

Homiletics Analysis: Luke 6

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Luke 6 is a dense, architecturally unified chapter presenting Jesus as the authoritative lawgiver of the new covenant age — a deliberate Moses-typology reaching its climax in what scholars identify as Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount (the "Sermon on the Plain," vv. 17-49). The chapter opens with two Sabbath controversies (vv. 1-11) in which Jesus asserts sovereign lordship over the Sabbath and performs a healing despite Pharisaic hostility — provocations that generate the first explicit murderous plotting against Him. He then withdraws to pray through the night and descends to appoint the Twelve (vv. 12-16), constituting a new Israel around Himself. The sermon proper (vv. 17-49) unfolds in four major movements: the Beatitudes and Woes (vv. 20-26), the love-of-enemies command (vv. 27-36), the non-judgment principle and its relational logic (vv. 37-42), and the parable of the two builders (vv. 46-49). The chapter ends without resolution — the house on rock stands; the house on sand collapses. The question hangs in the air: which house are you?

This Text — Intent

God is doing two things simultaneously in Luke 6. First, He is establishing Jesus's sovereign authority — over the Sabbath, over the Law, over the constitution of His people, over the ethical norms of the kingdom. Second, He is confronting every reader with a binary: the life that flows from hearing-and-doing versus the life that flows from hearing-without-doing. The intent is not primarily to give moral instruction, though instruction is present. The intent is crisis — a forced decision about who Jesus is and what it will cost to actually live under His lordship rather than merely admire it. The reader is meant to feel the weight of "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (v. 46) as a personal indictment before reaching the parable that follows it. The effect God is seeking is not behavior change but foundational reorientation — building on Christ rather than on self.

Subject Sentence: Jesus constitutes His kingdom people and defines the life that flows from genuine allegiance to Him.

Primary Claim: The Jesus who claims lordship over the Sabbath, selects His own covenant community, and preaches a kingdom ethics of radical grace is not admired from a distance — He is either the foundation on which your entire life is built, or He is not your Lord at all.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Sermon on the Plain versus the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

The most persistent interpretive question in Luke 6 is its relationship to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Three positions exist: (1) they are the same sermon, with Luke condensing and Matthew expanding; (2) they are different sermons delivered at different times and places; (3) both evangelists have shaped their accounts theologically, using common Dominical material to different ends. The Reformed tradition rightly resists forcing a harmonization that flattens Luke's distinctive emphases. Luke's setting — the plain, the crowd of disciples and a great multitude of people — is clearly significant for Luke's theological purposes. The Beatitudes in Luke are addressed in the second person ("Blessed are you who are poor," v. 20), are paired with explicit Woes (vv. 24-26) absent from Matthew, and are socioeconomically concrete in ways Matthew's spiritualized forms ("poor in spirit," "hunger and thirst for righteousness") are not. Neither account should be collapsed into the other. Luke's Beatitudes and Woes are best read on their own terms: the kingdom inverts present social arrangements, and those whose security rests on present comfort, wealth, reputation, and social approval have already received all they will receive. The Reformed reading holds that Luke and Matthew are complementary accounts, not competing ones — but exposition of Luke 6 must let Luke's emphases govern, not harmonize them away.

The Beatitudes: Sociological Reversal or Spiritual Condition?

Liberation theology reads Luke's Beatitudes as primarily a socioeconomic promise — the materially poor, the literally hungry, the actually weeping will be reversed in the coming kingdom. This reading has force: Luke is concrete where Matthew spiritualizes, and the Woes addressed to the rich (v. 24), the well-fed (v. 25), and those who "laugh now" (v. 25) confirm that material conditions are in view. The reading should be *acknowledged* where it rightly identifies Luke's concreteness as intentional — Luke is not merely spiritualizing poverty, and to evacuate his Beatitudes of their material dimension is to misread them. However, the liberation reading *overreaches* when it reduces the Beatitudes to social reversal without reference to the kingdom of God as their ground. The poor are blessed not because poverty is intrinsically virtuous but because the kingdom has come to them in Jesus — the One who has been anointed to preach good news to the poor (4:18). The Reformed reading holds both dimensions: Luke intends material concreteness *and* kingdom-grounding, not one at the expense of the other. The Woes are not curses pronounced over the wealthy per se but sobering diagnoses of misplaced trust — the idol beneath the surface, to use Keller's lens.

