

AM Luke 6:1-26 That Level Place

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[0 : 00] Chapter 6, and the first part of the chapter. Luke chapter 6. On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands.

But some of the Pharisees said, Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? And Jesus answered them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?

And he said to them, The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered.

And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. But he knew their thoughts.

And he said to the man with the withered hand, Come and stand here. And he rose and stood there. And Jesus said to them, I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?

[1 : 32] And after looking around at them all, he said to him, Stretch out your hand. And he did so, and his hand was restored. But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

In those days, he went out to the mountain to pray. And all night, he continued in prayer to God.

And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles. Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

And 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 and Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.

And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him, and healed them all.

[3 : 04] And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

And so on. In the first sermon, it would be verse 17 of Luke 6, and he came down with them, and stood on a level place.

[4 : 21] Now, you may be familiar with sometimes a word or a phrase of Scripture that you may have read a hundred, a thousand times in your life before, jumps out of the pages of Scripture, takes a hold of you, it seizes your hearts, and your heart and your thoughts, and it brings you to your knees.

And a few weeks ago, that verse did that for me. He went down with them and stood on a level place. I know it may sound quite unordinary and maybe a little inconsequential as a text, but when we think about it, I think it's brimming over with grace, with amazing grace, unwarranted grace, the

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is our very benediction.

You see, this verse echoes the incarnation. It tells us of the humility and the givingness of our Lord, He who came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all, and yet He's bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, DNA of our DNA, yet without sin.

But the Lord Jesus, as we read that verse there, must have been exhausted. When did you last stay all night awake in prayer?

Already having had a full-on day of effort and toil beforehand. In the bad old days when junior doctors could be on duty for 36 hours at a stretch, I remember one occasion when I worked without a break for all of that time.

[6 : 28] The night hours were particularly difficult as you try to retain mental focus, but come the morning I was completely wasted and exhausted and kind of automatically made my way through the day in a duam of muddleness and discomfort.

And when I got home, I slept for 15 hours. Not all changes to the NHS have been bad ones. But here we have the Lord Jesus in verse 12 going out on a mountainside to pray and spending the night praying to God.

So, for starters, that is miraculous. I am not saying that speaking to your Heavenly Father as you drift off to sleep is a bad thing in a way it is rather beautiful.

But if you and I were exhausted at the end of a working day and closed our eyes in prayer, just how long would it take for sleep to overwhelm us? And this was without anyone else there to encourage us to jolly us along, helping us to stay awake and pray.

Remember what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane when even the three apostles, James, John and Peter, couldn't keep their eyes open.

[7 : 52] And that in spite of Jesus specially asking them to stay awake and pray with him, they fell asleep. So here on the mountainside was a very special night by our reckoning where Jesus spent the night in prayer though it does seem it may have been Jesus' custom to do that.

If we look back a few verses to chapter 5 and verse 16, we read, But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. And there is of course a very obvious deduction to be made from this example of our Lord.

If he made it his practice to draw aside to lonely places to pray, day and night it seems, how much more do we his followers require to follow that example?

Is any of us not convicted by that thought? In the Baptist church, a couple of times over the last five or six years we've had a 24-7 prayer week and it was amazing how the slots, the hour slots during the night were the last to be filled up by the insomniacs in the congregation.

So recently, I've actually learned afresh the meaning of praying without ceasing as we have it in 1 Thessalonians 5 and 17.

[9 : 26] There's a 14-year-old lad in our church, Thomas, who was diagnosed with acute leukemia in November. And he's been through the most awful time physically with the illness and the severity and the complexity and the complications of the treatment.

And the anguish of his father and mother and younger brother and sister is untold. But multiple times every day I remember him in prayer.

And then when I waken during the night I remember him and others. And I suspect that the insomniacs amongst us be that for biological reasons or not we're strangely blessed at these times of communion with our Heavenly Father just as our Lord was.

even getting up at night to feed a babe. Physically speaking though, Jesus must have been weary even as he agonised over the choice of which of his disciples he should designate apostles.

Now there are two quite different words used here. Disciple means a pupil or an apprentice, someone who sits at the master's feet. An apostle on the other hand means a messenger or a commissioner, someone who represents someone in a different place.

