One Sermon, Two Audiences

What Matthew and Luke Chose to Keep

Understanding Jesus' Ministry: The Keys to the Gospels

The Passage

Jesus has been preaching one sentence through the towns of Galilee — "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17) — and the crowds have come from every direction to hear it and to be healed (Matt. 4:23-25). In Luke's account He has just spent a whole night in prayer on a mountain and, at daybreak, chosen twelve of His disciples and named them apostles (Luke 6:12-16). The nation hasn't answered Him yet. What He does next is teach the men who have attached themselves to Him.

Two stretches of Matthew and Luke have long been recognized as that same body of teaching. Neither writer records it the same way, and the key to how the two accounts fit together lies in the opening lines of each.

Matthew 5:1-2

> And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

Luke 6:17-20

> And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all. Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God."

A mountain and a level place. Seated and standing. A crowd from Galilee and Judea, and a crowd that reaches up the coast into Gentile territory. One sermon that runs three chapters; one that runs thirty verses. One that promises the kingdom of the heavens; one that promises the kingdom of God.

And in both, the same detail: the multitudes are there, but the disciples are the ones being taught.

Who Was Actually Listening

Settle the audience first, because every difficult sentence in this sermon depends on it.

The Sermon on the Mount is regularly treated as evangelism — a public address to strangers, telling outsiders how to become right with God. Both writers say otherwise, and they say it in the opening line before a word of the sermon is quoted.

Matthew's sequence is precise. Jesus sees the multitudes. He *withdraws* from them, up the mountain. He sits down. Then "His disciples came to Him," and "He... taught **them**" (Matt. 5:1-2). The crowd is the reason He moves away, not the party He turns to address. Luke is even plainer:

"He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said" (Luke 6:20), and from there the sermon runs in the second person — *you* poor, *you* who hunger, *you* who weep — all the way to the end.

The crowds are present in both accounts, and they hear it. Matthew says so when the sermon ends: "the people were astonished at His teaching" (Matt. 7:28). But being within earshot isn't the same as being addressed. What Matthew describes is a Teacher instructing His own students in the hearing of a listening crowd — which is exactly how a rabbi taught.

This changes what the sermon *is*.

Jesus' disciples were not outsiders being told how to get in. They were Israelites, members of a nation God had already redeemed and already called His own — His firstborn son among the nations (Ex. 4:22), a people whose sins were covered by a sacrificial system God Himself had commanded (Lev. 17:11), to whom belonged "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). They hadn't come to that mountain in search of a standing before God. They came because a Man had begun announcing that the kingdom promised to their fathers was now near, and they had attached themselves to Him.

What He gives them is the conduct proper to people who belong to a kingdom that is being announced.

That distinction is not a technicality. Read as an entrance exam for the unsaved, this sermon is crushing and unusable — no one has ever cleared a bar set above the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20) by trying harder, and a message that told a sinner to pluck out his own eye (5:29) would be the worst news ever preached. Read as what the text says it is — instruction to men already inside the covenant, already following, about how those who expect a place in the coming kingdom are to live now — every hard line in it lands exactly where it was aimed.

Both writers close the sermon on the same note for the same reason. The final test is not whether a hearer agrees, and not whether a hearer has heard. It's whether a hearer *does*. That question only has force when it is put to someone who is already listening as a follower.

One Sermon, or Two?

The two accounts differ in some real ways, and it helps to lay them side by side before going further.

Matthew has a mountain; Luke has a level place. Matthew has Jesus seated; Luke has Him standing. Matthew's sermon comes before the Twelve are named (Matt. 10:1-4); Luke's comes directly after (Luke 6:12-16). Matthew runs three chapters; Luke runs thirty verses. Some readers conclude these are two sermons on two days. Others hold that Luke's "level place" is simply a plateau on the same hill, and that a Man may stand to heal and then sit to teach.

Settle that question either way, and the same puzzle is still sitting there.

Jesus preached publicly for something like three years, walking from town to town. A traveling teacher repeats himself; the material would have been given many times, in many settings, to many crowds. Which means that whatever the relationship between these two occasions, the fact demanding an explanation is the same:

Matthew and Luke made *different selections*. They arranged them differently. They stopped at different places. One kept the Law material and gathered it into a single block; the other kept much of that same material and scattered it across ten chapters. One pronounced blessings only; the other matched every blessing with a woe.

