

Introduction to Luke

Key Thought: Luke has written so that we can know the certainty of the things we have been taught.

Lesson Text: Luke 1:1-4 (NIV 2011)

¹ Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. ³ With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Introduction

Luke is one of the few books of the Bible which gives us insight as to how and why it was written. We will focus on this in our first lesson.

The author of Luke does not name himself, but tradition has long connected the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles to Luke, who is mentioned in scripture in Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:11 and Philemon 24. It is thought that Luke joined the Apostle Paul in Troas as indicated by the use of “we” starting in Acts 16:10. Some even think Luke might be the “man of Macedonia” Paul saw in a vision, because the uses of “we” continue during the journey from Troas to Philippi in Macedonia and then are dropped until Paul returns to Macedonia in Acts 20. The phrase “The Gospel According to Luke,” is appended to the oldest surviving manuscript of the book, dated between 175 and 224 A.D. (p. 1, Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, New International Bible Commentary).

It’s a good assumption that Luke also wrote Acts, both of which are addressed to the same person. Together these books add up to more of the New Testament than any other writer produced. Neither book’s text offers a date of its writing. Some assume that Luke was written in the period after Paul was imprisoned in Rome, but prior to his trial and execution. That is based on the story of Acts ending at that point (which would be after 60 A.D.). But Acts is not the biography of Paul and we can recognize a point in the description given of Paul’s actions while awaiting trial which might have justified stopping the story of Acts at that stage even if more had taken place by the time it was recorded.

Some think that Luke wrote after the Romans captured Jerusalem in 70 A.D. because his account of the Olivet Discourse in chapter 21 might indicate an awareness that the events of 70 A.D. did not usher in the end of

the age (Luke 21:24, “and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”).

Bible Learning

Verse 1. Luke begins by saying that many others have attempted to compile the history of the “things that have been fulfilled among us”. We don’t know how many writers Luke means, but he definitely isn’t the first. Most scholars think that among the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) Mark was written first. Based on the material which is common to all three books it appears that Luke and Matthew were aware of Mark and followed his arrangement, but maybe they were not aware of each other. The two are the most similar in materials they share in common with Mark and often are quite different in the areas that they don’t share in common.

Luke’s use of “us” indicates that he, too, is a believer.

Verse 2. Besides the attempt to compile written accounts, eyewitnesses have reported what was “handed down to us”. That phrase translates the same Greek word which is related to *tradition*. So these things were not necessarily written down but could also have been passed along orally. Many scholars have suggested that sayings of Jesus may have been collected into what they call “Q” from the German word *quelle*, meaning *source*. Whether there was one actual document that served as a source of the sayings of Jesus (and providing some of the material which Luke and Matthew presented that differs from Mark) is the subject of great debate but it is obvious from this verse that the sayings and story of Jesus had been handed down to later believers.

This verse would also indicate that Luke was not an eyewitness to the life of Jesus.

Verse 3. Theophilus. Luke writes to someone named Theophilus, which literally means *God-lover*. The Acts of the Apostles is addressed the same way. It is open to speculation whether Theophilus is an actual person, perhaps royalty as indicated by the appendage “most excellent”, or simply represents all lovers of God. Most scholars believe that Luke is written to Gentile believers but one scholar suggests that the phrase might specifically refer to those almost-converts to Judaism who were called *God-fearers*:

A little more than a decade ago, I argued in a doctoral dissertation (“Luke’s Readers”) that Luke made considerable use in his argumentation of reader-assumptions which could only be true for people whose religious values had been considerably shaped by first-century Judaism, and that he was vigorously engaged apologetically in responding to Jewish polemic against the Christian movement, polemic

of a kind which, once again, would be effective only for those whose value structure was coming essentially from Judaism.

Indeed, I thought then, and think now, that the ideal first-century reader for much of the Gospel of Luke (and of Acts) is a God-fearer; one whose birth is not Jewish and whose background culture is Hellenistic, but who had been attracted to Judaism, drawn to the God of Israel and the worship of the synagogue; one who had taken on from his Jewish mentors many of the ethical and religious values of the faith on whose threshold he stood; but one who had not yet taken the final step of circumcision and full incorporation into the national and cultural life of the Jews.

Such a God-fearer would have experienced the ambiguity of his situation in Judaism: welcomed, but at the crucial divide still considered to be an outsider to the promises of God. Luke's God-fearer will have been no stranger to the Christian gospel; perhaps he has been reached in an evangelistic itineration like those attributed to Paul in Acts. Luke's God-fearer is also, however, no stranger to Christianity's detractors (whose form he will also recognize in the Acts material). He has not fully found his way into Judaism, and now he stands at the crossroads. On the one hand Christianity is being offered to him as the completion and fulfillment of the Judaism to which he has been drawn, a version of Judaism which can embrace him in his Gentile identity, while itself holding dear all from Judaism that he has come to hold dear. On the other hand there are his Jewish friends who consider Christianity to be a dangerous perversion of their Jewish heritage, and who urge our God-fearer to make the break and to abandon his Gentile identity once and for all and to come all the way into Judaism, to become a Jew

(John Nolland, *Luke 1-9*, Word Biblical Commentary.)

Carefully investigated. Luke writes as a reporter or historian. He has carefully investigated what has been written about the good news of Jesus as well as what has been handed down by eyewitnesses and servants of the word. This doesn't mean that he isn't guided by the inspiration of God but Luke doesn't make that claim.

This might be why Luke resonates well with modern people. Don't most people respond with skepticism when someone says, "God told me", while valuing research and critical thinking?

An orderly account. This phrase can mean a chronological account, but that meaning doesn't seem likely. In places where Luke's sequence differs with Mark and Matthew it seems most likely that the other two are written chronologically. One of the most obvious would be Luke's placing of Jesus

visiting Nazareth at the beginning of his public ministry while Matthew and Mark record his ministry as beginning in Capernaum (and in Luke 4:23 Jesus makes it clear that he has already been to Capernaum).

It is likely that Luke means he is using a *logical* order rather than a chronological order. He places events in order to best tell the story. So he puts the visit to Nazareth at the beginning because that is where Jesus defined the purpose of his public ministry. In the same way, in his account of the temptation of Jesus, Luke places Jesus in Jerusalem last (rather than for the “second” temptation) because throughout his gospel he portrays Jesus as being on the road to Jerusalem.

Verse 4. Luke states the purpose of his book, “so that you may know the certainty of the things that you have been taught”. He has already given two reasons that Theophilus can have certainty, first because there are eyewitness accounts and second because Luke has carefully investigated all the available accounts.

Robert H. Stein, in the New American Commentary, suggests three other reasons from Luke that Theophilus can have confidence in what he has believed.

1. Proof from prophecy. [Luke records more fulfilled prophecy than any other gospel.]
2. The proof of miracles.
3. The growth of the church (Vol. 24, p. 38, Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary).

Stein suggests three other purposes for the writing of Luke:

1. To clarify the Christian self-understanding of his readers, especially the relationship of the church and Israel.
2. To clarify Jesus’ teachings concerning the End Times.
3. To assure his readers that Rome was not a threat to them.

That last point might seem unusual, but in Luke and Acts Rome is usually portrayed in a favorable light and the persecution of the believers most often comes from the Jews. Stein offers an alternative to that speculation, suggesting that Luke may have written as he did to assure Roman officials that Christianity is not a political threat to the empire.

Bible Application

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The Gospel of Luke certainly meets the purpose of giving us certainty

about the things that we have been taught. As we study this book look for some recurring themes: the kingdom of God, the prevalence of prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit, the lordship of Christ, warnings against materialism, and the call to salvation. Another common theme is the great reversal, i.e., the last shall be first.

Life Response

What does it mean to you to have a faith that is based on what we can read in scripture? How important is it to you that Luke carefully researched the history of Jesus and gave us this book?

How do you show that the Bible is important to you? Will you make a commitment to carefully study this book during this winter quarter?

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think of regarding the Gospel of Luke?
2. Do you think Luke might be the “man of Macedonia”?
3. Why are Matthew, Mark and Luke called the Synoptic Gospels?
4. Why do you think that most of the writings Luke mentioned didn’t survive? What does it mean that the church preserved the book of Luke?
5. What do you think it was like to rely on oral tradition to know the Gospel message before the New Testament was written?
6. What is the difference between a “logical” order and a “chronological” order?
7. What does it mean to you to have a faith that is based on what we can read in scripture?
8. How important is it to you that Luke carefully researched the history of Jesus and gave us this book?
9. How do you show that the Bible is important to you?

Faith in Patience

Golden Text: “But the angel said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. . . . And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.’” (Luke 1:13, 17, NIV)

Key Thought: God hears the prayers of the faithful, are we patient enough to allow Him to answer?

Lesson Text: Luke 1:5-20, 57-80 (NIV)

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ Once when Zechariah’s division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

¹⁹ The angel said to him, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And

now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time.”

⁵⁷ When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him after his father Zechariah, ⁶⁰ but his mother spoke up and said, “No! He is to be called John.”

⁶¹ They said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who has that name.”

⁶² Then they made signs to his father, to find out what he would like to name the child. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet, and to everyone’s astonishment he wrote, “His name is John.” ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue set free, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ All the neighbors were filled with awe, and throughout the hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things. ⁶⁶ Everyone who heard this wondered about it, asking, “What then is this child going to be?” For the Lord’s hand was with him.

⁶⁷ His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸ “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹ He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰ (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹ salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷² to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³ the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴ to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear

⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶ And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

⁷⁷ to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸ because of the tender mercy of our God,

by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹ to shine on those living in darkness

and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

⁸⁰ And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

The Stage is Set (read Luke 1:5-20):

Zechariah: A priest in the division of Abija. By birth in the elite part of the tribe of Levi, marriage was arranged by his parents to marry a daughter of another priest. This should have given Zechariah double honors because his wife was from a priestly family.

Elizabeth: Daughter of a priest, descendant of Aaron the priest, wife of Zechariah. Unfortunately she was unable to have a child, and in her culture that meant she could be looked down upon. Barrenness brought unfair ramifications, even a woman’s integrity often came into question.

Their Humble Abode: Zechariah came from the elite group, the priests, but his home was not among the elite. Zechariah lived south of Jerusalem in a small town in the hill country. Some speculate he may have chosen this because Elizabeth was barren, but perhaps it was simply due to Zechariah being a humble man doing the things God had called him to do.

Zechariah’s Duty: His division was to serve in the Temple, and lots were cast to decide which priest would perform what task. The most prestigious honor, to burn the incense, fell to Zechariah. When the time came all the assembled worshipers stood outside praying. Offering incense before the Lord was a big deal. Two of the sons of Aaron died after offering unholy incense (Lev. 10:1).

The Angel Gabriel: This angel stood beside the altar to bring Good News to Zechariah. Gabriel knew of Zachariah and Elizabeth, and of her barrenness. He also knew she was going to have a son. (Look back again at the message Gabriel gave Zechariah in Luke 1:11-17.) From the sound of it, this child is going to be unique.

Questions, Questions, Questions: As faithful as Zechariah was he still had to question how these things could be. He and Elizabeth were both up in years, and she has always been barren.

Gabriel’s response, and the result: Zechariah would not speak until after the child was born.

Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever given up on asking God about something you have prayed for during a very long time?
2. In cases where God later answered your prayer, what was your response when that took place?
3. What can we learn from Zechariah and Elizabeth's faith and patience?
4. Is it okay to question God?

We Are Going To Give Birth: (Read Luke 1:57-66)

The Baby is Born: The relatives arrive and rejoice with Elizabeth. God had finally shown her mercy and she was no longer barren.

The Day of Circumcision: When the child was eight days old it was time to name the baby. The relatives thought he was going to be named Zechariah, after his father. It was a great surprise when Elizabeth said the child's name was John – which was not even a family name – and then his dad confirmed it. But as Zechariah wrote the name of John on the tablet his tongue was loosed and he began praising God.

The Relatives' Reaction: The relatives had no reason to question that unusual events were taking place. They had seen the miracle of the pregnancy, and they knew what had happened to Zechariah after being in the Temple with Gabriel. Now they simply ask, "What then is this child going to be?"

Questions for Discussion

5. Do you think there was a baby shower for Elizabeth? This is a strange question, but I wonder if her relatives had a lot of questions of their own.
6. Do you think Zechariah and Elizabeth were surprised when Zechariah was able to speak again?
7. Do we fully understand the purpose of John's ministry before Christ?

Time for the Happy Dance: (Read Luke 1:67-79)

Songs are written for many reasons. In this song of praise and prophecy Zechariah shows his love and obedience to God and also helps us to understand Israel's future.

80. Consider the parallel which exists between what this verse says of John the Baptist's ministry and what is said of Jesus in 2:40, 52.

Questions for Discussion

8. Are we growing in the Spirit of God?

The Announcement to Mary

Golden Text: “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.”

