

The Gospels

Lesson 4

The Gospel According to Luke

Forum



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Lesson Four: The Gospel According to Luke

Forum

With

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Question 1:

How do scholars determine the date of early manuscripts?

In serious studies of New Testament writings, it's common to consider early manuscripts of the books. Examining the content of early manuscripts helps interpreters verify that the process of copying and transmitting the book over time hasn't altered the book in significant ways. In studies on the Gospel of Luke, looking at early manuscripts can be particularly helpful because they confirm that the book has consistently been attributed to Luke. But is the process for dating manuscripts reliable? How do scholars determine the date of early manuscripts?

Dr. Robert Plummer

The New Testament has more ancient manuscript evidence than any other piece of ancient literature, shockingly more. There are more than five thousand manuscripts or portions of manuscripts to testify to the contents of the New Testament. Now it's interesting that if you pick up an edition of the Greek New Testament, scholars have categorized these manuscripts based on where they were written, at what time they were written, and how reliably they were transmitted. There's an entire field of people who devote their lives to reading these manuscripts, or even portions of these manuscripts, and specializing in them. Now, these manuscripts are written on one of two things usually — ancient manuscripts on leather — vellum — or on parchment, which is from a plant fiber, papyrus. So of course, this material can be carbon dated. Also, people who spend their lives studying these, there are very specific styles of writing that changed over time, so through the kind of ink used, through the style of writing, through the preparation of the manuscript, one can arrive at a very high precision of confidence at what time that manuscript was dated. So, for example, the earliest portion of a manuscript of the New Testament is the "John Ryland's Fragment," which scholars agree is somewhere around 120 to 135. So even though you have scholars with all kinds of presuppositions and different views, you've got them narrowing it down to 15 years. And so, sometimes people who are unfamiliar

with textual issues and the transmission of the New Testament in ancient times have some fear that, “If I really look into this, my faith will be weakened as to the authority and trustworthiness of the Word of God.” But I have found that teaching students Greek and getting down to level where we’re actually doing some text criticism, students have only a growing value for God’s Word and how faithfully it has been transmitted through time.

Dr. Richard Bauckham

The experts who try to determine the dates of early manuscripts are a very specialized group of people who have become very expert in identifying ancient handwriting styles. I think this is the main key to it, that they can plot the way ancient handwriting styles changed over a period so that, you know, one way of writing was common at a certain period and then be succeeded, and so forth. So that it is really by locating the style of handwriting of a particular manuscript within the kind of reconstructed sequence of changes in handwriting. That’s the basic tool they use. Of course, it does depend on the fact that we have some manuscripts that date themselves, you know, who tell us they were written in the 6th year of Augustus, or whatever. So with some manuscripts dating themselves, you can then relate the others to those dates by handwriting styles. It’s not, of course, a very precise dating. A particular scribe, you know, who learned his handwriting at a certain stage of his life would go on using that same style probably when other scribes were beginning to use a slightly different one. So it can’t date more precisely within, I think, about 20 or 30 years, but that’s a pretty good rough indication. I think that’s the main way it’s done. I mean, sometimes they have used carbon dating. I think the Qumran documents, some of them have been carbon dated and, interestingly, confirmed the datings that have been based on study of handwriting before that. So it’s a very expert skill, but happily, there are some people who devote their lives to it and are very good at it.

Question 2:

How confident can we be that Luke wrote the third gospel?

Besides manuscript evidence, there are many other reasons to confirm that Luke wrote the gospel that bears his name. Of course, Luke never identified himself as the author of the third gospel, so we don’t have infallible proof that he wrote it. But we still have a lot of evidence for his authorship. Overall, how confident can we be that Luke wrote the third gospel?

Dr. Steven Cowan

I think we can be fairly confident that Luke wrote the third gospel. For one thing, we know from church history that the early church fathers were strongly opposed to

accepting works that were forgeries as being inspired by God. They wouldn't have accepted this work as canonical, as belonging to the canon of Scripture, if there was any doubt about its authorship in their minds. We have plenty of evidence that they would have just dismissed forgeries out of hand as being disingenuous, inauthentic works. Secondly, there's no competing tradition regarding the authorship of Luke's gospel. The only tradition we find in the writings of the church fathers is that Luke, this disciple and follower of the apostle Paul, was the author of Luke's gospel. If they had just simply picked this name out of a hat to attach to Luke's gospel, then we might expect there to be competing voices or people saying, "No, it wasn't Luke. It was so-and-so." There's no competing tradition on this, so there's no reason to deny this tradition, given that fact. And thirdly, if they had just picked Luke's name out of hat or attached Luke's name to this gospel arbitrarily, or for non-historical reasons, then their choice of Luke is kind of strange, because who is Luke? Luke is a rather obscure figure. He's mentioned a couple of times in Paul's letters. We know virtually nothing about him. He was probably a physician, we learn from Paul's letters, but he is a fairly obscure, almost unknown figure, and so, why pick this man? If the early church were going to make up a name to attach to Luke's gospel and persuade readers to accept this work as authoritative, they might have chosen somebody more prominent like Thaddeus or Bartholomew or Peter or somebody. But no, they choose this very obscure person named Luke. Seems to me the only reason why they would attach Luke's name to the Gospel of Luke is if they had strong historical reason to think that Luke actually wrote it.

