

**The Yale Divinity School Bible Study
New Canaan, Connecticut**

The Gospel of Luke

**III: Luke 6:12-8:55
Jesus Begins to Teach**

Jesus has now been established as a prophetic preacher and, like prophets of old he has the power to heal. Yet something more than Elijah or Elishah is involved in the work of Jesus. From the first days of his ministry he called disciples to his side (5:1-11, 27-32) and distinguished them from other known groups, the disciples of John or the Pharisees (5:33). The next section of the Gospel continues the story of community formation and begins to sketch a new picture of Jesus. In addition to proclamation and healing, he is also a teacher of a distinctive way of life into which his disciples are being initiated.

The first major block of teaching consists of a sermon delivered by Jesus “on a plain” (Contrast Matthew’s setting of a similar sermon, “on a mount,” Matt 5:1). The first section of the sermon consists of “beatitudes” balanced by a series of prophetic judgments or “woes.” The beatitudes here, unlike their counterparts in Matthew which focus on the way people behave (Matt 5:3-11), comment on the conditions that people face. If people are now in a sorry state, poor, hungry, mourning, they will experience a change for the better. If people are now rich, full, and rejoicing, their situation too will change, for the worse. When? How? The gospel does not offer a definite answer. Matthew’s Jesus speaks more as a teacher of virtue. Luke’s teaching Jesus begins his lecture in a prophetic mode, but when and how the prophecy is to be fulfilled remains an open question!

What follows in Luke’s version of the great sermon parallels sayings recorded in Matt 5:36-48, without Matthew’s organizing structure. Perhaps reflecting more accurately the common source he shared with Matthew, Luke’s gospel focuses on the direct and challenging calls of Jesus to love in the most trying of circumstances, to pray for enemies, to respond to violence with non-violence, to give aid without question. Following these calls to radical love and non-violence, Jesus challenges his disciples to love without regard to the worthiness of the beloved, to love even enemies. All of this exhortation reaches its climax in the admonition to be merciful as God is merciful (6:36), a marked contrast to Matthew’s parallel call to perfection (Matt 5:48).

The sermon continues with other known sayings, not to judge, to give, to remove the beam from one’s own eye rather than the mote from the neighbor’s. The sermon culminates with images of the fruitful tree (6:43-45) and the sure foundation (6:4-49).

Luke is probably not responsible for the collection of the sayings of Jesus assembled into this homily, but he puts his own stamp on the collection with the summons to be merciful. That may even be the way in which the evangelist tries to rationalize the Teacher’s extreme claims.

After the sermon Jesus continues his activity of healing, treating the son of a centurion who utters a famous expression of humility (7:6). The healing ministry is carried

3. What is the significance of the choice of a woman as the paradigm of a sinner whom Jesus forgives in Luke 7? How does this woman relate to other female characters in the gospel?

For Further Study:

Alan Kirk, "‘Love your enemies,’ The Golden Rule, and Ancient Reciprocity (Luke 6:27-35)," *JBL* 122 (2003) 667-86.

Charles A. Cosgrove, "A Woman’s Unbound Hair in the Greco-Roman World, with Special Reference to the story of the ‘Sinful Woman’ in Luke 7:36-50," *JBL* 124 (2005) 675-92