

The Four Gospel Accounts

PART 3: LUKE

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This morning I would invite you to turn with me again to the four gospel accounts. Two weeks ago, we started something of an overview based on a request that came in from one of the women of this congregation. She was asking for “a sermon comparing and contrasting the four gospel [accounts]; studying the differences and why they are important.” And that is what we are doing!

If you have not been here, I would just briefly mention a helpful resource we’ve been referring to in this brief series, *A Harmony of the Gospels (NASB)*, by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry. Whenever we study just about anything from one of the four gospel accounts, there is a huge value in seeing the four accounts laid out in a parallel way. Again, this is available on Amazon³ for less than \$25, and we also now have one of these in the church library.

We’ve been using a handout for these lessons. If you need another one, these are coming around again this morning - just take one and pass it on - and there are also several in the back room again. And for those who have not been here, we have a reading guide on one side and a grid on the other.

On the grid side, we have now covered Matthew and Mark. In terms of differences between these two, Matthew (or Levi) was a tax collector, and Mark (also known as John Mark) was the cousin of Barnabas. Matthew, writing primarily to the Jews, emphasizes that Jesus is a King, the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Mark, on the other hand, was written to the Romans, so he emphasizes power and action. Matthew is arranged around five of Jesus’ major sermons, but Mark doesn’t have any structure; instead, Mark basically rambles. He’s excited, recording one amazing thing after another. The word “immediately” is found more than 40 times in the book of Mark. Matthew, on the other hand, is extremely concise. Every word seems to be very carefully chosen.

This morning, we continue with the book of Luke, and although he never signs his book, we believe that Luke is the author! With this in mind, let us please look at the opening verses - Luke 1:1-4,

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ² just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated

everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; ⁴ so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Let's keep a marker or a finger here in Luke 1, and let's turn over just briefly to Acts 1, because I'd like to point out some similarities between the beginning of Luke and the beginning of Acts. Notice, please, Acts 1:1-2,

¹ The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.

I hope all of us noticed some of the similarities, starting with the fact that both books are written to someone by the name ***"Theophilus."*** Literally, ***"Theophilus"*** means "friend of God" or "lover of God." So, either this person's name is actually Theophilus, or this is some kind of code word or nickname for somebody who is a "friend of God." Either way, it seems rather obvious that Luke and Acts were both written, 1.) BY the same person, and 2.) TO the same person - by Luke to Theophilus. Luke, then, is Volume 1, and Acts is Volume 2. Volume 1 covers the roughly 30 years from the birth of Jesus to the ascension of Jesus back into heaven, and Volume 2 covers the roughly 30 years from the ascension to the arrival of Paul in Rome. Luke and Acts, then, go together and were both written by Luke.

Going back to Luke 1, we learn something else about the author of Luke, and that is: The author was not an eyewitness; but instead, Luke seems to come along later, and he ***"investigates"*** the life of Christ. And he actually starts his account by acknowledging previous accounts. And I point this out, because it seems rather scholarly, rather methodical. It almost sounds like someone's dissertation, some kind of a research paper. He starts by recognizing previous research. It almost sounds like a submission to some kind of scholarly journal. And I mention this, because we know from a brief reference in one of Paul's letters that Luke is a medical doctor. This reference comes in Colossians 4:14, where Paul is sending greetings, and he says, ***"Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas."*** Luke, then, is a medical doctor. Luke is a physician. And like physicians today, physicians in the First Century were also highly educated. And the book of Luke reads like it was written by someone who is highly educated. Scholars tell us, in fact, that Luke has some of the finest Greek in the New Testament. Not that there are errors in the other accounts (there are not), but Luke's writing is more refined. He's not a fisherman like Peter, but Luke is a doctor, and it shows in his writing.

Continuing on our chart, it seems that Luke writes his gospel account at some point in the 60's AD. He's not the first to write (like Mark did in the 50's), but he's certainly not the last (as John did in the 80's or 90's).