[10 : 52] We speak of the High Commissioner in Botswana or Australia or a huge number of countries where our King or his government wish to have a voice. So, our Lord chose, our Lord Jesus chose and chose prayerfully twelve of his pupils his apprentices and elevated them to the position of speaking on his behalf being his commissioners.

How awesome was that honour and how awesome the responsibility. And then chillingly the last in that list of named apostles says Luke was Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

Jesus prayerfully wittingly in collaboration with his father chose among the apostles a traitor.

How often did our Lord say so that scripture might be fulfilled. Jesus carried that knowledge of who and what Judas was and would be throughout his ministry.

And well did he teach the prayer our father your will be done in earth as in heaven. I think it's also worth noting that in verse 13 there Jesus on this mountainside didn't just call up to him the apostles it says he called his disciples to him and there were quite a cohort there was quite a cohort of disciples of pupils after all didn't he dispatch 72 of them in Luke 10 verse 1 so up to his place excuse me up to his place of quietude and prayer on the mountainside Jesus called the whole group of his followers his disciples and knowing each one individually he chose in accordance with the father's will and in keeping with each one's God given gifts and characteristics these 12 commissioners and the designation of apostles in verses 13 and 14 was therefore a very high honour only in one or two regards could we liken it to the selection of a cabinet by a prime minister but honouring a few with greater responsibility without disaffecting the others was in its way a beautiful thing too but what a rag bag of humanity by our way of thinking these were not men of learning or literature they weren't military men or judges they weren't scientists or surgeons they weren't diplomats or landowners they weren't rich and they weren't famous they were fishermen a tax collector a Simon a zealot who was either very enthusiastic or a bit of an extremist as we might say nowadays there were some who were so ordinary that we don't know what they did and not as any word of theirs recorded anywhere in scripture and then there was

[14:03] Judas the traitor the mole the money grabber don't you find it incredibly encouraging that Jesus commissioners were ordinary people and we we could so argue that if God could use that group of people of apparently limited ability who even when push came to shove forsook him and fled well could the almighty not use us too with all our deficiencies our inadequacies our frailties our weak faith could he not use us in his service too and actually the passage the parallel passage in Matthew's gospel that in that the Lord Jesus tells us precisely that he said you are the salt of the earth you are the light of the world now there's no conditional element to this this is not a choice that we can make an optional extra to our faith when we feel the times right this is here and now we are salt we are light if we have

Jesus as our saviour that is what we are we have no choice in the matter it comes with the territory and that is because we cannot help ourselves if Christ is in us as the hope of glory John 14 26 tells us that the Father and the Son by the Spirit come to live in our hearts and we cannot fail to be who we are it savours and enlightens the proximity round about us so just like it was for the apostles what honour and privilege but what responsibility which is why we should be living in a way that pleases our saviour when we are his high commissioners his ambassadors as we read of it in 2 Corinthians 5 and 20 we are ambassadors for Christ God making his appeal through us now there is something very beautiful about how we may observe our Lord in these verses 12 to 19 because this is

Jesus in action you see this is Jesus as he relates to others in verse 12 we get Jesus relating to his heavenly father in prayer in prayer and supplication in quiet all night praying for strength and guidance to do his father's will one to one face to face perfect communion then in verses 13 to 16 we've got Jesus relating to his family his earthly family remember that wonderful saying when his genetic family his mother and brother and sisters were trying to get a hold of him thinking and alleging that he was mad and so as not to create a stramash they sent a message to try to extricate him from where he was teaching your mother and brothers are outside wanting to speak to people told him but Jesus with a gesture of his arm to encompass the circle of those sitting listening to his teaching and hanging on his every word

Mark 3 34 he said here are my mother and my brothers whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother this then is Jesus family to whom he is relating in verses 13 to 16 teaching encouraging choosing those right for some tasks others for other tasks all servants a mixture maxter of extraordinary ordinary people but extraordinary because they were his friends for whom like for us he was going to lay down his life these his family he called up the mountain to where he'd been communing with the father he called them to him but then in verses 17 to 19 we see Jesus interacting with for want of a better phrase the public the generality of people and just as in his interactions with his father and with his family he does this acting like himself not compromising himself in any way the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world perfectly divine perfectly human how often do we observe our fellow human beings acting like chameleons adapting their attitudes their speech their accents their ideas even their dress code to fit with the people that