(Luke 1:38, KJV)

Key Thought: Mary’s willingness to be used of the Lord was a testimony of her abiding faith and her obedience to her Lord. The favor she found with God would cause her to go through much discomfort and humiliation, but she was still willing to rejoice at the opportunity to be of service to her Lord.

Lesson Text: Luke 1:25-56 (KJV)

²⁵ “The Lord has done this for me,” she said. “In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people.”

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary.

²⁸ The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

²⁹ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

³⁴ “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail.”

³⁸ “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth.

⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!

⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
⁴⁸ for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
⁵² He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”

⁵⁶ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

Introduction

We find the thought of a baby thrilling. This is new life, another unique person, added to our universe. Our text shows us Mary with the joy of a new mother expecting the birth of her child. And Mary wasn't going to have just any baby, she had been personally selected for the long-awaited Messiah, the son of God. That was quite an honor for a young lady of seemingly no significance in society.

Yet the honor Mary received came along with trouble. She was not yet married, only betrothed to Joseph. Rumors would fly about an unwed mother. She could expect disgrace, the distrust of her prospective husband Joseph and probably the soon end of their relationship. Additionally her parents would also suffer from having an unwed, pregnant daughter.

Her rejoicing in the face of her circumstances, gladly accepting the responsibility God bestowed on her, shows that her faith was incredible. The visit she then made to her cousin Elisabeth, who was also miraculously

expecting, solidified the message she had been given and multiplied her joy. How would we have handled this type of situation? Would we have been as fully surrendered to God as Mary was? Would we be filled with so much joy in light of the amount of shame, and ostracizing, she could receive?

Bible Learning

Luke 1:26-33 Mary’s cousin Elisabeth is also miraculously expecting a baby, which was specially announced to her husband the priest Zacharias while he served in the Temple of the Lord. He and his wife Elizabeth were extremely devoted to the Lord. They had been childless, and she was beyond normal childbearing age. In biblical times the inability to bear a child was considered to be a disgrace to the woman. But now through miraculous intervention God had caused Elisabeth and Zacharias to conceive beyond their expected childbearing years. She was six months pregnant when the angel Gabriel appeared to her cousin Mary. Mary was a virgin engaged to Joseph, a descendant of King David.

We must assume that when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and began talking with her he looked very much like a human. That was the case with other appearances of angels, as with the pair who went to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19) and the angel who appeared to Gideon near the tree (Judges 6:11-24). But Mary must have been slightly frightened by the salutation this angel greeted her with, being unsure what might happen next. Gabriel tells her not to be afraid and explains what is about to happen to her, and reiterates that she is chosen and favored by God.

The fact that Mary is a virgin fulfills a prophecy about the Messiah given in Isaiah 7:14: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and you shall call his name Immanuel” (KJV). The prophet Isaiah lived at least 680 years before the time of Mary. Young women whose parents made them familiar with the law and the prophets knew of the promised Messiah. For centuries each young woman could hope to be his mother. Mary is saluted as the highly favored one, the one whom God had chosen for the honor of bearing His son who would be the promised Messiah.

Gabriel then explains who this baby will be and what he will do for his people. He also mentions that the baby is to be called Jesus. That was not typical. As is shown in the biblical account of Jesus’ cousin John the Baptist’s birth and naming, the custom then was for a firstborn son to have the same name as a male relative, perhaps his father’s name. It was unusual to choose a name for a baby that was not a family name. But Jesus would be set apart.

Luke 1:34-38 The obvious question comes to Mary while Gabriel is talking: “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” Gabriel says that with God everything is possible. That isn’t an explanation, but probably we wouldn’t understand any “explanation” of God’s abilities anyway. Gabriel did offer an illustration, however. Mary’s cousin Elisabeth, who everyone thought couldn’t have children, was having a child by the grace of God through natural means. Like this point was mentioned to boost Mary’s already strong faith, helping her accept the awesome thing that is about to happen to her.

With the most wonderful display of obedience and submission to God’s will Mary accepts what Gabriel said, and offers her agreement for God to use her in such a wonderful way.

Luke 1:39-56 Mary then travels to visit Elisabeth. Perhaps she was asked to assist her cousin in the preparations for John’s birth. Perhaps her family treated this situation as an opportunity to send Mary away, lessening the effects of the disgrace she and they would suffer due to her pregnancy. For Mary the trip likely provided great encouragement and further faith-building, at the least through the joyful salutation Elisabeth offered her. We know from the prophets of old that the Jews were looking forward to a human Messiah to be born into the world to fulfill longstanding promises. The Jews were under the distinct impression that the Messiah would, upon his arrival, overthrow the government system they were currently subjected to and replace it with his own God-ordained government. Jeremiah 23:5-8 says:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper. And shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say. The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land. (KJV)

It is important to note that since that promise was given the Israelites had been captives, had been scattered about, and had been under the control of multiple oppressors. That was the situation since at least 605 BC when Daniel was taken captive and Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews

were eagerly looking for the one who would put an end to them being under foreign rule and gather the scattered people.

At her age Elisabeth may not have expected to see the change occur, but she counts herself as blessed for being in the presence of the mother of her long-awaited Messiah. No doubt she knew of Mary's situation, perhaps through family but the Lord may have revealed matters to her and Zacharias prior to Mary's arrival. Upon seeing Mary, Elisabeth becomes overjoyed and even the baby inside her leapt for joy! The baby, who would later be known as John the Baptist, made a physical sign to his mother that the baby forming inside of Mary was indeed special and sent from God as well. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Elisabeth goes on to encourage Mary. She also praises Mary's total submission to God's will for her life, and the life of the baby she would have.

Mary grasps the importance of the situation and begins to praise the LORD and recount His blessings to her for choosing her – a seemingly ordinary, unimportant woman – giving her the privilege of being the mother of the promised Messiah. Further inspired by the Holy Spirit she pours out her heart in praise to the LORD, reciting the goodness, strength, and faithfulness He has exhibited in the past towards His people, and that He has not forgotten the promises He made to His people but in due time is bringing them to pass.

Bible Application

Luke 1:26-33 Mary was just an ordinary girl with nothing socially significant about her until the day Gabriel visited her. People would have expected the promised Messiah to come with more signs of importance, probably with obvious royal lineage and significant family influence, knowing how he would save the people (which, of course, they assumed would be from their current government situation). Mary was related to King David, but she was not on anyone's "who's who" list of royal relatives. She was ordinary. Joseph, her carpenter husband-to-be, seemed the same. So what made Mary so special to God? We look back to the biblical principle from 1 Samuel 16:7 "the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh upon the heart." Mary's heart must have been pure and her motives right, for God chose her to bear His one and only Son.

Luke 1:34-38 Imagine being totally surrendered to God's will even though it would mean obvious disgrace and suffering. Let's not forget that having a baby is itself not an easy task. The fact that she is a virgin suggests that physiologically this would be additionally painful. And, amazingly, knowing all this Mary is willing to go through with what God wants her to

do. Her obedience to God should serve as an inspiring example to us that with God all things are possible. She trusted that God would see her through. She seems so calm about this whole situation, which is a testimony to her faith in the providence of God. If we think we face hard situations they probably are minute compared to what she faced over the next few years, giving birth to and rearing Jesus. (Would it be okay to give the son of God a spanking when he is testing his limits at age three? Or did he need spankings at all?) We should be able to realize that with God all situations are possible to get through, and to be reminded that God won't give us more than we can handle. He knows our limitations and expects us to rely on Him in faith to bring us through difficult times.

Luke 1:39-56 Blessing others by encouraging them is highly important. The encouragement Elisabeth gave Mary at their greeting worked toward her glorifying and praising God in the midst of what must have been a very confusing, troublesome, and exciting time for her. She truly exhibits the admonition from James 1:2-4: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." It is difficult to be joyful in times of conflict or hardship, but multiple Bible figures like Mary give us examples of being joyful in spite of their circumstances. If we were to put into practice their attitudes of worship and praise unto our Heavenly Father for the things He's done for us and the many ways He has already worked in our lives maybe we would be filled with the kind of joy and peace Mary exhibited. Many opportunities come our way to give God praise for His character in faith rather than wallowing in despair or anxiety in a situation. This is part of God's process in refining us to be His people of excellence that He calls us to be.

Life Response

At times we are called to do difficult things for God. None of us are in Mary's situation but all of us have been asked by God to do something we have struggled to do. It is important for us to obey God, and Mary set us a great example. She was asked to do something difficult and she completely surrendered herself to God to be used by Him. She was not without His help and encouragement. Just as He encouraged and helped her He will help us to do whatever it is He has asked us to do. All we need to do is obey.

When we find ourselves in difficult circumstances we can look to God and see His faithfulness and goodness in the past. Thinking about His character and how it relates to us in our circumstances can help us have a
(continued on page 46)

Something to Think About

Golden Text: “But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19)

Key Thought: Scripture gives two positive responses to the message of Christmas: 1. Ponder in your heart, 2. Go and tell.

Lesson Text: Luke 2:1-20 (NRSV)

¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Introduction

Those of you who have seen *A Charlie Brown Christmas* may well remember Charlie Brown's plaintive cry, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?"

Linus replies, "Sure, Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is about." He steps to the center of the stage and says, "Lights, please". And then Lucy van Pelt's little brother quotes Luke 2:8-14, picks up his treasured blanket and walks back to Charlie Brown to say "That's what Christmas is all about".

In today's lesson we will remind ourselves what Christmas is all about.

Bible Learning

1-3. In those days. Our story opens on the world stage. In the book the birth of John the Baptist is connected to Herod, king of Judea (Luke 1:5), but Jesus' birth is linked to Caesar Augustus.

The reigns of Augustus and Herod the Great did overlap, which harmonizes with Matthew's account of Jesus' birth (Matt. 2:1). More problematic is the finding of a census under Quirinius. History records the death of Herod in 4 B.C., and that the reign of Quirinius as governor began in A.D. 6, which would be 10 years later. Numerous attempts have been made to harmonize these dates. The best of these harmonizations suggests that in 4 B.C. Quirinius served as some type of adjunct to the actual governor of that time, and that his later fame made him more memorable than that governor and the census became linked to him.

It is also possible that Luke simply made the connection to Quirinius as a literary device to explain the trip of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. If so, his audience would have understood what he was doing.

4-7. Jesus is born. Joseph goes to Bethlehem because he is a descendant of David, bringing his pregnant fiancée, Mary. While there, Jesus is born. It is certainly stated simply, isn't it? But the phrase "the time came" is rich with meaning. Literally it says "fulfilled were the days". This is an event that was long awaited.

The new edition of the NIV reads, "because there was no guest room available for them." That sounds strange to our ears but *guest room* is a legitimate translation of the word often translated as *inn*. And there never was an innkeeper mentioned in any of the ancient manuscripts. It's likely that Joseph and Mary were at the home of relatives but there was no room in the house and so they were in the adjacent room where the animals were kept.

8-12. There were shepherds. Jesus is first announced to shepherds. This fits Luke's emphasis of the good news being proclaimed to the common

people.

First we see the message as a visual – the darkness of night displaced by the radiant glory of God. One angel appears, then many. The original message from “an angel of the Lord” is simple but loaded with meaning: “Do not be afraid”. Then comes the announcement that a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord has been given to all the people. The hope of the Messiah was a Jewish hope yet it is for “all” the people, not just the Jews.

The angel tells the shepherd that the sign would be that they would find a baby lying in a manger. The unusual circumstance of Jesus’ birth now takes on a greater meaning. What looks like bad fortune is now good fortune, and perhaps much more than that.

13-14. Glory to God. The angels appear (could it be that angels are always nearby singing God’s praises but we usually can’t see them?) and give glory first to God in the highest heaven and then peace on earth to the people with whom He is pleased.

15-20. Let us go. The shepherds’ first response is to go to Bethlehem to see what the Lord has made known to them. Note that they said that it is the Lord who had made it known, even though specifically it was an angel that spoke to them. The principle of God speaking through an angel sometimes has not been well understood. Some have suggested that appearances by the “angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament were actually the Son of God before Jesus’ birth, partly because when the angel speaks it is described as the Lord speaking (e.g. Moses and the angel of the Lord at the burning bush; Exod. 3:1-6). But here we have a very similar scenario, with the first angel, who may be Gabriel, called “an angel of the Lord,” and his words then being attributed by the shepherds as coming from God. It must be obvious that this angel isn’t Jesus.

In Luke every time an angel appears the audience response is recorded. Zechariah doubted, Mary believed and the shepherds went with haste to Bethlehem. The shepherds find Mary and Joseph (notice that Mary is now listed first in the couple). It appears that they immediately began telling everyone what they had heard and seen and then returned to the fields praising God.

