



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 6:17-26**

To begin learning about Luke's account of the Beatitudes.

## The Growing Crowds

In 1991, a small, relatively unknown grunge-rock band began touring around the Seattle area in small clubs, playing several tracks off of their recently recorded upcoming album in order to promote it. Struggling to survive, they lived out of a van and barely had money to get from one gig to another. By 1992, they were playing sold-out stadiums around the world and were one of the biggest names on the planet. The album? *Nevermind*. The band? *Nirvana*. It did not take long for them to garner a following. They became an international success seemingly overnight. They were doing something compelling that a lot of people wanted to see in person, and they traveled from all over to see them live.

Midway through Luke chapter 6, Jesus has amassed a sizable following. Just two chapters ago, Jesus was in His hometown ministering and teaching, and the people there were asking "Is not this Joseph's son" (Lk. 4:22). Now, by Luke 6:17, just after His selection of the twelve apostles (Lk. 6:12-16), there was awaiting Him a "a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon." Jesus was doing and saying compelling things that a lot of people wanted to see, and they traveled from all over to experience it.

## The Beatitudes

After coming down to the "level place" and healing and ministering to the multitudes, verse 20 says, "He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said: Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." This

marks the beginning of the famous *Beatitudes*, a lengthy portion of teaching that Matthew also chronicles in Matthew chapter 5, albeit a little differently. Luke begins the first portion of the Beatitudes with four “blessed” statements followed by four “woe” statements, and they are connected to one another in chiasmic form. In other words, the first “blessed” statement corresponds to the first “woe” statement, the second to the second, and so on. Below is a breakdown of the statements back to back for the sake of comparison.

### **THE POOR AND THE RICH**

Verse 20 includes the first “blessed” statement: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” The term “blessed” throughout these first four statements (Gk. μακάριος) is usually reserved for the upper social caste and it entails enjoying wealth, prosperity, happiness, blessings, and good fortune. However, the New Testament typically uses it apart from any kind of material blessing and instead focuses on more qualitative characteristics such as happiness, joy, and a general sense of well-being. Still, there is intentionality in the usage of this word. Jesus is speaking to a crowd that likely included both upper and lower class people. When He says the word “blessed,” the inclination of the listener was likely to expect the following words to apply to the upper class, and yet the characteristics and experiences He attaches this word to are firmly lower class in nature.

Here, in verse 20, the first statement is a worthy example of such reversal of classes. “Blessed are you who are poor,” is the very definition of applying an upper class term to a lower class person. Why does Jesus say this? Perhaps it is because the poor are near and dear to the heart of Jesus. In the aforementioned sermon He preached in His hometown of Nazareth in chapter 4, He taught from Isaiah 61:1: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the **poor**; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.” Deuteronomy 15:1-11 sets aside a means by which all debts were to be cancelled, and the poor are to be cared for and re-established back to sustainability. There are warnings against slothfulness in Proverbs because it leads to poverty, and while those passages seem to be almost critical of the poor, they are actually intended to be passages of warning. God hardly cares to see humanity in a “healthy and wealthy” Western mentality; that does not mean that He is indifferent to those who are so impoverished that they are unable to survive. Jesus begins this sermon by reminding the poor and destitute that while they do not have much, they will one day inherit the greatest possible inheritance: the kingdom of God. By contrast, verse 24 says: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” They have received their reward, and need no further consolation. This would invite the terrifying question: “Do we (the rich) **not** get the kingdom?”

### **THE HUNGRY AND THE FULL**

Verse 21 continues: “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.” Again, there is a reversal in fortunes between the privileged and the destitute. Those who are hungry will be satisfied (Gk. χορτάζω), a word that conveys the idea of not just being full but gorged. In contrast, verse 25: “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.” Jesus is making the point that those who are in need will have their needs filled by God, but those who have no needs have no reason to be dependent upon Him. Beyond that, there is a connection to hunger and thirst within Luke’s Gospel and the Old Testament that should be mentioned. Mary quotes Psalm 107:9 in her famous *Magnificat* (Lk. 1:53), a psalm that deals with both the hungry and thirsty: “For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, and the hungry soul He has filled with what is good.” The *Magnificat* was a song that pronounced the goodness of God towards her, and also predicted the kind of ministry her Son would usher in. Jesus’ words here bring fulfillment to Mary’s song of praise.