Dr. Richard Bauckham

I think we are quite dependent on the fact that the author of the third gospel was also the author of the Acts of the Apostles. And the Acts of the Apostles, in its accounts of Paul's missionary travels, has a number of passages where the author switches from saying, "Paul and his companions" to saying, "we," meaning, evidently, the group of people, including Paul, of whom the author formed a part for those bits of the narrative. And there have been other suggestions as to how to interpret that. But I think, in the end, the most plausible explanation is the obvious one, that the author of the Acts of the Apostles was present with Paul for those bits of the narrative. So that identifies him as a companion of Paul. It doesn't yet give us the name Luke, but we do know that a Luke was one of Paul's companions. But I also think there is good reason for thinking that the names of the persons to whom the Gospels are attributed go back to a very early stage when the Gospels were first circulating. So I think the combination of the ascription to Luke and the fact that the same author in Acts appears to be a companion of Paul, make it very likely that the author of both works is the Luke who accompanied Paul on some of his travels who is one of Paul's coworkers.

Question 3: **How do we know Luke's gospel is true?**

There are compelling reasons to believe that Luke wrote the third gospel. But his authorship raises legitimate questions. Luke wasn't an apostle or even an eyewitness to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. So, how do we know Luke's gospel is true?

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

Luke tells us right at the beginning of his gospel that he was not an eyewitness, but he did research, and he consulted eyewitnesses in compiling his gospel, and I think that's true of the book of Acts as well. I think Luke talked to people like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and, of course, the apostles. They accurately conveyed to Luke what had happened. They represented the events in which they were participants. But Luke did not just check it with one person. We have good evidence, as he says in chapter 1, that he researched everything carefully. Incidentally, if we look at the book of Acts where we can test Luke in terms of talking about political leaders, he is shown again and again to be amazingly accurate. Yes, Luke's gospel was written to edify the church, and it has a certain perspective and a certain point of view. Luke was not a neutral history writer. No gospel writer was writing history from a neutral, unbiased point of view. But no history writer writes from a neutral unbiased point of view. There is always a perspective. To have such a perspective, to have a theological agenda, which Luke certainly has, does not preclude the accuracy of the accounts. And in the ancient world, everyone still believed that it was important to accurately represent what had happened as well. So we have an inspired account that is historically reliable and theologically edifying at the same time.

Dr. Peter Chow, translation

Archaeology helps us ascertain the accuracy of Luke's historical accounts. For example, archaeology confirms the kings, governors and Roman officials that he recorded, as well as the different places that he traveled to in the book of Acts. In this way, archaeology helps us verify the historicity of Luke. We also believe that the Holy Spirit led biblical authors to write the Canon, so we believe that the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Luke's gospel carries the highest authority; it's God's Word.

Dr. Dan Doriani

Luke was in the entourage of Paul. So, he had access to an apostle who would know what happened because Paul was talking to the other apostles. Paul had the outline to the life of Christ. Paul might have seen some things, might not, but he certainly knew what happened, and more importantly, he knew what it meant and could pass that on to Luke. Now, Luke clearly had a lot of skills. He was — we call him “the beloved physician” — he was a trained man, he was an observer, he has a great eye for detail, but maybe most importantly, he says, “Hey, I worked at this. I carefully consulted all the eyewitnesses from the beginning. I made a careful investigation.” He's implying that some investigations were not so careful. And, in fact, there are extant fragments

or quotations or whole documents that purport to give maybe more detail about Jesus' birth and how he came to this life, or his death, or something of that nature, and we look at them, and they're often fantastic. They're often incredible. They have Jesus doing very strange things, and pointless things, like making clay birds on the Sabbath one day, and a Pharisee — surprise, surprise — comes up and says to Mary and Joseph, "What kind of a son do you have? He's making clay birds. He's laboring on the Sabbath day." And Jesus claps his hands and says, "Be off with you!" and the birds come to life and fly away. Now, this is the kind of thing we don't find in the Gospels. We have something that's implausible — why would Pharisees be questioning the activity of a child? Something that is a mere wonder, an empty miracle, if you will. Something that doesn't point anywhere or signify anything. Maybe even corrupt activity — destroying the evidence, disrespect — which is all through the non-canonical infancy narratives — so-called infancy narratives — in other gospels.

Luke is sober-minded. He interviewed people. People ask questions like, "How do we know what Mary was thinking?" "How do we know what happened in the temple when Jesus was dedicated?" Well, the answer is, Luke interviewed her. Now, was Luke infallible? Was Mary infallible? Did she remember everything? Well, the Bible does say she treasured up things in her heart, and so, she was probably working hard to remember things, and there were people there to help her if she forgot. God equipped Luke as well. We all make mistakes. Every human is fallible, but God can take our fallible activities and make something infallible out of it. It happens to us routinely. We say something, not exactly like Luke, of course, we say something that's almost true, but somebody knows exactly what we meant. So, an error is purged by the good listener. God the Holy Spirit has the power to purge the errors that Luke, or for that matter, Matthew, John, Mark, might have been prone to commit. The Holy Spirit superintended. So, we have a man who has skills, who worked hard, who maybe wrote multiple drafts even, for all we know, and prayed over what he did, we assume, and God kept the errors out so it could be a reliable work, even though he didn't see it all, or maybe even didn't see anything with his own eyes.

Question 4:

Are there distinctly Gentile aspects of Luke's gospel?

Unlike the other gospel writers, Luke wasn't Jewish. In fact, he was probably the only Gentile whose books we have in the New Testament. And his audience was probably Gentile, too. But how did Luke's ethnicity and the ethnicity of his audience impact what he wrote? Are there distinctly Gentile aspects of Luke's gospel?

Dr. Peter Walker

Luke, himself a Gentile, writing the gospel for Gentiles like himself who had very little understanding perhaps of Judaism but have been brought into the story of Jesus,

and so it's written for the whole world, if you like. Luke's gospel — well, because he's trying to include people from all the world, and Gentiles like himself — has a very much more inclusive feel, and this is the gospel where you get a real sense of the human Jesus, God's love and compassion for all people, slightly more a feeling gospel, perhaps, whereas Matthew's gospel feels a little more truth and analysis, that kind of thing.

