

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lessons 21 & 22

Luke – Parts Two & Three

I. REVIEW

Last week, we covered basic information about Luke, including why we believe Luke wrote the gospel, the reasons for the gospel, when the gospel was written, and how the gospel fits into the Acts of the Apostles, a second book by Luke. We also discussed a number of the themes in Luke. We then began a review of the material in Luke with an emphasis on Luke's structure around an ever-expanding ministry.

The expansion began with John the Baptist and Jesus from conception and infancy up to ministry in Nazareth, a small out-of-the-way town in Judea. Luke traces the expansion of the ministry and following of Jesus from a small point eventually to the capital of the Jewish world (what many Jews believed to be the center point of the earth), Jerusalem. In the follow-up text of Acts, Luke will trace the expansion of Christianity from Jerusalem (in the eyes of the Romans, a small place itself!) to the capital of the Roman Empire and most points in between.

The spreading of the Christian faith from such humble beginnings throughout the known world is the central history that Luke uses as he explains the "how" and "why" to this expansion.

II. THIS WEEK

We will continue the expansion story but take time to focus on one stand out point. We will see a focus point in Luke's gospel on the aloneness and rejection of Jesus. Luke shows Jesus, not always popular, and in the middle of a crowd. Luke shows Jesus alone and rejected in ways that always precede victory and mighty works of God.

In the beginning, Jesus started his ministry with a wilderness one-on-one against Satan. After emerging victorious, we find Jesus rejected in the synagogue in Nazareth where the crowd seeks to kill him for blasphemy. Jesus leaves Nazareth in Luke's account alone without mention of anyone else.

After the hometown rejection, Jesus does not quit. He does not retreat with his tail tucked between his legs. Jesus heads out for the small towns and

places around the countryside performing works of God everywhere he goes. In this way, we see Jesus as one who experiences the rejection that all people do, but we see also his godly reaction. Jesus puts one foot in front of the other and continues about the calling God has on his life trusting God to handle the results. The results are incredible.

As Jesus goes through the various places, he heals those far and wide, Jew and Gentile. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dead rise. Jesus is not alone anymore. Even when Jesus seeks time alone to pray, Jesus is mobbed by the masses. The ministry that began alone and rejected in the backwater town of Nazareth is taking on great appeal among folks all around. Eventually, Jesus has 5,000 following him when he feeds them in Luke 9.

As this popularity has increased, Luke gives us a new direction for Jesus in Luke 9:51. We are told that with a view towards the approaching time for Jesus to be taken to heaven, that “Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” Thus begins the next section of Luke, where the ministry takes a turn from just country towns toward the very capital of Judea itself.

In this “toward Jerusalem” section, Luke focuses on a different type of ministry. In the previous “countryside section,” Luke mainly wrote of the miracles that Jesus worked. Those miracles brought occasional reproach, but mostly large followings. Now, as Jesus moves toward Jerusalem, Luke will put a greater emphasis on the teachings of Jesus.

III. THE “TOWARD JERUSALEM” STORY

Luke starts the section with interchanges between Jesus and three men. One wants to follow Jesus “wherever you go,” and Jesus warns the man that the journey is not an easy one, “the Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (9:57). Jesus then calls two others to follow, but they both suggest there are other priorities to keep them from immediately obeying the Lord. Jesus tells them that God’s Kingdom is the priority, and when one sets out for the kingdom of God, living in the past is not appropriate.

In Luke 10, the Lord appoints 72 to go in groups of two to various towns for ministry. Urging them to go in prayer for God to aid the harvest with workers, Jesus gives them instructions of how to live and care for themselves in the ministry.

The 72 return to Jesus on a spiritual high, overjoyed at the power they experienced in the name of Jesus. Jesus emphasizes to them that the real cause for joy is being in God's house eternally.

Luke then gives us the story of the Good Samaritan. The story unfolds when a teacher of the law tests Jesus about how he should live to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers by asking the teacher what the teacher thinks the law says about this subject. The teacher quotes for Jesus the *shema* from Deuteronomy 6:5. Jesus says the teacher is right, but the teacher then presses Jesus on who is his neighbor. The answer lies in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

In the now well-known story, a robber besets a traveler leaving him naked, robbed and half dead. Neither a priest nor a Levite were willing to even acknowledge the man. A distasteful, not to be spoken to nor touched Samaritan, however, responded differently. The outcast Samaritan saved the life of the man in a most generous way. This Samaritan was the neighbor that was to be an example for the teacher testing Jesus.

