

Why Luke?

Introduction

The Text

Luke 1:1–4

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,
²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,
³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,
⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Why “Luke”?

- A. This is a big morning. It marks the beginning of what I’m assuming will be many years long series through the Gospel of Luke. My aim this morning is simple: I want to get you excited about this gospel. I want to get us leaning in, anticipating what our great Savior is going to do as we travel with Him through this book as a church. I figured that the best way to get you excited about this is to tell you why I’m excited about it. So that’s all we’re going to do with our time today.
- B. I’m titling this sermon series—“Luke: All Things New.”
 - 1. This morning I’m going to attempt to answer the question: Why “Luke”? Why do I feel like God wants us in Luke’s gospel?
 - 2. Next week we’ll answer the question: Why “All Things New”? Why do I feel those 3 words encapsulate the thrust of the gospel as a whole? To answer this we will dive into the deep waters of v. 1.
 - 3. The week following, Lord willing, we will be ready to officially begin our exposition, and we will seek to answer the question: Why did Luke write this gospel? And here we shall follow more closely the first 4 vv. which we just read.
 - 4. After that, your guess is as good as mine!
- C. But this morning we ask: Why “Luke”? There are many reasons I could list. I’ll give you 4 of the most prominent. These reasons will build on one another as we go. The culminating effect I pray is that, by the end of our time this morning, we all would be longing to get home, sit down, read through the pages of this gospel and meet with our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ!

(1) Luke Gives Us Access & Insight into the Whole Canon of Scripture

- A. We believe at this church that the Bible, this book I'm holding in my hand, is not mere mythology written by men to try to make sense of the chaotic world around them; not mere moral teaching offering guidance as we seek to be good people; but the very words of almighty God, declaring to us His way of salvation! "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable [...for us]" (2 Tim 3:16a).
1. With this being the case, the Gospel of Luke ought to be of particular interest to us. For the canonical reach we are given in this gospel is perhaps unmatched by any other book in the Bible. It connects us in very significant ways to the whole of the Old Testament that came before it, and the whole of the New Testament that comes after it.

(a) Access & Insight into the Whole Old Testament

- A. The coming of Christ as the climactic fulfillment of the entirety of the Old Testament (promises, prophecies, symbols, and shadows) is of special importance to Luke from the very beginning of his gospel to the very end (literally). He labors to show how all things new in Christ is connected to all things old (as we will see more fully next week).
1. The first v. of the gospel sets us up for this: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us..." (v. 1). "Accomplished" here can have the meaning: "to fill completely; to fulfill". Christ had fulfilled something among them, but what?
 - a. As we keep reading we immediately see that these things that Jesus fulfilled among them were those things foretold and foreseen in the Old Testament. In the 2 chapters that follow (with the great majority of content unique to Luke), this is the reverberating message. As an illustration, let's follow Mary:
 - i. The angel Gabriel appears to her that she would bear the Son of God, saying of Jesus: "The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (1:32b-33). The promise to David of an everlasting kingdom, fulfilled in Jesus.
 - ii. Later, Mary responds to all that God's doing by blessing Him and saying "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring forever" (1:54-55). She sees in all of this, God moving in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham.
 2. Abraham and David. All things new emerges from all things old. And the whole gospel narrative displays how Jesus is the fulfillment of such things. Which is why, in the last few vv. of the gospel we read of the resurrected Christ saying this to His disciples:

Luke 24:44b

“...everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

- a. Law, Prophets, Psalms, the whole Old Testament—He is the fulfillment of it all! Doesn't this make you want to run through the pages of the Old Testament like Solomon's bride searching for her beloved? He's here, he's there, he's everywhere!
- B. So, Luke's gospel reaches back to the entirety of the Old Testament and shows us how Jesus is the fulfillment of it all.