Dr. Peter Chow, translation

The first point of difference in comparing Luke with the other gospels is that its original readers were not Jewish people, and so it was adjusted to be more fitting to the Greek culture. For example, its genealogy begins with Adam instead of Abraham. It also uses Greek phrases. For example, when the four friends lowered a paralytic from the ceiling to be healed by Jesus, the roof that Luke described with his verbiage was a Greek-styled roof, not a Hebrew-styled mud roof.

Dr. Mark Strauss

The church of his day is made up of Jews and Gentiles, and from a historical perspective, the synagogue. The Jews in the synagogue would say, "What is this? God's people is the nation, Israel." And so, part of his purpose is to demonstrate that, in fact, the mission to the Gentiles was all along part of God's purpose and plan. So throughout both Luke and Acts you see this vision, this global vision, that the gospel isn't just for the Jews, that all along the Jews were meant to be a light for the Gentiles, and that one day this gospel — it starts in Israel — is going to go forth to all nations. And so very much central to Luke's purpose, to demonstrate that the church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, are the people of God in the present age.

Question 5:

Was "Theophilus" a real person, or was the name just a symbolic reference to anyone who loved God?

Most scholars agree that Luke wrote primarily for Gentiles. But not everyone agrees on the precise identity of his original audience: the man Luke called "Theophilus." Many interpreters have noticed that the name "Theophilus" means "one who loves God" or "friend of God." And this has led to speculation that Luke wrote generically to all Christians. Was "Theophilus" a real person, or was the name just a symbolic reference to anyone who loved God?

Dr. Peter Walker

Theophilus, as a name, does just mean "lover of God," and so it's possible that it's a reference just to an imaginary figure. I think that's a little bit unlikely. I think it's more likely that this is actually a real person who's come to believe in Christ. He says, "I'm trying to give you the assurance of the things which you yourself have believed." And so, I imagine this to be a Roman patron of Luke. I mean, Luke is

possibly in Rome for two years, writing up his gospel researches, writing the book of Acts as well, and therefore it makes every sense for him to be, as it were, writing it for someone who's perhaps supporting him financially, encouraging him. And it's very helpful for Luke, I think, also to have a real Gentile believer in his mind as he writes because then that acts as a kind of way of selecting his material. What would be most helpful for Theophilus, to write? And any of us, when we are writing, it's really useful to have a real audience in mind, and I think Theophilus was his real audience.

Dr. David Bauer

Many have thought that perhaps Theophilus was not an actual individual, but represents the readership of Luke's gospel, which would be the lovers of God in the church, that Luke's gospel is directed towards a church, the so-called "Lukan" church. Or some have suggested more recently that Luke, as well as the other gospels, was not directed to a specific church, but to the whole church. And so, "Theophilus" then might refer to the church as a lover of God. And insofar as the church is a lover of God then this gospel relates to the church in that existence, in that aspiration. An argument in favor of seeing Theophilus as a figurative representation, is the fact that Luke — and remember when I say Luke-Acts because Luke 1:1-4, I think, introduces not just the Gospel of Luke, but the whole work, including the book of Acts — is concerned with issues that go beyond the interests or the challenges of just one person. There is a great deal of material in Luke-Acts that is clearly meant to be edifying to the entire church. The other major possibility, of course, is that Theophilus was an individual.

Most scholars, and for what it's worth I would agree with this second view, hold to the second view because Luke describes him as "most excellent," "*kratista*," there, and Luke later uses that very word, "*kratista*," to refer to Roman officials, to Felix and to Agrippa. And so, it was apparently in Luke's mind a rather technical expression referring to a person of high standing, and perhaps especially a person of high standing in the Roman government. Beyond that, Luke 1:1-4 does seem to be a dedication. It just fits in terms of the genre of introductory dedications. And historical works were often dedicated using this kind of language to a patron, someone who actually paid for the production of the work. And so, it really fits into what we know of dedicatory statements, and for that reason, as I say, almost certainly Theophilus was an actual person.

Now, that does not mean that the Gospel of Luke, or Luke-Acts, was addressed solely to him, but I think it does mean that one purpose of Luke-Acts — not the only purpose, but one purpose of Luke-Acts — is to fulfill the purpose statement that is mentioned in connection with Theophilus there in Luke 1:1-4, "That you may know" — it's often translated — "the truth of the things about which you have been informed." The word for "truth" there is actually in Greek, "*asphaleia*." It's the word from which we get our English word "asphalt," which is heuristic, or suggestive of its meaning in Greek, that is something upon which you can confidently stand, something that you can build your life upon. So, if that is the case, then Theophilus

was probably a person who either had heard the gospel, was interested, but was not fully convinced, so that there would be something of an evangelistic or apologetics aspect to Luke-Acts, particularly directed toward Theophilus and those like him, significant officials in the Roman government, persons of high standing. Or Theophilus may have been a catechumen, someone who was going through the process of Christian instruction which would ideally lead to baptism and incorporation of the Christian community, still had some questions, and so if that is in fact the case, there'd be almost a catechetical, catechesis, sort of aspect to the purpose of Luke or Luke-Acts.

Question 6:

What was the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first century?

At the time that Luke wrote his gospel, the church was sometimes identified as a Jewish sect, and sometimes sharply distinguished from Judaism. And some scholars have suggested that the tension between Judaism and Christianity influenced Luke's work. So, what was the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first century?

