NT SURVEY: GOSPELS/ACTS

WEEK 3: LUKE

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE SURVEY SERIES

- We need to know our Bibles from front to back.
    - What implications does this have for my life?
    - What are the major themes in each book of the Bible?
    - How does each book fit within the overall framework of the Bible?
    - When I read each section of Scripture, what are commonly misread passages?
- Each year we will highlight each part of Scripture, both its importance and profitability (2 Tim 3:16-17).
- Specifically, this series will focus on the Gospels and the Book of Acts. These books primarily show us Jesus and how His church was established. They are true stories and they are history, but demonstrate important theological realities that are still true for the church today.
- Why are Matthew, Mark, and Luke so similar?
- Is everything that happens in Acts normative for today?
- If a friend asked you about what Luke teaches us about Jesus, could you help him?
- **Class Schedule:**
    - November 1: Matthew
    - November 8: Mark
    - **November 15: Luke**
    - November 22: John
    - November 29: Acts 1-7
    - December 6: Acts 8-12
    - December 13: Acts 13-28

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE

- The Good News of Luke has real similarities to the other Gospels in terms of data about Jesus' life, suffering, crucifixion and resurrection. But in my opinion, there is a warmth and detail in a fashion different than the other Gospels about many of the people who appear in Luke's record.
- For example, consider the remarkable way that Zacharias and Elizabeth are portrayed. We see the angel Gabriel describe Zacharias' incredulity about the birth of John: "Because you did not believe my words" he would be struck dumb (1:20). When I read it, I think "I would have probably said something similar to

Zacharias." We may faithfully serve God every day, but like Zacharias we simply do not expect the miraculous to occur, even when he already has an angel in his presence! I am not saying Gabriel was wrong in his statement about Zacharias's unbelief, but I can understand it. He was "troubled" at Gabriel's appearance (1:12) and fearful. That "troubled" is the same word used to describe Jesus in Gethsemane as he came face to face with the here-and-now reality of fully obeying the Father. That term carries with it meanings of *greatly disturbed, terrified, frighteningly stirred*, and similar notions. But Zacharias continued on with his priestly duties and returned home. After John's birth, God gave Zacharias's voice back after he wrote out John's name and Luke describes him as "he began to speak the praise of God." Zacharias' psalm is recorded in 1:67 - 79. Let's look at it together. We see the warmth of his love and praise for God—when earlier we had only seen his disbelief. Luke records the transformation in this man from doubt to ebullient faith and rejoicing.

- When you are home, compare his experience to Luke's record of Simeon and Anna in 2:25 – 38. Both of these stories reveal a *more-than-dates-and-facts* approach. This is something of what I mean when I say Luke portrays a depth and warmth about the characters in Jesus' life.
- Luke also portrays the life of Jesus from a different angle than the other Gospel writers. One author states that Luke displays him as "the perfect man."[1] His portrayal of the birth of Jesus is so personal and detailed that it even found its way on the lips of Charles Schultz's comic strip character Linus, in "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Linus quotes verses 8 – 14 of Luke 2, with a famous remark to Charlie Brown: "Sure Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about." From Luke alone we discover that Jesus was early welcomed into the world through the shepherds who heard from the angels in 2:8 – 14. His Gospel is one of the chief ways that Christians and the world see that Christmas is all about Jesus.

Author and Date

- "**Luke 1:1-4** Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, [2] just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, [3] it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; [4] so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."[2]

- Luke's name is never mentioned in the Gospel of Luke, or in the companion volume The Acts of the Apostles. But "the uniform testimony of Christian tradition, dating back to early times, names Luke as the author of the third gospel…The earliest witnesses that name Luke as the author belong to the latter part of the second century A.D."[3]

[1] J. Sidlow Baxter quoted in D. Edmund Hiebert's "An Introduction to the New Testament: the Gospels and Acts" p. 114
[2] Unless otherwise noted, biblical references are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition.
[3] Hiebert, 115.