Somebody chose. The question is why, and both writers leave enough on the page to answer it.

Two Writers, Two Stated Purposes

Luke, unusually among the Gospel writers, tells the reader outright what he is doing and for whom.

Luke 1:1-4

> Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

Four things sit in that sentence.

Luke is working from eyewitness testimony rather than his own memory. He has investigated. He is arranging his material in an order of his own choosing — "an orderly account" is a claim about arrangement, and it gives the reader express permission to notice when Luke places something differently from Matthew. And he is writing to one named man. "Most excellent" is the honorific the New Testament uses elsewhere for Roman officials (Acts 24:3; 26:25), which marks Theophilus as a man of rank, most likely a Gentile — a man who has already been taught something about Christ and is now being handed the verified version.

Note the last clause especially: "that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were **instructed**." Luke's reader is not a stranger to the message. He has been catechized already. Luke is writing to confirm and to order what the man has been taught — which is precisely why Luke keeps supplying occasions, settings, and explanations that Matthew leaves out. He is filling in a framework his reader does not have by birth.

Matthew supplies no comparable preface. His purpose has to be read out of what he includes, and what he includes leans one direction from his opening line: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Both names carry sworn promises a Jewish reader knew by heart — the land and the seed to Abraham (Gen. 22:17-18), the throne to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16). Matthew opens by claiming both and expects no explanation to be necessary.

Luke traces the same family and runs it the other way entirely, and he does not stop at Abraham. He carries it back through Abraham to "Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38). One writer anchors Christ in Israel's covenants. The other anchors Him in the human race.

That single decision explains a great deal of what follows.

The Kingdom Being Announced

The sermon doesn't open the Gospel. Something precedes it, and the sermon is unintelligible without it.

Matthew 4:17

> From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

That sentence had already been preached by John the Baptist in the same words (Matt. 3:2), and would shortly be handed to the Twelve to preach in the same words again (Matt. 10:7). What's remarkable about it is what never happens next. Nobody in the crowds ever asks, "What kingdom?" No one stops Him for a definition. The announcement lands on a nation that already knew exactly which kingdom was meant, because the prophets had been describing it for centuries — a throne, a King out of David's line, a reign that would not end (Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5; Dan. 2:44).

"At hand" means *near*, not *new*.

And immediately before the sermon, Matthew describes the crowds gathering:

Matthew 4:23-25

> And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him — from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

"The gospel of the kingdom." That is the message being preached at the moment the sermon is delivered. The next verse is Matthew 5:1. The sermon is what the kingdom's announcement sounds like when it turns to instruct those who have responded to it.

Matthew's own word for it

Matthew's blessings promise "the kingdom of heaven." Luke's blessing, describing the same promise, calls it "the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20).

Matthew's phrase is his own. It appears more than thirty times in his Gospel and nowhere else in the New Testament, and the Greek behind it is plural — *the kingdom of the heavens*. The common explanation is that Matthew, writing for Jewish readers accustomed to speaking around the divine name, substituted "heaven" for "God" as a matter of reverence. But Matthew was willing to write "God." He uses "the kingdom of God" himself, five times (Matt. 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; 21:43).

And he shows what the two phrases are to each other. Just after the rich young ruler walks away, Jesus says in two sentences side by side that it's hard for a rich man to enter "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23) and easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter "the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). One kingdom, two names. Luke isn't describing a different kingdom from Matthew's; he's using the name his own reader would follow.

What both names point to is a kingdom with two portions, a heavenly one and an earthly one — rule exercised from the heavens over the earth. Daniel puts it in a single phrase, telling a king his kingdom would be assured to him once he came "to know that Heaven [the heavens] rules" (Dan.

4:26), and shows it in a vision: dominion given to the Son of Man in the presence of the Ancient of Days and then exercised over "all peoples, nations, and languages" (Dan. 7:13-14). The kingdom the prophets described was never only a patch of ground in the Middle East.

What "enter the kingdom" is not

This matters immediately, because the sermon says "enter the kingdom of heaven" twice at its two most quoted pressure points — 5:20 and 7:21 — and both are routinely read as though they meant "be saved" or "go to heaven when you die."

