

## Four Times Jesus Showed Concern for the Poor in Luke's Gospel

Robert Sang

Source: <https://drawingontheword.com/jesus-showed-concern-for-the-poor-in-lukes-gospel/>

Throughout the New Testament, there are numerous references to the poor. Many of these are found in the Gospel of Luke alone. The Greek word used translated “poor” refers both to those who are financially and economically poor, and those who are spiritually poor.

Luke's Gospel is full of examples where Jesus showed his love towards outcasts. Among these included the poor and needy. Jesus shows an ongoing concern for the marginalized in society and gives them an important place in his ministry. However, His concern is not just for their spiritual needs, but also their social, economic, physical, and emotional needs as well.

Jesus went beyond merely alleviating financial poverty. Bryant Myers writes in his book, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, that sin has affected all of our relationships in some way. Our relationships with God, ourselves, with others and with creation. He suggests that poverty is a result of broken relationships with each of these categories. Poverty is an absence of *shalom*, inner peace, in every sense of the word that affects all these relationships.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus went beyond simply trying to alleviate material poverty. He addressed the spiritual and emotional conditions of the poor as well and restored their relationships with God, themselves, others, and creation.

Here is four times Jesus showed his concern for the poor in Luke's Gospel. There are many more examples, but we focus on these ones in particular.

### 1. The Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me (Luke 4:18-19)

In Luke 4, Jesus is teaching in the synagogue. As he stands up to read the scriptures, He is handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. In verses 18-19, Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-2. He says:

<sup>18</sup> *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.”*

After finishing, Jesus sits back down and then makes the bold declaration in verse 21 that this passage of scripture has been fulfilled in him today.

Jesus lays out his mission statement here – the reason He was sent. He says He is here to proclaim good news to the poor. However, in Luke 2:10, the angel declares when Jesus is born that this is good news for all people. Jesus also spoke numerous times of God's love for the world.

Jesus describes many different types of people here in addition to the poor. The prisoners, the blind, the oppressed. However, he doesn't simply see these as limited to only certain people. Instead, this describes the spiritual condition that each one of us find ourselves in. In one way or another, we are all poor, imprisoned, blind, and oppressed. It may not be in material or physical terms, but in spiritual terms as well.

Jesus' good news is for everyone. He recognizes that we are all in need of a savior. These were outcasts in many ways. However, while we may not find ourselves in quite the same predicament as them, there are many ways in which we are still outcasts and need someone to rescue us.

In Isaiah 61:1, it also includes the statement "*He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,*" Although Jesus doesn't mention it here when he quotes the passage, He does minister to those who experience brokenness in many ways. These include the broken relationships with God, ourselves, with others and creation.

## **2. Blessed Are the Poor (Luke 6:20)**

In Luke 6, Jesus says, "*Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.*"

Jesus' words are more hard-hitting and direct in Luke's version. When Jesus says, "*blessed are the poor,*" He is summarizing over 200 references in the Old Testament where the poor are mentioned.

He promises that the poor will inherit something far greater than any of the riches of this world. He goes on to say that those who suffer now will not suffer in the kingdom (Luke 6:21–22).

In Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says "*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*" By contrast, in Luke, Jesus says "*Blessed are the poor.*" Matthew's version might seem more metaphorical, talking about the spiritually poor. However, Jesus' message in Luke is direct and to the point. There is no way around it. Here he means the poor. Jesus even goes further and says, "*woe to the rich.*"

The gospel also helps us become the poor. Luke 6:20 – "*looking at his disciples, he said 'blessed are you who are poor.'*" Some have observed that not all the disciples are materially poor. One of them was Matthew, who was a tax collector, who was well off.

Although Jesus says "*blessed are the poor*" in Luke 6:20, we must also become poor in spirit. When we realize that we, like the poor, have nothing of value before God, then we can receive the gospel and be saved. As Keller says, "the gospel is only for the spiritually poor, and especially for the actually poor."

