

Luke

Part 1 | 1:1-8:56

Anchor Church | Fall 2026

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Story of Scripture: An Overview

Creation

In Genesis, God shows himself to be the Creator. He has always existed, and as we study Scripture, we will find he has always existed as the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons. Everything else was created by him from nothing, a fact that shows us he is wholly different from us. As we are introduced to his creation in Genesis 1, we see that everything he has made is good, and we feel a tension because we recognize that the world as we know it misses the mark. It is not good that people get old, that loved ones get sick and die, that the world is filled with violence and corruption.

This tension in the story is intentional. Things are not how God created them or wanted them to be. He created a good world, and at its heart is a garden called Eden that represents the best of it. Here he places a man and woman (Adam and Eve), both created in the image of God, to rule over creation and to fill the earth with the glory of God. This is a world with no sin, no sickness, no violence and no death. They have everything that they need. They have fellowship with God, they have a purpose, and they have the use of all of creation. God gives them life freely with only one condition: they can eat of the fruit of every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they eat from it, they will die.

The Fall

In the next scene, a serpent enters the garden. This creature suggests that God does not have humanity's best interest in mind, that maybe they know more about what they want than God does. He suggests that God denies them the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because he does not want them to be like him. And instead of trusting in the goodness of God as displayed throughout his creation and provision for them, they disobey God. This is known as the Fall. At this point, sin and its consequences enter into the world, and it is corrupted. From here, the Bible shows how the choice of Adam and Eve to disobey God leads to increasing destruction and death. It corrupts everything it touches, and humanity can do nothing to rid itself of the problem. Evil is in our world because we invited it in, and there is nothing we can do to shut it out again. This is the tension we are meant to feel as we read Scripture: one that echoes our experience in what is often a cruel world.

But God is gracious. Instead of letting death be the last word, he makes a promise in Genesis 3:15 even as he doles out the consequences of disobedience. When talking to the serpent, God says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." God promises that there will one day be an offspring (or seed or child) of the woman that will defeat the serpent. He will be hurt by the serpent, but in so doing, he will crush its head. This promise will become clearer as the story unfolds.

The Good Seed and Righteousness by Faith

After this, we see the effects of sin driving the world into chaos. Just as God promised, sin has led to death. People are choosing immorality, violence, abuse, destruction, and death. A few faithful hold to the promise of a seed of the woman: a serpent slayer who will set things right, but even these show themselves to be thoroughly infected by sin. The story of Noah illustrates this. Things have gone horribly wrong up to this point: "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart

was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). But Genesis 5:28–29 says, “When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.’” Lamech, Noah’s father, understands the promise of Genesis 3:15 that God will send a serpent slayer to set things right. He hopes that his son is this man. And as Noah grows, it looks like he might be; God recognizes that he is the one righteous man on earth.

Because the world is so evil, God floods the earth, saving only Noah and his family. This story teaches us something about the heart of man. Although God has brought judgment upon the earth and is restarting with one righteous man and his family, sin has so permeated the human heart that even Noah, a righteous man who has just been spared judgment, shows his brokenness. The next time we hear about Noah, he is drunk and naked, shaming himself before his children. Even the most righteous man on earth falls far short of God’s standard for humanity. Noah looked like he may be the promised seed of the woman to slay the serpent, but he is as broken as all the rest. Though his faith is to be emulated, he cannot save even himself, much less the world. And by Genesis 11, we see the world openly rebelling against the rule of God again. This shows there is a heart problem with humanity. We choose to cut ourselves off from God, the source of life, and in doing so, we choose destruction. That is the clear trajectory for humanity established in Genesis.

But just as things are looking hopeless, God steps in and chooses a man who will later be renamed Abraham to receive a great promise. In Genesis 12:1–2, God says to Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” Of particular importance here is the idea that all the families of the earth will be blessed through Abraham (more on that in a minute). Of immediate concern to Abraham is how God can make him a great nation even though he has no children and has a barren wife. But in Genesis 15, God reaffirms his promise, and Abraham believes God and in so doing clues us into how a sinful and broken people might be able to be made right with our creator. Genesis 15:6 says, “And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” Abraham believes that God will come through on his promise, and God counts Abraham’s faith as righteousness. This clues us into why people like Noah are considered righteous even though we see that man’s heart is broken. They believe the promise of the seed of the woman who will slay the serpent. And God is narrowing his promise when he covenants with Abraham to bless the nations through his offspring or seed. The serpent slayer will be a child of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations.

The OT’s definition of righteousness can be surprising to many. Many see the OT way to salvation as observance to the law of Moses, but this is not the case. It is by faith in the promises of God. Romans 4:1–3 assures us that this interpretation is correct, “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’” Faith, not works, is and has always been the basis of justification. However, it is important to note that belief and obedience are closely related throughout Scripture. Belief is counted as righteousness, but that belief is always accompanied by a heart that is motivated towards obedience by the grace and mercy received. Thus obedience is the fruit (or result) of a life of faith. Faith, not works, is counted as righteousness. Obedience flows out of this faith. Obedience can be thought of as

living out the identity God gives us because of our faith. We will look at this more in our discussion of the New Testament.

Just as we would expect from our knowledge of humanity, Abraham and his descendants continue to exhibit evidence of heart problems. Throughout the rest of the OT, they lie, they cheat, they sleep around, they murder. They are thoroughly broken. They will never make themselves pure. Even the best choose themselves over God. It is important that we see salvation as something completely out of the reach of humanity. But more importantly, God steps in and provides salvation to those who are willing to repent. God is faithful despite failures. He continues to pursue his people. He continues to offer forgiveness and mercy to those who will respond in belief to his promises.

The Exodus and The Law

A few generations down the road from Abraham, we find that his family (the Hebrews or the people of Israel) has grown large, but they are enslaved to the Egyptians. It is important to note that this is predicted in Genesis 15:13, a fact that should only further confirm the sovereignty of God in our minds. Things are not good. Not only are they oppressed, but their numbers intimidate Pharaoh, and he decrees that every Hebrew male child born be killed by being cast into the Nile (Exodus 1:22). But one woman, in an effort to save her baby son, places him in a basket and floats him down the same river. The daughter of Pharaoh finds the child and raises him as her own. This man is Moses. He will lead Israel in the exodus, a climatic moment in history where God delivers Israel from Egypt and establishes them as a nation. This will be the moment by which OT believers remember the faithfulness of God and becomes the bedrock for their hope of future deliverance.

The story of Exodus shows the power of God. He uses the deliverance of Israel to tell a story that will be repeated over and over again. A man will bring a broken people out of the bonds of slavery and into a Promised Land. The story of Moses will set the trajectory for the greater redemption story where Christ comes to save his people from sin and death and restore them and the world to their intended place. Moses, through the power of God, pleads with Pharaoh to let his people go. God sends ten plagues, each proving his power over the gods of Egypt and the last of which costs the Egyptians that which they took from the Israelites: their firstborn sons. Israel is spared this fate through what becomes known as the Passover. God calls each house to sacrifice a lamb and paint its blood on the door posts. They are to then eat a special meal that becomes known as the Passover meal. That night as the angel of the Lord is putting the firstborn to death, he passes over the houses that believe God and act on his commandment to sacrifice the lamb, resulting in the sparing of their firstborn sons. This final plague convinces Pharaoh to release Israel.

Despite the miraculous ways God delivers them from Egypt, including the crossing of the Red Sea, they again choose fear rather than trust him. God leads them on the way to Promised Land in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He feeds them manna that miraculously appears on the ground. He gives them water from a rock when they have nothing to drink, and still they grumble against him.

Finally, they come to a place called Mount Sinai and something amazing happens. God makes a covenant (probably the best way to understand a covenant is a promise that is marked by loyal relationship) with Israel that they will be his people if they will obey what he calls them to do. That sounds good to them and so they say they will. Moses then goes up the mountain to meet with God and before he can come back down, they have already failed. They make an idol

and begin worshiping it. The only thing that keeps God from destroying them is his promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Eventually, they move on. God leads them on towards the Promised Land (Canaan), and he continues to provide for them on the way. As they near the land, they send out twelve spies to investigate. It is a rich land but also one filled with powerful people. Ten of the twelve spies report that they do not believe they can take the land. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, disagree and urge the people to trust God. Instead, they doubt his promise and try to stone Joshua and Caleb, rebelling against God. God intervenes and is again on the verge of destroying Israel. Only his promise stays his hand. The consequence for their actions? None of this unbelieving generation will get to enter the Promised Land. All but Joshua and Caleb will die in the wilderness as Israel is made to wander in it for the next 40 years.

This includes Moses. He is like Noah in that he appears to be the one who will bring about the promises of God, but despite his great faithfulness, he too sins in ways that show us he too is broken and in need of God's intervention. This is never more evident than when he strikes the rock at Meribah in disbelief and frustration, and God says to him, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12). Even the great prophet Moses falls short of God's perfect standard and is lost apart from God's intervention.

It is amazing that God continues to provide for Israel even as they wander through the desert. But the message is clear – disobedience displays a lack of belief in the promises of God, resulting in wandering through the desert rather than entering into the Promised Land (an image that will later represent entering into the rest of God). As the 40 years come to a close, Moses gives some last instructions to the Israelites before he dies, and they enter into the land without him.

In Deuteronomy 28–29, Moses reminds them of the covenant they have made with God. If they believe in him and his promises as demonstrated by their obedience, he will bless them in all kinds of ways. If they disobey, they will experience curses, most notably they will face exile at the hands of their enemies. Deuteronomy 30:15 sums it up this way, "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil." But Deuteronomy 30 also lets us know what is going to happen. They are going to disobey and go into exile. They are going to do exactly what everyone before them has done. They are going to choose to disobey God and die, and here we are clued in as to why: they have uncircumcised hearts. They can't love God how they are supposed to because their hearts are infected with sin and must be made new. This is also called a "heart of stone" (Ezekiel 36:26). But there is hope. There will be a day that God intervenes. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." God is doing something on the behalf of his people that they cannot do for themselves: change their very hearts.

This echoes what we see in Genesis 3:15 and Genesis 12:1–2. God is at work to bring about salvation for his people, and we are seeing his plan slowly unfold. It is something he must do on our behalf. God will send a seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He will be from the line of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations. Genesis 15:6 assures us that those who are considered righteous are those who believe the promises of God. These believers will be the ones whose hearts have been circumcised so they will love God with all their hearts and souls that they may live (Deuteronomy 30:6).

Despite the warning, the prediction of Deuteronomy 30 comes true. Upon entering the Promised Land, Israel's obedience quickly wavers. Numerous accounts like Joshua 7 show the Israelites disobeying God thinking they know better than him about what will make them happy. At times, they keep things for themselves they were told not to; other times, they are fearful. They do not completely conquer the land. Judges records in great detail a people who are quick to forget God. He intervenes to save them over and over again, sending judges to help, but they continue to fall into unbelief and disobedience. Judges is summed up with its last verse, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Kingdoms, Prophets, and Exile

At this point, God allows Israel an earthly king. A man of kingly stature named Saul receives the crown. However, despite his appearance, it quickly becomes apparent that his life does not match up. He becomes murderously jealous of a young man named David that God chooses to replace him as king (remember disobedience illustrates a lack of belief). David is a man specifically chosen by God. He is from the tribe of Judah. We didn't talk about this, but in Genesis 49:10, Jacob, a descendant of Abraham, declares that Judah, or more literally an offspring of Judah, will rule forever. All peoples will obey him, and the kingdom will be so wealthy he can tie his foal to the choice vine and wash his garments in wine. These are Messianic descriptors, meaning that these things describe the Messiah, the one God is sending to set things right, and the Messianic Kingdom he will usher in. This is important now because it hints to the meaning of the promises of God given here.

The serpent slayer will be a seed of the woman (a human), a seed of Abraham, from the tribe of Judah, and as we will see, a son of David (meaning in the lineage of David). David seems to be the next contender for the position of serpent slayer. God handpicks him. As a boy, he slays the giant Goliath when all of Israel trembles before him. He is patient and merciful to Saul despite Saul's murderous intentions towards him. He is even called a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). But we will see that he too is broken, most notably in his sin with Bathsheba. He will sleep with her, a married woman, and then have her husband killed to cover his sin. Again, the Bible clearly illustrates even the best of men have hearts that are deeply flawed. David is not the Messiah. But he does receive a promise from God that focuses the expectations of deliverance. God promises David, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). One from the line of David will rule forever as the Messianic King. This Kingdom will be described in further detail in the prophets, but the gist is that it will be an everlasting kingdom marked by righteousness and justice: the two major concerns of God's law.

After David dies, his son Solomon begins his rule. His rule, like his father's, starts out promising. He asks God for wisdom and receives it. He writes much of the wisdom literature in Scripture (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and much of Proverbs). He is successful in his reign. The nations come to meet him and pay tribute. In some ways, he is a picture of what the Messianic King might look like, but he is as fallen as the rest. He lets his numerous wives lead his heart after idols rather than stay true to God.

The rest of the accounts of the kings of Israel are much like this. Most are outright rebellious. Some make a call for renewed faithfulness, but the trend is towards disobedience. As a result, God does just what he said he was going to do. The people choose disobedience and in doing so, they choose the curse (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

This leads to disaster for Israel. Under Solomon's son, the kingdom of Israel is split into two kingdoms: Israel in the North, and Judah in the South. The kingdom of Israel is conquered by the Assyrians and carried off into exile. The same happens to the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. At this point, the question is how one in the line of David will sit on the throne forever and set things right if there is no throne in Israel? But we must remember that during the periods of the kings and now in the exile, prophets are sent to tell the Jewish people they are about to be punished and then while in exile why they are being punished. They have disobeyed God and are experiencing the curse Moses discussed in Deuteronomy 29. But that is not the end of the story. They are also reminded of who God is, how he is faithful to his promises, how he is merciful, how he has redeemed them in the past, and how they can expect him to do so again. And he will do so in a way that will address the problem they have been unable to address themselves. He will give them new hearts.

There are many clarifications of the promises of God in the prophets. In our brief overview it is important to see that there will be a Messianic (anointed one, promised deliverer) King from the line of David (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-5) and yet greater than David (Psalm 110:1), who in some way is like a son of man and yet who seems to share in the divinity and authority of God (Daniel 7:13-14), who will suffer for the sins of others (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) and yet will rule forever in righteousness and justice over a world that has been freed from sin and its curse (Isaiah 11:1-9). This king will not only save Israel but will bring salvation to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). We see that the members of this new kingdom will have a new covenant with God in which he will write his law on their hearts and mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34), meaning he will make them into the kind of people with hearts that are able to love follow him. There is more than we can discuss in this short overview, but it is important to see the expectation of redemption and salvation that exists because of the promises of God revolving around the seed of the woman as declared by the prophets throughout the exile.

This is where the OT ends, with the expectation of a Messiah, a serpent-slayer from the line of David who will be a blessing to the nations, who will provide forgiveness of sins, conquer death, and rule eternally with righteousness and justice. However, as they trickle back from exile and are allowed to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, no one thinks that this new kingdom has come. Israel languishes, waiting for its promised deliverer, and they will do so for 400 years. The question for Israel is, "When will this Messiah come?"

The Messiah

This is the context for the coming of Jesus—a once perfect world broken by an act of rebellion by the very ones created to be caretakers of it. This rebellion has led to broken fellowship with the creator, humanity's enslavement to sin, suffering caused by evil, and ultimately death. Hope seems distant, but deliverance is coming in a most unexpected way.

It is important to note that the NT writers see the coming of Jesus and his preaching of the dawning kingdom of God as the fulfillment of the OT Scripture and its promises. This is why Matthew begins with a genealogy of Jesus connecting him to Abraham (Matthew 1:1-17), Luke records a genealogy connecting him all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38), and all of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) make frequent use of OT quotes and allusions to confirm Jesus as the promised Messianic King. They believe God's promises in the OT and see them fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Although there are plenty of examples of God choosing people of low station to fulfill his purposes, the typical Jewish expectation for the Messiah was one who would come in political

power. That is not how Jesus comes. He comes from humble beginnings. When he starts his ministry he chooses twelve men to invest in. He doesn't choose the best and brightest; he chooses fishermen and a tax collector. But as he begins to minister, it becomes clear that Jesus is different. He heals people; he casts out demons; he shows his authority over nature; and he miraculously provides sustenance. He amazes the crowds as he teaches as one with more authority than they have never seen. He forgives sins; he overturns the temple; he explains how they have misunderstood the teachings of the OT. He claims to be the fulfillment of OT, the way to the Father, the living water, the light of the world. But most amazing of all, he claims to be the Son of God: one with God the Father. That is what all his teachings and miracles are pointing towards. The Messiah (or Christ as he is called in the NT) has come and his miracles are showing the dawning of the new kingdom promised in the OT. But the Jewish leaders are skeptical, which is unsurprising as it threatens their positions of power, and they begin to plot to kill Jesus.

Jesus' teachings are surprising. He teaches an upside-down economy for the new kingdom he is ushering in. The meek will inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). You must love your enemies (Matt. 5:43-48). You must store up your treasure in heaven, not on earth (Matt. 6:19-21). Those who want to follow him must expect to be hated and persecuted (Matt. 10:16-25). Those who are like children will be the greatest in the kingdom (Matt. 18:3-4). Those who desire to be great must serve (Matt. 23:11-12). Earthly riches make entering into the kingdom difficult (Matt. 19:23-24). Those who wish to keep their lives must lose it (Matt. 16:24-27). Then Jesus shows what he means by all of this by serving us in a way that we could never repay. He does something for us that we could never do for ourselves. He pays the penalty for our sins. The greatest among us, the very Son of God, serves a world that has been rebelling against him since the beginning of time and takes our sins upon his shoulders. He takes our penalty for our sins—death. The God of the universe becomes the suffering servant of Isaiah 53:5, "...he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed." And because he is perfect, because he is sinless, because he is the Son of God, he rises again from the grave (Matt. 28:1-10). Jesus—the seed of the woman, the blessing to the nations, the Davidic king, the suffering servant, the Son of God—has fulfilled the promise of God. He crushes the head of the serpent. He defeats sin and death and inaugurates the new kingdom.

Our Place in the Story

This is where you and I find ourselves in the story. Sin and death have been defeated, and we are offered a choice. Will we trust Jesus and his work on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins or will we trust in ourselves and our works? At first the answer seems easy. But Jesus calls us to count the cost of following him. He is coming back to set all things right, but until he does, we are to be sharing his story so that others might be saved. And what the Bible tells us is that many will reject him and in so doing reject and persecute us. Belief in him will mean hatred by the world. The call to follow Jesus is the call to forget about temporary, earthly gain and to pursue Jesus and his coming kingdom. It is the call to be willing, like Jesus, to suffer injustice. It is the call to share the gospel with those who are still dead in their sin so that they too can know God. We will find that we are exiles in this world, that we don't really belong, but we will also find that the temporary cost will be eternally worth it (Matt. 13:44-46). Luke 9:23-25 says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” We will all die. But Jesus tells us that a temporary life surrendered to him will result in salvation and eternal life with him in his new kingdom.

Revelation 21:1-4 says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’” This is just a small glimpse into what God has in store for those who accept what Jesus has done on their behalf, who believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God. While we await his return, we are called to live in such a way that we demonstrate our belief, particularly in our proclamation of the gospel of Jesus to those who do not know him.

In short, we respond to the story of Scripture by knowing Jesus and making him known.

Questions to ask when reading Scripture:

1. What is the author’s main point in this section of Scripture?
2. Where does what I’m reading fit in the overall story of the Bible? (i.e. before or after the Exodus from Egypt; before or after Jesus; before or after the resurrection, etc.)
3. What does it mean for those who were the original audience?
4. What does it mean for me today?
5. How should I change in response to this Scripture?

A Few Resources for Understanding the Story of Scripture

For Small Children:

The Biggest Story by Kevin DeYoung

The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name by Sally Lloyd-Jones

The Big Picture Story Bible by David Helm

The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross by Carl Laferton

thebibleproject.com

New City Catechism (Available as a book or for free as an app on both iOS and Android)

For Youth and Adults

thebibleproject.com

The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses by Chris Bruno

Multiply by Francis Chan

For a More In-depth Look

The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah by T.D. Alexander

Old Testament Survey by Paul House and Eric Mitchell

God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology by James M. Hamilton, Jr.

Week 1

An Overview of Luke

By Harvey Edwards, IV

Discussion

As we approach the book of Luke, we want to consider both the context in which the book is written, and what Luke intends to convey through his writing. The book of Luke is the first volume of Luke's account of Jesus and his works; the book of Acts is the second. He wrote both Luke and Acts to inform Theophilus, and anyone else who might read these books, about who Jesus is and what he has accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection. Luke wants us to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises throughout salvation history to both rescue God's people from sin and death and to bring about the promised Kingdom of God and the restoration of all things. This means that Luke was not written in isolation: it is a continuation of the Old Testament. This means that to understand what Luke is writing, we need to be aware of the Old Testament narrative.

In the Old Testament, we see that God created humanity to be in relationship with him. The problem is that the first two humans, Adam and Eve, rebel against God when the serpent tempts them to doubt the goodness of God. Through their rebellion, sin and death enter into the world. But despite humanity's sin, God promises to send a seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent, the implication being that sin and death would be done away with, humanity would be restored to right relationship with God, and the curse on creation would be lifted.

As the Old Testament progresses, the promises of God are expounded upon and become more specific. We learn that this seed will come through a man named Abraham and his lineage, the nation of Israel. God will bless Abraham and his family, and through them, he will bless all the nations of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). Along the way, we see that this salvation must be a work of God. Despite God's promises, Israel is unable to be faithful to the Lord. But despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God continues to be faithful. When Israel finds themselves enslaved in Egypt, God sends Moses, a prophet, whom God uses to lead Israel out of slavery in what is called the Exodus. God then establishes them as his people. He promises to be their God, and they will be his people. Eventually, God leads them into the land he had promised them, and he establishes his chosen king over them: King David. As he establishes David as king, God makes the promise that one from David's line will rule over God's kingdom forever. The problem is, both David and Israel are unable to be faithful. In addition, David's son, Solomon, leads Israel into rebellion. As Israel rebels despite God's provision for them in the Promised Land, it becomes clear that Israel, along with the rest of humanity, needs God to change their hearts.

This is made clear through the prophets. They both clarify and expound on the promises of God. They reiterate God's promise that one from the line of David will rule over God's people forever. We also begin to understand that this king will bring both forgiveness of sin and new life as he establishes the New Kingdom. He will restore God's people to a right relationship with him and bring them into the fulness of his presence. Thus God's people begin to look for this king. They begin to look for the Messiah.

Luke's message is that Jesus is this Messiah and that he is establishing the kingdom of God. Luke is testifying both to the historicity of Jesus and to how he is fulfilling the promises of God in part because of how Jesus is fulfilling these promises in an unexpected way.

He begins with an account of the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus. Both of these births were foretold before they happened, and they fulfilled Old Testament expectations. John

the Baptist is the prophet like Elijah who is preparing the way for the Messiah. Jesus is the Son of God, born of a virgin, come to establish the kingdom of God and the restoration of all things. The parental responses to these foretellings are a recognition of the Old Testament expectations coming to fulfillment. In addition, when Jesus is born and presented at the temple, Luke records this:

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation

³¹ that 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 his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed ³⁵ (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:25-35)

In this way, Luke begins to show us the identity of Jesus and what he will accomplish—the gathering of God's people into the kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins, and the restoration of all things. Luke sets our expectations for how we are to gauge Jesus' interactions in the flesh.

