



CHRIST CHURCH NOTES
THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

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2015



CHRIST CHURCH
THE ANGLICAN/EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN VIENNA

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

PART 1—LUKE 1:1-4

Before we start working our way through the Gospel of Luke, we should stop and consider some important basic theological concepts that will help as we study this and any Gospel.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The *gospel* (note the small *g*) literally means *good news* and is a term used to refer to a particular theological concept. The concept is that Jesus Christ died and rose again for the forgiveness of sins and generally requires a response of belief (or faith) and repentance from sin. Paul is famous for having numerous and slightly varied articulations of the gospel that include various elements of the incarnation or eschatological implications as well as those elements just mentioned (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 or 1 Timothy 1:15, for example).

WHAT IS A GOSPEL?

A *Gospel* (note the capital *G*), is a term referring to a piece of literature. In fact, most often, it refers to one of the four canonical books in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.¹ We see in Mark 1:1, the author conceives of his work as articulating a Gospel. The Gospels make up almost half of the New Testament.

The four Gospels consist of numerous kinds of text, including poetry, discourses, wisdom literature, prophetic literature, and apocalyptic literature. The main text type found in the Gospels, however, is narrative (διήγησις, or stories), the very word Luke uses to describe his *orderly account* in the first few verses of his Gospel. These varied text types and the rough structure of each (beginning with birth in two, ministry in two; ending with death) has suggested to some scholars that the Gospels might be modelled after Greco-Roman biography.²

WHO WROTE THE GOSPEL OF LUKE?

Scholarship is not uniform on the identity of who wrote the Gospel of Luke and even whether it should be paired with the Acts of the Apostles. However, the historically dominant position has been and remains that the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles together are a two-volume work of roughly equally sized parts and each written with very similar vocabulary and Greek style as well as similarly literary progressions and the same theological concerns. Together, Luke-Acts makes up 27.5 percent of the New Testament.

¹ Canonical refers to it being one of the official books in the Bible. There are several dozen other Gospels that date from the first few centuries but were not, for various reasons, accepted into the biblical canon.

² For more on the genre of the Gospels and a great deal of other general information about the Gospels, see the extended introduction to the Matthew notes. In terms of Luke's sources and the relationship between Luke and the other Gospels: 41 percent of Luke appears in all three of the Synoptics (triple tradition), 23 percent is found in Matthew only (i.e., Q), 1 percent is found in Mark only (suggesting that most of his Markan material could have been gotten from Matthew as well), and 35 percent is unique (or Lukan *Sondergut*). Finally, in addition to his Gospel sources, Luke used a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Septuagint (and usually designated as LXX).

Assuming that the two books belong together, then the argument for Luke, the follower of Paul, as author is built on three arguments: 1) Certain passages later in Acts leave the third person (they) and are, instead, written in the first person (we), suggesting that the author was a participant. Given this, Luke would be the person described. 2) The Early Church is nearly uniform in its belief that Luke was the author of the Gospel of Luke. 3) The eschatological tone and awareness of history suggest someone at least in the second generation of Christians (as Luke would have been—though some have used these arguments to suggest the Gospel is so late as to exclude Luke).

WHAT IS LUKE'S AGENDA PURPOSE?

The best place to begin looking for Luke's agenda is in the prologue. Here, he states something of his purpose in collecting his materials and writing. Luke 1:1-4:

¹ Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

Several points are important. First, the word translated as *orderly account* in the first verse (διήγησις) literally means *narrative*. The NRSV is vexingly inconsistent here as the same phrase in English in verse three is translating an entirely different Greek word. Second, the phrase *the truth* in the fourth verse is not the typical word for truth in New Testament Greek, but rather a relatively rare word: ἀσφάλεια. Other translations render the phrase as *know with certainty* or *have confidence in*.

