

PART 7: JESUS: OUR AUTHOR, *OUR AUTHORITY*

By David Fields

Luke 6

I. Establishing and Exercising Authority

Luke 6:1-11: Jesus lets his hungry disciples pick and eat grain on the Sabbath—a day set apart under Jewish law for rest rather than work. The Pharisees challenge him.

Jesus points to David's example as biblical precedent for showing mercy to the hungry. Then he makes a claim far beyond anything David would say: "*The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath.*"

In **Genesis**, the Sabbath marks the completion of God's creative work as he takes up his rule over creation. In Exodus, the law given to Moses commands people to keep the Sabbath holy, recognizing God's rule and care. They do this by stopping to rest, worship, and celebrate.

So, when Jesus says: "*The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath,*" this is claiming a kind of authority that belongs to God alone.

Luke 6:12-16: We see this authority emphasized again in the next scene. After a night of prayer, Jesus calls twelve disciples out of the group that is following him and designates them as his apostles.

We might wonder: why twelve? And why men? For a very good reason. In the same way that God constituted a people for himself from the twelve sons of Jacob in Genesis, Jesus is now "reconstituting Israel" around himself. That's a huge deal. This is a move that would be subverting God's own authority. Unless, of course, Jesus shares that very authority.

Spoiler alert: he does.

"*Authenticity is overrated. If you don't know who you are.*
They say life comes down to what you make it;
what if you don't know where to start?
All this pressure's got us feeling anxious.
We're a slave to a hungry heart.
Authenticity is overrated if you don't know who you are."

"*I don't know who I am unless you tell me.*
Carrying the future's getting heavy,
underneath the weight of what I can't create.
I don't know who I am unless you tell me."

– Sam McCabe, "*Authenticity is Overrated.*"

And, mercifully, Jesus does tell us. He can speak to who we are, and what our lives are for. We can authentically be ourselves when we know our Creator's intent for us. We are relieved of the weight of trying to 'create and maintain' an identity for myself. Free of the anxiety of making life count on my own terms.

II. Living the Way of King Jesus

"*Blessed are you who are poor,*
for yours is the kingdom of God." – Luke 6:20

If you're familiar with the Bible, you will notice right away, this sounds a lot like the way Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, but with some serious modification.

Matthew 5:3-12: Eight "Blessings" or Beatitudes

Luke 6:20-26: Four "Blessings" and Four Corresponding "Woes"

Matthew 5:3: "*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Luke 6:20: "*Blessed are you who are poor,*
for yours is the kingdom of God."

Luke addresses the poor directly. "…*You* who are poor… *yours* is the kingdom," where Matthew has it in a general sense.

Luke 6 reflects a number of the same points Jesus makes in Matthew 5-7, but has far less detail, some different order of the material, but ends with the same story – an analogy of building our house on the rock, not on sand.

Is this Luke's version of the same sermon, but modified for his particular audience and purposes? Or did Jesus preach a similar message at a different time, and that's what Luke is recording here?

Excursus: The Synoptic Problem

These differences between the three most similar Gospel – Matthew, Mark, and Luke – is what biblical scholars call the "*Synoptic Problem.*" Synoptic means "seen together" because they are so "similar." These three share so much material, where John's Gospel only shares 8% of the same material.

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In short, the problem is what do we do when there are variations in what seems to be the same story or material – like in our text?

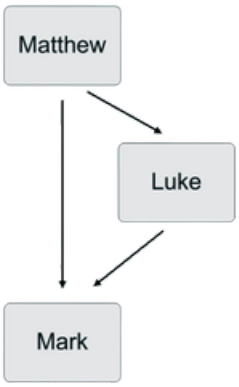
1. **Ancient history writing is very different than our modern standards.** They are not only reporting what "happened" but even more interested in "what does it mean?"

2. **All the Gospel writers are "summarizing" Jesus' teachings and his life.** Like, they could never record *everything* Jesus said like it's being filmed.

3. **Luke tells us he is not an eyewitness, but he is doing research.** Then he puts it together, arranging the material to present in an "orderly way." So, he tells us he's working with multiple sources. the writer of Matthew's Gospel does not claim to be an eyewitness either; we really don't know if this Matthew is "Levi", the tax collector who gets renamed Matthew, or a different Matthew.