Luke identifies Jesus in his baptism and in his genealogy. As he is baptized, the heavens are opened, the Holy Spirit descends upon him in bodily form like a dove, and the voice of God identifies Jesus as his "beloved Son" with whom he is "well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Here we see that Jesus is the Son of God. In his genealogy, he is identified as the promised son of David and the son of Adam. He is the one who will deal with the serpent, and he is the recipient of the Kingdom of God.

His identity as the serpent crusher is demonstrated in his ability to withstand the temptation in the wilderness. His identity as king is demonstrated in his ability to cast out demons and to heal the sick. His identity as the blessing to the nations is demonstrated in his interactions with all different kinds of people from all different kinds of places. The nature of his kingdom is demonstrated by the fact that any who will humbly repent and submit to him will be forgiven, while those who depend on self-righteousness find themselves at odds with him. Look how Jesus identifies himself as the one who fulfills Isaiah 61 and is bringing about the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation in Luke 4:16-21.

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and 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 proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus claims to be the Messiah, and his ministry demonstrates this reality. But even as Jesus demonstrates this identity as the Son of God by displaying the power of God, he subverts people’s expectations about what the coming of the kingdom will look like. Jesus says that he will bring about the kingdom, but he also says that he must die and rise again on the third day (Luke 9). He says that anyone who follows him must take up his cross daily. He demonstrates that the true people of God are those who are humble and respond to him, not those who seem to be blessed on earth. All of this comes to a head when Jesus humbly submits himself to death on a cross despite being obviously innocent of the charges brought against him. He does this in fulfillment of the Scriptures as he said he would in Luke 22:37, “³⁷ For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment.” God’s only Son, the promised Messiah and king, died on the cross for the sins of people. But what appeared to be his defeat was actually his victory. Just as Jesus said he would, he rose again on the third day.

After his resurrection, he appeared to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus. They are lamenting the crucifixion of Jesus, but look what Luke records Jesus saying to them, “‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27). Jesus showed them how he had begun to fulfill all the promises of God to rescue a people for himself and to bring about a New Kingdom and the restoration of all things. And look at their response when he opened their eyes, and they finally recognized him as they ate with him: ³² They said to each other, “ ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’ ³³ And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, ³⁴ saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread” (Luke 24:32-35).

They finally understood the Old Testament promises and how Jesus had begun to fulfill them. He has initiated the Kingdom of God through his life, death, and resurrection. And those who know him are to carry this message forward. Jesus has ascended into heaven to await the day that all of his people are gathered to himself. And on that day, he will return to bring about the fullness of the kingdom and completion of our salvation. Until that time, there is work for God’s people to do. Look what Jesus said to his disciples in Luke 24:44-49:

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

The book of Luke tells us who Jesus is and what he has begun to do. We are to be a people who respond to who Jesus is and what he has accomplished, and we are to join in the work of sharing that good news while we await his return. This is the good news of Luke.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. How has the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus changed salvation history?
2. What does it look like to live knowing that Jesus has defeated sin and death and initiated the New Kingdom, but to still experience the effects of sin and death in the here and now? How do we navigate this reality?
3. How does the humility of Jesus taking on flesh impact how you navigate difficult circumstances in your life.

The Main Point

God has been progressively revealing his intent to rescue a people for himself from sin and death through his promised Messiah. Luke wants us to be sure about the identity of this Messiah. He is Jesus—the Son of God—and through his life, death, and resurrection he has defeated sin and death to initiate the dawning of the New Kingdom.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 3:15 – The promise of a serpent slayer who will set things right.
- Genesis 12:1-3 – The promise of one from the line of Abraham who will bless the nations.
- Genesis 14:17-20 – The foreshadowing of a greater high priest than Aaron.
- 2 Samuel 7:16 – One from the line of David who will sit on the throne forever.
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 – The promised New Covenant.

Week 2

Luke 1:1-38 – Trustworthiness of Scripture and the Way Foretold

By Michael Kulick

Introduction

One of the most frustrating and disappointing times of my life came about six months after graduating college. The transitional period between being a college student for 4 years and then suddenly being thrust out into the world actually started out pretty sweet for me. I graduated from the University of Alabama in December of 2020 and quickly got engaged to the love of my life in January of 2021. I had moved up to New Hope, Alabama to live with Kelsey's family until our wedding in November. I was doing freelance videography while looking for full time jobs when I got a call to come back to Tuscaloosa and fill the role of my former supervisor working for Alabama Football. Kelsey and I changed all of our plans and immediately moved back to Tuscaloosa. A word of advice for any soon to be graduates, do not under any circumstances move somewhere for a job that you do not officially have. I think you can see where this is going.

The details of the early phone calls about the job have gotten fuzzier over the years, but my takeaway was that the job was mine. I just had to go through the formal process of interviewing. I moved my soon to be family to Tuscaloosa, got an apartment, went through two rounds of interviews, and after a few more weeks found out I did not get the job. I was in complete shock, frustration, and disappointment. I was not even married yet and I had taken my fiancé away from a job she loved and moved her to a city where she hardly knew anyone. Bills have to be paid so I got a job working in the paint department at Lowes. After a few months at Lowes, I got a videography job working for WVUA 23 helping their marketing department make advertisements and running their social media. Eight months into that job, I got another call from Alabama Football asking me to come back to fill a new role on their team. Thankfully, this process ended up going much smoother, and I got back to the place I thought I was meant to be. After two years, I have worked my way back up into the position I originally wanted when I uprooted my family's life to move back to Tuscaloosa.

I remember sitting on the floor of our new apartment asking God why He moved me back to Tuscaloosa for a job I wasn't meant to have. I remember mixing paint at Lowes wondering what the point of me being there was. If I am honest with myself, I was not prepared for that job fresh out of college. I learned an incredible amount about myself and my work ethic while being at Lowes. I learned so much more about the technical aspect of videography and video editing while at WVUA. I had so many more lessons to learn before I got thrown into the deep end of helping manage the external view of Alabama Football to the world. God's timing is better than our own timing. I had to learn that lesson the hard way, but I add it as one of the most important lessons learned during that period of my life.

After a lifetime of being barren, Zechariah and Elizabeth have found themselves at an age typically too old to bear children. Through the unpredictable timing of the Lord, they find themselves about to bear a son who is to be the messenger of the Savior to come. Mary, a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, is told she will become pregnant with the Son of the Highest. This news comes to her at a time when she is getting ready to start her new life with her soon to be husband, Joseph. The timing of the Lord is often unpredictable to us, but it always comes at the perfect time for the betterment of His kingdom. We all find ourselves subject to God's

timing. Whether big or small circumstances, it is imperative that we trust in His promises and trust that His timing is better than our desires.

Read Luke 1:1-38 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Zechariah showed doubt in the plans God had for him based on his life's circumstances. Are there times in your life that you have doubted God's plan and timing because it seemed impossible due to circumstances in your life?
 2. In what unlikely or strange ways has God used you or other people around you to the betterment of His Kingdom?
 3. Luke obviously pays great attention to detail in providing a historically accurate gospel. How does this inform our theological understanding of the stories being told?
-

Commentary

Luke 1:1-38

Luke opens his book by explaining his intentions for writing. He aims to provide a comprehensive narrative of the life of Christ focused on the order of events and the accuracy of when they happened. Luke was not an eyewitness to the story of Jesus. Luke was a Gentile who later became a Christian and was a close companion to Paul. He closely followed the order in which the events of the Gospel occurred, interviewed key eyewitnesses and characters in the history of Christ, and set out to give the reader a comprehensive and detailed understanding of how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were fulfilled. "Having already read Matthew and Mark's account, Luke wanted to give a third account with an emphasis on comprehensiveness and order. Therefore, Luke is the most *comprehensive* gospel. He documents the story of Jesus' all the way from the annunciation of John the Baptist to Jesus' ascension" (Guzik). Luke wrote this book to someone named Theophilus; whose identity is not known. By his title, *most excellent*, we can assume that he was someone of high rank or "noble birth." Luke continues by saying in verse 4, "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Theophilus was most likely someone whom Luke had taught himself and knew first-hand the extent of Theophilus' understanding of the Gospel. Matthew Henry said this about the relationship between Luke and Theophilus:

It is implied, that he (Theophilus) had been *instructed* in these things either before his baptism, or since, or both, according to the rule, Mt. 28:19, 20...Theophilus was a person of quality, perhaps of noble birth; and so much the more pains should be taken with such when they are young, to teach them the principles of the oracles of God, that they may be fortified against temptations, and furnished for the opportunities, of a high condition in the world.¹

Luke begins the history of Jesus by first explaining how the miraculous conception of John the Baptist came to be. Malachi 3:1 says, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” Zechariah, also referred to as Zacharius, and his wife Elizabeth were old in age, and Elizabeth had been barren. They both were considered righteous before the Lord, but this prayer for a child had not yet been answered. Zechariah was a priest of the division of Abijah. He had been chosen by lot to enter the temple, burn incense, and pray while hundreds of worshipers gathered outside the temple to worship and wait for the priest to exit the temple. Being chosen by lot to burn the incense in the temple was a high honor. “Only priests from a particular lineage could serve in the temple. Over the years the number of priests multiplied, (there were said to be as many as 20,000 priests in the time of Jesus) so they used the lot to determine which priests would serve when. The lot to serve might fall to a priest only once in his life. To a godly man like Zacharias, this was probably the biggest event of his life, a tremendous privilege, a-once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”² Gabriel, an angel of the Lord, appeared to Zechariah while he was in the temple.

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’ (Luke 1:11-17).

Imagine for a second that it is your first time performing a very important task at your job. You get through the process of doing it and then all of a sudden your boss, or in this case your boss’s right hand man, shows up out of nowhere. You might be concerned that they are there to fix your mistake or scold you for potentially messing up this task. That is how I imagine Zechariah must’ve felt in those first few moments of Gabriel appearing to him. Thankfully,

¹ Matthew Henry, “Luke 1 Bible Commentary,” *Luke 1 Bible Commentary - Matthew Henry (Complete)* | Christianity.Com, accessed July 16, 2026, www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-complete/luke/1.

² David Guzik, “Luke 1 Commentary: The Birth of John the Baptist,” *Enduring Word*, 11 Mar. 2026, enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-1/.

Gabriel begins his message by reassuring Zechariah that he is safe and there is no reason to fear his appearance. He continues by saying that Zechariah's prayer has been heard and that his wife will bear them a son named John. Consider for a moment what Zechariah might've been praying about while in the temple. In his old age, the thought of having a child at this point would certainly seem like a prayer that had been answered with a resounding no. "If he means his particular prayer *for a son* to build up his family, it must be the prayers he had formerly made for that mercy, when he was likely to have children; but we may suppose, now that he and his wife were both *well stricken in years*, as they had done expecting it, so they had done praying for it: like Moses, it *sufficeth them*, and they *speak no more to God of that matter*, Deu. 3:26."³ It is more likely that he was praying for the coming of Christ and the salvation of man. Spurgeon explains it this way: "I do not think the prayer alluded to here was so much a prayer for a son; if so, methinks that Zacharias had long ago left off praying it, and now his old prayers are heard, after he had discontinued them. I think that it alludes rather to his prayer for the coming of the Christ, the appearance of the Messiah; that prayer was heard, as we shall see further on."⁴ Zechariah, in his old age, was most likely not expecting to have his prayer for a child answered. It seems more likely that he was praying for the coming of a Savior and with that comes the answered promise of a messenger that would come before Christ mentioned previously in Malachi. He is telling him that he will have a son named John which means "God's grace," a signifier of what is to come from the work of the Lord through John and ultimately through Jesus.

Malachi 4:5-6 says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." The end of Malachi is pointing the church to the coming of Jesus which is preceded by the messenger of Christ. Gabriel continues his message to Zechariah by telling him that John will be great before the Lord. He says that John will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. John is clearly blessed by the Lord to be this messenger of Christ. He is tasked with preparing the way for Jesus and preparing the hearts of man to eventually accept salvation. John is also tasked with living out his life in the way of the Nazarites. Like Samson, John was expected to not drink wine or any other alcoholic drinks. It is not that it is inherently evil, but as a man of a particular calling, John is expected to abstain in dedication to his calling.

Gabriel continues by saying, "and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17). Back in Malachi, we can see a promise from the Lord that Elijah the prophet will be sent to "turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers." Old Testament readers did not consider this to be a literal coming of Elijah since his time on earth had already come to an end. Instead, they expected another prophet to come in the same spirit and power as Elijah. John the Baptist is the fulfillment of this promise. Jesus confirms this in Matthew 11:14 where he says, "and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come." There are no empty promises in Scripture. The promises that the Lord makes with His people are always for the betterment of His kingdom, and

³ Henry, "Luke 1 Bible Commentary."

⁴ Charles H. Spurgeon, "Luke 1 Commentary - Spurgeon's Verse Expositions of the Bible," *Truth According to Scripture*, accessed July 17, 2026, www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/commentaries/spe/luke-1.php.

all His promises must be fulfilled for the Scripture to be trustworthy. The promise of a Savior is consistently given throughout Scripture starting back in Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The promise and fulfillment of a messenger through John is another important piece of the foundation that brings about the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah.

Zechariah has heard some unbelievable news at this point. He and his wife are now to expect the birth of a son after a lifetime of barrenness. He becomes skeptical of this news and begins to doubt what Gabriel is telling him. In verses 18-20, we see that the doubt of Zechariah is answered with punishment. Gabriel answers sternly by explaining that Gabriel is an angel who has stood in the presence of God and was sent to bring this good news specifically to Zechariah, yet he still doesn’t believe. As a measure of corrective discipline, Gabriel makes Zechariah mute for his unbelief. Even though Zechariah and Elizabeth were considered righteous by God, they are still sinful and are in need of a Savior like everyone else. Although some may be considered righteous in the eyes of the Lord, no one except for Christ has ever been perfect. It is through that perfection that he is capable of being our Savior and the Lamb of God.

At this point, the worshipers gathered outside the temple have been waiting for Zechariah for longer than normal. He eventually exits the temple, but is unable to explain what he has just witnessed to all who were waiting for him. It’s through this sudden muteness that the people realize he must’ve seen something while serving in the temple. A short time after, Elizabeth became pregnant and hid herself away for five months. Her reasoning for hiding herself is not clear. There are a few different reasons commentators have developed regarding this. Matthew Henry lays out a few reasons which I will summarize. The first is that she hid herself out of “an excess of modesty” that someone at her age shouldn’t be pregnant. Another reason was to simply protect the pregnancy and not put herself into any potential danger of miscarrying. Henry also says she could have hid herself to preserve the Nazariteship of her child; following the same commands that were given to Samson’s mother in Judges 13:14. The last reasoning he gives is that she hid herself away in an act of devotion and worship to the Lord.⁵

There are a few things that are important to take away from this section of Luke. First, the promises of God will always be fulfilled, even in ways that might seem abnormal to us. The Lord promised a messenger would come before the Savior and this was fulfilled in the conception and life of John. Second, we must remember that God works in his own timing. This is often one of the hardest truths for us to accept. Zechariah and Elizabeth most likely thought the possibility of children was far behind them. Yet, it is through them that God works miracles to bring about a people for the coming Messiah.

Luke continues by recounting the conception of Jesus. Six months after the conception of John, Gabriel appears to a virgin woman in Nazareth named Mary. Mary is pledged to be married to a man named Joseph who is of the house of David. Gabriel greets Mary by telling her that she has found favor with the Lord. He continued by reassuring her in the same way he reassured Zachariah.

³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord

⁵ Henry, “Luke 1 Bible Commentary.”

God will give to him the throne of his father David,³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” Luke (1:30-35).

Mary responds to this by asking how it is possible since she is a virgin. Gabriel tells her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and bless her with a child who is the Son of God. He also tells her about her relative Elizabeth who is also pregnant by a miracle of God. He ends by saying in verse 37, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” Mary responds to him by saying, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”

There is a lot of context behind this retelling of the story that is important to better understand the weight of this encounter between Gabriel and Mary. First, engagement was a very serious matter in their time. That is not to say it isn’t a serious matter now, but today we see more repercussions in a divorce than we do in broken engagements. “Engagement was a serious matter in Judaism. We read in Deuteronomy 22:23–24 that if a man has consensual sexual relations with a woman engaged to another man, then both the man and the woman are to be executed. Engagement took place before witnesses and with the giving of the bride price; the wedding would typically occur a year later. The woman belonged to her future husband from this point onward.”⁶ Mary could be at risk of persecution for becoming pregnant while engaged and not yet married. Secondly, the link through Joseph to the house of David is important for fulfilling the promise that God made of the Savior of Israel coming through the line of David (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Lastly, Mary’s grace is a received grace. It was bestowed upon her by God, and she responded to him in faith. It is not a grace that she is able to bestow upon others. “Mary had been ‘graced’ by God in that she had been chosen to bear God’s Son (1:31, 35). She had not been chosen for this task because she possessed a particular piety or holiness of life that merited this privilege. The text suggests no special worthiness on Mary’s part.”⁷ Mary was highly blessed, favored, and the Lord was with her.

You might wonder at first why Mary was able to question Gabriel about the news without punishment while Zechariah was punished for his. Zechariah’s question was asked with doubt. “He said to the angel, *Whereby shall I know this?* This was not a humble petition for the confirming of his faith, but a peevish objection against what was said to him as altogether incredible; as if he should say, ‘I can never be made to believe this.’”⁸ Mary asked her question in a way that was looking for more instruction. She believed Gabriel, but was asking for more information on how this would come to pass. Gabriel affirms her by answering that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and bless her in this way. Mary then accepts this good news and submits herself to the Lord and His plans for her.

All throughout the Bible, we see the miraculous ways that God continues to fulfill His promises to His people. Ultimately, these promises all coincide with the promise of a Savior. This first chapter of Luke sets the stage by showing us how God delivered on the promise of not only the Savior of man, but of someone who would prepare the way for Him. Nothing is without reason in Scripture. All promises must be fulfilled for the Scripture to be trustworthy. If there

⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Luke,” in *Matthew–Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. VIII, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 734.

⁷ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 82–83.

⁸ Henry, “Luke 1 Bible Commentary.”

was no John the Baptist, then there would be no messenger for Christ who was promised in Malachi. If that promise wasn't fulfilled, then Christ would not have fulfilled all things. It is important to understand that all things are ultimately said and done for the betterment of His kingdom. We must trust that God and His Word are infallible. We must have faith in the truth that He has a plan for all of us, even if that plan is brought to fruition in unlikely ways. Zechariah and Elizabeth, in their old years of age, were given a child that was instrumental in paving the way for Jesus' work. Mary miraculously conceived a child through the power of the Holy Spirit while being a virgin in her young age and not yet married. All of these things happen in unlikely and sometimes strange ways, but it was and is always for the ultimate betterment of the Kingdom of God.

The Main Point

The Word of God is the infallible truth of the good news of Jesus, and we are called to hold fast to it in belief. All of God's promises are fulfilled throughout Scripture and dependent on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We must trust in His Word to guide us in our daily walk as Christians because we know that it is true and that God's promises will ultimately be fulfilled.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Malachi 3:1-4:5-6 - A messenger in the spirit of Elijah is promised to prepare the way for the coming Savior.
- Psalm 119:160 - His Word is truth.
- 2 Timothy 3:16 - All Scripture is breathed out by God.

Week 3

Luke 1:39-80 – The Right Response to the Promises of God

By Wen Burnette

Introduction

Everyone loves an underdog story: Rudy being carried off the field, Average Joe's Gymnasium beating Globo Gym in dodgeball, and Bobby Boucher leading the Mud Dogs to a Bourbon Bowl win. These stories can't help but move something inside us—the small and overlooked person reaching heights that no one thought they could reach. Fortunately or unfortunately, I do not have a personal underdog story, but I have seen many underdogs take a swing at the big dog.

I do not believe that anyone would call Nick Saban an underdog by the time he got to Alabama. He and Alabama were the standard, and everyone knew it. Starting in 2021, each time Alabama lost, there was something in common: the team that won rushed the field. There was overwhelming joy that the impossible had been done. Videos are still shown on ESPN of people crying, hugging, and throwing goal posts into the river. Why does this resonate with so many people? Because we love to see the average Joe do the impossible.

When it comes to what really matters, however, we can really do nothing. As Ephesians 2 says, we are dead in our trespasses and sin. Without God, we have no hope. God did not leave us here; He came for us. Using an underdog woman in a small town, an old priest and his wife, and the earthly cousin of the King, God has set His salvation plan in motion.

Read Luke 1:39-80 together

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. What does it mean when Mary says, "All generations will call me blessed?"
 2. Mary talks about the mighty being brought down and the humble being exalted. What does this mean? How do we see that in the world today?
 3. Zechariah knows that John will prepare the way for the Lord. What is our role as we await the return of Christ? What story is He telling in and through your life?
-

Commentary

Luke 1:39-45

Following the visit from the angel, Mary responds by visiting her relative Elizabeth. This trip for Mary is roughly 80–100 miles, a three- to four-day journey. Upon her arrival at the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, John the Baptist recognizes that the Savior has come. As told to

Zechariah while John the Baptist is still in Elizabeth's womb in Luke 1:17, John will play an important role in God's plan. He will go before Jesus, preparing the way for Christ's ministry.

John, already filled with the Holy Spirit in the womb, recognizes that the Lord has come.⁹ After feeling John the Baptist leap within her, Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cries out, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Luke 1:42). The verb *blessed* that Elizabeth uses is passive. The blessing comes from God. Mary has been blessed by the grace of God to carry and be the earthly mother of God's Son. This is a unique role that only Mary has.¹⁰ As Bible-believing Christians, we reject many of the Roman Catholic teachings on Mary such as the teaching that she was sinless, or that she acts as a divine intermediary. However, Mary is blessed among women because, by the grace of God, she is an incredible example to us: she trusts the promise of God and faithfully says yes to being the Lord's earthly mother.

Elizabeth continues to greet Mary, confirming what the angel had told Mary. We should realize from this interaction that the Holy Spirit is working. The Spirit has already been the means of Mary's pregnancy, has filled John the Baptist in the womb, and now inspires the prophetic words of Elizabeth to encourage Mary's faith. This is not a simple family greeting, but a recognition of the Savior who has come and the role Mary is playing in salvation history.¹¹

Luke 1:46-56

After hearing what Elizabeth says, prompted by the Spirit, Mary breaks into praise. She echoes Hannah's praise at the birth of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:1-10:

My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let no arrogance come from your mouth; for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.

⁹ R. T. France, *Luke*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 21.

¹⁰ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Luke," in *Matthew–Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. VIII, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 739.

¹¹ France, *Luke*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 22.

Following in the pattern of Hannah, Mary praises the Lord for the great things He has done for her and His people.¹² Mary's entire self is caught up in praising God for who He is. In verse 48, Mary says that the foundation of her praise is that the all-powerful God "has looked on the humble estate of His servant." Like many others before her, such as Jacob, Joseph, and David, God often uses the people whom the world overlooks to accomplish great things.

In verses 50-53, Mary's song moves to what it will mean for those who believe in the coming Lord whom she is carrying. The phrases "those who fear Him," "the humble," and "the hungry" should call to mind the frequent depictions throughout Scripture of God-fearing believers.¹³ What should also come to mind are the teachings of Christ throughout the Gospels. One example is Matthew 5:3-6, just a few of the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Rounding off her praise in verses 54 and 55, Mary calls to mind all of salvation history to that point. By referring to Abraham, we should see that Jesus is the fulfillment and realization of the promises made to Abraham and his offspring.¹⁴ To Abraham in Genesis 17:19: "God said, 'No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.'" To Isaac: "I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 26:4). And to David: "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

Mary realizes that it is God who works through ordinary people for His glory. We should call her blessed because she is an example of humbly submitting to the will of the God of her salvation.

