

Luke's Sermon on the Plain

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The questions here asked of the long Sermon in Luke 6 are: (1) its theological content, and (2) its internal structure as an early Christian sermon. On the latter question, the aid of stylistic analysis will be cautiously sought.¹ We may begin with the received text of the Sermon. The A, B, C divisions will be used in the stylistic analysis to follow.

Text of the Sermon (Luke 6:20-49)

A [Lk 6:20b] Blessed are ye poor, for yours in the Kingdom of God. [21] Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh. [22] Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you and reproach you and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. [23] Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in Heaven, for in the same manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

B [6:24] But woe unto you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation. [25] Woe unto you, ye that are full now, for ye shall hunger. Woe, ye that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep. [26] Woe, when all men shall speak well of you, for in the same manner did their fathers to the false prophets.²

C [6:27] But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, [28] bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you. [29] To him that smiteth thee on the cheek, offer also the other, and from him that taketh away thy cloak, withhold not thy coat also. [30] Give to every one that asketh thee, and of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again.

D [6:31] And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. [32] And if ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? For even sinners love those that love them. [33] And if ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have ye? For even sinners do the same. [34] And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive again as much.

¹For details of that method, see Brooks **Chinese**.

²This reverses the usual expectation, that wealth and good repute are signs of God's favor, and that poverty and distress are signs of God's disapproval.

E [6:35] But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, never despairing, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High, for he is kind toward the unthankful and evil. [36] Be ye merciful, even as your Father is merciful. [37] And judge not, and ye shall not be judged; and condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; release, and ye shall be released; [38] Give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.³

F [6:39]⁴ And he spake also a parable unto them: Can the blind guide the blind? Shall they not both fall into a pit? [40] The disciple is not above his teacher; but every one when he is perfected shall be as his teacher.⁵ [41] And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how canst thou say unto thy brother, Brother, let me cast out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.⁶

G [6:43] For there is no good tree that bringeth forth corrupt fruit, nor again a corrupt tree that bringeth forth good fruit. [44] For each tree is known by its fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. [45] The good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good,⁷ and the evil out of the evil bringeth forth that which is evil. For out of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaketh.

H [6:46] And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?⁸ [47] Every one that cometh unto me, and heareth my words, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. [48] He is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock, and when a flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it, because it had been well builded. [49] But he that heareth and doeth not, is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation, against which the stream brake, and straightway it fell in, and the ruin of that house was great.⁹

³This is Luke's transactional theory. Note the similarity with a discordant section of the Sermon on the Sea, Mk 4:24-25, perhaps an addition to that Sermon (Brooks **Parables** 191).

⁴6:39a ("And he spake also a parable unto them") marks a transition to points borrowed from the Epistle of Jacob. For the formation and date of that Epistle, see Brooks **Jacob**.

⁵Compare Jacob 3:1, "Be not many of you teachers."

⁶The prohibition of judging within the congregation ("brothers") is a step on the way to the later "Love Commandment," which become prominent in the Deutero-Pauline era. One of its effects was to forbid argument about first principles within the community.

⁷This may be the ancestor of Mt 13:52, "Every scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old." The two treasures are the Scriptures (the old) and the teachings of Jesus (the new).

⁸A rebuke to those who claim to be followers, but do not in fact follow.

⁹This conclusion is a warning to follow these teachings. Compare the end of the Sermon.

Content of the Sermon

The Doctrine of Poverty. The sermon opens with affirmation (the Beatitudes, A) and its counterpart warnings (the Woes, B). Then follows the rationale: Luke's theory of ethical transactions (C-E). This is a development of Mark's theory of divestiture: in Mk 10:21-22, a rich man is told to give away his goods before entering on the life of a Jesus follower. Two added passages (Mk 10:23-27 and 10:28-31) further explain this requirement: those who give away their worldly goods will receive them again, from the shared resources of the community, and even more so in the life to come. What Luke does is to spell out the latter. The idea is to create, in God's account book, *a balance in your favor*. If you should die with the world in your debt, you can only be repaid in Heaven, and eternal life is the only coin in which Heaven can repay.

The Resurrection. One curious feature of the Sermon is that it never mentions the Resurrection. This may be why it rarely figures in surveys of the theology of Luke. The Sermon is not about belief; it is entirely about behavior. It is *what we do*, and what God does in response, and not any detail of Jesus' life or its interpretation, that counts.

