

DINNER WITH THE DOCTOR

LUKE'S GOSPEL
FOR THE HUNGRY



A. ANDREW DAS



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PREPARING FOR DINNER: INTRODUCTIONS

Have you ever found yourself wanting to know more about a biblical text as you listened to a message or sermon, attended a Bible study, or read your daily devotion? Why does the author say what he says? How does it all fit together? What about those difficult verses? I believe there are Bible-believing Christians searching for rich and insightful materials for their daily devotional life that dig deeper into the passages they are reading. If you too are wanting to drink more deeply from the Scriptures, this book is for you.

From childhood to the present, my whole life has been shaped by a curiosity about the Bible. I began early on with children's Bible story books and then read through the Bible, also at a young age. I was hungry for a deeper understanding and craving more, still unsatisfied through high school, college, and even seminary. At the graduate level, I began to find more answers to my questions. I was amazed at the wealth of insights that scholars enjoy in their discussions that most Christian readers (and sometimes even their pastors) will just never hear or have access to—thus the reason for this book. I believe that there are believers out there looking for good materials to use in their daily devotional life that will dig deeper into the passages they are reading. Many Bible teachers and pastors are looking for models of biblical preaching and teaching they can mine in their own labors

(and please do). If you or the people you know want to drink more deeply of Scripture, this book is for you.

You might ask why this is a book only about Luke and his Gospel. He filled an entire scroll with his story of Jesus, and the story takes a while to work through. Luke will be one of the more extended stops along the way through the Bible, *and* he offers one of our treasured accounts of the Savior. What was Luke trying to communicate in *his* Gospel story? What makes Luke tick, as opposed to Matthew or Mark or John? God employed particular individuals and their gifts and abilities as He inspired His Word. If the Gospels seem to blend together, we are missing out on valuable insights and lessons, and we are not reading each Gospel first on its *own* terms and in its *own* context. These Gospels are not just stories of Jesus; each one was written for a particular first-century audience with real-world needs, just like our own. We want to imagine ourselves in Luke's first audience as we hear his Gospel afresh for ourselves.

You're probably sensing that we are already broaching how we should interpret Luke. Have you ever heard someone in a Bible study say, "What this means to me is . . ."? It's pretty common. A darker version is for someone to say, "That's just your interpretation." Not every reading or interpretation is a legitimate one. Jesus tells a scribe that he had answered *correctly* in how he had interpreted what was written in the Law.¹ The apostle Paul admonishes a young preacher to teach correctly the Word of truth.² Good interpretation takes time, effort, and patience. Fortunately, to interpret the Scriptures rightly does not require us to know everything about a text. Luke tells Theophilus that he had investigated sufficiently about Jesus for Theophilus to know and be certain.³ Again, we don't have to know everything to know enough with certainty.

How can I be sure that my interpretation of a text is correct, especially with a text two or three thousand years old, written in another

1 Luke 10:28

2 2 Timothy 2:15

3 Luke 1:3-4

language and from another culture? The first order of business is to have a *good translation of the Scriptures* from their original languages. A translation needs to be *optimal*, which means that it is both readable and accurate with respect to the original. A Global Bible Institute scholar analyzed English translations and identified one uniquely close to that “sweet spot” between readability and faithfulness to the original, the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).⁴ It’s as readable as the New International Version and yet as word-for-word as the English Standard Version.⁵ We’ll use this accurate and readable English translation in what follows.

With a good translation in hand, the next step is to engage the biblical text by asking the reporter’s who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. What comes immediately before and what comes immediately after the passage? How does it connect with the passage we are studying? And again, God inspired individual human beings to write to particular people for particular reasons. As we hear Luke’s Gospel being read (most people in the first century were illiterate), whom do we see around us in his audience? Jews or non-Jews? Maybe both? Maybe more non-Jews than Jews? What was their world like? How would these *first-century* listeners understand the words? We do not want to import our own modern notions into the biblical text but strive to understand *what Luke’s words meant for those original, intended recipients!*

Let me give you a heads-up on a couple features of this book. A more extended introduction, up next, will help further explain why these devotions are on *Luke’s Gospel*. Also, I didn’t want to clutter the text of the devotions too much. If I mention a passage from elsewhere in the Bible or even the Gospel of Luke, the chapter and verse is in a footnote on the page just below the text you are reading. I recommend reading each chapter *twice*: once devotionally, and then a second time studying the various Bible passages in the footnotes that connect to

4 <https://csbible.com/about-the-csb/translation-philosophy/>

5 The Christian Standard Bible is the only mainstream translation thoroughly vetted by conservative Lutheran scholars with Lutherans included on its oversight committee.

the one you're reading. You'll begin to see from those related texts the threads that weave the whole story together.