They cannot mean that here, for the plain reason that the men being addressed were not lost men. They were disciples out of a redeemed nation. And they are being told to *pray for the kingdom to come*:

Matthew 6:10

> Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.

You don't pray for the arrival of something you're already inside. The kingdom in this sermon is future, it is coming, and entrance into it is the thing at stake in the instruction. That is why the sermon is saturated with the language of *reward* — "great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12); "you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (6:1); "your reward will be great" (Luke 6:35). Reward is not the salvation a person receives the moment he believes. Reward is what is placed in the hands of someone who already belongs to the master and has done something with what he was given.

Hold that distinction through everything below, and the sermon stops threatening the reader's standing and starts doing what it was given to do.

The Mountain and the Level Place

The settings differ, and each writer's setting fits the reader he is writing for.

Matthew puts Jesus on a mountain, seated. Sitting was the posture of a rabbi teaching with authority, not of a man projecting his voice down a hillside — and Matthew closes the sermon by naming exactly that: "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:29). For a reader who knows the Law, a mountain and a lawgiver together carry an unmistakable echo. Israel's covenant was given from a mountain, through a man who went up and came down with it. Matthew's five long teaching blocks have often been read as a deliberate answer to Moses' own five books.

The echo comes with a pointed difference. At Sinai, the people were fenced off from the mountain on pain of death:

Exodus 19:12

> You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, "Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death."

At Matthew's mountain, no one is fenced off. "His disciples came to Him" (Matt. 5:1). The One giving the instruction is Himself approachable, and the men He instructs walk up to Him. A reader raised on the Torah doesn't need that contrast explained; he feels it as he reads.

Luke stages it entirely differently, and the details are his own. Jesus comes *down* and stands on level ground, among the people rather than above them. Luke names where the crowd came from: Judea and Jerusalem, and also "the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon" (Luke 6:17) — Gentile territory, up the coast, outside Israel proper. Luke doesn't say which of them were Jews and which weren't, but he sets the scene so that Theophilus can see the crowd reaching past Israel's borders.

The setting also arrives out of something Matthew does not report. In Luke, the teaching comes straight out of a healing. The crowd pressed in to touch Him, power went out from Him, and everyone was healed (Luke 6:19) — and only then does He lift His eyes and begin to speak. His hearers were not an audience assembled to evaluate a teacher; they were people who had just felt what He could do, some of them still standing there whole for the first time in years. Matthew's sermon opens with a Teacher taking His seat and instructing men who came up the mountain to learn. Luke's opens with a Healer catching His breath in front of people who came to be made well and got a sermon besides.

Matthew's Sermon: Written for Readers Steeped in the Law

Matthew's version runs three chapters, and much of that length has no counterpart in Luke's sermon at all. It's teaching that assumes the hearer already holds the Law of Moses as a working framework and wants to know what this Man intends to do with it.

The shape of the opening blessings is itself built for such a reader. Matthew gives eight in the third person, describing a kind of person — "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are those who mourn" — and then, in a ninth, turns and addresses the hearers directly: "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you" (Matt. 5:11). The eight are bracketed at both ends by the same promise. The first closes with "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3); the eighth closes with the identical words (5:10). Everything between is framed by the kingdom on either side. That is the kind of construction a reader raised on the Psalms and the Prophets is trained to notice, and Matthew builds it without comment.

Look at what sits between those brackets. Every promise in the middle is future tense: *shall be* comforted, *shall* inherit, *shall be* filled, *shall* obtain mercy, *shall* see God, *shall be* called sons of God. The condition is present; the payment is later. That is reward language, and Matthew has arranged the whole opening around it.

Slow down at one of those promises, because it is quoted straight out of Israel's own hymnbook.

Matthew 5:5

> Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

Psalm 37:11

> But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

In its own psalm, that promise concerns the land — Israel's land, held by the faithful when the wicked have been cut off (Ps. 37:9, 22, 29). Jesus is not inventing a new promise for a new people. He is repeating one His hearers already had, to men who had every reason to expect it, at the moment its King was standing in front of them. Keep it in its own frame. What a Christian can take from a verse like this is not Israel's title deed; it's the pattern — the humble and dependent are the ones God places in positions of trust, and the proud are not.

