

It must be remembered that Luke does not put the stories about Jesus together in chronological order; rather, he puts them together as it suits his theological purposes. In Luke 6 he puts two incidents of conflict on the Sabbath together, because they are dealing with the same topic.

The first century Jews discussed in length about what could be done on the Sabbath. There were 39 categories that were broken down into 1,529 rules. For example, people were not supposed to lift anything beyond the weight of a dried fig on the Sabbath. They were not to leave milk to curdle, because the curdling process was viewed as the milk working. They were not to drag a chair across the ground lest they inadvertently make a furrow and would be "plowing." They were not to care for the sick on the Sabbath. Medical help could be obtained only in life-threatening situations. Something could be done to stabilize someone on their deathbed, but treatment that improved their condition was considered work and was therefore forbidden. Thus the Sabbath, which was intended to serve man and bring him refreshment, became the most burdensome and enslaving day of the week.

Although Jesus perfectly kept the OT law regarding the Sabbath and often went to the synagogue on the Sabbath to teach, He never approved or submitted to the extra-biblical teaching of His day.

Healing of a man's withered hand on the Sabbath – Luke 6:6-11; Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6

6:6 On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered.

6:7 The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him.

6:8 But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward.

6:9 And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?"

On this Sabbath the scribes and the Pharisees were at the synagogue to scrutinize Jesus so that they might find reason to accuse Him. This wasn't casual observation; it was purposeful. The hypocrisy is blatant; the very men who saw themselves as the protectors of the Sabbath wanted Jesus to violate the Sabbath so they could indict Him. Instead of seeing Jesus' miracles as evidence that He was their Messiah, they wanted to see a miracle so that they could get rid of Him.

Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking (6:8). This is a pattern in Luke. Luke 5:22 says that Jesus was aware of the reasoning in their hearts. Likewise, Luke 9:47 says, "Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart..." Luke 11:17 also says, "He knew their thoughts." In other words, Jesus knew that they wanted Him to heal on the Sabbath so they could accuse Him of being a Sabbath breaker, yet He acted anyway. Jesus was taking a defiant posture against the Sabbath law in the Judaism of His day. He repeatedly and deliberately staged Sabbath-defiance events in front of the religious leaders so that the whole system of ceremony and works would be struck down.

It so happened that a man was in the synagogue with a paralyzed hand. This was not a life-threatening condition, and so, according to the rabbinic law, the man could not be healed on the Sabbath. Jesus called him out of the crowd so that he was standing in front of everybody. He then said to the teachers of the law, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?"

Jesus' question is masterful. They could not say it was bad to do good or it was better to destroy a life than to save one. So they couldn't disagree with Jesus. But they couldn't agree with Him either. If they agreed with Jesus, then they could not accuse Him of doing wrong because they would have just given Him official authorization to act. Either they would have to affirm Jesus or condemn themselves, so they just sat there in silence.

But this question is also masterful in another way. Jesus knew what the leaders were thinking; He knew that the leaders were seeking to find reason to kill Him; they wanted to apply Sabbath law to murder the Lord of the Sabbath. He knew that they wanted to do harm, that they wanted to destroy a life. So when Jesus was asking, "is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" He was also exposing the perversion of their warped hearts. In essence He was asking: "Which of us is honoring God; is it you or Me? Am I, the One who wants to do good and save a life by showing mercy and compassion, the Sabbath breaker? Or are you, the ones who are filled with murderous intent, the Sabbath breakers? You who claim to be the law-keepers, is it *lawful* to do harm or destroy a life on the Sabbath?"

The parallel passages in the other Gospels fill out the content of this story even more. In Matthew 12:11-12 Jesus says, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Jesus' argument assumes the greater value of men over animals. Man was a special act of creation and was alone created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27). If helping a sheep that had fallen in a pit on the Sabbath was allowed, surely it wouldn't be wrong to help a man. The argument moves from lesser to greater. Neither the sheep nor the man was in a life-threatening situation; the issue is simply doing good. The religious leaders still had nothing to say.

