



## Session Five

# The Gospel of Luke, Pt.2

### Luke 3 & 4

#### Questions to consider as you read Luke Chapters 3 & 4

The richness of Luke's Gospel means the text continually provides us with a multitude of lenses through which we should be looking at the events he narrates. At the beginning of chapter 3, we find one that is particularly important to understanding Jesus and what it means to follow him. Note, in verse 3:6, which is part of a quotation from Isaiah 40, these words: "...and ***all flesh*** shall see the salvation of God," (NRSV). The Greek word in boldface is *sarkos*, which means exactly what the translation says: *flesh*. Note, too, the modifier: *all*. As biblical scholar Alan Culpepper has written, "In many respects, the story of the ministry of Jesus in Luke and the spread of the early church in Acts is the story of God's challenge to social, ethnic, economic, and racial barriers to the spread of the Gospel."

1) Because Luke, unlike Matthew and Mark, groups pretty much all of the narrative he provides about John the Baptist here in one place (as opposed to spreading it throughout his Gospel), it's easier to see the links between John's ministry and Jesus'. Read 3:7-8, for instance, and compare it with Luke 24:47 (or with Matthew 4:17). And compare John's instructions in 3:10-14 with what you read in the Sermon on the Mount. This illustrates the consistency of the Scriptural witness about what God expects of God's people—and it didn't just begin with John the Baptist and Jesus. Similar admonitions are spread throughout the Old Testament.

2) Both John and Jesus preach the primary need of *repentance*. You'll remember that the Greek word is *metanoia* and means a turning away from, a change in direction. The emphasis in repentance is on the heart. This is not for poetic effect. In Israelite understanding of humanity, the heart is the seat of true knowledge. Changing your heart, therefore, would necessarily result in changing your behavior and how you see the world. To the extent that's the case, the call to repentance is a call to *transformation*: don't merely stop an ungodly behavior but completely change who and what you are. It is a reminder that the claims of the Gospel are *total*.

3) Read 3:8 carefully. What do you think John is saying here?

4) Look at what happens in 3:19-20. This is a reminder that worldly power and position don't place anyone above the ethical and moral demands of the Kingdom. It is also a reminder that speaking the Truth to power often comes at a cost. That said, these verses give us the opportunity to revisit some of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount about judgment and anger, and the necessity of remembering the difference between anger and *righteous* anger. How can you know that you are acting from righteous anger as opposed to just anger?

5) Read 3:21-22. Why does Jesus agree to being baptized? Matthew 3:13-17 may give you a clue. What do you make of the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus? Note that the Spirit appears not to descend on Jesus when he is baptized but afterwards, when Jesus is in prayer.

6) Very often John the Baptist is seen as important because he is the forerunner of Jesus, the one who prepares the way for the Messiah. Once Jesus begins his earthly ministry, John essentially disappears. But here, with verse 22, as Luke's recounting of John's ministry essentially draws to a close, you might stop and ask yourself, how might John the Baptist be an ongoing role model for the church?

7) Scripture provides two genealogies for Jesus, one here in Luke and one in Matthew. They are not identical. Matthew begins with Abraham and moves forward to Jesus; Luke begins with Jesus and moves back to Adam. In both, the genealogies between Abraham and David are essentially the same, but from David to Jesus they differ. The typical explanation for this is that Matthew follows the line of Joseph (Jesus' legal father) while Luke follows the line of Mary, Jesus' blood relation. If this is true, it would be very atypical of Jewish practice, where tracing one's genealogy was typically done through the father. Why do you think Luke would choose to trace Jesus' lineage back to David through Mary?

8) For 4:1-13, Jesus' temptation, you may find it helpful to consult *The Temptation of Jesus*, attached.

9) Verse 4:14 marks the beginning of an extended section of Luke's Gospel (lasting through most of chapter 9) that, one way or another, is asking and seeking to answer this question: *Who is Jesus?* It is a question far more complicated than just lineage, what Jesus looked like, or what he liked for breakfast. This is because here, beginning at verse 14, Jesus portrays himself as the Messiah, which means that to ask who is Jesus? is to ask what does *Messiah* mean if that is, in fact, who Jesus is. The Scripture Jesus uses to inaugurate his earthly ministry is equally a description of what the Messiah is about, which suggests it is a description of what the followers of the Messiah should be about.

- a) Read 4:14-30. Even if you knew nothing else about Jesus, what do these verses tell you about how Jesus understands what it means to be the Messiah?
- b) Do you see any similarities between Jesus' words here and his words in the Sermon on the Mount?
- c) What do the events narrated here suggest about what it means to be a follower of Jesus?

- d) Why did the citizens of Nazareth who heard Jesus become so outraged they wanted to murder him?
- e) As you continue reading in the coming weeks through to the end of chapter 9, keep this question in front of you: What does this say about who Jesus is as Messiah and what that means to me as his follower?

10) As preparation for reading 4:31-44, consider the following... First, Jesus goes to Capernaum, which will be one of the places over the course of his earthly ministry that will serve as something of a “home base.” Capernaum is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee in the northern part of present day Israel. In Jesus’ time it was a major Jewish trade, fishing, and agriculture center. Second, these verses focus on three healings. What do these facts suggest about Jesus and his ministry? Keep in mind that healings and miracles in the Gospel narratives are always indications of deeper realities; in other words, Jesus’ healings are never just about people getting better.

11) The first healing in these verses is an exorcism (4:31-37). The presence of demons occurs 23 times in Luke; 14 of those occur between here and the end of chapter 9. Judaism of Jesus’ time believed in demons and demonic possession; we tend not to believe in such things today. But this does raise an important question. To the extent demons are agents of evil, this suggests evil exists as a power apart from human agency. In other words, it suggests that evil just exists as a power in the world rather than occurring as a result of human choice and action. Do you agree with that?

12) Note what Jesus does in 4:42. This is a recurring theme in the gospel narratives about Jesus: he intentionally goes by himself to a place away from others to pray. Do you?

13) Verse 4:43 provides another statement from Jesus of what it means to be the Messiah: preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God. This suggests that, as his followers, we should do likewise—if not, literally, by preaching, then in how we live and in being prepared, should we be asked, to explain what the Good News of the Kingdom of God is. So: how would you explain the Good News of the Kingdom of God to someone who’s never heard of Jesus or the Kingdom?