Luke 1:57-66

The day of John's birth comes, and the neighbors come to rejoice with Elizabeth, knowing that the Lord has shown her great mercy by blessing her with a child. On the eighth day, in accordance with the Law (Leviticus 12:3), Elizabeth and Zechariah follow the mandate to have John circumcised. At the circumcision and naming, the people are shocked that John will not have a family name. Zechariah indicates by writing on a tablet, "His name is John," and upon doing this—affirming his response in faith to the promise of God—his tongue is loosed and he speaks. This is a shock to the people: a barren couple conceives, and a mute man speaks! Filled with the Spirit, Zechariah prophesies.

¹² Schreiner, "Luke," 741.

¹³ France, *Luke*, 22.

¹⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 95.

Luke 1:67-80

In the hymn of Zechariah, we as readers see two points of emphasis. First, Zechariah praises God for fulfilling His promise to Israel through Jesus; second, he praises God for the role his son John will play.¹⁵

Starting with the first point, in verses 68-75 Zechariah praises God for sending the Savior. Remember, Zechariah knows that this is not John, but the One who will come after John. Zechariah, a priest, would be very aware of the history of Israel and the promises of the Lord. Zechariah knows the rebellion of Israel and the steadfast love that the Lord has shown His people. God has rescued His people from Egypt, saved them from their enemies, and brought them out of exile. Now Zechariah knows that God is truly visiting His people in the person of Jesus. Redemption will become a reality. How humbling it must be that his son gets to lead the way for the Savior to come. Verses 69-71 reinforce that this child, who will bring the salvation of the Lord, will come through the line of David, as spoken by the prophets.

In verses 72-75, God has not forgotten His covenant to Abraham and will deliver Israel from the hand of its enemies so that the Lord may be served without fear. Pausing here for a moment, who are Israel's enemies? At this time, Israel is under the rule of Rome, and many throughout the Gospels believe that Jesus has come to set up an earthly kingdom to expel Rome. But what many will realize is that the greatest enemy is sin. Zephaniah 3:15 says, "The LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil." Christ has come to deal with the greatest enemies: sin and death.

In verse 76, Zechariah changes focus from Christ to John. Zechariah says his child, John, will be the prophet spoken of in Malachi 3:1a: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me." This prophet will go before Jesus to prepare the people for Jesus' ministry. The purpose of this preparation is to give the people the knowledge that the One coming is bringing forgiveness. Later, we will read in chapter 3 of Luke that John does just this.

Zechariah finishes by saying, "...to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." This is a callback to Isaiah 9:2: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; and those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."¹⁶ The Messiah has come. Salvation has come. And John will prepare the way.

The Main Point

The promises of God are trustworthy and believable because of who God is. Mary is a wonderful example of someone whose faith in God allowed her to play a special and unique role in salvation history. This faith says, "I have nothing to bring to the table, but You, God, and Your promises are where my hope is found."

¹⁵ Schreiner, "Luke," 748.

¹⁶ Schreiner, "Luke," 749-750.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- 1 Samuel 2:1-10 - Hannah's Song of Thanksgiving
- Isaiah 9:2 - Hope of the light coming to the darkness
- Genesis 17 - God's Promise to Abraham
- Zephaniah 3:15 - God healing our biggest problem
- Malachi 3:1 - Foretelling of John
- 2 Samuel 7 - God's Promise to David

Week 4

Luke 2:1-52 – The Birth of Christ

By Harvey Edwards, IV

Introduction

One of the difficulties I have experienced as a father is remembering the nature of parenting. The most important work happens in daily intentionality. We have to be consistent to train them, to correct and discipline them, to spend time with them, to tell them we love them and are proud of them, and to point them towards Jesus. While there are paramount moments in parenting, even the impact of these moments is built upon the foundation of our everyday interactions. We must remember the impact of the seemingly normal moments, and there seems to be something of this same sort of dynamic when it comes to the nature of the birth and life of Jesus.

An interesting dynamic happens in the Gospel of Luke. While the culmination of all of God's promises are coming to fruition in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, it is happening in such a way that emphasizes a daily faithfulness in regards to trusting the Lord. For thousands of years, God's people have been looking for the Messiah, and he has finally come in Christ. But Jesus doesn't come to worldwide fanfare. His birth is announced to shepherds. Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth, but he humbly takes on flesh to be born and laid in a manger. As the second person of the triune God he has all knowledge and power, but he takes on the form of a child and grows in wisdom and stature. The most monumental things are happening in salvation history, but even so, an everyday experience and faithfulness is required. We must be people who abide in God's Word, who keep his promises ever in front of us, and who cling in faith to Jesus in every circumstance.

Read Luke 2:1-52 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Passages that remind us of the sovereignty of God can bring great comfort. Are you quick to think of these passages when you find yourself in difficult circumstances? Why or why not?
 2. How does the humble nature of Jesus' birth and ministry impact your expectations for what life in this world will look like for believers? How does it push you towards placing your hope in what Jesus is ultimately doing in establishing the fullness of his kingdom rather than the things of this world?
 3. What does it look like to balance family relationships with both our relationship with Christ and our relationships with other believers?
-

Commentary

Luke 2:1-21

As readers, when Luke sets out to write an “orderly account” of the life of Jesus, we might not initially expect so many references and allusions to the Old Testament stories and prophecies. But what becomes immediately apparent is that Luke believes that Jesus is no ordinary man. Luke’s claim is that Jesus is the Son of God who has taken on flesh in fulfillment of all of God’s plans and purposes to rescue a people for himself from sin and death and to restore all things to himself. In chapter 1, this becomes evident through the foretelling of the birth of Jesus and of the messenger, John, who will prepare the way for him. John’s parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, are told by an angel that their son will prepare the way for the Lord by turning the hearts of the people to the Lord in repentance. Mary is told by an angel that she will bear the Son of the Most High, that he will be given the throne of David, and that his kingdom will have no end. These are all Messianic prophecies that tell of a promised deliverer who will set all things right, save God’s people from their sins, and rule righteously and justly forevermore.

Those who received these announcements believed these things. They believed that God’s promises of redemption were being fulfilled. But like everyone else, they will be surprised by how God is bringing about the fulfillment of his promises. This begins with the humble circumstances of Jesus’ birth. But even in these humble beginnings, God is at work accomplishing things just as he said he would. We should be struck by the sovereignty of God as history unfolds and, from the perspective of the world, the seemingly upside-down nature of the kingdom of God in regards to how power is perceived and exercised.

The sovereignty of God is put on display in the circumstances of the location of Jesus’ birth. In the Old Testament, the Messiah was to be born in the town of Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 says this,

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,
 whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.

The problem was that Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth. But at just the right time, a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. Everyone had to return to their hometowns. This meant that Joseph, of the house and lineage of David, had to return home to Bethlehem—the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah. A pagan king chooses to make a decree that lands a pregnant Mary in Bethlehem at the necessary moment to fulfill the Old Testament expectations. This is the Lord of salvation history at work—man’s purposes are his own, but they all serve the will of the Father. As Schreiner notes, this should cause us to think of passages like Proverbs 21:1, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Luke,” in *Matthew–Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. VIII, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 753–54.

It is particularly helpful to remember God's hand is guiding every moment of history in difficult or humble situations. God often chooses to work in these ways. Think about what is happening in Luke 2. The Son of God is taking on flesh to defeat sin and death and to bring about the Kingdom of God. He is throwing down the evil one, the great serpent, and restoring his creation to himself. He is beginning his eternal righteous rule. The promised Day of the Lord has finally come!

But it doesn't come as expected. Jesus doesn't appear in the fullness of his glory. He comes as a baby. And he isn't born into a palace and laid in a golden crib. Instead, there is no room for him in the inn, so when he is born, he is wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

God is purposefully working in these humble situations. All throughout Luke, God puts his power on display. But he does it selectively, in ways that reveal humanity's sinful desire for power and control for what it is, a failure to trust the goodness of God. God reveals his power and his plans and purposes in ways that demonstrate his identity but that also call us to choose between his ways and the ways of the world.

For instance, look how the birth of Jesus is announced. In 2:9, an angel of the Lord appears and the glory of God shines brightly. The angel announces the birth of Jesus and identifies him as the longed-for Messiah—Christ the Lord. Then suddenly, a heavenly host of angels appears, and they are praising the Lord for who he is and for what he is accomplishing in Jesus. Our God is the God who commands heavenly beings and inspires them to burst forth in worship! This is the kind of display of God's power that seems appropriate at the dawning of a new age of salvation history: appropriate, that is, until we realize that this display appears only before lowly shepherds. Not only this, the way these lowly shepherds will identify their King and Savior is that he will be a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

God is working in such a way that only he gets the glory. He is orchestrating his plans and purposes in a way that displays his identity to those who submit themselves to his revealed Word but that is rejected by those who refuse him. We should take comfort in this knowledge of God's sovereignty, particularly when the circumstances we find ourselves in are difficult. We have seen how he works in these difficult and humble circumstances for what is ultimately best, so we can be sure at all times that God is at work accomplishing what he has promised. As Paul puts it in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

Luke 2:22-38

Later, in accordance with the Law of Moses, Jesus is presented in the temple in Jerusalem. At that time, there was a righteous and devout man named Simeon who was waiting for the consolation of Israel—the Messiah who would bring about restoration. It had been revealed to him by the Spirit that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. When Jesus is presented to him, he recognizes by the Spirit who Jesus is, and he testifies to his identity. He identifies Jesus as the one fulfilling the expectations of Isaiah, particularly Isaiah 42, that God would make a new covenant with his people, that he would set his people free, and that his people would be a people from every nation, not just Israel.

When Mary and Joseph hear this, they marvel. Luke's Gospel uses a progressive revelation of the identity of Jesus, and until the Spirit opens people's eyes, they do not understand the magnitude of what Jesus is accomplishing. Simeon gives a clue here in verses 34-35. Jesus is appointed for "the fall and rising of many...so that thoughts from many hearts may

be revealed.” Jesus is the king who is setting all things right, but first he lays down his life to rescue his people from sin. Some will see Jesus for who he is and repent and be saved, rising to new life in him. But others will reject Jesus and his call to die to ourselves and will find themselves condemned. Our response to Jesus reveals our hearts.

At the temple, Simeon was not the only one to testify to the reality of Jesus. The prophetess Ana does as well. This is important because of the OT standard of two witnesses establishing the truth of a matter. Ana devoted her life to the Lord. She stayed at the temple, worshipping and fasting and praying night and day. This was a woman waiting on the salvation of the Lord. When Ana sees Jesus, she begins to give thanks to God. She understands something of his identity and responds in the way that all of us should when we meet Jesus—she gives thanks to God and speaks of him to all who are waiting on the redemption of the Lord.

Luke 2:38-52

We don’t know much about the early life of Jesus, but we do know that he grew in wisdom. This is part of the mystery of both the full humanity and the full divinity of Christ. While we can’t work out all of the intricacies of this reality, there is a way that in his humanity, Jesus grew in wisdom. But even as he grew in wisdom, his wisdom surpassed what would be expected. When Jesus stayed behind at the temple and was listening to the teachers and asking questions, everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. We may not ever be able to come to a place of understanding on how Jesus can be fully God and omniscient while at the same time being fully human and growing in wisdom. It is worth thinking about this mystery and about how our God humbles himself in this way to both identify with us and to ultimately save us from our sin. What a loving God we serve.

The other interesting part about this section is that while Jesus is submissive to his parents, it becomes very clear that Jesus’ relationship with the Father supersedes his relationship to his earthly parents. While this is uniquely true about Jesus in the sense that he is the only begotten Son of God and the second person of the Trinity, our relationship with God supersedes any of our earthly relationships as well. In addition, our relationship with other believers is closer than that of our blood relatives who have rejected Christ because we are joined to Christ in faith and therefore joined to one another. While we still possess a special responsibility to our biological families (after all, even Jesus is said here to be submissive to his parents despite being their Lord and Savior), there is a sense of unity and purpose in the body of Christ that is unavailable apart from Christ even in our family.

The Main Point

From the beginning, God has been working out his sovereign purposes to rescue a people for himself from sin and death through his son, Jesus. Jesus’ humble beginnings, his ministry, and his death on the cross have all taken place in such a way that we must believe the promises of God and turn in repentance from the ways of this world to accept him as Lord. While this will demand submitting ourselves to Jesus, in him, we are being made new and are included in the New Kingdom he is bringing, a kingdom that far outshines that of this world.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Micah 5:2 – Jesus fulfills the OT expectations of the Messiah.
- Romans 8:28-30 – God is working all things for the good of those who love him.
- Isaiah 42:6-9 – Jesus brings about the salvation of God’s people according to the plans of God.
- 1 Peter 2:6-8 – Peter says that Jesus is the foundation of hope for those who believe but a stone of stumbling to those who reject him.

Week 5

Luke 3:1-38 – The Identification of Jesus

By Michael Green

Introduction

About ten years ago, I listened to a Moody Radio program regarding the Jewish thoughts on sin put forth by Cornelius Plantinga Jr. The primary thought regarding sin was “that’s not how it’s supposed to be.” Hebrew prophets spoke of the notion of “Shalom.” The idea is “peace,” but in a much deeper sense than how we think of it. Shalom involves a harmony based on a good design, “the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.” Shalom is “the way things are supposed to be.” Plantinga Jr. defines sin as a “vandalism of Shalom.” Paul gets at this sentiment in describing the hope of a restored creation ushered in by the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:18-25)

The “futility” that Paul speaks of is not ultimately futile; it is purposeful futility, imposed by our loving Creator. It is not futile futility. Verse 21 of the passage above tells us it was imposed bondage pointing creation toward a glorious freedom to be initiated by the finished work of Christ and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit. Creation waits in a hopeful futility, a purposeful futility, a struggling that points us to someone who can mend the brokenness and set creation back straight. Creation was subjected to bondage “in hope” by a good, purposeful God as a means to accomplish His good and perfect plan. In Luke 3, John the Baptist is the herald of really good news on that front. The Messiah has arrived to set things right, and John is using the dramatic symbol of water baptism to call people to repentance and to receive the forgiveness of their sins, preparing the way for the Lord’s Anointed One.

Read Luke 3:1-38 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I’ve read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Would you be willing to share a moment of repentance from your life, a moment when the Lord turned you away from sin and self and toward him?
 2. In our current period of salvation history, how is the concept of water baptism connected to the baptism by fire that Jesus issued in? How are they distinct?
 3. Describe aspects of the provided genealogy that bolster or encourage your faith. How would you describe the importance of recording detailed lineages such as these to someone who isn't familiar with our faith?
-

Commentary

Luke 3:1-6

John the Baptist is living in a unique time in salvation history. Before and since, there has not been a time like this; it stands alone in human history. The Son of God, who has eternally existed outside of time and space and matter as an uncreated, fully divine being, has taken on flesh and become a participant in his creation. John is to be his herald, or to put it in modern terms, his hype man. But while the hype man of our day is typically over-inflating an unworthy individual or an unworthy cause, John the Baptist was hand selected by God to herald the only one who deserves all glory, honor, and praise.

In describing John the Baptist's role as the proverbial "voice of one crying in the wilderness," Luke is harkening back to the language used in Isaiah to capture this magnanimous moment in the history of creation:

"Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall become straight,
and the rough places shall become level ways,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:5-6).

Due to sin, things aren't the way they're supposed to be. Something is way off in creation. Things are out of alignment. Since the fall in the garden, what was straight has become crooked. Jesus has come to make it straight again.

John the Baptist is the herald of the good news that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has arrived and is issuing in his kingdom. The advent of the Messiah will make straight what is crooked. He will issue in a new shalom, the "this is how things are meant to be" of the prefall creation that has been absent since the garden. In light of that, John the Baptist lives a peculiar, set apart life, and uses a vivid, tangible picture, water baptism, to call people to repent. He is calling them to turn to the LORD, away from sin and self, to receive the forgiveness of sins that can only be found in Christ.

Luke 3:7-14

John the Baptist calls the crowds to "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance" (v. 8a). Reminiscent of Jesus' words in John 8, he warns the crowds not to think that their lineage as descendants of Abraham would save them. Jesus unites and he divides. John the Baptist warns them that they need to repent and bear fruit or risk being destroyed by God. The holiness of God

that purges, refines, and renews will burn against those who set themselves in opposition to the King through unrepentance. As Jesus says about himself, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Matthew 21:42a). One man runs to the rock and finds shelter and security, a mighty fortress. Another bucks against the rock and is crushed.

True repentance yields real fruit. In light of that, John the Baptist’s ensuing discussion in vv.10-14 involves fruit (actions that accord with Godliness) as a result of a heart change (true repentance to the Lord, turning away from sin and self and to the Lord for forgiveness). Folks that turn to the Lord and receive forgiveness should bear fruit that manifests itself in their various life situations, in how they love and treat others. The applications in this particular conversation involve sharing resources with others and not abusing your profession or position of authority to take advantage of people. But the undergirding truth is that the reality of our convictions is displayed in the fruit of our lives. Jesus told us that we could recognize false teachers by their fruit: “A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:18-20). Eventually, we live what we believe regardless of what our lips declare. John is calling his listeners to repentance.

Luke 3:15-22

John the Baptist knows that he’s just the messenger. He’s just the hype man. As his dad, Zechariah, prophesies in Luke 1:76-78, his son John is on this earth to be “the prophet of the Most High” and “go before the Lord to prepare his ways,” to “give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God.” John knows that his water baptism is just symbolic of the real deal baptism that the Messiah is bringing. That’s why he says, “I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (v. 16).

John’s water baptism was a baptism of repentance that was meant to be a picture of the true cleansing that would only be brought about by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. It was a foreshadowing, similar to Colossians 2:17 when Paul is talking about past food and drink rules or specific festivals prescribed by the law and he says, “These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” John’s baptism was a shadow, and the substance is found in Christ. Jesus is the only one who can redeem his people, the Savior spoken of by the prophets and the fulfillment of the covenants of God. He is the only one that can provide salvation through the forgiveness of sins, based on the tender mercy of God.

The baptism that Jesus issues in is not a ritualistic, ceremonial, metaphorical cleansing. It’s an actual cleansing on the deepest levels. Unlike the blood of bulls and goats (which was a shadow, see Hebrews 10), Christ’s blood (the substance) really does take away our sin. It’s a true cleansing from sin, a rebirth. The “Baptism of the Spirit” that Jesus ushers in is a rebirth that we are called to remember and proclaim through water baptism.

When we trust in Christ, turning to him in faith, we are born again of the Spirit. If a person does not have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, then they are not a child of God (Romans 8:10). When we turn in faith to Christ, receiving his forgiveness, we are born again of the Spirit, baptized by the Spirit, and indwelt by the Spirit. Those are all synonymous.

John was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah, and the Messiah is walking through the process that the Lord set before him to become our Great High Priest. Part of that process is being baptized by John the Baptist, which is recorded in all four Gospels. Jesus’ baptism is one

of the rare places in Scripture where we see the Trinity so clearly on display in a single event. The Spirit of God descends on Jesus, and God the Father says audibly that Jesus is his “beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (v. 22).

Luke 3:23-38

The credentials of the Messiah were incredibly important. Before and since, many have self-appointed that title, but there is only one truly Anointed One. To say that the Old Testament left breadcrumbs regarding his identity is a vast understatement. The whole of the Old Testament points to the anticipated Savior that would come and offer his life as a ransom, buying back sinners from death and damnation and restoring them to a right relationship with their Creator. It is chock-full of specific prophecies dealing with events surrounding his advent, his lineage, his purpose, his nature, and specific aspects of his life, death, and resurrection. In vv. 23-38, Luke, an excellent historian, is painting a vivid picture that Jesus has the necessary credentials pertaining to his lineage, as required by Scripture. For our community guide purposes, I will hit some of the high points of his ancestral line.

Joseph
(as was supposed)

⋮

David

⋮

Judah

⋮

Jacob

⋮

Joseph is Jesus’ father, but not really, as indicated by the parenthetical statement in v. 23, “as was supposed.” Jesus was conceived when the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary. Joseph is not his biological father. Jesus is divine, the one and only Son of God (Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35).

David is the second King of Israel. But it was promised that David would reign forever (see 2 Samuel 7:16 among others). Embedded in this prophecy is the idea that God’s people will have an eternal, good King, a ruler that will rule in righteousness. Thus, it was essential that the Anointed One come through the line of David, taking his rightful place on his eternal throne, being what David and no earthly king ever could.

Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The Old Testament prophesied that the ruling scepter would not leave the House of Judah (Genesis 49:8-10). With Jesus having Judah as an ancestor, it never will (Revelation 5:5). The scepter is his for all eternity.

Governed by God’s providence, Jacob stole his father Isaac’s blessing from his brother, Esau (Genesis 27). The blessing of Abraham, his grandfather, was bestowed upon him. Jacob then wrestled with God and received a new name: Israel (Genesis 32:22-32). Israel is described as a vine planted by God (Psalm 80:8-11, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21). Jesus, the Son of God, is the true vine (John 15:1), that came through Israel and is the full realization of Israel, bearing the fruit of righteousness that Israel never could.

Isaac

⋮

Abraham

⋮

Noah

⋮

Seth

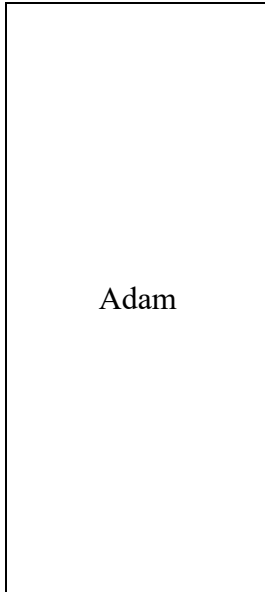
⋮

Isaac was the child of the promise, the first step in the realization of the covenant that God made with Abraham, discussed below. That covenant finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, a descendant of Isaac, who offers salvation to everyone on the globe, no matter their ethnicity or country of origin. He is the blessing to the nations.

The Lord made a promise to Abraham when he and his wife were advanced in years, well past her child-bearing days and after a lifetime of not being able to have children. The Lord told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Additionally, the Lord would give him a certain land later known as the Promised Land. Lastly, all the earth would be blessed through Abraham's line. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Jesus is the blessing to the nations that came through the line of Abraham. Salvation came through Abraham's line and is available to anyone who puts their faith in Christ and has his righteousness credited to them.

Due to the proliferation of sin and wickedness after the fall in the Garden, the Lord destroyed the world through a flood (Genesis 6-9). However, in grace, God delivered mankind through a man named Noah. But Noah quickly proved that he wasn't mankind's ultimate deliverer, sinning shortly after leaving the ark. The flood and the deliverance through Noah and his ark did nothing to solve mankind's greatest problem: the sin that separates fallen man from a Holy God. Jesus, Noah's descendant, accomplishes that. He is mankind's ultimate deliverer, conquering sin and death, saving those who trust in him.

Cain and Abel were the first two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain murdered Abel (Genesis 4). The promise that a seed of the woman would one day crush the head of the serpent would not come to fruition in Cain's line; his lineage would be marked by progressive sin and darkness. But "Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him"" (Genesis 4:25). Along that line, "people began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Genesis 4:26). A descendant of Seth, Jesus is the seed of the woman that crushes the head of the serpent, defeating Satan through his life, death and resurrection.



