

# WHEN FLOODS RISE

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**LUKE 6:46-49**

**LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH**

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**JUNE 22, 2014/2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

Today is the first Sunday of our summer worship schedule, and I was planning on beginning our summer worship series called “The Early Church, Our Church” where we will be looking at seven cities, seven churches full of ordinary people, and looking at what they have to say to *our* church in *this* city all these years later.

That was the plan. And then, the rain started to fall. And fall and fall and fall... ☺.

Many basements, including ours, were underwater.

(How many folks experienced some flooding in their homes this week?)

So, on Wednesday evening, after a day of vacuuming and ripping up carpet and hauling furniture upstairs and into our garage, and assuming that water and flooding would still be on many of our minds this Sunday, I decided to go in a bit of a different direction with this week’s sermon.

We will begin our summer series next week.

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The theme that was on my mind for most of this week was what it means to be *prepared* when bad things happen.

One of the most frustrating things that became increasingly apparent as the week went on, as we continued to deal with the fallout of the flood, was that *we could have prevented a basement full of water.*

We *could* have bought longer down spouts months ago, so that the water from the roof would have drained further from the house on to the road.

We *could* have built up our front yard, adding soil, sloping it away from the house toward the road.

But we didn't.

We weren't prepared.

And when the rains came on Tuesday night, the water came rushing in, and I arrived home after Claire's piano lessons to ankle-deep water.

***What is true of houses is also true of human lives.***

Flood resistant houses don't just happen; neither do flood-resistant lives. Whether we are talking about a house or a human life, *both* need to be built and preserved and maintained.

Yesterday morning I came across an article by Josh Milburn and Ryan Nicodemus, two guys who call themselves the "minimalists." Both did kind of a U-Turn in their thirties, leaving the rat race of consumerism and upward mobility and embracing a life of simplicity. The article was called "An Extraordinary Life" and discussed what such a life might look like and how it might be attained.

I was struck by the following paragraph:

An extraordinary life doesn't just happen. It is constructed, crafted, curated.

We ought not simply "go with the flow," then. Going with the flow is nice and easy for a while, riding the current to wherever it might take us. But eventually everyone ends up at the same place: the rapids. And then, unprepared, we're in for a world of hurt.<sup>1</sup>

What they are saying, I think, is this: The path of least resistance works, for a time. But if we don't think ahead, if we don't make decisions about what a human life ought to look like and how we ought to pursue it, we will find ourselves, one day, in a place we don't want to be, unprepared and unequipped to deal with what we are facing.

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In our passage today, Jesus talks about crafting and constructing a well-lived life, about being prepared, about the one who builds his or her life in such a way that it will withstand the pressures that will come.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theminimalists.com/extraordinary/>

Let's look at the context because context for *any* passage of Scripture is always crucially important to understanding what it being taught.

Our scripture this morning is the summary statement of the larger passage of Luke 6:17-49. This passage is known as the "Sermon on the Plain" which shares many features with Matthew's "Sermon on the Mount."

It is a very clearly marked out section of teaching that begins, in verse 17 with Jesus coming to be with a great crowd of people who had come to hear him, and ends, in chapter 7:1 with "After Jesus had finished all his sayings...."

So we know that verses 6:17-49 are meant to be treated as a unified block of teaching that happened at a single time.

If you have your bibles, you can follow along as we work through the entire passage that precedes the short text that we just read aloud.

### **Starting with verses 17-23**

After a few introductory remarks, verse 20 begins "Then he looked at his disciples and said":

- Blessed are the poor (not poor *in spirit*, as in Matthew) for yours is the kingdom of God
- Blessed are you who are hungry not (not you who *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, as in Matthew) for you will be filled
- Blessed are you when people hate you *and* exclude *and* revile you on account of the Son of Man (similarities to Matthew here) but Luke adds "and leap for joy" where Matthew only says "be glad"

Luke then goes on to add an entire section that Matthew doesn't have:

### **Verses 24-26**

"But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

<sup>25</sup> "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.

<sup>26</sup>“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

These are strong, bracing words.

The ones accustomed to being on the losing end of life are “blessed” while “woe” is pronounced upon the ones accustomed to being on the winning end.

This is followed by Jesus teaching about loving our enemies, doing good to those who persecute you, giving to those who wish to take, and doing unto others as we would have done to them...

Anyone can love those who love them in return, who do good to them, Jesus says. It’s easy to love the loveable.

But you are to love even those who don’t love you, those who seek to harm you, take advantage of you.

You are to be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 6:36).

**Ok, on to verses 37-42...**

What does Jesus say here?

Do not judge and you will not be judged. Forgive easily and often. Give without compulsion and with great generosity.

*Why do you see the speck in your neighbour’s eye and fail to see the log in your own?* Jesus asks.

It’s so easy to point out the faults of others, isn’t it? So easy to see where others have it wrong, so easy to ridicule and belittle and be condescending towards those who don’t think like us, act like us, talk like us... But what does Jesus say?

*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly...*

The measure you give will be the measure you get back (v. 38).

The overall message of this section is that *the way that we treat our neighbour is the way that God will treat us*. This is what Jesus says.

**Verses 43-45** are the last ones before our text today...

Here Jesus simply talks about the well-rehearsed biblical metaphor of “bearing fruit.” *Good hearts produce good deeds*, Jesus says. And the opposite is also true.