The Love-of-Enemies Command: Impossible Ideal or Kingdom Ethics?

Lutheran readings sometimes handle the love-of-enemies command (vv. 27-36) as a "second use of the law" — its function is to expose human inability and drive the hearer to

Christ. This reading captures something genuine: no one outside of gospel transformation loves their enemies, does good to those who hate them, or blesses those who curse them. But the Lutheran frame risks making the command purely diagnostic rather than genuinely directive. Luke presents it as the actual ethic of the kingdom — the way Jesus’s disciples actually live, grounded in the mercy of the Father (v. 36). The Wesleyan tradition tends to emphasize the command’s achievability through sanctifying grace, which rightly resists defeatism but can too easily slide into moralism disconnected from the cross. The Reformed reading insists: these commands are possible only as fruit of gospel transformation; they cannot be obeyed by moral effort; but they are genuinely commanded, not merely illustrative of failure. The ground of enemy-love is not heroic virtue but the character of the Father who “is kind to the ungrateful and the evil” (v. 35) — disciples are called to *become like their Father*, a Clowney-inflected point: the imperative flows from the indicative of divine character already displayed.

The Judgment Passage (vv. 37-42): Moral Non-judgment or Discernment?

The “judge not” command (v. 37) is the most frequently decontextualized verse in this chapter — extracted to mean that Christians should never evaluate, discern, or name sin. This is a serious misreading. The passage addresses hypocritical condemnation — the person with a log in their own eye pronouncing judgment on the person with a speck. The concern is not discernment per se (Jesus commands the removal of the speck in v. 42 — a discernment act) but the posture of self-exemption from the very standard one applies to others. The Baptist tradition, which has sometimes retreated into “judge not” as a conversation-stopper, needs to be *qualified* here: Jesus is not abolishing moral discernment but demanding that it proceed from self-examination and humility, not from self-righteousness.

Key Canonical Support

- **Deuteronomy 30:11-20** — Moses places before Israel the choice between life and death, blessing and cursing, framing obedience to God’s commands as the only path to flourishing. Luke 6’s two-builders parable stands in direct typological continuity: Jesus is the new Moses issuing the same covenantal binary, but now the question is whether one builds on *Him*.
- **Isaiah 61:1-3** — The anointed Servant is sent to preach good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor. Luke’s Beatitudes (“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God,” v. 20) are the fulfillment announcement of this Isaianic promise — Jesus is not merely teaching kingdom ethics but *being* the kingdom come to the poor.
- **Psalms 1** — The righteous man is like a tree planted by streams of water; the wicked are like chaff driven away. The two-builders parable (vv. 46-49) restates the Psalm 1 binary in construction imagery: the person who hears and does is the stable tree;

the person who hears and does not is the house on sand. Both passages frame the entire life as a wager on one's ultimate ground of trust.

- **Matthew 7:24-27** — The parallel two-builders parable confirms the binary as dominical and not merely Lukan redaction — the claim that genuine discipleship is structurally distinguished from mere hearing belongs to Jesus's core teaching, not to evangelistic shaping. Luke's version emphasizes the depth of the foundation ("dug deep," v. 48) rather than the rock/sand contrast of Matthew — stressing intentionality of building, not merely choice of location.
- **Romans 5:8-10** — "While we were still enemies, God demonstrated His love for us." The love-of-enemies command (vv. 27-36) is grounded in the prior love of God for His enemies. Paul's statement is the theological substructure of Jesus's command: disciples are called to imitate in their relational lives what God has already done for them in the cross. This is the anti-moralism anchor — enemy-love is not heroic virtue but gospel reflection.