Paul in Rom 12:17-20 seems to be aware of the "return good for evil" aspect of the Sermon (Lk 6:27-31), but misunderstands it as a way of retaliation, since the failure of the enemy to reciprocate will earn him later damnation ("coals of fire," Rom 12:20). But how *can* he be aware? Jacob and Paul existed in the same time frame (the 50's), and so could trade insults, but Luke most likely undertook his Gospel as a response to the end of the Apostolic Age, defined by the deaths of Paul (c60) and Peter (c64); it must be at least 15 years later. One solution to this seeming impossibility is that Luke did not invent this detail when he wrote his Gospel, but had previously heard it preached in his church in Antioch, a major early Christian center, whose range of influence may well have reached to Paul's headquarters in Ephesus.¹⁰

Continuity. The Sermon does not maintain the same thought throughout. The final segment (H) calls on obedience to Jesus' teachings; it would fit almost any sermon. So also with the preceding segment (G). Segment F warns of the danger of uninformed teachers; the Epistle of Jacob (3:1) had already warned about people aspiring to teach others. The possibility of incorporating earlier material thus arises here. Finally, the "love your enemies" segments (C, E) are separated, as Nolland notes, by a different subject: the Golden Rule, stated in 6:31 and then harmonized with Luke's theory of ethical transactions. This observation, plus Paul's seeming awareness of the maxim, suggests prior origin. That suggestion can be independently supported.

Stylistic Analysis

With that much by way of preliminary inspection, we may ask what the BIRD stylistic difference test reports about the degree of continuity between successive segments of the Sermon; and what it suggests about its structure and organization: whether it is stylistically consecutive, and if so, over how much of its total extent.

¹⁰Not an extravagant surmise; a major trade artery connected them. For the foreign origin of the Golden Rule, and its transmission to the Mediterranean world, see Brooks **Golden**..

The crosstable is as follows:¹¹

Luke	6A	6B	6C	6D	6E	6F	6G	6H
6A	~	0.18	0.54	0.48	0.73	0.61	0.59	0.96
6B	0.18	~	0.50	0.45	0.67	0.68	0.52	0.88
6C	0.54	0.50	~	0.53	0.50	0.69	0.73	0.52
6D	0.48	0.45	0.53	~	0.62	0.84	0.54	0.72
6E	0.73	0.67	0.50	0.62	~	0.94	0.76	0.59
6F	0.61	0.68	0.69	0.84	0.94	~	0.58	0.77
6G	0.59	0.52	0.73	0.54	0.76	0.58	~	0.87
6H	0.96	0.88	0.52	0.72	0.59	0.77	0.87	~

Without D, C and E would be a consecutive pair. That table would look like this:

Luke	6A	6B	6C	6E	6F	6G	6H
6A	~	0.18	0.54	0.73	0.61	0.59	0.96
6B	0.18	~	0.50	0.67	0.68	0.52	0.88
6C	0.54	0.50	~	0.50	0.69	0.73	0.52
6E	0.73	0.67	0.50	~	0.94	0.76	0.59
6F	0.61	0.68	0.69	0.94	~	0.58	0.77
6G	0.59	0.52	0.73	0.76	0.58	~	0.87
6H	0.96	0.88	0.52	0.59	0.77	0.87	~

It was noted above that D (the Golden Rule and its explication) comes between the two “Love Your Enemy” passages, C and E. The above stylistic results mirror that (admittedly slight) discontinuity. Is D intrusive? It is well integrated into the Sermon, and it shows close similarity with its beginning, A-B, but perhaps it is showing some trace of special origin. From these results, the Golden Rule, though part of the Sermon, seems unlikely (as has been elsewhere suggested) to be a Lukan invention.

Form. In terms of large structure, we have not the *forensic* type, with preliminaries leading to a final consecutive argument, but its opposite: an orderly exposition ending (as in a personal letter) with miscellaneous segments of encouragement or admonition. We might call this type of discourse organization the *epistolary*.

Works Cited

- E Bruce Brooks and A Taeko Brooks. Stylistic Difference in Chinese and .Greek. Alpha v2 (2022) 23-38
 E Bruce Brooks. The Epistle of Jacob. Alpha v1 (2017) 58-70
 E Bruce Brooks. The Golden Rule. Alpha v2 (2022) 210-211
 E Bruce Brooks. Mark’s Parables of the Kingdom. Alpha v1 (2017) 89-91

¹¹Values of **0.50** or less indicate significant similarity, as of an author writing consecutively. It should be noted that these segments are below the recommended minimum size for this test.