Adam was the first person created by God, created without sin but with the capacity to sin. Placed in the Garden of Eden, Adam rebelled against his Maker and chose to sin. In doing so, sin and death came to the world through one man, Adam, negatively polluting the whole of humanity. In Adam, every person has sinned (save one) because everyone ultimately comes from Adam. As a perfect human representative, Jesus is the better Adam. He is fully God and fully man and was able to do what Adam could not: live a sinless, holy life. He alone could offer his life as a sinless sacrifice to take the penalty for mankind's rebellion against God. Through faith in Christ, the curse is reversed and we will experience eternal life in union with the Lord. Paul contrasts Adam and Jesus in Romans 5. "For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).

The Main Point

Christ has come. John the Baptist heralded the coming of the only one who could rescue creation from sin and death through his perfect life, obedient death, and glorious resurrection. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures, the Son of God.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Genesis 3 – The Fall of Mankind
- Genesis 6-9 – The Flood
- Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15:18–21, and Genesis 17:4–7 – The Abrahamic Covenant
- Genesis 32:22-32 – Jacob wrestles with God.
- 2 Samuel 7 – The Davidic Covenant
- Isaiah 40 – Isaiah prophesies that a voice will cry out and prepare the way for the arrival of the Messiah.
- Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and John 1:32-34 – The Baptism of Jesus

Week 6

Luke 4:1-13 – The Temptation of Jesus

By Nathan Kenny

Introduction

As a math teacher, I always run into an interesting struggle: students regularly get to an assessment and flounder even though they thought they understood the concepts. I am sure many of you have had a similar experience at some point in your educational career. Quite frequently students will tell me, “But I understood it when we went over the concepts in class.” When I continue talking with these students, though, they usually reveal that they spent little to no time studying or sometimes doing any of the homework leading up to the assessment.

I am consistently floored by this interaction. I know extracurriculars interfere with study time for some students, and for some motivation is their struggle. However, many students do not recognize that watching me present concepts like the features of polynomial functions as a wrap-up to a task and understanding in the moment is not enough. They do not realize that they need to grapple with novel problems in small groups to identify those features from an equation, and they need to practice on their own time so that they experience the math in a more personal way. The students who actually take the time to engage, to be active in the learning process, and to experience the mathematics we study have a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the beauty and power of the mathematical concepts.

At this point you are likely wondering how in the world this experience ties into the temptation of Jesus in Luke. But did you know that truth, knowledge, and understanding were viewed differently in the ancient Middle East than it is here in our modern context? In America, we are heirs to a very Greek view of knowledge in that knowledge is developed through intellectual comprehension of a definition or essence of a thing. This type of knowledge is developed through reason and logic and can be proven and argued intellectually. However, in ancient Hebrew, “to know” (yada) indicates “knowledge and experience on an intimate level.”¹⁸ It is this “yada” that Scripture uses in Job when God asks if Job knows “the balancing of the clouds” (Job 37:16), that Scripture uses when “Adam knew Eve his wife” (Genesis 4:1), that David uses throughout the Psalms for how he knows God, and that Scripture uses to talk about how God knows us.¹⁹ This knowledge is deep, intimate, and even relational, not just cerebral and something to be transferred from one person to the next.

Now in the Greek sense, individuals can develop a strong understanding of knowledge as well, but I love this deep and intimate sense of knowledge that we see in Hebrew. This time in the wilderness is why the author of Hebrews writes that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Our Savior knows temptation experientially, but he responded in such a different way than we do, and we can learn so much from this short passage about how Satan works, about temptation, and about overcoming temptation.

¹⁸ Jeff Benner, “Biblical Wisdom, Knowledge, and Understanding Explained,” accessed July 22, 2026, <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/studies-words/wisdom-knowledge-and-understanding.htm>.

¹⁹ Benner, “Biblical Wisdom, Knowledge, and Understanding Explained.”

Read Luke 4:1-13 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. How do you know ("yada") that you can trust God?
 2. In light of the grace we have received, what do you actively do to battle the temptations of Satan? How can the example of Jesus' time in the wilderness inform us in our struggles? How do discipline, prayer, Scripture, and repentance fit into your plan?
 3. How does Jesus's time in the wilderness reveal the author of Hebrews' claims about him?
 4. What about Jesus's temptations is most challenging for your walk with Christ?
-

Commentary

Let's start by recognizing that this story is the culmination of Jesus's preparation for his ministry. In chapter 2 we saw 12-year-old Jesus stay behind in Jerusalem after the Festival of the Passover, so he could sit with the teachers of the Law, listening and asking questions. Even then people were amazed at his understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, for he was and is fully God. For us, though, I think it is easy to forget the fullness of Jesus's humanity. Yes, he is God the Son and was fully God's son, but he was still in the temple to learn and grow since he was also fully human. From there, Jesus was consistently growing "in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

Then when Jesus was about 30, it was time for him to begin his ministry. According to John Whittaker, 30 was a culturally accepted age for a man to begin public service.²⁰ Similarly, David was 30 when he became king. Now Jesus is on the verge of ushering in a completely new type of kingdom embodying the rule and relationship that God always designed for Israel. Israel was supposed to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" for the Lord, so the world would know that the Lord is God (Exodus 19:6), but throughout the Old Testament Israel failed in this role. Christ's kingdom and reign had been designed to completely undo the brokenness and sin resulting from Adam and Eve's fall in the garden of Eden. This new kingdom is what Israel ought to have been upon leaving Egypt.

However, where Adam and Eve fell to temptation in the garden, Jesus did not. Where Israel was rescued out of bondage but then just fell back into doubting God's goodness and provision over and over again, Jesus did not. Where Israel never fully realized all that God had designed, Jesus did. I think it is easy to chalk this up to "Well he was God," but as we dive deeper into the details of this story, it is important to realize that Jesus was also fully man. These temptations were truly tests and trials Jesus faced.

²⁰ John Whittaker, "The Listener's Commentary: Luke 3:21-38," accessed August 3, 2026, <https://listenerscommentary.com/podcast/luke-321-38/?lang=en>.

One more note before getting into the actual verses is a detail that I noticed for the first time while meditating on this passage and then had confirmed when doing some research: this is the only story in the Gospels that had zero witnesses. Many stories recorded are direct teaching blocks from Jesus to masses of people or maybe just to the disciples. Others were miracles that Jesus performed in front of others. Some were stories that just involved Jesus and were shared by others (such as his birth, the visits from shepherds and wise men, and the trip to the temple as a baby). Even at the transfiguration, Peter, James, and John were there. However, from the reading of the gospels, Jesus went into the wilderness alone. He must have personally told the disciples of his interactions with Satan. If Jesus found this story that important for the disciples to learn from, we need to be attentive as well.

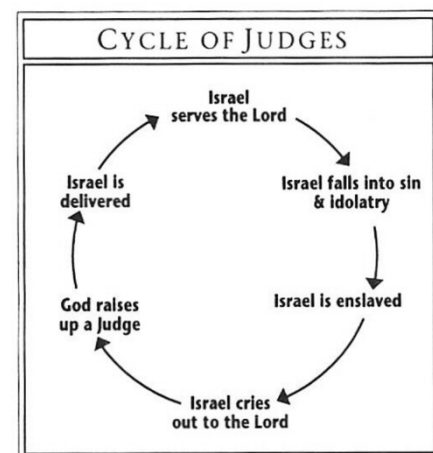
Finally, note how this story means Jesus learned to know (yada) what his followers experience with regards to temptation as preparation for his ministry.

Luke 4:1-2

As we move through this accounting, keep in the back of your mind how Christ's baptism and time in the wilderness clearly points back to the history of the Israelites escaping Egypt.²¹ Jesus did not need to be baptized in the way others did. He was not converting to Judaism as a gentile proselyte would to experience divine deliverance. He did not need to wash away ceremonial uncleanness or to repent from sin for spiritual rebirth. He was transitioning to and through trials as the Israelites did to establish a new kingdom after escaping Egypt but in a much better way. Following the directions of the Spirit to be baptized, I believe he prepared for ministry with Isaiah 43:2 in mind:

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.

Then Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan, the time corresponding to the 40 years Israel spent in the desert after doubting the goodness of God's Promised Land. Consistently in this story about the temptation of Jesus, we will see how Jesus, as led by the Spirit, paralleled Israel's journey. While meditating on all of Scripture, he likely intentionally meditated on the Exodus and Israel's time in the desert. Jesus intentionally started at the beginning of Israel's cyclical relationship with God (most clearly seen in the time of judges and kings) so that he could create a new dynamic, one where he (and now we) could be victorious where



²¹ Whittaker, "The Listener's Commentary: Luke 4: 1-13."

Israel failed over and over again, and even more importantly where Adam and Eve failed in the very beginning.²²

To prepare for his ministry and to create this new dynamic, Jesus spends 40 days fasting in the Judean wilderness. I personally cannot fathom fasting for forty days, but I have heard that Jesus was fasting partially to prepare himself to take on Satan's temptations, and if that is the case, then we need to learn from that example how to resist Satan's temptations. What we know is that Jesus intentionally fasted this way at the guidance of the Holy Spirit while being tempted, and before starting his ministry. This ought to remind us that fasting to spend time meditating on God's Word, not just refraining from eating, is a spiritual discipline, one that is critically important in our spiritual walk. Through his fasting, Jesus was able to focus on God's Word and become spiritually fortified for the coming trials. We also know at the end of all this that Jesus is hungry, setting up Satan's first temptation.

Luke 4:3-4

One note for the language throughout these temptations is that Satan most likely did not doubt Jesus's status as the Son of God. According to Whittaker, there are two Greek words for "if".²³ One indicates uncertainty in the result or truth, but the other that is used here has more of the sense of "since you are."

Jesus was hungry, and he had the power to satisfy his hunger, so Satan starts with what could be seen as a lay-up: "[Since] you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." The real challenge here is for Jesus to satisfy his lust of the flesh, his body's strong desire for food, by using his power and status as the Son of God. Now he had foregone food for 40 straight days, 40 days being about the longest humans can go without food before enduring permanent physical damage. Food is a legitimate need of his and a legitimate temptation. Jesus, empowered by the Spirit and in his wisdom, recognized this as a temptation to not wait on and trust God. He chose to trust God's goodness and provision without trying to take matters into his own hands as Adam and Eve, and then the Israelites, did.

As noted earlier, Jesus's time in the desert directly parallels the Israelites' time escaping Egypt, and they too hungered at one time. They grumbled against the Lord several times about their lack of food and regularly showed that they didn't trust him to provide even though He daily provided manna, bread literally from heaven (Exodus 16, Numbers 11: 4-6). With this in mind, Jesus rebuffed Satan with Scripture from Israel's time in the desert with Deuteronomy 8:3, "Man shall not live by bread alone." The rest of the verse reads, "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

Clearly this teaches us that we do not need to focus purely on our own needs but rather need to know (yada) God's Word. God and His Word are the source of true life. There is another important truth to learn from Jesus's response here and later. Remember that during his time in the desert, Jesus has been fasting and meditating on the Word of the Lord this whole time. Now he was likely not reading Scripture because scrolls with the Scriptures were large, costly, and

²² Marty Solomon, "The Redemption Cycle," December 26, 2013, accessed August 3, 2026, <https://makingtalmidim.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-redemption-cycle.html>.

²³ Whittaker, "The Listener's Commentary: Luke 4: 1-13."

somewhat rare. He had memorized the Scriptures completely as he grew up (please do some research on the education of Jews in the time of Christ, and you will be blown away by the expectations) and was awash in God's Word. By knowing God and His Word, Jesus chose to trust that his life was in the Father's hands and that as his Son, the Father would take care of him, just as the Lord did for the Israelites in the desert. Do you/we know Scripture well enough like this?

This temptation most clearly mirrors Israel's time in the desert as indicated above, but I find it very interesting that the first temptation for Jesus is food related, just like Adam and Eve's sole temptation. Their temptation included a desire to become like God, knowing good and evil through tasting the forbidden food. Satan did not have to continue beyond this temptation with Adam and Eve. They failed at the first chance. Jesus, on the other hand, was the better Adam. He was starving, and he had to feel the pressure to eat. Yet, he resisted the temptation to doubt God's goodness and providence, establishing a new possibility for us in Christ. Paul put it perfectly in Romans 5:18-19:

¹⁸Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

Luke 4:5-8

Now it is not clear how Satan does this, but he somehow shows Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment in time" and promises to give him these kingdoms and the power and glory if only Jesus would worship him. For the longest time, this temptation seemed a little odd to me. Why would Jesus be tempted by this? Jesus is God, the rightful creator and inheritor of all the Earth. Satan only has partial and temporary control, so how would this tempt Jesus? For Jesus to come into his full power, he had to go through the reality of human existence, dealing with others' brokenness, and then being tortured and sacrificed for our sins. Satan's pledge seemed to offer an easy way for Jesus to grasp kingship. To me that promise sounds very enticing. I think of Jesus sweating blood in the garden as he asked God to take away the coming cup of suffering as something that would have been a similar struggle, but Jesus would never give into temptation. Instead, to live in harmony with the Father and the Spirit, Jesus went to Deuteronomy 6 for another Scripture from Israel's time in the desert to rebuke Satan: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve."

As the Israelites were entering the Promised Land, Moses wanted to warn them to not become proud and to not forget that God is the one who has given them everything when they have plenty of food, feel established, and are comfortable.²⁴ When we serve and worship other parts of this world or supernatural forces, we remove God from His rightful focus of our lives, and Jesus resists this temptation through Scripture.

When meditating on this passage, I began to wonder if Satan really did not understand Jesus's purpose on the Earth. From what we can tell, Satan rebelled because he wanted all the power and glory due to God. He thought he deserved it rather than God. Satan may have thought that Jesus was here on Earth simply to re-establish his control over the kingdoms to regain his power and glory on Earth. This temptation would speed up that process. While we may have

²⁴ Whittaker, "The Listener's Commentary: Luke 4: 1-13."

been tempted to gain this promised glory without the necessary suffering, Jesus recognized that his kingdom is not purely about his power and glory in the traditional sense. He was restoring God's kingdom through winning people back to God, through redemption. That redeeming work could not happen by just ruling over people but by loving people and serving. Jesus made the tough choice to live with us, to experience humanity, to be tried, tortured, and crucified. He chose to reject Satan's temptation for quick power and glory, Satan's own temptation, because he was focused on God's goal, because he knew that God's love would change the world.

Luke 4:9-13

In the first two temptations, Satan has challenged Jesus to take matters into his own hands (implying a lack of trust in God's providence) and challenged Jesus to worship someone other than God (take the easy route to his glory). Now Satan takes Jesus to the highest part of the temple. Knowing how Jesus has resisted the temptations using Scripture, Satan uses the Scripture to tempt Jesus. Satan draws from the Davidic Psalm 91 about God's provision to care for David. Satan implies that if God would protect David in this way, then how much more should God protect Jesus, David's heir and the foretold Messiah. This seems to ask Jesus, "Do you actually know (yada) that God will protect you?" This would be an easy way to experience and know God's love and protection. Jesus has two choices. If he jumps, then he forces God's hand rather than faithfully trusting that God will protect him. If Jesus does not jump, then does he actually trust God? Which route will he go? Jesus refuses to give in to this temptation and wisely returns to Deuteronomy 6 (again from Israel's time in the desert): "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Based on the language in Mark 1, it is possible that Jesus was enduring more temptations during his time in the desert, and these three are the culmination of Satan's temptations. Regardless, Satan finally wearies of tempting Jesus and retreats. We learn in Matthew that after Satan leaves, the angels actually come and minister to Jesus, taking care of him. After all Satan's temptations of Jesus to take care of himself and not wait on God, to subvert God's design for worship, and to test God, God is good and faithful and takes care of his son.

Conclusion

We can learn a couple of really important truths for our Christian walk. Especially in the U.S., I find it easy to think I am personally responsible for providing everything that I have, that my family has. Isn't the American mindset to "pull oneself up by your bootstraps," a phrase originally from a physics textbook to describe something truly impossible? That is not what we see in the story of Israel's and Jesus's time in the desert. God is faithful. We can trust Him, and we do not have to provide everything for ourselves. Next, Scripture is the key to our sanctification, to becoming more like Jesus. Jesus was divine, but he also took on flesh to be fully man. He grew up studying Scripture and spent time in the temple asking questions and learning. Jesus was steeped in the Scriptures, and he intentionally used them to shape his walk: to be baptized and go out into the desert before starting his public ministry and initiating his new kingdom. He intentionally used the Scriptures to battle Satan and temptation successfully.

It is through these truths that Jesus broke the sin cycle. He became our ultimate high priest, making propitiation for our sins and offering a different way forward. I want to leave you with some key passages from Hebrews to recognize the power of who Christ is and what his time in the desert did.

Hebrews 2:17-18 - Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 4:14-15 - Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 5:7-10 - In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

The Main Point

Before he began his ministry, Jesus was fully tested and tempted as we are. He intimately knows (yada) what it means to be human, and it is important that we learn from his time in the desert how Satan tempts so that we can be wary and prepared. It is even more important to learn from Jesus how he used fasting, prayer, and Scripture to hold fast to the promises of God where every human previously failed. It is most important to learn and to know (yada) how true Romans 5:18-19 and Hebrews 4:15 are: Jesus is the better Adam and our true heavenly high priest, for he resisted the temptations of Satan, creating new possibilities when a cycle of sin was the only reality before.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Israel's Commands Used by Jesus: Deuteronomy 6 and 8
- Israel's Failures and Cycle of Sin: Most of the Old Testament
- Jesus Sympathizes with our Temptations: Hebrews 2:17-18, Hebrews 4:14-15
- Jesus Created a New Reality and Kingdom: Romans 5:18-19, Hebrews 5: 7-10

Week 7

Luke 4:14-44 – Today this Scripture is Fulfilled

By Will Bomar

Introduction

When I attended the University of Alabama, there were approximately 1500 international students enrolled to study. That meant that essentially 1 in every 25 students at UA was a student who traveled to Tuscaloosa from another country. Of these nations represented, there were East Asians, Central Asians, Southeast Asians, South Americans, Europeans, Middle-Easterners. It felt like the entire world had moved to our city!

During my sophomore and junior years, I grew incredibly close with a group of about 30 Brazilians. We spent nearly every day together for one and a half years. Time with each other involved eating rice and beans, hosting parties, playing soccer, and of course, lots of dancing. It was truly the most fun time of my life. Recognizing the opportunity before me, I was quick to share the gospel with each of them, and I genuinely believe I shared the gospel with them hundreds of times. In addition to those conversations, many of them would come to my apartment and study the Bible with me. They would join me at worship services, and we even went on a few church retreats. Unfortunately, by the end of our time together, not one of them repented and believed the gospel.

If you're unfamiliar with Brazilian culture, Christianity is deeply woven into the country's cultural identity, even among those who don't follow Jesus. Christian holidays, traditions, symbols, and even references to God permeate everyday life. I recently visited Brazil and literally stood under a one-hundred-foot statue of Jesus that overlooks one of Brazil's most populated cities. One might think that this would have made conversations about the gospel more receptive, but that simply didn't prove to be true.

While in college, I also spent time with friends from closed countries, or countries run by governments that prohibit their people from worshiping Christ. For their safety, I won't reveal the nations that they represent, but I can say that I also shared the gospel with them, genuinely hundreds of times. Our conversations centered not only on the gospel, but also on the cost of following Christ—even unto death, a very real possibility for many of them. By God's grace, some of my friends from these closed countries counted the cost of following Christ and found him worthy. Though the places they once called home were hostile to Jesus, and though their conversion could cost them their lives, they heard the gospel, repented, and believed.

I have often reflected on the contrast between these two groups of friends. On the surface, I would have expected the opposite response. My Brazilian friends came from a culture in which the name of Jesus was familiar, Christian symbols were everywhere, and conversations about God were hardly foreign. My other friends came from places where following Jesus could mean rejection by family, persecution by their communities, and even death. Yet familiarity with Christianity did not necessarily produce faith, and hostility toward Christianity did not prevent it.

In Luke 4, Jesus encounters a similar and surprising contrast. He returns to Nazareth, the town where he was raised, enters the synagogue, and stands before people who knew him and were familiar with the Scriptures he read. Yet those who were closest to Jesus would ultimately reject him. Jesus then reminds them of two occasions when God's grace extended beyond Israel—to a widow in Sidon and a leper from Syria. The message was as offensive then as it can be surprising now: proximity to the things of God does not guarantee faith, and distance from them does not place anyone beyond the reach of his grace. The gospel announced by Jesus is

good news for the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed—and that the gospel extends even to the nations.

Read Luke 4:14-44 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. The people of Nazareth wanted Jesus to fit their expectations instead of embracing the Messiah revealed in Scripture. How can we avoid making the same mistake?
 2. Jesus used the examples of Elijah, the widow of Zarephath, and Elisha's healing of Naaman to show that God's grace often reaches those we least expect. How should this shape the way we think about evangelism and the people God may be calling us to reach?
 3. Throughout Luke 4, Jesus demonstrates authority over Scripture, demons, sickness, and the effects of the Fall. Which display of Jesus' authority stands out to you the most, and why does it matter for your faith today?
-

Commentary

Luke 4:14-30

In chapter 3 of Luke, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism. At the beginning of chapter 4, the Holy Spirit filled Jesus and led him into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil. Then, in Luke 4:14, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit, and news about him spread throughout the surrounding region. During this time, he taught in their synagogues and was glorified by all.

Then, in verse 16, Luke reports that Jesus went to Nazareth, where he was raised. People knew him there because they had watched him grow up. Because Nazareth was a small town, everybody likely knew everybody. Jesus was no stranger to them; rather, Jesus was among those who'd witnessed him become a young man. Though they didn't yet know Jesus as the Messiah, it's possible the people of Nazareth had spent decades observing the most perfectly loving, patient, joyful, humble human being who had ever lived.

As was Jesus' custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Synagogue services typically involved reading from the Law and the Prophets. When Jesus was invited to read, he stood and was handed the scroll of Isaiah (4:17). Luke says he then unrolled the scroll and quotes from various portions of Isaiah (4:18-19). Afterward, he rolled up the scroll, returned it to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him, as they waited with anticipation for what he would say next (4:20). Finally, Jesus declares, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). What a powerful moment! Jesus declares

that Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in him. Since the prophecy speaks of the Messiah, it is worth examining more closely what Jesus reveals about himself through these words.

The passage Jesus reads begins with Isaiah prophesying, “the Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me” (Isaiah 61:1). By reading these words, Jesus is clearly emphasizing that he was anointed “to proclaim the good news to the poor” (Isaiah 61:1). In its original context, Isaiah’s prophecy anticipated the restoration and redemption of Israel, but Jesus reveals that this redemption ultimately extends to all who come to him in faith. The poor include those who lack financial resources and material possessions, as well as those who are spiritually impoverished—those who have not yet heard or embraced the gospel.

Jesus then reads, “he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Isaiah 61:1). Thomas Schreiner, the author of Luke’s section of *The ESV Expository Commentary* says,

“release for those who are imprisoned is not literal, since Jesus never frees prisoners in his ministry. The word for ‘release’ (Gk. *Aphesis*) is used fifteen times in Leviticus 25 for describing the year of Jubilee, when all debts are removed, slaves are freed, and people return to their property – evoking the exodus in which Israel is liberated from bondage and brought into the land.”²⁵

Another fascinating detail is that the word “release” (liberty here in the ESV) is used eight more times in Luke and Acts, yet in each of those occurrences it refers to the forgiveness of sins. It is unclear why the phrase, “he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1) is omitted, as well as the final part of Isaiah 61:1 that says he has been sent to, “open the prison of those who are bound.”