Aim: To confront the reader with the binary that closes Luke 6 — that hearing Jesus's words without building life upon them is not neutral ground but structural collapse — and to show that the foundation is not a program but a Person.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:1-5	Disciples pluck grain on the Sabbath; Pharisees object; Jesus invokes David's eating of the showbread and declares Himself Lord of the Sabbath	Sovereignty claim over the Sabbath's meaning and purpose; David typology suggests messianic authority
6:6-11	Jesus heals a man's withered hand on the Sabbath in the synagogue; He poses the question "Is it lawful to do good or harm on the Sabbath?"; Pharisees are furious and begin discussing what to do	First murderous plotting in Luke; healing as kingdom demonstration over against Pharisaic restriction
6:12-13	Jesus prays through the night on a mountain; at daybreak He calls His	Night prayer before covenant constitution; number twelve = new Israel;

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
6:14-16	disciples and chooses twelve The Twelve named: Simon/Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James, Judas Iscariot	Jesus as the one who constitutes His people Judas named last with the betrayal notation — Luke does not hide the darkness within the Twelve
6:17-19	Jesus descends to a level place; large crowd from all Judea, Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon; they come to hear and to be healed; power going out from Him heals all	Setting established: the sermon reaches both disciples and a wide crowd; Jesus's power is tangible and active before the sermon begins
6:20-23	Beatitudes: blessed are the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the persecuted — “for yours is the kingdom,” “you will be satisfied,” “you will laugh,” “your reward is great in heaven”	Second person address; kingdom-present tense for poor; future reversals for others; persecution beatitude connects disciples to the prophets
6:24-26	Woes: woe to the rich, the well-fed, those who laugh, those spoken well of — “you have received your consolation,” “you will be hungry,” “you will mourn,” “so their fathers did to the false prophets”	Woes are absent in Matthew; Luke's pairing is stark; these are not curses but diagnoses of misplaced trust and its terminal trajectory
6:27-31	Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you; turn the other cheek; give to the one who begs; the Golden Rule	Active and costly love, not passive tolerance; the Golden Rule appears here in positive form
6:32-35	If you love those who love you, what credit is that? Even sinners do the same.	The ethics grounded in the Father's character, not in reciprocity; “sons of the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	Love enemies, do good, lend expecting nothing — and your reward will be great; you will be sons of the Most High	Most High” — identity-formation, not merely behavior
6:36	“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”	The theological hinge of the love section: imitation of the Father’s mercy as the ground and model of kingdom ethics
6:37-38	Do not judge; do not condemn; forgive; give — “for with the measure you use it will be measured back to you”	Parallelism between the negative prohibitions and the positive commands; the generosity principle extends beyond money to judgment itself
6:39-40	Parable of the blind leading the blind; a disciple is not above his teacher but will be like his teacher	Warns against following blind guides; implies that the disciples should follow Jesus, not the Pharisees, as their teacher
6:41-42	Speck and log parable: remove the log from your own eye before helping your brother with his speck	Hypocritical condemnation is the target; self-examination must precede correction; discernment is not prohibited, only unexamined self-exemption
6:43-45	Good tree/bad tree; good fruit/bad fruit; the mouth speaks from the heart’s abundance	Character precedes conduct; transformation is from the inside out; connects to the theological question of what kind of person produces kingdom ethics
6:46	“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”	The rhetorical turning point of the sermon; the crisis question; hearing divorced from doing is a contradiction that Jesus names directly
6:47-49	Two builders: one digs deep and builds on rock — when	The binary closes the sermon; “dug deep” (Luke’s

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	flood comes, house stands; one builds on ground without foundation — when flood comes, immediate collapse and great ruin	detail) emphasizes intentional, costly building; the question of foundation is the question of lordship

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	6:1-11	The Lord of the Sabbath: Sovereignty Displayed and Rejected
2	6:12-16	The Constitution of the New Israel: Twelve Appointed by Prayer
3	6:17-26	The Beatitudes and Woes: Kingdom Inversions and Misplaced Trust Diagnosed
4	6:27-36	Enemy Love: The Ethics of the Father's Mercy
5	6:37-42	The Log and the Speck: Judgment, Generosity, and Self-Examination
6	6:43-45	Root and Fruit: Character Precedes Conduct
7	6:46-49	Two Builders: The Binary of Hearing and Doing

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: Jesus constitutes His kingdom people and defines the life that flows from genuine allegiance to Him.

Primary Claim: The Jesus who claims lordship over the Sabbath, selects His own covenant community, and preaches a kingdom ethics of radical grace is not admired from a distance — He is either the foundation on which your entire life is built, or He is not your Lord at all.

