

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Ministers to a Great Multitude

Luke 6:17-19

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Scripture

Jesus was about thirty years of age when he began his public ministry (Luke 3:23). That was in 28 AD.

Jesus' ministry was fundamentally a ministry of teaching and healing. His primary mission was to seek and to save the lost. That is, he came to find those who knew themselves to be estranged from God, and to reconcile them to God.

Jesus was extremely popular with the people. They came to listen to his teaching and they also came to him for healing.

However, the religious leaders opposed Jesus because he did not agree with their teaching of how to live in a right relationship with God.

So, on the one hand, Jesus' popularity with the people grew, while, on the other hand, Jesus encountered growing opposition and criticism from the religious leaders.

About six months after the start of Jesus' public ministry, opposition to his ministry escalated. By this time Jesus already had a growing number of disciples. A *disciple* is "someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way."¹

Jesus was aware that the religious leaders discussed with one another what they might do with him (Luke 6:11). And so he decided that it was time to choose twelve men whom he could equip to carry on his mission after his departure.

Jesus went up a mountain and spent an entire night in prayer, seeking God's guidance about which disciples to choose to carry on his mission. When day came, Jesus called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles (Luke 6:13).

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 629.

Having selected the apostles, Jesus then came down the mountain and ministered to a great multitude of people.

So, let's read about Jesus ministering to a great multitude in Luke 6:17-19:

¹⁷ 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 from all Judea and Jerusalem and the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all. (Luke 6:17-19)

Introduction

We live in a world that seeks to find meaning and fulfillment and satisfaction in all kinds of ways. And yet, people find only emptiness in following their various pursuits.

Listen to what some well-known people have said:

- Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.: "Everybody basically has an empty hole inside of them that they try to fill with money, drugs, alcohol, power – and none of the material stuff works."²
- Television producer Norman Lear: "I'm shocked by the hole in America's heart."
- Tennis star Boris Becker: "I had won Wimbledon twice before, once as the youngest player. I was rich. I had all the material possessions I needed. . . . It's the old song of movie stars and pop stars who commit suicide. They have everything, and yet they are so unhappy. I had no inner peace. I was a puppet on a string."

² Daniel Chu and Vicki Sheff, "Toxic Avenger," *People*, July 22, 1991, 74.

- Ernest Hemingway, who committed suicide: “I live in a vacuum that is as lonely as a radio tube when the batteries are dead and there is no current to plug into.”³
- Cartoonist Ralph Barton, although successful and in demand, took his own life, leaving a note nearby that included these words: “I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day.”⁴

Perhaps psychiatrist Carl Jung gave the best description of our culture today when he said, “The central neurosis of our time is emptiness.”⁵

One would think that people living in the 21st century would have learned how to deal with the emptiness of life. But they have not.

People in Jesus’ day found life just as empty as they do today. They struggled to find meaning and fulfillment and satisfaction in all kinds of ways too.

The reason Jesus was so popular is that he gave answers for life. He told people how they could find meaning and fulfillment and satisfaction in life.

On one occasion Jesus taught the people and fed more than five thousand people by miraculously turning five barley loaves and two fish into enough food for everyone. The next day the people wanted Jesus to keep giving them bread always (John 6:34).

Jesus told the people that he was “the bread of life.” He was the one who provided meaning and fulfillment and satisfaction in life. The miracle of the bread was merely a sign pointing to him who alone fully satisfies every human need.

³ Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 259.

⁴ Charles Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 179.

⁵ Galaxie Software, *10,000 Sermon Illustrations* (Biblical Studies Press, 2002).

But the people did not want that which would satisfy now and for all eternity. They simply wanted their immediate, physical needs met, and because Jesus would not keep providing for their temporal needs, they started grumbling.

Jesus told them that the words he had spoken to them were spirit and life.

After Jesus said this many people turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?”

Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God” (John 6:67-69).

The Twelve, also known as the apostles, had come to believe that life, eternal life, is found only in Jesus. But, it took a while before they came to that understanding.

In today’s lesson we learn about Jesus ministering to a great multitude. Jesus had just chosen the Twelve to be his apostles. He was about to begin their internship. On the first day of their basic training, Jesus wanted to give the apostles a perspective on the Christian life that would help them know what to expect in ministry. Luke gave his readers a summary of Jesus’ ministry in Luke 6:17-19.