(b) Access & Insight into the Whole New Testament

- A. But Luke's gospel uniquely reaches forward as well, connecting us with the New Testament.
1. It is first noteworthy that Luke's gospel itself is the longest book in the New Testament. This already should make it stand out in prominence for us. Luke begins earlier in the story of Christ and goes later in the story of Christ than any other gospel writer. The first two chapters provide significant backstory and also give us the only real snapshots we have of Christ's infancy and youth. The last chapter takes us all the way to His ascension.
 2. But this gospel isn't even all that we get from Luke! He wrote the book of Acts as well. This is made plain by a number of reasons: (1) Acts begins with a similar dedication to the same individual, Theophilus. (2) And in this dedication at the beginning of Acts, Luke even refers back to his “first book” (presumably, the Gospel of Luke). (3) And then we notice that Acts begins where the gospel of Luke ends. For, while the ends with the ascension of Christ, the book of Acts begins with it, and carries the story forward from there. (4) It is for this reason that people often refer to Luke-Acts as 1 work composed of 2 volumes.
 - a. What this means is that Luke is responsible for over ¼ of our New Testaments! Getting into his thought gives us access not only into the life of Christ, but into the life of Christ in and through His church. I presume that we will constantly be interfacing with Acts as we study this gospel. The 2 are intricately and intriguingly related.
 3. But even this is not all. For evidence points us towards the conclusion that Luke was a traveling companion and close associate of Paul. In fact, Luke's gospel is often understood to be the gospel of Paul's endorsing. And we see Pauline theology all over Luke-Acts. Whether we're talking about the Holy Spirit, regeneration, election, the sovereignty of God over all history, etc.
 - a. So Luke can help us understand Paul and Paul can help us understand Luke. With this relationship noted we now have in Luke's gospel entryway into the great majority of the New Testament. Luke is a gospel that connects us with Acts and the Pauline epistles.

- B. So then, returning 2 Tim 3:16, in its context we see that it is Paul's view of Scripture here that grounds his charge of Timothy to "preach the word" in the vv. that immediately follow (4:1-2). Scripture is God's breathed-out word, we desperately need it, so in and out of season preach it! With Luke's gospel giving us such significant access into the whole of the canon of this God-breathed Scripture, what better book in the Bible is there to preach for the profit of God's people than this?! When we drink from this gospel, we drink from the whole canon!

(2) Luke Locates Us (Gentiles) within the Scope of Christ's Redeeming Work

- A. While all the gospels clearly present Jesus as Savior of the world, not just of Israel, Luke seems to have taken this on as a point of particular importance.
1. Let me remark on something that will be especially important for this sermon from this point on. We have 4 gospels in our Bibles—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John. Why? Well, when you compare one to the other, you find that, while each is telling the same story, they are telling it from a different angle with a slightly different purpose and emphasis. Where the gospels differ is perhaps an indication for us of the gospel writer's unique purpose, focus, intent.
 - a. Luke even mentions at the beginning of his gospel "many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us..." (1:1). So why another narrative? We will answer this more fully in a couple of weeks, but for now, we can at least assume that he has something new to say, another angle from which to come at the accomplishments of Christ.
- B. When we do comparative studies of the gospels, one of Luke's unique emphases that emerges is his focus on Christ as the universal Savior. Let me give a few examples of this:
1. Look at Luk 3:4-5, where he is describing John the Baptist's forerunning ministry: "As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 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...'"
 - a. Up to this point, for many of us the words should sound familiar. These words, quoted from Isa 40:3-4, appear in all 3 synoptic gospels (Mat, Mar, Luk). But Luke alone continues the quote in 3:6: "...and all flesh shall see the salvation of God!!!"
 - i. Here then is an indication of what might be a unique emphasis in Luke. Christ while fulfilling all the promises to Israel, in doing so, is to be the Savior of "all flesh", of the world!

2. But we keep reading and we keep seeing this same thing. Do you ever skip over the genealogies? Don't do that. The author is trying to tell us something very significant. When we compare Matthew's genealogy of Christ ([Mat 1:1-17](#)) with Luke's ([Luk 3:23-38](#)), the contrast is illuminating. For, while Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry back to David and as far as Abraham, showing Christ to be the fulfillment of God's covenants to Israel, Luke traces Jesus' ancestry back beyond Abraham all the way to Adam: "[the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam...](#)" ([3:38](#)).
 - a. Why? Why go all the way back to Adam? Because Luke is trying to prove that this Christ, in His fulfilling of God's covenants to Israel, is actually going after all those who came from Adam, namely: the world! He is a universal Savior, Jew and Gentile here!