- The Muratorian Canon (AD 160 – 200) describes Luke's Gospel as being "compiled in his own name from reports [by] the physician whom Paul took with him after the ascension of Christ." [4]
- Additionally, Irenaeus and Tertullian portray Luke as the author. Both Origen, and his instructor, Clement of Alexandria note Luke as being the author. This places evidence as early as the second and third centuries.
- Remember, one of the difficulties in using external evidence to accurately date and author of ancient books is the fact that documents disappear over time, there are not always a multitude of copies of a book made in the first place, etc. Over the years we have found earlier and earlier records that help us with the date and authorship of the Bible, but this all depends on the progress of archaeology.
- A simple statement: The early and later church broadly accepted Luke as being the author.
- Relationship to Paul: Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm. 1:24
- The dating of Luke's writing. There are at least six considerations for Luke having written this in the early 60s:[5]
    - Acts, Luke's companion book[6] makes no mention of the Nero's persecution, the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), or Paul and James's deaths (AD 62).
    - He makes no mention of Paul's prison release or execution—narratively, Luke leaves him in prison.
    - Luke records the outcome of Agabus's prophecy (Acts 11:28), but not the result of Jesus' prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem (Lk 21:20).
    - Luke makes no mention of Paul visiting Ephesus (2Tim1:18) but leaves Paul saying he would never see Ephesus again in Acts 20:25, 38.
    - Luke makes no mention of Paul's epistles, whereas other early Church writings show that the Church greatly valued the Pauline Letters. If Acts was written later (as many non-Christian critics claim), it is hard to justify Luke not mentioning them.
    - Last, "it is unlikely that a Christian writer would give as friendly a picture of Rome as we find in Luke-Acts after the Neronic persecution."[7]
- There are non-Evangelical critics who want to place Luke's writing in the late 70s and 80s. Conservative scholars[8] concur that such efforts are "subjective" and hold "little weight." "The evidence for an early date seems more convincing than that for a later time, and…it should be accepted."[9]

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[4] Heibert 115.
[5] This material gleaned from "An Introduction to the New Testament", D.A. Carson, Doug Moo, and Leon Morris, 116. Note that many of these considerations presume that Luke wrote Luke and Acts, so many proofs use both Acts and Luke.
[6] See Acts 1:1f where again Luke addresses Theophilus as he did at the beginning of Luke
[7] Carson, Moo, Morris 116.
[8] Also, more and more modern secular scholars affirm an early date.
[9] Carson, Moo, Morris, 117. It should be noted that the growing number of archaeological discoveries over the years has repeatedly confirmed the accuracy of conservative Bible scholars.

Background and Setting

- Who is Theophilus? (Luke 1:1 and Acts 1:1)
    - It is likely that he was Luke's patron in that he was funding Luke's writing. This was a common occurrence then as now. Papyrus was expensive, and making copies of original manuscripts was expensive (scribal cost, papyrus cost, etc.)
    - He may have specifically requested to have a personal record of the life of Jesus (Luke) and the Early Church (The Acts of the Apostles). Or he may have requested it for his church, etc.
    - Luke describes him as "most excellent" which likely places Theophilus as a man of rank somehow—possibly in wealth, but more likely power and place. In the NT such terms are used to describe Felix (Acts 24:3) and Festus (Acts 26:25)[10].
- What does his address to Theophilus tell us by inference?
    - Luke was not an eyewitness of Jesus's life.
    - Luke was familiar with the other accounts of Jesus.
    - He had interviewed those who were eyewitnesses.
    - His research prompted him to write this Gospel account.
    - He used scholarly methods—"investigating carefully" (Lk 1:3)
    - Luke had "considerable literary ability". The structure of Luke's Prologue "suggests that the author was familiar with the classical writers, such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Polybius."[11]
- This leaves us with a positive view of knowing the author, date and setting for Luke's Gospel. Additionally, he was largely writing for a certain kind of audience. Let's discuss briefly…
    - His literary beginning (1:1f) makes clear that he meant this for more than Theophilus's eyes. He had a wider audience in view. For manuscripts meant to be read by a wide audience it was common in Luke's time to use an honorary statement to the patron. This carried over even centuries later to the publishing of the Authorized or King James Version, where the work was dedicated to England's King James.
    - Also Luke noted his careful efforts—again a practice used by other writers when addressing larger audiences.
    - "He had in mind predominantly Gentile Christians, as we see from the (1) dedication to someone with a Greek name, (2)his clear showing of the relevance of salvation to people outside the commonwealth of Israel, and (3) the Greco-Roman style of his preface. He mostly avoids Aramaic words such as "Rabbi" and "Abba"… [present in the other Gospels]; what he says is [certainly] of interest to Jewish Christians but apparently was not intended for them in the first instance."[12]