The individual chapters are intended to stand alone for a day's given reading in a devotional setting. If you were to read several together, you might notice repeated mention of some of the key moments in Luke's Gospel. That repetition signals Luke's own emphases and will help reinforce the central elements in the narrative, elements that the reader may begin to watch for throughout the Gospel (quite apart from the passages talked through in this volume). I hope you will begin to *think* like Luke and that you will come to appreciate Luke and his craft as he was conveying this wonderful, divinely inspired message of our salvation, our deliverance, in Jesus Christ!

The (fanciful?) inspiration for this book began a long time ago in a place far, far away . . . at a dinner I enjoyed.

THE DINNER

Dinner with the doctor? It was decades ago at the beginning of my teaching career while at the College of William and Mary in Virginia. I had just gone to bed after a long day's work. Susan noticed a worried look on my face. "So what are you doing tomorrow?" she asked. My wife was always interested in what I was teaching. She had minored in religion (at William and Mary) and especially loved biblical studies. I'd always give her a preview of my lectures for the next day, but that night I was unsure.

"I'm sweating it a little. I'm doing the Gospel of Luke for the first time. It's with my New Testament class. There are some really sharp people in there! You can't hide anything from them, and I'm not sure how to pull it all off." (My doctoral work had been on the apostle Paul.)

I paused. "You know what I would really love? I would love a chance to sit down with Luke and just ask him straight up what his Gospel was about—what he thought was distinctive, what he hoped to get across. Kind of like one of those science fiction shows where you get to go back in time."

"It's easy to confuse Matthew, Mark, and Luke," Susan agreed, adding, "John's obviously doing his own thing, but those three share a lot of the same stories." (She didn't mind my science fiction either.) Her voice sounded tired. It had gotten late.

As Susan was turning out the light, I was still fixated on my questions: "But what is it that Luke *himself* was doing? What makes *Luke's* Gospel tick?"

Susan went to sleep pretty fast. It was a little surprising as I heard her begin to breathe steadily. I was the one who would always hit the pillow and go right to sleep . . . but not tonight. I was turning it all

over in my head. I had had some writing projects on Paul hitting me that day that had kept me busy, and I didn't like going to bed without having figured out how to handle Luke.

The minutes dragged on, and then a few hours. Finally, I started drifting off to sleep, but that's when it happened.

I heard a voice. "Andrew."

I opened my eyes a little. The room was bright, as if someone had turned on the light. Someone was standing next to the bed! "Andrew." Definitely not the average home invader! That '70s-ish white robe was out of place, and his face must have been catching the light above him (or behind him).

Groggily, I blurted out, "Is this where I say, 'Speak, Lord, Your servant listens'?"

The flat tone: "No, Andrew, I'm not the Lord. I'm Gabriel, the Lord's servant."

I was upright now, totally confused—still groggy, and a little alarmed. I think I just stared at him. Susan would have told me that I could have caught flies with my mouth hanging open like that.

"Andrew, I have come here to take you with me."

"Take me with you?!?" I looked over, but somehow Susan had managed to stay asleep through it all. For the life of me, I couldn't understand how *that* was possible.

"Let's go," he said. I had barely gotten up out of bed and was standing when I realized . . . I wasn't next to my bed, or even in the bedroom.

We were outside a home, but an ancient home! Roman? Looking down, I wasn't in my pajamas. I was wearing a tunic, and over it was a small cloak. The color struck me as a little bright. It certainly wasn't subdued. Looking back up, I noticed the door appeared to be made of oak. The brightly polished knocker drew attention to itself. Gabriel motioned for me to knock. I did. A man opened the door: "We were expecting you. Come in." I glanced back in confusion, but Gabriel was no longer there.

As the strange man led me down the hallway, lamps set on polished bronze stands lighted the way along the wall. The short hallway opened

up into a fairly spacious room, also lighted by lamps and apparently ready for its guest. Fifty or sixty people would surely fit comfortably into this room for a social occasion. As we walked toward the back of the room, I was looking all around . . . and down. I was expecting a mosaic on the floor since I had seen pictures of them in the Roman ruins. I wasn't disappointed. Small tiles forming a pattern overlaid the concrete surface. I was surprised by the pattern. I was expecting the signs of the zodiac or something more typically pagan for this period. I had seen pictures of those in books on Roman antiquity. This pattern seemed more mundane, even geometrical. The whole mosaic was framed by white and black bands enclosing a red and yellow winding ribbon.

The walls and ceiling appeared to be plastered. A large painting on one of the walls of the cavernous room showed a man pouring water over the head of another. They both appeared to be standing in a small stream that went up to their ankles. The painting had a bird flying above them, maybe a dove, but that was just a guess. I wondered if it was a baptismal scene. There was a chariot near the two men.¹

A dim light was invading the room from an opening in the center of the ceiling, the last rays from a setting sun. The small pool below it looked like it caught the rainwater. I thought that was pretty clever—a source of natural water and decorative too.