Dr. Greg Perry

The relationship between Judaism and Christianity in the first century is complicated. It starts off where Christians are really a part of Judaism. We see in the book of Acts, for example, that Christianity is described as "The Way," as sort of a sect within Judaism, a messianic sect within Judaism of these people who worshipped Jesus as the Messiah. But we can see in Acts and in the other New Testament books that right away the claim that Jesus is the Messiah begins to divide synagogues, for example. And Paul is a great example of someone who is put out of the synagogue. For example in Ephesus he goes and teaches in a school hall, or we begin to see Christians who are meeting in households instead of in synagogue gatherings. One of the things that puts a lot of pressure on that relationship early on is, of course, the claim that Jesus is the Messiah, but also the influx of Gentiles. We began to see that those who are preaching Christianity are preaching Jesus as the Lord over all the nations. And we began to see Gentiles responding. And so the various sensibilities about the food laws, about circumcision, began to add more pressure. And we see these sort of disputes break out like at Galatia, over whether or not these Gentiles are to keep the Law.

The other thing that is putting a lot of pressure on this relationship is the way that both of them are relating to Rome and Rome's power. We know, of course, for example, that the temple is destroyed in A.D. 70. And even before that — that's because of Jewish revolution against Caesar — and so, in the wake of that, we see Jews trying to reestablish their identity. And they begin to discuss that, and what that

should look like. And that adds further to the separation between Christians and Jews. But even before that in Rome itself in the lead up to the revolt, we see that Christian Jews in particular are expelled from Rome. People like Priscilla and Aquila are again claiming Jesus is the Messiah, and so there is this civil disturbance over “*Chrestus*,” as what Suetonius says as he’s writing the life of Claudius, and we think that probably refers to *Christos*, to Jesus. So we see then that the relationship is complicated, and we see divisions taking place because of the claim “Jesus is Messiah,” because of the influx of Gentiles, and also because of the relationship with Rome. All these pressures began to divide Christians and Jews in the first century.

Question 7:

Why did Jesus need to be baptized?

Luke paid attention to many Gentile concerns. But he also wanted his readers to understand that the gospel is the story of a Jewish Messiah. God chose the Jews as the special people that would produce the Savior of the world. And the Messiah wouldn’t bring salvation by rejecting his Jewish heritage, but by embracing and fulfilling it. One way Jesus did this was through the Jewish rite of baptism. So, Luke reported this event even though its association with repentance raised questions like, why did Jesus need to be baptized?

Dr. David Redelings

Yeah, the question is often raised as to why Jesus had to be baptized, and the concern generally is that if Jesus is the sinless sacrifice for our sins, as the New Testament teaches elsewhere, why does he have to repent? And that’s the sort of concern. And I think the problem arises from joining a little too closely the idea of baptism and repentance. It’s helpful to understand the Jewish background, to understanding how Jews would have viewed baptism in the first century. In John 3:25, there’s a reference to an argument about baptism and it’s referred to as “purification” or “cleansing.” And so we understand that Jews thought of baptism as a kind of cleansing in the 1st century. And this is also seen in Jewish writings. For example, in the *Mishna*, which was written about 200 A.D., there’s a chapter called “*Mikvaot*.” And in *Mikvaot*, it basically gives laws about cleansing for various situations that are required by Mosaic Law. And the Mosaic Law did require cleansing, and it would be the kind of thing that would occur when people are perhaps sick or so on, then they would have to follow the cleansing requirements of the law. And so, this would be part of, actually, daily life. And we find also that archaeologists have found in first century Judea, *Mikvaot*. They’ve discovered them. For example, there are pools in the Qumran area, which are widely regarded as *Mikvaot*, and there are other areas as well, I believe, in Jerusalem and so on. And so, for Jews to think of baptism as purification is an important concept. They would think of it in those terms.

Now, beyond that, it’s interesting to note that in the Old Testament, that in Exodus

19, when the Israelites were going to hear from God, or God was going to descend on Mount Sinai, that they are told before that to wash their clothes and purify themselves. And so, so it turns out that cleansing was really something that people would do in preparation for God's coming, or God's appearance. And if we look at John the Baptist's proclamation, he's basically saying that God is going to come in judgment and that people need to prepare themselves by repentance, and then, of course, by baptism. And so, it's very natural to the Jewish mind to think that baptism would accompany repentance, especially of course, if Jews were actually unclean at the time, but even, perhaps, just to make sure, and so, we could also understand how Jesus would think of this as being appropriate for himself because he is one who obeys the Jewish law as a good Jew. The period when Gentiles are not under the Mosaic law is later and so that even in Acts 10 when Peter says that he has never eaten anything which was not clean food under Mosaic law, that's something new and that happens later. But at this time, and the time of the Gospels, it's very understandable, natural, for Jews to obey the laws of cleanness and to have regard for that as part of their piety towards God. And one of the difficulties I think we have often as Gentiles is that we think that, we'll think, well then, is it a sin to be unclean? If you look at Numbers, I believe it's chapter 19, there's an interesting example where the priests are required by law to carry off the ashes of a sacrifice, and they do become unclean by that act, even though it's commanded. So, being unclean is not the same as being sinful, and for Jesus to participate in a purification of baptism is not an admission of sin on his part.

Question 8: **Why did the Jews hate Jesus so much?**

At a variety of points in his gospel, Luke pointed out that Jesus strongly opposed the Jewish leaders, and that they strongly opposed him. Even the Jewish people eventually turned against Jesus and demanded his death. Now, it's not hard to understand why the Jewish Messiah would stand against the abuses and errors of his people. But why didn't the Jews accept their own Messiah? Why did the Jews hate Jesus so much?

Rev. Mike Glodo

First of all, those in authority had the most to lose. And we can see there is a general orientation to power and authority. It's just human nature, and Jewish authorities were no different than any other human beings. Those who have power want to hold on to it, and Jesus came as a threat to their power. They understood the kingdom of God in a narrow way, in a nationalistic way, in an ethnocentric way, in a tribal way, and they had the most to lose. And just as it was told to Mary in Luke's gospel, this child shall be the cause of the rise and fall of many in Israel and a sign to be opposed. John's gospel begins with the anticipation that this is the Light, which came into the world and the darkness did not, some translations say, "comprehend it," but I think, rather,

we should understand, “overpower it.” Jesus came as the light of the world, and the darkness had everything to lose. And so the religious authorities manifest that.