The compassion of God, which the Jewish leaders did not understand (Matt. 12:7), comes to light in a living illustration of the true meaning of Sabbath observance and of Jesus' authority over man and the Sabbath (MacArthur, 288). Just as healing the paralytic demonstrated that Jesus had the authority to forgive sins, so the healing of the man with the paralyzed hand demonstrated that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath (Lk. 6:5).

6:10 After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored.

6:11 But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.

Jesus healed the man and his hand was completely restored. God had testified through the creative power of Christ that Jesus was the Messiah. This Sabbath day had turned into a day when the glory of God – His goodness, mercy, kindness, compassion, power and love – was displayed toward a person in need; it was a day to be filled with amazement, joy, and awe. It was a day to ponder who Jesus was and what this sign meant. . . but the Pharisees were filled with rage.

Matthew 12:14 says, "the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him." The word translated as "conspired" refers to carrying out a decision that has already been made. The leaders already knew they wanted Jesus dead; they just needed to figure out how to get the job done. Mark 3:6 says, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him." So deep was their hatred for Christ that they were even willing to gain the help of their enemies, the Herodians (Mark 3:6). The Herodians were a worldly political party that supported Herod and stood wholly opposed to everything the Pharisees believed.

We are only in the sixth chapter of Luke and the position of Judaism in relationship to Jesus is already fixed; they wanted to kill him. Legalism is a ruthless enemy of grace. It is as much a barrier to salvation as it is a barrier to faithful living after salvation (Gal. 3:3).

6:12 It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.

6:13 And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles:

6:14 Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew;

6:15 and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot;

6:16 Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Verse 12 begins with "it was at this time." The time that is being spoken about is the time when the hatred for Jesus by the Jews had reached its apex. The Jews had decided that Jesus had to be killed and were seeking an opportunity to act. Jesus, knowing this, realized that He needed to prepare His men to take over His mission when He was gone. It was at that time that Jesus chose the Twelve.

If one were to study each of the disciples it wouldn't take long to realize that they were not important people by the world's standards. Four were fishermen, one was a tax collector, and one would become a traitor. No one knows what the others did, but one thing is certain, there was no one of any importance.

There was no Pharisee, Scribe, or religious leader among them; no one trained in theology or oratory skills. This meant that God alone could get glory for the change their ministry brought.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, Paul tells believers, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God."

Verse 13 makes a switch from being disciples to being apostles. A disciple is a learner, a student, or a follower of someone. In Jesus' day famous teachers or Rabbis had individuals that physically followed them and learned from them. These were called disciples. Jesus had many disciples who went where He went. We are not told how many disciples He had at this time, but Jesus only chose twelve from among them to be apostles. What is amazing about the Twelve is that the inclusion of Judas is part of a divinely guided process (Plummer, 172).

"Apostle" literally meant "sent one." People were familiar with what an apostle was since Rabbis and the members of the Sanhedrin had apostles. Apostles were people who were sent by someone to be their official, authoritative representatives.

The fact that Jesus chose *twelve* men is of symbolic significance. When Jesus came to the earth the nation of Israel was apostate. It had modified many of the OT teachings and had created a religion of its own. The twelve tribes would be replaced with people of Jesus' own choosing. This doesn't mean that the church became Israel, for in Luke 22:29-30 Jesus told the twelve, "just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." If they were to judge Israel, then Israel hadn't been replaced by them. Rather, when Jesus sits on the Davidic throne His apostles will act as judges of the nation; they will be the new heads over God's people including the nation.

6:17 Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon,

6:18 who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured.

6:19 And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all.

Luke 6:20 and following has generated a lot of discussion. Some see this as a shortened version of Jesus' sermon in Matthew 5-7; others see the two as completely different sermons given on different occasions. Both views have their strengths and weaknesses. The following distinctions form the basis for the uncertainty (from Bock, 933).