We were heading toward the back of the room where there was an opening on the right. I peeked. (The fellow escorting me didn't seem to mind.) The room inside had a rectangular shape. In the center was a table, and on three sides were dining couches with cushions and mattresses, each nearly meeting the table. The fourth side did not have any couches but offered access to the table, no doubt where the servants would come and go.

“Are we going to have dinner in there?” I asked.

1 Acts 8:26–40. Depictions of Baptism in pre-Constantinian art, prior to AD 313, typically depict a person pouring water over the head of the one being baptized. See “Lingering Questions” in the 2008 second edition of my book, *Baptized into God's Family* (see the bibliography for details).

Suddenly, I realized someone *else* was standing beside me. “A little big, isn’t it?”

I looked over at the stranger. He turned toward me. “I mean, it’s just the two of us. Well, we do have our brother and sister here who might join us for part of it. The room’s a bit large since we’re going to be it.” His eyes went back to the room we were studying.

I noticed the frescoes on the walls of the dining room with their depictions of peaceful woodland scenes. The opened shutters on the windows were allowing the last evening light into the room. They must have been facing to the west. Still, the lampstand candles were already lit in this room as well.

“By the way, I’m Luke,” he said. “I think you were hoping to talk to me. Right now, you’re looking at our *triclinium*,” he explained. “Whenever we have a decent-size party, we dine in here, but come with me.” Luke motioned as he went into the large dining room.

Going in, I could see a door off to the side of the dining area where, I assumed, the slaves would enter and exit. It was near the side of the table where there were no couches. We went through the door, and a kitchen was at the end of the short hallway. I could see an oven and a griddle over a raised open fire at the end of the hall in there. A woman was hard at work. Wafting through the air was a mix of unfamiliar aromas. The ends of some small tables in the kitchen were visible, as were a few shelves and cupboards.

Closer to me along that short hallway to the kitchen was another door to the side that led to a smaller room. Inside there was a table and chairs. I followed Luke into the small room. I got a glimpse of the male slave, who had apparently rejoined us, as he went past me into the kitchen.

“This is what the Romans call a *cenatio*. Since it’s just the four of us, I thought it would be a more comfortable dining area than the *triclinium*.”

The two servants were making some noise now with the dishes and small talk. I motioned toward them quizzically. “Yes,” Luke said,

“that man is Chrestus. It’s a common slave name among the gentiles around here.”

“Sounds a lot like ‘Christ,’” I couldn’t help but notice.

Luke smiled. “He gets that a lot. And the woman preparing our food is Lycoris. We tease her a bit. She’s named after a beautiful flowering plant. But there was—well over a hundred years ago—a slave who acted on the stage and served as a courtesan. Later, she became a prominent freedwoman. She was a lover, believe it or not, of Mark Antony, Marcus Brutus, and Cornelius Gallus. Lycoris was her nickname.”² They both must have heard us, because they called out their greetings, and I politely responded.

On the table before us were two cups with what seemed to be reddish wine. Luke motioned for me to sit in one of the chairs before taking the other. Two of the chairs were at the table next to the place settings and two more against the wall in the room. Luke lifted the cup nearest to himself and offered up a prayer: “Father in heaven, we thank You for this fruit of the vine and for the meal that we are about to receive. We ask that You be present with us in our conversation that it may be to Your glory for the furtherance of Your will and the Kingdom. In Your Son’s name we pray. Amen.” I heard an echo of the “Amen” coming from around the corner in the kitchen area.

With the “Amen,” Luke motioned, and I tried the wine. He explained that it was a Greek vintage, but it struck me that it had been diluted. Definitely not as strong as modern wines. Even so, Luke was sipping it sparingly. Did he plan on his cup lasting through the meal? I was guessing that there was about a quarter of a pint in each of our cups. He noticed my watching and remarked, with a smile again, “A little wine is good for the stomach—but only a little. I heard that from someone somewhere.”³

“By the way, Andrew, as we pray before our meal, you know we are following our Lord’s example.”

“I struggle sometimes with praying as I should.”

