The Holy Gospel according to Luke 6: 17-26

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.  They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.  And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

**Blessings and Woes**

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,  
    for yours is the kingdom of God.  
“Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
    for you will be filled.  
“Blessed are you who weep now,  
    for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.  Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich,  
    for you have received your consolation.  
“Woe to you who are full now,  
    for you will be hungry.  
“Woe to you who are laughing now,  
    for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Jesus had many disciples, the word disciple means followers, and he selected 12 of these disciples to be his close associates that he called apostles. So, what is the difference? While a disciple is a student, one who learns from a teacher, and in fact, anybody who follows Jesus is by the definition a disciple. But an apostle is a person sent to deliver those teachings to others. "Apostle" means messenger, he who is sent. The Apostle is anointed to teach the Word; the disciple is a follower of an anointed teacher. The Apostles 'followed' Jesus and were thus his disciples also. A disciple or follower follows Jesus or those that teach His word but are not Apostles/teachers of the Word. They were appointed by Jesus, and another was then appointed to replace Judas. All eleven left behind chose Matthias as the new 12th Apostle. Then Jesus directly appointed a 13th, Paul. His is considered the most influential in establishing Christianity.  
A narrower definition often regards the Apostles as the original 12. But, according to Luke, these 12 appointed another seventy-two who were to go out and spread the good news. There were seventy-two disciples, known in the [Eastern Christian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Christianity) traditions as the seventy-two apostles. They were early emissaries of [Jesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus) mentioned in the [Gospel of Luke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gospel_of_Luke).  I cannot find if the 72 includes the original 12. The later appointments were recruited by the original 12 to go out into the world and spread the word of God. The Apostles were appointed by the Apostles who came before them. It was a passing on but could only have been appointed by existing Apostles. Later on, this would have morphed into the appointment of Priests.   
It appears that now days an apostle appointment, apparently includes self-appointments by the Destiny Church here in New Zealand. I guess that makes it 73.  
In this reading Luke demonstrates that while Jesus’ life and ministry were intrinsically linked to God’s historic covenant with the house of Israel, they were also extended to all people of all nations. While both Matthew and Luke tell this story, it is interesting that Matthew has Jesus on top of a mountain – the sermon on the mount, delivering the Beatitudes; Luke has him coming down from the mountain where he has been praying, to stand on a level place – the sermon on the plain. Luke makes it clear that the Beatitudes are not about righteousness in general. He has offered a modified version. Matthew had put Jesus on a mountain to give his last charge to the disciples, whereas Luke has him down here.

Because Luke’s sermon on the plain has drawn less attention than Matthew’s sermon on the mount, interpreters might not bring to the text the same exaggerated expectations of us that come with the Matthew version. A careful reading of the passage, together with a comparison of Luke’s version with that of Matthew shows to me that both evangelists have shaped the material very much to address the needs of their own communities. I guess that after all, that is the fundamental task of preaching.

Show Chart of Beatitudes on screen.

Matthew began the sermon on the mount with nine beatitudes, Luke began the sermon on the plain with four beatitudes and four woes. Luke’s version of the Beatitudes differs from Matthew’s – it is much shorter, in the sense that both the list of Beatitudes, and each individual Beatitude is more briefly expressed.   
I have here a difference in perspective. Matthew has me looking up at Jesus above me. Like Moses on a mountain top between earth and heaven, the Beatitudes appear as a high law, a covenant with the community I should aspire to belong to. Here the Beatitudes are presented by Matthew as a framework of disciplined living to which I can look up to and grow in the right relation with God and my neighbour.  
However, Luke has brought him down, and I am looking at Jesus on my level, because he has knelt down to touch someone sick or lame, now the Beatitudes appear to be immediate, every day, and inseparable from the joys and sufferings of life.   
Here is the difference. Matthew spiritualizes the beatitudes by addressing the third person, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”. Luke says simply in addressing the second person, “Blessed are you who are poor”. Matthew says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness”. Luke says, “Blessed are you who hunger now”.  
In Luke the blessed are just the plain poor and hungry. This sermon on the plain was not intended to be an idyllic picture of utopia. This was a gospel for hard living, in the down and dirty mess of kids without food, dead husbands, and a broken leg that will not let me carry water back home from the well. Luke is ramming home a point to the rich who enjoy big meals with hearty laughter and good times. His point is, enjoy it while you can, because is does not last and you too should offer a lending hand to the poor.  
So, what is the difference in my perspective? In Matthew I sense Jesus looking down, inviting me to come up and see the big picture – a new covenant community of pure hearts and a burning hunger for righteousness. In Luke I sense Jesus looking up at me, as if to say, what are you doing right this minute? There are people down here who need help. A temptation here is to interpret this as a simple reversal as if those who now have wealth, eat well, laugh, and enjoy high standing according to the standards of the old age, just might one day be hungry themselves.   
But a longer view of Luke’s attitude towards persons with wealth and high social standing reveals a pastoral concern: Luke wanted such folk to avoid condemnation by putting some of their material resources at the service of the community. It would appear that Luke intended to shock persons with wealth into repentance and sharing their money and goods.   
Luke made it absolutely clear that the Beatitudes were not about righteousness in general. Instead, he brought us down to earth. The sermon on the plain was certainly not about our aspirations to Godliness. His message was about a community of disciples standing with the grieving, poor and hungry of the land – as Jesus did. They are about practising the presence of Jesus through acts of care and compassion. He summoned us to begin with practice, and there is a lesson here for the church.   
Our primary mission, as outlined in Matthew, is to go, to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach. However, Luke has said, if we are to be faithful to the Lord’s example, we must also address mundane needs as well—food, clothing, shelter, health, safety, disaster relief, and education. These needs, which the church has tried to meet over the centuries, and is endeavouring to meet today, are nearly endless.  
Luke insisted that Christian life begins with ministry, not with belief. Luke asked us to follow Jesus into the crowd, to learn about him, not by his teachings of higher law and eternal truth on a mountain top, but from working alongside him at his level, down here, on the plain. To do so is in itself a blessing.

Amen