

Do You Know My Jesus? Studies in the Gospel of Luke

By Bob Young

Introduction

I love the gospel of Luke. I love its combination of depth and breadth. Yes, it's too long, but it is so rich. How does Luke describe Jesus?

Here is the Christ who belongs to all of us.

Matthew is decidedly Jewish—Jesus describes and gives us a model of life in the kingdom, a concept of the NT which has roots in the OT.

Mark has a different audience as he describes the suffering servant of God, son of man, son of God

John focuses on Jesus as the source of life.

Luke is also distinctive in that it is a gospel to the Gentiles. That means it is for you and me especially. It is the only gospel written by a Greek, addressed to the Greek mind. Luke through the Spirit writes a narrative account of the life and teachings of Jesus for the larger Roman world of his day.

This is not Matthew, not Mark, not John.

Luke is the first volume of two-volume set.

Luke is trans-cultural communication which interprets the significance of a Jewish Messiah-Redeemer/Savior-King for a non-Jewish audience.

According to Luke—Jesus belongs to the whole world, as seen in the themes of universalism, outsiders, foreigners. This Jesus who is God's chosen, Lord and Savior, King belongs to all of us.

Luke is a spiritual book, inspired by the Spirit, focused on the spiritual realm.

The Jesus Luke describes is the one *WHO LEADS US IN SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIPS*

Luke is from a class unlikely to be drawn to Jesus (1 Cor. 1:26). Medical doctor, literate, educated.

But hearts from every segment of society rejoice over Jesus in Luke's gospel. Shepherds, illiterate peasants, physician historian, itinerant farm workers, established company executives, well-to-do North Americans, impoverished Latin Americans. Aching hearts, beating in the chests of all colors and classes. That is Luke's gospel. That is a story that leads us to spiritual solutions and not just physical. Everyone needs a Savior.

Luke obviously thought that there were other people in the world of his day who would be thrilled to learn about the Jewish Messiah who came to the earth to be Lord of all.

As in the other Gospels, Jesus is seen as Messiah (e.g., Lk. 9:20). He is also the Son of God, as the angel indicates (Lk 1:35) and as he himself recognizes (Lk. 2:49). One unique contribution of Luke is the presentation of Jesus as a prophet. He is compared and contrasted with John the Baptist as a prophetic figure. Luke hints at his prophetic role in 4:24-27 and 13:33. Also the ministry of Elisha comes to mind at the raising of the son of the widow of Nain near where Elisha had raised the son of the "great woman" of Shunem.

Luke's Christology is carefully designed. Luke portrays the exalted Jesus as God's co-equal by the kinds of things he does and says from heaven. Through the Holy Spirit, the divine name and personal manifestations, Jesus behaves toward people in Luke-Acts as does God in the OT. His power and knowledge are supreme. Jesus reigns as Sovereign over Israel, the church, and the powers of darkness and the world. Luke deepens this portrait by depicting Jesus as deity who by nature behaves as servant: the earthly Jesus among his people as one who serves; the exalted Jesus continues serving his people by strengthening and encouraging them in their witness of him to the world. That the believers in Acts resemble the way Jesus behaved in the Gospel means that they too are now imaging some of his servant-like character in their witness of him.

Luke's portrait of Jesus relates to these purposes. For Luke, Jesus is the bringer of authentic peace, of spiritual and physical wholeness, and of healing and reconciliation. At the Lucan Jesus' birth angelic messengers proclaim "good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day . . . a Savior! . . . Peace on earth among those whom God favors!" [2:10-11,14]. These words echo monument inscriptions which praised Augustus Caesar as "god" and "savior," the bringer of the Roman Peace, whose birth "marks the beginning of good news, through him, for the world." Luke is hereby claiming that Jesus completes more fully the work of Augustus. He is the one who brings true peace in the world. Similarly, the Lucan John the Baptist is described as one who will "guide our feet into the way of peace" [2:14].