But we also should remember that it’s not very long, it’s late in “Holy Week,” as we call it, where everyone, even the crowds that had followed Jesus, cried out for the release of Barabbas instead of Jesus. That Jesus came not fulfilling people’s expectations of what they wanted God to do. Instead, he came manifesting what God was determined to do, and that means a threat to our own independence, a threat to our own autonomy. And we don’t like to die to self, and so Jesus brought a threat of overturning our human wills, and that’s why he was ultimately, from a human level, rejected. But we also have to look at it on the divine level, too. It was God’s purpose and plan that Jesus came to redeem fallen humanity and that he would destroy death by himself dying. And so it was, as Peter says in his sermon in Acts 4, that according to the predetermined and foreordained plan of God, this Jesus was crucified. So what becomes the worst thing to ever happen in the history of the human race is also the most glorious thing that happens in the history of the human race. The way it comes to us individually is we see Jesus challenges our autonomy. Jesus challenges our self-authority. And just like Peter wrestled with this question, do I follow the way of the cross? Do I follow the way of the sword? Do I follow the way of death to self so that I may live in Christ? Or do I follow the way of living in my own power and strength? We feel that very dilemma that Jesus encountered in the crowds on the day he rode in and throughout the following week until he was crucified.

Dr. Dan Doriani

Well, people hated Jesus for a variety of reasons, and we could list them in, we might say, spiritual and non-spiritual everyday sorts of reasons. On one level people hated Jesus because he upset them. The Pharisees did not like the way he conducted himself. I mean, he’s obviously a teacher, he’s obviously somebody vaguely like themselves, and yet, he’s unlike them. He doesn’t keep their rules about the Sabbath, about who to associate with, about the way you eat, the way you wash. So many things were so upsetting to them. Essentially you could say they had a religion of Law, and they believed you got right with God by keeping Law, and they were the keepers of that law. They were the ones who knew what the Law meant, how it should be interpreted, how it should be practiced. And, you know, if Jesus were just an ordinary sinner, if he were just a...what, a tax collector? They would say, “well, a tax collector...” and written him off. Or if he were just an ignorant farmer, they would have written him off. But he looked like them. He was a teacher, he gathered disciples to himself, and he didn’t do it the way they did it, and for that reason, they found him troubling. Not just distasteful. It’s not just they hated him for personal reasons. They almost certainly thought he was what the Old Testament calls a “*mesith*,” a beguiler of the people, because he could perform miracles, mighty deeds. There was no question he had certain powers. He was charismatic, he gathered followers, and he was misleading people. For example, something we all know, that Jesus talked to women freely. And, you know, the rabbis at that time actually said, “You shouldn’t even talk to your own wife too much because it will drag you down. It will corrupt you. A woman can’t learn the Law, can’t study the Law effectively. It

goes in one ear and out the other. Why are you bothering?” Now, that’s trivial compared to the fact that he spent time with prostitutes, tax collectors, notorious sinners of all kinds. A holy man does not associate with such people. And the fact that he had disciples was what made him so dangerous in their mind.

And so they hated him, probably partially for, now go horizontal, you know partially for very human and very mundane reasons: he was more popular than they were. He seemed to criticize them. In fact, he did criticize them. He walked — now leaving the Pharisees for a moment, going over to the priests — he walked into their turf. He cleansed the temple. That’s what we call it. Really more like a protest, more like a partial or representative overthrow of the temple when Jesus cast out the moneychangers that the priests had said could operate there. And, you know, they asked him the question, “Who gave you the authority to do this?” Well, of course, that’s a loaded question. It’s mostly loaded because they’re the authorities, and they’re saying in part, “We didn’t give you the authority to do this. God gave us the responsibility to care for the temple. How dare you walk into our temple, God’s temple — God gave us the rules. How dare you walk in here and overthrow legitimate businessmen going about their affairs.” They were jealous of Jesus. He stepped in their turf. But there are also some aspects of self-righteousness that may be in a not wholly evil sense of the word. They really thought they were the guardians of God’s Word. They were finding Jesus disagreeing with them.

Now, there are other reasons, very different sorts of reasons. We don’t really know all. We can’t fathom all of them. Why did Judas turn against Jesus? Maybe Judas wanted Jesus to do more. Maybe he was hoping for a nationalistic hero, which so many other people hoped for. We don’t know about Judas, but certainly there were some people that wanted a Jewish leader to rise up and to unseat the Romans. And a lot of people followed Jesus for his signs, and thinking, “If he can do all this, he can do more.” And maybe that turned into disappointment during the final week so that they turned on Jesus. There’s an interesting use, various folks have noticed, of the word “*paradidomi*” which means “to hand over” or “betray.” And it goes like this, it says, “Judas,” in one place, “handed Jesus over, or betrayed him, to the Jews, to the priests, out of greed for thirty pieces of silver.” Boy, is that mundane. He just wanted money. We can’t minimize that. The priests — same verb, *paradidomi* — delivered Jesus over, betrayed Jesus over to Pilate out of envy and self-righteousness. That’s in Mark 15. Pilate handed Jesus over for execution out of fear of the crowds, fear of what the — or maybe not fear of the crowds, but accountability, shall we say, and fear of what the Jewish leaders might say to the Romans if he didn’t come through and kill this seditious man. And then of course behind it all we have the eternal perspective that God delivered his Son over for us all. So, there are many answers to the question, “Why was Jesus hated?” And many answers to the question, “Why did he die?” And I think we’re best off if we look at the sort of horizontal, the misguided spiritual, and also the divine, God-centered spiritual answers.

Question 9:

Why didn't the Jews recognize that Jesus was the Messiah?

