

Part 18: Mountains and Motivations

Tyler Velin | Luke 6:12-26

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If you've ever heard the phrase, "To the man who only has a hammer, everything is a nail," then you've been introduced to the thoughts of Abraham Maslow. Maslow was an American psychologist who published a groundbreaking article in 1943 entitled "A Theory of Human Motivation."

The goal of Maslow's paper, which has been further developed and expanded since its introduction, was to create a model of personal flourishing from the ground up. He created a pyramid shaped mountain that build on basic needs which once fulfilled allowed one to reach the summit of self-actualization. Self-actualization is where you, no longer motivated by fear are able to adopt a growth mindset instead of a scarcity mindset and actually thrive.

Today we are entering one of Jesus' longest teaching to his followers in the book of Luke—it's a section which is intentionally aimed at his disciples. Over the next four weeks we will see how Jesus intends to address motivation and growth in the heart of his own people—those who follow him.

We don't need a PhD to know that life often challenges our needs. But what Jesus is going to do today is to address the varied fears and experiences we might have in life and provide you with motivation of your own. This gospel shaped motivation addresses our need and fears and supplies hope and comfort which keeps us moving forward as we learn to see more clearly the reward of following Jesus.

But in our text it's not us who climb the mountain of need. Instead we see Jesus goes up a mountain for his own need, and then descends to share with us the joy of his own comfort. Our big picture today is this: **Our experience with God gives us clarity and motivation in the muddiness of life.**

We are going to see this in two parts. First we are going to see **The Experience of Jesus** and then secondly we are going to see **The Experience of Jesus' Disciples.**

Our text begins today in Luke 6:12, but to understand the weight of what we read, I want to begin our text with the passage we concluded with last week: **Luke 6:6-11.**

Over the past few weeks we have seen Jesus' tension with the Pharisees begin to grow and now it has reached a head. The Greek here communicates that the Pharisees were blinded and made dumb with anger. They were no longer thinking rationally but were consumed with visceral rage towards Jesus and they were wanting to act upon it.

Here is where our doctrine of Jesus' incarnation actually needs to play a role in our reading of scripture. It's very easy for us to flatten Jesus, who was both fully God and fully man, into one category or the other. We can see an aspect of Jesus divinity in this text because in verse 8 we are told that Jesus knew the thoughts of the Pharisees.

Which means that Jesus here was certainly aware of the hatred and hostility which was being directed powerfully at him. If we only think of Jesus as fully God, then we might expect him to encounter this

conflict with nothing more than stoic sensibility. But remember this divine son was so motivated by love that he also became our brother according to the flesh.

How did Jesus who was fully God, yet also fully man respond to this experience of hatred and fury? Let's let Luke give us a glimpse: **Luke 6:11-12**.

When Jesus saw and knew the powerful men of his day were directing all their wrath to the work of harming him, what did he do? He retreated to a mountain on his own and prayed to God.

Here we see our first point today: **The Experience of Jesus**.

There are many times where Luke shares of Jesus withdrawing to pray to God. But there are only two times where he is sure to show us the intensity in which Jesus prayed. One is in the garden of Gethsemane the night Jesus is arrested, the other is here in Luke 6.

Whatever is going on in Jesus' heart, it lead him not just to pray, but to go out to pray, and to pray continually throughout the night to God.

The beauty of Jesus' incarnation is that we see it is not innately sinful for us to be burdened with the realities, conflicts and despair of life in a broken world. In fact to not be touched by the pain of sinful creation is to have our own hearts seared in an unhelpful way. To not acknowledge the pain of evil is to belittle the weight of the cross and the wonder of redemption.

In Luke 12, Jesus shares with his disciples his personal distress on account of the cross. What we see in the experience of our Savior is not an impassioned god who fails to feel, nor is it a man who is left to manage his fears on his own. But instead we see Jesus our faithful brother who encounters the reality of brokenness, feels the weight of its effect, but remains sinless in the midst of it.

So what does Jesus do in this text? Where does he go with his emotions? While the Pharisees, blinded by fury, discussed what they might do, Jesus, with clear need, discussed with his Father what he might do.

When we encounter such emotions we often turn to the work of worry, but Jesus was driven to the duty of devotion. Instead of laboring on a counter movement, or preaching more visibly against the Pharisees, he went in humble need to God the Father through the work of God the Spirit.