Finally, it is important to observe that Luke has no problem pairing what seems like a disinterested and historical approach (references to sources, his commitment to investigating everything carefully from the very first) with a theological and practical (in the sense of ethical instruction) agenda (that the reader would have certainty). This has been hard to reconcile for many scholars since Hans Conzelmann raised the issue in 1954.³ Conzelmann suggested that Luke's theological purpose had driven him to abandon social scientific history (which Luke had been thought to have engaged in well). It has since been shown somewhat persuasively that Conzelmann was selective in his presentation and, therefore, his conclusion should be treated with caution? some scepticism. Nevertheless, the issue remains significant in modern scholarly discussion. How do Luke's historical tendencies and theological motivations relate to each other and can they be reconciled?

In the end, Luke's purpose revolves around the notion that the reader should have confidence in what is being presented about Jesus Christ, the good news that he came to save sinners through his death and resurrection. And so, as we look further into Luke's Gospel in the coming sessions, let this wonderful Gospel strengthen our faith and encourage our hearts.

³ Hans Conzelmann, *Die Mitte der Zeit* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1954).

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PART 2—LUKE 1:5-9:50

Two important ways (but not the only two ways) of distilling a biblical book's main theme or the essence of a biblical book, like the Gospel of Luke, is in the author's statement of purpose and in noting how the book is structured or organized.

WHAT IS LUKE'S PURPOSE AGAIN?

The purpose statement (Luke 1:1-4) suggests that Luke has set out to write an *ordered account* in the form of *narrative* to provide the recipient of his writings (Theophilus, meaning lover of God) with reasons to be confident (or certain) about the things (or truth) he's been taught.

¹ Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

There is very possibly a reference to at least the Gospel of Mark and other eyewitness accounts as his sources in these verses. Likewise, we know he draws on the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (otherwise called the Septuagint and designated LXX).

HOW IS THE GOSPEL OF LUKE ORGANIZED?

The Gospel of Luke, it seems, divides into three major geographic sections: 1) the birth narratives including Jesus's origin in heaven, time outside of Judea, and Jesus's ministry in 1:5-9:50. This section is focused in Galilee. With Luke 9:51, Jesus turns his face to Jerusalem and 2) 9:51-19:27 focuses on his ministry while traveling through Judea toward Jerusalem beginning with Samaria. Luke 19:28 restates Jesus's intention to be in Jerusalem and the last section of the book, 3) 19:28-24:53, focuses on Jesus's final teaching, trial, and death and resurrection in Jerusalem. It should be noted that this is a geographic inverse of the structure of the Acts of the Apostles, with the gospel message being carried by the Holy Spirit and the apostolic witness "from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

HOW IS 1:5-9:50 ORGANIZED? HOW DO THE TEXTS IN 1:5-9:50 SUPPORT LUKE'S AGENDA?

Given roughly three major content sections in the Gospel, we turn our attention to the first section. What themes bind the parts of this section (its stories and speeches and poems) together?

Two literary techniques and two particular items of content will be helpful. The first literary technique is that of comparison (both of similarity and dissimilarity, or contrast, and which will be addressed with a later question). The second literary technique is that of *chiasmus* (or creating a chiasm or ring structure of text, where the first and last points correspond and each successive point working toward the centre corresponds). Some of the particular speeches and even an entire section of miracles take this form. The centre vertex of the

structure, the middle-most item in the structure, is typically the point of emphasis. This technique (which tends to be thought of as Hebrew in its origin because of its ring form) is deeply related to the literary concepts of balancing and, as a result, comparison. This is most obvious in the Hebrew poetry and its parallel lines (*parallelism*) that we see each week, for example, in the Psalm reading.