Two Common Options [among others]:

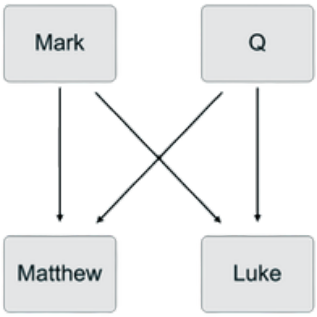
Griesbach hypothesis



Matthew is written first, and Luke has a copy and is drawing from it as one source of this information, arranging it along with other info he has, to focus on a particular aspect of Jesus' teaching. This says Matthew writes first, and Luke and Mark use Matthew as a source.

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Two Source Hypothesis



Mark writes first, and Matthew and Luke are both drawing on Mark for much of their information. They have another shared source [info not found in Mark], maybe a written document, or maybe a body of oral tradition that the early witness of Jesus has been teaching. Scholars call this "Q" – from the German *Quelle* meaning "source."

Either of these could account for the similarities and differences.

Or they are reporting on two distinct teaching times. Matthew, recording Jesus' Sermon on the Mount; Luke recording his Sermon on the Plain.

Why Four Gospels Anyways?

Early Christians rejected proposals to "harmonize" the Four Gospels into one that "smooths out" all the tensions. They recognized that each of these authors is inspired by God to put what they did, in the way that they did, with all the tensions it might create for us. And God gives us each of these to fill in our understanding of Jesus.

The Bible is not faxed down from heaven, skipping this very 'human' element. It's the work of God the Holy Spirit, speaking through very human authors, in their own times and for specific purposes, to produce what can really and truly be considered "God's word to us."

We have four different authors, writing from four different perspectives.

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Consider this: If you have multiple witnesses at a car crash or crime scene; they are all going to tell you what they saw from their unique angle, their perspective. They will not all say exactly the same thing. If they did, that would make you highly suspicious; that would sound like they collaborating together or were coached. It would tell you that they were not telling the truth, if anything.

One person might have seen something from their angle that the others couldn't see.

Which persons story of the crash is true? Well, all of them of course. All of them are telling the truth, through their unique perspective.

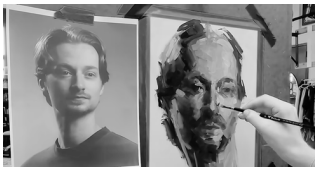
Four Artists:



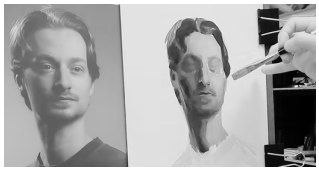
Now, imagine four artists, each painting a portrait of the same person. Their brush strokes, the way they mix their paint, the angle from which they are looking at the subject. They won't be identical – even if they looked at each other's work. They will be district paintings, but they will all reveal the person they are painting. You'll clearly "recognize" the person being painted, but the variety of perspectives of each artist will only serve to enhance your appreciation of the one being painted.



Artist 1



Artist 2



Artist 3



Artist 4

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Having **four gospels**, where the writers – having far more information than they could possibly ever encapsulate – and having reasons to write certain things for their audience, that only enriches our understanding of Jesus too.

III. Hearing Jesus' Blessings and Woes

A. The Future/Promise Lens:

Jesus' blessings and woes is in concert with the language of the Hebrew prophets. He's announcing the heart of what God has always envisioned – because again – he is the Author of Life. He knows how it works best.

Jesus is saying, "*The pressure you feel, the challenge you face, the way you are being treated for following me, that is not the end of the story.*"

In God's world "restored" will be enough for everyone, with no oppression or fear. Like, this beautiful picture we hear of in Michah 4:4: "*Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.*"

B. The Moral/Spiritual Lens:

Why? Why are the poor, poor? Or the hungry, the sad, the mistreated, why are they experiencing that?"

When the 'rich' that are critiqued in the Bible it's not because they have the financial stability to be able to feed their kids, but those who grow wealthy on the backs of the those they oppress. They remain wealthy by mistreating those who work for them, and have a stingy heart, unmoved toward the poor in generosity.

Listen to how James says it in James 5: "*Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.*" – James 5:4-5a.

Jesus reminds us that we do live in a moral universe, that Jesus is the measure of that morality, and that Jesus will see to it that those who suffer injustice are vindicated.

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C. Challenging Assumptions Lens:

So, by saying, "You're blessed!" to the poor, the hungry, the mistreated for his sake, he's flipping the common view in Jesus' day that basically says: "Oh, the rich must be "blessed" because they have lived well. The poor are poor because, somehow, they deserve it." And Jesus is challenging that, flipping that script – both then. And now.

We can't assume that people are at the top because they're good. Too often it's the opposite. They're on the top, top of the social status ladder, top of the power structure, in the top tier financially, because they're doing shady things.

