
The Money-loving, the Rich, the Tax-Collector, and the Gentile: Unexpected Calls to Discipleship in Luke and Acts

Benjamin Isachsen

DPhil Candidate in Theology and Religion (New Testament)
Oxford University, Oxford, UK

Luke's radical call to discipleship

Luke's Gospel is often associated with a radical call to discipleship.¹ When Jesus encounters would-be followers, he typically demands a sweeping upheaval of their former lives, tells them to leave everything, and frequently issues an imperative: "Follow me" (*akolouthei moi*).² The writings of Luke and Acts are rightly linked to themes of voluntary divestment of wealth (Luke 18:22), new kinship models (Luke 9:57–62), and a call to leave "everything" (*panta*, cf. Luke 14:33). Surely, from Jesus' Nazareth sermon in Luke 4:16–30—widely regarded as inaugural to and representative of his ministry in the Third Gospel—we learn that he has come to proclaim "good news to the poor," something the twelve apostles and the wider group of Jesus' disciples are frequently called to proclaim and embody.³ This call to discipleship, however, seems inextricably linked to the need for hospitality, sharing, divestment, and reversal. In crude terms, without banquet hosts, it would be difficult to invite the crippled to feast or to proclaim much good news to the poor. To accomplish this project, Luke is therefore deeply concerned with householders and people with a surplus of possessions. Their (in) hospitality has implications for Luke's larger narrative of salvation, and his economic language echoes both social realities and afterlife expectancies. The Pharisees, the dubious tax collectors, and even the rich can thus be found at the center of Jesus' call to discipleship.

Wealth and discipleship in Luke

In Luke's Gospel, the intentional focus of Jesus' ministry toward the poor has frequently been noted by scholars and readers of the New Testament.⁴ Several interpretations favor relegating those

[L]uke's] call to discipleship seems inextricably linked to the need for hospitality, sharing, divestment, and reversal. In crude terms, without banquet hosts, it would be difficult to invite the crippled to feast or to proclaim much good news to the poor. To accomplish this project, Luke is therefore deeply concerned with householders and people with a surplus of possessions.

who cling to their possessions or oppose Jesus' mission to the marginalized as the bad guys.⁵ One of the more blunt claims is articulated by Rachel Coleman, who argues that "'rich' is always used as an economic categorization with consistent negative connotations for discipleship."⁶ It is hard to disagree with the idea that selfishness and lavish overconsumption do not sit well with the Lukan economy.⁷ The unfortunate pitfall of such readings, however, is that we miss the significance of how the Samaritan uses money to extend charity (Luke 10:25–37) or the fact that Abraham appears as a model rich man in Luke's image of the

1. S. R. Llewelyn and W. Robinson, "Hyperbole and the Cost of Discipleship: A Case Study of Luke 14:26," *HTR* 116, no. 1 (2023): 44–65; I. J. du Plessis, "Discipleship according to Luke's Gospel," *Re&T* 2, no. 1 (1995): 58–71; Joel B. Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 102–121.

2. Luke 5:27; 9:23; 9:59; 18:22.

3. Luke uses "disciple" (*mathētēs*) differently than the other Synoptics. In the Third Gospel, the disciples are the crowds of followers while the twelve closest to Jesus are called "apostles" (*apostolos*). This is significant to our purposes because, while the twelve might fit a category of "poor," the disciples in Luke comprise a diverse crowd of followers.

4. For a concise overview, see Joel B. Green, "Good News to the Poor: A Lukan Leitmotif" *RevExp* 111, no. 2 (2014): 173–79.

5. See, e.g., Cornelis Bennema, "The Rich are the Bad Guys," in *Characters and Characterization in Luke-Acts*, ed. Frank Dicken and Julia Snyder (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 95–108; James A. Metzger, *Consumption and Wealth in Luke's Travel Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 2, 190–91.

6. Rachel L. Coleman, *The Lukan Lens on Wealth and Possessions: A Perspective Shaped by the Themes of Reversal and Right Response* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 150.

7. David L. Matson, *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation*, JSNTSup 123 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 45; cf. Anthony Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity, Creditor Christology, and the Economy of Salvation in Luke's Gospel*, WUNT 2/439 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

heavenly banquet (Luke 13:28–29; 16:22–31). These are but two examples that show the earthly as well as heavenly implications of Luke’s economic language.