Then comes the statement that governs everything after it, addressed to people who already hold the Law as binding:

Matthew 5:17-20

> "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Two things in that block carry more weight than they first appear to.

The first is the middle of it. Jesus describes people who will be "least in the kingdom of heaven" and people who will be "great" there. Both are in it. He is sorting rank among those who have a place, which is what a king does with his own servants — and it is one more sign of what kind of question this sermon is asking. It is not sorting the saved from the lost; it's sorting the faithful from the careless among people who already belong to Him.

The second is the last sentence, which is the hinge of the whole section. The scribes and Pharisees were the acknowledged experts, the men who had built their lives around keeping the Law precisely. To tell a Jewish audience that their righteousness must *exceed* that of the acknowledged experts is to close a door deliberately before opening a different one. Everything after it explains what the other door is.

What follows is six extended contrasts — "You have heard that it was said... But I say to you" — walking through murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and love of enemies (Matt. 5:21-48). Each takes a commandment already on the books and traces it back past the action to the heart it came out of. Two show the pattern:

Matthew 5:21-22

> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment."

Matthew 5:27-28

> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Neither commandment is loosened. Each is traced to where it actually begins. And that is how the righteousness of 5:20 comes to exceed the experts': not by keeping more rules more carefully, but by the commandment reaching a place no external observance can reach. A reader who already accepts the sixth and seventh commandments as settled law is being shown that the Law was never only about the act. A reader meeting these commandments for the first time would need the commandment itself explained before the deepening could land at all.

Matthew also keeps a long section on giving, prayer, and fasting — the three pillars of Jewish devotional life — each corrected the same way, and each carrying the same refrain about people who perform them for an audience:

Matthew 6:1-2

> "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."

"They have their reward" is not a casual phrase. The word behind it was the ordinary commercial term for a receipt — paid in full, account closed, nothing further owed. Jesus says it three times in this section, once for each pillar (6:2, 6:5, 6:16). The man who gives to be seen has been paid; he was seen. There is no second payment coming.

Notice what is being weighed on that scale. The question is not whether the man belongs to God. It's whether God still owes him anything for what he did. He was paid at the time, in the currency he chose, and the ledger closed. Keep that word in mind; Luke reaches for it too, in a passage that appears to have nothing to do with this one.

Inside that same section sits the prayer Jesus gives His disciples:

Matthew 6:9-13

> "In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

Matthew offers it not as a new religious practice but as the right way to do what this audience was already doing every day. And its second petition is the sermon's whole horizon in three words. *Your kingdom come.*

None of this material — the Law's permanence, the six contrasts, the correction of devotional habits already in daily use — needs explaining to a reader who knows the Law and has watched it handled badly. It is written for exactly that reader.

Luke's Sermon: Written for a Reader Not Raised in the Law

The men Jesus addressed were the same kind of men in both accounts — Jews, inside the covenant, raised on the Law, standing in front of their own Messiah. Luke doesn't have Him preaching to Gentiles. He has Him preaching to Jewish disciples, in a crowd that happened to include people

from up the coast. The difference between these two Gospels is not a difference in who was listening on that hillside; it's a difference in who was going to read about it afterward.

That is where Luke's selection shows. His version is far shorter, and what he keeps tends to be material that carries its own meaning without any prior familiarity with Mosaic categories — poverty, hunger, grief, exclusion, and the reversal of all four. Those conditions were real for the disciples standing there, and they were also legible to a reader in the Greco-Roman world who hadn't been raised inside Israel's Law. Luke kept what did both jobs at once.

Luke 6:20-23

> Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said: "Blessed are you poor, For yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."

Matthew reads "blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3); Luke reads simply "blessed are you poor." That is not a contradiction needing repair; it's a difference in what each sentence had to do. Matthew's phrase opens a section built around inward disposition before the Law. Luke's plainer wording reaches further, and it is spoken to disciples whose poverty was, for some of them, entirely literal — men who had left boats and tables to follow Him.