Beyond this key structure (which will be noted again), it seems that Luke makes abundant use of a second literary technique: the insertion of poetic speeches into his text (12 in total). Four of these speeches are new compositions of substantial length (i.e., they are not quotations from the Old Testament) and delivered by four different people: Mary (*Magnificat*), Zechariah (*Benedictus*), Simeon (*Nunc Dimittis*), and Jesus (in his Sermon on the Plain). These texts are meant to help us focus on particular aspects of what Jesus came to do by way of reflecting on it through poetic description. Of course, some of these speeches are grounded in Old Testament imagery, notwithstanding that they are not quotations.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF COMPARISON IN LUKE 1:5-9:50?

Contrast, one form of comparison, is a common literary technique that has, as we have seen, an origin in Hebrew literature. It also has an origin and abundant use in Greek literature—such as the kind of biography that Luke is writing.

Antithesis occurs when the style is built upon contraries... Embellishing our style by means of this figure we shall be able to give it impressiveness and distinction.¹

Antithesis, which Roman writers call either *contrapositum* or *contentio*, may be effected in more than one way. Single words may be contrasted with single... or the contrast may be between pairs of words... or sentence may be contrasted with sentence... we may have correspondence between subsequent particulars and others previously mentioned... Antithesis may also be effected by employing that *figure*, known as ἀντιμεταβολή by which words are repeated in different cases, tenses, moods, etc.²

In particular, the balancing of the prologue (1:1-4) demonstrates this literary technique:

Luke 1:1-2

many have undertaken
to set down an orderly account
the events that have been fulfilled among us
from the beginning
just as they were handed on to us

Luke 1:3-4

I too decided
to write an orderly account
after investigating everything
from the first
so that you may know

Mary's and Zechariah's stories (their angel encounters in 1:13-17 and 1:30-33) are very similar, and yet they ask slightly different questions and get very different responses. In particular, their encounters include:

¹ [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.21.

² Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 9.4.81-86 (LCL, Butler).

Luke 1:13-17

do not be afraid
will bear a son
his name will be...
for he will be great
mercy
people of Israel, Elijah
people prepared

Luke 1:30-33

do not be afraid
will bear a son
his name will be...
for he will be great
mercy
David, house of Jacob
his kingdom will have no end

Likewise, their speeches (Luke 1:46-55 and 1:68-79) are remarkably similar, focusing on the same themes of salvation for the lowly and the reversal of fortunes for both the strong and the weak (and Mary's speech is particularly reminiscent of Hannah's in 1 Samuel 2:1-11). The beatitudes and woes in Jesus's Sermon on the Plain are balanced (Luke 6:20-26) and the stories in Luke 7-8 form a set of larger chiasms.

7:1-17 "asking him to come and *save* his servant"

7:18-35 "Are you the one to come?"

7:36-50 "Your faith has *saved* you; go in peace"

8:1-21 "hearing the word...bear fruit with patience"

8:22-39 the demon possessed man had been *saved*

8:40-42 Jairus's 12-year-old daughter

8:43-48 woman's 12-year illness; "your faith has *saved* you; go in *peace*"

8:49-56 Jairus's 12-year-old daughter; "only believe and she will be *saved*"

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR THEMES OF 1:5-9:50?

In terms of the content, we noted that Zechariah's response to the angel revealed a disposition of scepticism. "How will I know?" The angel responded by silencing him for his scepticism. Mary's response revealed a disposition of humble curiosity. "How can this be?" Note that she continued to ponder these things in 2:15-19. In other words, Zechariah's answer is framed in doubt. Mary's is framed in a desire to understand.

This comparison and contrast of Mary and Zechariah leads us to the relationship between *hearing and doing*, noting that hearing is more than merely listening, but includes understanding and is related to character formation. This contrast in how Mary and Zechariah initially responded is underscored by Jesus's comment in his Sermon on the Plain, especially in Luke 6:43-45 and 6:46-49. Here Jesus connects *hearing/understanding* with *doing/action and a life of obeying* his commands. This might be thematic in the whole of the Gospel and takes the prologue comments to Theophilus as more than merely building certainty, but inviting an active response.