[10] This is not the fictional Festus in Gunsmoke who was Marshall Dillon's scrappy sidekick-deputy. He appeared circa 1962. In Acts 26:25 Paul is addressing Festus the Governor of Judea.
[11] Hiebert, 118.
[12] Carson, Moo, Morris, 118.

STRUCTURE AND OUTLINE

- There are many outlines for the book of course. But a useful scheme is to see it in literary terms. As the longest book in the Bible, Luke has a lot of information not in the other NT writings.
- Consider seeing it in five movements:[13]
    - Christian beginnings (1:1 – 4:13)
        - John the Baptist and Jesus' beginnings are presented as being essentially the same timeframe
        - Zachariah and Elizabeth; Mary and Elizabeth
        - The Song of Mary (1:46f)
        - Jesus' birth—shepherds and angels; Jesus in the Temple with Anna & Simeon; Jesus as a boy questioning with the spiritual leaders;
        - John the Baptist ministry
        - Jesus' victory in temptation
    - Jesus in Galilee (4:14 – 9:50)
        - Nazarene sermon
        - Jesus's healings
        - Miraculous catch of fish—Simon Peter's discipleship/apostleship calling
        - Levi called
        - Arguing the Sabbath with the spiritual leaders
        - The calling of the Twelve (6:12 – 16)
        - The stilling of the Storm
        - Various healings
        - Discipleship teaching (9:46f)
    - Jesus on the way to Jerusalem (9:51 – 19:44)
        - Good Samaritan
        - Mary and Martha and the Lord's (Disciples') Prayer
        - Jesus teaches repentance
        - Rich young ruler
        - Jesus predicts his Cross (18:31 – 34)
        - Zaccheus
        - Triumphal Entry
    - Jesus in Jerusalem (19:45 – 21:38)
        - Temple cleansing
        - His Divine Messianic Authority over the Temple (20:1 – 8)
        - Jesus predicting the End Times
    - Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection (22:1 – 24:53)
        - Judas betrays
        - Gethsemane and arrest (22:39 – 54)
        - Peter denies
        - Sanhedrin kangaroo court
        - Pilate prevaricates and punishes
        - Herod shirks any responsibility
        - Sentencing & Crucifixion (23:13 – 49)
        - Jesus in the Tomb
        - Two angels announce Jesus' resurrection and Peter at the tomb (ch. 24)!
        - Appearing to disciples (24:36 – 49)
        - Jesus ascends to his Father! (24:50ff)
- This is truly where Luke wants to take his readers—Jesus is the Messiah and Author of Salvation!

[13] Carson, Moo, Morris 111 - 113.

KEY PEOPLE AND IDEAS IN LUKE

- Jesus
- Disciples (The 12 and others)
- Spiritual leaders, Pilate, Herod
- Zachariah, Elizabeth, John the Baptist
- Prophecy "has been fulfilled"
- Salvation open to all
- Luke notices people "under the radar"
    - Women
    - Children—the infancy records both of Jesus and John the Baptist
    - Poor
    - Disreputable (Zaccheus, etc.)
    - Widow of Nain
    - The woman anointing Jesus' feet
    - The women at the tomb
    - Luke includes that to teach about saving faith and humility, we need to learn from the essential trust of children
    - Mary and the Magnificat
    - Simeon and Anna
    - Holy Spirit—Mary's conception, at Jesus' baptism, etc.
- The importance of prayer including the Pharisee and the tax collector
- The centrality of Jesus' purpose and the Cross and Resurrection (19:10)
- Whereas John helpfully brings out Jesus obeying the Father and glorifying him in salvation, Luke has this more from humanity's great need of Christ's rescue.