It is, therefore, necessary to complicate the image of Lukan discipleship. Contrary to how scholars have tended to view discipleship in Luke as tied solely to divestment and a homogenous group of followers, the more intricate layers of invitation and teaching reveal that in Luke’s gospel, Jesus’ ministry includes a diverse range of potential disciples. A ministry of Jesus that embraces rich disciples has been noted, although the full potential requires more careful attention. In their seminal book *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*, Schottroff and Stegemann claim that “one could with greater right call Luke the evangelist of the rich ... in the sense that he is an extraordinary sharp critic of the rich and is interested in their repentance.”⁸ While a focus on critiquing the rich is well documented in Luke, it is important to attend to the nuances of how this gospel message can be seen as an invitation to those with a surplus of resources. Luke does not endorse accumulation or hoarding of wealth per se, but rather recognizes the potential and significance of householders and banquet hosts for serving the purposes of the Lukan Jesus’ ministry, especially as the gospel spreads through household communities in Acts.

This thread can be seen throughout Luke’s writings. In his mission to call sinners to repentance and discipleship, Jesus often encounters groups of grumbling skeptics who challenge his teaching and practice (Luke 5:30; 15:2; 19:7). When Luke places the Levi pericope (Luke 5:27–32) in the chapter following the Nazareth manifesto (Luke 4:16–30), he elegantly supplies the “*how*” to the proclamation of “*what*” Jesus’ ministry is all about. This story of an ambiguous tax collector who leaves everything and hosts a great banquet for Jesus and his apostles situates meal scenes and table fellowship—motifs that will become central to Jesus’ ministry and teaching in Luke—in the house of someone formerly associated with mammon and exploiting economic practices.⁹ Moreover, throughout the Galilean ministry (Luke 4:14–9:50) and Travel Narrative (Luke 9:51–19:44) the Pharisees frequently appear as money-loving (*philarguroi*) representatives of the rural religious elite who function in many ways as a foil to Jesus’ call to discipleship.¹⁰ This led to a enduring tendency in scholarship to view the portrayal of the Pharisees representing that which Jesus’ *euangelion* (“good news” or “gospel”) has come to reverse.¹¹

8. Luise Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus and the Hope of the Poor*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986), 87.

9. See especially Luke 3:13 and 19:8 for examples of the economic misuse and deceit associated with tax collectors.

10. The Pharisees should not necessarily be considered rich in a rural first-century Galilean context, as per Halvor Moxnes, *The Economy of the Kingdom: Social Conflict and Economic Relations in Luke’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 1–9.

11. See, e.g., David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy, and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke and Acts*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 301. Gowler argues that the Pharisees are ambiguously and sometimes negatively portrayed in Luke, while they are usually more positively characterized in Acts. It might, however, be helpful to think about the Pharisees’ relationship to Jesus’ ministry as dynamic and

This story of an ambiguous tax collector who leaves everything and hosts a great banquet for Jesus and his apostles situates meal scenes and table fellowship—motifs that will become central to Jesus’ ministry and teaching in Luke—in the house of someone formerly associated with mammon and exploiting economic practices.

However, on a close reading, Luke’s portrayal of the assumed antagonistic groups of followers can be seen as an unexpected invitation to discipleship.¹² Immediately following Luke’s account of Levi’s call to discipleship in chapter 5:27–32 (Luke’s first use of the imperative “follow me”), Jesus likens the Pharisees to old wine, effectively saying that the Pharisees are indeed “good.”¹³ Although Jesus makes clear that he has come to heal the sick and call sinners to repentance (5:31–32), the “old wine” is not described as discarded or cast away, it is simply different. On a closer look, Luke’s portrayal of the Pharisees is less antagonistic than in both Mark and Matthew: They simultaneously challenge and warn Jesus of Herodian persecution (Luke 13:31), while also appear seated

developing. Luke’s Gospel is unique in portraying Jesus as eating with Pharisees and thus placing them at the center of the significant meal scenes in Luke. At the same time, they “have rejected the will of God for themselves” (Luke 7:30). This ambiguity provides depth and tension to their characterization, and these unresolved issues might offer valuable insight into the murkier areas of the call to discipleship in Luke.