3. One final example. All the Synoptics describe the mission of the 12 disciples where in Matthew's account Jesus sends them out instructing them: "[Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel](#)" ([10:5b-6](#)). Here the 12 disciples would represent the 12 tribes of Israel. But only Luke records a later sending of 70 disciples in [Luk 10](#), which many commentators take to be symbolic of the 70 nations of the world listed back in [Gen 10](#).
 - a. In other words, yet again, we see, the mission to Israel is actually a mission undertaken with a view to the whole world!

4. And of course this is precisely what we see as keep reading from Luke to Acts and watch as the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the end of the earth ([Act 1:8](#)). Luke has his eye on this expansion even when he's writing back in his gospel.
 - C. Such a focus is precisely what we would expect when we step back and consider the authorship, audience, and apostolic source of this gospel. Luke himself was Gentile ([Col 4:11-14](#)), the only Gentile author in all the Bible! Theophilus, a Greek name, was also most likely a Gentile. Beyond this, Paul, the proposed source of this gospel, was "[an apostle to the Gentiles](#)" ([Rom 11:13](#)). It would make sense then that this gospel in particular gives us the most comprehensive view of salvation.
 - D. And I love this! Because, as I said last week, you and I (Gentiles) are in view here! We were in the plural nouns of [Psa 117](#) (nations and peoples), now we're in the crosshairs of Luke's gospel. We will see it all over the pages of this book: Christ has come, even for us!
 1. As we watch Him live perfectly, fulfilling the precepts of the Law, He lives for us; as watch Him "[set His face to go to Jerusalem](#)" and die on that cross, suffering under the full weight of the curse of the Law, He dies for us; and as we, with breathless amazement, turn the page to find He's risen from the dead, never to die again, we know, He's risen for us!

(3) Luke Helps Us to Become What We Behold

- A. There is principle that runs throughout the Scriptures that has been summed up by many in this pithy statement: We become what we behold.
1. We see this in the Old Testament in both negative and positive forms. Negatively, we read that those who worship idols become deaf and dumb like their idols ([Psa 115:8](#)). Positively we read of someone like Moses who spends time with God and then comes away from his presence literally radiating God's glory. This principle carries into the New Testament and is perhaps most summarily put by Paul in [2 Cor 3](#) where he writes: "...we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..." ([v. 18a](#)).
- B. But this text spins us off into a series of quick questions:
1. I want to be transformed. You want to be transformed. So where are we to go to behold this glory and be transformed into it? He gives it to us in [4:6b](#): "...the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." When we keep Jesus in front of our eyes, we will be transformed into His image.
 - a. And then we must ask: Where do we most clearly see the face of Jesus Christ? To be sure, we get a vision of Christ from anywhere in the Bible, but there is something about this direct eye-to-eye kind of vision we get as we watch Him live, die, and rise again for us in the Gospels. They keep Him ever before us!
 - i. But we could get this direct vision of Christ from any of the 4 gospels. Why Luke in particular?
 - (1) Luke, because he also wrote Acts, gives us a unique perspective on how the church is truly to become what they behold in Christ. If Luke's gospel is about Christ's life, beholding Him. Acts is about the church's life, becoming Him. Not only are we shown the glory of God in the face of Christ, we are shown what it looks like for we, the church, to be transformed into it!
- C. In Luke-Acts, Luke clearly sets up Jesus' narrative as the paradigm or pattern for the church's narrative. Christ's story in the gospel becomes the church's story in Acts. Where Jesus moves from suffering to glory, from humiliation to exaltation, from incarnation-crucifixion to resurrection-ascension in Luke's gospel; the church follows the same trajectory in Acts. In other words, just as Christ took up His cross, despised the shame, and entered into glory as our forerunner; so too we, by the power of His resurrection Spirit, take up our cross and follow Him, through shame to glory. Luke will not allow us to buy the lie that Christ suffered in my place means I don't have to suffer in this place. No!

