

Themes in Lukes's Gospel Introduction

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 1st December 2013

Intro-

- Last session looked at intro to Mark's Gospel and time before the intro to John's Gospel.
- Today we will continue and look at the intro to Luke's Gospel, drawing out 4 themes he highlights both in his introductory chapter and also later in his writing.
- Church tradition is that this was written by Luke the Doctor. Luke was closely connected with the Apostle Paul and travelled extensively with him (Col 4:14; Philem 24; 2Tim 4:11). Apostles were the eyewitnesses of Jesus, including Paul as a later witness to the risen Jesus. This is why the writings of the New Testament had to have been either written by, or by those closely connected to the Apostles, as Luke was.
- 2 volume series- Luke and Acts- both are dedicated to a man called Theophilus (means 'friend of God' or 'loved by God'). This person is generally thought to be the name of a high ranking official because of the term 'most excellent' which was known to be used when addressing governing officials, and the Gospel may well have been written in an attempt to bring him to faith. Acts 1:1 says 'In my former account'- this is thought to be referring to Luke's Gospel. The language used in both writings is similar. In Acts many passages contain the first person plural, 'we', meaning Luke and the others travelling with Paul.
- Luke is thought to be well-travelled and educated. His writing contains the best Greek out of the gospels and his opening sentence is noted by one scholar as being 'the most finely composed sentence in the whole of post-Classical Greek literature.' (Graham Stanton-source Wikipedia). His writing also includes detailed medical names and diagnoses of the people Jesus healed. It is thought generally that Luke was a Gentile writing to Gentiles- whilst some Jewish customs are included, others are, it seems, deliberately left out, and events are placed into the context of Roman historical events.

Read Luke 1:1-4

4 themes Luke highlights in this introduction to his Gospel:

1. ORDER- v3'..orderly account'

- What is your favourite superhero? Mine was Spiderman. One thing I always wanted to know was- how did they first get their powers? I was interested in the 'origins' of the hero's and their villains, so getting hold of old copies of comics or later reprints was a real treat to find out how a hero, or villain first became that person.
- Here too Luke wants to give us the 'origins'. Whilst John and Mark start with John's ministry and then go into the ministry of Christ Luke desires to give us a fuller account by giving their background stories- their 'origins'. Therefore he includes information about both John and Jesus' birth.
- Luke wanted to give the full, broad picture rather than a snippet, so not only does he include the parents of Jesus and John, he also carries on with the story after Jesus has ascended and traces the work of Jesus through the Church until there has been a global impact- Luke is the only Gospel writer to do this.
- Luke is the longest of the four gospels and out of the three 'synoptic' gospels (meaning 'together' and 'seen' -i.e. they contain a similar view of the events, that is

Matthew, Mark and Luke) it has 35% of unique material. Luke wants to be thorough and complete.

- He also wants to be orderly. Some think he wrote in chronological order, and this may be so, but not necessarily limited to time as sometimes he appears to link similar themes together too, or geographical events.
- **Application:**
- Luke thoroughly researched what Jesus did. How well have we researched it, or read it/looked into it? In China they memorise whole gospels and go out preaching- how much of the Gospel story do we know? If you are not yet a Christian how much have you looked into Jesus? Jer 29:13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.
- Luke desired that people would know the important elements in the life of Christ and find faith for themselves. He was one of the first apologists. An apologist is someone who offers a defence by argument. C.S.Lewis was an apologist- he gave logical, valid reasons for God. Could we do the same? Josh Macdowell was an anti-Christian lawyer who wanted to disprove Christianity once and for all. He got all the evidence he could, both for and against, and put the claims of Christianity on trial. He ended up being convinced by the evidence and becoming a Christian. He wrote a book from this 'Evidence that demands a verdict' and it is famous apology of the Christian faith. 1Pet 3:15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, Ask God to help you in explaining your faith to others.
- Order is a key part of the Christian life- God brought order out of chaos in the beginning when He created the Universe. God wants to bring godly order to our lives without us becoming extreme and bound by that order (as in O.C.D). Are you enjoying God's order in your life- ask for His help to address areas of chaos.