Luke then records Jesus referencing Isaiah 42:7 when he proclaims he has come to recover sight to the blind. This ministry he fulfills in Luke 7:21-22 and Luke 18:35-42. Jesus is likely also proclaiming he has come to restore sight to the spiritually blind, granting them eyes to see the glory of God.

Jesus then references Isaiah 58:6, declaring that he has come to set free those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. The imagery of the "year of the Lord's favor" would have reminded his audience of the Year of Jubilee, when debts were forgiven, slaves were set free, and inheritances were restored—more can be found on the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. By applying these words to himself, Jesus announces that he has come to accomplish the greater redemption to which Jubilee pointed. Through him, those who are enslaved by sin are offered forgiveness, freedom, and reconciliation with God (4:18,19).

This moment was powerful because Jesus is declaring that the one Isaiah prophesied about is finally here. The long-awaited Messiah had come. Seated among the people who had watched him grow up, Jesus now publicly announced that the promises of Isaiah were being fulfilled in him. The people marveled at Jesus’ words, and Luke says they “spoke well of him” (4:22).

That is, until the reality sank in of who they were looking at. This was Jesus, son of Joseph (4:22). This was Jesus, the carpenter. This was Jesus, who at one time was simply a young boy, a young teenager, and now a young man. This was Jesus, who many of them had watched grow up. This was Jesus of Nazareth. In response, Jesus quotes the proverb, “Physician,

²⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Luke,” in *Matthew–Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. VIII, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 783.

heal yourself.” He then exposes the hearts of those before him by saying, “What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well” (4:23). Their desire was not to believe in him, but to see him perform miracles for them.

Seizing the opportunity to expose the unbelief of those before him, Jesus reminds them that a prophet is not accepted in his hometown—a pattern woven throughout the Old Testament. To illustrate this truth, he recalls the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. In verse 25, Jesus recounts how, during a severe famine, God chose to send Elijah to a Gentile widow in Zarephath instead of to the widows of Israel. Likewise, he reminds them that although there were many lepers in Israel during Elisha's ministry, none of them were cleansed. Instead, Elisha healed Naaman, a Gentile man from Syria (4:26). Jesus reveals that those who have received the greatest spiritual opportunities are not necessarily those who embrace the gospel. Conversely, those who appear least likely to respond may, by God's grace, repent and place their faith in him.

Luke presents Jesus' rejection at Nazareth as the beginning of a recurring pattern throughout Luke and Acts. This pattern appears in the Gerasenes (Luke 8), where the people ask Jesus to leave after witnessing his power; in Jerusalem (Luke 19–23), where the crowds welcome Jesus before calling for his crucifixion; in Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7); and in the ministries of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13), Iconium (Acts 14), Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17), Athens (Acts 17), and finally Rome (Acts 28). In each case, God's messengers proclaim the truth, some respond in faith while others reject it, and the gospel continues to advance, often extending beyond those who first rejected it to Gentiles who received it.

The people in the synagogue were enraged. Angered and offended by Jesus' words, they drove him out of town to the edge of a cliff. Schreiner suggests they likely viewed Jesus as a false prophet, alluding to Deuteronomy 13:1–5.²⁶ In that passage, Israel is instructed to put false prophets to death. In their attempt to do so, Jesus slips through the crowd and departs from them without being harmed. Luke does not tell us how Jesus escaped the crowd. Instead, he simply records that Jesus “passed through the midst of them and went away” (4:30). Though the manner remains a mystery, the reason is not: the time appointed for Christ's death had not yet come.

Luke 4:31–37

Like he did in Nazareth, Jesus taught on the Sabbath in the synagogue (4:31). While Luke does not tell us what Jesus was teaching, he makes it clear that Jesus proclaimed the Word of God with remarkable clarity and authority, leaving those in the synagogue astonished (4:32).

During one of Jesus' teachings, a man possessed by an unclean demon suddenly interrupts with a probing question for the Messiah (4:33). The demon asks, “What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us?” (4:34). Even the demon recognizes Jesus' authority and fears his power. His words reveal an awareness that Jesus has the authority to judge and ultimately destroy the forces of evil.

The demon then identifies Jesus as “the Holy One of God” (4:34), seemingly attempting to expose his identity publicly. Jesus immediately rebukes the demon, commands him to be silent, and casts him out of the man. Although the demon throws the man down as it departs, Luke is careful to note that the man is left unharmed (4:35). Witnessing this, the crowd is once again amazed at Jesus' authority. They see that his authority extends beyond his teaching—even the demons obey his commands (4:36). Jesus possesses authority not only over people, but over

²⁶ Schreiner, “Luke,” 785.

the powers of evil themselves. News of Jesus continued to spread of Jesus throughout the surrounding area (4:37).

Luke 4:38-44

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus enters Simon's house, where Simon's mother-in-law is suffering from a high fever (4:38). Throughout the Old Testament, sickness—including fever—is among the consequences associated with living under the curse of sin (Lev. 26:16; Deut. 28:22). Luke does not suggest that her illness was the result of her particular sin. Rather, her fever serves as another reminder of the brokenness that sin has brought into the world. With a simple rebuke, Jesus immediately removes the fever, demonstrating that even sickness is subject to his authority (4:39). In doing so, he provides another glimpse of the kingdom he has come to establish—a kingdom in which the effects of sin and the Fall will ultimately be undone. Simon's mother-in-law responds to Christ healing her by immediately serving him.

At the end of the same Sabbath day, people suffering from illnesses and possessions were flocking to Jesus for healing (4:40). The desperation in the people is strong, and Christ responds with compassion and willingness to heal. Demons continue to shout out Jesus' identity, this time as "the Son of God" (4:41), but Jesus prevents them from "continuing to speak as if they were the authoritative sources of revelation."²⁷

By morning, Jesus withdrew to a desolate place where he could be alone (4:42). Although the crowds continued searching for him and tried to keep him from leaving, Jesus explained that he must also preach "the good news of the kingdom of God" to other towns because that was the very purpose for which he had been sent (4:43). Rather than remaining where he was most wanted, Jesus continued traveling and preaching in the synagogues of Judea (4:44).

The Main Point

Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who fulfills Isaiah's prophecy and inaugurates the Kingdom of God. His authority is displayed throughout every aspect of his ministry, and both his teaching and his actions reveal that the good news of the kingdom extends beyond Israel to all who believe. Therefore, like Simon's mother-in-law, we should respond with joyful obedience, devoting our lives to Christ and to the proclamation of his gospel among the nations.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Isaiah 42:6-7 – Recovery of sight to the blind
- Isaiah 58:6 – Setting the oppressed free
- Isaiah 61:1-2 – Good news for the broken-hearted and bound
- Leviticus 25:8-55 – The Year of Jubilee
- 1 Kings 17:8-24 – Elijah and the widow of Zarephath
- 2 Kings 5:1-19 – Elisha heals Naaman
- Romans 9:30-33 – The Gentiles receive righteousness by faith
- Revelation 7:9-10 – All peoples worship Christ

²⁷ Schreiner, "Luke," 788.

Week 8

Luke 5:1–6:11 – A Growing Tension Between Jesus and the Religious Leaders

By Brandon Wingler

Introduction

In *The Matrix* (**SPOILER ALERT**), the main character Neo is faced with a defining choice: Will he take the red pill or the blue pill? One pill will let him choose a pleasant illusion over facing the truth, while the other pill will force him to wake up to the deeper reality of the world around him, but he will not be able to go back to life as it was before.

Throughout Luke 5:1-6:11, Jesus steps into the lives of ordinary people. Everywhere he goes, people are confronted with the question of what they will do with him. Not everyone responds the same way. Fishermen, tax collectors, and the sick recognize their need and are transformed by Jesus. Sinners gather around Jesus and find grace instead of rejection. Others, like the scribes and the Pharisees, reject Jesus and accuse him of blasphemy and disobedience to God's law. While one group finds a new way of living and seeing the world around them, another group prefers to persist in their own delusion to continue life as it has always been for them.

This passage makes it clear that following Jesus isn't about staying comfortable or preserving appearances. Following Jesus is about repentance, faith, and obedience to him. And just like Neo in *The Matrix*, we are faced with a choice: Will we cling to what is familiar and comfortable, preferring the illusion that we are "good enough" with our own righteousness? Or will our hearts be pliable to the true reality where we can recognize our need and trust that Jesus is the Son of God who has the power to cleanse us of all unrighteousness, forgive us of our sins, and transform us into new creations who follow him?

Read Luke 5:1 – 6:11 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Can you think of a time when God called you to trust him despite circumstances that suggested otherwise? Have you ever experienced God working in a situation after you had given up hope? What happened?
 2. What can we learn from the friends who went to such extraordinary lengths to bring the paralytic to Jesus?
 3. What does this passage teach us about the relationship between faith and action?
 4. What old habits, expectations, or ways of thinking might Jesus be calling you to leave behind?
-

Commentary

Luke 5:1-11

This passage begins with a crowd of people gathering to listen to Jesus of Nazareth, whose reputation for teaching and healing was surely beginning to precede him throughout the land. Jesus approaches two boats along the lake of Gennesaret (also called the Sea of Galilee or Sea of Tiberias). The fishermen of these boats had left to wash their nets from a disappointingly unsuccessful night of fishing.

Jesus approached Simon Peter and commanded him to put his boat out just a bit from the shore. Jesus taught from the boat and then commanded Peter once more, charging him and the rest of the fishermen to let down their nets. Yet the night before, they had failed to catch anything. And it was now day, which was considerably worse for fishing. And how exhausted all these fishermen would be from their failed endeavor just hours before. Peter captured all this in his initial response: “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing!” Yet despite every logical reason not to do so, Peter and the others obey Jesus' command. Astoundingly, the catch is so plentiful that the nets nearly broke. Both boats became so full that they even began to sink. As they all stood amazed, Peter fell to his knees and said to Jesus, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Peter had already witnessed Jesus heal his mother-in-law. Now he watched Jesus prove his superior fishing ability. In both instances, Peter witnessed Jesus demonstrate his authority over creation. Jesus truly is, as Peter proclaimed, “Master.” Even though Peter did not yet fully understand, he recognized his unworthiness and sinfulness, and begged Jesus to leave his presence. Yet Jesus looked upon Peter and the rest of the fishermen and said, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” Rather than cast off the failed fishermen, Jesus assured them and welcomed them into his mission. He did not choose them because they were worthy or qualified. He welcomed them in, despite their weaknesses and imperfections. Luke records that when “they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”

We can all identify with Peter. There are times in life when we feel we work hard and do all the right things yet don't see the fruit of our labor. We try to check all the right boxes, follow the best advice we know, and still find that the results don't always seem to match the effort. The process was followed, but the outcome wasn't what we hoped for or what we thought should happen. Yet God is always at work, and we often can't see under the surface all that he is doing.

Psalms 127 begins, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” God calls us to trust him, obey him, and leave the results to him. I love when Paul writes, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:6). Sometimes we are planting seeds. Other times we are watering seeds someone else has planted. But God gives the growth. He will handle the outcome. Paul later writes in 1 Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” So even when the results aren't immediately evident, even when we grow tired from our labor, may we continue to labor in Christ, trusting him and obeying him.

Luke 5:12-26

Jesus then encounters a man covered with a serious skin disease. This man sees Jesus, approaches him, falls down on his face, and begs Jesus to heal him, if Jesus will do so. Jesus touches the man, and he is cleansed of his disease.

To better understand and appreciate this miracle, we need to know this man's condition and how his life was impacted by his affliction. Most translations typically render this skin disease as "leprosy" (although leprosy today is associated with Hansen's disease, which is similar but not exactly the same as leprosy in biblical times). The basic features of leprosy and laws associated with it are outlined in Leviticus 13 and 14. A leprous disease often included bright white spots or patches on the skin, which also turned hair white. The disease would pierce through the surface of the skin, and the flesh of the skin would begin to look raw as it swelled. Additionally, the disease would spread across the body. The disease was also identified as something that affected clothing (Lev. 13:47-48) and houses (Lev. 14:34-53).

But more feared than the physical ailments of the disease were the ritual uncleanness and impurity associated with the disease. In Israel, a person suffering from leprosy was cut off from the community because the disease could spread to other people and objects. Several passages imply that leprosy was a punishment for sin and that God alone could heal it (Numbers 12:1-15; Deuteronomy 24:8-9; 28:27; 2 Samuel 3:29; 2 Kings 5:20-27; 15:5; 2 Chronicles 26:20). When King Uzziah disregarded God's laws surrounding the temple, the Lord caused him to be struck with leprosy until the day he died. When a Syrian commander, Naaman, came down with leprosy, the prophet Elisha interceded for him to be healed. But after Naaman was healed of his leprosy, Elisha's servant Gehazi sought money from Naaman, and when it was discovered, Elisha cursed Gehazi to have the leprosy of Naaman cling to him and his descendants forever.

In all these examples, we see that leprosy was deadly serious. In many ways, a leper was like a walking corpse, and being cleansed of leprosy could be likened to being brought back to life from death. By cleansing the man of his leprosy, Jesus demonstrated that he is like the prophet Elisha. But unlike Elisha, Jesus did not have to intercede on the man's behalf for him to be cleansed. With a simple touch, Jesus cleansed the man and removed the stigma and shame that had isolated him from the community.

Luke then records that a group of men carried a bed with a man who was paralyzed. As this group approached the crowd surrounding Jesus, they could not get close without climbing the roof, clearing it, and lowering the man to Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he turned to the man and said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

The Pharisees and teachers of the law watched this unfold, and they exclaimed, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus responds to their accusation of blasphemy with a question: "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home." The man immediately rose and went home, glorifying God. The Pharisees correctly understood that only God could forgive sins. But they failed to see that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Son of God who had both the authority and the power to forgive sins and to heal.

These miracles further reveal who Jesus is and remind us that no one is beyond his reach. He can cleanse and forgive sins, and he can heal disease and bring new life. These miracles also show us sinners who approach Christ aware of their condition and humbly ask to be healed. They recognized their need for a savior, and they acted with faith to approach that savior. Just as the priests could not cleanse the leper, and the doctors could not heal the paralytic, we cannot ultimately heal people of their physical and spiritual infirmities. But we can bring them to Christ. We can tell them the good news of who Christ is and what he has done. We can point them to the one who heals, the one who cleanses, the one who forgives sin.

Luke 5:27-32

Jesus then saw a tax collector named Levi and commanded him to follow him (Levi is likely the “Matthew” we read of in the other gospels when the disciples are listed). Just like Peter and the fishermen, Levi is recorded as “leaving everything” and following him. Levi holds a celebration with a large feast and invites several other tax collectors to join him. As the Pharisees and their scribes saw Jesus eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners, they grumbled at his disciples.

Tax collectors held a very negative reputation in Israel for many reasons. Their job required them to come into constant contact with Gentiles (and thus, also came into contact with “unclean” foods) and to collaborate with those charging high tax rates. In addition, many tax collectors were seen as dishonest since some collected higher rates of taxes to pocket the extra money for themselves. Darrell Bock notes, “Some may be startled at the ministry’s openness. They may react that such associations taint the teacher’s credentials and raise questions about his spiritual integrity. But what Jesus’ actions show is the extent of his compassion and the depth of God’s grace. The Physician seeks out the sick and calls them into the hospital room of God’s care.”²⁸

Jesus responds to the Pharisees: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Jesus’ ministry aligns with God’s character and purpose displayed in Ezekiel 34:1-16. In that passage, Ezekiel prophesies against the shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves while the sheep are left neglected. God declares that he will search for his sheep and seek them out so they may be rescued, fed, and find rest. The Lord says, “I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice” (Ezekiel 34:16).

Rather than distancing himself from sinners, Jesus welcomes sinners while also calling them to repentance so they may be brought into the fold of God’s family. Before sinners can be healed, they must recognize their need for a Savior. Jesus seeks the lost, brings back those who have strayed, heals the injured, and strengthens the weak. But those who rely on their own righteousness will be judged by God’s perfect justice. All of us stand before God as undeserving sinners. But Jesus offers to forgive us of our sins, to clothe us in his righteousness, to adopt us into God’s family and thus make us heirs to his kingdom and all the blessings that come with being in the family of the King.

Luke 5:33-39

The Pharisees now turn their attention to the issue of fasting. Before Jesus arrived, John the Baptist proclaimed a message of repentance and prepared the way for Jesus and his ministry. The Pharisees note that John’s disciples regularly prayed and fasted, but Jesus’ disciples did not.

Fasting was a common practice throughout the Old Testament and was often associated with mourning, repentance, and seeking God’s guidance. Fasting might be done on specific occasions such as the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Numbers 29:7-11). Individuals might also fast for their own spiritual reasons. After David sinned against Uriah, he fasted in mourning and repentance (2 Samuel 12:13-20). After Nehemiah learned that Jerusalem’s walls had been broken down and its gates burned with fire, he fasted and prayed,

²⁸ Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 500.

confessing to the Lord and pleading with God to remember his promises and to show mercy (Nehemiah 1).

Jesus responded to the Pharisees with a question: “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?” Jesus paints a simple illustration. No one at a wedding would abstain from eating and celebrating. Fasting would not be appropriate for the occasion. The wedding imagery mirrors that used in the Old Testament to describe God’s relationship with his people (Isaiah 54:5-6; 62:4-5; Jeremiah 2:2; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 2:14-23). In the previous passage of Luke’s gospel, Jesus read a prophecy from Isaiah 61:1-2 and identified his ministry as the fulfillment of that prophecy:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
² to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Jesus’ ministry on earth is a time for celebration, not for mourning. Jesus is making the point that he is the bridegroom and that he and his disciples do not fast because the current time calls for feasting and celebration since the bridegroom of God’s people is now here.

Yet Jesus also proclaims, “The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” His remark anticipates his future death, resurrection, and ascension. When Jesus died, his followers properly wept, mourned, prayed, and fasted. But Jesus also rose from the grave and conquered sin and death, and this is worthy of great celebration. As Christians, we live in an “already/not yet” era of salvation history. We celebrate that Jesus has already come and has begun to inaugurate his kingdom on earth. Yet we also know that the fullness of this reality is not yet here. The wedding has not yet taken place since the bridegroom was taken away. So we mourn the brokenness that still exists throughout creation. We pray for God’s will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven. We long for the day when Revelation 21:1-5 is fulfilled. And we have a sure and steadfast hope that Jesus will return for his bride and make all things new so that the old passes away.

Whereas fasting was required in the Old Testament, no New Testament command regulates or requires fasting by all believers. At the same time, we find examples of fasting in Acts 13:2-3 and 14:23 when the early church fasted and prayed. Fasting is also presented positively as a way for believers to focus on their relationship with God through prayer, temporarily abstaining from food and other things (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:1-5), and focusing one’s attention on the Lord and not on things of the world. So while fasting is not strictly required for believers, it can be profitable for believers when done responsibly and with the right intentions. Whether or not we fast from food, all believers can benefit from examining what captures our attention and considering what we might temporarily set aside to seek God more intentionally.

Jesus also responds to the Pharisees with another illustration. He explains that no one tears a piece of a new garment to patch an old garment. In the same vein, no one would put new wine into an old wineskin because the fermented wine would cause the brittle skins to burst. Jesus’ point is that something new is taking place, connecting back to his illustration about

feasting rather than fasting as the bridegroom is now here. The old covenant and laws, as well as the religious traditions and systems built up by the Pharisees, cannot contain the new. Jesus did not come to patch on a new addition to an old covenant. He did not come to put the old covenant within the new covenant. He came to bring a new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Through the new covenant, Jesus fulfills God's purposes and promises for his people. Jesus is a continuation of God's plan to redeem a people for himself. While the way people relate to God changes in this new covenant, the plan of God continues forward as he always intended. Jesus' message here about the old and new being unable to be mixed would have particular significance as the early church wrestled with issues surrounding its Jewish heritage, such as laws concerning the Sabbath.

Luke 6:1-11

This chapter of Luke begins with two controversies involving the Sabbath. In the first, Jesus and his disciples walk through a field of grain on the Sabbath, and the disciples pluck the heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat them. The Pharisees object, accusing them of doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath. The issue was not that they plucked grain from the field (this was permitted under Deuteronomy 23:25, as long as one did not attempt to harvest the grain with a sickle). The issue was that they did so on the Sabbath.

As Scripture makes clear, the Sabbath was established by God as a day of rest and worship. The Sabbath was meant to commemorate when God rested on the seventh day of creation, as well as when God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. As time passed, several additional regulations developed around the Sabbath. Darrell Bock notes that the Mishnah (a written compilation of Jewish oral traditions that was first written after Jesus and literally means “repetition” or “study by repetition”) prohibits “thirty-nine tasks on the day of rest” and that “according to this detailed and specific list, the disciples were reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing food—a quadruple violation!”²⁹ While the Mishnah itself is not Scripture, it reflects traditions that were developing during the time of Jesus and were influential among groups like the Pharisees. Even today, many Orthodox Jews regard the Mishnah as an important and authoritative guide for interpreting the law.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees' accusation by referring to the events recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-6. As David and his men fled from Saul, David asked the priest Ahimelech to bring him and his men the bread of the Presence in the tabernacle, which was reserved for the priests.

²⁹ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 523.

Bock notes, “In rabbinic tradition, it is suggested that this event occurred on the Sabbath... If this element is correct, then the illustration is even more appropriate, being a Sabbath violation as well as being an illegal eating of the priestly bread.”³⁰ A strict “letter of the law” reading of this event would lead one to see David as violating the law. In the same vein, Jesus’ disciples plucked and ate grain on the Sabbath, and the Pharisees saw them as violating the law. Bock argues, “The law should not restrict people in their basic tasks, but should encourage them, in the case of the Sabbath, to honor the day. There are situations in which the law can be waived or transcended. David and his men had such a moment. Such a situation faces the disciples.”³¹ He further notes, “Jesus places the officials in a dilemma. If the Pharisees are right, David and his men were guilty. The Pharisees’ problem is that the biblical text does not question David’s actions and neither did the priest at the scene of the ‘crime.’

It may be that David violated the “letter of the law” but not the “spirit of the law,” and thus may not be “guilty” of violating the law. Alternatively, it may be that David violated the law, but this violation was overridden by the circumstances, and thus David was not found “guilty” in the eyes of the Lord. Or perhaps there is still some other explanation. The text is not entirely clear on this fine point, but the greater point which Jesus adds next is clear. Jesus concludes by saying, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” By doing so, Jesus established his authority over the Sabbath and all that comes with it. He can decree what is lawful and what is not lawful. David Garland notices that David was chosen by God to be king and may have acted as a “type” of Messiah when he used his authority to enter into the tabernacle and eat the bread of the Presence, which was only lawful for the priests to eat.³² Jesus, as lord of the Sabbath and the Son of God, would have the authority to supersede the law for the greater good. Regardless of every detail here, the main point is clear: Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

The second Sabbath controversy involved Jesus healing a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Luke tells us that “the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him.” Jesus knew their thoughts, and so he called the man towards him and asked, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” Jesus then commanded the man to stretch out his hand, and Jesus healed the man. Luke concludes that the scribes and the Pharisees “were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.”

We see from Luke’s descriptions and Jesus’ question that the Pharisees’ hearts were hardened. They had become so committed to their interpretation of the Sabbath that they ignored the miracle of healing right in front of them. While Jesus uses his authority to heal, the Pharisees will use their authority to eventually bring Jesus to his death. Jesus reminds us that God’s commands are meant to lead us toward him and shape us into people who reflect his character. We should honor and obey God’s teaching, but we must also remember that obedience to God is much more than “following the rules” and “checking off the boxes.” True obedience flows out of a heart transformed by God’s grace. And those whose hearts have been changed will show that in how they love others.