Many of the Jewish leaders and people probably wouldn't have hated Jesus so much if they had only recognized that he was the Messiah. And for Christians reading Luke's gospel, it seems fairly obvious that Jesus really was the long-awaited Son of David. Did the Jews in Jesus' day have mistaken ideas about who the Messiah would be and what he would do? Why didn't the Jews recognize that Jesus was the Messiah?

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the best texts in the Old Testament to discover the role of the Messiah is Psalm 2, which speaks about the way in which God has established this particular King, this Anointed One, this Messiah, on his holy hill, in Zion, in Jerusalem, and how he's going to be the one who's going to ... well, he's going to be Lord over the whole world. The ends of the earth are going to be his possession. The obedience of the nations is going to be his. And that Psalm ends with the rulers of the earth being called to kiss the Son, or to bow down and to worship him. This sets up an incredible picture of what the role of the Messiah is, and over the centuries as the Jewish people reflect on that, they're expecting someone to come who's going to be like David was, who was the king before, but who's going to be a ruler. Now, in Jesus' day, there were other expectations as well, that the Messiah would come and restore the temple, and that the Messiah would redeem Israel, and they began to understand this in a more political sense, that "surely if the kingdom was going to be restored to Israel, then we're going to be lord over the whole world." But that wasn't the way it was going to be.

Dr. Thomas Schreiner

We look at the Old Testament, the Old Testament especially emphasizes that the Messiah is first of all a son of David. Of course, David was that great king of Israel who trusted in the Lord so significantly, won powerful victories, in many, many ways obeyed the Lord. Of course, he had some significant failings as well, but David becomes the paradigm of what the Messiah will be. He will be a ruler who brings peace to the nation. And so we see in the latter part of the Old Testament after David has died there is an expectation that a son of David will come, and that's especially aligned with the idea that there will be peace and righteousness and joy. Of course, this plays right into the New Testament, doesn't it? When we read even before the New Testament there's a little book called The Psalms of Solomon. And there's this strong expectation of a son of David who would come. He would rescue the nation from their oppressors. He would roust out the Romans and defeat them. There would be peace with this ruler upon the throne. And of course, that's a central part of what we find in the Old Testament expectation. But mixed in with this is this expectation as well in Isaiah 53 and some other passages that the Messiah would suffer.

Now, interestingly enough, from all the evidence we have, the Jewish people did not understand that as well. We even see that in the New Testament when Jesus begins to explain to his disciples that he is the son of David and he's the Messiah, they agree and they confess him as such, but their expectation is that he would bring in an age of peace and righteousness. He would destroy their enemies. But then Jesus shifts gears on them a little bit, helping them understand the fullness of what the Old Testament teaches about the Messiah, indeed, in terms of the suffering servant and immediately the disciples are quite perplexed. That strand of the Old Testament teaching they hadn't integrated well into their thinking. Indeed we don't know what they thought exactly about Isaiah 53 at all, but apparently they didn't clearly understand that to refer to the Messiah. So it was quite an education for the disciples to begin to understand that the Messiah would suffer and he would die and he would be crucified. Their notion was the Messiah was pleasing to God and anyone who was pleasing to God would not end up being crucified. So we have to take these two strands together and what we actually see in the Scriptures is that the victory predicted for the son of David would not come by him destroying his enemies, but by taking suffering upon himself, by absorbing the sins of human kind upon himself. So it was quite a radical idea, which virtually no one understood.

Question 10:

What characterizes the kingdom of God in Luke's gospel?

One of the main messages in all four gospels is that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah that brought the kingdom of God to earth. But each of the gospels emphasizes different aspects of that kingdom. And Luke's approach differs from the others in significant ways. What characterizes the kingdom of God in Luke's gospel?

Dr. Peter Chow, translation

In Luke's gospel, Jesus is the King, the ruler of the kingdom of heaven. And Luke emphasized that when Jesus came into the world, he brought the kingdom of heaven with him. When he was just an infant, a host of angels showed themselves to the shepherds because the ruler of the kingdom of heaven had arrived on earth. The armies of heaven came to earth and praised God, saying: "Glory to God in the Highest, and peace on earth among those with whom God is pleased." The arrival of the kingdom signifies the arrival of God's reign. Jesus is the ruler of the kingdom of heaven, and his arrival on earth gives a clear picture of God's kingdom. He sets the oppressed free; he forgives sins; he drives out demons; the blind can see; the lame can walk; the lepers are cleansed. And people experience the righteousness of God. But most importantly, the coming of the kingdom means the defeat of death and sin. Through the kingdom, we have eternal life.

Rev. Mike Glodo

In Luke's gospel, what characterizes the kingdom of God? One important place to look is in Luke 4 when Jesus inaugurated his public ministry. He stood up in the synagogue on the Sabbath and he read from Isaiah 61, which declared the favorable year of the Lord, the recovery of sight to the blind, the binding up of the brokenhearted, and so forth. And when he said, "This Scripture is now fulfilled in your hearing," what Jesus was saying was that something the Old Testament had provided for and anticipated was now being realized. He was announcing that the Year of Jubilee, the year of restoration, had come. And so that is a distinctive of the kingdom of God as Luke's presents it. Luke presents many things that Matthew and Mark do as well, but this was unique to Luke. Luke's gospel begins with an announcement very similar to the kind of announcement that Caesar Augustus would have sent when he sent an announcement throughout the empire that he had conquered the western territories. And it presents Jesus really in that kind of light, but yet much, much greater. Luke's gospel tells us that only Christ is the Lord, no civil authority is the Lord, and that Jesus comes as the fulfillment of God's restoration promises. And so, we are restored. We're restored to God, and God then becomes our Father as he provides for us, and then, through his community, through those who follow Jesus, people find restoration and redemption through the generosity of God's people, through the humility of God's people, through the peace that is supposed to prevail among the followers of Jesus as they are united to one another by virtue of being united to him. And so, Jesus sets about to show the signs of this Jubilee. He's freeing people from the oppression of demons, freeing them from social stigmatization, or social classification, and he's restoring them to God their maker and their Father.