Read Luke 1:5-13

2. PRAYER-v13 '...Your prayer is heard'

- Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission, says that about 1830 his father became so interested in the spiritual condition of China, that he was led to pray that if God ever gave him a son, he might be privileged to labor as a missionary there; a prayer unknown to the son until after seven years of service in that mission field. Though carefully trained to the study of God's word and a life of devotion, yet at the age of fifteen the lad was a skeptic. Of his conversion he says: "One day, which I shall never forget, when I was about fifteen years old, my dear mother being absent from home some eighty miles away, I had a holiday. I searched through the library for a book to while away time. I selected a gospel tract which looked unattractive, saying, there will be an interesting story at the commencement, and a sermon or moral at the end; I will take the former, and leave the latter for those who like it. I little knew what was going on in the heart of my dear mother. She arose from the dinner-table with an intense yearning for the conversion of her boy, and feeling that, being from home, and having more leisure than she otherwise would, there was a special opportunity afforded her of pleading with God for me. She went to her bedroom, and turned the key in the door, and resolved not to leave the room until her prayers were answered. Hour after hour did that dear mother plead for me, until she could only praise God for the conversion of her son. In the meantime, as I was reading the tract, 'The Finished Work of Christ,' a light was flashed into my soul by the Holy Spirit, that there was nothing to be done, but to fall 'on my knees and accept this Savior and his salvation, and praise God forevermore. While my mother was praising God in her closet, I was praising Him in the old warehouse where I had retired to read my book. When I met mother at the door on her return with the glad news, she said: "I know, my boy; I have been rejoicing for a fortnight in the glad tidings you have to tell me!" (Touching Incidents and Remarkable Answers to Prayer- S B Shaw).
- Prayer changes things, and this is something Luke wanted to get across as much as possible in his Gospel.
- Here you have the Angel Gabriel announcing 'Your prayer is heard' to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist. His wife had been barren for many years and they were past hope of having kids. However, despite this it is clear that Zechariah has prayed much for a child- and here we are privileged to witness the answer to his prayers.
- He was chosen by lot to burn incense in the temple. This incense was a picture of prayers going up to God. There were 24 divisions of priests (1Chron 24:7-18) and they were on duty twice a year for a week at a time. Because of the large numbers

of priests this would be the only time in his lifetime he would be privileged to do this. The incense symbolised the prayers of the whole of Israel going up to God, thus when everyone was praying outside the focus would have been on this incense which pictured their prayers. Not only was God going to answer John's prayer for a son- He was going to answer the nation's prayer for the Messiah, and Zachariah's son would be his herald. Luke wanted us to see- God answers prayer!

- More than any of the other Gospels Luke highlights prayer: 7 occasions Jesus prayed not recorded in other gospels (3:21 'while [Jesus] prayed the heaven was opened') ; 5:16 (Jesus often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed); 6:12 (Jesus prays all night on a mountain before choosing the 12 apostles); 9:18 (as Jesus was alone praying His disciples joined Him and He said 'Who do the crowds say I am?'), 29 (Mt- transfiguration- 'and Jesus prayed and the appearance of His face was altered'); 11:1 (disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray after hearing Jesus praying); 23:34 ('Father forgive them, they don't know what they do') ,46 'Father into Your hands I commit My Spirit').
- Luke alone has the Lord's lessons on prayer taught in the parables of the persistent friend (11:5-10); persistent widow (18:1-8) and Pharisee & Tax Collector (18:9-14).
- **Application:**
- How is your prayer life? Does prayer characterise your life? It did Christ's. If Jesus needed to pray, how much more us.
- It takes self-control to pray. The Devil will try to distract us, because he hates us praying. Our flesh will kick against it (just as the disciples experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane when they fell asleep 'keeping watch'). The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 1Pet 4:7
- Being 'sober-minded' means staying alert and focussed rather than being distracted. What are your distractions to praying? How can you minimise them?

Read Luke 1:14-20

3. FAITH- v20 '..you will be mute because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time'.

- Gabriel is often seen in Nativity plays or pictures as a pretty 'fairy' type of angel, but this was not the case here.
- Firstly, Zechariah was terrified at the sight of this angel (literally 'fear fell on him'), so much so that Gabriel had to reassure him 'do not be afraid'. It probably didn't help that the angel appeared on the right side of the altar of incense as there was apparently (according to Arnold Fruchtenbaum) a tradition that if this was the case your life was up!
- Secondly, 'Gabriel' means 'Mighty man (warrior) of God'! Imagine the Terminator or Rocky or Giant Haystacks or Hulk Hogan suddenly appearing in your room as you were praying- you'd be terrified.
- The thing is, if this happened to you, you would probably accept the message from the angel and get out of there. Not Zechariah! He had to go and question God's warrior angel! He doubted it could happen. He wanted a sign and he got it- zipped up mouth!
- 'Zippy' was a glove puppet character from Rainbow, a children's program in my childhood, and he used to have a zip mouth and when he put his foot in it with things he said he ended up getting his mouth zipped up! This must have been a similar concept here- he was prevented speaking out any more words of unbelief.
- This is contrasted with the female response to the very same angel which appeared to Mary announcing something even more tricky to believe. She was told that as a virgin she would miraculously become pregnant and carry God's child, and she accepted it in faith and left happy! We are told in Matthew's gospel that her husband

didn't accept things quite so easily and needed divine help to accept Mary's side of the story.