### **3. The Woman Bleeding for 12 Years (Luke 8:43-48)**

In Luke 8:43-48, Jesus was on his way to heal Jairus's daughter, who was dying. However, along the way, there was a woman who had been severely bleeding for 12 years. Verse 43 tells us that she had spent all of her money trying to get better. However, despite seeing many doctors, she only became worse instead of getting any better.

The woman was now in a state of poverty because of her illness. Her condition, which appears to be a form of hemorrhaging, affected her livelihood and well-being. Also, others would have considered her ritually unclean, leaving her as an outcast from the rest of society.

In verse 44, in an act of sheer desperation, she reached out and touched the edge of Jesus' cloak. She had hoped that the mere touch would heal her. Immediately, the bleeding stopped. However, Jesus knew straight away that power had gone out of him and he asked in verse 45 "*who touched me?*" The woman came forward and explained what had happened and why she did it.

Why did Jesus call her forward in front of everyone to share her testimony? He could simply have let her go on her way, especially since he was in a hurry to get to Jairus's dying daughter.

It was because Jesus recognized that she needed healing of more than just her physical condition. The woman had fallen into a state of material poverty. Others also regarded her as an outcast because her constant bleeding made her ritually unclean. This left her both spiritually and emotionally poor.

By giving the woman the opportunity to share her testimony and show how God had worked in her life, He was able to restore her in these other areas as well. Jesus could heal her broken relationships with others and herself.

### **4. The Rich Man (Luke 18:18-30)**

Why is the story of the rich young ruler included in this study? Isn't this about the poor? However, Jesus draws out several points here of relevance.

In this story, a young Jewish leader who possesses great wealth asks Jesus what he must to do inherit eternal life.

The rich man first addresses Jesus as "*good teacher*". Jesus responds by asking Him why He calls Him "*good*." No-one is good except for God alone. Jesus recognizes that no-one can fully keep the law by themselves.

Then Jesus proceeds to list the commandments found in the second half of the Ten Commandments. These are ones which are directed towards loving one's neighbor. The rich man responds by saying that he has kept these diligently since he was a child. To put this to the test, Jesus tells the man to go and sell everything he has and give the money to the poor. If he really does love his neighbor as himself, then the rich man will not hesitate to help others out who are in need.

By highlighting that the rich man had failed to observe the second set of commandments, Jesus effectively pointed out that he ultimately failed to observe the first set, which relate to loving God.

When Jesus said earlier that no-one is good except for God alone, He knew that no-one else could claim to be good or adhere to every aspect of the law. They would always fall short of the glory and goodness of God. Thus, when He told the rich man to keep the commandments and the man realized his inability to keep them, the next step would be for him to follow Jesus.

However, there was one thing standing in the way of following Jesus. It was the man's wealth. It had become an idol in his life and held him back from loving and following God completely. He had also hardened his heart towards helping the poor and could not bring himself to part with his great wealth. Immediately, the rich man went away sad.

As Tim Keller indicates in his book *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just (Law, Justice and Power)*, if we claim to love God and be in a relationship with Him but are not involved in caring for the needs of the poor, then we are not truly having a relationship with Him. Nor can we say we truly love God.

Jesus was also saddened. He concluded that it is much harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Did he simply mean that no rich person could enter the kingdom?

Well, in a way he was right. When we are rich or middle-class in spirit, we can become self-sufficient and believe there is no need for God. It is when we are poor in spirit, like the materially poor, that we see that we have nothing of value on this earth and therefore acknowledge our need for God. The rich man was unable to see his need for God.

Do you claim to love God too? If so, this is a challenge for each one of us. Are we willing to show love to our neighbor by caring for the needs of the poor like Jesus did?

### **Conclusion**

There are many more examples in Luke's Gospel where Jesus cared for the poor or demonstrated His teaching on the subject. We've only scratched the surface of it here. After this study, why don't you continue this study of Luke focusing on other instances where Jesus cared for the poor?