And before we move away from that opening paragraph in Luke 1, we need to note that Luke is writing to something of a Greek audience. After all, he writes to some guy named ***"Theophilus."*** He addresses this man as ***"the most excellent Theophilus."*** That little phrase ***"most excellent"*** is only found in Luke's writing, and he uses it when referring to Theophilus as well as when Paul refers to the governors Felix and Festus. We assume, then, that Theophilus is either some kind of ruler, or perhaps he is at the very least someone extremely wealthy, perhaps, even, a sponsor of these two books (perhaps covering Luke's expenses as he writes). But the point here is: Luke is literally writing to a Greek audience, since Theophilus is a Greek name. But we might even describe it as a Universal audience, since Greek was basically a universal language back then. Greek was the language of commerce. Greek was the language of travel. As to Luke being Greek and something of an outsider, Luke, then, writes to everybody. And by everybody, I mean EVERYBODY. Luke goes out of his way to include those who were typically excluded in the First Century world, but we will get back to that in just a

moment. For now, though, we just note that Luke was written to a Greek audience, to everybody. I should also point out that Luke itself is a Greek name, and that reminds us that Luke is most likely the only Gentile to write a book of the Bible (with the possible exception of the book of Job). As a gentile, Luke writes more of the New Testament than anybody else. Luke and Acts make up about ¼ of the New Testament. Emphasizing that Luke is not a Jew, I would point out a passing reference in Acts 1:19, where Luke is writing about the place where Judas was buried, and he says, ***“And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.”*** Notice in that passage, he refers to ***“their own language.”*** Hebrew wasn’t HIS language, but it was THEIR language, the language of the Jewish people, and Luke was not a Jew.

Years ago, I got a strange call on the church phone in the middle of the night at a church lock-in down in Janesville. We were up all night playing games with the teens, and the phone rings. Some anonymous person apparently couldn’t sleep, and they wanted to know, “Was Luke an apostle?” I guess I had never thought about that before. The question caught me off guard a bit. So I said, “I don’t know. Let me think about that.” So we looked it up and we confirmed that no, Luke was not an apostle. And now, if somebody ever calls the church in the middle of the night asking this again, I will know! Luke was not one of the twelve apostles! Last week we learned that Mark was not an apostle either. So, two of the four accounts were not written by apostles. John Mark was at least Jewish. Luke, though, was a Gentile (a non-Jew). And this ties in to the audience. Luke is writing as something of an outsider. Luke is writing as a second-generation Christian. Luke is not an eyewitness, but he has interviewed the witnesses, he has examined previous accounts, and he has combined all of his research into this document we have open before us this morning. As gentiles ourselves, we are the audience Luke was trying to reach.

And speaking of Luke being a gentile reaching out to other gentiles, it seems that the first reference to Luke in the Bible comes in Acts 16 as Luke shows up to join Paul, and Timothy, and Silas in Troas right in the middle of the Second Missionary Journey. He appears for the first time in what is clearly a Gentile region, in Troas, in a Greek-speaking province of the Roman Empire. If we think of Luke as the author of Acts, we have the first ***“we”*** passage in Acts 16. Notice, please, Acts 16:6-12, and I want us to notice the shift from ***“they”*** to ***“we”*** in this passage - Acts 16:6-12,

⁶ They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; ⁷ and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; ⁸ and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. ⁹ A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. ¹¹ So putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the day following to Neapolis; ¹² and from there to Philippi...

They then meet Lydia, and the Philippian Jailer, and so on. But the point is: Luke seems to step into the book of Acts (and into the history of the church) for the first time here in Acts 16 - right in the middle of the Greek-speaking world. We might assume, then, that Luke has some connection to Troas (a city on the far NW coast of Asia Minor). And this tells us that Luke is not just a researcher at this point, but he joins in on the action. He takes an active part in spreading the gospel, along with Paul, and Silas, and the others. He seems to stay in Philippi for a while, he rejoins Paul as he passes through Philippi on his Third Missionary Journey, he then returns with Paul to Jerusalem and accompanies Paul on his trip to Rome, and stays with Paul through the end of Paul’s life.

