

## Pulling Back the Kingdom Curtain

Luke 6:17-20

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Summary: As we return to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has chosen his 12 closest followers, and now he begins to teach the multitudes, proclaiming the kingdom of God. Even though Jesus chose an exclusive group of inner friends, His teaching, His miracles, and His ministry were given freely to thousands of people who came to see Him. And his invitation is just as open today as it was then.

As we return to our study through the Gospel of Luke, we have just finished a study of the 12 disciples, listed for us in chapter 6.

So let's go back there and get a running start.

Jesus has just finished an all-night prayer meeting with His Father, and we're told in **verse 13**:

*And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.*

Luke 6:13

The Lord more than likely has well over 100 disciples at this point, including several women, Luke records in chapter 23, who had followed Him.

But now the Lord is going to select from among all of them 12 men who will become His closest companions; they're going to get extra tutoring from the Lord. They will be uniquely commissioned as apostles—sent ones, which is what the word means.

Several of them will eventually write much of the New Testament.

The Lord is promoting these 12 from student status to associate status, and of course it goes straight to their heads, because they begin arguing behind His back as to which of them will be the greatest in the kingdom (**Mathew 18:1**).

So they certainly have a lot to learn; but over time they will move from the classroom to the platform in this ministry.

*And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people . . .*

*Luke 6:17a*

Now what the Lord does next, we're told in **verse 17**, is move down this mountainous region to a level place—you could translate that: to a plateau—to minister to this huge crowd of people, no doubt numbering in the thousands.

Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 65

He's going to preach what is traditionally called The Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5. More technically, Luke specifies in this parallel account as The Sermon on the Plateau.

Now before we get to the sermon, notice that this crowd is composed of three categories: first, you have the twelve newly appointed apostles; secondly, you have a great crowd of disciples—these are individuals who have been following Jesus for some time.

Some of them aren't true believers because eventually Jesus' preaching disturbs so many of them that John's Gospel tells us many of His disciples left Him and never came back (**John 6**).

The third category is simply this mass of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and coastal cities nearby—they numbered no doubt in the thousands.

And Jesus essentially does three things here according to **verse 18**: He will teach them, heal them, and deliver them.

What Jesus is doing is revealing the credentials of His kingly authority; His ability to rule; His credentials as the true Messiah.

He's teaching them—we'll get to His sermon in a moment; just understand that when He teaches, He speaks from his own authority, and He teaches like no one they have ever heard before (**Matthew 7:29**).

The scribes and rabbis of His day simply quoted one another when they preached; "rabbi so and so says this, and rabbi so and so says that."

Jesus would say, "Now you've heard it said . . . but I say unto you."

Jesus isn't quoting some other teacher. He is *the* Teacher.

So when He finished His sermon, we're told in Matthew's gospel that:

*The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*

*Matthew 7:28b-29*

Then notice that Jesus heals their diseases, in **verse 19**.

This is the Lord's way of fulfilling Messianic prophecy and proving Messianic authority.

But I want you to notice here that Jesus doesn't just provide healing; notice that in His presence there is healing.

And you might underline the word ***all, in verse 19:***

*And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.*

*Luke 6:19*

The implication here is they are all trying to touch Him, but they can't, and yet Jesus is still healing them all.

And by the way, would you notice here that Jesus doesn't ask them if they have enough faith; if they have given any seed money; He's not putting His hand on their head; He's not shouting at them or shaking them. There isn't any organ music anywhere.



**What is the importance of Jesus' healing power being unconditional? Does anyone have enough faith or obtain enough merit to deserve the divine healing of God?**

He's demonstrating inherent divine power, which will be delegated for a season to the apostles to authenticate they are true messengers of His, as the early church is established.

How different is this demonstration of power than in the phony healers of today who gather people in arenas and then heal only the few who seem to have enough faith?

Which of course provides these false teachers with the perfect fall back that the person who wasn't healed was someone who didn't have enough faith; or they didn't claim enough of God's power; or they didn't do it in the right way; or they didn't get to the platform in time.

I remember reading the testimony of Joni Erickson Tada as she wrote of one such visit she made soon after her accident which left her a paraplegic.

She said that she and dozens of others in wheelchairs waited for the elevators to take them from the parking deck down to the floor of the arena where a world-renowned healer was holding a healing service.

The place was packed, and the air was electric with anticipation. Hours later, after only a few were supposedly healed, Joni wrote that there was a long line of those same people in wheelchairs waiting for the elevators to take them back up to the parking deck.

Imagine it this way: if Jesus had been there, they all would have been healed by simply getting into the arena. That would have been enough.

What's taking place here isn't some kind of statement on sickness. In fact, sickness isn't really the issue. Had

sickness been the issue in Jesus' ministry, Jesus would have healed everyone on the planet.

He wouldn't have healed a few lepers, He would have emptied the leper colonies; he wouldn't have healed one man at the pool of Siloam, he would have healed them all; he wouldn't have raised only Lazarus from the dead, He would have emptied the graveyard.

The issue in the ministry of Christ—and what's happening here—isn't about sickness or death, but a demonstration of Christ's ability to fulfill the Messianic claims, exercising divine power and giving everyone a foretaste of not just the coming Kingdom, but an eternal Heaven.

In Heaven all diseases, disabilities, sorrows, and grief will be gone. When the King is on His throne, all pain and suffering will be forever banished.

Adapted from John MacArthur, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Moody Press, 2011), p. 89

And that's because you're not just perfected and glorified in Heaven, you happen to be in His presence—you're in the arena, so to speak.