"*But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;*
I had nearly lost my foothold.
[3] *For I envied the arrogant*
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
[4] *They have no struggles;*
their bodies are healthy and strong.
[5] *They are free from common human burdens;*
they are not plagued by human ills.
[6] *Therefore pride is their necklace;*
they cloth themselves in violence....
[12] *This is what the wicked are like—*
always free of care, they go on amassing wealth."
– Psalm 73:2-6, 12

Implications: This text, like that of James, is an invitation for us, especially for us who do have financial advantage or who find ourselves privileged by where we happen to live in the world, to think about how your own wealth is generated.

- If we have investments, are they something we can be proud of? Are my investments supporting companies known for bad practices?
- Or how is my perspective on wealth affecting how I am voting? Am I primarily thinking about how I maintain whatever I have, or am I concerned about justice? About how those who are disadvantaged treated?
- Am I reflecting the mercy of God?

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Jesus is clear, like the Psalmist, that "wealth" does not equal "blessed" by God, like: "You must be pleasing God and you deserve it." No. Jesus says, "Woe to you who think like that; who act out of a place of self-centeredness."

IV. Listening to Jesus as My Authority

"*It is impossible to trust Jesus, or anyone else, in matters where we do not believe him to be competent….He is not just nice, he is brilliant. He is the smartest [person] who ever lived.*" – Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

Jesus ends this whole sermon by basically saying, "Don't just listen to my words. Do it!"

"*Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?*" - Luke 6:46

Jesus is showing us the truth of how things are and how things really work according to his kingdom.

And that includes things like: "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.*" (Luke 6:27). And, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*" (Luke 6:36).

It is Jesus' death in our place, his victorious defeat of death in his resurrection, the gift of his Spirit living in us, that Jesus not only has the authority to teach us how to live, but gives us the example of what it looks like, and the power to begin enacting it.

But when we take Jesus' promise of forgiveness and a new heart into us, will we find both the motivation and the strength to begin living in line with the kingdom.

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Additional Notes on Enemy - Love and Turning the Other Cheek

Jesus will go on to give some very clear instruction next, particularly about how to live in a world that may be hostile to those who are his followers.

"*But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold it your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:27-31).

I know. That sounds impossible. This is wildly different than how the world around us functions. That's exactly the point. What Jesus is bringing to bear is the world remade. The world brought back into line with God's intent.

It probably matters to explain, particularly, what Jesus means by "*Turn the other cheek*," to make clear that he is not at all excusing those who are abusive – in the home or anywhere for that matter – or creating an environment where bullies just go on assaulting people.

In Jesus' world, a slap on the cheek was an act of violence, but not intending so much physical harm: they had swords, or stones, or much more lethal ways to go about enacting actual, physical harm if they wanted.

A slap on the cheek was a sign of rejection, an insult, or a way to put someone "*in their place*" so to speak. We see numerous examples in the book of Acts. What Jesus is saying is that his followers do not retaliate – with physical violence, yes. But also, with insult or rudeness toward those who intend to insult them.

To "*turn the other cheek*" was to essentially say, "*It didn't work.*" What was intended to "shut them up," had the opposite effect of the early followers of Jesus. They would "turn the other cheek," refusing to retaliate, by continuing to share the news of Jesus and his kingdom ways, overcoming evil with good (see Romans 12:19-21). They didn't stop. And we won't either. They didn't retaliate. And we won't either.

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Open Up

How do you tend to feel when you hear the word "authority"? On a scale from full blown punk-rock attitude ("No way anyone is telling me how to live my life!") to excessively compliant ('doe-eyed' "yes boss!" approach), where do you tend to fall?

To what extent does the legitimate claim on authority and character of that "claimant" have on how you respond to authority?

Dig In

1. Read **Luke 6:1-11**. What is the primary claim that Jesus is making about himself in these two "Sabbath scenes"? What is the primary character trait that Jesus is revealing? Why might that matter to you?

2. Slowly read **Luke 6:27-45**. Every person, listen for, and underline any of the instructions that you feel are particular "growth areas" for you.

   a. Take a moment to consider what it might look like to let Jesus lead you in this area – moving you to reflect and resemble him.

   b. As you feel led, share with your group how you would like to take seriously the instructions that you feel most significant to your growth in this season.

3. Finally, read **Luke 6:46-49**. Remind each other that God's grace is sufficient to help us say "yes" to Jesus' loving leadership, his mercy-filled-authority.

Pray

Pray for any specific challenges or joys for your group. Pray specifically for those areas in Jesus' teaching that you need to keep growing in. Give thanks that God the Holy Spirit fills and empowers us to be formed more and more like Jesus.