12. Recent scholarship has shown how the New Testament, and Luke in particular, have a lenient view on the Pharisees. Vered Noam argues that the Qumran sectarians (4QMMT) represent a far more stringent legalistic practice, more in line with how earlier Christian scholars viewed the Pharisees of the New Testament. Steve Mason argues that Josephus’s descriptions of the Pharisees (*J.W.* 2.119–66; *Ant.* 13.171–73; 18.12–20) describe them as lawyers who “mitigated the potential severity of the laws and provided guidance for living with them.” Noam, “Pharisaic Halakah as Emerging from 4QMMT,” in *The Pharisees*, ed. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 55–79; Mason, “Josephus’s Pharisees,” in *The Pharisees*, ed. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 109.

13. By criticizing Jesus for eating with tax collectors and others who do not seem to live up to the Pharisees expectations of moral and fasting, they implicitly assign a positive assessment of Jesus, expecting him to have known better. See further Christina Eschner, “Jesus’ Table Fellowship with Tax Collectors and Sinners as Therapy: The Symposium Tradition as the Background of Mark 2:15–17,” in *Reading the Gospel of Mark in the Twenty-First Century: Method and Meaning*, ed. Gert Van Oyen (Leuven: Peeters, 2019), 528–532.

around Luke's all-important banquet table on several occasions.¹⁴

Similarly, in the triad of parables in Luke 15, the Pharisees seem to be likened to the 99 sheep, the nine coins, and the elder brother, while Jesus' teaching and table fellowship is directed to the lost sheep/coin/brother, i.e. the sinner (cf. Luke 15:2, 7, 10). Seeing as Luke ends the emblematic parable of the Prodigal Son with a conversation between the father and the elder brother who is on the outside looking in at the homecoming banquet, Luke parallels a focus on the prodigal son/lost sinner with the angry brother/grumbling Pharisees. Luke thus likens the Pharisees to those that are *not lost*, but rather fail to celebrate when sinners repent (*metanoëō*) and are brought back. Compared to Mark's and Matthew's portrayals of these religious leaders, Luke seems rather lenient in his description.¹⁵ Moreover, when Jesus is asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God is coming, he replies that the kingdom is *entos* them, meaning "within" (their reach), "among," or "inside" them (Luke 17:20–21). Finally, when Jesus arrives at Jerusalem and the passion narrative begins (Luke 22–24), the Pharisees disappear and the religious leaders who plot to kill Jesus are the chief priests and their scribes (22:1–4). Indeed, when we get to Acts, Luke's portrayal of Pharisees seems rather positive, exemplified by his characterization of Paul of Tarsus and Gamaliel, both highly acclaimed Pharisees whom Luke describes in a favorable light.

Based on these preliminary observations, Luke's description of the Pharisees and other groups of followers might be better understood as an invitation to discipleship. Foregrounding how the Pharisees were experts in the Law (Luke 11:46), it seems to be a central idea that Jesus challenges the rural religious leaders and presents a competing interpretation of the Law. The animosity between the Pharisees and Jesus thus appears to be an internal exegetical struggle, and Luke is adamant that Jesus is prophesied by the Law (3:4–6; 4:18–19) and has come to proclaim it (16:17; 24:44–48). As argued by Craig Evans, "Luke is anxious to avoid leaving the impression that the Law is irrelevant or, worse yet, broken."¹⁶ All the while the Pharisees receive woe and criticism from Luke's Jesus (11:37–54). Their misunderstanding or rejection of his message creates tension, but they continuously appear with the crowds on the way to Jerusalem and, more importantly, do not take part in the plot against him when he arrives in Jerusalem. Indeed, Jesus' most vocal critique of the Pharisees in Luke 11 takes place while he is sharing a meal with a Pharisee. Jesus' critique elucidates the significance of "justice and the love of God" over against the tithing and religious boasting practiced by the Pharisees (11:37–54). Conclusively, their steadfast challenge of Jesus, their dialogic interaction with him, and their ambiguous relationship to the kingdom, to the people of Israel, and God's salvific plan keeps them in unexpected proximity to Luke's overarching invitation to discipleship, even though they seem to misunderstand and grumble when sinners repent and are forgiven. What can

[The Pharisees'] steadfast challenge of Jesus, their dialogic interaction with him, and their ambiguous relationship to the kingdom, to the people of Israel, and God's salvific plan keeps them in unexpected proximity to Luke's overarching invitation to discipleship, even though they seem to misunderstand and grumble when sinners repent and are forgiven.

these unexpected groups teach us about discipleship in Luke? To investigate further, we briefly consider what a disciple is in Luke's two volumes.

