Jesus explicitly reveals in the next part of our passage are eternal blessings. Jesus says:

²⁰“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 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. (Luke 6:20-23)

At first, these blessings appear to be set up like a checklist. If you do all these things, then you will be blessed. I'm not sure about you, but I love checklists. Checklists and task lists make me feel more accomplished, especially when I take that pen with the crisp ink and slide it across my note pad. That means I'm one step closer to achieving a goal or a task, and I feel so accomplished. Unfortunately, God doesn't work that way. You can't make a checklist of 1) become poor 2) become hungry 3) weep 4) be hated and expect all those things to equal being blessed. Anyone could do those things and not be blessed in the way Jesus reveals. People who do not follow Jesus are poor, are hungry, cry, and are hated. What then makes someone blessed?

If it's not anything we do ourselves, then what does Jesus mean when He says, “blessed are those who are poor, blessed are those who hunger, blessed are those who weep and blessed are those who are hated?” The end of verse twenty-three gives us a hint: “Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, revile you and defame you *on account of the Son of Man.*” “On account of the Son of Man;” that phrase is huge and critical to this whole passage, to this whole revelation of Jesus. What Jesus is saying is blessed are you when people hate you, exclude you, revile you and defame you because you follow me, because you are my disciple.³ We're blessed because we first and foremost follow Jesus.

Jesus makes this clear at another time, recorded in Matthew chapter ten verses thirty-eight through thirty-nine, as Jesus is preparing his disciples to be sent out. Jesus says:

³ Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament, Luke 6:23.

“And whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”
(Matthew 10:38-39)

We see here that putting Jesus first is of priority, and in Luke, the same message is being communicated.

Now some of you know that I am a Northwest Nazarene University alum, but most probably didn't know I did cheerleading there for a year and did competitive speech during my last two years. In all those activities, memorization and repetition was key. My cheer coaches had my team repeat new chants or new routines so we would remember them and my speech coaches would have me practice my 10-minute speeches and drama interps by going over them again and again until they were memorized. Those memorization techniques worked, and I think that is why the Gospels repeat Jesus's message that following him is of priority, because it's a message worth remembering. I'm not going to make you memorize anything, but I do want you to remember this next epiphany:

2. Blessed Are Those Who Give Their Whole Selves to Jesus

When we give up everything for Jesus, such as money, food, satisfaction, pleasures and social status, and when we put Jesus first, we are be eternally blessed.

At the time Jesus was delivering this passage, Jesus really was talking to the poor, to the hungry, to the mournful and to those who had been defamed. He was saying they would be blessed if they followed him and accepted the grace of God and the invitation of God to care for them. Jesus announced to the poor, the Kingdom of Heaven was theirs. Jesus was the in-breaking of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, so the Kingdom of Heaven really was theirs if they chose to follow Jesus, and guess what? The Kingdom of Heaven is still available to you too if you choose.

Jesus also said to those who were hungry and wept, they would be filled, and they would be joyful. Jesus was talking in future tense—giving hints as to what kinds of things to expect when you enter the Kingdom of Heaven. When you enter the Kingdom of Heaven, you will be blessed, you will be provided for, you will be in God's care. Isn't that amazing and awesome news?! This is what Jesus reveals through these blessings; not that if we become poor, become hungry or weep we will be blessed, but if we follow Jesus, we will be blessed; we will be in God's care. What it requires is a total and whole-hearted devotion to God and acceptance of Jesus as Savior. It requires trust in God to provide, which isn't easy, but totally worth it.

To those who were rich, were full/satisfied, joyful and famous, and even to those who would attain such things, Jesus gave warning. Jesus said:

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. (Luke 6:24-26)

Jesus wasn't saying all these things are bad, but if you're rich, fully satisfied, joyful and famous and do nothing for others, beware. You're not following in the way of Jesus, and you will not be blessed eternally. For those who are rich, give. To those who are fully satisfied, give. To those joyful, seek those who mourn and comfort them. To those famous, humble yourself and give God glory and honor and use your fame for good, to be an exemplar of Christ.

