

There is a lot about this text that I like: the healing, the prayer. Then, Jesus gives us a challenging passage, well at least me. I live in wealth most of the world cannot imagine. I am joyful; people even tell me to take it down a notch sometimes. I certainly have never gone hungry. The church that I serve is filled with kind, generous people, and the church has ample resources. These are good things. If I am honest, I would rather preach on Matthew's gospel version of the beatitudes with the words "poor in spirit" rather than Luke's which says, "blessed are the poor."

Yet this is the beatitudes, in which Jesus warns us of the dangers of being well fed, happy, wealthy, and well liked, while also blessing those who are struggling such as the poor, hungry, mourning, and hated. This is a beatitude encouraging us to rely on God's strength and grace..

To understand the power of Luke's words, we must look at the difference between Luke, Matthew and Mark: First, Luke has called the disciples before the healings. Luke has changed the geography as well; we are now on the plain rather than near the sea where Jesus called them in Mark, with all of the ups and downs that occur in sea life, it feels as if Luke is trying to create a balanced effect. Grace is delivered to God's people all at once and peace is brought, we are literally in a plain, on even ground.<sup>1</sup>

Again, "Luke's sermon is given on a level place (6:17), [while Matthew's gospel is given] on a mountain (Matt. 5:1)."<sup>2</sup> The high mountain top experience is not a group experience, in fact there is no need for those assembled to come down from the mountain. They are all equal on a plain.

Jesus is the fulfillment of past prophets: In Luke, he is a new Moses, who went on a mountain to pray only to return to God's people and tell them how to live blessed lives.<sup>3</sup> Luke speaks of the poor more often than either Mark or Matthew. He is not writing to a crowd that is well literate and among the elite. Luke is speaking to the masses; ensuring grace to all.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff Luke has placed the sermon later in his Gospel than Matthew does in his, but even so, the contexts are similar. Matthew's version comes after the call of four disciples and a general statement about Jesus' ministry (Matt. 4:18–25), while Luke's follows the call of the Twelve and a general statement about Jesus' ministry (6:12–19). Luke's sermon is but one-fourth the length of Matthew's, and there are noticeable differences in the common subject matter, reversed Mark's order (Mark 3:7–19) by placing the call of the Twelve (6:12–16) prior to the healing of the crowds (6:17–19) and has moved the scene from the sea (Mark 3:7) to a level place (6:17).

<sup>2</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff "Both Matthew and Luke seem to be making a theological use of geography. For Luke, the mountain is a place of prayer, and there he chooses the Twelve. Now he moves to the plain below to be with the people, with whom Jesus identifies, as at his baptism (3:21)."

<sup>3</sup> Stone, M. (2020).. *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing. Fr. Roman noted this in his sermon from a few weeks ago referring to Jesus as the new Jonah.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos. "Comparing: Luke refers to the poor twice as often as do both Matt and Mark, and often in prominent contexts. In Isa 61:1, the foundational text of Jesus' inaugural sermon in Nazareth, "proclaiming good news to the poor" (4:18) is the first characteristic of God's Spirit-anointed Servant, and it is likewise preeminent in Jesus' sermon."

The gospel has a balance: there are four blessings, and then four woes. Jesus speaks to the entire crowd; he does not say, “group two please for the blessings and group two for the woes.”<sup>5</sup> All gathered receive the same message full of blessing and woes.<sup>6</sup>

Grace is for all.

In Luke’s gospel, Jesus has been at his ministry for a while, he found disciples to follow him and chose his inner circle, the twelve apostles. These men left their lives behind to represent Christ in ministry.<sup>7</sup> Jesus gives a precise message: our ultimate reward is to come later through the grace of God.<sup>8</sup> The scripture notes how people traveled from Jerusalem to Judea to Tyre to Sidon in order to hear this message of grace.<sup>9</sup>

As challenging as the message is for those assembled, it is necessary that they know: all good things come from God. Not from wealth, being well fed, earthly joy, or a good reputation. God’s grace alone. Those gathered likely remembered the time when God called “the twelve tribes of Israel ” and made them his people. In the world they live, there is violence, oppression, and some believed riches were a sign of God’s blessing. Many people are left outside of this version of success.<sup>10</sup>

As such, Luke shows Jesus lifting up the downcast, the poor, the hungry, the mourning, and the excluded. The literal poor are blessed. Not just the poor in spirit as in Matthew’s gospel. It is likely that Jesus is speaking to exactly the outcast rather than an inner circle such as he did in Matthew.<sup>11</sup> Throughout Jesus’ “sermon”<sup>12</sup> is an obvious preference for those who are suffering. Luke strives to challenge us to be the godly version of ourselves. Remember, this

---

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, D. (2022). “Leveled” <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/lectionary-essays/current-essay?id=3319>

<sup>7</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff

<sup>8</sup> Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

<sup>9</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff Though, it is unclear to scholars whether Jesus was speaking to the entire crowd assembled or singling out the disciples that were gathered, however, I stand by my conclusion.

<sup>10</sup> See Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK. “These formed part of the charter, the covenant, the binding agreement between God and Israel. Now, with the renewed Israel formed around him, Jesus gives them his own version of the same thing. And a radical version it is. It’s an upside-down code, or perhaps (Jesus might have said) a right-way-up code instead of the upside-down ones people had been following. God is doing something quite new: as Jesus had emphasized in the synagogue at Nazareth, in chapter 4, he is fulfilling his promises at last, and this will mean good news for all the people who haven’t had any for a long time.”