Jesus' disciples in Luke

To be a disciple (*mathētēs*) can be understood as being a student, pupil, or follower, and is used by all the New Testament evangelists to describe followers of Jesus. As mentioned, one significant difference we might notice between Luke and the other evangelists is that in the Third Gospel the term "disciple" does not designate the twelve closest followers of Jesus. In Luke 6:13 Jesus summons a crowd of disciples and elects twelve to be his apostles (from *apostello*: to send out). Luke elaborates on his Markan source—which uses neither "disciple" nor "apostle" (Mark 3:13–14)—and thus distinguishes the twelve from the other disciples who follow Jesus. Although not all disciples are part of his innermost circle in Luke's version, Jesus' call to discipleship is perhaps most radically formulated in the Third Gospel. A disciple must be ready to deny him- or herself and sacrifice everything (Luke 14:26), including his or her life (Luke 9:23–26, cf. Matt 16:24–26), and they must have calculated this cost *before* becoming a follower of Jesus (Luke 14:28–33).

At the same time, Jesus seems reliant on several householder disciples such as Levi and Zacchaeus, who potentially complicate the radical divestment called for in Luke 14:33 by seemingly having enough wealth and possessions to host banquets and to care for Jesus and his followers. Women are also mentioned as "providing" (*diakoneō*) for Jesus' ministry in Luke 8:1–3, although the imperative "to follow" and the banquet hosting is predominately required by men.¹⁷ Luke's particular interest in wealth thus intersects with

14. Luke 7:36–50; 11:37–54; 14:1–24.

15. See especially Matt 23.

16. Craig A. Evans, *Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 244.

17. See further Halvor Moxnes, "Where is 'Following Jesus'? Masculinity and Place in Luke's Gospel," in *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Methods and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey*, eds. Anselm C. Hagedorn, Zeba A. Crook, and Eric Stewart, SWBA 1 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 155–157,

discipleship and the call to care for the poor and needy. Some disciples and parable characters with a surplus of possessions are challenged and called to divest, while at the same time someone like Abraham is portrayed as a banquet host in Luke 13:28–30 and 16:19–31—a character who is consistently portrayed as rich in Jewish Scriptures.¹⁸ This suggests that Luke is interested in calling wealthy readers such as his inscribed recipient of the Gospel and Acts, the “most excellent” Theophilus.

So, while we might conclude that the disciples in Luke are those following Jesus who have fully accepted Jesus’ radical calls for forms of divestment, we also see that this faithful response is not the only possibility. Even the apostles seem to misunderstand their calling up until the very last hour when they ask, “Who shall be the greatest?” (Luke 22:26). More importantly, Jesus’ demand to give away everything does not seem to necessitate self-impoverishment as a requirement for all paths of discipleship. The Pharisees, somewhat surprisingly, share certain characteristics with Jesus’ disciples in Luke. First, they follow Jesus and listen to his teaching. Second, he calls them to grasp the kingdom of God and criticizes them when they fail to understand their calling, much like how Jesus criticizes both the apostles and the disciples. Third, they frequently appear in settings of table fellowship, hospitality, meal scenes, and banqueting. Finally, they are “lovers of money” and thus intersect with central issues in Luke’s overall theology and economic language. They are not among the sick, sinners, or lost that Jesus has come to save, but through them we might glean what Luke’s Jesus expects from those who are called to realize the good news to the poor. They are, conversely, examples of the part of Israel who have the kingdom within their grasp but fail to realize it. Their role, therefore, might be less antagonistic and hostile than usually suggested. As some of the main interlocutors with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, they function to elucidate central issues regarding what it means to follow Jesus and answer the call to be his disciple. To take a closer look at how the interactions between Jesus and the Pharisees might inform the call and invitation to discipleship in Luke, we consider some of the key

160–161. Moxnes argues that women are not called to “follow” (*akoloutheō*) in the same way as men, but that their contribution to Jesus’ ministry is marked by “being healed” and “serving,” while men are associated with “calling” and “following” (161). While his argument is most helpful in distinguishing different *spatial* modes of discipleship in Luke, Moxnes’ argument focuses on the closest followers of Jesus who leave “everything” (*panta*). Moreover, it is noteworthy that Levi, the first man who is explicitly “called to follow,” appears servile by throwing a great banquet and is never described as leaving his household. To broaden the conversation on how Luke’s Jesus calls disciples to leave households and form new categories of identification, I argue that householders outside Jesus’ inner circle continue to play a key part of discipleship in Luke—and particularly in Acts—where this important role is frequently occupied by women.