2 Volumnia Cytheris

3 1 Timothy 5:23

“That’s too bad. I hope you don’t mind if I say that you really should revisit that. We are to keep at our prayers! One of the things that really struck me as I was listening to the disciples and others describe our Lord was that He would always find time to pray. He would leave the guys behind just to be by Himself. Sometimes for a whole night! He prayed before He called the disciples to follow Him. He even prayed before Simon Peter denied Him, that Peter’s faith would not fail him.⁴ I think we’ve all seen the results of *that* prayer here in Rome.”⁵

Luke was not finished with me. “The Lord even taught the disciples a *pattern* for how they should pray: He said that we should all seek His kingdom and that His will be done not just in heaven but also here on earth and in our lives!⁶ Even more, when we all come together in this house each week to worship, it’s really just the overflow of all the prayers we do on our own. We have to do battle first on our own and not just when we are together.”⁷

Admittedly, prayer is hard for me, and I felt convicted. Luke noticed that my eyes had drifted away for a second. Given the position of my chair, I could see a little around the corner into the kitchen area. One of the slaves was visible preparing the food. Sure enough, Chrestus turned and brought the dishes and utensils. The first course consisted of vegetables—mostly lettuce mixed with olives and sliced eggs. Luke explained that this was the *gustus* of a Roman meal, a sort of warm-up. The plates and bowls were all earthenware. There were knives to cut the food, and even toothpicks. The spoons and forks were apparently just for serving the food. Luke scooped up some food with his fingers, and I followed his lead.

“I have my suspicions, but where are we?” I asked.

4 Luke 11:5–8; 18:1–8; 5:16; 6:12–13; 22:32. There’s *more* on prayer in Luke than in the other Gospels! See for example also Luke 9:18, 28; 10:21–22; 22:39–46.

5 A generation later, Clement of Rome, the corresponding pastor for the city, would mention in his letter to the Corinthians how Peter had been martyred in Rome (chapter 5 of *1 Clement*).

6 Luke 11:1–4; 17:20–21

7 On Jesus encouraging frequent prayer, see, for instance, Luke 18:1; 21:36; 22:40, 46.

“Andrew, you’re in Rome. My patron owns this house and allows those who believe in the Lord Jesus to use it for lodging, for worship, and for whatever else we need to serve our Lord. In fact, a few years after I finished my story of Jesus, I came here to begin work on my second volume.”

“So is your patron the Theophilus you mentioned at the beginning of your Gospel?”⁸

“Indeed, he is,” confirmed Luke. “When Paul came to Rome under house arrest, Theophilus had taken an interest in his preaching and had wanted to learn more.⁹ (Jesus is a Jewish Messiah, but Theophilus is a gentile.) Around here, they consider Judaism a *superstitio*. It’s not a good thing, a sort of disease from the East afflicting their society. But Theophilus was very curious—and generous. He supported my travels and work as I did my interviews. I guess turnabout is fair play, and it seems you’ve come to interview *me*.”

I began a bit nervously. “Dr. Luke, thank you for letting me visit. The reason I am here, I’m pretty sure, is that I am getting ready to introduce my students to your story about Jesus. I was hoping to ask you a few questions, if I may.”

“Sure. Let’s hope that they come to ‘love God’ like my patron!” (I got the double meaning with “theo-philus.”)

“To begin with: What do you see your story as ultimately about?”

“Well, Andrew, many Jews had recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah and Savior talked about in our Scriptures. I would mention that something in my story was written in the Scriptures and then quote the prophecy. You see, many were looking forward to the Deliverer God had promised to redeem His people Israel.”

“Didn’t Matthew and Mark write much the same in their stories?” I asked.

“Sure, we were relying on a lot of the same witnesses as we told our stories. You know, our best Greek historians tell us that the best history is the one recorded while the events are still fresh and the

8 Luke 1:1–4

9 Acts 28:16–31

eyewitnesses still available. Mark and Matthew wanted to emphasize that Jesus's death was for our sins.¹⁰ I would completely agree. After all, I had stressed that Jesus was the Innocent One. The centurion at the cross had called Jesus 'righteous,' or innocent.¹¹ That's also what Pilate had said about Jesus at the trial. Even Herod had come to that conclusion when Pilate sent Jesus over to him.¹² As the events were playing out, no one had realized that the Innocent One was dying for the guilty."¹³

Luke took a bite and then another sip of his wine. "On a slightly different note, let me ask *you* a question, Andrew. How much did you see before you entered this house?"

"Not much," I said. "I saw the home itself and looked around. It was a busy street, but then we knocked and I came in."

"Well, Andrew, if you had been able to walk down that street before you came in, you would see other homes, but not many like this one. We are very fortunate to have a generous patron who watches over and helps our Christian brothers and sisters. And he *should* do that."

"You seemed a little emphatic there. Why is that?"

Luke was quick to respond, as if he had said something like this many times before. "What a person does with his or her wealth and possessions says a lot about where that person's heart is before God. You cannot serve two masters!¹⁴ One of the quickest ways the devil corrupts us—he tried this with the Lord—is to show us all the kingdoms of the world and offer them to us.¹⁵ Most people in our world, I am guessing, would say yes. So if Theophilus was blessed with a kingdom, the real question is what is he going to do with it? We expect much from him since he was given so much."

"But that can seem a little harsh, Luke, especially if you're Theophilus."