Here again we see the astounding beauty of Trinitarian theology. Jesus who was himself fully God, sinless in every regard, was still in need of communion with the Trinity.

Now classic Trinitarianism expresses that each person of the Trinity is of the same substance. Jesus is fully God. God the Father is fully God. The Holy Spirit is fully God. It is not like football where you need the leather, the laces and the air and only when they are together is it fully a football.

The Trinity isn't composed of parts which when assembled make the Godhead. The Trinity is three persons who in total unity are co-existent and co-equal. They are distinct, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Father. But they are also indivisible. God cannot be Father apart from the Son. The Spirit cannot be the Spirit apart from the Father.

Here we see that experience in this world is so broken, so difficult, the effects of sin so profound that even Jesus who was fully God in the flesh, was motivated to seek the clarity and comfort of being with the Father through the Spirit.

There's nothing like an experience with the sovereign, powerful, all-knowing God of the Bible which can re-orient our hearts and provide new motivation in the mess of this broken world.

You see Jesus went to God because he was limited in the flesh. He faced distractions. He faced the temptation of sleep all throughout that night. But Jesus persisted in pursuing this divine comfort not only because his flesh was weak, but because his memory was strong. In the midst of the most conflict the Son of God ever encountered, Jesus remembered the joy of relational unity with God. In John 17, Jesus opens the curtain into this joyful, comforting, loving reality of the Trinity. Here, in the midst of life's muddiness, he runs back to the source to enjoy the clarity, motivation and peace which would drive him forward even amidst opposition, difficulty and sorrow.

How much more do we, who are sinful, who are not fully God, who are not Jesus need to realize the refuge we have in bringing our experience and our need into the presence of God?

Jesus himself wanted to draw near to that comfort and we get a glimpse into that effort.

Have you ever found yourself living, "In these days"—days where it seems everything is going wrong? What might it look like for you to pursue what Jesus pursued with the same vigor?

I confess that I come to you as one who loves to bounce back and forth between worried work and dumb distraction. I can tell you that this too takes work. But Jesus worked at finding true peace in his devotion.

When Jesus encountered a specific season of difficulty and trial, he responded with an intentional and persistent manner of prayer—continually throughout the night pouring out his own heart to God the Father. My guess is most of us have a shared experience with Jesus of difficulty, but do we have a shared experience with Jesus in devotion?

What does it look like for you to do this? I'm one who is often distracted in my prayer life, so in seasons of unique challenge I fast. I fast because it distracts me in the right way. When I feel the pangs of hunger, I'm reminded to take that need and go to God with it. I'm reminded that God is the provider and comfort I need most of all. What could this look like in your life?

In a beautifully prophetic way, Isaiah spoke of the Lord's servant who communed with the Lord for strength and purpose. Here we see Jesus going to God and perhaps receiving the encouragement of **Isaiah 49:5-6**.

Whatever encouragement Jesus encountered on the mountain, it motivated him forward in his ministry: **Luke 6:13-16**.

Part of Jesus' messianic role was not only to bring back the twelve tribes, but to bring salvation to the nations. That's what we just read in Isaiah 49, and here we see how Jesus plans on doing that, by continuing his recreation and restoration of God's spiritual people through the appointing of 12 apostles.

This number wouldn't have been lost on the Jews as it would have been clear that these 12 were meant to mirror the twelve tribes of God's people. In fact both the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles are glimpses into how God has desired to reveal himself to his people through Jesus Christ.

Paul speaks of this in **Ephesians 2:19-20**.

The foundation of the Christian faith is two-fold and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. First it is a specific promise. The promise of living in God's perfect kingdom is in fact the promise given to Israel. But this promise is also for a specific people. That is those who like these apostles respond to Jesus in faith. God's people were always meant to be a spiritual people and here we see the reclamation of that idea.

Now what are the apostles? We often call them the 12 disciples. Are disciples and apostles the same? Yes and no. Yes, in that we see in verse 13 that Jesus called these specific men to be apostles from the broader pool of his disciples. So the apostles were also disciples.

But not all disciples are apostles. In scripture we read that these 12 men plus Matthias who was chosen to replace Judas and later Paul, were the only ones called explicitly to the apostleship.

The word apostle means, "sent ones." To be an apostle is to be commissioned for a specific task, and the first apostle was Jesus himself. When Jesus appeared to this same group of men after he was resurrected look at what he said: **John 20:21** (as the *father apostaken* me, so I send you).