Luke paints a picture of a boisterous response by the shepherds while Mary quietly takes it all in. Notice the phrase translated “pondered in her heart”. In a translation by John Nolland it comes across differently: “Mary stored up all these things, trying in her heart to penetrate their significance” (in the *Word Biblical Commentary*).

Bible Application

I like the summary by Robert Stein in *The New American Commentary*:

(Volume 24: *Luke*, p. 111)

Several Lukan themes are found in our passage. The Christological description of Mary's firstborn son is clearly one. Luke taught his readers that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Jewish messianic hopes by showing that he was born in David's town (2:4, 11). Although he did not quote Mic 5:2 as Matt 2:6 does, the account of the birth in Bethlehem is clearly meant to demonstrate that Jesus is David's legitimate offspring and the promised Davidic King/Messiah. Thus Luke 2:4, 11 picks up the theme of 1:27, 32-33, 69. Mary's child is also referred to as a Savior, is called the Christ in a way that indicates that Luke's readers were already aware that this title had become a name for Jesus, and is called the Lord (2:11). Although the child's work as Savior and full authorization as Lord was still future, he was proleptically referred to as such. Later the church would proclaim that Jesus is the only Savior, for salvation is found in no one else (Acts 4:12). Luke also continued the John the Baptist-Jesus parallelism in this account. Once again the greater nature of Jesus is evident, for whereas John the Baptist was the prophet of the Most High (1:16, 17, 76; 7:26), Jesus is Savior, Christ, and Lord. And whereas at John the Baptist's birth Zechariah uttered a prophetic pronouncement, at Jesus' birth an angelic host sang a doxology to God.

Another theme that appears in this passage involves God's sovereignty over history. The historical description in 2:1-3 is to be understood not simply as an accidental quirk but rather as showing how God, who rules over nations, directed Caesar Augustus to issue the census decree in order to bring about the fulfillment of what God had decreed centuries earlier. Thus in God's providence while they were there (2:6) David's greatest Son was born. God's sovereign rule is also emphasized in 2:20, where Luke remarked that all took place "just as they had been told."

A final Lukan theme is the divine visitation to the poor and humble of Israel. God's visitation of salvation comes to the humble (1:48, 52) and hungry (1:53), not the proud (1:51-52) and rich (1:53). Thus those present at the birth of God's Son were not this world's rulers or its religious leaders. Rather the angelic invitation was extended to shepherds on the fringe of society, and they were present to see the birth of the Lord Christ.

Life Response

The disparate responses of the shepherds and Mary show two good ways that we can respond to the good news of the birth of our savior. We can go and tell the good news or we can ponder it in our hearts.

This writer has been a “teller” all his life, but has learned the value of simple contemplation. I’ve noticed that when I have told a personal story often enough, it eventually doesn’t feel much different to me than a story that could have happened to anyone. I find myself trying to remember the story when I retell it. But things I keep to myself seem to have a different kind of life. This is hard to explain, but think about the types of things we talk about. I tend to talk about the positive and keep the negative to myself. When those negative things come to mind they can feel as embarrassing or hurtful as when they first happened. I’ve learned that talking about these things with a trusted person can eventually take away the sting. So reverse that and think about treasuring the good things that happen to us, taking some time to let them sink in, reflecting on their meaning, digging deeper with time.

What things did Mary ponder in her heart? The visit from Gabriel, her own visit to Elizabeth and the greeting she received from her cousin, the first time she felt the baby move in her womb, Joseph’s willingness to stick with her, the trip to Bethlehem, no room available, the birth in the manger, the baby’s first cry, the visit from the shepherds.

Read through the first two chapters of Luke and pause and ponder over anything that catches your attention. Don’t do this so that you can talk about it, do it so that you can take it in.

Questions for Discussion

1. If you have seen *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, what do you remember from the show?
2. Why do you think that Luke begins by mentioning Caesar Augustus and the world-wide census?
3. Thinking about how you picture the scene of Jesus’ birth, what things have helped you form that vision?
4. What are the implications of Jesus’ titles: Savior, Messiah, Lord?
5. What are the implications of the good news being for “all the people?”
6. What do you think the shepherds saw when the angels began praising God?
7. How is the appearance of the angels in Luke similar to accounts of angels in the Old Testament?
8. What are the Lukan themes that Stein develops in the *Bible Application*?
9. What do you need to “go and tell” concerning the good news about Jesus?
10. When can you take some time to ponder these things in your heart?

Jesus' Childhood

Golden Text: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"
(Luke 2:49b)

Lesson Text: 2:21-52 (NRSV)

²¹ After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

²² When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), ²⁴ and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

²⁷ Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,

²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.'

³³ And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵ so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. ³⁸ At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.

⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.

⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' ⁴⁹ He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

Introduction

Only Luke gives us information about Jesus' childhood and what he gives serves more as background to the plan of God than a biographical account. The writings which are labeled as pseudopigrapha (meaning false writings) do give us some stories of Jesus' youth, but they are fanciful. For example about Jesus making birds from clay which then come to life and fly away, or repairing mistakes made by Joseph in his carpentry.

We'll look at several events in this text but Luke brackets them as two topics. The first section, 2:21-29, is set off by opening statements about Jesus' parents meeting requirements of the Law of Moses and the closing statement, "When they had finished everything required by the Law". The second subject is bracketed by repeating the statement that Jesus grew strong, filled with wisdom and having the favor of God.

Bible Learning

Fulfilling the Law

2:22-25. The time of purification. Luke isn't concerned about explaining the details of the Jewish Law (Lev. 12:2-6) but rather with saying that Mary and Joseph were obedient. It was only the mother that was considered unclean at birth but Luke emphasizes that they were both being obedient. The offering indicates that Mary and Joseph would be considered to be of low-income (5:7)

Jesus' name is finally given, perhaps making this text parallel the account of John's birth (Luke 1:57-66)

25-35. Simeon. Simeon is the first of two righteous people who meet Mary and Joseph in the Temple. Their stories open with the description that Simeon looked "forward to the consolation of Israel," and ends with the statement that Anna spoke about Jesus to "all who were looking for the redemption of Israel". This introduces a major theme of Luke, that Jesus fulfills the desire of Israel and sounds like the many references to *comfort* in the book of Isaiah.

The work of the Holy Spirit is continually recognized in Luke. The Holy Spirit rests on Simeon, revealed to him that he would not die before he saw the Messiah, and guided Simeon into the Temple.

Luke also emphasizes the international nature of the Gospel. That theme appears here when Simeon speaks of Jesus being a light to the Gentiles.

It's very possible that Simeon was a priest because his words sound like a priestly blessing. This continues the parallel of John the Baptist receiving a blessing after birth.

Luke has no problem speaking of Jesus' *parents* and later calling Joseph, "Father." He has already established the nature of Jesus' birth and is not concerned about any confusion on that issue.

Simeon first directs his words toward God, praising Him and saying that God has fulfilled His word. He emphasizes that salvation will come through Jesus.

Mary and Joseph respond with "amazement", a common description in Luke. Simeon then blesses Jesus and speaks of his mission. Every time Luke speaks of a person's inner thoughts (five times) it always has a negative connotation. Simeon then let's Mary know that Jesus will turn her life upside down as well.

36-38. Anna. Anna is a widow of at least 84 years of age. The description could also be translated to mean that she was a widow for 84 years (so that if she had married at the age of 14 she would be 106). She is described as being of the tribe of Asher. Some speak of the 10 tribes of

Israel which had existed in Samaria as having been “lost” after that region was conquered by Assyria, yet tribal identity continued in Israel throughout its history.

No words of Anna are recorded so Luke must include her in the narrative to show the type of person who responds positively to Jesus. Throughout this passage he has emphasized righteousness and mentions four times that things are being done in fulfillment of the Law.

Growing in Favor

41-45. Jesus is missing. This is the only biblical account of anything that Jesus said or did as a child. The setting is the aftermath of one of Israel’s feasts. Mary, Joseph and Jesus joined the many pilgrims who went to Jerusalem for the feast. On the return trip Mary and Joseph discover that Jesus is missing. It is said that the women and young children typically walked at the front of the caravan while the men and the teenagers brought up the rear. At the age of 12 Jesus could have been assumed to be with either group.

46-47. Amazed at his understanding. After three days searching, Mary and Joseph found Jesus in the Temple. I imagine that they saw a crowd of rabbis, then realized that sitting in the midst of them was their 12-year-old son.

Jesus appears to be following the traditional rabbinical style of asking good questions to elucidate even better answers. All were amazed at both his questions and his answers. Wouldn’t it be nice if Luke had given us a hint as to what was being said? Perhaps he didn’t discover that in his research.

48-51. My Father’s house. Mary’s first question betrays the fear that most parents would have when a child is missing. But Jesus’ response is rich with meaning. “I MUST be in MY FATHER’S house.” I used all capitals to emphasize Jesus’ reply. There was no place that he could be but in his Father’s house. And it’s obvious that he knows who his daddy is.

Mary and Joseph don’t really understand what Jesus is saying. They return to Nazareth, where Jesus continued to grow as an obedient child, and Mary treasured these moments in her heart.

2:52. Favor. I think it is important to note that Jesus increased in favor. He grew. Some assert that Jesus pre-existed his human existence as a divine being. But it is evident that his life as the human Son of God was not a continuation of a pre-human existence. He grew as a person. He became more than he was at the beginning of human life. This writer would argue that nothing about Jesus’ human existence is dependent upon having a pre-human existence. A pre-human existence is extremely problematic to understanding who Jesus is as a human being.

I think the concept of favor is very interesting. Jesus had God's favor as well as man's favor. It's easy to understand that God was on Jesus' side but it's another thing to think of people being favorably disposed toward Jesus. What does it mean to have favor? I remember reading long ago that teachers rated the name "Greg" as the best name in terms of their expectations for a student. I thought that was cool, that teacher's were automatically predisposed to think well of me. I think all of have experienced either someone being favorably disposed or opposed to us.

Bible Application

I like Robert Stein's summary of this text:

The main theological emphasis of this passage is Christological. Long before Jesus began his public ministry, Luke revealed that he was aware of his unique relationship to God. Already at the age of twelve he knew that he was God's Son and that he possessed a unique calling. He demonstrated a higher allegiance to his divine sonship than to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:49), although because he kept the law he would be obedient to them (2:51). This is no adoptionist Christology . . . Before his birth Mary's child was already [called] Lord (1:43) and Son of God (1:35), and this was affirmed by the twelve-year-old Jesus (2:49) and would soon be affirmed by God (3:22).

Along with the "person" of Mary's son, Jesus' role as teacher (cf. 2:46; 4:20-27; 5:3) and the centrality of Jerusalem and the Temple may also be alluded to in this account. One other possible emphasis found in this passage is the equating of true piety with the keeping of the law. We find this in Jesus' parents' yearly celebration of the Passover Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem (2:41), in Jesus' training in the law (2:46-47), and in his obedience to his parents (2:52).

(Robert H. Stein. *New American Commentary, Volume 24: Luke*, p. 124.)

Life Response

The concept of favor is found throughout the scripture. In the New Testament it is usually translated from a word that is often translated as *grace*. Throughout scripture it is said to come both God and from people and in our text it says that Jesus grew in favor with God and people.

To have favor means that someone is favorably disposed toward you, in other words, the person would give you the benefit of the doubt, would expect the best from you, would want you to be successful. Here's an example that this writer likes. Back in the early 1980s, school teachers were given a list of names and were asked to choose which they would expect to

be the best students. The name *Greg* was the number one choice. That meant I had one thing going for me before I even started class.

A great example of favor in the scriptures is the story of Esther. She initially found favor with the person bringing candidates for queen to the king (Esther 2:9), then with the king himself (2:17), then prayed for and received favor that she could go to him to plead the case of Israel (4:15; 5:2), and then found favor when he granted that request (8:5).

Can we still ask for favor today? I find that many people think the opposite, that they don't expect to be favorably received, that they fear that a person is prejudiced toward them. When I catch myself thinking like that, I ask God to grant me favor with that person.

What about favor from God? Do you think of God as wanting you to succeed in following Him or do you think He is just waiting for you to mess up? The message of the angels is that His favor is upon all people.

Know that God is favorably disposed toward you. Pray for favor in all your endeavors.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you imagine Jesus' childhood was like? Did he play? Would he have been a typical child?
2. Why does Luke emphasize that Mary and Joseph fulfilled the Law?
3. What role do Simeon and Anna serve in the narrative?
4. How does Luke emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in the story of Simeon? Why does he do that?
5. How do you think Simeon felt as the promise that he would see the Messiah was fulfilled?
6. How did many in Israel fall or rise because of Jesus?
7. How were the inner thoughts of many revealed?
8. What do you think Mary thought when Simeon said that a sword would pierce her soul? How did she feel.
9. How would you describe the scene of Anna meeting Jesus Temple?
10. How does the story of Jesus' circumcision and blessing parallel the account of John the Baptist in Luke 1:57-66.
11. From where did Jesus' sense of urgency about being in his Father's house come from? How do you think Jesus grew in his knowledge of God being his Father?
12. What do you think of the idea of favor meaning that someone is favorably disposed toward you? Is it acceptable to pray for favor from other people?
13. What would you do if you knew that your action would be received with favor?