Blessed Are Those Who Bless Others

Following Jesus not only results in us being blessed, but others being blessed through how we live in the world, and in verses twenty-seven through thirty-six, Jesus reveals how to live in this world when you follow him. He says,

²⁷ Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27-36)

In this section, Jesus reveals the difference between sinners and disciples is that disciples love their enemies, do good to those who hate them, bless those who curse them, pray for those who abuse them, give generously and lend without expectation. Jesus lived this way, and those who follow Him are to live in a similar fashion, because when you follow Jesus whole-heartedly, it's almost impossible not to live in such a way. Living and acting flow from following and flow from the heart as Jesus lives in it; it doesn't flow from a desire to check things off a list.

Jesus precedes this teaching with revealing those who follow him will be blessed and then reveals what following him entails. We need to trust in Jesus first and foremost in order to live like Jesus, which is why Jesus chose his first disciples, why Jesus came to others first before they came to him; they needed to trust in order to follow.

I think sometimes we do the reverse. We do things we think are "Christian," but we don't spend much time with Jesus, listening to Jesus, and sometimes the things we do aren't that "Christian" at all. I know I have way more Christian friends than non-Christians; I know that I do things expecting the same in return or to at least be appreciated, but when I seek to follow Jesus first before doing things, my intentions become pure, and I am open to more opportunities to bless those with a pure, generous heart, even in difficult times.

I think if we are to truly live as Christ-followers, truly live in the way Jesus reveals above, it is going to be difficult and we are going to need to trust in Jesus to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate us, to pray for those who exploit us, and do things out of pure love,

expecting nothing in return. We need strength to do such things and that strength and ability to live and bless others comes through following Jesus; we don't have the strength, the emotional energy to put ourselves through such things. We have to rely on Jesus.

I know it will be difficult, but be reminded of this truth, this third epiphany:

3. Blessed Are Those Who Bless Others

For Jesus says: "Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Blessed Are Those Because That's What God Does

I've been repeating it throughout this sermon, and hopefully you've caught on by now, but this list of blessings Jesus reveals, and this list of how to live in the world, is not meant to be a checklist. I know it's easy to look at these and think, "If only I do these things, I will be blessed." But is that what this is all about? Doing things to gain rewards? Somehow, the way our brains are wired and think, we tend to sway in that direction. We need to be rewarded.

I have a 7-year-old niece, and the nice thing about living in Yakima is that I get to see her more often, as she lives two hours away from here. Now when she came to our house for Christmas, I prepared what I thought was a kid-friendly dinner, because I knew she wouldn't eat a fancy dinner. I know this because when I saw her at Thanksgiving, all she wanted was a corndog. I thought, "Are you kidding me?!" as I looked at all of the yummy thanksgiving food bubbling and bursting with flavor. So when she came to our house, we prepared taco bowls! I mean, who doesn't like tacos? But this kid, well, she wouldn't eat it, and to get her to eat it, we enticed her by making her take a bite for everyone sitting at the table and by saying you need to eat in order to eat all the yummy sugar cookies we made today. It worked somewhat, but it only worked because she knew that if she ate some of the dinner, she would make her family happy and be able to eat cookies after dinner.

From a young age we're wired to do things based on reward, but God doesn't work like that. When you take away the words in verses twenty through twenty-three, such as poor, hungry, weep, hate, exclude, revile, defame, we read what Jesus is really getting at. Jesus says, "Blessed are you...for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you...for you will be filled. Blessed are you...for you will laugh. Blessed are you...on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice...for surely your reward is great in heaven." Jesus pronounces those who are followers are blessed; they don't need to do anything, except *follow* Him, and when they do, they will be eternally blessed, which brings us to our last epiphany:

4. Blessed Are Those Because That's What God Does

God blesses us because God loves us and God cares for us. We can rest knowing there's no amount of doing good, no amount of works, that can save us, except that we say yes to God and to the grace and blessings that are extended to us.