Finally, the themes of *salvation* and *peace* seem to be springing up in the text with some frequency. In particular, the quotation from Isaiah 59:8 (in Luke 1:79: 'feet will be guided into the way of peace'), the angel's poem (in Luke 2:14), and a few other places demonstrate a focus on peace. Salvation is mentioned in the poetic speeches in the birth narrative and is the focus of the miracles in Luke 7-8.

OUTLINE³

Testimony Verifying the Saviour

- 1:5-25 – Zechariah’s encounter with the angel Gabriel
- 1:26-38 – Mary’s encounter with the angel Gabriel
- 1:39-45 – Mary and Elizabeth
- 1:46-56 – Poetic Speech: Mary’s *Magnificat*
- 1:57-66 – John is born
- 1:67-80 – Poetic Speech: Zechariah’s *Benedictus*
- 2:1-21 – Jesus is born (including the angels’ *Gloria in Excelsis*)
- 2:22-40 – Jesus is presented at the Temple (including Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis*)
- 2:41-52 – Jesus in the Temple as a boy
- 3:1-22 – John prepares ‘the way’
- 3:23-38 – the genealogy of Jesus
- 4:1-13 – Jesus tempted

The Saviour’s Testimony

- 4:14-30 – Jesus rejected
- 4:31-44 – Jesus begins his ministry with a healing of a man, healing of many, preaching
- 5:1-11 – Jesus calls disciples
- 5:12-26 – Jesus heals a leper and a paralytic
- 5:27-28 – Jesus calls another disciple
- 5:29-39 – Jesus answers a question about fasting
- 6:1-5 – Jesus answers a question about the Sabbath
- 6:6-11 – Jesus heals a man with a withered hand
- 6:12-19 – Jesus identifies the 12 apostles and heals many and preaches
- 6:20-49 – Poetic Speech: Jesus’s *Sermon on the Plain*

The Message of Salvation

- 7:1-17 – Jesus heals a centurion’s servant and a widow’s son
- 7:18-35 – Jesus answers questions about John
- 7:36-50 – Jesus forgives a sinful woman
- 8:1-21 – Jesus teaches in parables
- 8:22-39 – Jesus calms a storm and heals a man with a demon
- 8:40-56 – Jesus heals a woman, and Jairus’s daughter

The Saviour’s Plan (or Pattern?)

- 9:1-9 – Jesus sends out the 12 and perplexes Herod
- 9:10-17 – Jesus feeds 5,000
- 9:18-27 – Peter confesses Jesus as Christ, Jesus foretells his death
- 9:28-36 – transfiguration
- 9:37-42 – Jesus heals a boy
- 9:43-45 – Jesus foretells his death
- 9:46-50 – internal and external disputes

³ This outline is based, in part, on the work of the Rev. William Taylor at St. Helen’s Bishopsgate in London, England.

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PART 3—LUKE 9:51-19:27

LUKE 9:51-56, 9:57-62, 10:1-20, 21-24

We can get a sense of the whole of this section of the Gospel of Luke (9:51-19:27) by looking at the opening texts as a representative introduction to the main themes of the section. In particular, the geographic transition in Luke 9:51-56 is not only significant in its reversed echoes in the structure of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:8, wherein the gospel witness travels from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth), but it becomes directly tied to one of the main themes in the section.

⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³ but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then they went on to another village.

Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem. And as a result of this orientation, *he is rejected* by the Samaritans. It is no accident that Jesus turns toward Jerusalem (and the implications of working toward the fulfilment of the promises to the Jews that were captured in the angelic encounters and poetic speeches of the first section) and is immediately faced with rejection.

Interestingly, the disciples want to call down judgment (like Elijah), but Jesus stops them. Why? We aren't told just yet. Instead, it seems that we are invited to draw a conclusion based on the next two sections.

Cost of Following and Rejection

In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus encounters three separate potential disciples and has similar discussions with them on the *cost of following*.

