

Session 1

March 10, 2024

## THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Luke 6:17-23, 27-31

Once again, we see much of the foundational ministry of the Lord Jesus being described in familiar but somewhat different settings. This section sounds very much like the much longer Sermon on the Mount. While the setting is different (see v. 17), the multitudes are made up of the same types of people and the needs represented by those multitudes haven't changed. Hence, the introductory aspects of Christ's ministry haven't changed either. These lessons are what I call "Kingdom lessons," because they pointed people away from the dead-ended religious requirements of law-based Judaism and toward God's ultimate (and much bigger) Kingdom best. He would fill in the details later. But for now, He painted in broad strokes. And He did so in three different ways.

**Exposed by His miracles (vv. 17-19).** The ministry of the Lord Jesus quickly grew from a small wonder to a grand spectacle. Luke points out that the crowds were drawn to Him for two reasons. First, they came "to hear Him" (v. 18). This implies that the message of Jesus was accessible. Judaism was propagated somewhat selectively. The synagogues were in place to educate the boys and congregate the men. The girls and women were expected to get their religion from home. Various religious teachers had their followers (both men and women), but no one could draw a crowd like Jesus. In addition, unlike the dry precepts of the law, the teaching of Jesus was fresh, astonishing, and authoritative (see Matt. 7:28-29). Second, the crowds formed because of the miracles that Jesus performed. Two specific miracles are mentioned. First, He healed their diseases, and second, He cast out the evil spirits that tormented them (v. 18). Notice how Luke's description emphasizes the influence that Jesus had. Verse 17 calls the crowd "large" and their numbers "great," and points out the vast region from which they were drawn. Verse 19 mentions the "whole crowd" and says that Jesus' power was "healing them all." For reflection: *Why do you think Jesus performed miracles in the first place? Was He simply trying to draw a crowd? Or was there more to it?*

**Expounded by His teaching (vv. 20-23).** Here, the kingdom concepts are expounded. What was spoken in the Sermon on the Mount is summarized again for the disciples. Two important features stand out. First, Jesus was focusing on His disciples. The crowds were still there, and still pressed around Him. But He picked their faces from the crowd and addressed them. The rest of the people were invited (and expected) to listen, but His priority at this point was making sure the disciples were discipled. Second, in His teaching, He was clearly pointing out that the Kingdom (as well as His ministry) was not about supernatural miracles, but about holy living. The time would come when the crowds would leave Him for that very reason (see John 6:15; 40). The essence of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-10) and their shortened form here, basically contrast the popular religious teaching of the day with what Kingdom living was supposed to be. The word "blessed" is often translated "happy," but the connotation goes much further. To be "blessed" is to be absolutely satisfied and contented beyond belief. In contrast to conventional wisdom, Jesus taught that in Kingdom living the poor are blessed (v. 20), the hungry and the mourning are blessed (v. 21), and the hated and slandered are blessed (v. 22). In sum, those who suffer here for the Kingdom's sake will be rewarded for it in heaven (v. 23). For reflection: *Are*

*there times when today's church needs to be reminded of Kingdom truth? In what ways do we need to guard against the same traps Old Testament Judaism posed?*

**Expressed by His applications (vv. 27-31).** The third way that Christ's ministry pointed people to a deeper relationship with God was through His demand for tangible, notable changes in behavior. Again, notice the contrasts. The idea of humble submission to those who might take advantage of you at the least, or blatantly attack you at the worst was considered as absurd in Christ's day as it is today! Yet the Lord's point was that expressing genuine love in the most adverse circumstances was the best way to influence outsiders to take note of real kingdom living and hopefully become a part of it. For reflection: *Notice how Jesus made practical applications of the Kingdom truth He espoused. How did the Lord Himself demonstrate those same applications later in His ministry?*