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus is surrounded by an aura of healing and reconciliation that affects all who come into contact with him. This Lucan trait can be seen in several unique passages in his passion narrative. It is only in Luke that Jesus heals the servant's ear that was severed during the scuffle at Jesus' arrest [22:51]. Only in Luke do Herod Antipas and Pontius Pilate become unlikely fast friends after being in Jesus' presence [23:12]. Jesus prays for forgiveness for his crucifiers only in Luke's Gospel [23:34]. And only in Luke does one of those crucified with Jesus express faith in him [23:39-43].

There is also a Lucan theme that sees Jesus as the Ultimate Prophet who is fated to die in Jerusalem as prophets before him.

Connected with this Christology is Luke's concern for those marginalized in first-century society. Think of some of the topics Luke shares to make this point. The poor, the oppressed, the diseased, the children, and women all receive special attention in this Gospel. This gospel of reversals brings joy where one would expect sadness. And Christians who follow in the footsteps of Jesus are expected to address the physical needs of people, particularly the disadvantaged, and see to it that none go hungry or without shelter. The rich are shown in Luke as finding it especially difficult to detach themselves from their possessions, although those few who do so are praised [e.g., Acts 4:32-37]. No wonder repentance is such an obvious theme in this gospel of reversals.

The main Christological perspective in Luke is that Jesus is the one who brings shalom, that is, peace, healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, and wholeness. He brings God's promises of blessings for the world through Israel to fulfillment. Authentic discipleship is defined by promoting the well-being of all, especially the marginalized, and by fostering peace and unity. What must be said is that Luke says this is for everyone—universally applicable.

For Luke, universalism does not mean that all will be saved in spite of themselves. It refers to God's desire to save all folks without respect of persons. No one has a leg up—not Jews, not Gentiles. Luke is telling about the comprehensive reach of the love of God (Luke 1:1-4).

"I want to tell you about a Jew. Don't be turned off. I know about anti-Semitism. I know that the Jewish region of Palestine is just a little hole-in-the-wall spot in this larger Roman Empire of ours. But I've studied this carefully. I've done research. I've taken meticulous notes; I've put together something I think is worth your time in reading, most excellent Theophilus. Jesus is heaven's adequacy for all our inadequacies, and you can know and understand that with certainty."

This is the theme on almost every page of the Gospel of Luke. News for all the people....to all the earth....

Shepherds, 2:10, 14

Simeon, light for the Gentiles, 2:32

John the Baptist, all mankind will see God's salvation, 3:1-6

Genealogy is traced to Adam (3:38)

Samaritans, Good Samaritan, cleansed leper

Tax collectors like Zacchaeus...

Luke shows us that Jesus is concerned about and accepts the poor and the sick, in fact, he accepts anyone who will come to him.

He came to seek and to save the lost.

This has implications for you and for me.

24:27, repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be preached

The gospel is for cultures in every place, much different than ours

Compassion, our calling is not change folks but to love them and show them Jesus

We will never be victimizers nor indifferent

Finally, it implies personal faith—personally accepting Jesus. Believing that God loves and cares for and can accept you. That God will release you from what holds you—doubt, fear, sin. If I can't accept myself, how can God accept me? I'm too bad, I've gone too far, it's hopeless.

The gospel of Luke is the gospel of divine grace. God accepts people who are having a hard time accepting themselves.

One more parable—Pharisee and publican. Respected churchman, sinner.

Both men go home, only one is heard by God, only one is accepted by God, only one is saved.

The parable reminds us that there is no way to shift the blame, no advantage to compare my sins to those of another, my successes...., my faith...

Luke's portrait of Jesus is powerful—a Jewish Savior through Gentile eyes.

Can you see the full breadth of the vision, get Jesus outside any little boxes you might be tempted to put him in, escape the natural tendency of churches to a parochialism that cannot see beyond our own walls and our own self-interests, a Jesus that is for everyone, even those who never darken the doors here?

Jesus is God's gift to everyone.