Take the word "blessed" on its own for a moment, since English has worn it thin. It does not mean happy in the sense of a mood. It is a pronouncement about a person's actual standing — a declaration that this one, appearances notwithstanding, is in a good position. That is why it can be said over people who are hungry and weeping without cruelty. Jesus is not telling them how they feel. He's telling them where they stand, and then telling them when the account settles: *you shall be filled, you shall laugh, your reward is great*. Later, again.

This theme is not something Luke invented for the sermon. He's been sounding it since his opening chapters. It's in Mary's song, before Jesus is born:

Luke 1:52-53

> He has put down the mighty from their thrones, And exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, And the rich He has sent away empty.

And it is in the first sermon Luke records Jesus preaching, in the Nazareth synagogue, where He reads from Isaiah and applies the words to Himself on the spot (Luke 4:16-21):

Isaiah 61:1

> "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound."

"Good tidings to the poor" in Isaiah, "He has filled the hungry" in Mary's song, "blessed are you poor" in the sermon — one thread, three points, one writer's hand. Luke keeps this material because it is the note his whole Gospel has been striking since chapter one, and because it needs no scaffolding from the Law to be understood.

The Woes: The Line Matthew Never Draws

Matthew's blessings are entirely positive — nine in a row, with no counterpart pronounced against anyone. Luke, alone among the Gospel writers, pairs every blessing with its opposite:

Luke 6:24-26

> "But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets."

The symmetry is exact, and it is meant to be seen. Four blessings, four woes, matched one for one: poor against rich, hungry now against full now, weeping now against laughing now, hated for the Son of Man's sake against spoken well of by everyone. Each woe is the precise inversion of the blessing before it, in the same order. Luke isn't appending a warning section; he's holding a mirror up to what he has just said.

And the first woe reaches for the same word Matthew used of the men who gave alms to be seen. "You have received your consolation" is the receipt language again — paid in full, account closed. The rich man has what he was after. He got it. That is the entire content of the woe: not that comfort is wicked, but that a comfort already collected is a comfort not still coming. Matthew says it of religious display; Luke says it of wealth. On the surface these two passages have nothing to do with each other — one is about a man blowing a trumpet in the street, the other about a man with money. Underneath, the same word sits in both. Two different sins, one identical verdict: paid already, nothing further owed.

Which is also a caution about how the woes are usually preached. Luke does not say the rich are damned. He says they have been paid. The question in front of every one of these four pairs is the same question the whole sermon asks: is your account settled here, or is something still coming to you later?

The confrontational shape fits Luke's Gospel as a whole. He is the writer who preserves the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), told nowhere else, and John the Baptist's blunt instructions to tax collectors and soldiers (Luke 3:10-14), also told nowhere else. Matthew and Luke are doing two different things to their readers here. Matthew takes a man who already grants that the Law is binding and drives him further into it, past the act and down to the motive. Luke sets two columns in front of his reader and leaves him to find his own name in one of them — blessed or woe, hungry now or full now — with nothing in between the two.

The Same Sentence, Two Endings

The clearest cases are not where one writer keeps a saying and the other drops it. They are where both keep the same saying and finish it differently.

Take the command to love enemies, which both sermons carry. Watch the last line of each.

Matthew 5:44-45, 48

> "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your

> Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust... Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Luke 6:35-36

> "But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

Same command, same reasoning from the Father's own conduct toward people who do not deserve it, same promise of sonship — and two different words at the end. Matthew: *perfect*, which in Greek carries the sense of complete, finished, having reached what a thing was made for. It is the natural closing word for a section that has just walked through six commandments and traced each one to its root, and it lands on a reader who has been thinking about the Law's demands for two full chapters. Luke: *merciful* — a word needing no legal background at all, and one that reaches straight back to the poverty and hunger of his own beatitudes.

Notice too what "sons" does here, because English flattens it. The word does not mean offspring in the sense of birth. It denotes one who bears his father's character and does his father's business — which is why loving an enemy is the illustration attached to it. God sends rain on people who curse Him. A son of that Father does the same, and is recognizable by it. This is not describing how a man becomes God's; it's describing how a man who is God's comes to bear the image of Him.

The golden rule shows the same thing in miniature.

Matthew 7:12

> "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Luke 6:31

> "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

The rule is identical. Matthew adds a clause that ties it to the whole Old Testament — *this is the Law and the Prophets* — because for his reader that clause is the point: the rule is not a new invention, it is the summary of what the reader already holds. Luke drops the clause, because for his reader it would raise a question rather than answer one.