Question 11:

How should the kingdom of God impact the lives of Christians?

When we think about Jesus' work in bringing the kingdom of God, it's important to ask what his work and his kingdom imply about the Christian life. Did Jesus do everything that needs to be done for the kingdom? Or do Christians have an obligation to apply the reality of the kingdom to their lives? How should the kingdom of God impact the lives of Christians?

Dr. Brandon Crowe

We see the kingdom of God very prominently in the teaching of Jesus. And what we find in the New Testament is Jesus, is that King who is powerfully bringing the kingdom of God into our world. The technical term is "eruption." There's an in-breaking; there's a very powerful entrance of God into our world by means of his messianic King. A great way to say what the kingdom is comes from Geerhardus Vos, and he says, the kingdom comes where the gospel is spread, hearts are changed, sin and error overcome, righteousness cultivated, and a living communion with God

established. And so, the kingdom of God is a supernatural thing. It is not something that we work for. It's something that God brings. And this leads to the cultivation of righteousness. God's priorities come to be realized on earth. So the kingdom comes in both word and deed. It comes with a powerful gospel message telling the world who Jesus is as the King and how he implements his kingdom through faith and repentance and trusting in him and following him. And as we do that, as we follow him through that gospel message, it leads to the deeds, to the works of the kingdom. And these are not just any good works that someone might do, but these are the good works that arise out of the regenerated life of the believing church, and these are works that lead back into the praise of God's glory. And these are works then that are unique to the church as those who have been overcome in a sense with the grace of the kingdom. And as we follow Christ, we manifest the kingdom today through both the message, which can never be left out, and the works of the kingdom. And these two things go hand-in-hand to spread the kingdom of God today.

Question 12:

Why did Jesus demonstrate mercy during his earthly ministry?

One of the aspects of the kingdom of God that Luke emphasized was that Jesus had come as a king to judge the world and to conquer sin and death. But how did Jesus' ministry of grace and blessing relate to his role as King? Why did Jesus demonstrate mercy during his earthly ministry?

Dr. William Ury

I think the showing of mercy is not just because the Lord feels sorry for us, which I'm sure he does, but I think it's because he's trying to reveal something about the inner life of God. Mercy has got to be connected to the triune life, and the Trinity, from my perspective from eternity, the King himself, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the King of all the universe, is a God who, three-in-one, is giving himself one to another, Father to Son, Son, Father, Spirit to the other two, in this self-giving. So that when Jesus comes to show mercy to sinners, he's expressing that self-giving love, which is the King's self-revelation. He will judge. He will eventually condemn those that don't love him. But when he comes to the earth, he comes to people who have been abused, who have been warped by all kinds of wrong powers and the Devil himself, and this King comes, and he says, "I'm not going to demand anything of you. First, I'm going to come and give myself to you." So, all of his acts of mercy are acts of the triune God's heart in the world to give oneself away. He comes with a self-giving. And I think mercy is a marvelous expression of that self-giving love that starts in the heart of God, in the incarnation offered to people wherever Jesus went. And, of course, his climax is on the cross, his mercy to us; the King who would die, giving his life away that we might receive the mercy of God for salvation. So he is the only truly merciful King, and he describes what that mercy is in his kingship.

Dr. Mark Strauss

All that God was, Jesus revealed. And that's not just his authority and power and sovereignty. It's also what we call his communicable attributes like his love and mercy and care for others. And so he's demonstrating God's love, reaching out to those throughout the biblical testimony, throughout the Old and New Testament, God's compassion on people, particularly the outcast, particularly the oppressed, and so Jesus' mercy is a demonstration of that. Then there's the larger issue of, the whole purpose of Jesus' coming is to save us, and so it's an act of grace, it's an act of mercy, and so we would expect Jesus to be demonstrating individual acts of mercy and grace — to demonstrate what his larger purpose is in coming to earth.

Question 13:**Why did Luke pay so much attention to people that lacked influence in Israel in Jesus' day?**

In Luke's gospel, one of the ways Jesus revealed the mercy of the kingdom was through his concern for the weak and the oppressed. In particular, Luke focused on Jesus' care for women, the poor, the sick, and other marginalized groups. Why did Luke pay so much attention to people that lacked influence in Israel in Jesus' day?

Dr. Peter Walker

One of the attractive and most beautiful things about Luke's gospel is the way in which he tells the story of Jesus, who has welcomed all people, and in particular some of the groups in his own day that might have not felt they were worthy of Jesus' attention — the women, the Gentiles, the Samaritans, the poor. It's a great feature of Luke's gospel that he's so inclusive and reaches out to them. And when we ask the question, well why has Luke done that? Apart from the fact that it's true, I think Luke has an extra reason. He himself is a Gentile, he's the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, so I understand it, and he himself was someone who was so delighted to have been brought into Jesus' kingdom. Gentiles were actually often on the edge, looking into Judaism. There was a group of people known as "the God-fearers" who really wanted to be Jewish, but perhaps because they didn't want to get circumcised, or for other reasons, they stood on the edge. Now, through Jesus, they've got the opportunity to come into God's people, and they don't have to become Jewish, they are welcomed as they are, as Gentiles. I think this is such good news for Luke himself, that he then tells how Jesus, in his own life, had been welcoming to all those who might have thought of themselves as outcasts, and I think it's just a beautiful story.