Just another brief note on Luke being a physician (and the fact that he traveled with Paul): We know that Paul had some health concerns, so we assume that Luke was a huge help to Paul as he traveled. And we know, in fact, that this condition Paul had (whatever it was) flared up in Galatia (in this Greek-speaking area, where he meets Luke for the first time). Notice, please, Galatians 4:12-15. Writing a letter back to these people, this is what Paul says,

¹² I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; ¹³ but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴ and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. ¹⁵ Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

There's all kinds of speculation as to what Paul was suffering here. It seems that it was related to his eyes in some way, so some have suggested that it was some level of blindness or debilitating migraines going back to seeing the light on the road to Damascus, that vision issues were the ***"thorn in the flesh"*** he refers to in 2 Corinthians 12:7. Paul usually used a secretary to do the actual writing of his letters, but a bit later in Galatians, in Galatians 6:11, Paul writes the last few verses himself and says, ***"See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand."*** As you looked at the original copy of Galatians, then, you apparently had the neat writing of a professional scribe, and then you had these huge letters as if written by a kindergartener. And this is perhaps because of the trouble he had with his eyes. But the point here is: Luke is a doctor, he joins Paul in this Greek-speaking area, and we assume that Luke must have been a huge help to Paul as he suffered with whatever he was going through.

As to Jesus, Luke seems to emphasize that Jesus is the ***"Son of Man."*** In Luke, Jesus is human. Yes, he is the Son of God, yes, he is the King, but we see his humanity emphasized in the book of Luke. And this ties in to the audience. In Luke, Jesus has a way of relating to our humanity. Luke emphasizes Jesus' birth and childhood more than the others. Luke is the only one, in fact, who tells us anything about Jesus growing up. All of us have been children. And so, no matter who we are, Jesus is one of us. Jesus is like us. Yes, he is the Son of God, but he is also the Son of Man.

As to major themes or big ideas in Luke, Luke focuses in on INCLUSION. From the very beginning, Luke tells us how the angel announced to the shepherds, ***"Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people."*** Later in the same chapter (in Luke 2:30-32), the old man Simeon took Jesus in his arms, was overwhelmed by the Spirit, and praised God saying, ***"For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a Light of revelation to the Gentiles..."*** Do you remember the prophecy about John the Baptist and how he would prepare the way for the Lord, and make his paths straight, and so on? All three parallel accounts give us the quote from Isaiah 40:3-4, but only Luke goes further and quotes from verse 5 where Isaiah says that ***"all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*** In Luke 4:25-27, Luke has Jesus praising Naaman and the widow of Zerephath (both Gentiles) as having more faith than the Jewish people. From the beginning, then, Luke includes the gentiles, women, outcasts, children, and foreigners in a way that they are not featured in the other gospel accounts. Only Luke tells us about the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Boy (or the Prodigal Son). Luke is rooting for the underdog. Luke has the "little guy" being honored - literally! The account of Zaccheus, the vertically challenged tax collector, is found only in Luke (the passage John read for us earlier). Luke is the gospel of inclusion. And the reason is, I believe: Luke himself is something of an outsider. Luke himself is a gentile. In Luke, therefore, we have an emphasis on God's grace showing up in unexpected places. Besides the account of Zaccheus, Luke tells us

about the Rich Man and Lazarus; Lazarus, of course, being the poor man who goes to Paradise while the Rich Man ends up being lost. Luke is the only one who tells us about the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Luke is the only one who tells us about the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable where the Samaritan (a rejected outsider) is praised by Jesus, and the religious leaders are shamed and humiliated. Luke is the only one who tells us about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, and it's the Tax Collector, of course, who goes home justified, while the self-righteous Pharisee is condemned. Luke is the gospel of inclusion.

As to the arrangement of Luke, Luke seems to feature some of the major parables. There isn't a formal structure to the book, but there are more parables in Luke than in any of the other gospel accounts. He gives us 18 parables, more than Matthew, Mark, or John. We have some clue about the arrangement in Luke 1:1-4 where Luke tells us that his goal is to lay out the life of Christ in **"consecutive order."** Luke's goal, then, was to put the life of Christ on a timeline, so to speak.

As to key words, the phrase **"Son of Man"** is repeated over and over in Luke, something like 25 times. I've already mentioned this in passing, but Luke emphasizes Jesus' humanity. Jesus is like us. He is the Son of God, but he is also the Son of Man. We see this emphasis in the genealogy Luke records for us in Luke Chapters 1 and 3. Matthew traces the Lord's genealogy through Joseph and back to Abraham. Luke takes the genealogy from Mary all the way back to Adam. In other words, Jesus is not just a son of Abraham, but he is the Son of Adam, the **"Son of Man."** His genealogy is our genealogy. Even as Gentiles, we are related to Jesus in some way. Even as gentiles, we are included (going back to the idea of inclusion). Not all of us are children of Abraham, but all of us are children of Adam.