Just as Jesus was sent from the Father for a specific purpose, Jesus sent these specific men as unique ambassadors, guardians and stewards of Jesus' teaching. That's why the Nicene Creed confesses "We believe in one, holy, universal and apostolic church."

In other words it's not only the red letter words of Jesus which guide the church, but the writings, teaching and authority of the apostles that we see in scripture. These men had a unique task to establish the Christian church, and when their ministry was done, the office of apostle ceased. We don't read any more of it.

But having now called these apostles, Jesus returns back down the mountain: **Luke 6:17-19**.

So here, Jesus comes down the mountain with his apostles and his disciples and labors among a great crowd. Jesus knows a few things. First he knows what Luke tips his hand to here, that some of those who were seeking Jesus had no desire to follow him, no desire to be a disciple, but only wanted something from him.

He also knew that of these 12 men he appointed, all of them would die on account of their role in the church.

In light of this, Jesus seeks to prepare his disciples for the realities of life, giving them motivation and perspective. If Jesus were to give you a primer on following him, what would you expect him to say? Well, here we see him do just that, and we find our second point: **The Experience of Jesus' Disciples**.

Read with me Jesus' words: **Luke 6:20-26**.

Here we see the astounding privilege of following Jesus in that he wants to speak into your experiences. He wants to come alongside you in your seasons of sorrow and speak to you.

Jesus point here is profoundly simple. Blessed (*markarios* – happy) is the present reality of those who in following Jesus find themselves poor, hungry, weeping and rejected for you presently have the kingdom of God, and you will receive astounding rewards in heaven. Woeful is the present reality of those who on account of not following Jesus find themselves rich, full, laughing and well thought of. For just as history showed the foolishness of backing false prophets and scam artists, so you are being completely duped and will lose everything you worked so hard to gain.

Perhaps you've heard the pop-psychology term that has been gaining usage as of late: "gaslighting." It's been used to describe actions of manipulation and abuse—its namesake being a 1944 movie where a husband manipulated his wife into thinking she was insane.

In the film, he would manipulate the gaslights in the house so they would slowly get dimmer. But when his wife would comment he would act as if she was the only one who noticed it. By the end this woman's perception on reality was so twisted that she was disbelieving everything that was actually true.

Perhaps you look at Jesus' bold claims here and think, is this just religious gaslighting? Is the Bible merely trying to convince us to deny our realities and believe in some fairy tale of a silver lining?

I would say this would be a very challenging claim were it not for the person of Jesus. Might I remind us where Luke has placed this teaching in the midst of the narrative? Just when it seemed all was lost, when powerful men blinded by wrath plotted against a preacher, when people were flocking to Jesus not because of who he was, but because of what they merely wanted from him, as power came out of the Jesus healing crowds who had no intention of following him, Jesus raised his eyes to his disciples and said: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

You see this would be nothing more than an incredulous lie and false reality if Jesus himself, in the midst of his own affliction and fears, did not that morning draw near to God the Father and find the hope of true reality. This reality is seen most visibly in the cross of Jesus wherein his torment, isolation and substitutionary death it was also his greatest joy so that he might be not only raised to glorious life but that he might be the savior and justifier for all who believe in him.

You see the fall in Genesis 3 not only affected our world and our experience, it effected our minds. We don't reason rightly. Our flesh has a knowing problem. But here Jesus is attempting to help us think more truthfully by sharing with us what I'm sure he himself enjoyed that morning on the mountain.

Jesus, the one who went up the mountain of need, came back down for our sake so that we might find hope ourselves in the realities of redemption.

You see Jesus is not calling us to be blissfully happy. We know the dilemma of happiness. Happiness according to man is often disconnected from reality. That's why we distract ourselves. It's why kids get stickers and suckers when they go to the doctor's office. It's why bribes are powerful. We know that we can placate people from reality by producing a shallow and superficial happiness. This was what the false prophets did in Israel, proclaiming peace when there was no peace.

But this divine happiness is a divine blessing. It is not blissfully unaware of what is true, but instead through the eyes of faith views what is true through the lens of the kingdom of God.

In Luke 4:43 Jesus says he must go on and preach the Kingdom of God and while we haven't heard much of Jesus preaching at this point Luke has been showing us the Kingdom of God hasn't he?

