



## Class 5 - Luke

*New Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church*

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### **Luke: The Savior King**

We are all geared to belong. Since the beginning of time, people have desired to be a part of something: a family, a clan, a tribe, a nation... whatever.

So we “friend” people that may not even be friends on Facebook, we read blogs, we follow tweeters, we volunteer, we are politically affiliated, we get married, we become passionate about sports teams, we celebrate holidays, we join a church and then maybe a small group.

So who belongs to God’s family? That’s the critical question we’ll be examining today in the book of Luke – the only Gospel written by a non-Jewish author. Luke upends the Jewish understanding of what it meant to be part of God’s people and presents, to a primarily Gentile audience, what it means to be a part of the expanding Kingdom of Christ.

### **Background**

We’ll start with some background. Luke the physician wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. While neither of the books contains an explicit reference to Luke’s authorship, the early church certainly associated the books with Luke, the traveling companion of Paul. We see him referenced in several New Testament letters from Paul (Col. 4:14; Phi. 24; II Timothy 4:11) and he is mentioned in all of the Roman imprisonment letters.

Luke was a careful historian as evidenced by the opening of his Gospel (1:1-4):

Many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed them down to us. It also seemed good to me, since I have carefully investigated everything from the very first, to write to you in an orderly sequence, most honorable Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things about which you have been instructed.

His purpose is clear: that his readers may know the certainty of the things they have been taught. Again, a reminder that ours is a historical religion. Your foundation for faith are these events from 2000 years ago. And it is accounts like the gospel of Luke that are the primary body of evidence for your faith. Study these gospels together, and when the storms of faith come, you will be certain of what you have been taught.

Luke's method for providing this certainty is that of the historian. He makes reference to accounts written by others, one reason why most scholars believe that Luke was the last of the three synoptic gospels to be written and used the gospels of Mark and Matthew as source material. In addition, Luke mentions "eyewitnesses and servants of the word" as sources for his gospel. We know that Luke was a close associate of the apostle Paul and would also have had access to other leaders in the early church, not to mention his own eyewitness participation in some of the events recorded in Acts (Acts 16:10-17; 27-28). So not surprisingly, Luke's writings bear the marks of careful research and historical accuracy. Most likely, Luke was written in the early 60s before the deaths of Peter and Paul — simply because one would assume that these martyrdoms would have been recorded in Acts had they already occurred.

As I mentioned earlier, the book appears to have been written with a Gentile audience in mind. Luke, a native of Antioch according to early church tradition, is the only Gentile among the New Testament writers (Col. 4:14). His writing style bears this out: He employs a typical Greco-Roman greeting to the opening of his gospel. And He quotes from the Septuagint rather than from the Hebrew and refers to Aramaic as though he does not speak the language (Acts 1:19, 21:40, 22:2, 26:14). In all this, Luke uses an educated and elegant style. His Greek is excellent and ranks second only to the Book of Hebrews in elegance. One scholar critical of Jesus called Luke's Gospel the most beautiful book in the world.

So, how did Luke structure his elegantly worded, historically precise, Greco-Roman focused Gospel?

## **Structure**

In one word, around the city of Jerusalem. You can see this most clearly simply by the events Luke chooses to record. The journey to Jerusalem that comprises one of Mark's chapters and two of Matthew's consumes nearly half the book of Luke (9:51-19:27). And if Luke focuses on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world, the companion volume of Acts chronicles the gospel's journey away from Jerusalem, to Rome — the center of the Gentile world. As a result,

this Gospel is the first half of Luke's message that the Kingdom of God has come, and that it has come to all nations.

As the storyline of Luke marches towards Jerusalem, we see six sections in the book: Chapter 1-3 — Luke describes Jesus' birth, childhood, baptism, and temptation; Chapters 4-9 recount His early ministry in Galilee, and then the whole Gospel turns on 9:51 where Luke writes, "When the days were coming to a close for him to be taken up, he determined to journey to Jerusalem"; Chapters 10-19 chart that resolute journey to Jerusalem and Jesus' teaching on what it means to be a disciple; Chapters 19-21 record Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem; Chapters 22-23 recount Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial; and Chapter 24 provides the fullest account of Christ's post-resurrection appearances and ascension.