The things that show up on the “outside” of our lives are a direct consequence of the state of affairs “inside.”

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**So. All of this—*the whole package*—is what Jesus is referring to in 6:46 when he talks about those who “hear his words and act on them.”**

**Those who hear *these* words and act, Jesus says, are like the one who digs deeply and lays a solid foundation, and whose life can withstand the storms of life.**

This is not a passage where Jesus is saying, if you will just believe in me for personal salvation, your life will be solid when the floods come. This is not even a passage about Jesus’ death and resurrection, which Christians are often quick to point to as the “foundation” of the life of faith.

No, in this specific teaching Jesus is describing a very particular *way of living*, a very particular way of treating other people—especially people who are different from us, or who we are not naturally disposed to treating well!

Jesus is describing an extraordinary, countercultural, revolutionary life, and saying, *this is the kind of life that stands up when the floods come.*

This is how you prepare when the weather is good. This is what a flood-resistant life looks like.

So, I want you to imagine a person who is able to put Jesus’ words into practice. Imagine a person who is merciful, who gives and forgives generously, who embraces a life of poverty and hunger (spiritual and physical), a person who is persecuted for righteousness’s sake, a person who refuses to judge, a person whose life is characterized by beautiful fruit...

Do you have a picture in your head?

Now, the question that occurred to me as I thought of this hypothetical person is this:

*What is it about this kind of a life that makes it “flood-resistant?”*

How will this cultivating *these* kinds of habits, becoming *this* kind of a person help when storms come?

I spent a lot of time thinking about this question this week. It puzzled me.

It could easily be argued, after all, that living in the way that Jesus describes here would make life *harder* for us. Not exactly what we are looking for when the floods come!

But the more I thought about this question, the more I thought that the common denominator behind all of these characteristics is freedom.

**A person who lived as Jesus describes in Luke 6 would be totally, gloriously *free*.**

They would be free in at least three important ways.

**They would be free from the love of money.** They would be skilled in generosity... they would know the truth of Jesus’ words that the love of money is the root of all evil... they would have experienced the freedom of a life of simplicity... They would not have been dragged into the race of accumulation that dominates so much of life in the twenty-first century western world... They would be well-practiced in the art of storing up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust cannot destroy and thieves cannot steal. They would hold their possessions lightly, knowing that we cannot take anything with us when we go, and that money cannot buy happiness.

**They would be free from the demands, real or imagined, of others.**

They would not be bound by the wearisome tit-for-tat reciprocity that dominates so many human relationships. They would love and seek the welfare of others, regardless of how others treated them, regardless of what they could “get out of the deal.” They would not always be seeking to scratch the right backs, grease the right palms, flatter the most influential people, etc. They would be people with no duplicity, no ulterior motives. They would simply see other human beings as divine image bearers, worthy of love and honour, regardless of how they were treated by them.

**They would be free from the burden of self-righteousness.**

We human beings spend so much time judging one another, explicitly or implicitly. So much time and effort is spent holding people up to our own moral standards, so many mental resources devoted to scrutinizing the behaviour of others. So much determination to avoid looking at ourselves in the mirror as we evaluate those who don't think or act like we do.

But the person who refused to judge and condemn, the person who studiously examines the log in their own eye before casting their gaze to the specks in the eyes of others? The person who forgives and forgives and forgives again? Well, such a person would be free to allow others to simply *be* without constantly having to police the boundaries of morality, without constantly demanding that others look more like them.

**A person who is truly free in these ways, it seems to me, would be uniquely well equipped to ride out the storms of life.**

They would still experience pain, of course, they would still hurt and grieve and go through the emotions of the variety of things that come our way.

But they would do so confident that there is nothing that can be taken from them, whether material or in terms of reputation or prestige or the praise and honour and respect of human beings, that ultimately matters.

They would have confidence that their life was hidden securely with Christ, who modeled precisely this kind of a life of freedom when he walked the earth two thousand years ago.

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A final note.

It's significant, I think, that Jesus says in Luke 6:48 *when* a flood arose. Not *if*. *When*.

Because floods will come. I'm not even forty years old and I can remember at least four significant floods in my lifetime here in southern Alberta.

Bad weather happens. Storms come. Earthquakes, tornadoes, tsunamis.... These things happen in our world. The world is not a safe place.

The same is true in a metaphorical way for our lives.

Bad things *will* happen. We *will* get unwelcome diagnoses. We *will* have trouble at work. Relationships *will* fracture. Unpleasant things *will* happen. They won't happen to all Not

to all of us in the same way or the same measure of course, but things *will happen* in each our lives and in the lives of those that we love, that we would never wish for.

Nobody has a “storm-free” life.

The question Jesus asks us in our text today is, *Will we be ready? Will the house of our lives stand? Or will it crumble under the weight of the pressure?*

Will we prepare for the flood by striving to live, by the power of the Holy Spirit, like Jesus? Or will we coast along on the path of least resistance, not really paying much attention to the kind of life we are living, the kind of people we are becoming?

The choice, as always, is ours.

May God help each of us to build on the solid foundation offered and modeled by Jesus of Nazareth, so that *when* floods rise, we will be able to stand strong, free, and full of hope.

Amen.