18. Abraham is frequently described as rich and hospitable in Old Testament and Pseudepigraphal texts such as Genesis 13:2 (“very rich,” cf. T.Ab. 1:5), Genesis 21:8 (“gave a great banquet”), and in the Testament of Abraham where he is described as having the same luxurious garments as the rich man in Luke’s parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19, cf. T.Ab. 4:2).

From the manger in Bethlehem to the cross on Golgotha, the Son of Man experiences rejection and inhospitality while a core part of his call to discipleship seems to focus on hospitality, especially hospitality to those who resemble Jesus, the outcast, and the poor.

texts where the rich and the Pharisees clash with the teaching and practice of Jesus of Nazareth.

Good news to the rich

Luke’s message to followers or disciples with a surplus of properties and possessions is often proclaimed as a call to hospitality. From Levi’s banquet in Luke 5:27–32 to the story of Zacchaeus who is called from the sycamore tree to host Jesus as a *son of Abraham* (Luke 19:1–10), Luke’s gospel—particularly the Travel Narrative—is permeated by stories of householders and wealthy people who are called and challenged by Jesus’ teaching and parables. The stories of the rich farmer (often called “fool”) who dies after expanding his barns instead of sharing his prosperity (Luke 12:13–21), instructions concerning banquet invitations (14:13–21), the prodigal son who squanders his inheritance (15:11–32), the ingenious steward (16:1–13) and the rich man who overlooks Lazarus and is condemned to Hades (16:19–31) are some of the highlights of Jesus’ challenging socio-economic vision in Luke’s Travel Narrative. Refusing to share, invite, and be charitable seems, in Luke’s Gospel, to have grave consequences for soteriological concerns as well as being one of the primary thresholds for discipleship. In contrast, Jesus himself identifies as having “nowhere to lay his head” (9:58).

From the manger in Bethlehem to the cross on Golgotha, the Son of Man experiences rejection and inhospitality while a core part of his call to discipleship seems to focus on hospitality, especially hospitality to those who resemble Jesus, the outcast, and the poor.¹⁹ John the Baptist propagates the way for Jesus’ teaching on radical hospitality and introduces several key themes even before Jesus begins his ministry. When the crowds ask what they must do, John the Baptist answers in line with the economic teaching to come with Jesus: “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise”

19. Jesus’ role as “homeless and poor” is not unambiguous as the Son of Man also hosts meals (Luke 22:14), sojourns in the house of Peter (4:38–41) and is frequently “eating and drinking” (7:34) and reclining to dine with both his friends and followers, Pharisees, women, tax collectors, and sinners (5:27–32; 7:36–50; 10:38–42; 11:37–54; 14:1–24; 19:1–10; 24:13–35, 36–53).

(Luke 3:11).²⁰ John continues to warn that the tax collectors must not collect more than their prescribed lot and soldiers abstain from extortion,²¹ signaling perhaps both the significance of these groups in the ensuing narrative and suggesting that negative connotations come with such vocations. Both tax collectors, such as Levi and Zacchaeus, and centurions, such as in Luke 7 and 23 and Cornelius in Acts 10, are examples of unexpected disciples in Luke's two-volume work.

The paragon of hospitality and the archetypal rich disciple in Luke is Abraham. While Luke includes typically standardized references to the patriarch's lineage and highlights the significance of his ancestry and genealogy like the other Synoptic Gospels, he includes an additional trope that sets his portrayal of Abraham apart from other New Testament descriptions of the Jewish exemplar of pious faith and hospitality. The references to children, daughters, and sons of Abraham, and particularly the active role of the patriarch in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, tie Abraham to Luke's vision for the rich and for calling and inviting disciples who appear in a household or hospitality setting.²² The theme of clever economic behavior and generous banquet hosting is developed throughout the Travel Narrative and reaches its peak with a vivid depiction of afterlife torment for the inhospitable rich, mirrored by the inclusive banquet hosted by Abraham, the epitome of hospitable wealth, with Lazarus reclining in Abraham's bosom (*kolpos*) in the afterlife, the seat of the guest of honor. The Pharisees are mentioned and described as money-loving immediately preceding the parable in 16:14, and, with the mention of disciples in 16:1 as the recipients of Jesus' teaching here, Luke neatly dovetails his call to discipleship by addressing the ambiguous Pharisees in the crowd. They have perhaps failed to see the significance of debt reduction (16:1–13) and hospitality (16:19–31) for the proclamation of the kingdom of God, but they remain connected to these central issues of Luke's radical call and cost of discipleship.²³