10 Mark 10:45; Matthew 20:28; 26:28

11 Luke 23:47. The centurion in Mark (15:39) and Matthew (27:54) calls Jesus the Son of God.

12 Luke 23:4, 14, 22; 23:15

13 But see Luke 23:40–42.

14 Luke 16:13

15 Luke 4:5–8

“No, not at all. If we enjoy the salvation of our souls and the gift of eternity, the blessings of this world are not all that important. It’s better just to give it all away. In fact, the Lord often calls us to do just that. And if you can’t, then you really have a different god in your life. Remember, Andrew, He called His disciples to leave everything behind, including your namesake.¹⁶ They even had to leave behind their families and loved ones. We too have to be ready to do that if the Lord asks it of us.”

As he paused for a bite, I asked him about how thirteen men could just go on the road like that. How did they pull that off? Luke answered, “You’re right about that. Fortunately, He didn’t call *all* of us to abandon everything. I learned that several of the women would take care of the expenses so that the men who had given everything up could go with Jesus on the road throughout Galilee.¹⁷ All that traveling certainly wasn’t free. In our world, most people are struggling just to eat. These women may not have left everything behind to follow Jesus, but they—as all of us—were ready to part with what they had if someone in our midst had need. Again, what you do with your possessions says a great deal about where your heart is before God.”

“In my time,” I explained, “our government takes our taxes and uses it to help the poor. We try to set up special programs to get them back on their feet. The government even helps people in their old age. I’m not sure the believers in our churches are as ready to help one another financially like that.”

“Well, your government sounds very different from Rome. People are on their own in our world. If you don’t have friends and family and you’re in need, you could very well end up in a dire situation. Many even die. We can’t take care of an entire world, Andrew, but if someone comes into our gatherings who is in need, or especially if one of our own is in need, we all chip in to try to take care of that

16 Luke 5:11, 27–28; Luke mentions *Simon*’s boat and call, along with James and John’s. Later, Andrew is named as Simon’s brother (Luke 6:14). It was always about *Simon*.

17 Luke 8:1–3

person.¹⁸ We look out for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We're prepared to sacrifice what we have. I mean, if you had a chance to go down the street that this house is sitting on, you would see a lot of people on the side of the road not doing all that well. People talk about our great empire, and it is, but what goes unmentioned is that on any given day more than half of us are starving. Not everyone has a wealthy patron. Theophilus is the reason I was able to get this message out. As much as he can, he takes care of the physical needs of our Christian gatherings and frees us so that we can minister to others."

"That sounds like you might be watering down what Jesus did on the cross into what we would call a mere 'social gospel.'"

Luke leaned over the table, as if to make his point more forcefully. "Salvation is God's freeing us not just from our sins but from *anything* that's not what God originally had planned for us. It's not an either-or. It's not just where we've disobeyed God's will. Zacchaeus realized that he had been enslaved to making money, and when he gave back what he had defrauded, *that's* when Jesus said that salvation had come to his house.¹⁹ Or to give you another example: Salvation is to be delivered from sickness or disease or even possession. God's salvation will one day free us from *all* these afflictions. I am a doctor, remember?"²⁰

"So I'm assuming that's why you have all those stories of Jesus healing people."

"That's the whole point of my account of Jesus! It's more than that Jesus saved us from our sins, although it certainly includes that. When you look at the emptiness in people's eyes or the emptiness in their stomachs or souls, or all the disease and bodily afflictions people in our world have, Jesus came to save us from even more than our sins. He came to save us from *everything* that is keeping us from living our lives as God intended. The Lord saw all the sickness and disease in our world. Everything had gotten rotten and all turned upside down, and God wanted to set it back aright. We see that with what Jesus

18 Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35

19 Luke 19:1-10

20 Colossians 4:14

did. At the same time, while Jesus healed and exorcised demons, He didn't remove *all* these ailments and afflictions from our world. The Lord also taught us that there is a world to come, and that we will still suffer in this life and that we will still die. But the Lord wanted to clue us in on the fullness of all that awaits us. What Jesus was doing with His powerful healing ministry was showing us that the world that is to come had already invaded this world in His ministry."

"Sounds like your passion as a doctor coming through," I inserted.

"Yes, Jesus took away diseases. He cast out demons. He delivered people from their sins. He even took notice when a poor widow gave all that she had—as little as it was.²¹ From what those who knew Him said, the Lord was always watching people. He was always very aware of people's needs. When Jesus visited His hometown at Nazareth, He read to them from the prophet Isaiah about how the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Him to preach good news to the poor and release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind. The year of the Lord's favor meant that God Himself had come to restore His people—all people."²²

As Luke paused and grabbed a quick bite, I sneaked in a quick follow-up question: "Luke, what do you mean by *all* people? I understood you were writing about a *Jewish* Messiah. I know gentiles or non-Jews joined the faith, but you never mentioned Jesus going to the gentiles much. For that matter, I don't think you ever talked about Jesus leaving Jewish lands for gentile soil the way Mark did with Jesus's going to the Decapolis."