John the Baptist

Golden Text: “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.” (Luke 3:8)

Key Thought: John called everyone to live spiritually clean lives so they would be prepared to live them in God’s kingdom.

Lesson Text: Luke 3:1-20 (NASB) with 7:18-34 (not printed here)

¹ Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, ² in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. ³ And he came into all the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,

“THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,
MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.

⁵ ‘EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED,
AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW;
THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT,
AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH;

⁶ AND ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE SALVATION OF GOD.’”

⁷ So he *began* saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

⁸ Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. ⁹ Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

¹⁰ And the crowds were questioning him, saying, “Then what shall we do?” ¹¹ And he would answer and say to them, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.”

¹² And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” ¹³ And he said to them, “Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.” ¹⁴ *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, “And *what about* us, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do

not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages.”

¹⁵ Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he was the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people. ¹⁹ But when Herod the tetrarch was reprimanded by him because of Herodias, his brother’s wife, and because of all the wicked things which Herod had done, ²⁰ Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison.

Introduction

It can be easy to identify with the line sung by Frank Sinatra “I did it my way”. Many people follow their natural inclinations and live as they wish to. With all we have learned, and how eagerly we can seek to discover the best ways to do things, it is amazing that we will insist upon already understanding how to live. Why do we think we know what is best for us?

Yahweh, creator of heaven and earth and all things therein, including each of us, declares, “You will live life My way”. And He has the last word. When asked if God will one day judge the world there are some who will acknowledge that this is so, but then go right on living like they want to. God’s judgment day, far in the future, isn’t something to worry about now. We want to get all the gusto out of life we can now, while the gettin’s good.

Life in God’s eternal kingdom looks very appealing to most people, but that doesn’t mean they understand how to enter it. It is sad how many believe they can enter His kingdom by their own devices, and do not care to listen to Yahweh’s admonitions. Yet He has sent a very clear message about what He expects of us.

Bible Learning

The word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias. Like Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Zechariah before him John was a prophet sent by God to speak an admonitory message to God’s people. The prophecy of his coming came straight from Isaiah 40:3-5,

**THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS,
‘MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD,**

MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT.’

But Mark (1:2) prefaces this announcement by saying,

BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU,
WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY.

Later Jesus paid tribute to John’s prophetic work with that same phrase. John prepared the people to receive Jesus’ good news message. Years later John the Evangelist put things this way: “There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light” (John 1:6-8).

John gave a very important witness of his successor on the day he baptized Jesus and again about six weeks later. He admitted that he did not know who it was who would follow him. His testimony was captured this way (again from the Gospel of John):

“I did not recognize Him, but so that He might be manifested to Israel, I came baptizing in water.” John testified saying, “I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him. I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’ I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God” (John 1:31-34).

The way must be clear for Yahweh to dwell on the earth in His eternal kingdom. Sin must be eradicated from the hearts of God’s people. Therefore, John’s message was twofold: Luke says **He came . . . preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins**, while Matthew reported John preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:3).

Many people came out to hear John preach. His message was basic and stern, and cut to the core of the issue. But some of his hearers were hard of heart. **He began saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”** John spoke harshly of the urgency of his message, desiring the people to listen.

Maybe it is because his message was so basic and simple to understand that some disliked it. He insisted they bear **fruits in keeping with repentance**. Hasn’t this always been in God’s message to this world’s sin-riddled people? How can anyone who insists on having their own way, in opposition to the ways of God, expect to enter the kingdom of God? No one should expect God to welcome them into His kingdom if they choose to

hold such attitudes, rejecting repentance and God's ways. They should not be surprised at the outcome of their lives should they persist in this. John warns, **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

Many people responded in fear and reverence, which is what Yahweh wanted to achieve by sending John to them. They cried out, **What shall we do?** John's reply was astounding, for he did not demand some amazing act of contrition or virtue. Rather he speaks words of common sense advice which basically reflect the "golden rule" Jesus would teach not much later: "What you want others to do for you, do so for them" (Matt. 7:12). Luke mentions three specifics of behavior. **The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.** To tax collectors John said, **Collect no more than what you have been ordered to.** And he told soldiers, **Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.**

People easily recognize the sins of others, and wish to have better treatment from them. But we can also let ourselves be ruled by a desire to wrongly gain benefits from others. When that occurs, we let our selfish inclinations block our opportunity to do right. John says take your stand to do what is right because this is what you would expect to find in God's kingdom.

John's ministry used baptism for repentant converts to realize the need to begin life anew. They must bury their old ways and arise to do what is right. But John also taught of another prophet who would preach repentance, but who would present a new method of conversion. That new way has the convert washed in the spirit of truth, knowledge of the true way of living. That is a much deeper lifestyle, reaching to the core of how God desires us to live. John told his disciples. **As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** He would bring great power to bear in the lives of those who practiced what he preached.

John warned those who opposed God's ways that this will not be tolerated. He will punish the obstinate severely and absolutely, but in the day of judgment He will welcome the yielding ones. In John's figurative language, God will **gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**

Near the end of John's ministry he sought confirmation of Jesus' role as the one following John in ministry. By now John was imprisoned, and there was no expectation that King Herod Antipas would release him – unless Jesus was not that prophet and more remained to be done. Some of John's

disciples were sent to inquire of Jesus, **Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?** By this time Jesus had already performed many miracles and taught new lessons on spiritual living to the people. So his response was to tell John's disciples to go back and **report to John what you have seen and heard.** This news let John be content that his role was complete.

Bible Application

Why do you think many people reject God's appeal to them for even the most simple and commonsense behavior by which He expects them to show their willingness to prepare to live in His kingdom?

God also stresses grave consequences from not doing what He calls for. Again, most people choose to ignore His warnings, and elect rather to believe "a loving God" would not do such nasty things to those He created. Again, why do you suppose that is so?

Are there areas in your life where you admit to choosing to sidestep the obvious instruction found in God's word? What do you believe you should do about that?

Coming to church once in awhile appeases the conscience of people who choose to keep doing things they know are contrary to the will of God. Would you accept such people into God's kingdom? What is your reasoning for that decision?

Why does God make such a strong point of excluding people from His kingdom who choose not to repent?

Life Response

This lesson calls for a response to the simple message of commonsense living revealed by God Himself through His prophets John and Jesus. If these teachings make good sense to us and their implementation would greatly benefit us, why do we let them become so difficult for us to practice? Who is preventing us from practicing what is taught by John, Jesus, Paul and the apostles? What must we do to overcome this resistance and begin practicing what they taught?

Truths to Emphasize

1. Bear fruit in keeping with repentance just like a tree bears good fruit.
2. Deeds of repentance are simple, commonsense practices all people would like to have done to them and for them.
3. John the Baptist came primarily to prepare the way for God to dwell on the earth and secondarily to announce the coming of Jesus who would become the way for people to enter God's kingdom.

Jesus is Tempted

Golden Text: “For we have an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Temptation’s universal appeal

Temptation is present in pretty much every situation. We are not always being heavily enticed, but the fact of temptation remains. And there is always the possibility for something with major consequences.

When Jesus began his public ministry he was presented with the serious lures of seeking instant gratification and daring God. The package of temptation also called for a change of allegiance.

Jesus experienced these temptations during a battle of wills in a forty day total fast – not a normal circumstance. He was completely immersed in God’s will, giving no regard to physical needs, and achieved the zenith of spiritual preparation. Perhaps that’s why he quickly dispatched the temptation.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- agree disagree Small problems are my chief temptations today.
- agree disagree Rarely am I enticed to be disloyal to God.
- agree disagree When I am tempted my decision is easily made, and never involves a lengthy process.
- agree disagree I’m hardly ever prepared to confront temptation.
- agree disagree My time in God’s will via obeying His word is woefully lacking.

Lesson Text: Luke 4:1-13 (RSV)

¹ And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit ² for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” ⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” ⁵ And the devil took him up, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it shall all be

yours.”⁸ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.’”⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the Temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; ¹⁰ for it is written, ‘He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,’ ¹¹ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”¹² And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Adam Vs. Jesus

What can we learn through comparing the ways that Adam, the first human, and Jesus, called the “second Adam”, dealt with temptation? Adam was tempted into sin while surrounded by abundance. Jesus confronted temptation in a most austere setting, yet he overcame. In a sense, the temptation scene comments on our Lord’s ministry as a whole. Time and again he had opportunities to use his kingly power in ways he was not meant to. He resisted, trusting God’s plan and God’s timing instead. His ministry flowered in a bleak desert of human demands for political action against Rome.

Adam had abundance, and lost it. Jesus was offered a false picture of abundance, tied to instant gratification. The offer of “more” aside from God’s will is an illusion, one Adam failed to recognize. Passing this test transformed the Lord’s spiritual environment, putting to flight the tempter (v. 13).

Questions for Discussion

1. How can disloyalty to God challenge the faith of our Lord?
2. By what means did the temptation come?
3. What did Jesus do to defeat the devil?

Satisfy Craving Instantly (Luke 4:2-4)

The logic presented in the temptation scene could seem very clear. Wasn’t it right for the Son of God to satisfy his physical hunger, being nourished so he could begin his ministry? After all, how can one meet the famine of others when his own hunger is not yet solved? It would only seem right to “look out for #1” and gain strength to minister for God.

That Jesus didn’t fall for this temptation to immediately relieve his 40-day hunger problem does not mean he wasn’t interested in physical needs. During his ministry he asked his followers to pray for daily bread. He knew our basic need for food and other bodily concerns; everywhere he

went he filled hungry bellies or healed the physically limited before he relieved spiritual hunger.

But Jesus chose to heed his Father’s word over stomach pains. Our Lord understood the Scriptures: the call of God and the Word He speaks is the very Bread of Life that sustains us. Physical bread endures merely for the day. The Word of God brings true nourishment that leads to eternal life, and Jesus chose obedience to that source of life rather than seek temporary satisfaction.

Decide if these statements are true:

- ____ (T) ____ (F) Our needs are best satisfied by “looking out for #1”.
- ____ (T) ____ (F) “Find a need and fill it” is the first priority of Jesus’ work.
- ____ (T) ____ (F) No matter our own hunger, the empty bellies of others come first.
- ____ (T) ____ (F) My loyalty to God transcends other loyalties.

The End Justifies the Means (Luke 4:5-8)

While the first temptation urged Jesus to use the power of his Messianic office to meet merely material needs, the second enticement called for him to fulfill the political passions of Judea.

Many in Israel anticipated the Messiah overthrowing the hated Romans and establishing a Jewish kingdom of God on earth. The Jews wanted to be free again. They longed for the glory promised them. Did Jesus not have the authority to accomplish this noble political objective for his oppressed people? What if Jesus, in his great personal power, led the Jews to revolt against Rome and seek to dethrone Emperor Tiberius? Would not this great goal justify any means taken to achieve it? That is the essence of the issue.

But to achieve such an all-encompassing military and political goal meant shifting his allegiance from God to Satan. Who would be “pulling his strings” if the focus of his work moved from the spiritual to the politico-military arena?

Since the mark of all Jesus stood for and came to do was set by God – who created all and planned for mankind’s salvation – He alone merits his trust. He alone is worthy of devotion and faith. He alone calls the shots, states the objective, declares the goals and determines the agenda. To take another path in fulfilling other dreams meant serving somebody else.

So again Jesus quotes Scripture (Deut. 6:13) to refute the tempter. “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (v. 8, RSV).

Questions for Discussion

4. How and when should political concerns be addressed?
5. What activities might be construed as “giving the devil his due”?
6. What temptations might you yield to that clearly result in worshiping the devil?

Daring God (Luke 4:9-12)

Now the temptation becomes ugly, an image of violence offered to Jesus’ self. But the use of Scripture as authority for the action places a dare in the picture.

If God truly plans to use Jesus to accomplish His will, doesn’t it stand to reason He would save Jesus from death? Would not God grant guardian angel protection? The logic seems incontrovertible. Jesus surely will have God’s favor and protection. There is no way in God’s great universe that the Son of God could be hurt.

Now recall Job’s horrible condition and how much he lost, including his health. Recall the great apostle Paul suffering a “thorn in the flesh” – from Satan, by the way. God is open to allowing pain in the lives of His special followers, and did not exempt Jesus.

Away with such reasoning. The very suggestion smacked of daring God, tempting the Almighty, something forbidden (Deut. 6:16) and out of the question. Jesus scuttled the whole case in his reply: “It is said, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God’” (v. 12, RSV).