The qualities of the old wine: Pharisees and other banquet hosts in Acts

In Luke's gospel the Pharisees and the rich seem to hold an ambiguous role: at once criticized for vanity and neglect of the poor, and simultaneously characterized as hosting Jesus and his poor followers. However, as Luke's two-volume work crescendos toward the universalization of the gospel message in Acts, much of the propagation in the first volume is brought to fruition through the words and deeds of a Pharisee from Tarsus named Paul. At this

At the end of Acts when Paul professes to be carrying his chains “for the sake of the hope of Israel” (28:20), the narrative portrayal of the Pharisees has progressed from grumbling onlookers of Jesus' ministry ... to a converted Pharisee (Paul) who is willingly enduring punishment and imprisonment for the same gospel project.

point in Luke's narrative—reading Luke and Acts in unity—the Pharisees have been absent since Jesus entered Jerusalem and the beginning of the Passion Narrative. Their obstinate presence during Jesus' time in Galilee is followed by a sudden disappearance, before reappearing as a main protagonist in Acts. Luke makes several mentions of Paul's Pharisaic identity and mentions his teacher Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 23:6; 26:5). Although Luke does not refer to Jesus' words and teaching from the first volume, Peter and Paul the Pharisee effectively export to the Gentile world the radical hospitality and inclusive household community proclaimed in the Third Gospel. Paul's *ekklēsia*²⁴ is founded on followers of the Way (Luke's preferred term for Jesus-followers in Acts) who appear in household settings or with a surplus of possessions, such as the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10), Lydia the merchant of luxurious clothing (16:11–15), the wealthy in Beroea (17:10–12), as well as Publius and the Maltese islanders (28:7–10).

Furthermore, at the end of Acts when Paul professes to be carrying his chains “for the sake of the hope of Israel” (28:20), the narrative portrayal of the Pharisees has progressed from grumbling onlookers of Jesus' ministry who stand to miss out on God's salvific plan to a converted Pharisee (Paul) who is willingly enduring punishment and imprisonment for the same gospel project. In fact, without the Pharisees and their dynamic character development, we might lose sight of Jesus' teaching on central issues such as wealth and possessions, repentance and reversal, or the tension between rejection and inclusion in God's salvific plan. The Pharisees seem to represent that part of Israel that encounters the revelation of Jesus but fails to receive and recognize it for what it is. In the words of Simeon in Luke 2:32, Jesus has come to be “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people

20. The question, “What must I/we do?” is a central question in Luke and Acts (Luke 3:10–14; 10:25; 12:17; [14:16]; 16:3; 18:18; 20:13; Acts 2:37; 9:36; 16:30; 22:10). Cf. Mija Wi, *The Path to Salvation in Luke's Gospel: What Must We Do?* LNTS 607 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 175–177.

21. Including centurions, as per Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 296.

22. Luke 19:1–10; Acts 10; 16:15, 30–34.

23. Pharisees also host banquets and meals in Luke: 7:36–50; 11:37–52; 14:1–24.

24. I use *ekklēsia*—the Greek word for assembly or congregation—and not “church” to signal that these first Christ-following communities were not yet institutionalized into anything that resembles what we might think of as “the Church” today. Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), ix.

Israel.” At the same time, when Jesus says that he has come to call sinners to repentance (5:32), he is talking about Levi and tax collectors. The Pharisees seemingly do not need to do more than accept and be joyful that sinners are repenting and being brought back into the fold in which they have always belonged. It is only natural, therefore, to portray Paul as a devout Pharisee, described by Luke as continuing to sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 21:26), as “zealous for God” (22:3), and in the Lukan Paul’s own words to “have lived my life with a clear conscience before God” (23:1).²⁵

One might go so far to say that the old wine is not only good but remains a core part of Luke’s vision of discipleship. They exemplify a group who needs to act shrewdly with material wealth in the first volume and are represented by a shrewd Pharisee who proclaims inclusive table fellowship for all in the second. The unexpected calls to discipleship, Jesus’ challenging words to the rich, the tax collectors, and the Pharisees propagate the way for an emerging *ekklēsia* to be founded in the homes of rich Gentiles. Such a story could not have been told with an exclusive focus on the good news to the poor but rather is intertwined with a message to the rich ever since John the Baptist cried out in the wilderness. Therefore, to fully grasp the radicalness of Luke’s call to discipleship, we must always consider the way it addresses and invites not only the poor, but also those called to host, house, and be hospitable.