- Often in Luke it is the women who get things first- they are the ones following Jesus to see from a distance Him being crucified, who travel to the tomb and go to anoint His body with oils and spices and are the first to meet the risen Jesus. They are the ones to tell the other, male, disciples and the male disciples don't believe them.
- Luke notices the heart Jesus has for the poor, the outcasts, the oppressed and how they respond in faith to Him. He also notes the women who also follow Jesus and also the Samaritan and Gentile response to Jesus. He notes that the Gospel is for all.
- **Application:**
- Would we be like the women, like Mary or would we be like the skeptical disciples who needed proof first? Thomas even wanted to put his hands into Jesus' side and his fingers where the nails were! Zechariah wanted more proof, are we the same?
- The risen Jesus rebukes the disciples on the road to Emmaus because they didn't believe the women's testimony or the scriptures- He said they were 'slow of heart to believe'. Faith involves letting down the barriers and opening our heart to God- allowing Him to actually work, rather than discounting the possibility. What things may have caused us to harden our hearts to God? Let's bring these to God in repentance.
- Faith comes by hearing the Word- Rom 10:17. Jesus took the disciples on the road to Emmaus back through the scriptures and explained them to them. Are we allowing time for God to build our faith by reading and listening to His Word?
- In the film Last Crusade Indiana Jones has to take a step of faith and realises then that there is a bridge under his feet. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). If we want to please God it will take courageous steps of faith. When was the last time we took a step of faith?

Read Luke 1:21-56

4. PRAISE – v46 '..and Mary said "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my saviour"'

- -v46 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour'
- Mary's song in verses 46-55 is based on Hannah's song in the Old Testament- she was unable to have children but prayed and God gave her a son, Samuel, so she sang a song of praise- Mary is likening her joy to Hannah's here. In so doing, she is also likening Jesus in some ways to Samuel, whose life had certain elements which foreshadowed Christ- e.g. he was both Israel's priest and also Judge (or ruler)- Jesus is our great High Priest and He is King of Kings. Christ is foreshadowed in many different ways in the lives of Old Testament saints, as well as the prophetic words they spoke.
- The result of God stepping into our situations and answering our prayers is great praise:
 - v14 'and you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth' (came true- Zechariah's tongue loosened and he sings a spontaneous song of praise-v67-79).
 - v28 Gabriel to Mary 'Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you'
 - v41 'When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit'
- Luke also emphasises thanksgiving throughout his gospel (2:14 'angels praising', 20 'shepherds praising', 29-32 'Simeon praising'; 5:25-26 'paralysed man and the people praising'; 7:16 'crowd glorify God when Jesus raises widow's son' ; 13:13

- 'woman straightens and glorifies God'; 17:15 'Samaritan leper glorifies God with a loud voice'; 18:43 'blind man healed glorifies God, as do the people').
- In Luke's sequel, the Book of Acts (Acts 3) a lame man is healed and he is 'walking and leaping and praising God'. This phrase is repeated a second time for emphasis!
 - **Application:** Mary is spontaneous in her worship and prophetic- she is led by the Holy Spirit and becomes God's mouthpiece as she praises. Our worship is to be characterised by freedom, spontaneity and being Spirit-led. Let's choose to progress in our freedom and sing out when there is opportunity to do so in meetings, gradually building our confidence and skill, and sensitivity to God in this area.
 - People praise when they get excited- people at a football match have no problem raising their arms, hands, voices and rejoicing. We need to overcome our 'British stiff upper lip', self-conscious reserve and give God His due- He is worthy of our praise. Africans often are so much more thankful to God than Westerners- we can tend to be pessimistic and moany- let's break out of this into the freedom of the children of God!
 - When we realise afresh what He has done we want to thank Him for it. Let's look around at creation and thank God regularly for things. Let's thank Him for His character. Let's thank Him for salvation!
 - Psalm 51 'Restore to me the joy of my salvation'- David had committed adultery and lost his joy. Sin robs us of our joy. The way through this is repentance- confess your sin honestly to God and choose to follow Him- you will again receive back the joy of your salvation, as David did.

Summary

Luke's Gospel, in the introductory chapter and further on highlights the following themes amongst others when he relates the Good News of Jesus:

- ORDER
- PRAYER
- FAITH
- PRAISE

Song

There is a voice

O for a thousand tongues