Whatever lay in God’s high purpose appeared on Christ’s agenda as well. If no quick triumphs await, that’s fine. Even tragic times would be accepted. Jesus refused to lay down conditions for serving God. He would face whatever objective the Father had marked for his life.

Sure, the Lord could claim 12 legions of angels to aid him against the devil. He might use the strength of his Sonship against the wiles of the evil one. He could lay claim to all the promises his Father gave through the prophets concerning his person and ministry.

But Jesus chose the sure method of keeping Scripture in context, something the devil did not do. To tempt the Father through misuse of the Bible, or the mismanagement of His agenda, is the height of disloyalty. Jesus remained steadfast as God’s Son, and passed the test.

What about Us?

What things can Christians learn from Jesus’ example so we can overcome temptation?

For starters, believers are prone to overlook temptation which is disguised in small and attractive lures. Uninhibited entertainment is a snare,

in such insignificant activities as aimless television viewing, our reading materials, or pointless cruising of the internet. Foolish career choices can be a snare as well. And each of these can grow and test our loyalty to God

Another overlooked problem is the richness of our lifestyle. “As many as 2.8 billion people on the planet struggle to survive on less than \$2 a day, and more than one billion people lack reasonable access to safe drinking water” (<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/810>). Have we fallen to the lure of gratifying our “hunger”, satisfying our personal needs and wants more liberally than we should? In what ways should we be responding to the needs of others so we can more effectively minister the gospel?

Perhaps our most subtle temptation cover-up is the justifiable purpose for political power. After all, we reason, government decision makers are in a position to affect more lives for good than we who use God’s spiritual strength. However, unless politicians recognize their “ministry” the good they do is soon traded away in the form of lesser evils. For that matter, any effort to justify an end by disregarding the means used to achieve that end does nothing less than sell out to the devil and sell God short.

One lure which is attractive for true believers says “If God says it (regardless of purpose, intent, and context), it has got to be for me”. This results in all sorts of personal claims being seen as right and true, in spite of the spiritual suicide they bring. Such “name it . . . claim it” activities often are an end in themselves, an attempt to misuse God’s words and in essence tempt God to “prove” Himself.

Questions for Discussion

7. How does Christ’s example of overcoming temptation help me do so?
8. What is wrong with the saying: “The end justifies the means”?
9. What problems do you see in the “name it . . . claim it” approach?
10. What small temptations loom large for you?

Freedom

Key Thought: To announce that the Kingdom of God has come near is to announce the year of God's favor.

Lesson Text: Luke 4:16-30 (NRSV)

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,
¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'
²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' ²³ He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum."'
²⁴ And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.'
²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Introduction

What does it mean to proclaim the Kingdom of God? Both Matthew (4:17) and Mark (1:15) say that immediately after his temptation in the

wilderness, Jesus went forth proclaiming, “Repent for the Kingdom of God [in Matthew the Kingdom of Heaven] is come near.” But what was he proclaiming?

Luke records the same statement in 4:43 but before that Luke records Jesus’ introductory words for his ministry. In our text today we’ll see what Jesus meant when he said that the Kingdom of God has come near.

Bible Learning

4:16-17. Jesus goes home. Jesus returns to his home town of Nazareth and enters the synagogue. Not a lot is known about the synagogue services from this time but it is thought that the service began with the singing of a psalm, then a reciting of the Shema (“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One”, Deut. 6:4). After that is a reading of the 18 Blessings, then a reading from the Law and finally a reading from the prophets. So it’s likely that the service has gone on for some time before Jesus stands to read from the scroll of Isaiah.

It appears that Jesus had the choice as to what he would read because it says that he “found” the place from which he read.

4:18-19. The word from Isaiah. Jesus reads from Isaiah 61 from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. This is indicated by the phrase, “sight to the blind,” rather than “to bind up the broken-hearted,” which is found in the Hebrew text on which all our modern translations are based.

The quotation is interesting both for what it included as well as what is omitted. Included is a sentence from Isaiah 58:6, “to let the oppressed go free,” which has the effect of doubling the emphasis upon freedom in this passage as it retains from Isaiah 61, “release to the captives”.

Jesus omits the last part of Isaiah 61:2, “and the day of vengeance of our God,” making his statement all about announcing the year of God’s favor rather than coming judgment.

Jesus chose a text that gives a strong emphasis upon the speaker, as seen by the way that “me” is placed in the sentences:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon *me*

He has anointed *me*

He has sent *me*

4:20-21. All eyes on Jesus. Luke writes in a way that builds tension, beginning in verse 16 where Jesus stands to read. The scroll is handed to him and he unrolls the scroll. Now he rolls up the scroll, hands it back to the attendant and then sits down. All eyes are upon him and he says, “today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

4:22. The crowd reacts. While Luke opens his account of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth, Jesus had already begun his public ministry and his reputation had preceded him to his home town. This writer imagines that throughout the synagogue service the people had been wondering what Jesus would do and probably reacted expectantly when the attendant handed the scroll to Jesus. His words from Isaiah confirmed their hopes and they spoke well of him. But it appears that their amazement was somewhat incredulous as well because they knew of Jesus' humble beginnings. "Isn't he Joseph's son?" they asked.

4:23-27. Jesus turns the tables. Some have wondered at the sharpness of Jesus' response as the townspeople seem generally positive toward him. But it appears that the reference to him being Joseph's son pushed his buttons. He couldn't let the people label him simply by what they knew about him.

Understanding the proverb Jesus quoted helps us see what Jesus is reacting to. According to Joel B. Green in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*:

"Doctor, cure yourself!" was a well-known maxim in antiquity, and appears to have been used rhetorically in a way that has direct bearing on our understanding of the interchange between Jesus and his audience in this scene. It could be employed in an argument to insist that one must not refuse to do to one's own relations the favors one does to others, or that one must not benefit others while refusing the same benefits to one's own relations. It is clear, then, that the following sentence that is, the anticipated appeal to doing in Nazareth what was done in Capernaum, is only an interpretation of the first aphorism. In effect, Jesus addresses the parochial vision of his townspeople directly, countering their assumptions that, as Joseph's son, he will be especially for them a source of God's favor. [p. 217]

Jesus had just announced the year of God's favor and the people were worried about what he was going to do for them. He immediately seeks to broaden their vision, not simply to include all of Israel but to see that God is seeking salvation for all people. Jesus gives two examples from the Old Testament, first from the life of Elijah and then from Elisha to show that God has always been a blessing for all people and sometimes Israel has missed out on blessings because of unbelief. Later in chapter seven, Jesus performs two miracles, one like that of Elijah and another like Elisha.

4:28-30. Enraged. How quickly the crowd turned on Jesus. It doesn't appear that there was any attempt to understand what he had meant when he read from Isaiah but only a reaction to the realization that they weren't going to get what they wanted. It appears they intended to stone Jesus because they immediately began to push him toward a cliff. Throwing a person off a cliff was often the first step in stoning and that would have been Jesus' fate, but he simply passed through the crowd and went on his way. It can't be known whether that took a miraculous action on God's part or showed the crowd's reluctance to follow through with the plan when Jesus turned and began to walk toward them.

Bible Application

This text helps us understand what it means in the Gospels when Jesus said that the Kingdom of God has come near. It's not that he's saying that the new heavens and new earth are about to be unveiled but rather that the initial effects of the rule of God are now present: the proclaiming of good news to the poor, the release of captives and sight to the blind. Jesus demonstrated this by not finishing the quote from Isaiah, that the "day of God's vengeance" is coming but rather proclaiming that he is announcing the year of the Lord's favor.

God had built into Israel's economy the concept of release. Before they took the land of Canaan God commanded that they allow the land to go fallow every seventh year and after seven of these cycle have a special year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:10). In that year, slaves were to be freed and land was to go back to the original owners. It's not recorded that Israel ever actually celebrated a Jubilee (it probably didn't even observe the seven-year Sabbaths, c.f. 2 Chron. 36:20-21).

So we see that Jesus came announcing a message of freedom and release. It's not that Jesus didn't expect a future expression of the Kingdom of God that includes the new heavens and the new earth. He speaks of the future kingdom many times in Luke: 11:2; 17:22; 19:11; 22:18; 23:42, 51. But now he is announcing the presence of the kingdom in a way that turns upside down Israel's society – the good news is for the poor, the blind, the oppressed, the captives. No wonder the leaders of Israel rejected his message. The first did not want to become the last.

Life Response

Nearly 200 years ago the teaching of the future Kingdom of God upon a renewed earth set the Church of God apart from almost all other churches. In many ways it is the reason for our existence as a distinct people. So when we read about the Kingdom of God we immediately associate the phrase with that treasured teaching. Yet when Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of

God, quite often he was speaking about the way that the reign of God was breaking into the world around him. And the nature of that breaking in was demonstrated by the announcement of freedom in Luke chapter 4.

How is our message today a message of freedom? What oppresses people? What keeps them bound? What is it that they don't see?

The United States is a country that values freedom above all things. But sometimes freedom is seen as merely being able to do whatever one wants to do. How many have been enslaved by unfettered desires?

The good news of the gospel is true freedom for all. As Jesus said, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you think of when you hear the phrase, "The Kingdom of God"?
2. What do you think it would have been like to be in the synagogue with Jesus sitting there? What would you have hoped for?
3. What is the message of Isaiah? How did Jesus' choice of what he left in and what he left out affect the message? What is the affect of the repetition of the pronoun *me*?
4. How was the message of Isaiah fulfilled in the people's hearing?
5. How did the crowd react to Jesus' words? In what way was their response positive? What was negative?
6. What is indicated by the parable Jesus quoted?
7. What is the point that Jesus made with the example of Elijah and Elisha?
8. What do you think it looked like when Jesus walked through the hostile crowd and went on his way?
9. How does this scripture illustrate what Jesus meant when he says that the Kingdom of God has come near?
10. What is the year of Jubilee in Israel's history? How is it similar to what Jesus just proclaimed?
11. How is the announcement of the year of the Lord's favor similar to Jesus' statement that the first will be last and the last first?
12. How can we proclaim a message of freedom to those who are captive? What kind of freedom is Jesus speaking about?

The Authority of Jesus

Golden Text: “The power of the Lord was present for [Jesus] to perform healing.” (Luke 5:17b)

Key Thought: All the authority that Jesus had to act, teach, and perform miracles came from his heavenly Father.

Lesson Text: Luke 5:1-29 (NASB – which omits verses 1-3 and 29)

⁴When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” ⁵Simon answered and said, “Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say *and* let down the nets.” ⁶When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets *began* to break; ⁷so they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!” ⁹For amazement had seized him and all his companions because of the catch of fish which they had taken; ¹⁰and so also *were* James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.” ¹¹When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him.

¹²While He was in one of the cities, behold, *there was* a man covered with leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” ¹³And He stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴And He ordered him to tell no one, “But go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering for your cleansing, just as Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” ¹⁵But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear *Him* and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶But Jesus Himself would *often* slip away to the wilderness and pray.

¹⁷One day He was teaching; and there were *some* Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting *there*, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and *from* Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was *present* for Him to perform healing. ¹⁸And *some* men *were* carrying on a bed a man who was paralyzed; and they were trying to bring him in and to set him down in front of Him. ¹⁹But not finding any *way* to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles with his

stretcher, into the middle *of the crowd*, in front of Jesus. ²⁰ Seeing their faith, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.” ²¹ The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this *man* who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” ²² But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts? ²³ Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins have been forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? ²⁴ But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” – He said to the paralytic – “I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.” ²⁵ Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. ²⁶ They were all struck with astonishment and *began* glorifying God; and they were filled with fear, saying, “We have seen remarkable things today.”

²⁷ After that He went out and noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, “Follow Me.” ²⁸ And he left everything behind, and got up and *began* to follow Him.

Introduction

Jesus did and said remarkable things, which astonished even the apostles when they began to encounter his works and words. But even with the amazement they inspired, some saw and heard him and acknowledged that Yahweh God was with him to do and say these things (as in Matthew 9:8, after the healing of the lame man). This shows a great contrast with so many today who teach that Jesus’ ability to perform miracles shows him to *be* God. It’s like they totally ignore others through whom God performed miracles, like Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha. In fact God prophesied through Moses that another prophet like himself would arise in Israel and be even greater than Moses (Deut. 18:15-19). The prophecy not only gave no hint that Jesus (who fulfilled it) would have to be God, it specifies that he will be one of their countrymen.

