

Route Sixty-Six

Part Forty-Two

Luke

Behold the Man

(John 5:39; Luke 2:52)

With Study Questions

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Introduction

I was not raised in a Christian home. So, like many of us, my early influences regarding religion came from television and movies. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, unlike today, religious figures were often portrayed in a somewhat positive light. Movies like *The Robe* or *Ben Hur* made an effort at giving an affirming, and at least somewhat accurate, understanding of the Christian faith (again, unlike today where it has become in vogue to wield Christ as a political tool, seeking to turn Him into something that He is not—a woman or gay or sinful, etc.).

One image that stuck in my head was when Charlton Heston played Moses in *The Ten Commandments*. To be sure, when Moses descended Sinai with The Law his face shone in such a way that they were afraid to come near him (Exodus 34:29, 30). But I recall in the movie, after that event, how they portrayed Moses so other-worldly that he was almost in a trance for the remainder of the film. He had no fear, was undistracted from his quest, and even walked with a brisker stride. I figured that must be what true religion bestows in the life of the faithful.

I am still waiting for it to kick in.

Of course, if Moses, a mere man, can walk this life with such a profound sense of other worldliness and unwavering spiritual courage, how much more Jesus, the God-Man! What an advantage, one would think, Jesus would have over other mere mortals—the Godhead and the manhood, inseparably joined together in one person, very God, and very

man, yet one Christ! But we must be careful to avoid allowing early heresies to creep into our thinking when it comes to the nature of Christ.

Do we see God and man joined together into one person? Yes. But the early church worked out years ago (at Chalcedon) something reflected in the words pertaining to Christ that He is, **“one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion (WCF, 8:2).”** Simply put, the two natures are not mixed together, as if Jesus could reach into His back pocket and pull out His God card when He needed extra strength, endurance, and even wisdom (as we are taught, there were things Jesus didn’t know-Matthew 24:36). What we will learn in Luke is that

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52).

How does God (who is **“alone wise”** Romans 16:27), increase in wisdom? In the same way it was Jesus, the man, who increased in stature (became bigger and taller), it was Jesus, the man, who became wiser.

The Emphasis of Luke

As mentioned, the four gospels give four harmonious, full, yet unique perspectives of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ (Luke and Mark mention the ascension as well). We should not overstate nor understate their distinctions. Let us not overstate it knowing that if you read any gospel, you will read of that which was necessary regarding the complete accomplishment of redemption. But let us not understate it as if the gospels are mere repetitions of each other. They do emphasize different things.

We learned that in Matthew, the emphasis was Jesus the promised King/Deliverer/Messiah. Matthew begins with a genealogy from Abraham to Jesus. This would speak loudly to the Jewish reader. Mark emphasized Jesus as the servant. Very little reference to Jesus’ ancestry. Mark focused on the serving hands of a true leader-that He did not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45). Luke appears to bring paint the picture of Jesus, *the man*.

The philosopher and theologian, Joseph, Ernest Renan said of this gospel that it was “the most beautiful book ever written.” Where we saw in Mark a photographer, moving quickly from scene to scene, we see in

Luke a painter of pen-pictures. Perhaps we think of a Norman Rockwell so famous for painting images of simple, real life: a family picnic, a child at the doctor, a couple in a diner.

Luke will paint pictures of real human life. He opens his gospel by saying as much. He is setting **“in order a narrative”** of things that were actually done and seen. He wants his readers (beginning with Theophilus, to whom the gospel is written-likely a Roman Christian) to benefit from his **“perfect understanding of things from the very first...that you may know the certainty of those things” (Luke 1:1-4).**

Luke’s pen-pictures reflect real things happening in the real, physical world with real physical humans, including Christ Himself. We mentioned last time how we will not see verses from Mark on people’s lawns during Christmas. This is not the case with Luke. Luke will spend a great deal of time painting the picture of Christ’s birth, and more. Like Rockwell, Luke brings us into the families.

He begins with Zacharias and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist. He writes in detail of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth when they are both with child and Mary’s beautifully poetic and theologically rich response in the Magnificat. Where Matthew writes of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the response of Herod and the presence of wise men and a star indicating His location, Luke introduces shepherds and a full inn, and how Jesus was patiently waited for by Simeon and Anna.

It is only Luke who tells us of Jesus as a twelve-year-old and how (similar to Home Alone) He was left by his parents for an entire day’s journey while Jesus interacted with the teachers in the temple.

Unlike Matthew, it isn’t until the third chapter that we see the genealogy. Two other quick observations about the genealogy. It doesn’t merely go back to Abraham (which would emphasize promise and faith). It goes back to Adam, the first man! Also, it is the genealogy, not of Joseph (the legal father of Jesus), but of Mary, the physical mother of Jesus in a real human birth.

Genuine human interaction is included in all the gospels, but it is accentuated by Luke. The story of the Good Samaritan (where a neighbor is defined by anyone who helps) is only in Luke; the Prodigal Son (touching the most intimate relationship of parent and child) is found only in Luke; the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (highlighting a personal recognition of our need for mercy before a holy God) is found only in Luke.

