

“The Mission of Jesus”
Introduction to the Gospel of Luke
Luke 1:1-4, 19:10

Intro: Please open your Bibles to the Gospel of Luke. Pg. ____

Have you ever studied the life of Jesus? I mean, I know you have heard of Jesus, I know you probably think you know enough about Jesus, but have you ever really dove into who he is, what he did, why he came, and the difference that could, should, and would make in your life if you were you to truly embrace him. A cursory glance at his teaching and life tells us that we should not pass over these matters with a sense of levity.

Most people want a slice of Jesus. or maybe we should call it the buffet approach to Jesus: I will take a little bit of this and a little bit of that, but I'll pass on that. For example, I like it when he said, "Give us our daily bread." And "you can have treasure in heaven." And I really liked it when he said, "Don't judge." (even though I don't really understand exactly what he meant), but I don't really care for the Jesus, turns over tables in the temple, calls out my imperfections, and claims to be God.

I'll take the Jesus who loves the poor, not the Jesus who even extends mercy to the rich. I'll take the Jesus who will forgive me of every heinous thing I've done, but I'm not so sure about the one who places radical demands on my life: the one who says to love my enemies, live with radical generosity, put my hand to the plow and not look back, deny myself, take up my cross. . . . I think I'll pass on most all of that.

Because of this, some people, and even some churches, choose not to present a full picture of Jesus. They want a sanitized Jesus, one that is more tolerable and acceptable. But I'm here this morning, and Luke is here this morning to begin to set forth a full picture of Jesus. Anything less will leave us short of truly grasping his significance on both a personal and cosmic scale. [After all, who would be astounded if they stood before Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, and the painting was reduced to simply a few little stars?]

As we dive into to Luke's gospel this morning, I want to invite you to . . .

Wrestle with the mission of Jesus and its implications for your life.

The word choice is intentional. To wrestle with something conveys the idea of an intense tug of war, going back and forth, really seriously considering, questioning, even submitting to what we encounter. This is the goal whether you are new to Christianity or have read the gospels 100 times. Before we get into the heart of Luke's message, we should become familiar with a few introductory matters that he spells out in his prologue. **Luke 1:1-4**

Introductory Matters

- **Author: Luke.** Who was Luke?
 - He was an educated and cultured person. One can gather this from the literary quality of this book and the book of Acts, which really serves as the sequel to this gospel.
 - We also know that Luke was a doctor. We know this from Colossians 4, because he was a traveling companion with Paul. He was a gospel worker, faithful to the end. Paul says, one occasion near the end of his life when he wrote in 2 Timothy: "Luke alone is with me."
 - For all of you doctors out there, do something *really* positive with your life, write a book about Jesus. Ok, maybe you won't write a book about Jesus.
- **Date: Early to mid 60s** seems most likely.
- **Recipients: Theophilus & a Gentile audience.** Theophilus means "lover of God." "most excellent" indicates that he held a prominent position in the Roman government. It also seems that he was a recent convert to Christianity.
- **Purpose: Certainty**
 - Luke is writing to Theophilus to confirm the things he was taught about the main character of the book, who is (and here's a shocker for you this morning) Jesus.
 - Verse 4 spells this out: "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."
 - In his prologue to the Book of Acts, Luke said that he wrote to deal "with all that Jesus began to do and teach." (Acts 1:1)

- He wants to confirm Theophilus in his faith and show him that his faith was not built blindly on the machinations of a few zealous men, but built on historical realities.
- Luke wanted to answer the questions swirling in his head: “Is Jesus really God? Did he really walk on water and cast out demons? Did he really give blind men sight and feed 5,000 people?”
- How did he go about his writing to provide confidence for Theophilus? Verses 1-4 tell us:
 - Careful investigation... He consulted those who knew Jesus from the beginning of his ministry and most likely, the beginning of his life.
 - He was thorough, a first class historian. Check v. 3: “it seemed good to me also, *having followed all things close for some time past.*” This was not a hurried project, knocked out at last minute before a looming deadline came crashing down on him. Perhaps some of our college students should take a page out of Luke’s playbook. Procrastination brings pain. Write that down.
 - This careful investigation was based on oral tradition, written documents, and eyewitness accounts.
 - Xnity is not a check your brains at the door kind of faith. Luke was not predisposed to just accept a report. He was a doctor, not wired to simply receive information without examining the evidence.
- **The Reliability of the Gospels:**
 - **The gospels were written too early to be legend.** (*30-60 yrs after his death)
 - **The gospels are too shocking to be legend.** (A crucified Messiah? Women as the first witnesses to his resurrection? Followers of Jesus with serious flaws?)
 - **The gospels are too detailed to be legend.**
- Those were borrowed from Keller’s *Reason for God*. I’m sure he borrowed them from other scholars (like Mark Coppenger).
- It is important to understand that Luke was not simply a historian. He was also a theologian. He is not just reporting events and facts, but he is interpreting those events and writing with a purpose.
- The superiority of the Word: Don’t miss the implicit claim that we can know the certainty of the gospel through reading and reflecting on what God has revealed to us in his word. You can know the story of Jesus and be convinced of the validity of the story of Jesus through reading this book. You don’t have to have some mystical experience. You don’t need a message in the sky. You need to receive this Word.