What I love most about the Bible, is that it is the Story of God through all the ages. Yes, it is composed of 66 different books, but all those books are related. They all tell the story of God, the mission of God, the LOVE of God. Even when we go back to the first book in the Bible, we see this epiphany that God blesses those because that's what God does.

In Genesis chapter eleven, we read a genealogy listing the sons of Shem, and after a while, we get to see that out of the line of Shem came a man named Abram, whom God later names Abraham. At the end of chapter eleven, we read that Terah, Abram's father, takes Abram and Abram's wife, Sarai, and Abram's nephew Lot to go to Canaan, but end up settling in Haran. The chapter ends noting Terah's death in Haran, and then do you know what happens next in Chapter twelve?

“The Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:1-2)

Wow. There is nothing in between chapters eleven and twelve that makes us think Abram is going to be blessed. Abram is blessed because that's just what God does. We see that in Genesis, and we see that in Luke. God's message is the same throughout that God blesses us because that's just what God does.

And did you know that God's blessings aren't just for those who follow, but God's blessings are for everyone? God blesses everyone with prevenient grace; the grace that comes before us, the grace that allows us to say yes to God to redeem us of our sins, to transform us, to provide for us, to save us. We are first and foremost blessed with grace, and it's available to us right now. When we say yes to that grace, we allow ourselves to become vulnerable before God, to say we need you God, to be redeemed, and to allow God to work within us and to follow in the way of Jesus. Becoming a part of the Kingdom of God is really that simple. Don't make it harder than it is. Don't think that to be part of the Kingdom you have to do things; you have to be something or someone. God wants you just the way you are; all you have to do is respond and follow, like the disciples and the crowd did, and when you say yes to God, God will bless you, transform you, give you new life, make you new. You don't need to change anything; come before God just as you are and let God work within you.

Conclusion

As we entered this new year, I'm sure you made a resolution of some sort, and by now, on this last Sunday of January; you may have kept it or may have broken it. Cheers to you who have kept it! I told Dan I would join him by running 1,000+ miles this year, but that means I would have to run 3 miles/day, and I haven't even done one, unless you count the miles I put in at Zumba 😊 As we leave this month of January and enter February, will you make a resolution with me? One that we can keep and hold each other accountable to? Can we live in a way that seeks to follow Jesus, seeks Jesus first, seeks to follow whole-heartedly and rest in the fact that we are blessed because that's just what God does?

I asked Pastor Roger and the worship team to lead us today in a song of response, and I'm going to ask them to come up now, but before we sing, I want us to think about where we find ourselves today.

Perhaps you have never considered following Jesus or perhaps you have considered it but haven't chosen to do so yet. This message is for you, and these blessings are for you. You already are blessed with prevenient grace, but if you'd like to partake in these other blessings, these eternal blessings, I would encourage you to tell God you're ready, you're ready to accept the offer of grace, ready to repent of the way you have lived, be forgiven, and follow Him. I would also encourage you, if you do make that step today, to seek out one of our pastors or visit Starting Point at the back of the room where we have more information on how you can follow Jesus.

Perhaps you have already been following, but you haven't followed whole-heartedly. I would encourage you to keep strong in the faith and to keep following Jesus, taking more steps of faith into this new year.

And for those of you who find yourself following Jesus and following whole-heartedly, I encourage you to keep following and to better love God and others. I know it is hard to love God and others full-time, but there is always room for growth in this area, and I pray in this new year you may know the joy and blessings that come when you love God and others fully and in difficult times.

Wherever you have found yourself today, remember that these blessings are only possible by the grace and love of God. We are blessed because God blesses us; we are not blessed by the things we do but because we are children of God. How will you respond to this grace? To this blessing?

Let us pray...