In the Kingdom of God, things aren't what like what they look like in the kingdom of man. It was not to Herod in the location of Jewish rule that God opened his mouth, but to an old priest with a barren wife. It was not to the wife of the high priest that the Holy Spirit came, but to the virgin betrothed to an ordinary carpenter. It was not to the royal messengers in Jerusalem the birth of Jesus was declared, but to despised shepherds outside the city. It was not to Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod the Tetrarch, or Caiaphas the High Priest the word of God came, but to a prophet in the wilderness.

It was not Jesus' hometown crowd who was healed first, but a man possessed by an evil spirit. It was not the scribes Jesus called to himself but the struggling fishermen and the deceitful tax collector. It was not the legs that needed restoration, but the heart that needed forgiveness. It was not the righteous which needed a physician, but the sinners.

You see Maslow's mountain of needs says that in order for one to be who they want to be they must move past the fears of the following: Physiological needs and Safety needs. Those are basic needs like shelter, clothing, food, and property.

But Jesus here says to his disciples: blessed are the poor and the hungry.

Maslow's next need is that of love and belonging: contentment, connection and intimacy.

Jesus says to his disciples: blessed are those who weep now.

The final step on Maslow's mountain of need is the need for esteem: being respected, having status and recognition.

Jesus says: blessed are you in that inevitable day when people hate you, exclude you, revile you and mock your name on account of me.

I want to make something clear here that Jesus makes explicit in verse 22. That is that there is nothing innately redemptive or even explicitly good about being poor, hungry, sad, or hated.

It is a perversion of redemption to say those things are good. Following Jesus isn't asking us to see that poverty, tears, hunger and hatred are good. In fact the cross itself proves that they are not. In the New Heavens and the New Earth those things will not remain. Why? Because they are not good. They themselves are not the sign of blessedness.

Jesus is not saying blessed are those who love poverty, blessed are those who love hunger, blessed are those who love tears, blessed are those who love rejection. Instead he's saying: blessed are those who love me, who are willing to suffer not for their own sake, but for my sake.

Maslow was right in realizing the motivational effects of needs, but Jesus here show us where those needs are met: in him.

Blessed are those who love the Son of Man and are therefore able to trust him in the midst of poverty knowing that those who have nothing of worldly value can have access, this very moment, the Kingdom of God through the riches of Jesus Christ. Here is safety and security.

Blessed are those who love the Son of Man so much that in the midst of their hunger now, they know that one day hunger will be thrown into the pit of hell and we will feast in glory. Here is food and fill.

Blessed are those who weep now, for one day all our tears will be wiped away and we will see only the kind providence of God who weaned us from the love of the world to win us to the laughter of love.

Blessed are those who are mistreated, mocked, reviled, turned down jobs, lost income, lost political power, persecuted, abandoned, and maimed because to do so on account of the Son of Man is to rejoice! It is to leap for joy--as we consider that we will not be so rejected by God himself. Here is acceptance peace.

Life in the Kingdom of God, true blessedness comes not from drawing our strength from the positions of power, sources of comfort, or affirmations of man. But from the Lord who provides our every need and has held out for us a reward in heaven.

There are only three commands in this text: Rejoice, leap for joy, and behold. Behold your reward in heaven. Jesus wants us in the midst of the mud to see the realities of redemption.

You might not be poor right now, you might not be hungry, or even hated. This present relief should lead you to reflect on if that's because of God's grace or because you've chosen to take your consolation now. When we encounter these threats to our own need it's easy for us to bounce between the two doors of distraction and dilemma.

For a few of us, we see what's broken and we are lead to an unshakable dilemma. This world is hard, we are limited, change seems impossible, pain is real, what hope do we have? It drives us into the depths of despair.

For others, because we don't want to face that reality and knowing we can't solve it we instead distract ourselves from the question. We turn to constant entertainment, relationships, work and experience to distract ourselves from the fears and pains we wish to leave unaddressed.

But Jesus here holds up a better option than dilemma or distraction and that is the beauty of devotion. You see it is God and God alone who makes sense of our reality. Look at what James says in **James 1:9-12**.

You see when we come to Jesus we get access into an intimacy with God big enough for us to run to even when our needs are threatened. And to receive comfort when the comforts of the world are stripped away is to realize the happiness of finding something the world can never take. That's the privilege of the Kingdom.