You won't get a sore knee one day in Heaven and go stand in line at the clinic to see Him; being in His presence forever is another way of understanding you are healed forever.



**What makes you excited about Heaven? As you study Jesus' earthly ministry, what hints of Heaven do you see in His ministry? How were His life, teaching, and miracles reflections of the coming kingdom?**

Jesus is pulling back the curtain on who He really is and what His kingdom will be like one day.

What Jesus is doing here is fulfilling the very text of Scripture He read in the synagogue as His ministry began:

*He is bringing good news to the poor;*

*binding up the brokenhearted;*

*proclaiming liberty to the captives,*

*giving sight to the blind,*

*and opening the prison doors to those who are bound*

*(Luke 4:18 and Isaiah 61:1)*

Thirdly, Jesus isn't just teaching and healing.

**Back in verse 18 we read:**

*And those who were troubled with unclean spirits (demons) were cured.*

*Luke 6:18b*

He's showing this crowd here that He can exercise comprehensive authority over the demonic world.

Satan and the demons cannot resist Him. Their powers are nothing to Him. His kingdom of light has total and irresistible power over the kingdom of darkness.

They've already lost, Jesus is just serving notice.

Every person under the controlling power of the demonic world is immediately delivered in His presence.

And again, the implication isn't that Jesus had a one-on-one encounter with every demonized person; the implication is that He just showed up.

Now from here we move to **verse 20** where Jesus begins delivering His sermon.

Now if you're familiar with Matthew's account of this Sermon on the Mount, Luke's sermon transcript is much shorter.

Matthew records nine beatitudes and a lot of interactions with the audience while Luke gives us four beatitudes and no audience interaction. Matthew gives us three chapters on this sermon and Luke gives us 29 verses.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 1* (Crossway, 1998), p. 214

Matthew gives us the entire sermon series on a thumb-drive and Luke puts up a video clip on Instagram.

Luke gives you the Cliff Notes—that one was for you older people.

He cuts to the chase and gets the main point across to Theophilus, the man to whom Luke originally writes this Gospel letter.

Now before we dive into the Lord's sermon, your Bible might have already outlined this passage with the heading: The Beatitudes.

Beatitude is a Latin word that simply means blessing.

Jesus is going to begin delivering a sermon that essentially describes the profound difference between His kingdom and the world system; between what it means to live a life that is blessed compared to living a life that ultimately fails.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 153

This sermon is what theologians call eschatological. You don't have to spell that on the quiz. Eschatology is the study of end times, and in this context, the end times as they relate to the kingdom Christ will bring when He returns to earth one day to set up His millennial kingdom (**Revelation 20**).

Jesus is describing the values of that coming kingdom.

However—now follow me here—even though the Lord is describing the ultimate fulfillment of end-time promises, He is, here and now, inviting this crowd to become citizens now; put in their reservation by faith in Him now.

Let Jesus begin to reign as King in your heart and life now, and that literal coming

kingdom on earth will be your future home.

That's a staggering invitation, isn't it?

It sounds a fairy tale. But according to God's Word, it's going to happen.



Have you accepted Jesus' invitation? If so, does someone else come to mind who hasn't? How can you be part of expanding the kingdom of God today?

In his letter, James writes:

*Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?*

*James 2:5*

So what's it like to be a citizen of the kingdom? What's it like to have the blessing of God?

Well, get ready for Jesus to turn everything upside down, as He begins to preach; **verse 20**:

*And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:*

*"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*

*Luke 6:20*

Now does this mean you have to quit your job and go live under a bridge to get into the kingdom?

It is true that this word for "poor" here describes somebody who is bankrupt.

There were two kinds of poor people described in the first century: the poor day laborers who were paid at the end of every day; and they made just enough money to buy food, one day at a time. That was their daily bread.

But then there were poor people—the word used here by Luke—to describe people who didn't have a job and didn't have any bread either. In fact, they were entirely dependent on someone else for survival.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Crossway, 2001), p. 19

In fact, in Matthew's parallel account he adds the words, "poor in spirit."

*Blessed are the poor **in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Matthew 5:3*

This is spiritual destitution, spiritual desperation.

This is deeper than economic status. It has spiritual meaning

Darrell L. Bock, Baker Exegetical Commentary: Luke, Volume 1 (Baker, 1994), p. 573

Jesus is preaching to people who thought they were good enough to get into Heaven. All the scribes and Pharisees and religious leaders in this massive crowd were carefully keeping the minutia of the law, convinced they were holy enough for Heaven. They weren't spiritually desperate; they were spiritually confident.

And Jesus drops a bombshell and says, 'No, no, only the spiritually bankrupt get in; only those who realize they have nothing to offer God are able to cross the threshold into Heaven.'

Jesus is effectively saying, "Only those who depend entirely on the King get into the coming kingdom."

This is so different from the world's system of religion. The world of religion says, "Do your best and you can get in."

The Apostle Paul made it clear as possible when he wrote:

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

### *Ephesians 2:8-9*

Jesus was surrounded by two kinds of people in this massive audience, the same two kinds of people in this auditorium today: those boasting in their own work and those whose only boast is in the work of Christ.

Thomas Watson, a puritan pastor in England, wrote this in the late 1600's on this particular passage of Christ's sermon:

*This text signifies those who are brought to the sense of their sins, and seeing no goodness in themselves, despair in themselves and appeal wholly to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.*

*Thomas Watson*

*(1620-1686)*

That's how you become a citizen *now* in the coming kingdom.

That's how you make your reservation.

Blessed are the poor, the spiritual destitute who depend upon Christ alone, for yours is the kingdom of God.