

I. Introduction

On June 4th, 2008, Ichiro Fujisaki (藤崎一郎) was named as the Ambassador from Japan to the USA. When he was appointed, I am sure that Mr. Fujisaki received specific instructions about his role as an ambassador and that he gave careful thought to how he was going to serve in this role. An ambassador is not to give his own opinions or follow his own agenda. Instead, he is to represent the position and agenda of his home government. And, although he may enjoy his time in America, Mr. Fujisaki must remember that his reward for faithful service is not in America; it is in Japan, his home country.



What about us? **Philippians 3:20** tells us, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." And, in **2 Corinthians 5:20**, Paul declares, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." We also are ambassadors. Like Christians who have gone before us, we are citizens of heaven and Jesus' ambassadors to a fallen world. And we would do well to think deeply about our role so that we might receive a good reward when we go home to heaven.



In today's Bible passage we will read about how Jesus chose twelve very special ambassadors, and called them apostles. And we will also take a brief look at some of the specific instructions that He gave them about how to fulfill their role. Let's begin by reading Luke 6:12-19.



Christ and the Twelve Apostles, 1100 AD

II. Scripture Luke 6:12-19 (NIV)

[12] One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. [13] When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: [14] Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, [15] Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, [16] Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. [17] He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, [18] who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, [19] and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

III. Teaching

It was time for Jesus to make some big decisions. It was time for Him to choose a small group of men who would be His apostles, His ambassadors to take the Good News of the gospel to the world. How did Jesus go about choosing these men? **Luke 6:12**, "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." Jesus made the decision in prayer. Jesus went to a quiet place and talked it over with His heavenly Father all night long.



Luke 6:13, "When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles." Notice that Jesus called the disciples to come to Him. The call to Christian faith is always a call to come to Jesus. Christian faith is not found in a set of rules for living or in clever philosophical principles; Christian faith is found in a person, in Jesus Christ. We become His disciples and we learn from Him. And it was from among the disciples, the learners, that Jesus chose

twelve to be apostles, special messengers and ambassadors of His Kingdom to the world. These twelve are very special, they were the first chosen as Christ's apostles, and Jesus trained them personally. But, in a wider sense, all who are called to share the Good News of Jesus are messengers, apostles, and ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. Some Christians have a special calling and special spiritual gifts for this work, but all of us are called to participate in sharing the Good News of Jesus.

After Jesus chose the twelve, they went down together and Jesus began to heal many people and cast out demons, ministering in love to the crowd of people who had gathered. And then He gave some special instructions to the apostles, instructions that have deep meaning for us as well. Let's read Luke 6:20-26.

IV. Scripture Luke 6:20-26 (NIV)

[20] Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. [21] Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. [22] Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. [23] "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. [24] "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. [25] Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. [26] Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

V. Teaching

Many people are familiar with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, and the message here in Luke is similar. But this sermon is given in, "a level place," and therefore it is called the Sermon on the Plain. Both of these messages were spoken primarily to those who had already decided to follow Jesus. So we should not expect to find teaching about how to be saved here. Instead, we find deep teaching about how to live as a disciple, fully committed to the Kingdom of God. Jesus was a traveling preacher, and like traveling preachers after Him, Jesus probably spoke similar messages on many occasions, so we should not be surprised to find similar, but different, material in Matthew and Luke.



Sermon on the Mount
by Carl Heinrich Bloch,
1860

Although we are looking at only the first part today, we will see that the Sermon on the Plain is shorter and more intimate than the Sermon on the Mount. In **Matthew 5:3** Jesus says, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**" But in **Luke 6:20**, Jesus says, "**Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.**" The newer Japanese translations don't have the first word, "you," but the colloquial translation (口語訳) has it and I think it adds to the intimacy and power of Jesus' words. Here, Jesus is talking to, "you." At the time, "you," referred to the apostles, but it is also for us.

And what kind of instructions does Jesus give to those He calls as His ambassadors? Matthew's version makes it clear that Jesus is not talking about material poverty, but about the condition of the heart. This is something the twelve would have already understood, so Jesus did not need to say it to them, but it is very important for us. Jesus' message here is primarily about the attitude of the heart. At the same time, we cannot completely ignore the issues of money and poverty, because these things do affect the heart. Those who have little in this world are often quicker to call out to God. But Jesus is not condemning material wealth or exalting physical poverty; Jesus is instructing His ambassadors about what kind of attitudes they should embrace in their hearts.

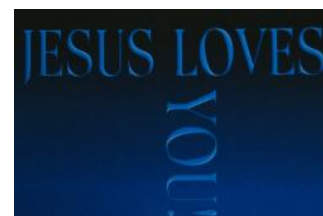
And what does Jesus say to His ambassadors about their heart attitudes? Jesus says reject the values of the world and embrace the values of the Kingdom of God. Jesus says you will never be happy if you chase after the things of this world, but you will be eternally blessed if you put the Kingdom of God first. Jesus pronounces four blessings; but He is not talking about four different groups of people; He is speaking about four aspects of our heart attitudes. Jesus says, "**Blessed are you who are poor... Blessed are you who hunger now... Blessed are you who weep now... Blessed are you when men hate you...**"

We might apply this teaching to our situation here in Osaka by saying, “You will be blessed when you abandon your pride, when you hunger for righteousness, when you weep for the lost, and when you are willing to preach Jesus even when people don’t want to listen. These are heart attitudes, but they are not theoretical, they are practical. If we adopt these heart attitudes, they will change how we live. And, I think, if you meditate on Jesus’ words, you will find even more applications for your own life.

Jesus also spoke of four woes. **“But woe to you who are rich... Woe to you who are well fed now... Woe to you who laugh now... Woe to you when all men speak well of you...”** These are not condemnations; Jesus is not speaking as a judge here, although one day He will come again as the Judge of all the earth. But here, Jesus is not judging; He is making a sad observation. As long as you accept the values of this world and seek happiness in the things of this world, you will end up being unhappy and unsatisfied, because the things of this world will soon pass away. If you build your life on seeking wealth, comfort, entertainment, and popularity, you end up with nothing, because all of these things will soon pass away.

VI. Conclusion

Jesus’ words seem like foolishness to the people of this world. But to those whose citizenship is in heaven, to those who are called as ambassadors of the Kingdom of God, to those who boldly proclaim the love of Jesus to a lost world, to them, and I pray, to us, Jesus’ words are light and life. An ambassador cannot find satisfaction in pleasing the people of the country where he has been sent. Sometimes the agenda of his own government may be the exact opposite of the agenda of the country he is sent to. In such a situation, an ambassador needs to be willing to suffer insult and worse as he faithfully represents the position of his home country.



In our case, for Christians, the agenda of this world is often the opposite of God’s agenda for His Kingdom. So in this world we must be ready to suffer when we proclaim the love of Jesus. But we are not looking for the praise of this world. We will receive our reward when we go home to Him who sent us. Have your friends, family members, classmates, or coworkers criticized your Christian faith? Have you suffered ridicule, or worse, because of Jesus? At one time or another, all Christians face opposition and some even face severe persecution for their faith. But do not be discouraged. Instead (Luke 6:23), **“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.”** Let’s pray.

VII. Closing Prayer