they're engaging with compromising who they are as human beings

I remember one relative of mine changing his accent and his demeanour in an instant when someone who had political influence came into the room we were in I was looking around to see if there was somebody else had come into the room as well it was so unlike him but there are no heirs and graces with the Lord Jesus he was so himself with this amazing crowd and what a crowd it was there was Jesus and the newly appointed apostles and the bigger group of disciples and it says a great number of people from all over Judea from Jerusalem and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon and we don't have an exact number but might it have been as many as the 5,000 men who were fed plus women and children in John 6 imagine imagine the scene thousands of bodies scrambling to get near this teacher who performed the amazing miracles and who taught with authority not like the scribes and

[20 : 15] Pharisees the health and safety executive would have had apoplexy the potential for injury and harm with so many pushing and shoving each other on a rocky hillside would have been enormous and then we have our text he went down with them and stood on a level place so humble he didn't make them come up to him he went down to them so considerate to his disciples and apostles he didn't make it difficult for them to listen to his teaching which we've got summarized in the rest of the chapter there and so thoughtful for this big crowd he came to them on a level place where there was little danger of injury he was so accessible he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance and so gracious he brought his own and his father's riches to them at his own expense and so giving the exhausted saviour who after a sleepless night then spent a day giving of himself we're told in verse 18 why this needy crowd had assembled in the first place they had come firstly to hear him and secondly to be healed of their diseases it's almost as if the healing was of secondary importance and that would have been true our greatest need mankind's greatest need is not to be cured of leprosy or cancer or heart disease but to hear the truth about our relationship with God broken by sin restored by the sacrificial death of the

Lord Jesus and by his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand when even now right now he's interceding for us we need to hear and understand that this salvation plan was formulated in a past eternity and it was working itself out from the first word in Genesis till this very moment now here and it continues till Jesus comes again in unimaginable indescribable power and majesty so that those who have died in him are raised first incorruptible in their resurrection bodies while we who remain if still alive at that point will be right there after them fit and fitted for glory in Christ Jesus first and foremost we need to hear and to respond in our spirits but our physical and mental health may be something which features large in our own agendas today just as it did with that crowd in

Luke 6 there were few effective treatments for illness in those days Luke the physician knew that only too well it must have been a revelation to him as he researched all of this in writing his gospel that untreatable conditions were cured now I've thought as I've practiced medicine from 1975 up till when I retired in 2021 that what we do now the treatments we offer and the cures that are often effected would have shocked Luke the beloved physician rigid heart transplants pacemakers renal dialysis clipping cerebral aneurysms antibiotics for all sorts of infections leprosy cured the list goes on and on and on and modern secularists applaud man's ingenuity at developing so many amazing cures and treatments but on the other hand and in direct contrast to them

I see the fulfillment of Jesus own promise to his disciples regarding his miracles that greater things than these shall you do I see these treatments as graciously coming from God's good hand as part of the common grace the universal grace he shows to all mankind as we have it in Psalm 145 verse 9 the Lord is good to all he has compassion on all he has made God does not reserve his goodness only for his chosen people nor did the Lord Jesus fail to heal that crowd that day he didn't ask them first if they were saved or not he saw their great need a sheep without a shepherd in his heart a compassion out to them in their physical as well as their spiritual need and I'd like to notice that in verse 18 those troubled by impure spirits were also cured and I think it's really important to scotch the idea that some people have that all illness is being possessed by an evil spirit one way or another and especially they would refer to the belief that folk who suffer from epilepsy or seizures are somehow possessed by evil spirits let's be clear each person here could in the next minute have a seizure indistinguishable from classical epilepsy if we were to faint and our brain would be temporarily deprived of blood this does not mean that we are possessed by an evil spirit it means it means that the room is too warm or we don't like the thought of blood or pain or a thousand and one

other things physical illness is what it says on the tin mental illness is also what it says on the tin basically both are caused by faults with the structure and biochemical function of the cells in our bodies sometimes temporarily sometimes persistently being possessed by an impure spirit however is something just as real and just as biblical but quite different and should not be confused with physical or mental illness because it's management as the Bible and the Lord