³⁰ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 524.

³¹ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 524.

³² David Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 262-63.

Conclusion

Throughout this passage, Luke presents a series of encounters that force us to wrestle with one central question: Who is Jesus?

Luke shows that Jesus is the Lord who fills empty nets, cleanses lepers, forgives sins, heals sinners, brings new life, and reigns over the Sabbath. The responses to Jesus vary widely. Peter leaves everything to follow him. A leper worships him. Friends tear through a roof to reach him. Levi abandons his tax booth for him. And the Pharisees increasingly oppose him.

Luke has shown us who Jesus is. The question that remains is the same one that faced everyone in this passage: How will we respond to him? At Anchor Church, our mission statement captures the appropriate response: Know Jesus and Make Him Known.

The Main Point

Jesus reveals his authority to heal and forgive sins, and he properly defines what it means to follow God. He invites sinners into a new life marked by repentance and faith-filled obedience. Those who cling to self-righteousness resist Jesus, but those who humbly respond to him are transformed.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Mark 1:16-20 & 1:40-3:6 – This section of Mark’s gospel covers the same events.
- Psalm 103:2-3 – “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases.”
- Ezekiel 34:1-16 – Jesus seeks out his sheep.
- Jeremiah 31:31-34 – The new covenant.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 – “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.”
- Mark 2:27 – “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”

Week 9

Luke 6:12-49 – The Sermon on the Plain

By Rand Nelson

Introduction

It's not often I've found myself on the receiving end of legalistic condescension. I've just simply not lived in a lot of spaces where I've felt judged by my peers regarding my words, actions, clothing choices, etc. The one exception I can think of is that I grew up in a medium-sized non-denominational church in Birmingham, Alabama. The church wasn't legalistic at all (at least not that I remember); however, there was a small group of people who made me feel pretty insignificant when they communicated to me how short I fell of their standards.

During the school year, our church hosted a program called AWANA—which stood for Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed. At its heart, AWANA is a great program that teaches children the gospel and motivates them to memorize bible verses through an advancement-incentive structure. For example, in the Sparks group (for kindergarten through 2nd grade), each student is awarded their red vest to wear to the mid-week meeting upon completing the entrance booklet. After that, they can earn subsequent rewards as they complete units, progressing through the three different, grade-level workbooks. Pretty soon, your red vest is shimmering with all the plastic jewels you affix to the plastic crowns that pin to your uniform.

Well, most people's vests were shimmering; mine wasn't. Uniforms were kind of an issue for me. In fact, I had accidentally caught one of my PALS uniforms (the next level up from Sparks) on fire trying to iron on one of the shoulder patches. I often attended group in my little league baseball uniform—having just come from practice—and so, there was a routine visual reminder of the kid who came unprepared, unorganized and definitely not with completed sections of memorized bible verses.

I don't remember my classmate's name, but I remember what he looked like, and I remember what he said to me. "Why do you even come to AWANA? You don't ever complete any sections and you seem to only care about game time and snacks?" Now to his credit, his observation skills were A+. He wasn't wrong. But he also failed to understand how his circumstances and my circumstances were different. While he came from a small family, I had 8 siblings. Furthermore, he was homeschooled and didn't play any sports, while I was in school all day long and played several. I found out later that, each week, his mother would work with him and his brother to memorize AWANA sections during their school day (which counted as a grade for their Bible instruction). This doesn't excuse my lack of initiative in AWANA, but I think it is the kind of thing that would have maybe altered his criticism of me, had he considered how vastly different our circumstances were.

As we attempt to be people who know Jesus and make him known, we are to love them graciously, mercifully and generously. Legalistic condescension cannot be the kind of thing we're known for, because it doesn't naturally flow from a heart that has been radically changed by Jesus.

Read Luke 6:12-49 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. Do the blessings and woes in verses 20-26 give you any reason for pause? What about them is challenging as we think about the comforts, pleasures and community we now enjoy?
 2. We all have people in our lives we find difficult to love, even if we wouldn't call them enemies. What are some ways we can actively love these people in spite of how they treat us?
 3. Do you think that you're a person who is known to be judgmental? How can we use where Jesus has sanctified us as a ministry to those walking similar paths?
-

Commentary

Luke 6:12-16

This section begins with a verse it would be easy to overlook—a verse telling us that prior to naming his 12 apostles, Jesus spent the entire night in prayer. I don't know that I've ever spent the entire night in prayer (though I have, perhaps, spent an entire night worrying about something which should have instead been dedicated to prayer). The selection of his 12 apostles would mark a significant turning point in his earthly ministry, including welcoming into his inner circle the man who would eventually betray him. Perhaps this was what kept our Lord up all night in communion with the Father, perhaps not; nevertheless, we see from Jesus a great deal of importance placed on prayer—especially before making big decisions (Grudem, 1962).

Reading this list of men, you may notice that the list differs slightly in Luke from the lists provided in Mark and Matthew. The lists are different in the names given, but not in who they ultimately name. Both Mark and Matthew list a man named Thaddeus, while Luke mentions another Judas. As Henry Spence points out, Thaddeus is certainly a surname of Judas, and (as you can imagine) there was a need to distinguish between the two Judases—especially considering the infamy of Judas Iscariot (Spence, 143).

More importantly, this list includes men who have previously been called as disciples now being named apostles. It's important that we understand that there is a distinction between these terms in the Greek language, and in how we understand the difference in their roles. The word the New Testament uses for disciple simply translates to “a learner or pupil,” while the word for apostle translates to “a messenger, he that is sent” (Strong, 45 and 15). However, when we colloquially refer to “the disciples” we are specifically referring to a group of 12 men—even though the Bible mentions many more disciples of Jesus more generally. What the words directly translate to and how we use those words are two different things. Such is also the case with the word apostle. While there is a sense in which we are all apostles (we are all commissioned and

sent as ambassadors of Christ), none of us are apostles in the sense that these 12 men (and later a few others) receive this designation. R. C. Sproul points out that in the ancient world, the title of apostle was not merely referring to someone who was sent, but should be understood to mean someone who was sent to speak on behalf of their ruler, and in this sense carried with them the authority of the power they represented—similar to a diplomat or emissary (Sproul, 105).

When we see the apostles function in the book of Acts and the New Testament epistles, it is clear that they occupy a space of more vital authority than disciples or missionaries. So, in this context, the word does not merely mean “those who are sent,” but carries with it a weighty mantle. This is critically important, because our understanding of how the Bible (in this case with the apostles, the New Testament specifically) communicates inerrant infallible truth hinges upon their set apart status. Their words carry weight, because their recorded words are authoritatively communicating what God says through them as his apostles. The men who wrote the New Testament were all apostles or very close associates of the apostles. Many texts help shape this idea of inerrancy, but I find 2 Peter 1:21 particularly helpful: “For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Luke 6:17-19

These verses set the stage for the teaching that takes place in the next, fuller section. We read that a large multitude of people from all over the region came to see Jesus and hear him speak. Sick people came to be healed, those troubled by unclean spirits were cured by him, and all the crowd longed to touch him because, as they did, power came out of Jesus and healed them all.

Verses like these are commonplace in the New Testament, but we should fight against the norm of familiarity breeding apathy here. Throngs of people—likely thousands upon thousands flocked to this level place partially up the mountain to hear this young Jewish man speak and to try to touch him. Likely not understanding his message or his eternal importance, they simply knew as the women with a discharge of blood knew, “If I only touch his garment, I will be made well” (Matthew 9:21). Here’s the really cool thing: they were. Their diseases were healed and their unclean spirits cast out.

The teaching that follows is what theologians sometimes refer to as the Sermon on the Plain. You may notice similarities this passage has with the Sermon on the Mount. Is this possibly just Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount? That’s certainly possible, but there is enough difference in the two sermons to cause us significant doubt in thinking so. Additionally, we see Jesus traveling and teaching all over Israel throughout his ministry; the fact is, it could easily be a collection of similar teachings he would frequent in a different setting to a potentially different audience.

Luke 6:20-26

Jesus begins his sermon here with a series of beatitudes, and you can immediately note that Jesus’ list is different here than it appears in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount. To start, there are only four listed here (Matthew lists nine). Furthermore, each “blessed” here is accompanied by a corresponding “woe” to its inverse. For example: “Blessed are you who are poor” (v.20)... “Woe to you who are rich” (v.24).

Luke is doing something really interesting here with his emphasis, and by week nine in this commentary, it’s likely something we’ve already discussed—the theme of reversal of

fortune. Present throughout Luke's gospel, the idea of this reversal is an emphasis on the poor, the humble, or the seemingly unimportant. "It is also implicit in the attention Luke gives to social and religious outcasts throughout his Gospel" (Liefeld, 891). Let me show a few examples from where we've been so far:

- First, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-56) → You'll notice it is the proud who are scattered, the mighty are brought down from their thrones and the rich are sent away empty—all while those of humble estate are exalted, the hungry are filled with good things. Also, the Lord's humble servant, Mary, is herself looked upon by the Lord and exalted such that all generations will call her blessed.
- Second, Jesus is rejected at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30) → At first, Jesus is welcomed and lauded at the Nazareth synagogue; it is only when he reminds his people of their historically deaf ears and God's salvation of Gentiles outside Israel that they become enraged and seek to kill him.

This is what makes Luke's account of the beatitudes so jarring. Those who are called blessed are those who are experiencing the absolute worst of life (poverty, hunger, pain and rejection). Those upon whom the Lord pronounces woe are all the people who you would think "must be doing something right." I think caution is needed here to not take the words of Jesus too far, trying to tie what he's saying to modern ideas or movements about "wealth inequality." Those may be valuable discussions to have, but I think they miss Jesus' real message—and the point of Luke's emphasis on the lowly and outcast: How we see people and how God sees people are not always the same thing. It is not that wealth, status and comfort are bad things, but that they are not ultimate things, nor should we view material wealth as an indicator of spiritual blessing. Unfortunately, by default this is kind of what we do. The prosperity gospel did not teach us this; the prosperity gospel plays upon a falsehood we already believe in our fallen nature—that those who are wealthy, influential and "put together" are so because they are nearer to God than the rest of us. Luke's gospel routinely turns that message on its head.

Let's look closer at these pronouncements of blessings and woes. It would be a foolish thing to read into these statements that poverty in and of itself, hunger in and of itself, etc. are the ultimate aims of those who belong to Christ. A person is not necessarily holier or closer to God just because they are poor, hungry, rejected, etc. So, how then do we make sense of this passage? Two statements occur in the beatitudes section that answer this question. First, verse 20 points out that Jesus is speaking here to his disciples. Second, in the final beatitude (verse 22), Jesus rounds out this section with the qualifying phrase "on account of the Son of Man!" Those who are here said to be blessed are not merely those who are poor, hungry, sad and rejected, but those who are poor, hungry, sad and rejected because they have considered the cost and are living this life for Jesus and his kingdom, rather than any earthly one. Likewise, those in this life who receive this pronouncement of woe are not those who experience wealth, satisfaction, laughter and respect in and of themselves, but those who are experiencing these earthly and temporary pleasures now at the expense of any future kingdom blessings because they do not belong to Christ.

This clarification is important because it allows us to learn what Luke intends us to do without drawing unintended conclusions—taking vows of poverty, starving ourselves, weeping uncontrollably. To do so would be to consider these things as entry requirements for the kingdom, rather than blessings pronounced on those who have already entered (Grudem, 1962). Nor should we assume that the rejection we face here and now is rooted in our holy pursuit of the

Lord and not innumerable other reasons (being brash, offensive, curt, etc.). To do so would be to carve out a habitat for our sinful behavior.

Luke 6:27-36

Jesus continues teaching his disciples—moving from what they think about kingdom values to how they should live them out practically in a relational ethic. Once again, we see how we may naturally think about things being turned on their heads. Rather than seeking to repay evil for evil, the believer who is mocked, rejected and reviled should love, do good to, bless and pray for those who are their enemies—those who hate them, curse them and abuse them. Furthermore, in how we interact with our enemies, our love for them should compel us to overlook insults, exercise generosity to a fault, and accept some mistreatment and countless other ways we may be taken advantage of.

The instructive verses end with what is often called the “Golden Rule:” as you wish others would do to you, do so to them (verse 31, ESV). This is a really helpful standard to follow as we all seek to live like the transformed people our belief in God is making us. How should we treat others—even our enemies? We should treat them the way we wish they would treat us. This verse provides a closing summation of how it is that believers are to act towards all people—both friends and enemies. Not only that, it serves as a helpful bridge into the applicative verses of this section, where Jesus continues next.

Jesus points out that the way things work in the world, among sinners, is as we’d all expect—it’s a social economy based on reciprocity. It makes sense to treat people well when they treat you well, to lend to people who you expect to receive from, and to love those who love you. The kingdom of God is different. It’s not *quid pro quo*; it’s supernatural and of great benefit to us to live out this radical mandate, given to us from the Lord. He calls us to love our enemies, to lend expecting nothing, and to do good so that our reward will be great. When we do this, we mirror the mercy and generosity of our heavenly father who is kind and merciful to the ungrateful and the evil.

A few points to close out this section:

- First: Love is an idea that has been shaped and reshaped by modern movements. Our music, literature and, yes, Hallmark Movies have given us an idea of love that is different from what Jesus is talking about. To our culture, love is an emotive, roller coaster marinade we soak in that both controls us and dictates how we treat people. Jesus is not calling us to simply embrace the way we feel about people in this sense. In fact, he’s seemingly calling on us to put those feelings aside and love people actively—even if they mistreat us. As John Mayer and DC Talk would both argue, “Love is a verb.”
- Second: This is only possible for kingdom-minded people who recognize God’s goodness and his sovereignty over all creation. We cannot live at peace while being mistreated, maligned, insulted and mocked unless we are at peace in our Father’s hands. If we lack this heavenly mindset, we will constantly seek revenge or suffer joylessly.
- Third: It is possible to take this teaching of Jesus too far. These are pithy statements that lack much explanatory context. For example, being struck on the cheek is likely meant to be understood as an insulting gesture, not an overtly violent one (Sproul, 118). Jesus didn’t say, “If someone stabs you in the left kidney, turn to him the right one, too.” In other words, I think it is naive to think the same Jesus who instructed his disciples to buy a sword but not to live by it (Luke 22:36, Matthew 26:52) is here instructing us to be doormats. The qualifying question that motivates us should always be, “How has Jesus

called me to love this person?” Likewise, we live in a world that is dominated by different, overlapping financial sectors. Lending money is not always a sinful way to make a living, though we would all agree that predatory lending demonstrates a lack of love and care for our neighbor. As always, we must fight the urge to pluck verses out of both their immediate context and the broader, biblical context to build theologies.

- Lastly, as to the reward. Throughout Scripture, we are told that the way we live is earning for us an inheritance, a reward that will be ours in heaven. And simultaneously, Scripture teaches that our salvation is a free gift of God’s love, grace and mercy. There is nothing at all in our salvation that we earn. So, when Jesus tells his disciples that living this way will mean their reward is great, he means it. Loving our enemies is pleasing to the Lord, and he sees and rewards that in eternity. But we stray from the truth when we think this is what makes us sons of the Most High; it isn’t. Our faith in Jesus, being born again into the kingdom of God is what makes us his sons.

Luke 6:37-45

Of the verses in the Bible that are known and talked about among non-Christians, Luke 6:37 may take the cake: “Judge not, and you will not be judged.” Make any criticism of our libertine, sexually saturated culture from a biblical standpoint and you will earn the ire of those who are just waiting to call you judgmental and throw this verse at you. The way our culture understands these verses (including the subsequent instructions about forgiveness and generosity), is that Jesus is teaching some kind of karmic this for that. Simply put, if you don’t judge people you need not worry about God judging you. Jesus is actually pretty cool—way cooler than his followers who concern themselves with things like morality, holiness, obedience and the like. Their conclusion then is to permissively allow anything at all (so long as someone isn’t being actively harmed), and we’ll all end up in the same place, whatever that place is. Obviously, this is wrong and not at all what Jesus is talking about.

Before we get into exactly what Jesus is trying to say, I think it’s important to establish the context a bit. One thing that is obvious to the reader of the New Testament (perhaps especially in Matthew) is that Jesus has strong opinions about hypocrisy—especially the hypocrisy present in the Pharisees who were supposed to be leading God’s people. I think this is who he has in mind as he’s teaching his disciples a better way to love and lead people. In telling them to judge not, he’s telling them to avoid a mindset and spirit of judgmentalism that was very present in the pharisaical elites of their day—whom he called blind guides in Matthew 23. In telling them to not condemn, to forgive, he’s telling his disciples to be gracious, merciful and forgiving. In short, when we love others the way Jesus does—in a forgiving, gracious, merciful and generous way—we will find that this radical infusion of God’s character into our social network and our ministries is (generally speaking) attractive and contagious.

The scope of what Jesus is teaching is narrowed in the following verses. He gives us two somewhat humorous pictures (depending on what you’re willing to laugh at). First, he speaks of a blind man leading a blind man—which ends badly, and, second, he talks about a man trying to remove a tiny speck from his brother’s eye even though his eye has a beam of wood sticking out of it. Through the first picture, Jesus is telling his disciples that their disciples are going to be like them (Liefeld, 895). If they are critical and hostile and bitter, their students will be as well. They need to be mindful of this as they love and lead others, lest their blindness mislead their own followers. In the second image, we see, perhaps, legalistic criticism of someone’s minor faults while serious problems exist in their own lives—hypocrisy writ large.

Putting it all together, we have a dear moment when Jesus is impressing upon his closest followers a clear directive: As you love others, avoid unnecessary criticism and condemnation—rather be gracious, merciful and generous. He’s not telling them to ignore sin, nor is he telling them to avoid correction. I think this is more a change in perspective and tone than it is a change in substance. And while this is impossible for the legalist who’s trying to establish his little religious kingdom, it makes perfect sense to the life that has been radically changed by Jesus Christ. The gospel changes our hearts in such a way that we stop seeing other people’s speck-laden eyes the way a judge does, and instead sees them the way our savior would have us to: “Hey, I’ve had specks in my eyes too before. In fact, I still get specks from time to time and, yes, the occasional log. Let me show you how Jesus has helped me to clean them out.”

You want to know how I know Jesus wants us to be judgmental (in the sense that the word means discerning and evaluative) about good and evil? Because that’s exactly what he calls us to do in the very next verses. Speaking from exactly zero horticultural experience, it does seem to make sense that orange trees grow only oranges, fig trees grow figs, and persimmon trees grow persimmons. In simplistic terms of good and evil, Jesus here says that, just as trees are known by their fruits, we can see a person’s heart in the way that they bear fruit. The gospel should so radically make us alive, that life springs forth from us rather than death. This instruction is intended for both caution and for introspection. This teaching cautions us to discern who is a teacher worthy of following or listening to by the fruit that they bear, and it should cause us to be introspective—evaluating whether or not God has truly made a change in our lives. What springs forth from our hearts in the way that we act, think, live and speak? If the answer is death, then what basis have we to think that we are indeed alive?

Luke 6:46-49

Knowing a tree by its fruit is more closely focused and more personally applied in these next verses. Jesus tells his disciples that it is not pretense that communicates their authentic relationship with him, but rather obedience. The doubling of the address, “Lord, Lord” is a Hebrew way of communicating intimacy in the relationship (Sproul, 129). But as it is true in our relationships with other people, so it is true here—gestures of intimacy are not necessarily a way to determine whether or not a person truly loves you. Here there can be no missing the point for the disciples: Jesus is not talking only about the Pharisees in his sermon; he’s talking about them too. Merely listening to Jesus is not enough. Their love is proved through their obedience.

To drive this point home in their minds, the Lord gives them an illustration—the first-ever Goofus and Gallant comic. There are two men building houses. One of them takes time, effort and expense to carefully lay a foundation underneath his house, while the other does not. In their lives, both of these men experience the trouble of storms, and their houses at that moment prove their reliability based on whether or not a foundation has been laid. The man who takes the time to lay the foundation sees that his house survives the storm, while the other man’s home is ruined.

Obedience requires intentionality. Jesus tells them that the man who lays a foundation is the man who hears his words and does them. When this man calls to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” it is authentic. There is no reason for him to fear the storm. The other man also hears the instructions of the Lord. He knows the right answers. Perhaps he’s been to Sunday School and on several mission trips. He too calls to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” but this is merely a hollow gesture, because how he has lived his life has demonstrated he does not know the Lord. The sermon ends with this

challenge echoing in the minds of the disciples. Will they be those who merely hear the words of the Lord, or in authentic faith will they follow in obedience?

The Main Point

The authenticity of the people of God is revealed through how they view the world with an eternal mindset, love and lead people counterculturally, and faithfully obey the words of the Lord.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Luke 1:46-56 - The Magnificat
- Luke 4:16-30 - Jesus is rejected at Nazareth
- Matthew 5-7 - The Sermon on the Mount
- Luke 8:43-48, Matthew 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34 - The woman with the issue of blood

Week 10

Luke 7:1-50 – The Works of Jesus Testify to His Identity

By John Roberson

Introduction

Function reveals identity. We see it every day. If you go to a classroom, sit in a seat, listen to a lecture, do homework, study, and take a test, you must be a student. The teacher is identified as the one who stands at the front of the room and teaches. Understanding everyone's identity also helps understand what role everyone should play, and how they should respond to each other. The students come to the teacher for knowledge, and they respond by listening in order to receive that knowledge.

When I was in high school, for whatever reason one day, we were especially rowdy in the lunchroom. People were yelling, throwing food, sitting on the tabletops, running around, making noise—we were completely out of control. The dean of students at the time came in on a bullhorn and told us to calm down and behave. We all saw him and knew what he was trying to do, but because he was not someone our student body respected, he had a hard time getting any control of the situation. In fact, it made many people get that much rowdier, because they did not fear his consequences, nor did he have any good relationships with students where we would have wanted to obey out of love and appreciation for him. He nervously laughed and sulked back out of the lunchroom when all his efforts failed. A few minutes later, our head football coach walked in calmly and didn't yell or get angry, he just curled his tongue and whistled. It pierced through all our noise and echoed against the walls. Immediately, the whole lunchroom fell silent. Everyone stopped and looked to the door. We all knew who whistled; we recognized that distinct sound and the person requiring our attention. Coach Yancey had been the football coach for decades. He was well-liked and respected. He didn't put up with any shenanigans. We respected him because we feared him and the consequences he set, but also because he was fair. If you got in trouble, you were certainly nervous. He'd listen to your side of the story, but he was always in control; everyone knew it. He was decisive, and when he gave you your marching orders, you marched. But we loved him because he loved us. He knew our names, things about us, and cared about how we were doing. We knew what he did reflected his heart, and we could trust even the consequences he gave or the grueling practices he put us through. That made him a good coach. His experience and knowledge, plus the attention he gave to the players, led us to believe in him. All these things Coach Yancey did and how he did them pointed to who he was. And who he was determined our view of him and how we responded to him.

In Luke 7, we see 4 stories that detail part of Jesus's earthly ministry. All of them center around the question of Jesus's identity. Jesus is beginning to reveal himself to the world, and he is gaining the attention of many. He reveals himself through his actions and teachings, which points to his identity. Some receive it and believe, while some are skeptics.

Read Luke 7:1-50 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?

3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. How do you approach Jesus when you come to him with requests? Is it easy to come before him in a posture of undeserved humility, or are you tempted to list all the reasons why he should grant your request?
2. John the Baptist was greater than any other prophet, yet we are greater than John the Baptist because we live on this side of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. How should that affect and inform how we live?
3. If you are a believer, how have your expectations of Jesus changed throughout your relationship with him as you increase in knowledge and understanding of who he is? To the nonbeliever, as you are learning about Jesus, what has surprised you or differed from what you expected?
4. Throughout these stories, we have seen many different responses and attitudes to the person of Jesus. After reading Luke 7, what has convicted you about how you respond in your daily life to who Jesus is?