Conclusions

While this article can only begin to tease out some underexplored tensions in Luke’s call to discipleship, I offer some preliminary conclusions. Based on the argument above, it seems that Luke is not only relying on a vigilant core group of followers of Jesus who renounce everything to forward the Kingdom of God. In addition to these kinds of disciples, the Third Gospel also addresses banquet hosts and other disciples with some surplus of possessions who contribute towards the nascent *ekklēsia* without abandoning all their wealth. These conclusions raise some fundamental issues about traditional readings focusing on the gospel to the poor, showing that a significant part of Luke’s call to discipleship engages groups that are ambiguously portrayed.

It might, therefore, be more accurate to conclude that Luke’s Gospel’s good news to the poor is inextricably linked to a good news for the Pharisees and hosts, the tax collectors, and the rich. The good news for the poor is introduced in reversal terms by Mary (Luke 1:53, cf. 6:24) and explicitly by Jesus at the onset of his anointed ministry in the Nazareth synagogue sermon (Luke 4:18). The good news for those disciples called to offer hospitality, however, is perhaps less vocally proclaimed, but just as important for Luke’s overarching themes from soteriology and reversal to

25. Luke’s portrayal of the Pharisees in Acts adds to the ambiguity of the characterization in the Gospel. When Gamaliel is lecturing the Sanhedrin on the will of God in Acts 5:38–39, the echo to Luke 7:30 (“the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God’s purpose for themselves”) seems almost paradoxical.

[D]on’t overlook the significance of the money-lover, the rich, the tax-collector, and the Gentile needed to ... host these inclusive meals.

social realities and community building (Acts 2:44; 4:33–37).²⁶ The traditional binary of Luke’s Gospel as comforting to the poor and threatening to the rich should thus rightfully be contested, and the Pharisees, the rich banquet hosts and farmers in the Gospel, alongside Roman soldiers and other Gentiles in Acts, function to underscore this point. In many ways, Luke’s intertwined portrayals of salvation—pending merciful deeds by those with possessions and more or less passive reception for the poor—demand an active choice for the rich to support the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7–11, Amos 6:1–14, and Isaiah 58:6–9), while the poor seem to be predisposed to receive salvation in fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 61:1 in Luke 4:18) and as a reversal of earthly fates (Luke 1:46–55; 6:20–26; 13:30; 16:19–31). While the themes of reversal and social concerns permeate the Third Gospel, characters in Luke and Acts are multifaceted and can sometimes challenge superficial characterizations.²⁷ In addition to Luke’s lenient portrayal of the Pharisees compared to the other Synoptic Gospels, texts such as Luke 16:19–31, alongside other key pericopes on renunciation such as Luke 12:33, 18:22, and 19:8 exemplify this very tension in the Third Gospel. It is therefore necessary to complicate the image of Luke’s calling and invitation to discipleship as strictly for the poor. It also includes those characters who are portrayed with ambiguity, tension, and depth. Although Luke’s Gospel is centered on a message of good news to the poor, much of this project includes, invites, and engages more ambiguously characterized followers who often appear in meal settings or as having a surplus of means. We might imagine a banquet where the blind, the lame, the crippled, and the poor are seated around the table, but should not overlook the significance of the money-lover, the rich, the tax-collector, and the Gentile needed to offer hospitality, host these inclusive meals, and perhaps even clarify some fundamental aspects of Luke’s call to discipleship.

26. See further Heiko Wojtkowiak, “Mit realistischem Blick – Lukianische Perspektiven auf Geld,” *ZNW* 114, no. 1 (2023): 52. Wojtkowiak argues that we must recognize the significance of money to value Luke’s agenda with rich disciples: “Die Forderung, den eigenen Besitz und das Geld positiv zur Unterstützung Notleidender einzusetzen, kann für Lukas’ Adressaten, nicht zuletzt für Wohlhabende unter ihnen, gerade durch die Anerkennung der Rolle des Geldes anschlussfähig werden” (“The demand to use one’s own possessions and money positively to support those in need, for Luke’s addressees—not least for the wealthy among them—can be made compatible, precisely through the recognition of the role of money”).

27. See Christopher M. Hays, *Luke’s Wealth Ethics: A Study in their Coherence and Character*, WUNT 2/275 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 185; cf. Giambrone, *Sacramental Charity*, 2017.