Now, before we move on to the central message of Luke’s gospel, I wanted to share a few unique features:

- Longest book in the NT. A little Bible trivia for you: who wrote more of the NT than anyone else? Paul? John? No. no. Luke.
- Luke is the only gospel with a sequel, the Book of Acts. Luke covers the mission of Jesus. Acts covers the mission of Jesus through his disciples in the power of the Holy Spirit. As we read Luke it is always important to keep Acts in mind because Luke is conveying one big story.
- Unique Material: 41 unique passages from the other Synoptics (explain Synoptics). Many famous parables including the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Tax Collector and the Pharisee to name a few, not mention the conversion of Zaccheus, the walk to Emmaus after his resurrection, and his ascension.
- Of the 1,151 verses in Luke, almost half them quote the words of Jesus.
- Luke has a pretty simple structure in his orderly account: Beginnings (1:1-2:52), Prep for Ministry – (3:1-4:13), Galilean Ministry (4:14-9:50), Road to Jerusalem (9:51-19:44), Jerusalem: “where Jesus is crucified, resurrected, before he ascends to heaven (19:45-24:53)

Trans: I want to take what I believe is the central theme and key verse and provide three points that will help us begin getting a handle on the overarching message of Luke.

I. The mission of Jesus fulfills God’s plan of salvation.

- **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10)**
Jesus came to seek – Jesus was on a rescue mission.
 - The Titanic is going down and we are on the ship.
 - The hospital is on fire, and we are in the bed and can’t make it down the fire escape. I mean, I know that is a graphic picture, but it does not even begin to tell the story of what Jesus did for us.
 - Jesus was on a rescue mission to save people from the predicament of their sin.
 - God pursues people through his Son and his Spirit, and Jesus was absolutely committed to this mission. He knew that the end of the road for him was a bloody Roman cross. Death by execution

was on the horizon and he was so resolved to fulfill his mission of redemption and salvation that Luke in many ways centers his Gospel around it.

- In Luke 9:51, it says: When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” (Luke 9:51 ESV) This marks the beginning of what scholars call the Travelogue. It takes up ten chapters in Luke whereas it only takes up two in Matthew and one in Mark.
- Luke is going to keep telling us of his resolve to go to Jerusalem in chs. 13, 17, 18 & 19. If that was not clear enough, he highlights how Jesus, no less than three times explicitly foretells his death. Why is his death so pivotal? Because that is where he sacrificed himself in order that he might not only seek but also save. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Jesus came to save.

- *Sozo*: “to save, to heal”
- We are a broken people. No one wants to admit that they are needy and broken and hurting, and sometimes we can’t even see it, but we are deeply broken and in need of grace.
- Pic: We often view our lives as if we were pictured in a glamour magazine. What do I mean? No supermodel is really as super as they appear. No offense to Quarterback Tom and Giselle, (Go Pats) but the pictures we see in the magazines are most often edited and a false representation of their true beauty. Why? Because they photoshop out all of flaws and failings... We want to touch up and crop that which is not very pretty about us, but the beautiful thing is that Jesus sees all of our flaws, even the ones invisible to those around us, and he loves us in spite of them!

Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

- Make a case for lostness. No one wants to be lost! The only thing worse than being lost is being lost and not knowing that you are lost.
- Pic?