After pausing for a second to swallow, Luke responded. "That's a good point, Andrew. Jesus had come to Israel, but He came to Israel *first*. I know you were brought here to talk about my story of Jesus, but keep in mind that I didn't stop the story there. Already early in Jesus's ministry, even when He addressed His hometown at Nazareth, Jesus talked about how the prophets had gone to the non-Jews. The angel announced how the salvation Jesus would bring would be for

21 Luke 21:1-4

22 Luke 4:18-19

all people, for all of us from Adam.²³ But Jesus still came for Israel *first*. The story begins in Jerusalem!²⁴ The problem, as you know, is that many people in Israel rejected Him, and their rejection led to His being crucified.²⁵ At the end of the story of Jesus, all those promises of a salvation also for Israel and the gentiles had not been fulfilled.²⁶ It was kind of a loose end. I had to write more. I had filled the scroll with the story of Jesus, and so I took advantage of Theophilus's curiosity and provision and wrote more. I wrote the story of the first Christians and even the apostle Paul. I used to travel with him."²⁷

I couldn't help myself. "I know this is about your story of Jesus, but I would love to hear more about your second volume, Acts."

Luke nodded. "Yes, but we have enough on our plates tonight with Jesus."

The conversation ebbed for a few minutes as we both ate lettuce, olives, and eggs. I didn't think I'd be hungry since I had had dinner before going to bed. I wondered if it was the result of the time zone change. And I *was* curious about the food. After we finished the course, I looked up. Chrestus had appeared in the doorway. "It's time for the *cena*. That's our main course. Gabriel already told us that you're not one to eat fish, but I must forewarn you that that's what we have for tonight."

Luke chimed in. "You wanted to know about Jesus's adventures with His Galilean disciples. Many were fishermen, *Andrew*! I thought you could bear it for a night."

Chrestus stressed, "I'm guessing you've not had *good* fish. Many people don't have access to that. Lycoris is preparing fresh fish from the markets today. The vendors brought it in from Ostia on the coast southwest of the city. It's only about fifteen to twenty miles away along the Tiber."

23 Luke 4:24–27; 2:10; 3:23–38

24 Luke 1–2

25 Luke 23:13–26

26 Luke 24:21, 46–47

27 Colossians 4:11, 14; Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16

I heard her reassuring voice from the kitchen. “That’s right, Andrew. It’s fresh!”

Luke explained that it is not often that they have fresh fish for dinner. Chrestus placed the dishes before the two of us. “Try it,” Luke motioned.

I sampled the fish. It didn’t taste “fishy” at all! It was surprisingly good. I said as much and couldn’t help but add, “You know, the sauce on the fish is *also* surprisingly good. It reminds me of what we call Worcestershire sauce.”

Lycoris came around the corner. “It’s *garum*. It’s pretty popular around here. People make it with different ingredients, sometimes with anchovies, sometimes sardines.”

“It’s really good,” I emphasized again.

Lycoris disappeared for a second and brought out some plates for herself and Chrestus and sat down beside Luke and me to listen and eat. I was not sure about whether slaves should be so free in the ancient world to do that. Luke noticed my puzzled look. “We are all brothers and sisters here. While Chrestus and Lycoris are slaves in Theophilus’s household, in Christ we know that they are our family. Those who follow ‘the Way’ are closer than blood. To quote what brother Paul would say, there is no slave and free among us in the Lord.²⁸ And we are *all* slaves to our Lord Jesus as we serve His kingdom and one another.”

I noticed that Lycoris was comfortable conversing with us and commented, “I had thought that women would not be able to socialize in the same way as men.”

Lycoris answered, “We believe that there is no male *and* female. You know, women were the first to witness our Lord’s resurrection!”

Chrestus chimed in, “Yeah, the guys dismissed their report at first. Women’s kind of talk.”

Luke added, “Jesus treated them very differently. Again, women made possible, financially, Jesus’s and the disciples’ ministry. Women are students of our Master as much as we men are, even if they aren’t

28 Galatians 3:28; “The Way”: Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22

doing so publicly.²⁹ In fact, that's something that was surprising to me as well when I was with Jesus's brother James and the men in Jerusalem. They narrated a lot of stories about the women. Whatever happened with men in Jesus's ministry, it seems like the same was happening with the women too. I noticed that and tried to make sure it ended up in my account. You'll read about Mary, the mother of our Lord, but you'll also read about Zechariah. You'll read about Simeon, who held the baby Jesus, and then Anna. You'll read about a shepherd who lost a sheep and then a woman who lost a coin.³⁰ Most of the time, though, I liked to place the same sorts of stories about a man and a woman at different points in my narrative. It's more fun that way."