<sup>11</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff

<sup>12</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff here is the outline: “(1) blessings and woes (vv. 20–26); (2) on love of enemies (vv. 27–36); (3) on judging (vv. 37–42); (4) on integrity (vv. 43–45); and (5) on hearing and doing (vv. 46–49).” Be Clear, this gospel favors the poor and marginalized. It is likely that Jesus is speaking to exactly this type of outcast rather than an inner circle such as he did in Matthew, “God’s word of favor on the poor, the hungry, those who weep, and those who are despised, nor is it surprising that woes are pronounced on their opposites. Luke stated as early as the Magnificat (1:46–55) that the arrival of God’s reign will be marked by a complete reversal of fortunes for the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the full and the empty.” Jesus will preach on a variety of topics over this period.

gospel is read generations after Jesus' resurrection. Luke is likely writing to a persecuted church.

13

The only way to move beyond this persecution, to move beyond our earthly version of happiness, is through grace. We truly cannot have any meaningful blessedness without God's help. And when do we ask for God's help more than when we are struggling?

This is a message of grace! It is evident in the language Jesus uses. In the blessings and woes Jesus reminds them that the present times will change in the end. Jesus tells people the future and present are one in God's eyes, "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled."<sup>14</sup>

Being blessed is a state of being rather than an action.<sup>15</sup> It is not the type of blessing we give at the end of a worship, or to a child going off to school, this is the blessing in our hearts.

Being blessed does not mean "having it all." Jesus tells us to be blessed means to be vulnerable and in need of God's grace in our lives. We have the greatest opportunity to find Christ when we are experiencing hardship; when the comforts of the world are stripped away.<sup>16 17</sup>

We live in a world where success is just as revered as it was in the Ancient Near East. How are we then filled in our hearts? It is not that we are to cause ourselves suffering, rather that we are to seek God as our true comfort in the time of trouble and tribulation.<sup>18</sup> We can only be blessed through God's grace. We can do nothing truly worthy, truly good, without God's help.

---

<sup>13</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos. "The specific focus on disciples in vv. 20-49, and their unique behaviors in the face of persecution, may suggest that Luke is presenting Jesus' teaching for a persecuted church."

<sup>14</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." They are already promised laughter. "Jesus is making the official proclamation of the way life is inside and outside the reign of God... This joining of present and future reminds us that the eschatological reality is already beginning with the advent of Jesus. Jesus has already announced as much: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled" (4:21)."

<sup>15</sup> Bailey, Kenneth E. (2008) *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove: IVP Academics. pp.68 "Two words for Blessed Eulogeō (blessing in a church or prayer), bless the sick, bless the children, bless your valentine makarios, "not part of a wish, not to invoke a blessing, rather they recognize and existing state of happiness or good fortune"

<sup>16</sup> This idea was inspired by two sources, first: Stone, M. (2020). *Living on the Plain*. New York: Church Publishing. who focuses on the word for blessed being translated as joyful. I think a better source is, Wright, N.T. (2001). *Luke for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

Second, and a better translation is from Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos. Context: LXX, makarios translates the Hebrew asher, "blessed," which occurs frequently in Pss and Prov.

<sup>17</sup> Craddock, F.B. (1990). *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. pp.85ff "Let us make one final observation. Luke is clearly addressing the poor and the despised of the earth in the literal sense of those words, not the "poor in spirit" or "those who hunger and thirst for righteousness," as in Matthew (Matt. 5:3, 6)."

<sup>18</sup> Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos. The exact quote here is quite good, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." They are already promised laughter. "Jesus is making the official proclamation of the way life is inside and outside the reign of God... This joining of present and future reminds us that the eschatological reality is already beginning with the advent of Jesus. Jesus has already announced as much: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled" (4:21)."

We confess our sins at this church even during Christmastide and Eastertide, because we are conscious of this passage; we are blessed when we mourn over our sinfulness and at the injustice of the world. We pray the prayers of the people and take part in the healing of the sick and the suffering. We are called to neither deny suffering nor pursue it.<sup>19</sup>

We are told to rejoice when we are excluded and reviled.

This is hard.

Very likely, each person in this room has been on different sides of most of these blessings. You have wept and as a Christian there are times when our life means we give up a great deal for our Lord and savior. This mirror image sees a balance and is different; it places the need for grace more on God than all of our accomplishments. If we rely on ourselves, we will get caught up in worldly issues: promotions, good grades, friends, etc. If we rely on God, we will find true grace.<sup>20</sup>

We take God out of the equation when we talk only about our personal successes. Jesus says woe, which means sadness, “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” Jesus is sad for those who are rich, because it is a human-made success rather than God being part of the journey.

Our Collect of the day gives us all the answers we need: we go to our God who is strong, while acknowledging our weakness. We recognize that we need God’s grace, because we may be too focused on all those worldly things. We know that the ones who are blessed are the ones who can rely on grace rather than earthly affirmation. On this sixth Sunday after Epiphany, we pray that we are able to be truly blessed through God’s grace. Amen.

---

<sup>19</sup> Bailey, Kenneth E. (2008 ) *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove: IVP Academics. pp.74-75

<sup>20</sup> Bailey, Kenneth E. (2008 ) *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*. Downers Grove: IVP Academics. pp.65-75