**THE WEeping AND THE LAUGHING**

The second part of verse 21 reads: “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” Jesus moves from hunger, a physical ailment, to weeping, another physical ailment. Those who weep are clearly those who are in some kind of pain or deep need. The one who weeps would hardly be considered “blessed” by societal standard, but again, Jesus turns everything upside down. Weeping is usually connected to mourning (Ja. 4:9; Rev. 18:11). This kind of weeping imagined here is likely connected to the kind of mourning and weeping that comes from repentance of sin as indicated by the temporal marker “now.” In other words, it’s better to repent now rather than later. Those who are repentant will be met with a radical undoing of all that has harmed them (Rev. 21:4). In contrast, the latter part of verse 25 reads: “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” Those who do not repent will laugh now but will be met with dread on judgment day (Matt. 12:36-37).

**THE HATED AND THE LOVED**

Verses 22 and 23 complete the four “blessed” statements: “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.” Finally, there is a guarantee of opposition for those who follow Jesus. This kind of rejection, however, is to be celebrated because it mirrors what happened to the prophets in the Old Testament. In contrast to this, verse 26 says: “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” In other words, Jesus is making the point that when you are loved by the world rather than hated, you have more in common with the false prophets than the prophets sent by God who spoke truth. The idea that Christians should be loved and celebrated in the world is simply not biblical. Standing for biblical truth warrants condemnation for the world. They will “exclude you, revile you and spurn your name as evil.” You will not be welcomed by them, but you will receive the same honor as the prophets who stayed the course regardless of the persecution they faced.

## What About Now?

This first portion of the Beatitudes is simply a comparison between those who depend upon and live for Jesus, and those who are self-sufficient and lukewarm with regard to what the Bible teaches. The former group will be met with comfort and hope because they, against all difficulty, remain faithful to God in Christ. On the other hand, there are those who live for themselves. They do not stand for truth unless it is convenient, and they care for their own desires and needs to the detriment of others. They are the upper class of the world, but they will not inherit the kingdom and will be filled with sadness and desolation in the end. The takeaway is evaluating what group you belong to, and why? What changes do you need to make? Do you need to repent? What strides are you taking to live for Jesus?

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Luke 6:17-19. From where did Jesus come? What was He doing prior to this passage? Where did He go to and what did He begin doing? Who came to see Him there?

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2. Read Luke 6:20. What did Jesus do and say? What does “blessed” mean? What is backwards about this?

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 6:21. In your own words, write the meaning of these next two statements that Jesus makes. What does Jesus mean?

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2. Read Luke 6:22-23. Summarize this last statement in your own words. What do these verses mean?

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 6:24. What is the significance of this statement? What other “blessed” statement is it connected to?

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2. Read Luke 6:25a. In your own words, what is the meaning of this statement? What “blessed” statement is it connected to?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 6:25b. In your own words, what is the meaning of this statement? What “blessed” statement is it connected to?

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2. Read Luke 6:26. In your own words, what is the meaning of this statement? What “blessed” statement is it connected to?

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## Week 21 Discussion: Basic Needs Matter

In Luke 6:17-26, Jesus begins the Beatitudes with four “blessed” statements and four “woe” statements that all have to do with basic needs. Talk as a group about how important these needs seem to be to the heart of God, and by comparison, how important they are to you.

1. Icebreaker: Do you think it’s important for Christians to help other people with basic needs? Why or why not?
2. Why do you suppose Jesus is so concerned with the poor? Read Isaiah 61:1 and Deuteronomy 15:1-11. What is the big idea in both of these passages?
3. What are some practical ways Christians can help those who are poor and destitute?
4. Has anyone ever helped you when you were in need? If so, share about it, and how it made you feel.
5. Who in your life could you help right now? What is preventing you from doing that?

6. How can the church better empower Christians to meet tangible needs of other people?

## Takeaways:

1. Jesus came down to teach a large crowd after selecting His twelve apostles.
2. The Beatitudes begin with contrasting statements about people who are either in need or self-serving, and what they can expect in the future.