Jesus then gets a chance to teach priorities to Martha, a sister of Mary. When Jesus visits, Martha is more worried about the food and such than spending time with Jesus. With kindness, Jesus corrects her.

In Luke 11, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray. The Lord's Prayer is short and succinct, yet powerful and encompassing as it covers praise, needs, attitude and forgiveness.

Jesus also teaches his followers that they will bless strangers bold enough to ask, they will bless their children in need should not they realize that God will bless much more generously. God was not something for these people to fear as beyond concern for them. Rather, God was someone whose concern for them was much more so than they could for anyone else, even a child.

Jesus also taught about his work as the work of God over Satan when driving out a demon that had made a man mute. Some in the crowd accused Jesus of driving out the demon by the power of Satan itself. Jesus points out how foolish the logic is that Satan would be victoriously trying to defeat himself. Jesus then gives the cynics the only logical alternative: God is at work. That being true, Jesus urges the folks to consider their own position vis-à-vis Jesus and his ministry.

A woman called out a blessing on Jesus' mother. Jesus replied with the blessing of those who follow God and his word.

Luke notes that even then, the crowds were increasing. Jesus then began to teach that unbelief was the sign of a wicked generation. Folks needed to live consistently in the light themselves and let that light shine to those around them.

A Pharisee asked Jesus to come join him and eat. When Jesus did so, Jesus did not perform the pre-meal washing that was ceremonial with certain devout Jews. The Pharisee was surprised at the lack of washing, but probably more surprised when Jesus spoke of it. Jesus explained that the real concern should be the filth inside a man, not that on the hands. With some strong illustrations, Jesus spoke of certain hypocrisies of the religious folks.

Another expert in the law saw Jesus' statements as insulting to him as well as others who took pride in their piety. Jesus resoundly rebukes the man and those of his ilk for loading burdens too heavy for folks and sending people further from God rather than closer.

This caused a number of "pious" folks to seek Jesus' destruction.

In Luke 12, the crowd numbers in the thousands when Jesus taught his followers to guard against those proud of their religiosity. While on their guard, they should not fear the religious, but rather trust God whose power far surpasses even those who have an earthly power of life and death over folks.

One fellow in the crowd sought Jesus and his authority to help in a family dispute over an inheritance. Jesus points out that Jesus is not the arbiter of the family dispute, however, the man himself needed to guard against greed. Jesus told a story about a rich man who worked to the point where he had his finances secure for a long time to rest, eat, and be merry. The "long time" turned out to be a few hours. The man died that night. Jesus points out that the man should have spent that energy on something worthwhile.

Instead of working yourself to death to provide security for the future in food, clothing and other things, Jesus taught folks that as the birds have food, and the flowers beauty, people need to go about God's calling in their lives and trust God to supply their needs.

As a part of this lesson, Jesus also taught included being ready for the second coming of Jesus as well. As good servants wait for their master to return, Jesus' followers, not knowing the time, should live as if his return is imminent. This is a lifestyle that will rain blessings from above.

With an eye toward the future, Jesus warns that following him will not always make life easy. In fact, it can cause family division and struggle as well as difficulties with neighbors. Jesus teaches the proper course is to stay focused on God and his mission, trying in the process to live a life of reconciliation.

In chapter 13, Jesus is approached with a current event question about a wretched deed by Pilate killing some Gentiles. Jesus explains that the deaths were not the result of some inordinate sin. Further, he explained that the deaths were mild compared to the problems folks would face absent repentance and a right walk with God. Like a fig tree that couldn't bear fruit, absent things changing, the future was dismal.

On a Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in a synagogue when he healed a woman who had been crippled 18 years. After the healing, the synagogue ruler chewed out the people telling them the Sabbath was for rest. The folks had six other days when they could be healed...come for the healing then! Jesus responded to this strongly urging freedom from Satan's bonds was a pretty good way to spend the Sabbath. This humiliated those against Jesus but delighted those who followed him.

Jesus then explained that those truly coming to God were not those who always thought themselves right before him.

Word comes to Jesus that Herod is out to kill him. Jesus responds with no fear that such would not happen absent God's control. Jesus knows his death will come in Jerusalem and that brings out his mourning for the city and its people.