Commentary

Luke 7:1-10

After speaking to and healing many amongst the large crowd, Jesus heads into Capernaum. As we see throughout the gospel accounts, and more specifically in Luke 4, Capernaum is a familiar place to Jesus, even though it is not the city where he grew up. Capernaum is where Jesus based much of his ministry: he taught in the synagogues, disciplined the twelve (as several were from Capernaum), and performed miracles.³³ Luke 7 opens with his only report of a Capernaum miracle in his gospel. We are told that a centurion's servant is sick and on his deathbed. The centurion does not want to lose this servant, as he is "highly valued by him" (7:2). A centurion is a Roman officer that is in charge of a unit of 100 men,³⁴ and, being a Roman, I would point out here that this means the centurion is a Gentile (helpful to keep in mind as you read through this story). The centurion at some point had caught wind of Jesus, specifically word of his healing power, because he sends to Jesus "elders of the Jews" on his behalf (7:3). It is not widely agreed upon who these elders of the Jews are or their specific role, but we can consider them as local Jewish officials, and it is most likely they functioned as local judges.³⁵ Being Jewish officials, their position allowed them to see and therefore speak to the centurion's friendliness to the Jewish nation (7:4). The elders point out how the centurion loves the Jewish people and even helped build the synagogue in Capernaum (7:5). Jesus obliges, and follows them to the centurion's house. Along the way, he was met with another envoy from the

³³ GotQuestions.org. "What is the significance of Capernaum in the Bible?" accessed July 29, 2026.

³⁴ Wayne Grudem and Thomas R. Schreiner, "Notes on Luke," in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1964.

³⁵ Grudem and Schreiner, "Notes on Luke," 1964.

centurion, with a surprising message: you don't need to come any further, I am unworthy to have you step foot in my house, I couldn't even approach you myself—that is why I sent others to speak to you (7:6-7). The centurion then notes Jesus's spiritual authority, and his power, explaining that when he gives commands to those under his authority, they are obeyed, noting all Jesus needs to do is “say the word, and let my servant be healed” (7:7-8). Despite his unworthiness, the centurion believes in Jesus, believes in his command over creation and disease, the power of his word, and in his willingness to save. Jesus's response is amazement. Jesus turns to those following him, and makes an example out of the centurion: “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (7:9). The story concludes with a description that confirms the miracle (as do all healing miracles in Scripture).³⁶ When the messengers returned to the centurion's house, they found that Jesus's word had come to pass: the servant had been healed (7:10). The centurion's faith was rewarded.

This same story is recorded in Matthew 8:5-13. I encourage you to go read that right now. Comparing the two accounts of this story helps glean different (but not opposing) perspectives on what this story shows us, directing our gaze to focus on different aspects. Luke's account leaves out two things of note at the end of the story: 1) part of the address from Jesus to his followers detailing the consequences of lack of faith in Israel and 2) Jesus's response to the centurion after addressing his followers (“Go; let it be done for you as you have believed” (Matthew 5:13)). With these omissions in the Luke account, our focus rests more so on the faith of the centurion. Jesus reveals that faith, and even *great* faith, regarded as commendable, can be found outside of Israel. Jesus came to save the *world*, not just the Jews (John 3:17), and this message is not something new to the Jews listening to Jesus. The Hebrew scriptures constantly point to the purpose and mission of the coming Messiah, including who will be on the receiving end. Indeed, some 700 years before Jesus marvels at this gentile's faith, the prophet Isaiah, pointing to Christ through the example of David, said, “Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you” (Isaiah 55:5a). The centurion is part of a nation (Roman Empire) that did not know the Lord as Israel had, yet will be a part of the one, everlasting kingdom, because of his faith. The object of his faith is Jesus. Let's contrast the two different approaches to Jesus in this story that Luke describes: the centurion's request for healing approaches Jesus with humility and reverence, while the Jewish elders bring the request baked with a merit-based, “he deserves this” posture. Jesus obliges the elder's request and follows them, but makes no mention of their “faith.” The centurion's posture reveals he understands *who is worthy* and proves he believes in him who is worthy when he says, with his servant's life on the line, “but say the word.” In the gospel account of John, Jesus is speaking of himself being the good shepherd. One part stands out to me that correlates a lot with this story: “I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me... And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:14-16). There's this recognition on the part of the centurion of who Jesus is. The centurion has singled out the one shepherd, the one who is able, and believes in the power of his voice. Jesus rewards his faith with healing, and commends his faith as worthy, even though he is someone not of this fold (meaning he is not of Israel). However, because of his faith, he is someone who belongs to the flock of Jesus.

³⁶ Grudem and Schreiner, “Notes on Luke,” 1965.

Luke 7:11-17

Jesus heads to Nain, a small village just southeast of Jesus's hometown of Nazareth.³⁷ Accompanying him were his disciples and as was the norm for Jesus during his ministry, a large crowd in tow (7:11). The group arrives at the city in the middle of a large funeral procession exiting the city gate heading to the burial grounds (7:12). An only son has died, and the mother is a widow. Seeing as the funeral crowd is "considerable" that accompanies the widow, even though it is a small town, this family was probably well respected and liked. The death of her only son leaves her in a rather vulnerable position being a widow, as she now has no male in her family to help provide for or protect her. The mother feels anguish over the loss of her son, coupled with the fear of this new, lonely reality. Jesus sees the mother weeping, the pain and agony, and feels compassion. He understands her plight, sees her emotion, and because he is a loving God, he feels for her. The compassion he feels compels him to act. He approaches the woman and tells her not to weep (7:13). The woman has every reason to weep, but again the Lord demonstrates his authority both by giving this strange instruction, and by what he does next. Jesus approaches the bier, a wooden frame constructed in the fashion of a stretcher used to carry out a body to the burial site,³⁸ and touches it. This makes Jesus, a Jew, unclean according to the Law (Numbers 19:11, 16),³⁹ and those carrying the bier stop. Jesus speaks to the corpse and says, "young man, I say to you, arise" (7:13). Here, Jesus demonstrates his authority and power over both the Law and death itself. The dead man sits up, speaks, and Jesus happily reunites him to his mother, restoring what just moments ago, had been lost (7:15). Again, Jesus's voice brings life to the lifeless. Quickly, fear grips the crowd after watching this dead man rise and talk. Fear of *did that just happen?* And *who is this man that did this?* And *what does this mean?* Amid all the adrenaline, astonished excitement, and wonder, the crowd praised God, exclaiming that surely he has visited his people by raising up a prophet among them (7:16)! The crowd is certainly right in identifying the hand of the Lord orchestrating these events in Nain, and that Jesus is a great prophet indeed. They even have a right response in glorifying God with fearful hearts, however, their assessment is incomplete. Luke reports that the crowd identifies Jesus as merely a prophet sent from God, but fails to recognize that this man is the Son of God, the Christ. The people in this crowd can be considered Jewish,⁴⁰ and they likely recall stories of Elijah (1 Kings 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Kings 4:32-37), prophets who the Lord works through to raise people from the dead. These two stories specifically note that Elijah and Elisha prayed to God for their life, but Jesus directly commanded the dead to raise to life. Throughout Luke's gospel account, he frequently notes that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 1:32,35, 3:22,28, 4:3,9 to name a few) as this was an important characteristic of Jesus he featured in his writings, and he makes it clear that this is not recognized amongst the crowd at large. In verse 17, he even specifies that "this report" (that a great prophet from God has risen among us) is what spread to the surrounding country, specifically throughout the whole of Judea, which just so happens to be the geographical focal point for the Jewish people. The person this report paints Jesus to be

³⁷ Grudem and Schreiner, "Notes on Luke," 1965.

³⁸ "Bier," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, accessed August 1, 2026.

³⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, "Luke," in *Matthew–Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. VIII, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 828.

⁴⁰ GotQuestions.org, "What is the significance of Nain in the Bible?" accessed August 1, 2026, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Nain-in-the-Bible.html>.

differs from what he claims in his teachings and ministry. This has life and death ramifications for Jesus as we see in the remainder of the story of the gospel accounts. As word spreads throughout the region of this Jesus and what he does, every individual is faced with the question: who is this man? This man that has power over death, comforts the widow, commands life, displays ultimate authority (even over Hebrew law), shows compassion for the grieving—is he a prophet, or something more?

Luke 7:18-35

John the Baptist's disciples have been following Jesus, as Luke tells us that they are reporting "all these things" that Jesus had done (7:18). From Matthew 11:2, we know that John is receiving these reports from his disciples while he is in prison. John listens to the description of this man healing and teaching, and he has questions. What he heard was not quite what he was expecting. Before John was thrown in prison, he preached of a man bringing a "wrath to come" (Luke 3:7), axes being laid to trees (Luke 3:9), a man wielding a winnowing fork and an unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17). Based on what his disciples are saying, John isn't hearing about the fiery judgment he proclaimed Jesus would be bringing. So, he inquires. He asks for two of his disciples to come to him, then sent them to Jesus (7:19). The question John sends with them is "are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" "The one who is to come" refers to the Messiah, the king of Israel.⁴¹ John is asking a direct question: are you the Christ or not? They get to Jesus, identify themselves sent from John the Baptist, and ask him as they were instructed (7:20). In a seemingly strange interruption to the story, Luke notes that during this time, Jesus has been healing people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and restoring sight to the blind (7:21). In verse 22, Jesus gives his answer. And as so often he does, it is not a direct answer. He does not say, "yes I am the one to come," he tells them to simply go report back to John what you have seen and heard today: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (7:22). Jesus basically quotes prophecies from Isaiah to share with John (Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, 61:1). We learn in Luke 4:18-19 of Jesus preaching from the scroll of Isaiah, sharing this prophecy that the anointed one is he who does these things. In this section in Luke 4, Jesus even follows this reading of the Isaiah prophecy with the declaration, "today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The fulfillment has occurred because Jesus, the one who is to come, *has come*, and so his ministry commences. Jesus is giving clear indication that what he has done is evidence enough for others to know who he is, if only they will believe, for Jesus says, "blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (7:23). Jesus gives this direct exhortation back to John, that God's blessing comes to those who do not turn from or reject the Messiah, but instead have faith in him regardless of what their situation or expectations may lead them to think.

John's disciples leave, and Jesus turns his attention to the crowds, and with his mind on his friend, begins to speak to the crowd concerning John the Baptist. Jesus addresses the crowd to clear confusion about John's role (Luke 3:15). He asks them three questions, each beginning with the same refrain: "who did you go out into the wilderness to see?" to challenge them on who John the Baptist is to them. The first question asks if they went to see "a reed shaken by the wind?" (7:24), meaning "did you go out into the wilderness to see someone who panders and

⁴¹ Grudem and Schreiner, "Notes on Luke," 1965.

shifts with public opinion, a spineless man with no conviction?”⁴² The second: “A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts” (7:25). In other words, “Is John someone who only resides with the elite royalty, someone who is out of touch, who maintains a lifestyle excluding those less than him?” Both of these questions elicit an obvious “no” to anyone who has even scarcely observed John the Baptist, or heard even a little about him. He warned people of coming judgment, preached unashamedly, doing it openly and for anyone to come and hear, dressed simply in camel’s hair and a leather belt (Mark 1:6). The third question can be answered with a “yes.” Jesus asks if they came out to see a prophet. He affirms that John is a prophet, but he is even “more than a prophet” (7:26). John “had a unique and unrepeatable role in the history of salvation”⁴³ Jesus explains, citing the prophecy made in Malachi 3:1, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you” (7:27). Jesus then expounds on John the Baptist’s greatness, stating that no man is greater than John, “yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he” (7:28). It is important to understand what Jesus is saying here. Thomas Schreiner explains this well:

We must recognize that Jesus speaks of function, not essence. John is not essentially greater than Isaiah or Jeremiah or any other person, but he is the greatest in terms of function because he has had the privilege of introducing the Christ to Israel (cf. 16:16). On the other hand, those who live on the other side of the coming of the Christ, even one with the most insignificant ministry, is greater than John. Again, this greatness should be explained in terms of function. Citizens of the kingdom live on the other side of the cross and resurrection, and thus they can point others to the Christ with more clarity than the Baptist could. Furthermore, John could baptize only with water (3:16), but every believer can promise the gift of the Spirit to those who repent and believe (Acts 2:38; 5:32; 15:8).⁴⁴

The crowd seems to understand what Jesus is saying here, yet we have two different responses. Luke splits it into two camps: those who were baptized by John and those who rejected his baptism. The first camp is comprised of the people at large, the common people. This includes tax collectors (7:29). These people are the people noted in Luke 3:10-14, the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers all came and asked John the Baptist for instruction on how to live according to their baptism. These are the people that acknowledged their brokenness and repented of their ways, submitting to baptism to be raised to new life in the savior of the world. By contrast, the other camp consists of the Pharisees and lawyers, who, by choosing not to be baptized by John the Baptist, “rejected the purpose of God for themselves” (7:30). God desires that all people take on the righteousness of Christ, rejecting any claims of righteousness from themselves (Philippians 3:9), so that, as a new creation in Christ Jesus, they would be doers of good works (Ephesians 2:10). The religious leaders, however, who should be leading the response of acceptance and celebration at the coming of Jesus, let their arrogance and pride get in the way, leading them to reject the very person their scriptures point to.

⁴² Schreiner, “Luke,” 832.

⁴³ Schreiner, “Luke,” 832.

⁴⁴ Schreiner, “Luke,” 832.

Jesus wraps up the address to the crowd by creating a comparison for this generation (7:31). This generation refers to the religious leaders that have rejected him.⁴⁵ Jesus compares them to children who refuse to play with others. There are children in a marketplace playing the flute in a happy tune to encourage others to dance, but there is a group of children that do not dance. So, aiming to include them, they switch their tone and sing a sad song, but again the group of children remain indifferent and unchanged (7:32). Jesus directly mentions John the Baptist, comparing him to the somber tone of the dirge, noting that he has abstained from indulgence and lead a committed lifestyle, yet the leaders have condemned him as demon possessed (7:33). Then Jesus refers to himself, the Son of Man, coming in the joyful tone as the flute, “eating and drinking,” yet he is ridiculed as a “glutton and drunkard,” enjoying the company of tax collectors and sinners, as if he himself is consumed with the very debauchery that characterizes such people (7:34). Jesus’s “point was that neither John’s asceticism and stern message of the need for repentance nor Jesus’s message of healing and hope (His welcoming of sinners) was satisfactory to the self-appointed arbiters of “taste” and “wisdom.”⁴⁶ Jesus ends this rebuke with “yet wisdom is justified by all her children” (7:35). Offspring and children point to the character of the parent. The deeds wisdom produces vindicate itself, as actions point to and explain the heart. Those who are truly wisdom’s children clearly display the wisdom they come from. Those who truly understand what they have seen and heard visibly respond with repentance and walk in new life.

Luke 7:36-50

A Pharisee asks to eat with Jesus, and they meet at the Pharisee’s house. This is not an uncommon request, nor is it unlikely to find Jesus as a guest in a Pharisee’s house, however it is often the intent of these skeptical hosts to know Jesus more in order to find fault with him (11:37, 14:1). To set the scene, this is a formal dinner, where the ones eating are “reclining at table” (7:36). When reclining at table, the people’s heads are near the table, and their feet extend behind them away from the table.⁴⁷ The meal also could have been in a courtyard or some area of the house that would make it more accessible to others, as houses in this time and in this area are not so closed off from the outside as in modern times.⁴⁸ A woman carrying a flask of ointment approaches once she learns that Jesus was present at the Pharisee’s house (7:37). She is identified as a sinner, with the indication that it is common knowledge of such. We are not sure what particular sin she is known by, but it is likely sexual.⁴⁹ The woman approaches Jesus at his feet, and begins to weep in his presence. She takes her tears, wets his feet, then wipes them with her hair, kissing them. Finally, she takes the ointment (or perfume) and anoints his feet (7:38). What an astonishing scene. There are several implications to her actions in those days and in that culture, yet even us reading today need no pointers to realize how confounding this is. The fact

⁴⁵ Kevin D. Zuber, “Luke,” in *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute, 2014), 1564.

⁴⁶ Zuber, “Luke,” 1564-1565.

⁴⁷ Schreiner, “Luke,” 836.

⁴⁸ Schreiner, “Luke,” 836.

⁴⁹ Schreiner, “Luke,” 836.

that she brings a flask of ointment shows us there is some degree of a plan on her part. As she enters the presence of Jesus, she is overcome with a great deal of emotion. Whether she cried over Jesus's feet and tears fell, or she used her hands to transfer tears from her face to Jesus's feet, this isn't a quiet sniffle. One can imagine she is deeply remorseful over what she has done, and at the same time truly joyful to be in the presence of the merciful Jesus. This sorrow and joy leads her to unashamedly wash Jesus's feet with her tears and hair, lavish kisses upon them, and anoint them with perfume.

The attention turns back to Jesus's interactions with the Pharisee, who we learn in verse 40, is named Simon. Simon mutters to himself that Jesus would not allow such an act if he was a prophet and therefore knew what a sinner she was (7:39). In Jewish culture, being touched by a sinner like this woman would make oneself unclean or defiled.⁵⁰ Therefore, since Jesus did not stop or avoid this woman, Simon sees Jesus to be a farce. Knowing this, and demonstrating that he indeed is a prophet, Jesus addresses the Pharisee with a parable (7:40): there are two people in debt, one with a small debt, and one with a very large debt (7:41). Both of them have their debt forgiven. Jesus asks Simon which of the two debtors would love the moneylender more (7:42)? He correctly answers "the one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt" (7:43). Jesus then examines Simon, contrasting him to the woman. He points out that Simon did not provide anything to wash his feet, did not greet him with a kiss, nor provided oil to anoint his head. All three of these things are customary in Jewish hospitality in this time⁵¹ and Simon refused to do any, proving his skepticism and the walls he built in his own heart towards Jesus. The woman, on the other hand, unashamedly lavished Jesus in acts of love and gratitude (7:44-46). Then, Jesus even acknowledges what Simon could not get past in his own head: the woman is a great sinner. Even though she has many sins, she is forgiven, Jesus states. She displays great love for the one who cancelled her debts. A simple reading of verse 47 may make it seem like Jesus is saying that she is forgiven because she loves much. However, that would not fit the parable, nor does it fit the account of her actions towards Jesus that night. What does fit is that the woman already knows her sins are forgiven, and her direct response is to show her love for the one who forgives. Jesus then notes that "he who is forgiven little, loves little" (7:47). Thomas Schreiner points out that we should not take this wording literally to mean that by contrast, Simon is forgiven. In fact, Simon shows no love, because he has no sense of a need for forgiveness, and therefore receives none. "He is a critic of Jesus, not a recipient of his grace."⁵² Jesus turns to her and tells her her sins are forgiven (7:48). The onlookers observing all this mutter amongst themselves, "who is this, who even forgives sins?" (7:49). Again, instead of opening their minds to try to discern what they see and hear, skepticism prevents people from seeing and believing who Jesus has demonstrated himself to be. On the contrary, the woman's faith has saved her and made her well. Jesus sends her on her way in peace, because of her belief in who Jesus is (7:50), the one who forgives sins.

⁵⁰ Schreiner, "Luke," 836.

⁵¹ Zuber, "Luke," 1565.

⁵² Thomas R. Schreiner, "Luke," in *ESV Expository Commentary. Vol. 8, Matthew-Luke* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 837.

The Main Point

Jesus is the one who is able: able to heal, to give new life, to command creation, to show compassion, to comfort us in our sorrow, to wield ultimate authority, to give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf, to raise up the dead, to cleanse the unclean, to bring good news to the poor, to restore hope to the hopeless, to forgive sins, and to offer salvation. These actions, displayed by Jesus in his earthly ministry, testify to who he is. He is Jesus, the Only Son of God, the Christ, who is worthy of it all—worthy of our faith and our lives.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Matthew 8:5-13 – Matthew's account of the faith of the Centurion
- Galatians 3:7-9, 23-29 – Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham, comes to the Gentiles
- Romans 9 – God's election both within and outside of Israel; Israel's unbelief and Gentile's righteousness by faith
- Romans 3:21-31 – Justified by faith, apart from works of the law
- 1 Kings 17:17-24 – Elijah raising a child from the dead
- 2 Kings 4:32-37 – Elisha raising a child from the dead
- Isaiah 29:18, 35:5, 61:1 – Prophecy about the things that “the one who is to come” will do when he comes

Week 11

Luke 8:1-21 – The Importance of Responding to Jesus

By Harvey Edwards, III

Introduction

Luke's account of the actual *beginning* of our Lord's earthly ministry is found four chapters before today's scripture, in 4:14-15, immediately after Jesus emerges from his temptation in the wilderness: "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all." This certainly sounds like a favorable reception for the long-awaited Messiah! When he then returned to his home town of Nazareth and read the well-known prophecy of Isaiah announcing "the year of the Lord's favor," even identifying himself as that Messiah of whom Isaiah spoke, we might have expected the joyful and glorifying response to continue.

But Jesus himself did not expect that. He knew that unless he performed miracles for his home-town audience as he had done in Capernaum, they were not ready to truly believe in him. He confronted them with that perception by pointedly citing the previous rejection by Israel of the two prophets Elijah and Elisha centuries before. In each of their cases, upon their rejection by his people, the Lord sent them in times of distress to give miraculous aid *not to suffering Israelites*, but to *foreigners*: A starving widow in Sidon and a leprous military commander from Syria.

The warning to avoid doing the same was thus clearly issued. The opportunity to hear the good news and respond differently from their ancestors was immediately before them. The reaction of the people? Luke 4:28-30, "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away."

Over the next three and one-half chapters, Luke tells of Jesus spreading the good news of the kingdom throughout the towns and villages of Galilee, while also casting out demons, healing the multitudes, and even raising the dead. The evidence for the authenticity of his claim to be Messiah was indisputable, and many did believe. But many who witnessed the same did not, and were hardened. Now, in chapter 8, Jesus specifically addresses the importance of not just hearing, but also responding to the good news he is bringing.

Read Luke 8:1-21 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. The Israelites reportedly were yearning for the coming of the Messiah. What do you think led so many to resist his message? Why do people today still resist?
 2. In describing the seed that fell on the rocky soil and did not take root, Jesus says that the hearers so exemplified receive the word with joy, but in times of testing “fall away.” In contrast, what assurances does Scripture provide that true believers cannot fall away?
 3. Describe someone you know (without naming that person) who is like the seed that fell among the thorns and was choked out as it tried to grow.
 4. Are there people in your life whom you suspect are beyond the reach of God? How does Luke 8:16-18 speak to our responsibility with regard to these people?
-

Commentary

Luke 8:1-3

This chapter begins with Luke describing how Jesus preached throughout the villages of Galilee accompanied not only by the twelve disciples but also by a number of women. It would have been unusual in those days for an itinerant rabbi to allow women to travel in his party of disciples, and Luke apparently wanted to make specific note of it, for he provided such details as to make it impossible to overlook. There was Mary Magdalene, from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. There was Joanna, who must have been quite bold, being the wife of Chuza, the household manager of none other than the sinister King Herod. He also names “Susanna and many others,” apparently women of some wealth, since they are described as supporting the traveling party of disciples “out of their means.”