Applications (Five)

1. (*Mind/Belief*) Jesus's authority is not a theological category to affirm — it is a lordship to submit to in the specific places you are currently overriding it. The chapter opens with Jesus claiming sovereignty over the Sabbath and closes with the question “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” These are the same question asked from opposite ends of the chapter. Many people carry an orthodox Christology while maintaining functional lordship over specific domains of their life — their finances, their relationships, their ambition, their comfort. Luke 6 does not allow the category of “I believe Jesus is Lord” to be separated from the question “Over what, specifically, am I not letting Him be Lord?” The application is not general surrender but the discipline of identifying the specific domains where calling Him Lord is performative rather than operative.

2. (*Affections/Worship*) The Woes are not directed at the wealthy as a class — they are a diagnosis of what it feels like to have already received everything you wanted and to have wanted the wrong things. “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation” (v. 24). The Woes are not a curse on prosperity; they are a description of spiritual finality — you got what you wanted, and what you wanted was not the kingdom. The affective application is a question of what genuinely satisfies you, what you reach for when you are anxious, what you would be devastated to lose. The Beatitudes and Woes together ask: where is your consolation actually located? This is Keller’s idol-diagnosis lens applied: the woe falls not on wealth but on the condition of the heart that has made wealth its comfort and source of security. The call is not to poverty but to examining whether the kingdom of God is genuinely more desired than what “you have already received.”

3. (*Will/Behavior*) Love your enemy this week — not as a general posture but as a specific act toward a specific person who has treated you with hostility or contempt. The love-of-enemies command (vv. 27-31) is deliberately concrete: do good, bless, pray, give, do not demand return. Luke does not allow this to remain a general ethical orientation. There is almost certainly a specific person in the reader’s life toward whom these commands apply directly — someone who has wronged, dismissed, slandered, or exploited them. The application is not “cultivate a loving attitude toward enemies in general” but “identify who your enemy is right now, and do a specific, costly act of good toward them this week.” The ground for doing so is not the expectation of reciprocity or transformation in the other person, but the character of the Father who is “kind to the ungrateful and the evil” (v. 35).

4. (*Mind/Belief*) The fruit-before-fruit principle of vv. 43-45 means that behavioral change without heart transformation is not discipleship — it is renovation without foundation. “A good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit” (v. 43). This passage cuts directly against two distortions: moralism (behavior modification as the goal of discipleship) and antinomianism (since grace is given, behavior is irrelevant). Neither is Luke’s point. The chapter’s logic runs: who you are (character, heart, root) determines what you produce (fruit, conduct, speech). This means that the primary

discipleship question is not “what are you doing?” but “what is being formed in you, and by what?” The reframe that many readers need is that the commands of Luke 6 are not a ladder to climb by effort but a description of the person being formed by genuine encounter with Jesus — and that formation requires the kind of deep digging (v. 48) that is costly and intentional.

5. (*Affections/Worship*) The night of prayer before the selection of the Twelve (v. 12) confronts every leader and every Christian with the question of whose initiative and wisdom they are actually operating under. Jesus — the Son of God — spent the entire night in prayer before making one of the most significant decisions of His ministry. The selection of the Twelve was not a strategic HR decision but a covenantal act preceded by sustained communion with the Father. The application is not merely “pray before big decisions” (though it is at least that). It is a reorientation of the affections toward the kind of dependence that treats prayer as the actual mechanism of discernment, not the ceremonial opener to decisions already made by other means. For leaders especially: if Jesus prayed through the night before constituting His own community, what does it reveal about our actual operating theology when we make community-shaping decisions after a five-minute prayer?

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Luke 6 presents Jesus as simultaneously fulfilling and surpassing the Mosaic covenant — He is the lawgiver who claims lordship over the Law’s own institutions (the Sabbath), constitutes a new covenant community around Himself (the Twelve as new Israel), and issues an ethic that is not an improvement on Moses but a revelation of the Father’s own character. The chapter establishes that kingdom ethics are not achievable by moral effort but flow from a transformed character grounded in the Father’s mercy — “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (v. 36). The theological center of the chapter is not the commands but the Person who issues them and the Father whose character they reflect. This means that Luke 6 is ultimately Christological before it is ethical: its commands reveal who Jesus is, what His kingdom is like, and what kind of people the Father is making through allegiance to His Son.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Luke 6 is a premier text for the Reformed insistence that the indicative grounds the imperative — that what God has done and who He is (the Father who is merciful to the ungrateful and evil; the Son who constitutes His people and issues His commands from authority, not aspiration) is the necessary ground of kingdom obedience. The love-of-enemies ethic cannot be obeyed by moral effort and was never intended to be — it is the fruit of the person whose root is anchored in Christ (vv. 43-45) and whose character is being formed by genuine encounter with the living Lord. The two-