Luke 14 recites another Sabbath healing by Jesus, this time while eating in the house of a prominent Pharisee. Jesus was being "carefully watched." The man was suffering and Jesus asked those in the home whether they deemed it proper to heal on the Sabbath. As they remained silent, Jesus healed the man.

At the dinner, Jesus noticed how the guests of honor picked certain places to sit based upon their own perceptions of worth. Jesus taught that one should look for the lower seat with the chance of being asked to move up, rather than taking the high seat and suffer the humiliation of being asked to move down.

Jesus' banquet teaching also emphasized the need to serve and feed those who need it rather than those who deserve it. The banquet teachings also instructed followers to be responsive to God's invitation. God will fill his own table. DO not turn away an offer to be a guest!

In chapter 15, Jesus is surrounded by various notorious sinners, causing the Pharisees to mutter among themselves. Jesus uses parables to explain God's view of sinners. As a Shepard would leave 99 sheep to rescue one, so is God to sinners. Likewise, as a woman searches high and low for a lost coin, so is God to sinners. Finally, with the parable of the prodigal son, we see the crescendo of God's view of sinners.

The prodigal son takes his inheritance, leaves a loving father and home, and squanders the money on wildness. After the fruits of his sin start ruining his life, the boy decides to come home seeking the life of a servant in the father's house, for even servants had it better than the boy, once the money was all gone.

Servant hood is not in the picture, however. For the father runs to the boy, restores him to full son-ship, and much to the dismay of the "good brother" who had stayed at home, throws a party for the prodigal. This is the attitude of God to sinners.

In chapter 16, Jesus explains that a rich man had a manager who wasted the man's possessions. The manager was called to account. The manager gets to work quickly and tries to make the best of the situation. The master appreciates the latest work of the manager and says so. Jesus emphasizes the need to be trusted with what God has given us to manage.

The Pharisees despise Jesus for these teachings. Jesus rebukes them in their own self-holiness, noting that they fell short of the law themselves.

Jesus relates that a rich man had no mercy for a beggar named Lazarus when it came to food. After death, Lazarus went to the side of Abraham, but the rich man went to hell. The rich man sought help but was told that there was no help that could come. Similarly, the rich man would have no

effect on his still living brothers if the brothers were going to be non-responsive to the opportunities they would already have on earth.

In chapter 17, Jesus taught that we are not to cause others to sin either, especially young impressionable people. When folks do sin against us, we are to be forgiving. Our good deeds are not the basis for pride or haughtiness. We should see them as what is right to do. This was in response to the request by the disciples for more faith. Faith is certainly desirable, Jesus explains, but the key is attitude of service, not elevation.

Jesus then heals ten men with leprosy. Only one of the men returns from the healing to thank Jesus. Gratitude is another part of the attitude that God seeks from his followers.

Jesus finishes chapter 17 teaching more on the coming kingdom of God. It is not what people expect, but it is coming nonetheless and people should get ready.

In chapter 18, Jesus tells of a widow who persistently sought help from a judge. The judge finally relented and helped because of the constant bothering. God is contrasted with the judge as one who WANTS to help from the outset, not merely to alleviate a bother.

In this same vein, Jesus contrasted a self righteous man who prayed to God out of his own merit with one who prayed with head hung low in shame of his sin. The man aware of his sin was the one heard by God.

Just as God hears the sinner, Jesus urges people to respect and love on children, teaching them what is right before God.

Jesus is approached by a rich man who wants to earn his way into God's grace. Jesus tells the man to sell everything and give it to the poor but the man saddens because of his attachment to his "things." Jesus speaks of the difficulty of those with much trying to fit God and his kingdom into their lives. The only way for it to happen is by the very hand of God.

Jesus predicts, at this time, his death for yet a third time in Luke. Luke emphasizes that the disciples did not have a clue of what Jesus was talking about. Nevertheless, we see the foreshadowing by Jesus and Luke for the coming rejection and return to aloneness that marked the beginning of Jesus' phenomenal ministry.

After this, folks urged a blind man to stop bothering Jesus for healing. Jesus hears the blind man and stops him as well. But Jesus does it not by shushing the man. Jesus does it by healing him. The people rejoice as well they should!