Dr. Peter Chow, translation

The other gospels discuss the relationship between Jesus and the poor as well, but the Gospel of Luke expounds on this even more clearly. In Luke 4, Jesus entered the

synagogue and proclaimed that the Year of Jubilee had arrived, making it clear that the coming of the kingdom is the fulfillment of the Year of Jubilee. In the Year of Jubilee, the poor receive good news and the oppressed are set free. Of course, Jesus doesn't just free the poor on an economic basis, but he also saves them from their sins. This is what the angel had announced to Mary. At that time, many of the people were poor, and most of the common folks were heavily oppressed. And the arrival of the kingdom was very important to those who were dispossessed. God is just. God's grace is sufficient. And Luke emphasized Jesus' relationship with the poor because he connected the arrival of God's kingdom with the fulfillment of the Year of Jubilee.

Question 14:

How should Christians respond to Luke's emphasis on socially disenfranchised groups?

Given Luke's emphasis on disenfranchised groups like women and the poor, many modern Christians wonder if that should be one of our emphases, too. Should we do more than proclaim the good news of Christ? What social implications does the gospel have? How should Christians respond to Luke's emphasis on socially disenfranchised groups?

Mr. Emad Sami, translation

When we talk about the Great Commission, we realize that it involves merciful acts, social work. And the Bible teaches that this is not optional; this cannot be separated from the gospel's message. All this existed in the Old Testament, and God has revealed his love through his care and faithfulness in our daily lives. When Jesus came to offer himself, to reveal the Father, to redeem and bring salvation to the whole world, he showed mercy, fed the people, filled the hungry, healed the sick, and satisfied the people's needs. Doing merciful acts and social work was always part of the Great Commission. In fact, one way to fulfill the Great Commission is by first meeting and satisfying human needs, so that from there we can help people discover God's love.

Dr. Matt Friedeman

When God takes on human flesh and he comes here, he looks around about his world and he sees things that make him sad. And instead of just crying, he says, "Not only will I shed a tear but I'll move towards those situations mercifully." It's interesting that Barclay would suggest that the word "mercy" in the New Testament Greek means, "to get inside the skin of." So this whole understanding of compassion means that I can feel something of what they're feeling right now. And instead of just saying, "I'm glad I'm not there," I'm going to be there. I'm going to move towards them, and I'm going to be to them what I believe God the Father wants me to be for them in this moment and this time. Now, should the believers today do the same sort of thing? Again, Jesus says, "Follow me." We're to be the merciful ones that belong

and act on behalf of the merciful One.

Dr. Saul Cruz, translation

We must always think that the gospel is not only the verbal proclamation of God's message. The gospel is all of God's actions through his people, through his Spirit, through his church, and in all the ways he uses to reach mankind. God is not only trying to heal his people or trying to teach his people, but also trying to save his people. And all of this is a unified process. The multifaceted unity of the gospel is vital. We do the gospel a great disservice when we separate these parts. And we have separated them. I believe that our words and our work should remain unified.

Question 15:
Why is it important for Christians to pray?

God has called Christians to participate with him in his extraordinary plan for redemption. And he has given us a tremendous amount of help for our endeavors. We have Jesus as our king and example. We're empowered and gifted by the Holy Spirit. And we have God's ear in prayer, even though we sometimes forget to rely on that tremendous blessing. Why is it important for Christians to pray?

Dr. Steve Harper

I think the reason why prayer is so important is that it creates the very kind of relationship with God that Christianity is intended to foster. When we pray, we are talking with God, listening to what God has to say to us, and then responding to what we hear. And that's the basis for the relationship. And that's really what God wants for us, is to have relationship. As we get closer to God through prayer, we also find ourselves closer to each other at the same time. So, prayer is a great enhancement to that kind of fellowship and community. Prayer is also important for us as believers because it's through prayer that we discern the will of God. Jesus, in the Gospel of John, about ten times, not literally but in principle, talks about the difference between his work and his works. His works are the things that we all have to do, the things we've written down in our P.D.A.s or "day-timers," those are the things we're going to do at 8:00, 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, 12:00, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, 4:00, and then we go home at the end of the day. But his work was to pay attention to the Father. About 10 times he says, you know, "I only do what I see the Father doing." "I only say what the Father tells me to say." Where did he get that? Well, I believe he got that in prayer. It was in that communion with the Father where he saw the Father's will and he heard the Father's words, and that then became his discernment out of which he spoke and acted. So, prayer is that way of knowing that what we say and do is connected to something more than just, you know, our latest good idea or whatever it happens to be.

Prayer is the means of power. The prophet Zechariah said, “It’s not by might or by power but by my Spirit saith the Lord.” And I think that’s so important for us. Prayer is the way that when I say “help” or when I say “thanks” — which are the two primary forms of prayer, you know, need help or express gratitude — when I do either of those two things, then that’s an acknowledgment that I’m not at the center anymore. Someone else is at the center empowering me, directing me, guiding me, teaching me, helping me, preserving me, protecting, whatever it may be. Prayer is very important for us because it takes us out of the center. It puts God at the center and helps us to discern what it is that God wants us to do. And all of that, that we’ve just said, leads us to, really, a time of humility, when we give thanks to God that we’re not the masters of our fate, and we’re not the captains of our soul, that God is. E. Stanley Jones once said, “Yourself in your own hands is a problem and a pain, but yourself in God’s hands is a power and a potential.” And so, God gives us prayer to get ourselves out of our own hands and into God’s hands.

Although the gospel of Luke contains much of the same content as the other Synoptic Gospels, Luke’s gospel is distinctive in many ways. The fact that Luke was a Gentile and not a Jew led him to focus primarily on people that weren’t always the “chosen ones” of society. And the fact that he wasn’t an eyewitness to Jesus’ earthly life prompted him to “investigate everything from the beginning,” giving him a unique perspective. Through the eyes of Luke, we see Jesus’ great mercy and love for his people, and through prayer and dependence on Christ we are called to respond with compassion, bringing the kingdom of God to a world in need.

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