Maybe at this point, you're thinking, this doesn't sound much different than what we have already heard in the other Gospels. Granted. In fact, about 60 percent of Mark's gospel is reproduced in Luke's—and like Matthew, Luke shows how Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

But Luke makes some unique and very important contributions as well. You can see some of that in where Luke picks up Jesus' ministry. Whereas Matthew and Mark begin with a period of relative popularity as they use Jesus' ministry to prove his Messiahship, Luke jumps into Jesus' ministry at the point when he is rejected by his hometown of Nazareth. His focus will not be as much to prove that Jesus is the King, but to demonstrate what his kingdom will be like. And so the entire narrative of his ministry in Luke occurs under the cloud of rejection. This kingdom will not be composed of the fabric of cultural and religious leadership who are rejecting him. Instead, as Jesus' travels towards Jerusalem, his focus is on God's eternal plan to expand his kingdom to include all sorts of people. And that will be our theme this morning as well. We'll think through the nature of this Expanded Kingdom: The Expanded Kingdom, 1. Is for all people — even outcasts, 2. Has no ethnic or geographic boundaries, 3. Was the reason Jesus came, and 4. Will continue to expand until Jesus returns!

We'll start with that first characteristic.

## **The Expanded Kingdom—For All People—Even Outcasts**

Many in Israel had been waiting many years for the arrival of the Messiah, and many envisioned a Messiah that would come and restore Israel to her glory days and free her from Roman occupation.

The holders of all things Jewish, were the Pharisees and other teachers of the law, and we see

early on that Jesus' kingdom is not what they were expecting. Luke recounts for us one of these "expectation busting" meetings in chapter 7, "Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is — that she is a sinner.'" Jesus goes on to have a pointed discussion with this Pharisee named Simon, about the nature of sins and forgiveness.

Jesus' point in coming to earth and setting himself up in Israel was not to tap into this Jewish network, go to the important dinners, and be viewed as one of the Jewish elites. No, we see in this one account, a picture of what the expanding Kingdom looked like, it includes people who, as far as the world is concerned, are the very last to deserve favor from God.

Luke demonstrates Jesus' special concern for the marginalized and outcast of society. These individuals knew their need, and so they pictured the type of attitude needed to enter the Kingdom of God. Incidentally, this point is critical to understand Luke's treatment of the poor. Certain theologians, especially those in so-called "liberation theology" have seized on Luke to argue that the poor and oppressed are specially blessed by God. But the category of "poor" in the Old Testament wasn't merely about finances and power — it was the poor who depended on God. Luke's point in highlighting Jesus' ministry to the outcasts and marginalized is not to say that the rich and powerful cannot be saved, but rather to demonstrate that the Kingdom is for those who depend entirely on God — and those will often be the marginalized in society.

So, who were these marginalized people Christ ministered to? We see that Christ had a unique ministry towards women. Far from excluding women as was common among rabbis in his day, Luke reveals the rather prominent role women played in the life and ministry of Jesus. From the expanded accounts of Elizabeth's and Mary's pregnancies (chp. 1), to the close friendships of Mary and Martha (10:38-42), to the patron role played by some women (8:3), and the first reports of the resurrection (24:1-12), women were accepted and influential in the life of Jesus. "All told, Luke refers to more women than any other Gospel. This might reflect something about Luke, but it also reveals something of what Jesus considered important."<sup>1</sup> We should be encouraged by Jesus' attitude towards women. Maybe you've been tempted to think of Jesus as "male" focused, the 12 disciples were all men, the Godhead is masculine, only men are to be elders and pastors.

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<sup>1</sup>Promises Kept

But there is not a male or female way of taking up our cross and following Christ; the same Gospel is needed regardless of gender! Men, if you're ever tempted to think yourself as given a greater role or position because of your gender, spend some time reading Luke. Consider not only Jesus' attitude towards women, but consider the way many of these women were far greater examples of faithfulness to our Lord than even the "chosen disciples".

Another group Luke focuses on are children. While children are often idolized in our modern world, it was not this way in ancient cultures. There was no Peter Pan, there was no idealization of childhood, and there was little concern given towards children. Yet Jesus was concerned about them. He healed them, said we should receive them, and revealed himself to them (10:21). And he used them as examples, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (18:17). How do you view children? As insignificant and inconsequential? Jesus saw children as humans who needed Him just as much as adults, and in many ways exemplify the kind of trust and faith we need towards God!

And Jesus gave special attention to the poor. This would have been particularly unsettling for a culture that despised the poor even more than our own. There were no "social justice" ministries taking place across the ancient world of Jesus' time. It would have been extremely unsettling to hear Jesus tell the story of the rich man and Lazarus where Jesus says, "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side" (16:22-23). While Jesus is not teaching that poverty in this life equals automatic entry into Heaven, He is teaching that the rich should be careful to not trust their wealth more than God. Jesus, unlike the Jewish religious leaders of the day, was concerned about the poor and saw in them the necessary attitude for those in the expanding Kingdom!