In our text Luke records several significant acts in Jesus’ ministry, but Luke’s most significant statement in this chapter is “The power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing.” When God grants power to men, then and only then can they perform miraculous deeds. Near the end of Jesus’ ministry he himself said “I did not speak on my own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak” (John 12:49). Without power and authority from God Almighty, Jesus would not have attracted the attention that he did by what he did and spoke. His actions are quite consistent with the major prophets that went before him. Of course there is the difference that he was announced to be the only begotten son of God, with the unique purpose of

becoming the perfect, sinless sacrifice for the payment of our sins. This lesson focuses on several incidents which portray the authority God gave to Jesus to draw attention to God’s good news message for the people.

Bible Learning

Our lesson begins with words of authority from Jesus to some fishermen. Only Luke recorded this account in depth. The fishermen had just completed a long night of fishing without success of catching anything. After he finished teaching the people Jesus told the fishermen to **put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch**. What is remarkable is that the fishermen overcame their skepticism at being able to catch anything now, and obeyed Jesus. The vocal one, Peter, said, **I will do as You say**. What made Peter obey? Certainly he had already witnessed many healing miracles, including his own mother-in-law being healed from a high fever after Jesus simply rebuked it. Nothing builds confidence in others’ abilities like repeated success.

When Peter and his companions **enclosed a great quantity of fish** in their nets he was overcome with amazement and anxiety and **fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!”** Peter recognized he was in the presence of a very special man chosen of God to speak God’s word. His humility was deeply personal and heartfelt. He felt completely unworthy to witness and benefit from this experience. But Jesus knew the quality of character Peter was capable of possessing, and on the spot appealed to him to become a disciple of his. **Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men**. Not only Peter, but his companions likewise were impelled to accept Jesus’ leadership. **They left everything and followed Him**. Later in the chapter Luke records that Jesus **noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the tax booth, and He said to him, “Follow Me.” And he left everything behind, and got up and began to follow Him**. (Elsewhere we learn that this tax collector was also called Matthew, and that his father’s name was Alphaeus.) All these men were quick to seize the great opportunity to learn dynamic spiritual insights from this man of God.

Luke comments that Jesus’ miracles vastly increased the popularity of him and his work. **But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and large crowds were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses**.

As Luke continues to describe Jesus’ healing ministry he notes of one surrounding town that **the power of the Lord was present for Him to perform healing** – that is as if to say that this power was not always present

(which would not be consistent with the idea of Jesus being God, who could never lack power to heal).

That town was also the setting for revealing another authority God granted Jesus for his public ministry. A lame man was brought to Jesus on a stretcher by the man's friends, hoping for his healing. On seeing the man lowered by ropes to Jesus, his first words must have shocked all in the room (not just the scribes and Pharisees, who objected). He reassured the man, **Friend, your sins are forgiven you.** We consider that while this probably was a joy to hear it was also puzzling. It is obvious that the man wanted physical healing – or do we only assume that? His companions may have brought him there for that cause, but the man himself may have recognized deeper spiritual needs he desired Jesus to remedy. In any case Jesus' words certainly roused the attention of the spiritual leaders who were present. In their minds they accused Jesus of blasphemy, following the quite logical idea **Who can forgive sins, but God alone?** (Which, Mark explains, they did not speak aloud, but Jesus also had the God-given ability to be aware of this thought; Mark 2:8.) Jesus challenged them to reconsider their idea, saying to them, **Which is easier, to say, “Your sins have been forgiven you,” or to say, “Get up and walk”?** Jesus directly confronted the scribes and Pharisees, wanting them to assess exactly who he is who is performing such wondrous healing miracles. Logically, both the ability to forgive and the ability to heal come from God alone, and these responsibilities and authorities can be granted to those men whom God most trusts. Obviously doubt persisted in the minds of the religious leaders. But to prove he had the right to forgive sins Jesus said to these doubters, **“So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,” – He said to the paralytic – “I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home.”** At that very moment the lame man was healed of his infirmity, which equally proved Jesus' authority to forgive sins. As one would expect, the people who witnessed this episode **were all struck with astonishment.**

Bible Application

We can tell the difference between a magician's tricks and actual miracles of healing. It can be verified that the one performs illusions, and is not actually causing the disappearance of people and animals. It is done for entertainment, amazing us with the skill and craft that fools our eyes. But real miracles result in broken bones mending instantaneously and completely, dead people being raised to life again, people blind from birth gaining perfect vision. When Jesus performed such miracles he proved his authority was God-granted. Jesus even stated that he did not act on his own initiative, but was called to serve in this way by God.

It is absolutely essential that those who choose to follow Jesus do so with the understanding that they must acknowledge his absolute authority over their lives. We have a master-servant relationship with Jesus. No other relationship spelled out in the Bible subverts this idea. We are also called his friends, his fellow children of God who will reign with him in his kingdom, but nowhere are we said to be of equal rank with him in relation to his God. We are always subordinate to Jesus' authority.

Life Response

If we want to truly experience the richest blessings of a deep spiritual life with Jesus we must completely and always submit to his authority. We may have unique abilities and characteristics, but we are not independent individuals as Christians. We are members of the body of Christ and what happens with us affects that body. When we act independently we weaken the body's intended function. When we act in harmony and coordination with other members of the body we become a miraculous force in the hands of our master. It lets us find the fullest blessing God has in store for those who believe in Him and His Son. We were made to function as a whole and healthy body, but also to function as a church organism which works together under Jesus' authority to perform God's work. It is our duty as believers to submit to God's authority and to the authority God granted His Son Jesus.

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more joyful, worshipful attitude when times are rough. Then we, too, will be able to sing a song of praise recounting the goodness of the Lord in full trust that He will see us through the difficulty we are facing.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the things that hinder us from being completely surrendered to God's will?
2. What are we afraid might happen?
3. What would be the benefits of being completely surrendered to God?
4. Think of one of the most difficult times you've had in your life, and what happened in it; how did God work with you in that time?
5. When you were facing that difficult circumstance how did you react?
6. What are some good ways for us to react to difficult circumstances?
7. How can we adjust our hearts and minds so that when faced with difficulties we can rejoice as Mary did?
8. Think about what God has done for you in your life and what you appreciate most about Him, and share that with someone.

Jesus, the Friend of Sinners

Key Thought: This lesson is intended to challenge our thinking about sinners. We are not meant to see them as enemies, outcasts or unworthy people. Rather we are called to view them as friends. This lesson will explore the reasons why we should.

Lesson Text: Luke 5:27-31, 6:32-35, 7:36-50

Questions Prior to Study

1. Should we be friends with sinners?
2. Why should we be friends with sinners?
3. How can we be friends with sinners?

Lesson Background

Close your eyes and imagine listening to the classic hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”. It will serve as a perfect backdrop to the true reasons we need to view sinners as friends.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge;

take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;
thou wilt find a solace there.

Jesus is the perfect example of friendship. He is the ultimate friend, supporter and confidant. He drew so many followers to his teaching because he offered friendship rather than judgment. How are we supposed to model this behavior? In our current circumstances do we really need the same attitude as he had? We certainly do. In this lesson we will explore why we need to view sinners as friends, how we need to prepare ourselves to do so, and why this is necessary as believers. Three Bible passages will guide our lesson.

Bible Learning

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. Follow me, Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? Jesus answered them, It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. (Luke 5:27-31)

It is inspiring to picture Jesus at the table with these tax collectors. He becomes friends with sinners because he knows they need him as a part of their lives. Let's take a look at Jesus' attitude in this passage. First, it is apparent that he offers no judgment. Someone else might easily have thought these sinners had no hope and were unworthy of his time. But our king gives them his full attention and friendship, because he loves them. He knows they are sick (v. 31), which is why he reached out to them. Jesus does not leave anyone behind. How many of us can say we do this on a daily basis? How often each day do we ignore people we come in contact with simply for being different than us? It is easy to consider that people are "unholy" and sinful. Perhaps we need to take another look, and ask ourselves why we are judging our friends. I know I am guilty of this. But, how can we change our attitudes? What is needed for us to bridge the gap between believers and "sinners?"

“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:32-35)

It is remarkable that I am writing about this passage, because the concept it describes has really spoken to me recently. Things such as money or possessions are not our own. Every blessing we have in life is given by God. When we feel called to help people (even our enemies) we are not sharing our own blessings, we are sharing God’s blessings. A dear man from our church (who has passed) named Lee McQuinn wouldn’t take credit for being generous. Instead he would tell others “It doesn’t belong to me anyway”. That is exactly what this passage is trying to teach us. It can be a challenge to forgive or help others. It is even more of a challenge when they are our enemies. So to complete this challenge we need to stretch ourselves. What do you think are essential steps for us to take in developing the mindset needed to accomplish this?

“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 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 said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you, go in peace.” (Luke 7:36-50)

This passage focuses on Jesus’ response to the woman with the alabaster jar. How she showed her adoration and love toward Jesus pleased him. He did not focus on her sins, but on her heart. It is amazing to think about this quality of our Savior. He has the ability to see us for who we are and forget the many sins that we hold on to. This passage brings forth a twofold message. First, we need to examine ourselves in terms of our past sins.

When we have truly experienced forgiveness from our sins we need to release the negative thoughts we once had about ourselves. We are not attached to those sins, characterized by them, or labeled from them. We are branded with the cross, and that is how we should view ourselves. But it is not only *ourselves* we need to view differently. We also need to remember that we cannot hold onto our negative views about *other* people. If Jesus only saw this woman for her sins he would not have experienced this moment – but he accepted her love and directed us toward giving others a chance. Jesus died for each one of us so we would have a second chance. This means that all people can experience the love of Jesus no matter who they are or what they have done. The next time we view someone as being a sinner, perhaps we need to think about the woman with the alabaster jar. We need to remember that all people could have the potential of loving Jesus the way she did. How can we help a “sinner” come to experience the love of Jesus?

Life Response

Likely as your group looks through this lesson you will all agree that we need to be friends with sinners, just like Jesus. Your next question will probably involve how we should go about doing this. I think we need to examine three major points before we can be prepared for friendship with sinners.

1. We need the spiritual maturity to reach out to sinners without being tempted by their lifestyles to walk down a negative path. We should examine ourselves and make sure we are in a position in our lives to befriend sinners while maintaining the intention of purity.
2. We need to break past the easy decision that we should be “nice” to others, and understand the true importance in extending our friendship to particular people. Perhaps to make this a strong choice in our lives we must examine our daily situations and find those individuals who need us the most. When we go about this seriously it is a huge act of surrender. We are setting aside our pride and looking for people who need Jesus in their lives. Are these people in your neighborhood, at your work, or perhaps even in your family? It is amazing how God places people in our lives that we can minister to at times when that ministry is most needed.
3. Finally, we must remember prayer. We need to first pray for the spiritual maturity to be ready for God using us in this way. With our hearts and
(continued on page 62)

The Sermon on the Plain: Apprentices in Kingdom Living

Golden Text: “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.” (Luke 6:40)

Lesson Aim:

To Know: To be a disciple of Jesus means that we are students who are training to become like our teacher/rabbi/Jesus. We are to think the thoughts of Jesus and do the actions of Jesus.

To Respond: By doing what Jesus tells us to do (without making up excuses why we shouldn't).

Lesson Text: Luke 6:17-49

¹⁷ He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, ¹⁹ and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

²⁰ Looking at his disciples, he said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² Blessed are you when people hate you,
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.

²³ “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your comfort.

²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

²⁷ “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

²⁹ If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.

³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

³⁷ “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

³⁹ He also told them this parable: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.

⁴¹ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

⁴³ “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.

⁴⁴ Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. ⁴⁵ A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

⁴⁶ “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? ⁴⁷ As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. ⁴⁸ They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.

49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Introduction

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Does it mean we go to Church on Sunday, pay our tithes, or serve on a board or committee? Does it mean we teach a Sunday School class, hand out tracts and witness to unbelievers? Does it mean we’ve been baptized and we don’t do bad things like steal, cheat, curse or commit adultery? What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Is it possible to do all of those things and still NOT be a disciple of Jesus?

One of my favorite definitions of a disciple comes from Dallas Willard. “As Jesus’ disciple, I am his apprentice in kingdom living. I am learning from him how to lead my life in the Kingdom . . . as he would lead my life if he were I.” Disciples of Jesus are “apprentices in kingdom living.” Webster’s defines an apprentice as: “one who is learning by practical experience under skilled workers a trade, art, or calling.”

For our purposes then a disciple is one who is: Learning by practical experience from Jesus our calling to live as children of God and citizens of the Kingdom of God. It is a “learning by doing” model. There is a type of instruction in foreign language called “total immersion” where a person is taught a new language by being completely immersed in the language. Jesus is doing a total immersion model of apprenticing disciples in the language of the Kingdom of God. We won’t get it if all we do is read about it and talk about it for 45 minutes on a Sunday morning. You can only get this by being fully trained, fully immersed in Jesus and do what he does.

Bible Learning

Verse 40. “The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.”