THEME OF LUKE[14]

a. It's length shows the comprehensiveness that Luke means to bring to Jesus' story and teachings.

b. God deserves praise and thanksgiving—worship in the Temple serves as bookends for his book.

c. Jesus was perfect in his humanity—perfect faith, perfect obedience, perfect Friend, complete in his humanity (the nativity story).He trusts the Spirit completely. ***The*** Son of Man.

d. Mankind's only Savior "all flesh shall see his salvation"—both Gentile and Jew

e. Luke wants his readers to be interested in Jesus the person, and the people who interacted with Jesus—we have mentioned many

[14] Hiebert, 140f

A TEACHING FROM LUKE FOR US ALL (2:21 – 40)

Israel had been promised a deliverer—one who would bring political deliverance and spiritual renewal:

Jeremiah 31:31-40; Isaiah 42:1-8

The OT is filled with these kind of promises for Israel—this is what this man Simeon was looking for.

Israel was a shell of what it once was: politically, and spiritually—and Simeon was among those Jews who was looking for what God had promised.

Simeon represents what faith looks like and what faith looks for…

This introduction of Simeon's character and response to Jesus (as a 48 day old infant!) fits Luke's goal of reaching to Jews and God-fearers (Gentiles) who believed the OT promises about Israel's Messiah Deliverer. Luke means to affirm their wonderings if Jesus of Nazareth ("can anything good…?") was Messiah. Notice these characteristics of faith of this faithful Jewish follower of God:

- Righteous—this term used in the OT often to describe someone who treated others properly, according to the Law of Moses (Mt 23:23 justice and mercy and faithfulness)

- Devout—careful to show devotion to God—for a Jewish follower of God this meant one who was careful to worship God from his heart and lived out the OT Law. YHWH was the center of His life.

- Looking for the consolation of Israel—notice the language in Isaiah 57:1, 3, 5 and God's response in vv. 15, 18…You see, Simeon is one of those whom God will show Himself faithful—bringing consolation

God has come to him in a special way—revealing Himself to Simeon individually (25c & 26)

- "the Holy Spirit was upon Him"—this is the kind of language used when prophets were about to prophesy—proclaiming truth from God

- "he would not see death until he saw God's Messiah Deliverer"

God had also come to Him in another special way—

- so that Simeon not only had God's comfort for himself, but he also had a message for others—"he came in the Spirit into the temple"

- this is the nature of a true movement of the Spirit of God—His truth speaks to our own heart and prompts us to bring His comfort and truth to others. For us it is through the Scriptures…

Since the Holy Spirit of God was influencing Simeon in this special way, he knew who Jesus was even though Jesus was not yet teaching, preaching, healing, raising the dead or reigning as Israel's Anointed Messiah King (27—28)

- He recognized Christ
- He embraced Christ
- He praised and worshiped God of heaven
- He was **satisfied** with two important realities:
    - God's promise had been fulfilled just as he had been told
    - God's way of fulfilling His promise satisfied all his longings and needs

All Simeon needed was God's Word and Christ—this delighted and fulfilled him—fully and completely. (29—30)

- "releasing Your slave"—this is the word used to describe letting a slave go free—this quest of faith bound him to God and His truth ("according to Your Word")
- Simeon is satisfied with "seeing" God's salvation—we do not know if how old Simeon was, but remember what God had revealed to him in v. 26.
- We do not know if Simeon saw Jesus teaching, preaching, healing and bringing hope to Israel as He offered Himself as Messiah—what we do know is Simeon is **satisfied** with God's promise and he is **satisfied** with seeing that promise fulfilled only in seed form

And this is where we need to go with this today…when we see the lives of people in the Bible, God has not given them to us as some sort of perfect example of all that we are to do—they are fallen, redeemed people like us. But their lives are described in the Bible for these two larger reasons:

- First, so that we remember just how gracious and patient God is with us—we desperately need help!
- Second, if there is anything to imitate about them, we are to imitate their faith.

So, what does Simeon's faith teach us this morning?

I. Faith is always coupled with righteousness, devotion to God—expecting Him to do just as He has promised (25ab)

II. Faith is based upon the truth of God, and nothing else (25c—26, 29c)

III. Faith is centered on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ—not on ourselves (27—28)

IV. Faith is satisfied fully and completely with the way God fulfills His promises (29—30)