In chapter 19, Jesus goes through Jericho and stops at a tree to call down a wealthy short tax collector named Zaccheus. Little did Zaccheus know that by climbing a tree in an effort to glimpse Jesus, he would become a common name in song for millions of children 2,000 years later! Amazing what can happen when one is willing to put effort into seeing Jesus!

This section of Luke ends with Jesus teaching the parable about accountability where two men properly invested money given to them while a third did not. Those that were responsible were given more. The man that was not responsible lost what he had. And with that, Luke tells us that Jesus “went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem” (19:28).

IV. JERUSALEM

Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a colt to the praise and adoration of countless people. The Pharisees wanted Jesus to rebuke and quiet the crowd, but Jesus will not. Jesus teaches at the Temple, sometimes with words, but also with actions, clearing it out on one occasion. The leaders were searching for a way to kill Jesus but his popularity precluded their plans.

In an effort to find the means to Jesus’ end, the leaders send out the cross examining brigade. They questioned Jesus on his authority for his actions, but Jesus throws the question back into their laps by asking about the authority of John the Baptist. The leaders could not afford to insult the followers of the now deceased John.

Jesus then spoke against the leaders in a parable about wicked tenants of a vineyard who killed the son of the owner when he came to straighten some things out. The leaders understood that Jesus was speaking against them and the redoubled their efforts to bring him down.

The next trap for Jesus concerned whether it was right to pay taxes to Caesar. Holding a coin with the Emperor’s image, Jesus gave a wise answer telling them to give Caesar what was Caesar and God what was God. This astonished even the leaders.

The Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection, gave a wild hypothetical question to Jesus about what would happen to a woman who had seven husbands, each dying in his turn. They wanted to know who would be the husband in heaven. Jesus stopped the questions explaining that marriage wasn't in heaven as on earth.

Jesus then turns the tables and begins asking the leaders to explain some messianic implications of prophesy from David in the Old Testament. The leaders are at a loss to explain and Jesus warns the people not to follow leaders who live for show.

Jesus instead sees a model for life in the widow who gave her one coin to the treasury. This woman gave more than those who gave massive amounts out of their huge reserves.

Jesus then takes time to prophesy about the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, followed by prophecies about his second coming. Jesus warns of signs that these things would happen. When the signs come, the end will happen to that generation.

So, Jesus urges all to be watchful for the signs.

V. THE PASSION

At this point, at the climax of the book, Jesus has moved from alone in the wilderness, through the rejection of Nazareth, finding popularity and service/teaching each step toward this point in Jerusalem. The death predictions Jesus gave, now find their fruition.

Luke records Judas agreeing to betray Jesus, followed by the Passover. As Jesus and the disciples celebrate the last supper, Jesus institutes the Lord's Supper of wine and bread. While Jesus does this, the poor disciples spend the meal arguing over which one was better. Jesus tells them they are missing the point, and then predicts Peter's denial.

Peter argues that the denial could never come, but Jesus assures him it will happen three times before the rooster crows in morning.

Jesus then went to the Mount of Olives and prayed alone for the cup of God's wrath to pass from him. The disciples sleep through much of the prayer and Jesus is then arrested.

Luke records the rejections of Peter while giving an account of the trial of Jesus. Jesus stands before Pilate, Herod, and then back to Pilate. Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified and we have Jesus placed on a cross between two thieves. One thief mocks Jesus, while one finds his redemption. Jesus then dies, alone and forsaken on the cross. Jesus is laid in a tomb, wrapped in burial linen.

But Luke is not over! Just as Luke began, Jesus alone and rejected, yet commencing on a ministry of great growth and importance, Luke takes us in chapter 24 to the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus appears over and over again to a great number of his followers. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus has a chance to “anonymously” explain the biblical import, purpose, and promise of the resurrection. In closed quarters, Jesus appeared to his disciples, and again in Jerusalem, Jesus appears and teaches on the scriptures and resurrections. Jesus tells the apostles to stay in Jerusalem and await the Holy Spirit, and is taken into heaven.

Luke is then going to show how from backwater Nazareth, Jesus became to center point of Jerusalem, so on a much larger scale, from a small Judean capital city (Jerusalem) in thirty more short years, Jesus will come in his glory and church to the very heart and capital of the known world, Rome itself.... But that is next week!

VI. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Rejected? So was Jesus.
2. The Answer? Keep walking.
3. Watch God work.
4. He's got it all under control.