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' ⁵⁹ To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' ⁶⁰ But Jesus[m] said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' ⁶¹ Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' ⁶² Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

One of the potential disciples is invited to leave his home (land?). One is invited to leave his father's house (through the absence at burial). And one is invited to leave his people (or family or tribe?). It is likely that this is related to those very same things that Abram is beckoned to leave in order to enter into the covenant with God in hope of finding blessing in the Promised Land (see Genesis 12:1-9). While perhaps challenging to the modern reader,

that they were asked to leave such things was remarkably scandalous to an early reader, and indeed contrary to the expectations set by Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21). Beyond the Old Testament context, there is a superior example in Jesus Christ. Jesus left his father's heavenly home, his people, and his heavenly kingdom in becoming man in the Incarnation. Again, he left his earthly parents and home in order to engage in the ministry that will ultimately take him to his death in Jerusalem (in the Gospel of Luke). Like in many other places, Jesus serves as the example of perfection in the challenges he makes to his followers. This should have a character forming effect on the readers of the Gospel.

But, why? Why must his followers forego these things? To what end should these things—family and home—be sacrificed? What is the result for which they hope?

Peace and Salvation

In Luke 10:1-20, we encounter an important answer. Much is to be sacrificed in order to proclaim *peace* for the outsider. "Peace to this house." Will it be easy? Is it merely sacrifice? What about opposition? Again, Jesus has demonstrated his mercy and commitment to peace in the opposition he faced in Samaria. Now, the disciples will be similarly tested. They will be sent to proclaim this message of peace to the outsider as "lambs amidst wolves." They will be constantly confronted with *the cost of following Jesus and rejection*.

Ultimately, each person in the Gospel of Luke is asked to wrestle with the challenges (again, the costs and opposition) of following Jesus in this life now versus the certain *judgment*—that will come to those who reject Jesus. Jesus reminds his hearers of the judgment to come with another statement of "woe" (indeed, the "woe" statements are more significant in this section as eight of them are spread throughout, compared with five concentrated in the Sermon on the Plain and only two in the last section of the Gospel).

The disciples return, overjoyed at their use of power. Jesus rebukes them with a note about Satan. They should not rejoice in the power they were able to wield or the defeat of the enemy or even the judgment of those who deserve it. They should rejoice in the salvation of the saved. In other words, a Christian's joy comes from the salvation and ultimate peace that we have not earned and do not deserve, not in the fall of those who deserve to fall. This nuance is theologically important.

LUKE 13:18-35

It is worth noting briefly that the central unit of the section focuses on the decision that followers must make, having counted the cost and wrestled with the relationship between *hearing and doing*. Those who will be saved will be many, including gentiles and outsiders to the religious elite, but it will be those who have entered through the narrow door.

LUKE 18:35-19:10, 19:11-27

In Luke 10:21-24, Jesus's prayer brings the discussion back around to *seeing and hearing (or understanding) and its relationship to doing*. His message seems to indicate that doing—action—is fine, but they misunderstand if that's all that they get out of it. They need to see that which is hidden from the powers of the world. They need to hear the message that is being proclaimed by Jesus. Only then will their ministry activity make a difference.

Likewise, in the closing of the section in Luke 18:35-19:10, we are presented with healing and salvation for two men who cannot see, despite the protests of those around. Zacchaeus becomes the exemplary man, one who saw/heard, got it, and immediately committed himself to doing what is right. And in Luke 19:11-27, Jesus presents a parable about the consequences of how one responds to his words.

Beyond these opening and closing frames, the interior of this section of Luke continues with these themes. The opening frame serves as an introduction to a large chiasm that picks up these ideas of *rejection, the cost of discipleship* (in terms of family, people, riches, etc.), and the *judgment* that comes to those who reject Jesus. Likewise, this central section of the Gospel continues those themes that were begun in the first section: *peace/salvation* and the *relationship between hearing (or understanding) and doing*.