As to interesting facts, as a physician, Luke seems to use some medical terminology that isn't found elsewhere in the Bible. He notices things that perhaps only a doctor might notice, especially with some of the healings. With the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, for example, Matthew and Mark tell us that she was sick with a **"fever,"** but only Luke (in Luke 4:38) tells us that she was **"suffering from a high fever."** Other doctors at that time in history classified fevers as being "low" or "high." Luke, using the medical terminology of his day, tells us that hers was a **"high fever."** We would also consider Luke 5:12, where Luke describes a man not just as having leprosy, but he describes him as being **"full of leprosy,"** indicating the extent of his leprosy. As a doctor, Luke pays attention to that. In Luke 6:6, Luke tells us about Jesus healing the man with the withered hand, but only Luke tells us that it was the man's **"right hand."** In the account of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, only Luke tells us (in Luke 22:44) that Jesus' **"sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground."** There is one account where the difference between Luke and the others is almost hilarious. I'm thinking of the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years straight. Obviously, that is not the funny part. But in Luke 8:43, Luke describes **"...a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years and could not be healed by anyone."** Mark, on the other hand, says this (in Mark 5:25-27), **"And a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse, after hearing about Jesus, came up in the crowd behind him and touched his cloak."** It is interesting to me that Luke (as a physician himself) does not tell us how this woman had spent all of her money on doctors, only to get worse in the process! Instead, Luke only tells us that this woman **"could not be healed by anyone."** This is one value of having a Harmony of the Gospels - we can see all of the accounts laid out side by side, and it makes it much easier to see these differences. But again, Luke is a medical doctor, and we see this in his writing.

I would also add that Luke includes more secular history than some of the other authors. He brings in the names and offices held by certain government officials in a way that Matthew, Mark, and John do not. I put an article on the church's Facebook page yesterday, a link to some material by Wayne Jackson. Brother Jackson

points out that at one time Luke 2:1-7 was considered a passage with “more error per square inch than almost any other section in the New Testament.” However, as historians learned more and more about the ancient world, they have come to discover that Luke was right all along. In his gospel account, Luke mentions places, and events, and names of government officials, and every time it is possible to be proven right, Luke has been proven right. In Luke 2, Luke dates the arrival of John the Baptist in six ways - based on who was emperor, who was ruling as governor of Judea, who was tetrarch of Galilee, who was high priest at the time, and so on. He nails it down in a way the other accounts do not.

Conclusion:

There is so much more we could say on this, but we have come to the end for today, so hopefully we can get back into it next week by concluding with John. And again, if you have a chance, I would encourage all of us to read the book of Luke this week. It takes less than two hours to read, and I would certainly encourage you to read through it, keeping an eye out for the emphasis Luke puts on outsiders.

As outsiders ourselves, we need what Jesus has to offer. Going back again to that passage John read for us earlier, as Jesus went out of his way to speak to this hated tax collector, he explained his purpose, **“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”** We are that tax collector. We are Zaccheus. We are the ones who have been separated from God because of our sin, but we have been brought close to God by the blood of His only Son.

We respond to Luke’s account, then, by turning to Jesus just as Zaccheus did. We admit that we are in sin, and then with God’s help we take steps to make things right. We turn away from sin and back to God. Thankfully, Luke continues with the book of Acts, where he explains God’s plan for our lives in great detail, giving many examples - thousands of people turning away from sin and back to God in the act of baptism - allowing themselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of sins, at which point they are added by God to his church. And that is what we teach and offer to the world today.

Do you believe in Jesus? Have you really looked at Luke’s account? Like Zaccheus, are you ready to turn away from sin and back to God? If you are at that point, we would love to help you in any way we can. If you are interested in studying further, get in touch. But if you are ready to obey this good news right now, we invite you to let us know right now as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Author				
Date				
Audience				
Jesus				
Big Ideas				
Arrangement				
Key Words				
Interesting Facts				

Highly Recommended: *A Harmony of the Gospels (NASB)*, by Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry

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