In Matthew, most of the parables begin with **“The kingdom of heaven is like”** or some such language. In Luke the parables begin with words to the effect, **“A certain person...”** His brush is concerned with people and his brush paints pictures of Jesus the man. It has been said that Jesus performed miracles, thus proving that He was God. I think that statement needs a bit of a correction. Others did miracles, that didn't prove they were God. The ability to do miracles by Jesus (and His disciples) did not prove He was God, it proved that when He (and they) said He was God, it was true.

But we must understand that in His earthly ministry, Jesus was dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. It was at His baptism that the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. It was the same Holy Spirit who led the man, Jesus, into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil and succeed where Adam, the first man, failed. The success of the ministry of redemption found in Christ, was the work of a man. A man who got tired, hungry and needed to be strengthened by an angel (Luke 22:43).

And Luke underscores more than the other gospel writers, that it was the man, Jesus who needed prayer. Luke tells us that Jesus **“often drew into the wilderness and prayed”** (Luke 5:16). It is Luke who records that Jesus **“continued all night in prayer to God”** (Luke 6:12), prior to selecting the twelve apostles. Prior to the Transfiguration, Luke tells us that Peter, John and James **“went up on the mountain to pray”** (Luke 9:28). Luke records many of the same accounts of events we read of in other gospels but will add that prayer was included where the others may not.

Along with the humanity of Christ, we also will see in Luke motions of the humanity of the mission of redemption. Luke is no gnostic gospel, merely focusing on the immaterial. This may be most obviously noticed in the Beatitudes. Where Matthew records **“Blessed are the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3)”** Luke merely writes, **“Blessed are you poor”** (Luke 6:20). Where Matthew records **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”** (Matthew 5:6) Luke records **“Blessed are you who hunger now”** (Luke 6:21).

In very human terms, Luke prominently features in his gospel the genuinely disenfranchised-the poor, the needy, women, widows, Samaritans, gentiles, prodigals and others who might have otherwise thought there was no place for them when it came to the salvation of souls. Even the word **“salvation,”** which is not found in Matthew or Mark is mentioned five times by Luke. The word **“grace,”** also not found in

Matthew or Mark, is prominent in Luke. Though other gospel writers record Jesus being anointed by women for His burial (Matthew 26; Mark 14; John 12, 13), it is only Luke who mentions...

...a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, ³⁸ and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped *them* with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed *them* with the fragrant oil (Luke 7:37, 38).

Of all the accounts of such an anointing, it is only Luke who records the final disposition of the occasion.

Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Luke 7:48-50).

Luke, perhaps more than the other gospel writers, touches the human experience. Let us pray that even now we might begin to grasp the full effect of what it means to be pardoned by Christ; to know in the midst of guilt, uncertainty and chaos, that our names are written on His hands, that we belong to Him and though He remembers our sins no more, He never forgets us-like a young romantic, we are never off His mind (Isaiah 49:16).

Behold the Man

Though it is in John's gospel that we are met with the phrase "**Behold the Man**" (John 19:5), I think it appropriate to mention here, what must have been obvious to all the observers of the cross, that it was a man who was crucified.

Luke (it's been said), unlike the other writers, goes into more detail in his pen-art, sketching the humility of a murderous coalition of a dark clergy, the venom of a betrayers kiss, the panic-struck break-up of the apostles, the denial and blasphemy of Peter, the fiendish hypocrisy of the

Sanhedrin (the Jewish court), the sarcastic mockery of Herod and the political expediency and cowardice of Pilate.

But let us seek to grasp that it was a man who went through the cross on our behalf, to assume upon Himself the sins of the world. It was the man, Jesus who...

...redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Galatians 3:13).

May God grant our minds, our souls, elevation as we ponder the unfathomable, that a man took upon Himself the sins of the world. It's been said that...

...Luke sets forth Jesus in all the simple purity, lovely and naturalness, profound beauty, and moral sublimity of His sinless manhood.

He was so humble, nothing could humiliate Him. He was so loving, nothing could dissuade Him. He was so honest, nothing could deceive Him. Even on the cross, Luke records something not found in the other gospels. The criminal next to him makes a final petition:

Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:42, 43).

It was a man who was betrayed, denied, deserted, falsely accused and deceptively tried. He was nailed to a cross, anticipating the wrath of God, yet He ministered to His last breath. This is our Savior. This is the Savior of the world.

Questions for Study

1. Describe your early influences in religion. Does your faith feel like you think it should feel? Explain (pages 2, 3).
2. What are some common errors when it comes to Jesus being God? How do we understand Jesus being truly God and truly man (pages 2, 3)?
3. Review the focus of Matthew and Mark in their gospels. What does Luke appear to be painting and emphasizing in his gospel (pages 3, 4)?
4. Give some examples of events that are unique to Luke's account of the life of Christ (pages 4, 5)?
5. What kind of needs did Jesus have and why is that important for us to grasp (page 5)?
6. How are the beatitudes different from Matthew to Luke (page 5)?
7. Does an increased understanding of the cross being endured by a man change or alter your perceptions of Christ? How (pages 6, 7)?