

Love Letters

Reading Through the Gospels



Reading Guide
Week #12

Luke 23-John 4



NEW HORIZON
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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A Week in Review. Jesus makes His grand entrance into Jerusalem. He is swarmed by children (18:15) and a crowd of joyful followers (19:37). But the mood changes quickly as Jesus is challenged and questioned. Jesus speaks in cryptic language as He describes the future, then joins His followers for their Last Supper together.

This Week's Reading. We soon conclude the Gospel of Luke. We are well into Jesus' final days. For Luke, all is as planned: Christ's suffering and death are the fulfillment of prophecy—and His Resurrection confirms He is the Christ. Luke has indeed provided an "orderly account so that we might know the certainty of the things we believe" (1:4).

○ MONDAY—LUKE 23

Consider. Jesus is calm, cool, and collected during His trial and crucifixion. There is no panic in His responses to His accusers. From the cross Jesus doesn't feel sorry for Himself, but forgives His crucifiers and a thief. In Luke, Jesus is very much in control of His destiny. Are you encouraged believing He is in control of your destiny as well?

Read.

- Jesus' trial contains an important message. Pilate finds no basis for charging Jesus (vv.4, 14, 22). Jesus is not an enemy of the state, nor guilty of crimes against the Romans. Some suggest Luke was trying to convince the Romans that Christians weren't trying to overthrow the government. How might this message speak to church-state issues today?
- Joseph of Arimathea buried the body of Jesus (v.50). As a Jewish Council member, he didn't consent to Jesus' death. At great risk he approached Pilate for Jesus' body, and buried Jesus at personal expense. Scripture doesn't tell us what happens to Joseph after Jesus' burial, but it could not have been as usual. How has your confession of faith in Jesus altered the course of your life?

Reflect. Notice the onlookers at the cross who express faith in Jesus: Women (v.27), a criminal

(v.42), a soldier (v.47), and Joseph of Arimathea (v.50). Luke shows that Jesus' death is for all sorts of people. Look around—what kind of people stand at the foot of the cross with you?

○ TUESDAY—LUKE 24

Consider. God announces and works, and we watch and believe. That's Luke's Resurrection story. Jesus told His disciples He would be raised. The empty tomb is yet another evidence that Jesus is who He said He was. How is your faith encouraged as you read the story of Jesus?

Read.

- The story of The Road to Emmaus (vv.13-35) is found only in Luke. But, it follows the same pattern as Jesus' appearances in the other Gospels: Jesus appears, greets, is recognized, and commands them to tell others. So it is with each of us—Jesus calls to our heart, we respond in faith, and are commissioned to tell others. Has this been your experience and practice?
- Jesus "opened their minds" in v. 45. This passage suggests that understanding Scripture is more than an intellectual exercise. God must *reveal* His truths. Have you asked God to open your mind and understanding to the Scriptures?"

Reflect. Some movies end with an obvious invitation to the sequel. Luke does the same: "And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His Name to all nations" (v.47). Luke prepares us for his next work—the New Testament *Book of Acts*. His Gospel tells of Christ's mission. Acts tells of the early church's mission. Are you able to see yourself as part of the sequel to Luke's Book of Acts?

An Introduction to the Book of John

The Book. Today we begin our Fourth Gospel. Did you notice the many similarities between the first three? For this reason, they are called the "Synoptic Gospels" ("seen with the same eye.") The Gospel of John is a whole different matter. Often referred to as "The Maverick Gospel," it stands apart in its form, flow, and content. John has a "mystic" or "spiritual" quality.

The Writer. Most scholars believe the writer to be John, son of Zebedee (Mark 1:19). Although

he never refers to himself by name, most believe he is “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (13:23, etc.) He is also credited with 1, 2 & 3 John, and Revelation. For years scholars dated John at 85 AD or later. Recent scholarship suggests a date as early as the 50’s AD.

As You Read. Notice a uniqueness: Our other Gospel writers present the stories of Jesus and call the reader to draw conclusions. John, on the other hand, offers interpretations as he writes. Both methods were common in that day.

○ WEDNESDAY—JOHN 1

Consider. John begins his timeline long before the other Gospel writers: “*In the beginning*” (v.1). Scholars find John using wording and structure from the first chapter of the Bible, Genesis 1. Are you able to see Christ as God’s ongoing activity from eternity past?

Read.