By this report, Luke communicates at least two important points: That women were valued by Jesus just as much as men in that patriarchal society, and given a role, respect, and responsibility that was unusual for that time; and that the ministry of Jesus was meant for every segment of society, rich and poor alike. Those with wealth were not disqualified by it, but allowed to perform a valuable service by using their wealth to support the mission.

Luke 8:4-15

In these verses, we first see that Jesus has remained immensely popular as he has gone about spreading the good news of the kingdom. But we also glean from the preceding chapters that not all who are at first delighted with his teaching are becoming true followers and that there has even arisen determined opposition, especially among the religiously powerful. Jesus determines to address this issue of hearing and responding by use of what is usually called “the parable of the sower,” but is perhaps more accurately described as “the parable of the four soils.”

In the agricultural society of Israel, the usual method of planting a crop was well known to the people. The farmer began by walking about his untilled fields along well-trodden paths, wearing a bag of seed over his shoulder and casting the seed far and wide with his hand. The edges of the field were often overgrown with weeds and thorns and the underlying rocky ground was overlaid with varying depths of fertile soil, some of it quite shallow. The tilling differed from modern farming in that only *after* the sowing was completed would the ground be turned with the plow. Jesus describes the four typical outcomes of this agricultural technique: 1) The seed that fell on the hardened path became food for the birds, never germinating at all; 2) the seed that fell on the shallow soil over the rock sprouted, but soon withered due to insufficient moisture; 3) the seed that fell among the thorns also sprouted, but was choked out by the

surrounding thorns; 4) the seed that fell upon the good soil grew to maturity and eventually yielded a hundredfold in seed as it persisted to the production of fruit. To emphasize that there is an important principle to be understood in this parable, Jesus advised that “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

We might suspect that the disciples, who have for months been following Jesus as he has spread the good news of the kingdom, like seed, far and wide, probably have a good idea of the underlying message of this parable. But do they? Keen to discern it accurately, they ask Jesus to unfold it explicitly. He begins by first explaining why he often teaches in parables, and we might find his reason to be startling. According to Jesus, parables are utilized not to make his teaching about the mysteries of the kingdom of God *easy* to understand, but rather *to obscure* those mysteries. He quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10, wherein God commissions Isaiah to go to his rebellious people Israel and say to them, “keep on seeing but do not perceive.” God further instructs Isaiah to make their hearts dull, their ears heavy, and their eyes blind until they have received his discipline for their unbelief—defeat by their enemies and exile from the land he has given them.

So for some, the parables obscure the mysteries of the kingdom, but for others, whom God has sovereignly chosen, the parables illuminate those same kingdom mysteries. Blessedly, the disciples are assured that they are among the latter group. More on that later, but first we will consider how Jesus explained this particular parable to his disciples.

The seed, Jesus says, represents the Word of God, and we take the four soils to be the hearts of the hearers. The seed that lands on the trodden path never even starts to grow. It demonstrates what happens when the Word of God is swept away by the devil before it is even considered by the heart. Jesus doesn’t elaborate as to how the devil gains such unfettered access to one’s heart, but it might prove an interesting topic to consider. Of course no fruit is produced, no belief develops, and there is no salvation.

The seed that falls on the rocky soil represents the Word of God falling on a shallow heart. There is an initial happy response at hearing the good news of the kingdom, but there is no commitment of the heart sufficient to withstand times of testing. These hearers with shallow hearts never truly believe, they fall away, they produce no fruit, and they also are unsaved.

The seed that falls on the third soil, among the thorns, illustrates what happens when there is, once again, a happy response upon first hearing the good news of the kingdom, but no controlling commitment ever develops. The initial contemplation of belief is “choked out” by “the cares and riches and pleasures of life” so that no mature fruit is ever produced, and sadly, there is no salvation for these either.

But the seed that falls upon the good soil thrives. These seeds represent the word of God landing on hearts ready to receive it, hearts that “hold it fast,” that are honest and good, and that patiently, over time, produce much fruit.

Note—the seed (the Word of God) is the same in every situation, but for it to produce fruit in one’s life, the soil (the heart of the one who hears it), must first be well prepared to receive it. And the questions for the hearers of this parable are these: Among what group do I belong? Is the Word of God bearing fruit in my life?

Luke 8:16-18

We might imagine that after hearing Jesus expound on the necessity of the heart being prepared beforehand to receive the Word, the disciples might have had something of a defeatist view towards evangelism. If everything depends upon the heart having been previously prepared

to hear the word, and only the Lord can prepare the heart, what's the point of even trying to preach the Word to those showing signs of hard hearts or even hostility to the good news?

And so, while apparently still in private session with the disciples, Jesus moves on to the parable of the lamp. It's simple. One does not light a lamp and then take actions to conceal it or snuff it out. The light produced by a lamp is meant to illuminate. As Thomas Schreiner says, "the fact that not all will respond is no reason for withholding the message. The disciples have been 'given' special knowledge (8:10) so that they may pass it on to others." Jesus continues, "For there is nothing hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light."

In saying this, Jesus is declaring that according to God's own sovereign timing, the truth about the Lord will eventually be made known to all. We are not in possession of every detail in God's sovereign plan for how and when this will all come about, but he has definitely given us a role. Once we have received this light into our hearts and become filled with his enlightening and emboldening Spirit, we are very clearly commissioned to let that light shine, through the witness of both our words and our actions.

And then Jesus concludes this section with an admonition: "Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away." How are we to take this? On the one hand, by the parable of the soils, Jesus seems to be emphasizing that unless one's heart has been previously prepared to receive the word of God by God's enabling Spirit, it will not be able to receive it. But on the other hand, here in the parable of the lamp and repeatedly elsewhere in Scripture, there are warnings to "take care, then, how you hear," clearly suggesting that human agency has an essential role in our hearing and responding obediently to the Word of God. Commentator R.T. France offers a helpful suggestion: "The mysterious interaction of human responsibility and divine enabling confronts us at many points in the New Testament, and it is easier to recognize that both sides of the paradox are true than to provide a neat, logical explanation." So true! And as we reflect upon the overarching theme of this section of Luke on hearing and responding to the word of God rightly, let us remember that the whole of Scripture proclaims both of these two basic truths: Our sovereign Lord is completely just in all his judgments, including his choosing to save whomever he will; and each and every person has a responsibility to respond obediently when God's word is heard. To hear his word with an open heart and respond in obedient faith produces salvation, growth, and fruit; to hear his Word and reject it only hardens the heart.

Luke 8:19-21

In the concluding three verses of this section, Luke reports that the mother and brothers of Jesus were trying to come to him, "but they could not reach him because of the crowd." When Jesus learned of it, he responded, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it." We have no reason to think that Jesus intended to slight his mother and brothers with these words, for elsewhere Jesus emphasizes the importance of loving and honoring our family members. Rather, in speaking these words, Jesus is providing the coda for the entirety of this section of Luke. We must hear rightly and respond with obedience, for *exactly that response* is the way by which we enter into the only relationship more important than that of the human family—namely, the family of God.

The Main Point

Jesus teaches us to take care how we hear the Word of God. Those who hear, trust, and obey will flourish. They will grow in the Lord and their lives will produce much fruit. Resistance to the good news of the kingdom leads only to hardening of the heart, and in the end, desolation.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Jeremiah 32:40 – This prophetic reference to the New Covenant promises that the Lord “will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.”
- John 10:29 – Jesus reassures his sheep that no one will be able to snatch them out of his hand.
- James 1:22 – We must not just listen to the Word and so deceive ourselves. We must obey.
- Matthew 5:14-16 – Let your light shine!

Week 12

Luke 8:22-56 – Jesus Demonstrates Divine Power

By Aaron Barnes

Introduction

One of the characteristics of God that I am most thankful for is his unchangingness. I am thankful that God is God and I am not. There are times that I wish I could pull the proverbial strings, but I recognize what a gift and relief to others it is that I am not the one in charge. The fact that God does not change is referred to as his immutability. We see this throughout Scripture. For example, we are told in Malachi that God does not change and also in James 1 that with God, there is no variation—not even a shadow of turning because of change. For the Christian, we can take comfort in this as we read of the love that God has for his people throughout the Old Testament—how he provides for and protects them, even while they are in captivity in Babylon. This love and care continues into the New Testament as well, as we see God the Son coming to earth to fulfill all that was necessary to purchase redemption for his wayward creation.

Because God does not change, we can read this week's text with confidence knowing that God is all-powerful over all his creation, and is working in ways that we may not understand to bring about his purposes. So, come what may, we can walk through the hardships of life and trust in his ability to accomplish his will. And we can trust that this will result in his glory and our eternal good.

Read Luke 8:22-56 together.

Study Questions

1. What does this passage say about God, who He is, and what He does? (Father, Son, and Spirit)
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What comfort/promise/challenge can I take away from this passage?
4. How will I respond or live differently because of what I've read?

Passage Specific Questions

1. What are some of the things in life that tempt you to be afraid? How have you typically responded to them?
 2. As a follow up, what are some biblical truths that you can use to remind you of God's goodness and grace in times of despair?
 3. How can your community group work to encourage you in those fearful moments to help refocus your mind's attention and your heart's affection on Jesus?
-

Commentary

Luke 8:22-25

I love the way that this portion of Scripture begins. Luke says that Jesus and his disciples set out to cross the Sea of Galilee by boat, and he says in verse 23 that "as they sailed, [Jesus] fell asleep." The reason I love this is because I am reminded that Jesus was fully God AND he

was fully man. Whether our text this week was the same day as the previous verses or a totally different day, what we see is that even the Son of God needed to rest. As we walked through Hebrews last year, we were reminded of the importance that God became a man.

Hebrews 2:14-18, “¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

In 2 John 2:7, we are told that anyone who denies the humanity of the Son of God is a deceiver—an antichrist. So, the doctrine of the humanity of Christ is very important. And I love that God shows his grace and kindness for us by showing us the Son of God taking naps, eating meals, and doing all the normal things that humans do in their daily lives.

I think it needs to be stated here that these men were professional fishermen—well, many of them anyway. They had crossed the Sea of Galilee many times in the past. They were very familiar with the conditions and what to do when the weather took a turn for the worse. I imagine that these guys had seen storms on the water in the past. However, this time was different. The storm had seemingly become so tempestuous that they feared for their lives. I imagine that they did all the normal checklist things they should’ve done in a storm, but it didn’t seem to help. They resort to waking Jesus up and, as a last ditch effort, they accuse him of not caring that they might die (Matthew 8:25; Mark 4:38; Luke 8:24). In response to their lack of faith, Jesus displays his power over the creation that he brought into existence thousands of years prior. He rebukes the wind and the waves, and then everything was still...absolutely still. It was calm. It was peaceful. Breaking through the silence, we hear Jesus’ response to his disciples’ lack of faith, “Where is your faith?” This next part is pretty interesting as well. Recognizing that Jesus has the power to speak to creation and it obeys him, the fear of the storm that once filled the disciples’ hearts had been replaced by fear of the One that has the power to control the storm. The Reformation Study Bible connects Jesus’ calming the wind and waves with Psalm 107:28-30. The Psalm that the ESV titles *Let the Redeemed of the LORD Say So*, is referring to how God has delivered his people from the storms and they, in turn, praise him for their deliverance, (RSB pg1801). Let us be a people that seeks to cry out to the Lord—not just in our distress, but each and every day of our lives. Let us be a people who are quick to trust him and praise him because—as Christians—we have already been ultimately saved from the storms of sin within our own hearts. Let us be a people that work to actively pursue the Lord as we trust in his unwavering care for his creation.

Luke 8:26-39

Upon reaching the other side, Jesus and his disciples are met by a naked, violent man that has often been referred to as the Madman of Gadara, the Gerasene Demoniac, and probably other names, and this guy is possessed by many demons simultaneously. He has so many that when Jesus asks his name, the man simply responds, “Legion.” But that’s not the first thing that is said between the two. Before the disciples have a chance to get their bearings about them, this man

comes to Jesus and says, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me,” (v 28). The Bible tells us that because of this man’s condition, he lived among the tombs—read this as he had an unholy attraction for the dead—and he couldn’t be restrained by chains. Later in this portion, Luke tells us that once Jesus healed him, he is found “in his right mind.” So, what can be assumed here is that this man probably lived alone, he was violent, naked, and out of his mind. What a terribly lonely, helpless, and hopeless existence. This man was being held captive to workers of evil that belong to the deceiver—Satan. His only source of help and hope would come from the Son of God in the form of a Nazarene, a Jewish carpenter.

So, what happens? The demons meet Jesus as soon as he steps on land. The man cries out, falls onto the ground, and the demons in him ask Jesus not to torment them or throw them into the abyss. From this encounter, we see that even the demons are afraid of Jesus. Instead of the abyss, they ask if they might enter the pigs instead, and Jesus permits them to do so. Once they enter the pigs, what is the first thing they do? They run the pigs straight into the sea and drown them. They do the only thing they truly ever want to do. They want to ruin the good things that God has created. They want only to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10a). The Reformation Study Bible says that the demons carrying the pigs into the sea “reveals the demons’ fixation on destroying their victims,” (RSB pg1801). This stands in stark contrast with what God wants for his creation. Whereas the demons want to destroy and take away life, Jesus refers to himself as the Good Shepherd who comes to bring life abundantly (John 10:10b-11). PRAISE GOD!

The herdsmen who were in charge of the pigs saw this take place and were immediately struck with fear. In their fear, they went and told the story to everyone they passed—both in the city and the country. As a result, people from the city and country came out to see what had taken place. And what do they see? The man that once had been possessed by many demons—who lived naked among the tombs and ran around out of his mind—was now clothed, sitting at Jesus’ feet, listening to his teaching, and in his right mind. PRAISE GOD! This is what happens when Jesus sets the captives free from sin. However, not everyone was grateful for the man’s deliverance. Luke 8:35 tells us that when they realized what happened, they were afraid. In their fear, they asked Jesus to leave. Instead of responding in joy and praise for what had just happened, the people allowed their fear to dictate their actions. Instead of worshiping the God of creation, they rejected the miracle and missed out on what more Jesus might have done in their city.

As Jesus prepares to leave and return home, the former demoniac now in his right mind asks to follow Jesus. This is the type of response we might expect from someone who has spent time in torment by evil but has now been saved. But instead of welcoming him on the journey, Jesus tells the man to return home and tell all that God had done for him. Let’s not forget where Jesus is currently. Also, Jesus specifically tells him to tell the people all that “God has done for [him].” By doing this, Jesus is connecting his work to the Father, (RSB pg1801). Instead of responding in fear, let us be a people that responds like this man. Let us be a people that chooses to believe in the goodness of God and go and tell others “how much God has done for [us].”

Luke 8:40-56

After Jesus returns, he is once again met with a crowd of folks wanting his attention. The Bible says that “they were waiting for him,” (v40). One of those present was a man named Jairus. Jairus was “a ruler of the synagogue” in that area. This role was one of leadership and

authority, but in more of an administrative role. He would schedule the readings each week and monitor the teaching and worship of the synagogue. (SIDEBAR: Synagogues were not the Temple. Synagogues can be thought of as meeting places in the New Testament times for worship within a community much like local churches serve as that today. The Temple was a specific, fixed location where sacrifices would take place until it was destroyed in 70 AD. So, Jairus would have been one of the local synagogue rulers that would help to run the synagogue in his community).⁵³ No doubt, Jairus had heard of this Jesus character from some of those that had witnessed his miracles or even been healed themselves. How we see Jairus approach Jesus—falling at Jesus’ feet—tells us that he had some knowledge of who Jesus was, or at least he knew he had the ability to work miracles. He had only one twelve-year-old daughter who was very sick—sick to the point of death. Jairus asks Jesus to heal her. Jesus concedes, and they begin their journey.

In the meantime, as Jesus and his disciples are on the way to Jairus’s house, the crowd begins to encircle Jesus, so much so that the Bible says that “the people pressed around him.” One of the crowd members happened to be a woman with a bleeding condition for the past twelve years that no physician had been able to cure. Verse 43 tells us that she had spent “all her living on physicians,” to no avail. No relief. Only disappointment. For her to be in the crowd is significant, because in Leviticus 15:25-27, we are told that because of her condition, she was unclean and everything she touched would become unclean as well. To boot, anyone that touched her or the things that she touched would subsequently become unclean. To us today, this doesn’t mean too much. But to her in that day? This meant that she would not be able to go out in public, nor could she attend worship until her condition changed and she was able to offer the appropriate sacrifices. Unless God intervened, this woman was destined to live alone for the remainder of her days. Mark 5:27-28 tells us that she had heard of the things that Jesus had been doing, and she knew that he could change her circumstances. “She had heard the reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment. For she said, ‘If I touch even his garments, I will be made well.’” Much like Jairus, hearing of all that Jesus had been doing emboldened her to action.

Once she touches the hem of Jesus’ garment, verse 44 says that her bleeding “immediately” stopped. As a result, Jesus asks the crowd who it was that touched him. Peter thinks it’s a silly question because of the massive crowd, but Jesus makes it abundantly clear that “power [had] gone out from [him.]” The Reformation Study Bible note on this passage, states that “[t]he woman’s cure needs to be known publicly in order for her to be taken back into normal social life. Jesus is careful to arrange this,” (RSB pg1802). What an unsuspecting gift to her! Not only would she be healed, but making it a public spectacle would allow her to return to public life. And what does Jesus say to her in verse 48? “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” It was the Son of God that healed her, but it was her faith that God used as the tool to bring the healing.

After this took place, Jairus received news that his daughter had died. However, Jesus responds in verse 50 with, “Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.” Upon reaching the home, they are met by those gathered to mourn the death of his daughter. Jesus encourages the crowds not to weep and he refers to her as “not dead, but sleeping.” They laugh at him, but Jesus walks into the home with Peter, James, John, and Jairus and his wife. Looking at the child, he

⁵³ “What is a synagogue?” Got Questions, accessed on August 12, 2026, <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-a-synagogue.html>.

calls to her to get up. AND SHE DOES! The Bible says that her spirit returned and Jesus commanded that she have something to eat. PRAISE GOD Y'ALL!

To wrap up this portion, I'd like to copy and paste a recent conversation between me and Harvey. I was sharing all that was in my head, and it seemed to be spilling out all over the place. It was on the topic of grief and walking through hardships together with the knowledge that stories like this—the woman being healed after twelve years and Jairus's daughter being raised from the dead—really happened. One of the last things I said to him was that we had all been praying, we have faith that God can heal and he often does, but for reasons unknown to us, he had other plans for his glory. This is what Harvey said in response to me, “Yeah, it's a hard reality, but the final reality for nearly all of us is death before resurrection—even Lazarus. I think a lot of the healing is just a demonstration of Jesus' power to do the ultimate thing—give resurrection life. Sort of like the promised land always being temporary...knowing these things doesn't make it not hard, just bearable.” What a gift. In Christ, these things are bearable and ultimately, they will be worked in us for his glory to be revealed. And that will result in our ultimate good—our eternal sanctification.

In all of these four instances, Jesus shows his divine power over creation: by calming the storm; by casting out evil spirits; by healing disease; and by conquering even death. We see that people respond to his glory in different ways. Some allow their fear to rule the moment and they unfortunately reject him. Others, even in fear, choose to trust God and believe—they respond in worship. They go on to tell others all that God has done for them. In all scenarios, there is an element of fear and anxiety that can be used by the enemy to divert attention away from the life giver and Lord of all.

We may not find ourselves in these specific scenarios, however in this life we will be met with a handful of difficult scenarios—unforeseen trials and tribulations at home or work; chronic pain or illness that may result in death; or severe hardships that lead us to doubt the goodness of God. But God is still good. His divine power is still at work in our lives and around us as we—like the former demoniac—go and “declare all that God has done for [us].” And then, to say it again... “knowing these things doesn't make it not hard,” but we are able to bear it, together. Let us be a people that respond in worship to Christ's work in our lives. In spite of our fear, let us respond to him in belief and let us be a people that lives to go and tell others of his goodness and mercy.

The Main Point

The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. However, The Good Shepherd—Jesus—has come to bring life abundantly. Regardless of what we may encounter in life, we can rest securely in the mighty hands of our loving and gracious Lord and Savior—the Son of God. Even in the face of fear, we can choose to believe that he is working in and around us to bring about his purposes that will result in the salvation of others, for his glory and our eternal good.

A Few Relevant Scriptures

- Leviticus 15:25-30 – Laws for uncleanness brought on by an unnatural bleeding condition.
- Matthew 8:23-27 – Matthew's account of Jesus calming the storm.

- Matthew 9:18-26 – Matthew's account of Jesus healing the woman in Luke 8 and Jairus's daughter.
- Mark 4:35-41 – Mark's account of Jesus calming the storm.
- Mark 5 – Mark's account of Jesus healing the demoniac, the woman in Luke 8, and Jairus's daughter.

Bibliography

- Adam Clark's Commentary on the Bible*. Edited by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1967.
- Anyabwile, Thabiti M., *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke*. Brentwood, TN: Homan Bible Publishers, 2018.
- Benner, Jeff. "Biblical Wisdom, Knowledge, and Understanding Explained." Accessed July 22, 2026. <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/studies-words/wisdom-knowledge-and-understanding.htm>.
- "Bier." Merriam-Webster. Accessed August 1, 2026. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bier>.
- Bock, Darrell. *Luke 1:1-9:50*. Vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994.
- Barclay, W. *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976.
- ESV Study Bible*. Nashville, TN: Crossway Books, 2008.
- France, R.T., *Luke*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013.
- Garland, David. *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.
- GotQuestions.org. "What is the significance of Capernaum in the Bible?" Accessed July 29, 2026. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Capernaum-in-the-Bible.html>.
- GotQuestions.org. "What is the significance of Nain in the Bible?" Accessed August 1, 2026. <https://www.gotquestions.org/Nain-in-the-Bible.html>.
- Got Questions.org "Why did Jesus say, "Do not fear; only believe" to the ruler of the synagogue (Mark 5:36)?" Accessed on August 11, 2026. <https://www.gotquestions.org/do-not-fear-only-believe.html>.
- Grudem, Wayne and Thomas R. Schreiner. Notes on Luke. In *ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.
- Guzik, David. "Luke 1 Commentary: The Birth of John the Baptist." *Enduring Word*, 11 Mar. 2026, enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-1/.
- Henry, Matthew. "Luke Bible Commentary." Luke Bible Commentary - Matthew Henry (Complete) | Christianity.Com. Accessed July 16, 2026. www.christianity.com/bible/commentary/matthew-henry-complete/luke/.

Reformation Study Bible. Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 1988.

Schreiner, Thomas R. "Luke." In *ESV Expository Commentary. Vol. 8, Matthew-Luke*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.

Shepherd's Notes on the New Testament. Brentwood, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2025.

Solomon, Marty "The Redemption Cycle" Dec. 26, 2013. Accessed August 3, 2026.
<https://makingtalmidim.blogspot.com/2013/12/the-redemption-cycle.html>

Spurgeon, Charles H. "Luke 1 Commentary - Spurgeon's Verse Expositions of the Bible." *Truth According to Scripture*. Accessed July 17, 2026.
www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/commentaries/spe/luke-1.php.

Stein, Robert H., *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992).

Whittaker, John "The Listener's Commentary: Luke 4: 1-13." Accessed July 25, 2026.
<https://listenerscommentary.com/podcast/luke-41-13/?lang=en>.

Whittaker, John "The Listener's Commentary: Luke 3:21-38." Accessed August 3, 2026.
<https://listenerscommentary.com/podcast/luke-321-38/?lang=en>.

Zuber, Kevin D. "Luke." In *The Moody Bible Commentary*. Chicago, IL: The Moody Bible Institute, 2014.