

Lesson 3

A New Perspective

Group Icebreaker:

What is one family value that your parents stressed and why was it so important?

Introduction:

Children learn from watching and listening. The disciples have been watching and listening to Jesus. They have been with Him for more than a year.

Soon after their encounter with the woman at the well in Sychar, John the Baptist is thrown into prison. Jesus moves from his hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum where He goes public with His ministry. He preaches, heals the sick, and casts out demons. The message Jesus has been preaching is, *“the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.”* And the multitudes have been following Him wherever He goes.

Jesus takes His disciples to the Feast of Weeks in Jerusalem. Opposition begins to arise against Him when He heals a lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. Jesus further infuriates the religious leaders when He claims that He is the Son of God. Then His disciples are accused of working on the Sabbath when they pick, husk and eat grain from the fields.

Returning to the Galilee, Jesus ascends Mount Eremos (eremos topos – “solitary place”) where He spends the night in prayer. A cave on the southern exposure of the hill provides shelter for Him. In the morning, the disciples come to Jesus and He names twelve of them to be His apostles (sent ones). Together, they descend to a level place where Jesus begins to speak what today is known as the Sermon on the Mount.

The Sermon on the Mount is the Law of Christ. It is Jesus’ teaching on God’s family values. It compares favorably with the Ten Commandments that Moses received and delivered to his people, the Israelites. The events surrounding the Sermon on the Mount and the giving of the Ten Commandments are very similar.

Both events immediately follow the Feast of Weeks. Both Moses and Jesus worked miracles before the events occurred. Both were being followed by a multitude of people. Both ascend a mountain where they spend time with God. Both descend the mountain to give the law of God to the multitudes below. Moses delivers the Ten Commandments that are written on two stone tablets by the finger of God. Jesus speaks His commandments and they are written on the hearts of people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Both the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount contain instructions for right living. Both contain blessings and curses. Moses finishes giving The Law (Torah) to the Israelites by having the people declare the blessings and curses of the covenant (Deuteronomy 28). Jesus begins the giving of His Law with nine blessings (beatitudes) and four curses (woes).

As Jesus descends the slope of Eremos to the waiting multitudes below He has time to reflect. Spread before Him to the south lay the Sea of Galilee. The azure blue of the harp-shaped lake dominates the scene. To His left the sun’s golden orb has risen above the eastern hills. Not two miles away is His home, Capernaum. To the west lay the plain of Gennesaret with its rich crop producing soil. On most days at this time of year the sun’s shimmering heat causes the whole

scene to look hazy. The slope of Eremos itself is covered with grasses and wildflowers and the chirping of sparrows' fills the air. The disciples, like children, are in need of the next stage of training, lessons on family values.

Reading The Scripture:

Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 6:20-26

The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 6:20-26

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible, authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a Journey with Jesus)

And turning His gaze on His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. **Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven;** for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full. Woe to you who are well-fed now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets.

The Sermon on the Mount - Although these passages are referred to as being on the mount, they actually occurred after Jesus had descended with His disciples to a level place. Here Jesus expounds His "Law" or "Teaching" (Torah) to His followers just as Moses had done when he came down from Mount Sinai to the Israelites.

Group Discussion:

1. How do the values Jesus lists in the eight beatitudes compare to what people value in our culture?
2. How are people taught our cultural values?

The Command:

Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great.

The Lesson:

The beatitudes challenge the way people think. Jesus wants His disciples to learn three things. First, the values within the family of God are not the same as the world's values. Secondly, the reward for holding these values is in the future. And finally, that the underlying attitude of the family of God is joy, even in the face of persecution.

Joy means to be exceedingly glad. To rejoice means to get exceedingly glad all over again. People find many reasons to rejoice and they are all based in finding themselves in fortunate circumstances. Some causes for rejoicing might be at the birth of a child, getting a raise at work, winning a jackpot, or watching their football team win the Super Bowl. When people are glad they usually make joyful noises and are quite animated. This is the attitude that Jesus wants His disciples to have.

It is easy for people to rejoice when they find themselves in fortunate circumstances. But it takes special qualities to rejoice when a person finds himself in painful or difficult circumstances. He must look beyond the circumstances. It takes faith in God, trusting that He is allowing these circumstances for the person's own good. It also requires hope in God's future promises and love to endure the suffering. It requires a different perspective.

The prophet Habakkuk foresaw that God was going to make a new creation, a different kind people who walked by faith not by sight. The last three verses of the book of Habakkuk read this way. *"Though the fig tree should not blossom, and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail, and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet, and makes me walk on my high places".*¹

The prophet contrasts the way men of this world see with the way the new creation sees things. Men are concerned with lack of things and the works of their hands. When these things fail they are discouraged. The new creation is made like a hind or deer. They have a better view because they live at a higher elevation. Deer are not concerned with empty stalls or failing crops. They don't worry about the circumstances of men because it's not how God created them. God clothes the deer and provides shelter in harsh elements. He supplies them with food and water and they rest in cool places throughout the heat of the day.

Some ask, "Why does God allow persecution of the righteous on account of Jesus Christ?" There are three reasons. The first reason is that it is a sign from God.² It is a sign of salvation to Christians and destruction for all those who oppose them. Christians are receiving assurance from God concerning their salvation when they are persecuted for their testimony of Jesus Christ.

The second reason ties in with the first, a testing of a person's faith. Is it genuine or not? The reference for this reason is found in 1 Peter 1:3-9. The third reason is also found in the first epistle of Peter. Chapter 4 verses 12-14 say that the Spirit of glory and God rest upon those who are persecuted for Christ's sake. In truth, those who oppose these individuals and persecute them hate God, His Christ and the way of salvation.

Jesus said, *"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."* Jesus wants His disciples to look forward to being persecuted for their faith. So much so that He wants them to rejoice in the persecution. Jesus considered persecution to be the norm. He even used the phrase when you are persecuted instead of if you are persecuted.

Since Jesus views persecution as a blessing, it behooves His followers to find the way persecution comes. It's quite simple; just start proclaiming your faith in Jesus Christ. The pattern is seen throughout the book of the Acts: proclaim faith in Jesus Christ, persecution comes, then start rejoicing.

Group Discussion:

3. How can you express joy?

¹ Habakkuk 3:17-19

² Philippians 1:27-30

The Point Of The Lesson:

Live joyously, for it is God's will for you and you will be rewarded.

Application:

Read the following five accounts of the pattern of preaching, persecution, and rejoicing from the book of Acts. Write down how you felt about the five accounts and share your feelings with the group.

1. Peter and John
 - a. Preached (3:1-26)
 - b. Persecuted (4:1-22)
 - c. Rejoiced (4:23-31)
2. The Apostles
 - a. Preached (5:12-16)
 - b. Persecuted (5:17-39)
 - c. Rejoiced (5:40-42)
3. Stephen
 - a. Preached (6:8-10)
 - b. Persecuted (6:11-7:58)
 - c. Rejoice (7:59-60)
4. Paul and Barnabas
 - a. Preached (13:14-43)
 - b. Persecuted (13:44-50)
 - c. Rejoiced (13:51-52)
5. Paul and Silas
 - a. Preached (16:11-18)
 - b. Persecuted (16:19-24)
 - c. Rejoice (16:25-34)