OUTLINE

9:51-56 rejection in Samaria

9:57-62 the cost of discipleship

10:1-20 the first missions (“Peace to this house!”) and a statement of “woe” (or judgment)

10:21-24 a prayer for understanding (hearing)

10:25-37 “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

10:38-42 how to approach Jesus (like Mary)

11:1-13 teaching on prayer

11:14-32 signs of judgment and what they mean

11:33-12:12 hard teaching, “woe” statements, insults for insiders

12:13-34 parable and teaching about the uselessness of riches

12:35-48 parable on imminent return of an

anticipated one and how to respond

12:49-13:17 a parable, a miracle, the cost of

discipleship (including

family) and challenging

religious rules

13:18-35 the Kingdom, Jerusalem,

and striving to enter

by the narrow door

14:1-35 a parable, a miracle, the cost of

discipleship (including

family) and challenging

religious rules

15:1-32 parable on imminent return of an anticipated

one and how to respond

16:1-31 parables and teaching about the uselessness of riches

17:1-17:19 hard teaching, “woe” statement, salvation for an outsider

17:20-37 signs of judgment and what they mean

18:1-14 parables on prayer

18:15-17 how to approach Jesus (as a child)

18:18-30 “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

18:31-34 a prediction of death

18:35-19:10 healing and salvation (for two men who can’t see, despite crowd protests)

19:11-27 a parable about the consequences of response

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PART 4 – LUKE 19:28-24:53

Having reviewed some of the larger structural techniques that Luke employs (*chiasmus* and *comparison*) as well as some of his most dominant themes we have seen throughout the Gospel of Luke (particularly *hearing and doing, peace and salvation, judgment, and the cost of following Jesus*), we now turn to the final section of the Gospel.

LUKE 19:28-44

Just like the middle section of Luke’s Gospel, the final section (Luke 19:28-24:53) opens with Jesus giving instructions to his close followers. There is, like in Mark’s Gospel, a strong sense of irony as the crowds gather to praise God when Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem. Note that their exclamations include the line: “Peace in heaven!” Neither Mark’s nor Matthew’s versions include this particular line. It shows, again, Luke’s distinctive focus on Jesus as the one who brings peace, even in this ironic moment.

The end of this opening scene ends with Jesus surveying Jerusalem. He looks over the city with great sadness. Note his remark in verse 42: “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!” The themes of pending judgment of the opposition and, especially, the peace that is possible and yet seems so far from grasp dominate the passage.

LUKE 19:45-20:47

This final section of Luke’s Gospel includes several smaller, and yet quite elegant, literary devices for organizing the text. After the opening vignette focused on “peace” in Jesus’s sorrowful, regretful tone, the reader would naturally be asking a question of how this struggle between judgment and peace will come about. In other words, how will Jesus demonstrate his superiority over the opposition? Luke then relays several different stories that demonstrate answers to this particular question.

<i>Text</i>	<i>With Whom Jesus Interacts</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>What Is In Question?</i>
19:45-48	temple vendors	temple	authority over God’s house
20:1-19	chief priests, scribes, Elders	baptism	authority [parable used to judge]
20:20-26	spies	the state	authority over secular/political
20:27-40	Sadducees	resurrection	authority over Scriptures/life
20:41-44	David	Lordship	authority of Messiah over David
20:45-47	scribes/hypocrites	hypocrisy	authority to judge

In chapter 21, Jesus continues with the theme of authority, but in an eschatological sense. He particularly focuses on the time when persecutions will occur and the Son of Man will come in great “power and glory.”

Notice also how this long series of interactions and eschatological teaching is framed in the first and last parts in Luke 19:47-48 and 22:1-2.

“Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.” [19:47-48]

“Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people.” [22:1-2]

The issue of Jesus’s authority is framed by the Jewish leadership’s abundant fear of the people. Their authority is proven meaningless in the arena of public opinion (for the moment) when compared to Jesus, who demonstrates his authority (and ability to overcome or trap or thwart the opposition) repeatedly throughout the section.