We continued to eat as Luke talked. Lycoris had said that the fish was mackerel. I wouldn't have known the difference. The bread served with the fish was very different. It seemed like there were ground husks with it. Luke certainly seemed to enjoy it.

As the main course was winding down, I decided to resume the conversation. "You mentioned that you had traveled with Paul. Is that why I'm finding you here in Rome?"³¹

"Partly, yes. Paul spent some time here when he was under house arrest, but he didn't stay. Once he was freed after a couple years, he got back on the road. But I don't want to give you the wrong impression. He was thrilled to be under arrest here in Rome. It was his first time here, and it gave him a chance to share the message of Christ, first with the Jewish community, but then with the gentiles. What had begun in Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish world, had reached a sort of fulfillment here in Rome, the heart of the non-Jewish world. Paul and I didn't get a *lot* of time together, but his way of thinking really made an impression on me—as you may have noticed from my two-volume work. Theophilus has a home here. After all, it's the center of the empire and of commerce. He has his other house in Antioch. That's the *third* largest city in the empire."

29 Luke 24:9–11; 8:1–3; 10:38–42

30 Luke 1; 2:25–38; 15:1–10

31 A "we" section, indicating Luke was with Paul: Acts 27:1–28:16

“It’s a great blessing and privilege to have this chance to meet you. I don’t know how much time I have left. It may only be this dinner. I feel like there are so many more questions that I have!”

“Andrew, when you get back home, please do teach that class on the Gospel that the Lord had me write, but keep one thing in mind.”

“What’s that?”

“God is still working miracles in your day too. I know, even though I haven’t been there. The Lord sent His Spirit at the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, and we saw His power.³² Then, whenever we would baptize people, they would receive the Spirit.³³ I think that must have been why the Lord loved reading that Isaiah passage at Nazareth: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on Me’—and no longer just on our Lord.³⁴ We all share in the power of the Spirit! Until Jesus comes back again and judges us all and brings in His new heavens and new earth, He is in the business of working miracles. And do you know what the greatest miracle of all is?”

“I have a suspicion,” I responded, “but what is it?”

“The greatest miracle of all is when God works repentance in a person’s heart. That was a point Peter used to make in his sermons.³⁵ And you know how God does that, don’t you?”

“I *think* so but, again, I’d rather hear you say it.”

“We’re all like that lost sheep or lost coin.³⁶ There’s not much we can offer for ourselves, really nothing. He works that miracle of repentance when we encounter preaching, a message, or His story. When we share the message of Jesus Christ, or in my case as the Lord inspired me to write it all down, that message has great power! We’ve seen that here in the first century. I’m sure it’s no different for people in your time too. God’s Word has great power. It comes with the ability to create the very faith of which it speaks. God’s Word

32 Acts 2

33 Acts 2:38

34 Luke 4:18

35 Acts 5:31; 11:17

36 Luke 15:1–10

changes lives and turns them right side up. I hope you challenge your students to study it for themselves. The more they read that story of Jesus, sooner or later, it will change them and they will repent of their sins and of the wickedness in their lives. God will make new people of them. I can't imagine a better job than what you have there teaching the Lord's message."

"Thanks for that encouragement. Sometimes my students seem like they're just taking a class. I don't know how much of it's sinking in."

"Mark used to love to share this parable of our Lord about where the seeds would land. Yes, there's a lot of rocky soil. There are a lot of places where the Word takes root and starts working a miracle, only for the world and the evil one to snuff it out. But that Word will find its way to good soil too, and I think Mark was right to emphasize this too. It's like a weed that just takes over a whole garden. I borrowed that one from him.³⁷ For my own part, I like to think of each of us as a light shining in a very dark world. No one lights a lamp and then covers it with a basket or puts it under the bed. We want people to see the light.³⁸ There is the light that is *in* you, Andrew!"

"Sometimes people in my age think that the world has gotten very dark, but your words are a reminder that the Lord's own shine that much brighter in a dark world."

"Absolutely!" nodded Luke.

"You mentioned Mark. I wish I could meet him too."

"Maybe you will someday, Andrew. Who would have guessed *we* would have met?"

The slaves brought out a new dish. Luke explained that the Romans like to call it *secundae mensae bellaria*. I learned that was their version of dessert. For us on this night, it consisted of plates of grapes, nuts, and figs.

"Vegetables, bread, and fish—the fish was expensive, but you are our guest—and we share what we have with one another," commented Luke, before the four of us quietly enjoyed the dessert.

37 Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15

38 Luke 8:16–18; Mark 4:21–22

It seemed like our conversation was winding down, and we had talked about even more. A lot to “digest”! The dessert had largely disappeared as well. As if on cue, Chrestus and Lycoris got up from the table, as did Luke. I followed their lead. Luke motioned, and Chrestus, Luke, and I started back for the front door while Lycoris ducked back into the kitchen with some of our plates.