1. Consider one of the strongest links Luke makes between Christ's narrative and that of the church's:
 - a. In Luke's gospel, Christ is anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism and is empowered to walk the long road to Jerusalem where He would be rejected by the Jews and crucified outside the gate for the sins of the world. And on that cross it is only Luke who records Him as saying: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (23:34). But Jesus rises from the dead, ascends to the throne of David.
 - b. ...And then, in Acts, He baptizes the church in His Spirit (ch. 2), empowering them to do what? Never suffer? No! You turn a couple pages and what do read: Stephen, "full of the Holy Spirit" (6:6; 7:55); radiating Christ's glory (6:15); was also rejected in Jerusalem; was also put to death outside the gate; is also recorded by Luke as crying out "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60), even as they're killing him; and His spirit was received by the Lord in glory (v. 59)...rising to the throne of the Father!
 - i. And what empowered this kind of suffering unto glory? "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (7:55-56). He became what He beheld!
- D. So what are we looking at? What are we beholding? Would we rather be more like that executive that takes vacations whenever he pleases? Or that woman that's maintained a size 2 even after pregnancy? If we are in pursuit of something lesser than God, we become something lesser than human—blind, deaf, dumb, dead.
 1. But may it never be for us! Luke will help us week after week: "Behold your God!" (Isa 40:9b), and His glory in the face of Christ! And may we be transformed!

(4) Luke Equips Us to Confront the Idols of Our City

- A. We live in a city that in many ways is situated at the pinnacle of the modern world. Many of the world's most successful and influential individuals and companies are located within a few miles of our church. You better believe that influences the ethos of a place. It seems to me that, in these sorts of situations, 2 types of groups are often established: (1) those inside—they've already made it; and (2) those outside—they're trying to make it, maybe they will, maybe they won't. But we have the insider, and the outsider; the one who's got it all (job, money, gadgets, girl), and the one who's barely surviving.
 1. Whichever side you're on, you can be tempted to think that being on the in is what matters. The insiders look down their noses with disdain at those outside: "How dare you think you could be as successful as me." The outsiders look up with longing jealousy at those on the inside: "If only I could get to where they are." But both are living in the wrong kingdom!

B. Luke, more than any other gospel, confronts the particular idols that plague our culture here in San Jose. The theme of reversal is critical to Luke. He goes out of his way to show that, in Christ's kingdom, it's the insiders that are out, and the outsiders that are in. Luke emphasizes again and again God's love for the poor, tax collectors, social outcasts, sinners, women, Samaritans, and Gentiles.

1. Luke alone records Jesus' anointing by an immoral woman who "loves much" because she has been forgiven much. Luke alone records those beloved parables like the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, or the Pharisee and Tax Collector.
2. And, again, this is a theme in Luke from the very beginning to the end:
 - a. Luke alone records at the beginning of his gospel that the angelic announcement of our King's birth was given not to the CEO's or the rich and famous, but to the lowly and often culturally despised shepherds. They partook of the very first worship service!
 - b. And then, who is the first one that Jesus ushers into Paradise with Himself at the end? Who's the first one to enter the gates of heaven in light of the completed work of Christ? A condemned criminal! Justified. Glorified. Paradise! Only Luke preserves this story!

C. There are those in this city that feel on the inside and those that feel on the outside. Jesus calls to both in this Gospel! To the insider, get out that you might be brought in. To the outsider, get in, you may be despised by the kings of this world, but this King, His kingdom is not of this world, and He welcomes you!

1. This gospel will help us push against the kingdom of this world and live for kingdom of heaven.

D. So, I am very excited about the journey that lay that before us in Luke's gospel. For...

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2. Luke Locates Us (Gentiles) within the Scope of Christ's Redeeming Work
3. Luke Helps Us to Become What We Behold
4. Luke Equips Us to Confront the Idols of Our City