Rabbi Yose ben Yoezer was part of the early rabbinical movement that preceded Jesus by about two centuries. One Mishnah saying attributed to him says: “Let thy house be a meeting-house for the wise; and powder thyself in the dust of their feet; and drink their words with thirstiness.” (Mishnah, *Avot* 1:4). What does it mean to be powdered with the dust of people’s feet? He was saying to sit *on the ground close to* these rabbis while they teach you, with the result that *the dust from their feet* lands on you.

Picture this story from Luke 10:38-39: “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened

her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said." There was Mary using her house as a meetinghouse for the wise and powdering herself with the dust from the feet of her rabbi, Jesus. So, as Jesus is speaking to his disciples in Luke 6:40 and says "the student is not above the teacher" he is using a play on words. Naturally, if the students are sitting at the teacher's feet they cannot be "above" him physically, but this also represents the idea of humility and acceptance of their teaching and "drinking in their words with thirstiness."

The apprentice would be listening attentively to the instructions of the master. Every word was to be heard and accepted as water to a person who was thirsty. But it didn't stop there. Not only would they sit at the feet of the rabbi and get his dust on them that way, but they would follow the rabbi to learn from all that he did to be just like him. So in that way you would also be "powdered in the dust of the rabbi". We live in the country and to get from my house to the church you must drive on a gravel road. And I've learned from experience that if you follow the car in front of you closely on a dry summer day your car will be covered in a layer of dust. This conveys the idea of following so closely to Rabbi Jesus that you are covered in his dust. You follow him to learn to be just like him – "everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher".

"The life of the rabbi was itself Torah. It was not enough to learn the words of the rabbi, but necessary to live with him, so as to absorb his thought and copy his every gesture" – (W. D. Davies, *Setting of the Sermon on the Mt.*, p. 455).

To be an apprentice of the rabbi means to learn to become "just like him." So Jesus goes on to ask his apprentices who are sitting at his feet getting his dust all over them the following question (verse 46): "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" The meaning here is quite simple and direct – don't say that you are my apprentice if you aren't willing to do what I teach you. Jesus says this within the context of some of his most challenging, counter-cultural teaching:

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you"

"Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you"

"If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also"

"If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them"

"Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back"

"Do to others as you would have them do to you"

"Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back"

“Be merciful”
“Do not judge”
“Do not condemn”
“Give”
“Forgive”

First take the plank out of your eye

Why say that Jesus is your master and you are his apprentice if you won't love your enemies, bless those who curse you, give to everyone who asks or not demand back what others take from you?

“Oh, come on, don't be so naïve” some of you are saying (or at least thinking to yourselves). “Jesus didn't really MEAN for us to DO any of that stuff! After all, if I actually gave to everyone who asked I would be poor.” Perhaps you would, and perhaps that is why Jesus said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” You might argue “but Jesus, I don't WANT to be poor, I want to be rich (or at least comfortably middle class)” to that Jesus says: “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort.”

Let's get close enough to the rabbi and follow him to see if he's just talking or if that's what he was living. “Jesus replied, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.’” (Luke 9:58). Does that mean that Jesus was HOMELESS? Jesus didn't just bless the poor and teach his apprentices that they should live in such a way that they would likely end up being poor, but he LIVED it.

Bible Application

What if Jesus really meant all of the stuff he said? What if it wasn't just hyperbole or intended to be metaphorical? What if Jesus really expects his apprentices to do what he tells them? Do you know what that means? It means Jesus would have a LOT LESS APPRENTICES. It means a lot less people would be calling Jesus “Lord, Lord”.

“Wait, this living as Jesus' apprentice with his dust all over me is hard!” Yes, it's hard. All foundational work is hard. Laying a proper foundation is hard work. If you want to live in a tent, it's not hard work. You can set up a tent in about five minutes, it's quick and easy. And it's temporary. And when the storms come and the billows blow that tent isn't going to be much of a shelter. It's much better to do the hard work of building a solid house on a solid structure, getting the footing right. It takes longer and you have to expend a lot more energy, but when the gale force winds bear down on you that house remains standing and provides safe shelter for all.

Some might be tempted to hear these words and wonder where the Good News is found. “So far, it sounds like a whole lotta hard work and sacrifice.” So here’s some Gospel: “Give and *it will be given to you*. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap”. There’s a positive return guaranteed by Jesus. If you give it will be given back to you in even greater measure than you gave. Someone once said “you can’t out give God.” True!

Here’s a little passage from Matthew’s Gospel. This follows on the heels of the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus seeking eternal life but went away sad for his unwillingness to do what Jesus said and walk in Jesus’ dust. Matthew 19:28-30:

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

If you could get a 100 to 1 return on investment, guaranteed, you’d probably take it (today, most of us would be happy with a 5% return on investment). Jesus guarantees it to his apprentices. Make a small investment today, reap HUGE dividends in the future. (If you could go back in time and invest in Apple or Microsoft knowing what you know now, you’d sell everything you own to buy as many shares of stock as possible wouldn’t you?) We are talking here about eternal life.

Jesus invites us to come sit at his feet and walk in his footsteps, get his dust all over us and then go and do what he said to do. The net result will be people who are living the life of the kingdom – loving our enemies, showing mercy, forgiving those who hurt us, refusing to retaliate against those who attack us, giving generously to all who ask in need, showing mercy to those who are hurting. We’ll be a community of people who refuse to condemn others or sit in judgment over others but instead look inside of ourselves to see where we need to change in order to be more like Jesus.

Life Response

Do you want to be an apprentice of Jesus? Do you want to be his student, his disciple? Do you want to sit at his feet and follow his footsteps and have

the dust of Rabbi Jesus all over you? Do you want to learn to become like Jesus and begin doing the things that Jesus did?

It is quite literally nonsense to call Jesus “Lord,” and not do what he said. “Lord” means nothing in such a case. (Luke 6:46-49) But because I do accept him as Lord, his instructions on behavior are my treasures for living life. Of course I cannot do what he said by just trying. I must train! I must, through appropriate courses of action, become inwardly transformed by grace to become the kind of person – in my inmost thoughts, feelings, attitudes and directions of will – who will routinely do the kinds of things he said to do. I will then not be governed by anger, contempt or lust. And I will be able to bless those who curse me, love my enemies, and so forth, because I am one in whom the character and power of Christ has come to dwell through the processes of discipleship to Christ. (Dallas Willard, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=103>)

How do we train for this? Like you would train for anything. You take the first steps and just begin to do it. The next time someone hurts you, forgive them. The next time someone asks you for help, help them. The next time you are tempted to judge someone or point out their flaws, stop judging them and look inside at your attitudes and look and see how your actions measure up to Jesus’ commands. Are you walking close enough to the rabbi to get his dust on you?

Questions for Discussion

1. How does our current church-based model of discipleship compare to Jesus’ model of apprenticeship?
2. What examples can you give of people who are living as apprentices of Jesus?
3. On a chalkboard/marker board make two columns side by side, under the left side make a list of the costs of being an apprentice of Jesus. On the right side make a list of the benefits of being an apprentice of Jesus. Compare/contrast them.
4. What can you do today, right now, to train to be like Jesus? Who do you need to forgive? To whom do you need to show mercy? To whom do you need to give? Who do you need to stop judging?
5. If someone accused you of being an apprentice of Jesus what evidence would they have to support that accusation?

The Cost of Discipleship

Key Thought: Discipleship means far more than verbal and intellectual agreement with Jesus, for it must involve practice, as well.

Lesson Text: Luke 8:1–9:17

Introduction:

Initially I found this lesson's fascinating set of Scriptures to be incongruous with its assigned theme. But through further study I began to appreciate this pairing, not as a writer but as an imperfect disciple, seeing what it all means to me.

Such realizations often occur for those who prepare lessons or sermons, as new and fresh insights received through the Spirit's prompting begin their transforming work with us. Hopefully that work continues with those who take the time to read and study this lesson and its text.

Bible Learning:

The great length of our text (73 verses) means we must assume that it has been read by each student – hopefully in the last week. In any case the text's eight parts are all rather familiar ones. We will consider the thrust of each, and how it presents our theme, the cost of discipleship.

- 1) Parable of the Sower – Luke 8:1-15
- 2) Lamp on a Lampstand – Luke 8:16-18
- 3) Jesus' Mother and Brothers – Luke 8:19-20
- 4) Jesus Calms a Storm – Luke 8:21-25
- 5) Jesus Restores a Demon-Possessed Man – Luke 8:26-39
- 6) Jesus Raises a Girl and Heals a Woman – Luke 8:40-56
- 7) Jesus Sends Out the Twelve – Luke 9:1-9
- 8) Jesus Feeds the 5000 – Luke 9:10-17

With the first section, the Parable of the Sower, we recall the nature of parables as simple stories that carry a more powerful message. Here we see a farmer reaching into his sack of grain slung over one shoulder, grasping seed by the handful and strewing it across the ground. Some lands on the roadside, some on soil which was good for seeds, and some on ground that was stony or which was infested with thorns. Jesus explained to his "disciples" (described in vv. 1-3 as including the twelve and many women followers) that this seed represented the word of God being spread to explain the Kingdom of God.

The second section regards a lamp on a lampstand which brings light into the surrounding darkness. Obviously to hide such a light negates the reason for having it. Jesus insists the people “listen” so they will have light to share.

The third part may appear to involve Jesus diminishing his familial relationships, but rather he is explaining how spiritual connections should overshadow these natural ties. He points out that if father or mother, son or daughter, comes before following him, this shows misplaced priorities (Matt. 10:37).

In the fourth part Jesus helps his disciples start to truly understand who he is. They feared destruction coming from nature rising up while they were on the Sea of Galilee, but Jesus showed the immense power which was his to command. Amid their reactions of awe, fear and amazement they were beginning to appreciate Jesus.

In the fifth section the concern is not the natural world but the supernatural. Jesus frees a man possessed, casting out what is explained to be many demons that controlled him. These demons had to respond to Jesus, and they cried out wishing not to be thrown into the Abyss. Instead Jesus sent them into a herd of pigs.

For some the reference to demon possession makes this a very problematic passage, seen as referring to some other issue – perhaps to mental illness. At times it appears that modern reasoning forces this to be a difficult concept (though apparently it is not for those who have worked in foreign mission fields). But maintaining that the Bible is inspired by God makes it difficult, and perhaps even dangerous, to rename the situation. Perhaps we need to recall Paul’s description (in Eph. 6:12) of our struggle as not against flesh and blood but against a list of powers he then enumerates, whatever they may be.

In the sixth section we again see the disciples needing to come to terms with just who Jesus was (and is). He speaks the word and raises the daughter of Jairus from the dead. Shortly earlier, on his way to her home, a woman simply touched the hem of his garment and was healed from a debilitating blood loss which had lasted 12 years.

Of course the disciples were astounded to see these miraculous powers exhibited. Jesus did not just talk of such things, but practiced them. His actions left the disciples wondering how they could be in his presence, and how they could work with and serve him.

In the seventh part we see what the disciples may have feared – being sent out to “do” as Jesus had done. Did the twelve he selected wonder if they could follow through? It was one thing to observe the achievements of their skilled and capable Master, and daunting when he laid out this

opportunity for their turn. Jesus said they were to drive out demons, heal, or cure diseases, and proclaim the Kingdom of God. They were also to go out with very little, and apparently not to a specific location, just traveling among the villages. But while they took no money or provisions he did give his “power and authority” to do what he asked of them. The scene is somewhat reminiscent of Abram’s directive to “go out”, not knowing just where that would take him (Heb. 11:8).

In our eighth and last section of the text Jesus fed over 5000 people. Note that he did it through the disciples he previously sent out. Apparently they felt they had accomplished their assignment, and wanted time to be alone with him. Maybe they expected Jesus to tell them what good jobs they had done (as perhaps they had, and perhaps he did). However in this scene Jesus again turned to them, calling on them to feed the great crowd. They were tired and you can sense unhappiness, and maybe exasperation, in them. Their response seems to be “with what?”

These disciples were just beginning to appreciate and comprehend this “man,” moving step-by-step, experience-after-experience. He guided them deeper and deeper in lives of discipleship. They were just beginning to understand and appreciate the “Cost of Discipleship”.

Bible Application

The eight sections of our text each give an opportunity to further understand what it means to follow Jesus as his disciple. Too often discipleship is seen as agreement to a doctrinal understanding. Some principles involve truly clear issues of what Scripture teaches or does not teach, and recognizing that is good (as did the Bereans, even checking what Paul taught them for its agreement with the Bible; Acts 17:11). But we need to balance our hunger for Bible knowledge, realizing it is not enough alone. Recall what Jesus told the Jewish leaders who knew the Scriptures, but didn’t know him (John 5:39-40). He constantly had to explain what the Scriptures really meant.