Lesson

The analysis of Jesus ministering to a great multitude as set forth in Luke 6:17-19 will teach us that Jesus satisfies every need.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Place of Jesus’ Ministry (6:17b)
2. The People of Jesus’ Ministry (6:17a, c)
3. The Purpose of Jesus’ Ministry (6:18-19)

I. The Place of Jesus' Ministry (6:17b)

First, let's look at the place of Jesus' ministry.

Luke said in verse 17b that Jesus came down with the newly appointed apostles **and stood on a level place**. One commentator said that the term "**level place**" is "perhaps best translated 'plateau' to make clear its location in the midst of a mountain setting."⁶ He also said that "some locate the setting on a plateau west of Tabgha near Capernaum, but there is not enough information to be sure of the locale."⁷

In verses 20-49 Jesus delivered a message to the people. This message is known as "The Sermon on the Plain." You may notice that it is very similar to "The Sermon on the Mount" that is recorded in Matthew's Gospel in chapters 5 to 7.

Bible scholars differ about whether Matthew and Luke were describing the same sermon or two different sermons.

However, there are a number of differences between the two sermons. For example, Matthew said that Jesus "went *up* on the mountain" (Matthew 5:1). Luke, on the other hand, said that Jesus "came *down* with [the apostles] and stood on a level place" (Luke 6:17). Some scholars resolve this discrepancy by saying that Jesus delivered his sermon on a plateau halfway up the mountain.

The major difficulty in viewing the two sermons as the same sermon is that there are so many differences in content.

Perhaps the simplest explanation is that Jesus preached the same but slightly different sermon on more than one occasion, as most preachers do. Last week, for instance, I was asked to preach a sermon on short notice to another church in our Presbytery. I found a suitable sermon that I had preached on a previous occasion and then preached it again last Sunday.

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1-9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 562.

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, 563.

So, it seems to me that the sermon recorded in Luke's Gospel is different than the one recorded in Matthew's Gospel. This sermon is known as "The Sermon on the Plain" because Jesus came down with his newly appointed apostles and **stood on a level place**.

II. The People of Jesus' Ministry (6:17a, c)

Second, notice the people of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus' ministry took place in the presence of three groups of people.

A. *Jesus Ministered to the Apostles (6:17a)*

First, Jesus ministered to the apostles.

Luke said in verse 17a that Jesus came down **with them**. That is, Jesus came down with the apostles whom he had just chosen.

This was the start of their three-year internship with Jesus. This was the first day of their basic training. Jesus demonstrated to the apostles what he wanted them to learn about his ministry of word and deed.

Jesus chose apostles to serve as *extraordinary* officers in his church. There are no apostles today because theirs was a unique, one-time appointment. However, today Jesus calls elders and deacons to serve as *ordinary* officers in his church.

So, Jesus' ministry was to the first officers of his church.

B. *Jesus Ministered to the Disciples (6:17c)*

Second, Jesus ministered to the disciples.

Luke said in verse 17c that Jesus came down the mountain with the apostles and stood on a level place **with a great crowd of his disciples**.

These were the people who followed Jesus and submitted themselves to his teaching. They were a growing number at this point in Jesus' ministry. They believed in Jesus, made a commitment to him, and embraced his teaching regarding eternal life.

One could liken these **disciples** to church members in our churches today.

C. Jesus Ministered to the Multitude (6:17c)

And third, Jesus ministered to the multitude.

Along with the apostles and disciples, Jesus also ministered to a **great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon** (6:17c). People came to Jesus from a vast region north of Jerusalem.

These people were not yet disciples. They had heard about Jesus and they were curious. They wanted to hear him for themselves. Some of them were ill and even demon-possessed, and they wanted to be healed.

One could liken the **multitude of people** to those who are not yet members of our churches and are in the process of learning more about Jesus.

III. The Purpose of Jesus' Ministry (6:18-19)

Finally, let's look at the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

Luke said in verses 18-19 that the disciples and multitude **came to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.**

Jesus' ministry was fundamentally a ministry of teaching and healing. He taught and he healed. It was a ministry of word and deed.

Jesus taught people that a life not rightly related to God was empty. He taught people that meaning and fulfillment and satisfaction in life was found only in him. He was the mediator who reconciled sinners with God.