- What is the “Word” (v.1, 14)? The Greek term is “Logos,” and means God’s mind, will, and intentions. Jesus, God’s *Logos*, is God’s mind, will, and intentions in human form. To see Jesus is to see God. If your “logos” became flesh, what would it look like?
- The other Gospel writers slowly introduce Jesus and permit His words and miracles to identify Him as the Christ. But John proclaims Jesus’ deity in the first verse: “*...and the Word was God*” (v.1). Immediately we encounter the truth that sets Christianity apart from all other religions: Jesus is One with God—*Divine*. Are you yet able to believe this assertion?

Reflect. Today John sets a major theme in motion: *The Gospel is spread as one tells another* (Kysar, *John’s Story of Jesus*, p.18). John the Baptist tells the crowds, Andrew told his brother Simon, and Philip told Nathaniel. Who told you? Who knows because you told them?

○ THURSDAY—JOHN 2

Consider. Immediately, two things set John apart from the other Gospels: 1) *The Wedding at Cana* (vv.1-11) is not found in any other Gospel; 2) *The Clearing of the Temple* (vv.13-16)

happens at the *end* of the other Gospels. Why might John include these stories in this order?

Read.

- Following *The Wedding at Cana*, John writes, “*This, the first of His miraculous signs...*” (v.11). John refers to Jesus’ supernatural works as “signs” rather than miracles, and lists seven altogether. In performing these signs, Jesus “*reveals His glory*” (v.11b) to His disciples and they will believe. When have you seen tangible expressions of God’s glory?
- After clearing the temple (vv.13-16), Jesus says, “*Destroy this Temple, and I will raise it again in three days*” (v.19). Then we learn, “*the temple Jesus had spoken of was His body*” (v.21). We’ve only begun and Jesus is predicting His death. What does Jesus’ prediction tell you about His mission?

Reflect. From the start Jesus teaches, “*My time has not yet come*” (v.4). Offering signs and wonders is not Christ’s greatest work. What, then, is the purpose of His supernatural works?

○ FRIDAY—JOHN 3

Consider. Today’s chapter is unique to John, and uses powerful language to describe faith in Christ. We meet Nicodemus, a prominent Jewish figure, seeking out Jesus. Nicodemus stands out among his unbelieving peers as he investigates Jesus’ claims. How have you done same?

Read.

- In verses 3, 5 & 7, Jesus speaks of being “born again” and “born of the Spirit.” More than a religion or philosophy, the Christian faith is a re-birth: our old life ends and our new begins. What has been your experience of becoming “born again”?
- John 3:16 may be the best-known verse in the Bible: “*For God so loved the world...*” Here we find the entire Gospel: God loves us; Jesus is God’s gift of salvation; we must intentionally place our faith and trust in Him; and those who believe will know eternal life. Does this summarize your faith?

Reflect. V.30 is a powerful summary of the Christian life: “*He (Jesus) must become greater; I must become less.*” In what ways does this verse challenge your daily living?

○ SATURDAY—JOHN 4

Consider. In yesterday’s reading, Jesus spends the whole chapter speaking with one man, Nicodemus. Most of today’s chapter is conversation with a Samaritan Woman. Contrast these incidents (found only in John) with the other three Gospels. In the Synoptics, we find Jesus speaking mainly to crowds and the Twelve. Here He spends time with individuals. How do these conversations encourage your faith?

Read.

- Consider Jesus’ conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman. Jesus thinks and speaks in spiritual terms—“*born again*” (3:3, 5, 7), and “*living water*” (4:10, 14). But, Nicodemus and the woman are only able to think in natural terms—“*Surely (a man) cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb!*” (3:4), and “*Sir, give me this (living) water so that I won’t get thirsty*” (4:15). How are you growing in your ability to think and speak of spiritual matters?
- Notice Jesus’ statement in v.26: “*I Am He.*” Amazingly, Jesus describes Himself using the same language God used when God appeared to Moses: “*I Am Who I Am*” (Exodus 3:14). (Watch for Jesus “*I AM*” statements throughout the Book of John.) Is the same God Who revealed Himself to Moses and the Samaritan woman revealing Himself to you?

Reflect. Should we look for “signs”? When Jesus heals the official’s son, John calls it Jesus’ “second sign” (v.54). Signs are Jesus’ way of revealing Himself as the Messiah. Yet, Jesus rebukes the crowds: “*Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders...you will never believe*” (v.48). The challenge for us is, now that Jesus has proven Himself by the signs recorded in Scripture, are we able to believe even in the absence of further signs?

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