If our intent is to be disciples we should realize there is a cost to that. It is not just amassing knowledge of truth, but putting that knowledge into action. That is what we were designed for (Eph. 2:10).

Last quarter’s lesson on 1 Corinthians 12 addressed being gifted, as the twelve and the other disciples were, and how it must then lead to service. If we lack that connection we have short-changed ourselves and others. Most importantly we will have short-changed the Lord himself.

Life Response

It is so often here that we end our lessons. It is reminiscent of the words in 1 John 3:18, where love needs expression in words and speech, but also in action.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor from Germany, fled Nazism and reached the safety of the United States after Germany's "confessing church" was threatened for refusing to bow to Hitler's monsters. But following some months teaching in New York City he resigned from Union Theological Seminary and returned to Germany where he was captured by the Nazis. He was imprisoned at Flossenburg, and was executed there by hanging just days before his prison was liberated by the Allies.

Consider some of what Bonhoeffer wrote regarding the nature of discipleship in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. . . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. . . .

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. . . .

Discipleship is not an offer that man makes to Christ. . . .

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "Ye were bought at a price", and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us.

These words call us to deeply consider what discipleship means for us, and what cost it has had (or potentially could have) for us. That may be a deeper examination than even most Christians want to make. Many want to talk on of grace and mercy, but cringe at talking of exemplifying grace and mercy in action, which is in truth!

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the concept of being a “disciple of Jesus” unclear for so many?
 2. How do you and/or your church implement the teaching of the Parable of the Sower?
 3. Do you think you have effectively placed your “light” on a lampstand? If so, how have you done that?
 4. Does the concept of putting the Lord before your father or mother bother you? How might a person do that?
 5. We believe Jesus can cause even a storm to subside, so why does he allow such upset among his disciples?
 6. How would the average modern American explain what the Bible calls demon possession? Do you think “demons” can speak and inhabit people as Luke describes happening?
 7. Is Jesus expecting us to go out to our “villages” and proclaim the Kingdom in a way similar to what he called for the twelve to do? Would we expect Jesus to give us the same power and authority he gave them?
 8. How is being a disciple a much larger issue than most Christians consider it to be?
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(Continued from page 50)

4. believe what can happen when you pray for someone who is not a believer. This very act reminds us that we are not in control. God will always be in control, and He can prepare someone’s heart to be open to our friendship and ministry before we even open our mouths. Remember that God will orchestrate these situations, we need to seek His guidance about how we will fit into them so we can glorify Him.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you agree with the lesson’s *Life Response*? How does your group feel about the three steps that were mentioned as necessary? Do you think they are appropriate for believers to follow who want to show sinners friendship? There may be other steps for you and your group to follow. If you feel led to consider the necessity of more steps please add them to the list.
2. Are there people in your life right now who can benefit from your friendship? If you know of people in need of you to help them remove their sin, write their names.
3. Why do you think we have been called to be vessels for Christ? Why have we been chosen to help show Jesus to others through friendship? How do you think this lesson can contribute to furthering the kingdom of God?

Who is Jesus?

Lesson Text: Luke 9:18-50 (NRSV)

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ ¹⁹ They answered, ‘John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.’ ²⁰ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Messiah of God.’

²¹ He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, ²² saying, ‘The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.’

²³ Then he said to them all, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? ²⁶ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.’

²⁸ Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. ²⁹ And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. ³⁰ Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. ³¹ They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. ³³ Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah’ – not knowing what he said. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ Just then a man from the crowd shouted, ‘Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. ³⁹ Suddenly a spirit seizes him,

and all at once he shrieks. It throws him into convulsions until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. ⁴⁰ I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.’ ⁴¹ Jesus answered, ‘You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.’ ⁴² While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

While everyone was amazed at all that he was doing, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴ ‘Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into human hands.’ ⁴⁵ But they did not understand this saying; its meaning was concealed from them, so that they could not perceive it. And they were afraid to ask him about this saying.

⁴⁶ An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷ But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, ⁴⁸ and said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.’

⁴⁹ John answered, ‘Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.’ ⁵⁰ But Jesus said to him, ‘Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you.’

Introduction

With today’s text we conclude a major section of Luke. After looking at Jesus’ birth and childhood, Luke tells the story of Jesus in three parts – his Galilean ministry, his journey to Jerusalem, and then his last week in Jerusalem. Today concludes the Galilean section of his ministry as verse 51 indicates a new phase with the statement that Jesus “set his face toward Jerusalem”.

The Galilean ministry has been characterized by the announcing of the mission, the cost of discipleship and the identity of Jesus. As he wraps up Jesus’ early ministry Luke brings the identity of Jesus sharply into focus with several different stories. Each one involves Jesus’ identity and also teaches something about discipleship.

Bible Learning

9:18-27. The Big Question.

9:18. While he is praying. Luke links prayer with many of the big events in Jesus’ life. Only he says that Jesus was praying when the Holy Spirit settled on him like a dove after his baptism (Luke 3:21-22). Later he is

praying before the transfiguration. Now he is praying before asking his disciples the monumental question.

9:19-22. The Messiah. Jesus' question and the disciples' answers seem a little less dramatic than in Matthew 16 where the stage is set as Jesus gathered his disciples near Caesarea Philippi. Jesus doesn't highlight Peter's answer but simply tells them to keep the answer a secret.

We might ask why the different authors tell the story so differently. It seems that Matthew puts a greater emphasis on the statement that Jesus is the Messiah while Jesus' answer in Luke highlights his upcoming suffering and death.

The identification of Jesus as the Messiah or Christ is still significant. He has already been described as such by the angels (2:11), the narrator (2:26) and demons (4:41). Jesus had indirectly alluded to this in 4:18 when he said that, "the spirit of the Lord has anointed me". The "anointed one" is the literal meaning of the Hebrew term Messiah or the Greek name, Christ.

9:23-27. Take up your cross. Jesus transitions from his own suffering to again emphasize the cost of discipleship. I've always appreciated the missionary Jim Elliot's paraphrase of this teaching: "He is no fool who gives up what he can't keep to gain that which he can't lose."

Jesus follows with a cryptic statement about the Kingdom of God. In lesson eight we looked at the present aspect of the Kingdom of God when Jesus announced the year of God's favor. It appears that this statement alludes to what the disciples were about to see.

9:28-36. The Transfiguration.

Again Luke emphasizes that Jesus is praying as this episode commenced. Moses and Elijah appear on the mountain with Jesus, perhaps representing the Law and the Prophets. They speak with him of his departure, literally *exodus*. As in 9:51, there seems to be more attention to the end of the passion with the resurrection and ascension than the crucifixion. Only Luke records that Moses and Elijah were leaving when Peter suggested that they build tabernacles for them. And the passage ends with another challenge to discipleship as God Himself tells the disciples to listen to Jesus.

I like the summary by Robert H. Stein in the New American Commentary:

Once again we come across an account that reveals several Lukan theological emphases. As in Matthew and Mark, the account serves a clear Christological purpose. The answer to the question of "Who is this?" in Luke 8:25 and 9:9, which was answered by Peter's confession on behalf of the disciples in 9:20, is now confirmed by God himself. The heavenly confession addressed to Jesus at the baptism (3:22) was now shared with the

disciples. Jesus is indeed the Christ, God's Chosen. He is not just Moses or Elijah risen from the dead. He is God's Son.

While Luke was not reporting this confession in order to affirm the later Christological understanding of Nicea, it is clear that he wanted his readers to know that Jesus is unique. No one is like him. He does not fit any human category available.

A second major Lukan theme involves the understanding of Jesus' death. Jesus' forthcoming death in Jerusalem was not a tragedy or mistake. It was an *exodos* known beforehand by the OT prophets (9:31). It was furthermore an event that would be a "fulfillment" of the divine plan. The divine "must" (*dei*) of which Jesus had just spoken (9:22) was now affirmed by the prophets (9:31) and by the Voice from heaven (9:35). (The latter is not as emphatic in Luke as it is in Mark, but one cannot eliminate from the command to heed Jesus' words what Jesus had just taught the disciples in 9:22.)

Another Lukan theological emphasis also merits attention. Luke probably wanted his readers to see a partial fulfillment of 9:27 in Jesus' transfiguration. This is seen in the twofold reference to glory found in 9:31-32. The glory of the returning Son of Man (9:26) is in part foreshadowed in the transfiguration as the three disciples "saw his glory" (9:32). This understanding is supported by the use of the term "bright as a flash of lightning" (*exastraptoæ*) in 9:29 and the use of a related term to describe the returning of the Son of Man (*astraptoæ*) in 17:24. [Vol. 24: *Luke*, p. 287]

9:37-45. Healing after the disciples fail.

All three synoptic Gospels include this story immediately after the account of the Transfiguration. I'm always reminded of the tagline from the old television show *The Wide World of Sports*: "bringing you the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat." What could be more exhilarating than the experience on the mountain, but Jesus is immediately brought back to earth by the trials of this life. I'm reminded of an early experience in youth ministry. After a typical last-night of camp decision night and the spiritual 'high' that involved, I found some of my youth group visiting with kids from town who had anything but spiritual things upon their mind. I was crushed that their mindset could change so quickly but it was a good reminder of the fallen world we live in.

We see a similar message here to the previous two accounts. First there is a greater appreciation of who Jesus is as the people are impressed by the miraculous healing, then Jesus challenges his disciples to understand that he was going to be betrayed. Just recognizing Jesus isn't enough, a human response is required. While in the first two incidents the disciples are

challenged to respond, here Jesus simply says that he is going to be rejected. The disciples don't want to dig any deeper into that statement.

9:46-50. It's not about you.

It's always mind-boggling to read about how the disciples missed the point and were more worried about their own future glory. But Jesus kept teaching them, no matter how frustrating.

Jesus knew what the disciples were arguing about but chose to address it with an illustration. He chose a child to show that the least would be greatest, but more important than receiving the child is the receiving of Jesus. Likewise, when the disciples worried about someone who wasn't part of their group, Jesus said to leave them alone, saying that the one who wasn't against him was for him.

That statement might sound like the opposite of 11:23: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." But in both cases, it is first of all about Jesus and secondarily what the other is doing. Stein gives a good summary:

Luke addressed two kinds of misunderstandings surrounding the Lord's mission and ministry. The Son of God's greatness (9:43) is only understood properly in light of the passion (9:44). True greatness comes from serving (22:27). The first misunderstanding involves the nature of greatness. Greatness lies not in receiving preferential treatment from others or in having more authority than others. On the contrary it involves serving others, especially the outcasts of society as represented by a little child. Greatness ministers to the poor, crippled, lame, and blind who can never repay (14:12-14).

The second error is to think that God is only working exclusively in one's immediate circle. Other followers of Christ were also exorcising demons in Jesus' name. It has been suggested that Luke may have been referring to a narrow sectarianism that excluded other servants of Christ, particularly thinking of the unwillingness of some in the Jerusalem church to accept the ministry of the apostle Paul "because he is not one of us" (9:49). Such speculation can never be demonstrated, but the practice of excluding others who minister in Christ's name because "they are not one of us" has been all too frequent within the Christian church. One need only think of the "established church" and the dissident or "nonconformist church." The church must guard itself against excluding outsiders who believe the cardinal tenets of historic Christianity simply because they are not associated "with us". [Vol. 24: *Luke*, p. 294]

Bible Application

We have said that the purpose of Luke's Gospel is that the lover of God (Theophilus) might know the truth about the things one has been taught (1:1-4). As Luke wraps up the first phase of Jesus' ministry he emphasizes that Jesus is the Messiah, emphasizes his glory as the Son of God, demonstrates his power over evil and finally puts the focus upon Jesus and away from ourselves.

Life Response

There is a dual message throughout today's text, the exaltation of Jesus and the necessary human response. It is not enough to recognize who Jesus is, we must also orient our lives toward following him.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do you answer the question, "Who is Jesus?"?
2. How would you summarize what we've studied in Luke chapters 4-8?
3. How does Luke emphasize prayer in the Gospels? What is the significance of Jesus being in prayer at these key points in his ministry?
4. What differences do you see in Luke 9:18-27 and Matthew 16:13-20?
5. What connection do you make between the statement of Jesus' messiahship and his admonition concerning the cost of discipleship?
6. What did Jesus mean when he said that some would not taste death until they saw the Kingdom come with power?
7. Why do you think that Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration?
8. What is the significance of the Transfiguration for the disciples? for us as readers of Luke's Gospel?
9. Why were the disciples unable to heal the man's son?
10. Why do you think this happened right after the Transfiguration of Jesus?
11. Why did the disciples not want to ask Jesus what he meant when he said that he was going to be betrayed into human hands?
12. Why do you imagine that the disciples were still arguing about who would be the greatest?
13. What do we learn about Jesus in today's text? What do we learn about our necessary response to Jesus?
14. What have you heard today that you would like to make more meaningful in your life? How can you do that?