

New Testament Survey for Beginners: Part 3 – Luke

The gospel according to Luke focuses on **the humanity of Christ**, which does not in any way deny His deity. It is important to remember that when Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary He did not set aside His being God, but, in the words of the Athanasian Creed, “He is God and man ... not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God.” Similarly, when He was resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven He did not set aside His being a man, but took with Him these two indivisible natures, divine and human, to sit at the right hand of the Majesty on High, from which position of honour and authority He will come again at the end of the world.

Now we need to examine why the humanity of Christ is so important, and what we find when doing so is that it is indispensable to His being the Mediator who reconciles His people to God. (1) The first Adam failed the test of the covenant of works when he fell into sin; the last Adam would have to pass this test, be obedient to fulfil all righteousness, and so qualify as a sinless man to meet the demands of the covenant of grace. (2) The covenant of grace required the death of a righteous man in order for him to achieve a substitutionary atonement on behalf of others. There was no righteous man, and God cannot die, so Jesus became a man (the last Adam) in order to be offered up unto death as an unblemished sacrifice in the place of all who would be given to Him and would subsequently come to believe in Him. This is what qualified Jesus to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world: it is the fact that He, as a man, was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The humanity of Christ is important, too, for other reasons. (1) As a man, Jesus is a great encouragement to His weak disciples. Having been tempted Himself – tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin – He is able to aid those who are also tempted. Let us therefore take courage and come boldly to the throne of grace, knowing that we are able to do all that God requires of us through Christ who strengthens us. (2) As a man, Jesus is an example for all who seek to walk in His footsteps. Yes, we have other examples to follow, but none as constant and unwavering as He. We are to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our

God, and none has done anything near to that as Jesus of Nazareth who did it perfectly. Oh, that this same mind might be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, that we might first be humbled and later exalted! (See Philippians 2:5f.) How thankful we can be, believer, that our Lord has taken our humanity with Him into heaven where He continues to be our Advocate and prepares a place for us.

John will focus on the deity of Christ, but Luke emphasizes His humanity and has written the most biographical of all the gospel records in doing so, from Jesus' lowly birth to His glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven. Luke does not give us a first-hand account of Jesus' earthly ministry, though he must have heard a lot about it. He did thoroughly investigate his material, however, as he tells us, and carefully checked it with the eye-witnesses of his day. Luke wrote not only the book that bears his name but also The Acts of the Apostles, which is a first-hand account of the history of the very early New Testament church. Both letters were written to a man named Theophilus, someone who belonged to the aristocracy and possibly held a position of some power. While we know very little about Theophilus, it seems that he was someone recently converted through faithful, apostolic preaching, and as a result of that Luke wants to provide him with written verification of what he has heard.

What do we know about this man Luke? He was from Antioch and was converted sometime after Pentecost. He was a good friend of Paul who spoke of him as "the beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14), and was probably the only Gentile to write any book of the Bible. Indeed, with his two books, Luke and Acts, he wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else, including Paul himself. Nothing is known of Luke until he met Paul at Troas. From there he went with Paul to Macedonia where he became, it would appear, the pastor of the Philippian church. When Paul returned to Philippi, Luke went with him back to Palestine, perhaps to minister to his health needs, and it seems that he was with Paul during the time of his last imprisonment and even up to his death in Rome.

Luke certainly had a good grasp of the gospel and was well grounded in all the doctrines of God's saving grace. At the same time, he was also a highly educated Gentile, a respected physician, someone who was very familiar with the culture of his day. Having met and conversed with people at every level of society, he was well suited to reaching the rich and poor all around him with the message of

Christ and Him crucified. We see his broad interest in the songs of praise he records in the opening chapters, songs not recorded by any of the other evangelists, but which have become deeply embedded in subsequent church history and greatly loved by many Christians still today: the Song of Elizabeth, the Song of Mary (the Magnificat), the Song of Zacharias (the Benedictus), the Song of the Angels (the Gloria in Excelsis), and the Song of Simeon (the Nunc Dimittis).

Women are very much included in Luke's account of the gospel, and one gets the impression that he wanted to reach out to them particularly. At any rate, he wanted to make certain that they were not left out, and the practical instruction he gives them makes this book most commendable for any women's Bible Study. First, he makes reference to Elizabeth who, like Sarah before her, gave birth miraculously in her old age. Then there was her near relative, Mary. Matthew recorded the birth of Jesus, but did so from the perspective of Joseph; Luke records this same virgin birth, but does it from the perspective of Mary. Next, he writes of Anna. It is a brief reference, but who can forget or fail to appreciate the example of that godly old widow who spent her time fasting and praying in the temple of the Lord?

Luke tells us of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, the raising of the widow's son at Nain, the forgiveness of the sinful woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, the women who provided for Jesus from their own financial means, the healing of the woman with the issue of blood, the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead, the hospitality of the sisters Mary and Martha, the healing of a crippled woman, the search of the woman for her lost coin, the warning regarding Lot's wife, the two mites of the poor widow, the lament of the daughters of Jerusalem, the presence of the women at the cross, the presence of the women at the tomb, and the resurrection report of the women to the disciples. Paul rejoiced to know that in Christ there is neither male nor female (Galatians 4:28), but that Christians are all one in Him. Clearly, this was something that Luke celebrated as well.

Another significant feature of what Luke has recorded for us is that long section in his book dealing with parables, the parables of Jesus, which Luke learned from those who first heard them. Of the twenty-two parables in the book, seventeen are found here and nowhere else. To be sure, Luke himself was fascinated by them, and believed that parables were a great teaching tool, especially if they

could be so long remembered and have such lasting influence on one's own life and behaviour. What kind of impact do these parables make on us? Do we not find these same illustrations to be a most effective way of establishing clarity and in driving home a practical point in our own conversation with others?

Finally, the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals is a significant feature of all Luke's writings. We see it in the lives of Mary, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Simeon and John the Baptist. The Spirit came upon Jesus Himself at His baptism, led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, empowered Jesus for every kind of ministry, and even equipped Him to endure the cross. Jesus later commissioned His apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, but first they must tarry in the city of Jerusalem until they were endowed with the Holy Spirit to do so. The book of Acts is a further installment of this same theme, and it is there that we find the beginning of that great work being fulfilled.

If you are an unbeliever, you need the Holy Spirit. You need His regenerating grace, and unless one is so born again, said Jesus, he cannot see the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is only flesh, but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit; with that comes spiritual discernment and a desire to serve the Lord. "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near" (Isaiah 55:6,7). Doing so is itself evidence of God's Spirit working in you to will and to do His good pleasure!

If, on the other hand, you are a believer, a new creation in Christ Jesus, you already have the Holy Spirit, dear Christian, and it was by such power that you were born again. Rejoice to know that you have been sealed with the Spirit who is the guarantee of your eternal inheritance, the very One who will preserve you in all your comings and goings until you are received up into heaven itself. In the meantime, seek to be filled with the Spirit. With the example of Jesus ever before you, and by this Spirit who makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be expressed in words, commit yourself to the will of our faithful Creator. Let us direct our own humanity to the glory and enjoyment of God!

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