And in order to demonstrate God's power, compassion and care, he healed people. Notice that Jesus **healed them all**. No one was beyond his power. No one was beyond his love. No one was beyond his compassion and care.

In the coming weeks we will look at the content of Jesus' teaching. At this point Luke wanted his readers to understand that Jesus really was able to satisfy every need.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus ministering to a great multitude as set forth in Luke 6:17-19, we should look to Jesus to satisfy our every need.

R. A. Torrey was a well-known Bible teacher about a century ago. He was eventually the pastor of what is now known as the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, IL. On one occasion, he travelled to New Zealand to preach. One evening in Christ Church, New Zealand, a note from a lady was handed to him. It read, "Is there any place where I can find satisfaction for my soul? I have been looking for it everywhere. I have sought it in wealth, but have not found it; I have sought it in society, but have not found it; I have sought it in the pleasures of this world, but have not found it; I have sought it in study, but have not found it; I have sought it in art, but have not found it; I have been seeking it in travel, I have just returned from a tour around the world seeking for satisfaction for my heart, but have not found it. Can you tell me where I can find it?" "

The note was unsigned. Torrey read it before the meeting that night and replied, "Yes, I can tell this lady where she can find satisfaction tonight. She can find it in Jesus. 'Whosoever

shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.’ ”

At the close of the meeting a lady came to him and said, “It was I who wrote that note.”

Opening his Bible, Torrey showed her the Way of Life and she received Jesus.

The next night she came back and, during the meeting, came forward and testified to the congregation, “Last night I wrote a note to Dr. Torrey asking him if there was any place where I could find satisfaction for my soul. I had sought it everywhere. I had sought it in wealth, in fashion, in society, in pleasure, in study, in art and in travel but could not find it. Last night I trusted Jesus Christ and I have found the satisfaction for my soul which I have been seeking all these years.”⁸

The beloved blind American poet Fanny Jane Crosby did not begin writing hymns until her mid-forties. But from then on, inspiring words seemed to flow constantly from her heart, and she became “the happiest creature in all the land.” Friends stopped in frequently to see her with requests for new texts for special occasions.

One day William Kirkpatrick, a talented gospel musician who had just composed a new melody that he felt needed suitable words to become a singable hymn, visited Fanny. As William sat at the piano and played the tune for Fanny, her face lit up. She knelt in prayer, as was always her custom, and soon the lines to this lovely hymn began to flow freely from her heart:

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord, a wonderful Savior
to me; He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock, where rivers
of pleasure I see.

⁸ R. A. Torrey, *Anecdotes and Illustrations* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1907), 98–99.

A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord—He taketh my burden away; He holdeth me up and I shall not be moved; He giveth me strength as my day.

With numberless blessings each moment He crowns, and, filled with His fullness divine, I sing in my rapture, “O Glory to God for such a Redeemer as mine!”

When clothed in His brightness transported I rise to meet Him in clouds of the sky; His perfect salvation, His wonderful love, I’ll shout with the millions on high.

Chorus: *He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock that shadows a dry, thirsty land; He hideth my life in the depths of His love, and covers me there with His hand, and covers me there with His hand.*

When Fanny Crosby wrote “rivers of pleasure I see,” “with numberless blessings each moment He crowns,” and “I sing in my rapture,” she revealed the satisfaction she found in Jesus even though she was blind.

This godly woman wrote at least 8,000 hymns. She lived to be 95 years of age and traveled extensively in her later years as a speaker throughout the country, telling all who would listen to look to Jesus to satisfy every need.⁹

Are you looking for meaning and fulfillment and satisfaction in life? Do you feel an emptiness in your life?

Jesus taught and healed all who came to him. He explained and demonstrated God’s love and compassion to all who came to him.

And what he did for the people 2,000 years ago, he will do for you today. So, look to Jesus to satisfy your every need. Amen.

⁹ Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1996), 214.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Father, thank you for sending Jesus to seek and to save the lost. Thank you that he taught and he healed. He taught people how to know you and receive eternal life, and he demonstrated your power by his compassionate healing.

God, there are some here today who are empty. They yearn for fulfillment and meaning and satisfaction in life. Help them to find satisfaction in Jesus alone by believing in him.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!