

# Bible Studies for Life: March 10

*The Ministry of Jesus • Luke 6: 17-23, 27-31*

*By Carl White*



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**Christianity is not a self-improvement plan.**

Jesus did not come to give us a self-improvement plan. He came to fix a broken relationship. There is nothing wrong with self-improvement, but that is not why Jesus came.

In 1985, over forty musicians came together to record a song to fight famine in Africa. *We are the World* became the best-selling single of all time. A reporter asked Bob Dylan, who sang a duet with Michael Jackson at the end of the recording, how he felt about the song.

Dylan said it made him feel uncomfortable. The reporter asked why? Dylan responded, because it makes us think we can save ourselves.

Bob Dylan got that right. No amount of self-improvement is adequate for salvation. Jesus came to fix our broken relationship with God so that we can be with him. Jesus' miracles and teachings point toward that singular purpose.

Jesus came down from the mountains where he had been praying with his disciples and a crowd was there. They were desperate for him. So, he began healing them.

Please note, healing is not an end unto itself. It is not to make better people. It is a step toward his purpose, which is to reconcile sinful people with God. Focus only on healing and you miss God's real purpose in sending his Son.

### **The Sermon on the Plain.**

What follows is known as the Sermon on the Plain because the text says he stood "on a level place." (vs. 17 NIV) This is similar in many ways to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel, but much shorter. He speak to the people of their condition: poor, hungry, and weeping. These conditions do not exclude being blessed. Rather, it prepares them to be blessed. It caused them, and causes us, to look toward the Lord alone to be reconciled with God.

Then in verse 22 he speaks directly to his disciples. Thus, he speaks to us as his disciples. "Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man" (vs. 22). On that day, Jesus says, you can rejoice. You can leap for joy! Why? Because you are sharing the sufferings of Christ, and when we share in the sufferings of Christ it means we are walking with him, and that is worth celebrating.

This doesn't look like a self-improvement plan. Self-

improvement is not being hated, excluded, insulted, and seen as evil. But this is a blessed position to be in as his disciple.

### **A Golden Rule Life.**

This is a hard teaching because we all long to be liked. The temptation is to respond in kind by hating, insulting, and excluding, but Jesus says we must not. Instead of responding in kind, we must respond with Godliness. Not self-righteousness, which is smug and arrogant, but with genuine love.

Verse 31, sometimes referred to as the Golden Rule, is a summary statement for verses 27-30. It is an impossible requirement. Consider what our Lord says. Love your enemies. Be good to the person who hates you. Bless the person who curses you. Pray for the ones who mistreat you. If someone slaps you, let them slap you again. If someone steals your coat, give them your shirt. Give to anyone who asks for something. And if someone steals from you, don't demand it be returned. (vs. 27-30)

Who can possibly do this? What kind of self-improvement plan can accomplish this? Only a power that is other worldly can accomplish the Golden Rule in our lives. It cannot come from our wealth or our strength, but from humility and poverty of spirit. It cannot come from our abundance, but from hunger of the spirit. It cannot come from our pettiness, but rather from genuine tears. It cannot come from a position of power and influence, but from the heart of one who knows that they, too, are a sinner in desperate need of God's grace.

This grace cannot be earned, it must be received. Only a man or woman who has been reconciled to God through His son, Jesus Christ, can truly live a Golden Rule life.

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