II. The mission of Jesus brought salvation for all people.

- Ironically, some of the people that Luke’s readers would assume belonged to this new community actually are revealed as being outside of the community.
 - Jesus was not down with hypocrites.
 - Jesus was not down with the formally religious. Not impressed.
- Salvation builds a new community for All People: Gentiles and Outcasts
 - The Gospel of Luke teaches us that there is not a person the gospel can’t reach, no barrier that it cannot cross.
 - More than Matthew, Mark, and John, Luke highlights the universal scope of the gospel. Examples in Luke. With example after example, Luke pounds us with the truth that there is not a social or spiritual barrier that Jesus is unwilling to cut through.
 - Jews *and* Greeks, including the ___ Romans & despised Samaritans. Males *and* Females. The Free *and* slaves. The rich *and* the poor. Widows, Cripples, and Prostitutes. Those who appear to have it together *and* the outcast. Luke has a special affinity for the weak and marginalized of society
 - Luke even tells us that Jesus was (are you ready for this?) “a friend of sinners.”
- This is one of the primary reasons we are studying Luke’s gospel at the beginning stages of our church... We saw it all the time. We can’t say it enough. The gospel breaks through all social barriers:
 - Ethnically: People from all over the world. We almost have people from every habitable continent in the world! I called my dad and was telling him about this and he suggested going to down to the Aquarium, confiscating a penguin and dressing him up as an RHC attender. I’m down. Man, we are a church for the globe.
 - Rich, poor, in the middle, blue, or white collar, young or old, you are welcomed here. We even love people from Malden.
 - The gospel breaks through all that divides us and actually makes us one in Christ.
 - **Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one...**

III. The mission of Jesus brings transformation to all who respond.

- While the gospel brings salvation for all, it is intensely personal. As we journey through these 24 chapters we are going to see individual people responding, often radically and sacrificially. Luke will tell us about real people, making real decisions to worship and follow Jesus. We're going to hear of Simeon and Anna, Mary & Martha, Matthew & Peter, widows and Roman officials, and a short little man named Zaccheus. All of these encounters teach us that God is interested in bringing transformation to all who respond.
- Transformation is the necessary result when a person comes to grips with who Jesus is and the life he calls us to live.
- Specifically, Luke teaches us that Repentance, Faith, and Obedience are all key aspects of those who would follow Jesus on his road of discipleship.
- And this call to discipleship is comprehensive in nature because the salvation Jesus died to bring is holistic. Sin put us in a holistic mess. We are tainted and depraved in every conceivable way. Our mind, thoughts, emotions, desires, will, and our bodies all suffer under the effects of the fall and our sin. BUT... There is not an area of your life that God does not wish to transform. When we catch a vision of the kingdom of Christ, we realize everything, down to the most minute details of our lives is need of transformation.
- So many people view Christianity as just another religious system detached from the realities of everyday life, but as we journey through Luke, we will discover that Jesus cares about our thoughts, our words, our wallet, and even how we respond to our enemies. And we could keep going.
- On this journey we will see the paradoxes of the kingdom of Christ: to save your life you must lose it; to become great you must serve all; the Savior who Conquers over Satan, sin, and death to give us life accomplishes this victory by death.
- I hope you will hear and answer the call of Christ: "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. If anyone would come after me, let him..."

Soaking up the Gospel of Luke:

- **Personal Reading:** Read through the Gospel... It takes the average person about two hours reading silently to read straight through the gospel, which is a great idea. That's an Ikea shopping trip, not too difficult. For those of us who read more carefully (we won't say slowly), that's a time in the store plus the ride down and maybe the ride back. To put it another way, you could spend 15-20 minutes a day reading just 3-4 chapters a day and be done in a week, piece of cake.
- **Sunday worship:** Bring a friend and a bag of popcorn or coffee (no, not really). I'm just saying be here and let's go after this.
- **Community Group:** It's not enough to be here. It's good to be here, but there is so much more to this...
- **Missional Reading:** Grab a copy of *Essential Jesus* and give it to a friend. As you read and talk with them, it will obviously help you grow as well.

Conclusion:

- We are inviting you to study the life of Jesus with us, but let me say that there is a world of difference between knowing a lot about Jesus and actually loving Jesus.
- There is a world of difference between saying, "Yeah, that is nice for those people," and saying with Paul in Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live is Christ." When we really get a clear vision of who he is: his purpose, his mission, his mercy, his love, his grace, there is nothing we could possibly desire more. It's over. I'm done. Finished looking for anything better, convinced that it is not out there.
- I am hopeful that you would weigh your response as we encounter Jesus through the Gospel of Luke.
- It is my prayer that we would see the depth of brokenness in our world and in our lives, that we would discover in a new and fresh way that Jesus is the answer for all of our brokenness, that He is the one who heals & saves, and that his life, death, and resurrection call us to a way of life that is radically reoriented around him.
- **C.S. Lewis famously said: "I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." – C. S. Lewis**
- Let's pray.