Neither writer changed what Jesus said. Each kept the part of it his own reader could use, and finished the sentence where that reader lived.

What Luke Did With the Rest

Luke kept a great deal of Matthew's Law-heavy material. He simply didn't keep it in the sermon.

The prayer Matthew places inside the sermon appears in Luke three chapters later, and Luke supplies an occasion Matthew does not:

Luke 11:1

> Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

Matthew gives the prayer as part of a correction to how prayer was already being practiced. Luke gives it as the answer to a disciple's direct request, prompted by watching Jesus pray. Same prayer, two settings, two different things being illustrated — and Luke's setting is the one a reader with no synagogue background can follow without help.

The pattern repeats across Luke's middle chapters. Treasures in heaven, in Matthew's sermon at 6:19-21, appears at Luke 12:33-34. The teaching on anxiety, the birds, the lilies, and seeking the kingdom first — Matthew 6:25-33 — appears at Luke 12:22-31. Serving two masters, Matthew 6:24, appears at Luke 16:13. The narrow gate, Matthew 7:13-14, appears at Luke 13:24. Salt that loses its flavor, Matthew 5:13, appears at Luke 14:34-35. The lamp not hidden under a basket, Matthew 5:15, appears at Luke 11:33.

The most striking case is the one that ought to be the least likely. Matthew's statement about the Law's permanence — the jot-and-tittle line, the most Jewish sentence in the whole sermon — *is* in Luke. It simply isn't in Luke's sermon:

Luke 16:14-18

> Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail. Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery."

Two of Matthew's sermon lines, side by side — the jot-and-tittle saying and the teaching on divorce — placed by Luke inside a passage explicitly about the Law and the Prophets and where they now stand. Luke also names who is standing there: Pharisees, deriding Him, told to their faces that they justify themselves before men. Luke didn't find this material irrelevant to his reader. He found that it needed a context his reader didn't have, so he supplied one. He moved the Law material to the place where he had already explained what the Law was, and set it in front of the men whose handling of the Law was the problem.

The divorce saying at the end looks like a stray. A rule about marriage, dropped into a paragraph about the Law and the kingdom, with no visible connection to either.

It is not a stray. Jesus has just said that not one stroke of the Law will fail. Then, in the very next breath, He names a commandment these men had loosened. Divorce was the live legal controversy of the day, argued back and forth over what Moses meant by "some uncleanness" (Deut. 24:1), and the argument had been used to widen the grounds until a man could put away his wife for almost any reason. So the saying about divorce is not a change of subject. It is the proof of the sentence before it. Not one stroke of the Law will fail — including the stroke you have talked your way around.

And it lands on the men Luke has already identified. These are the ones told to their faces that they justify themselves before men, standing there deriding Him while He speaks.

There is more in it than a marriage rule. The prophets had taken this same statute and applied it to God and Israel directly — "I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce" (Jer. 3:8). A

saying about putting away a wife, spoken to Israel's religious leadership at the moment the kingdom was being announced to the nation, points past marriage to the nation herself. The full weight of it belongs with the parable Luke tells next, the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31).

That reframes the difference between these two Gospels entirely.

Matthew concentrates; Luke distributes. Matthew gathers the teaching into one long block for readers who can absorb it in one sitting because they already hold the framework. Luke spreads the same teaching across his narrative, attaching each piece to an occasion that shows a reader not raised in Israel's Scriptures why it is being said. Neither writer is editing Jesus down. Both are teaching, and each has a different classroom.

Where Both Sermons Agree

For everything separating them, these two accounts show their likeness once again as they head toward their finish.

Both keep the teaching on judging, and both keep it in the same shape — a measure that comes back on the one who used it. Most readers know it only as a stand-alone line.

Matthew 7:1-2

> "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Luke 6:37-38

> "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Luke expands it in his own direction — three more clauses and a picture drawn from a grain merchant filling a fold of cloth until it overflows — and then adds material Matthew places elsewhere: the blind leading the blind, and "a disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:39-40). Even at a point of agreement, one writer states the principle and the other stages it.