This theme of Jesus tangling with authorities and demonstrating his authority returns later in the text, especially in Luke 22:66-23:25, wherein Jesus faces off with the Council, Pilate, Herod, and ultimately the people.

LUKE 22:14-30

Luke continues this use of literary devices to bind different pericopes, this time through the use of a single image: the three tables.

The Lord’s Table (Luke 22:14-24)

First, Jesus welcomes his disciples to the Passover feast at table. This was no ordinary dinner, but is rich with allusions to the biblical theological themes of blood, Passover, and covenant. This passage includes the second of Luke’s only two uses of the word *covenant* (διαθήκη), the first having come at the end of Zechariah’s song in Luke 1:72. Zechariah’s use of the word is connected to the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12:1-3. Also important is God’s demonstration of his commitment to keeping the covenant when Abraham asked for a sign in Genesis 15. There, God asks Abraham to slaughter several animals and arrange their bloody carcasses in such a way that God passed through the pieces while Abraham was in a deep sleep. Importantly, God’s restatement of the covenant in Genesis 15 promises Abraham an ultimate state of *peace* (see Genesis 15:15). Like the later story of Passover in Exodus 12:1-28, there is a portrayal of blood and the passing over of the dead bodies (as a kind of substitution) for the sake of God proving he will keep his covenant to save his people.

Our Tables (Luke 22:25-27)

Jesus moves from the discussion of ultimate salvation achieved through his death and resurrection symbolized in bread and wine, through a seeming response to the bickering of his disciples, to teaching on the ethical implications of the gospel imagery. He focuses on the kingdom ethic of serving versus reclining (an ironic turning of the parable about the great dinner in Luke 14:15-24). Luke has bound together these two passages through the image of a table to say this: The Lord’s Table and all it anticipates in the cross makes a demand for us at our own table and how we approach service and what it means to follow (first to last, greatest to least). We no longer have to look for or strive or grasp at power. He saved us so that we might serve others while following him (and it goes against all of our self-serving tendencies).

God's Eternal Table (Luke 22:28-30)

Jesus finishes his teaching by referring to a third table: God's banquet table in heaven. Having connected his own table of sacrifice to the table of following in sacrifice for the sake of others, Jesus ends by describing a final table as the goal. God's eternal table is the encouragement, the motivation for living out the ethic found in the second table. The result of living a sacrificial life is the assurance of getting a seat at God's Table in the kingdom of heaven, where we will all enjoy the presence of God (cf., Luke 12:37).

Luke employs a similar literary technique to organize his last chapter and the resurrection appearances. Each takes place on the same day, with the first early in the morning and the second during the day, and the third as night falls, signalling the beginning of the eighth day concluding with a dinner that night. In each episode on that day, Jesus appears to his various followers and uses nearly the exact same language to describe his suffering and death and resurrection.

CONCLUSION

Of course, our sessions on Luke have moved us quickly through the Gospel. It is an extraordinarily rich Gospel with incredible and somewhat unique theological messages. More than any other Gospel, it focuses on the *peace* and *salvation* that is won in the cross for the sake of the world, especially the ethical implications of how Christians ought to be striving for peace after the cross. Luke paints a sobering picture of what it means to follow Jesus, the *sacrificial cost of following* (usually in order to serve the lowest and most rejected of society) and the certainty of *facing opposition*. He focuses particularly on the relationship of *hearing* (Jesus's gospel message) and *doing* (the not merely learning, but reforming behaviour and being active in bringing about the peace and salvation of all). And yet, though *judgment* of the opponents is necessary and will be brought about by Jesus, the message keeps coming back to *peace* and *salvation*.

So, as we learn about Luke a bit more during the year, may we find, like Theophilus, the certainty and assurance about the things of our faith that we hear in Luke's Gospel, as well as the resolve to follow through in these matters of faith.

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