Jesus himself tell us is entirely different but in today's verse 18 we've got Jesus one teaching people's souls two healing their bodies and minds three curing those troubled by impure spirits but then comes one of the most astonishing verses in scripture and the people all tried to touch him because power was coming from him and healing them all now we mustn't think for a moment that this prelude to what many people call the sermon on the plain from verse 20 onwards as distinct from the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5 through 7 was some sort of giant outpatient clinic there were undoubtedly many sick people there of course there were in an era when actual treatments for disease were at a premium a truly successful healer would have drawn crowds but scripture tells us the people all tried to touch him no distinction drawn between the healthy and the sick they all tried because power was coming from him and healing them all

[28 : 19] I think this is telling us that those who were not physically sick were receiving this power and being healed just as much as the sick people if you saw someone being transformed by touching a source of healing would you not want to see what it felt like for yourself that amazing touch I can understand that that's human nature I can understand that everyone would want to touch even the psalmist tells us to taste and see that the Lord is good who trusts in him is blessed I think if I had been there in that crowd I would have wanted to touch too but I do wonder quite what the next line means because power was coming from him and healing them all now we know that Jesus was aware when power went out of him think about the accounts of the woman with the issue of blood for all those years who thought if she just touched the hem of Jesus garment she would be healed she did and she was but as

Jesus subsequently pointed out to her it was her touch of faith your faith has healed you go in peace but that day on the way to Jairus house and his dead daughter there were many people in the crowd jostling Jesus many touches many touches but only the woman's touch of Jesus cloak and Jesus touch of Jairus daughter's hand were effective were all these touches of Jesus in verse 19 touches of faith well they may have been but it didn't seem to be that kind of deliberate encounter typified by the woman with the issue of blood we've got thousands and thousands touching and being healed because of their touches in a way that's different from anything in our experience can healthy people be healed Jesus himself said that those who are whole have no need of a physician but those who were sick and yet it says they were all healed it certainly doesn't say they were granted immortality and it doesn't say that they were spiritually healed and yet in a way

I don't understand I feel sure that if I were physically able to touch Jesus I would not be indifferent to that touch I feel sure that power of some sort would be blessed to me perhaps the amplified translation of the Bible puts it in a helpful way it was their illnesses and their calamities it says from which people were healed do we have calamities of one sort or another in our lives apart from the physical diseases having worked with the crowd it then says in verse 20 that Jesus looked at his disciples including his apostles and he taught them he delivered to them the sermon on the plain some theologians say that the sermon on the mount and the sermon on the plain were one and the same sermon with slightly differing accounts from different authors others say they were different events and the broad sweep of Jesus teaching would be similar at different venues either may be true but the thrust of today's message is to marvel at Jesus relating to his father his disciples and his public with the ease that he does and it's to recognize that Jesus comes down to us in our need to minister to us it's to be humbled by the inadequacy of our prayer life and to be intentional about seeking out quiet places to pray it's to hear Jesus teaching and having heard to obey to do it because that so pleases the first two persons of the Godhead that they come to make their home with us by the power of the spirit and to recognize

God's providential care to mankind and all sorts of healings but to recognize the very specific nature of impure spirits from which we may also be cured and finally there is that touch have we touched Jesus intentionally rest assured that if we touch him if we touch him in faith he knows touch is amazing because touch is felt by the toucher and by the touched if we touch Jesus in faith he's never impassive or unfeeling or unmoved he will grasp your tentative hand in his nail scarred one

and will never let you go sometimes too we cry out in our pain and one way or another Jesus touches us let us never reject that touch he touched me oh he touched me I know the joy that floods my soul something happened and now I know he touched me and made me whole the most solemn thought of all my friends though is this that somehow by the work of his spirit we feel a need with the crowd we reach out and touch the saviour we feel his power we feel what healing is and despite that despite hearing the gospel year in year out we reject his overtures of love and mercy and then face a lost eternity today if you will hear his voice do not harden your hearts let's pray together heavenly father we come before you in our brokenness and our desperate need and we thank you that you have provided for that need in the shed blood of the lord jesus oh we thank you that in our lives we know that there have been many occasions when we have been in such pain and the lord has reached out and touched us but today father we would touch jesus we would seek your face and favour we would give our lives to jesus because we know that if we do that then we will never be lost and father we pray that not just for ourselves but all those we know and love and have a burden for would come to that saving knowledge of jesus we plead this earnestly in his precious name amen hand to help he can bless him para ■■ here