Then both place the same rebuke immediately before the closing parable — a rebuke aimed at precisely the gap the parable is about to illustrate:

Matthew 7:21

> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."

Luke 6:46

> "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?"

Matthew extends this into a fuller scene of judgment (Matt. 7:22-23) that Luke does not carry. That scene raises questions of its own and is left for separate treatment. What both writers keep is the rebuke itself, in nearly identical words: calling Him Lord and not doing what He says is a contradiction, and neither writer will let a reader leave the sermon without hearing it.

Then the parable — and here the two accounts run so close together that they are nearly word for word:

Matthew 7:24-27

> "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Luke 6:47-49

> "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

Two builders, and the difference between them is invisible until the weather arrives. Both men heard. Both men built. Both houses stood in fair conditions. The storm did not create the difference; it exposed one that was there the whole time — which is exactly what a day of accounting does.

And even here, at the point of closest agreement, each writer's reader is visible in the details. Matthew contrasts rock with sand and says nothing about how the house got onto the rock; his reader supplies that. Luke adds the step Matthew leaves out — the man "dug deep and laid the foundation" — and his contrast is not rock against sand but a house with a foundation against a house with none. Luke explains the work. Matthew assumes it. The difference running through both accounts shows up one last time inside a single sentence.

The Two Ways

There is one more thing both sermons share, and it is older than either of them.

Israel's hymnbook opens by pronouncing a man blessed and then setting two roads against each other:

Psalm 1:1-2, 6

> Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night... For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

That is the shape of both sermons exactly. Each opens by pronouncing people blessed. Each closes by putting two ways side by side and asking which one the hearer is on. Matthew even keeps the two-roads image itself, in the narrow gate and the broad way (Matt. 7:13-14), before arriving at his two builders. Luke keeps the two-ways structure and adds a second set of his own, in the blessings and the woes.

Neither writer built this pattern. Both inherited it, from the same Scriptures Jesus was teaching out of, and both recognized that the sermon they were recording had been cast in that ancient mold on purpose.

Which is a reminder of what these two accounts are and are not. They are not competing versions of one event, with a scholar's task being to determine which is accurate. They are two witnesses, each writing for a reader he could see, each keeping what that reader needed and placing the rest where that reader could use it.

What Sits on This Side of It

Everything above stands in its own frame, and that frame has to be respected before anything is carried out of it.

The men on that mountain were Israelites. The kingdom being announced to them was the one promised to their fathers, with a King out of David's line on a throne, and the nation was being asked to receive it. Israel did not receive it. The offer that stood open while Jesus preached this sermon was refused, and what happened to that nation afterward — her judgment, her preservation, and the day she will yet say "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD" (Matt. 23:39) — belongs to Israel and to no one else. The land promise in Psalm 37 is hers. The restoration is hers. None of it transfers.

But something does carry over to the Christian, and it comes along a specific line: the *offer*, and the *response* to it.

The kingdom of the heavens was set before Israel and refused. By refusing it, Israel forfeited the kingdom's heavenly portion; her earthly portion is still hers (Rom. 11:29). The heavenly portion is what's now set before the Christian — a place in a coming reign, offered to people already God's own, on the same terms of hearing and doing that this sermon lays out. Which means the sermon's questions come across intact even though Israel's promises do not:

What is being settled here, and what is still coming? The receipt language runs through both accounts — the man paid in applause (Matt. 6:2), the man paid in comfort (Luke 6:24). A Christian can spend his whole account in this life without ever intending to. His standing before God isn't at risk in that; it was settled by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). What is at risk is everything the sermon actually names — reward, rank, a place in the administration of a kingdom that hasn't arrived yet.

Is the obedience going anywhere the eye cannot see? Six times Jesus traced a commandment past the act to the heart it came from. That is not a heavier burden laid on a Christian's back; it's the only kind of obedience that survives a judgment where the Judge sees the whole of it.

What happens when the weather changes? Two men heard the same sermon and built two houses that looked alike until the flood came. The difference was underground the entire time. It always is.

And the sermon's own last question is the one to leave with, because both writers refused to end anywhere else. Not whether a hearer agrees. Not whether a hearer has heard.

Hearing is not the test. Doing is.

Two audiences, two selections, one foundation required of both.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.