builders parable is one of Scripture's clearest statements of the Reformed conviction that salvation and discipleship are not separable — building on Christ is not an add-on to believing in Christ; it is the very structure of what genuine faith does. The chapter also displays Reformed covenant theology: Jesus's night of prayer and appointment of the Twelve is a deliberate new-Israel constitution, not a random organizational decision — the covenant community is gathered by Christ's initiative, constituted by His choice, and defined by allegiance to His Lordship.

Main Takeaway

Jesus is asking you, directly, from verse 46: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” The question is not rhetorical — it is diagnostic. You may carry a fully orthodox Christology and be building on sand. The difference between the two builders in this chapter is not what they believed about Jesus, or even whether they heard His words — both builders heard the same sermon. The difference is what they did with what they heard. Dig deep. Build on Him. The flood is coming either way.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Turning the Beatitudes into a merit system.** The Beatitudes are not a list of virtues that earn kingdom entrance — they are the announcement that the kingdom has come to specific categories of people whom the world has excluded, dismissed, or written off. Preaching them as “here is how to be blessed” reverses their logic entirely. They are not prescriptive (“become poor in order to receive the kingdom”) but declarative (“the kingdom has arrived for you who are poor”). Luke's second-person address (“Blessed are *you*”) makes this harder to spiritualize than Matthew's version — the preacher must sit with the concreteness rather than escaping it.
- **Isolating “judge not” (v. 37) from its context.** This is perhaps the most frequently decontextualized verse in Western culture. Extracted from vv. 37-42, it appears to command a blanket suspension of moral discernment. But Jesus Himself commands “first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye” (v. 42) — a discernment act. The passage prohibits hypocritical condemnation, not evaluation. Failing to distinguish these is not only an interpretive error but produces a discipleship-destroying application: a church that cannot name sin cannot exercise care, correction, or restoration.
- **Moralizing the love-of-enemies command without grounding it in the Father's character.** The command in vv. 27-36 is not humanly achievable by moral effort. Preaching it as “here is the higher standard Christians must reach” without

anchoring it in v. 35-36 (“you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil — be merciful, even as your Father is merciful”) collapses into Pelagianism. The command is grounded in the prior mercy of the Father and is the fruit of the identity transformation that comes from belonging to that Father. Clowney’s anti-moralism principle applies directly: you cannot preach “be like the Father” without first preaching “you have been brought into the Father’s family through the Son.”

- **Treating the two-builders parable as evangelistic only.** The parable (vv. 46-49) is addressed to people who *already call Jesus “Lord”* — it is a discipleship text, not an evangelism text. Preaching it only as an invitation to initial faith misses the crisis it creates for the already-professing disciple: am I actually building my life on Him, or am I building on my own assumptions, preferences, and strategies while using the language of lordship? The most dangerous person in view is not the unbeliever but the person who sincerely calls Jesus Lord and has never noticed the gap between their confession and their construction.
- **Failing to hold together the chapter’s structural logic: Divisions 1-2 as ground for Divisions 3-7.** The sermon in vv. 17-49 is not free-floating ethical instruction — it is issued by the One who has just demonstrated authority over the Sabbath and constituted a new covenant community around Himself. The commands are from *this* Jesus. Preaching the sermon without first establishing the authority of the Preacher produces moralism — “here are some hard things you should try to do.” Preaching it from the foundation of Jesus’s established sovereignty produces kingdom ethics — “here is the life that flows from genuine allegiance to the Lord who has all authority and has brought you into His own people.”
- **Missing Luke’s distinctive Woes.** Matthew’s version of the Beatitudes has no corresponding Woes; Luke’s does. Harmonizing them away deprives the congregation of the diagnostic edge Luke intends. The Woes are not vindictive — they are a mercy: a warning that those whose consolation is already fully received in present wealth, comfort, social reputation, and approval are not coasting toward a better version of the same — they are heading toward reversal. The preacher who softens or omits the Woes to avoid offense has removed the very pressure Luke applies to comfortable, respectable, well-regarded hearers — which is to say, most of the people sitting in most Western congregations.