There are still two more groups of people that Jesus ministered to, the sick and the disreputable. These groups were beyond the marginalized of Jesus' day: they were outcasts, both physically and spiritually.

Jesus spent significant amounts of time caring for and healing the sick. Luke provides several unique reports of healing, including the widow of Nain's son (7:11-17); the crippled woman healed in the synagogue on the Sabbath (13:10-17); the man with dropsy (14:1-4); the ten lepers (17:11-19); and the restoration of Malchus' ear (22:50). While most Jewish persons remained at physical and social distance from the "unclean," Jesus physically and socially reached out to them. So, when he heals the leper in Luke 5:12-16, he actually touches the man – something a rabbi would never have done.

Beyond the physical outcasts, Jesus is profoundly concerned for the disreputable, the “sinners”. He includes a tax collector among his disciples, men who were regarded as cheats and traitors. Consider the way Jesus’ entrance into the world was announced, the angels came to the shepherds. Quoting Mark Dever, “We think of shepherds in terms of charming Christmas pageants, with cute children dressed in nicely pressed robes. Yet in the ancient world, shepherds were thought of as shifty; untrustworthy, even thieving migrant-workers. Yet they were some of the first to greet Jesus! That was typical, I think, of Jesus’ whole ministry.”

The lame, blind, crippled, and “sinners” were among all the outcasts that Jesus showed tender concern for. Luke makes it clear that a vital element of Christ’s message is one of hope, love, and justice for the mistreated and oppressed. As followers of Christ, we, too, should have a spiritual inclination to reach out to those on the margins. Who of us is not one of the outcasts that Jesus came to save, regardless of your standing in the eyes of the world today? Apart from Christ, we are outcasts before the only One whose approval ultimately matters!

So that is the first characteristic that we see of this expanding Kingdom: it is for all people, even those on the fringes of society. In fact, especially for those on the fringes if that marginalization leads them to dependence on God alone.

But not only is the Kingdom expanding to new classes of people, it is also expanding across ethnicities and nationalities!

## **The Expanded Kingdom — Has no ethnic boundaries**

This theme jumps off the page from the very beginning of the book. From the opening chapter of the book, Christ is described as “a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles...” (Luke 1:32a). And as Luke drops into Jesus’ ministry in Luke 4, he focuses on Jesus’ statement that in Israel’s history it was sometimes the Gentiles who found special favor in God’s sight:

“Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. But I say to you, there were certainly many widows in Israel in Elijah’s days, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months while a great famine came over all the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them except a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. And in the prophet Elisha’s time, there were many in Israel who had leprosy, and yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

Likewise, after telling the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that they would be rejected because they don’t know Him, he says that others “*will come from the east and west and north*

*and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29).*

Even Luke’s genealogy is a picture of the breadth of the Kingdom Christ has established. Luke doesn’t stop at Abraham (like Matthew did); he traces the line of Christ all the way back to Adam. The Second Adam has come, and where the first Adam’s sin plunged the nations into alienation from God, the Second Adam has made a way for the nations to be reconciled to this God! Just as God had promised to Abraham many nations would come from him, Jesus’ Kingdom would expand to all the nations, far beyond national Israel.

Needless to say, this was a source of great confusion and offense to the Pharisees. We see this most distinctly in their understanding of the Sabbath, as the Sabbath went to the very heart of Jewish national and religious identity. Luke recounts in chapter 13 the Pharisees’ reaction to Christ healing a lame woman on the Sabbath, “Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, ‘There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not the Sabbath.’ The Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?’ ”

In his book “Promises Kept,” Mark Dever says about this passage: “The Pharisees’ misunderstanding of the Sabbath points to the way many people in Israel mistook Israel’s role. God intended for Israel to be a means for reaching the whole world. But the Pharisees treated Israel as an end in itself, and so they bound up the people with unnecessary and overzealous regulation.”

Of course, before we pass judgment on the ethnocentric view of the Pharisees, we should consider our own hearts. Do you ever feel like you were more deserving of Grace than another? Do you ever have a desire to hold your Christian circle close? I don’t want to let those people, or those groups of people in, otherwise my church will lose its current atmosphere. Well, what kind of atmosphere or attitude are you seeking to preserve? Do you ever find yourself justifying why the Gospel seems to have such freedom to be proclaimed and believed in the USA but doesn’t in some other countries? Further, do you pray for the Gospel to go to other people groups and nations and are you doing anything to help this happen? The expanding Kingdom has no ethnic or political boundaries! And in the end there is only one boundary/distinction that matters, children of the light and children of darkness.