“Well, Andrew, it looks like we have come to the conclusion of our dinner together.” It didn’t seem to me to be that late. Our dinner and conversation had passed so quickly. I wondered if Luke must be an early riser.

“I guess so,” I responded with a less than enthusiastic tone to the announcement of the departure time. Luke led me back through the main dining area, then through the large *atrium* and toward the entryway and, finally, to the door.

“Thank you for welcoming me!” (I could see the candles being blown out in many of the areas we had been.)

“We’re more than friends. We’re brothers and sisters,” he said as he touched me on the shoulder. He added with a warm tone, “I need to get back to work. First, I need to pray, Andrew. I’ll pray for you, but I will pray especially that the message of our salvation in Christ would work a miracle to create repentant hearts and lives in your world too. I pray that the Lord would turn your world upside down and inside out, creating whole people again, people who join in worship and praise of a loving God who didn’t abandon our lost world but came and saved us!”

While we were praying, I thought I heard something behind me. With the “Amen,” I turned, and just outside the door was Gabriel, waiting. “Ready?”

“I think so.”

In the blink of an eye, I was back home again in bed next to Susan and, as they say, the rest is history.

I often think about that conversation. What follows in this volume is inspired by it—what Luke might have shared had he had more time with me. Going back in time to the first century and imagining what

DINNER WITH THE DOCTOR

it must have been like to hear Luke write his story for those first Christians—it led me to hear his story differently. I hope it helps you hear it as well, and that Luke’s inspired story and message would work the miracle of repentance in your life too!

HE HAS LIFTED UP THE LOWLY

LUKE 1:39-55

³⁹In those days Mary set out and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judah ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped inside her, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² Then she exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and your child will be blessed! ⁴³ How could this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ For you see, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby leaped for joy inside me. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill what he has spoken to her!"

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy.

⁵⁰ His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him.

5¹ He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts;

5² he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly.

5³ He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

5⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors.

Beginnings and endings are always important! Here, near the beginning of Luke’s Gospel, we are already discovering how God acts so counterintuitively, how He just loves to shock our expectations. In that spirit of divine reversal, we abandon for a moment the beginning to start our journey near the *end* of Luke’s Gospel. Women went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid, only to find the stone rolled away and no body inside. They were stunned and confused. Suddenly they realized two men in dazzling clothes were standing right there beside them. The women were terrified and fell to the ground. The two men said, “Why are you looking for the living among the dead? . . . He is not here, but He has risen!”¹ The women then remembered what Jesus had said while He was still with them, and left the tomb to go tell the male disciples what they had just witnessed. Now the men, when they heard about all this, considered it “nonsense,” an idle tale—you know, women’s kind of talk. So the disciples ran to the tomb to see for themselves and, sure enough, it was empty.

Still, you’re probably wondering what has Easter to do with the *beginning* of Luke’s Gospel? We’re beginning a journey with our Lord that will culminate in His resurrection Easter Sunday morning. But even more, Luke is very clear that women were the first ones to

1 Luke 24:1–6

witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and this incident with the women after the resurrection toward the very end frames a story that begins with *women*.

Very rarely do we ever see women acting on their own in the Bible apart from the men in their lives. This text is one of those rare instances. Luke relays the stories of these two women as seen from *their own* standpoint. The high point of Luke's first chapter is when Mary and Elizabeth meet and share the wondrous things God is doing in their lives. Mary travels the long way from Galilee to Judea to visit her much older relative Elizabeth to tell her the good news about a Son to be born. In Mary we have the woman from whose womb the Deliverer of Israel, the Savior, would come. And in Elizabeth we have the woman from whose womb would come the one who would announce that Deliverer. The only other time in the Bible we ever witness two women converse like this apart from men is in the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi—once again, a younger woman and an older relative. And from Ruth's womb would come the great king David, the one who united the people of Israel and delivered them from their enemies.

The book of Ruth is set “during the time of the judges.”² Now if you ever go read that other book in the Bible about the judges, it is not a pretty sight. This entire book is just one big spiral downward as the people abandoned their God. And all along the way, women were being vilely mistreated and abused, particularly at its dark climax, a scene of bone-chilling violence against a single woman, followed immediately by violence against hundreds of women. It's almost as if the story of Ruth with its opening in the days when the judges ruled was intended as a counterbalance to the story of Judges. In Ruth, we hear about women being treated with respect, speaking in their own voices, and playing a crucial role in the history of God's people. Now this is not to say that the book of Judges relishes violence against women. Nothing could be further from the truth. The point throughout Judges is that how women were treated in the land of Israel spoke volumes

2 Ruth 1:1