



“Level Ground”
 Luke 6:17-19

Idea: The disciple who walks with Jesus has his or her feet firmly placed on earth.

Intro: Humans are competitive. As such, the natural inclination of a man or woman is to create or obtain an advantage over one’s opponent. Once the advantage or privilege is established, it is then leveraged and exploited at the expense of others. One of the clearest depictions of this mindset is seen in war. When two armies battle with one another, one of the initial tactics is to take the high ground. The side who controls the high ground possesses a military advantage over the other. The lofty position provides a superior vantage point by which to monitor and strategically strike the enemy.

A couple weeks ago, several of the boys in our student ministry along with Pastor Nate and I spent an evening here on our church campus playing airsoft. If you do not what airsoft is, it is a creative way for older boys and men to continue to play G.I. Joes without being looked down upon. Airsoft guns shoot a plastic BB at a speed that will sting upon contact but not penetrate the skin. In airsoft, teams square off against one another in battle. Therefore, in our initial game, we played in the woods on the backside of our campus, and the first thing I did was run to the highest point to gain an advantage. I wanted to be higher than the guys on the opposing team in order to see them before they saw us.

The competitive spirit of people is displayed in the way in which we work to gain an advantage over others. This spirit is also demonstrated in the way people want to be recognized. It is natural for a person to want to be honored and known. On certain levels, this is not necessarily a bad thing. It is important that as a society we honor those who are worthy of honor. For example, we use titles when addressing or conversing with people in leadership roles. We say, “Mr. President, Madame Senator, and Governor Youngkin.” On a local level we say, “Mr. Byerly, Dr. Teigen, and Pastor So-and-So.” These are examples of how we recognize certain offices and the accomplishments of people. Unfortunately, titles and the prominence that a title and position bring are extremely important to many people. The people in this camp enjoy the privileges and recognition that accompany their titles. They like their perceived elevated position over others.

This competitive spirit was not lost on the Lord’s disciples. They struggled with it just as much as we do today. As we move forward in Luke’s Gospel, the Lord Jesus offers the newly appointed apostles an object lesson and instruction in what it means to follow Him. Today, we are examining the object lesson. From the passage before us, we will discover that the disciple who walks with Jesus has his or her feet firmly placed on earth. This kind of disciple understands how important it is to keep your eyes on Jesus and your hands and feet with the people.

Luke 6:17-19.

Inquiry: In Luke 6, we have learned that Jesus is greater than and the fulfillment of the Sabbath (vs. 1-5). In other words, He is the repose that this weekly day of rest foreshadowed. We have also learned that love compels the Lord to seek and heal broken people (vs. 6-11). He is our Life-Giver. Out of His desire to heal the broken, Jesus appointed twelve men to preach the message of the Kingdom and demonstrate its presence by performing signs and wonders. These apostles would continue the work of Christ after He was gone. They would establish the Church and its doctrine.

Following the appointment of the apostles, we read that Jesus came down the mountain with them to a “level place” (τόπου πεδινού). This phrase can easily be understood as a plateau. The activity of Jesus, which Luke has recorded for us, has largely been contained within the area of Galilee. Within this region there are several mountains and many of them have plateaus. Mt. Arbel is a tall mountain with a large plateau on its top. It overlooks the Sea of Galilee from the northwest corner. Now, it is impossible to know exactly where these events took place, and it is not important to know. We trust that if it were important, then the Holy Spirit would have led Luke and the gospel writers to document it for us. What is significant is that Jesus brought His apostles to a level place where they were joined by a great crowd of disciples and non-believers from the surrounding areas. On this level plain, the Lord presents the apostles with an object lesson. He will teach them some prerequisite lessons of discipleship. They will discover the importance of standing on level ground by learning that the disciple who walks with Jesus has his or her feet firmly placed on earth. They have their eyes on Jesus and their hands and feet with the people.

Prerequisite lessons of discipleship:

1. Spiritual leadership is servant leadership.

In verse 17, we read that Jesus came down from the mountain with His apostles (“*them*”). They stood together “on a level place” as a large crowd of Christ-followers and miracle seekers gathered around them. The Lord will use this teaching time to deliver a message often referred to as the Sermon on the Plain. The contents of this message have similarities with Matthew’s recording of Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7), but the teaching on the plain seems to have been more directly presented to His personal followers. He is addressing the Twelve and the disciples. On the mount, Jesus offered general teaching to everyone present that day. On the plain, He presented a profile of what a disciple is to be – poor, hungry, sorrowful, and rejected (6:20-22). The apostles needed to be aware of the struggle that awaited them when persecution came (6:24-26). They also needed to hear from Jesus the hope they possessed even in the face of persecution.