## The Expanded Kingdom – Was why Jesus came

That brings us to our third theme, that this expansion of God's kingdom is not just a side point, but the very reason why Jesus came. Luke 19:10 provides a succinct statement of Jesus' purpose in coming to earth. "*The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost.*"

Well, who then was lost? The lost included Israel and her religious leaders who rejected Jesus. The lost included those who were outcast and without a shepherd. So we read in **Luke 5:30-32**:

But the Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus replied to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

In short, the lost includes everyone who has not believed on Jesus Christ and the truth about Him. So, Jesus seeks those who are lost. And his concern for the lost is not a vague, general or amorphous concern but a specific concern for individuals. That's what we learn from the parables of the lost coin, lost sheep, and lost son in chapter 15 of Luke. His concern is personal and specific and extends to every circumstance.

And Luke takes pains to point out that this mission of Salvation is part of God's great plan to redeem the nations from their sin. If a key word in Mark's fast-paced narrative is "immediately," one of Luke's favorite words is "it is necessary" which he repeats often. It is necessary for Jesus to go to Jerusalem, because no prophet dies outside Jerusalem (13:33). It is necessary for Jesus to stay with Zacchaeus, that he might be saved. (19:5) And so forth. The book carries an air of inevitability, because God's sovereign plan is behind all these events, and God's sovereign plan will result in the salvation of the world.

Jesus came to complete a mission – to accomplish salvation – not just make salvation possible. And indeed He did this through his crucifixion and resurrection for the sins of the lost. The faithful are redeemed from their sins and the wrath of God and given a place in the kingdom.

As the lost who are saved, though, complete transformation is expected. So Jesus proclaims: "*I say to you, whoever acknowledges (confesses) Me before Men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God*" (Luke 12:8-9). And, those who would be disciples of the Lord must "hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life" (14:26) and "give up (forsake) everything" (14:33). Luke 18 shows that those who would be justified before God cannot be self-righteous but must be humble enough to cry out, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke

18:9-14). In Jesus' words, "unless you repent you will perish."

Well, if you haven't given much thought to how you can be a part of this Kingdom expansion, the good news we read in Luke and will continue to consider in Acts is that this Expanded Kingdom will continue expanding until Jesus returns. There is still time to participate in the Great Commission! And that is our fourth theme:

## **The Expanded Kingdom — Will Continue to Expand until Jesus Returns**

The Gospel of Luke paints a picture of the Kingdom that is broader than the rich, powerful and privileged. It is broader than a group of Jewish men or the nation of Israel alone. It also gives us the picture of a Kingdom that has come but has not yet come completely. In Luke, we see that the gospel is both already and not yet.

On the one hand, the kingdom of God is present wherever the King is present. So, wherever we find Jesus we find the kingdom of God. On one occasion, a Pharisee asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. To which Jesus responded, "*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation; nor will people say, 'Here it is!' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you*" (Luke 17:20-21).

On the other hand, Jesus speaks of an expected kingdom that is not yet fulfilled. We find him at the institution of the Lord's supper saying:

I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God... Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (Luke 22:15-18).

And at the mistaken notion that the kingdom of God would arrive immediately, Jesus speaks the parable of the nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and later return (**refer to Luke 19:11-27**). The express point of the parable seems to be to encourage the disciples to be faithful in attending to their gifts, resources, and calling while the King is away because the kingdom will not come immediately as they supposed.

## Conclusion

As we near the close of Luke's gospel, it is in this tension between the spiritual reality of the kingdom that has already come and the eschatological kingdom that is yet to come that we find the disciples. The book closes with Luke's version of the great commission and instruction for the disciples to wait in Jerusalem the coming of "power from on high." And thus begins the book of Acts with the disciples asking, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). And it is there that we will pick up the second half of Luke's writing, with the book of Acts. We will see not a history of the early church, but a vivid picture of how this Kingdom would expand from geographic Israel to the very heart of power in the ancient world, Rome... and from there it would go on to touch every corner of the earth and will continue to do so until Jesus returns again!

And in that sense, the story of Luke at this point becomes intensely personal for each of us. Few of us are physically descended from Abraham. None of us would qualify as the religious elite who expected to receive the Kingdom in Jesus' day. And yet the kingdom of God has come even to such as us. Glory be to God!

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This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/new-testament-overview/>.

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