1. Matthew has much more material than Luke (107 verses compared to 30 verses), but most agree that neither are Jesus' full sermon.
2. Luke locates the sermon on a plain; Matthew has it on a mountain.
3. Luke has the sermon after choosing the 12; Matthew has the sermon before their selection.
4. There are 13 sayings that are in Matthew's sermon that are found elsewhere in the Book of Luke.

Thus, is this the same sermon given in two slightly different, summarized forms? Or, are these two different sermons? It is most likely that these are the same sermon recorded by each author without either intending to give a word-for-word account of what was said. Rather, they were directed by the Holy Spirit to record those elements of Jesus' sermon that God wanted recorded, and in the way He wanted them recorded.

The prophetic call: Blessings (6:20-23) and Woes (6:24-26)

Jesus' message is dominated by the words "blessed" and "woe". Under each of those words are four statements. According to Jesus the blessed are the poor, the hungry, the sad, and the rejected while the cursed are the rich, the satisfied, the happy, and the popular - the exact opposite of conventional thinking.

Luke 6:20-23 forms the beginning of the Sermon and is known as the "Beatitudes." The word "beatitude" is a rough transliteration of the Latin word *beatus* meaning "blessed." Although some modern translations prefer the word "happy" over "blessed," it is a poor exchange. Although people who are blessed should be happy, blessedness cannot be reduced to happiness. Happiness is a feeling; blessedness is a state of being (Carson, 131). To be blessed is to be most favored; it is to be in the most beneficial condition. "Woe" is the opposite; it means to be in the most disfavored condition.

The Bible says that men can bless God and that God blesses men. Blessed means "to be approved." When we "approve" of God we extol Him, praise Him. When God blesses us He approves of us. Since this is God's universe there is no higher honor than to be approved by Him. Thus, blessedness is a supernatural experience of contentedness based on the fact that one's life is right with God (MacArthur, 53).

Moses in the OT had written about what constituted being blessed and cursed so the idea of "a place of blessing" was not new to the Jews. However, because they had so drifted from the truth they no longer knew what that place was. In these verses Jesus defines who is blessed and who is cursed. His message is given in a way that people can discern their spiritual condition. It lays the plumb line against which a person's life can be measured so they can determine whether they know God or not.

6:20 And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

Jesus' message is directed toward *His disciples* (6:20: turning His gaze *toward His disciples*, He began to say. . .). In this context, the disciples consist of the Twelve (who are now called apostles) and the larger crowd of people who were committed to following Jesus and learning from Him in varying degrees (6:17). The larger crowd consisted of people who were attracted to Jesus, people who believed in Him, people who were new to following Him, people who were enamored by His miracles, and people who were tired of the whole thing and were on their way out. They were the mixed multitude whose beliefs and commitment ran the gamut. Jesus addresses them because He wants them to know that there is a criterion by which they can evaluate their life and determine if they are blessed or cursed. It is a benchmark test for true salvation.

The first benchmark is expressed in the words, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." The blessing promised is in the present tense; God is not just promising a future experience, but a present one. Those to whom Jesus is addressing have been approved by God and possess the kingdom of God even as He speaks.

The word 'poor' itself means 'to cower' or 'cringe'. In the Bible it often has a double connotation of being physically destitute and being reliant upon God. In the OT the poor are those who look to and depend on God in order to live (Psalm 14:6; 22:24; 25:16; 34:6; 40:17; 69:29). In Luke 16:19-31 it was used of Lazarus, a beggar who was totally destitute. The poor can offer nothing to others, nor did they even try. All they could do was cry for mercy. Thus, the poor are viewed as the meek or humble, and the OT often speaks of God's promise to them in terms of vindication or protection (Exo. 22:25-27; Deut. 15:7-11; 2 Sam. 22:28; Psa. 72:2, 4, 12; Isa. 3:14-15; 10:2; Jer. 22:16; Ezek. 16:49; 18:12; Amos 8:4; Zech. 7:10). These verses leave the impression that one's compassion and love for a fellow human is measured by one's treatment of the poor.