The object lesson Jesus offers before the teaching begins is first seen in their location. They are standing on a level place. There is no elevation. Jesus and the apostles are not standing above or below the people. Often times in the gospels we find Jesus teaching on a mountain side. In those situations, He is frequently seated below the crowd in order to use the incline of the hillside as a natural acoustic. Here Luke points out the level ground, which makes the point that spiritual leadership is first servant leadership.

Jesus was and is the greatest of all leaders. He is the King of Heaven, the Son of God, and the One through whom everything was created. One day every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11). Jesus is worthy of all honor, yet He entered this world in the humblest of ways. He came as a servant.

J. Oswald Sanders, in his classic book entitled “Spiritual Leadership,” reminds us that Jesus said, “*But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all*” (Mark 10:43-44). Sanders points out that Jesus’ concept of leadership was revolutionary. Servants are those of low prestige, low respect, and low honor; however, Jesus turned it into a synonym for greatness. We learn from the Lord that the kingdom of God (the Church) is a

community where each member serves the other (Gal 5:13). This service begins and is modeled first by its spiritual leaders.

The believer who aspires to lead in the church must be willing to serve others. Leaders work to benefit and bless others rather than themselves. They stand on level ground with the people they serve.

2. Both the saved and the seeker are welcome.

Luke describes in verses 17 and 18 the people who gathered on the level place to hear from Jesus. Many of them were disciples. They were followers of Jesus. We might refer to them as the saved and regenerate. They had been born again and experienced new life in Jesus because they had placed their faith in Him and followed Him as the Messiah. The others gathered on the plain are perhaps best described as seekers. They were people, both Jew and Gentile, from Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon. They had come to learn from Jesus' teaching and be healed by Him.

Although, the purpose of their gathering on the plain was to offer instruction to the twelve apostles, Jesus welcomed both the saved and the seeker. He intentionally ministered to the needs of the seekers. He healed the sick and liberated the demonically oppressed. Today, we follow the Lord's pattern presented here and modeled by the apostles in the early church. When we gather each Lord's Day, both the saved and the seeker are welcome. While our preaching and teaching is primarily focused on the equipping of the believers, we realize God's Spirit uses His Word to draw the seeker to faith in Christ. For this reason, we offer a time of response each Sunday for both the saved and the seeker.

3. The Savior's activity in one person often leads to His work in others.

The Lord's reception of both the saved and the seeker brought transformation to the lives of many people that day. His ministry was causing quite a stir. Verse 19 reveals that more and more people recognized Jesus' power and availed themselves to it. The portrait of Jesus as a powerful healer is strong in Luke (5:17; 6:18; 7:7; 8:47; 9:11, 42; 14:4; 17:15; 22:51). Here we get the idea that the Lord's transformational work in one person's life led to a similar work in another person's life.

The same is true for us today. When Jesus transforms the life of a sinner others see it and want to know more about it. It does not matter the sin, when Jesus delivers and transforms a life, others take notice and are intrigued. The demoniac in Mark 5 is a wonderful example of this reality. When Jesus set this man free, he desired to go with Jesus. Instead, the Lord told him to go and share with his friends what He had done. He did just that. Can you imagine the kind of response this man got as he told his story?

The Savior's activity in one person often leads to His work in others. Today, if you know Jesus as Lord and Savior, you have a story too. You were once lost and dead in trespasses and sin, but Jesus set you free. Jesus gave you new life. He removed your sin and transformed your life. You have a story of redemption to share with others, which can and often leads to Jesus doing a similar work in their lives.

Conclusion: All of this happens on level ground. The apostles learned that day that the disciple who walks with Jesus has his or her feet firmly place on earth. Every one of us by nature has a competitive spirit. We are looking for and striving to get an advantage. We work to take possession of the high ground. Competition is not entirely bad. It drives exceptionalism and produces a better product. As Christ-followers, however, we dare not allow our competitive spirits to become arrogant and self-serving. We dare not put ourselves over and above others. Instead, we should remember the example Jesus and His disciples modeled for us and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 19:19). Christians are not better than non-Christians. Both are made in the image of God. Both have a fallen nature that is in rebellion against God. Both struggle with sin and the flesh. The only difference between the two is the redemption and transformation that Jesus brings. The Christian has experienced this transformation, and the Lord wants to use His work in the Christian to lead others to seek it for

themselves.

The ground at the foot of the cross is level. Are you not grateful for that? Jesus meets us on level ground. He is Immanuel, God with Us. He does not look down on us, though He could. No, Jesus sat beside the well and engaged the woman from Samaria (John 4). He forgave rather than condemned the woman caught in adultery (John 8). He embraced the hated tax collectors (Luke 5; 19). He healed the sick and liberated the oppressed. He got down on the level with people whose lives were a train wreck. If you know Jesus as Lord and Savior, this is where He met you. Today, if you are not in relationship with Him, this is where He desires to meet you.

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?

Jesus knows everything about you. He has assessed your life and knows your sin. In the face of your sin, He has also issued a call. Will you today decide to follow Him?