The "poor" whom Jesus is speaking about are not just those in a socio-economic class; they are those who recognize their need of the gospel. They have already been mentioned in Luke 4:18-19 where Jesus quoted Isaiah 61: "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor . . . to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." The immediate context also makes this clear for the promise is not that they will become rich, but that they will enter the kingdom of God. In other words, it is not a change in their worldly position, but in their spiritual condition that Jesus is offering (the antithesis of poverty is to inherit the kingdom - Liefeld, 891; Marshall, 249, 250; Alford, 497). In addition, the Bible nowhere teaches that poorness qualifies one for salvation. Later in 6:22, the poor are those who are persecuted because of *the Son of Man*. Lastly, Matthew is not as vague as Luke; he wrote, "Blessed are the poor *in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

Guelich's summary definition is helpful: "The poor in Judaism referred to those in desperate need (socioeconomic element), whose helplessness drove them to a dependent relationship with God

(religious element) for the supplying of their needs and vindication. Both elements are consistently present. . . "(quoted by Bock, 574).

At the very outset of the sermon we learn that we do not have the spiritual resources to put the sermon's precepts into practice. We cannot fulfill God's standards ourselves. We must come to Him, acknowledge our spiritual poverty, and empty ourselves of self-righteousness and false conceptions of our great worth. Emptied of these things we will be ready for Him to fill us (Carson, Sermon, 18).

6:21a "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied."

The second and third beatitudes are related to the consequences of being poor. The hungry and the poor are often paired together in the OT and both are addressed in comforting language. A spiritual connotation is never too far removed from the physically hungry. The hungry, like the poor, are very much aware of their inabilities and turn to God for help.

The promise to the hungry is that they will be satisfied. Unlike the preceding verse where the promise is in the present tense (see verse 20), those who hunger will not be satisfied until a future day. The parallel passage in Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is speaking of spiritual hunger. There it says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst *for righteousness*, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6).

Note the strong connection between spiritual and physical satisfaction in the following verses:

- Psalm 107:8-9: Let them give thanks to the LORD for . . . He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.
- Isaiah 25:6: The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine.
- Isaiah 49:10: "They will not hunger or thirst, Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them And will guide them to springs of water."
- Isaiah 55:1-2: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance."
- Luke 14:15: When one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"
- Luke 13:29: And they will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God."

6:21b "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."

Like the previous beatitude, a comparison is made between today's physical experiences and what will be received in the future. The same perspective of the need of and dependency on God fills the thought.

Suffering is experienced by the poor and it also accompanies the walk of the believer in this life (Lk. 6:23); but those who remain faithful will be rewarded with joy. This future promise occurs abundantly in the OT.

- Isaiah 60:20: "Your sun will no longer set, Nor will your moon wane; For you will have the LORD for an everlasting light, And the days of your mourning will be over."
- Isaiah 61:2-3: To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified."
- Isaiah 65:19: "I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying."
- Jeremiah 31:13: "Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance, And the young men and the old, together, For I will turn their mourning into joy And will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow."

6:22 "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man."

6:23 "Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."

The fourth beatitude shows that the Beatitudes as a whole have a spiritual base and are not to just be taken as socioeconomic in character (Bock, 577). Jesus anticipates spiritual opposition toward those who follow Him, but promises a blessing for their association with Him. This must have been especially comforting to the disciples when they heard this, since they had been steadily experiencing more hostility from the leaders in Judaism, and would face persecution later (Acts 3-4, 7; 21-28).

To align oneself with Jesus would be to take a public stand that would be potentially offensive and produce a reaction. The rejection they will face is stated in four ideas that depict a heightening of opposition: hatred, ostracization, insults, and scorn.

Verse 23 gives the one command in the Beatitudes: be glad when persecution comes. When we realize that being persecuted for the sake of Jesus is the cause for God to show His favor to us, and is aligning ourselves with the greatest servants of God, the prophets, we will rejoice.