

Luke

Quiet Time Series, Oct–Nov 2015

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Preface

The aim of this booklet is to help you to read, understand and apply the Bible to your life, via a series of short daily studies on the Gospel of Luke. For each section of scripture, we provide a mixture of notes and/or questions to help you get started, more detailed points for delving deeper into the text when you have time, and suggestions for applying the text. We have prepared studies for Monday to Saturday, leaving Sunday free for other study or catching up. The dates are a suggestion; feel free to read at your own pace. It is important to remember that the goal of Bible study is to understand and apply the Bible, not the quiet time series or a commentary. These extra tools are only a guide, an extra source of reference. This guide is not designed to feed you; God's word should do that.

At the beginning of the booklet is some background material addressing basic questions such as: Who wrote Luke? To whom was it written? Where and when was it written? What were the religious, political, economic, cultural and geographical circumstances at the time? If you have time you might want to read Luke straight through at first, to get an overview in your mind. Do not be distracted by the details to begin with. Then the second read would be based on the quiet time series, at which time you can delve deeper into the text. For each day's reading, we recommend that you read the Bible passage first — it is God's word, this booklet is not! — and write down any thoughts and questions you may have, and then go through the questions and notes for the passage. Any questions that are not answered here can be raised at the end of the Friday night lessons, or with one of the east teaching ministry (Andy, Simon, Steve, Tony, Tuka and Ugo) personally. You are also welcome to send any comments, criticisms and questions at any time by email to EastTeachingMinistry@gmail.com.

When reading through narrative or parable, look for the audience, the striking themes and connections with other scriptures. Ask yourself questions as you read; don't rely on just the questions in the guide. When you have or make time, compare passages in Luke with parallel passages in Matthew, Mark and John. Notice the similarities and differences in perspective. Take a note of the historical situation and the culture in which events took place; try to deduce the original meaning and purpose of each individual passage, and look for central themes over the whole of the book. Look for what Luke brings to the table that you do not find in Matthew, Mark, John or any other NT writer. Where possible, draw out any principles or lessons of application. Above all, enjoy the good news of Luke and his revelation of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Introduction to Luke

In the Time of Luke

If you were a disciple living in the mid first century (49-62AD) in a city or town like Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch, Caesarea, Troas, Philippi or Neapolis, you might have met an intelligent scholarly man who was trained in Greek rhetoric. This man visited and settled in many places across the Roman Empire spanning a distance of over 1400 miles between the furthest cities, travelling on foot, horseback and by sea. His profession as a physician (Col 4:14) would have been known by all, and his skills would have greatly served his community wherever he was. Above all, he was a disciple who served the churches with anonymity. He was a loyal companion of many in the church, especially Paul. This man was Luke.

If you were part of the Macedonian churches of Philippi or Thessalonica at the time when Luke may have settled for seven or eight years till he re-joined Paul's third mission (Acts 16:11-12, 20:6) you may have been encouraged by his preaching of God's word and his medical work. Luke, just like many of the congregation he met, was a second generation Christian and not an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry.

By this time, both written and oral traditions of the gospel were quite strong and widely circulated (2 Th 2:15; Luke 1:1), although some incipient heresies were also emerging (2 Th 2:1-2; 2 Cor 11:3-4; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tim 6:20-21) no more than twenty years after the resurrection. Many eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection were still alive (1 Cor 15:6), who could testify and corroborate the events accurately. This would prove essential for Luke's future service of the gospel message.

Before the writing of Luke's gospel, a small portion of the NT existed; two Thessalonian letters would have been with the Macedonian church; Galatians would have been circulated amongst some of the Turkish churches; James was written to an audience of Jewish Christians; and both Rome and Corinth in the mid 50s would also have been recipients of inspired letters. Perhaps by this time Mark and later Matthew would have been written to their Roman and Jewish audiences respectively. Many of the churches in the Roman world may not have seen these written versions yet. In our day we are blessed that we have the full NT compilation, in contrast to our faithful first century predecessors.

Luke took the challenge to make careful and thorough investigations with the eyewitnesses and other oral and written sources available. It is certainly possible that during Paul's custody in Jerusalem and later Caesarea (Acts 21-26, 58-59AD) that Luke would have spent productive time in Jerusalem interviewing key witnesses and collating oral and written sources that matched or complemented eyewitness testimonies. His research as a historian is thorough, with the highest integrity, and is well attested by modern archaeology.

Imagine who Luke would have seen still alive in the Jerusalem church: Mary the mother of Jesus; Jairus the synagogue ruler; Joanna and Chuza who worked under Herod Antipas's administration; James, Joseph, Simeon and Jude, brothers of Jesus; John Mark, the writer of Peter's gospel; and close relatives of Elizabeth and Zechariah who had served in the Jewish priesthood, but to mention a few. It is also conceivable that he may have spent some time in the Galilean towns of Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethsaida and Nain where Jesus grew up and cultivated his early ministry. Talking to local eyewitnesses and gathering written accounts of the events first-hand would have been essential for him to compile his own independent narrative. To be sure, Luke's diligent research did not subtract from the inspiration of God. God's providence and Spirit guided the work and words of Luke (2 Pet 1:20-21), just like any other biblical author, whilst allowing Luke's own literary style.

Author and Date of Authorship

The author of this gospel wrote anonymously, but early Christian tradition identified Luke as the writer. Irenaeus (120-200AD), an early Christian bishop and writer, identified the gospel of Luke and quoted from it in defence against theological heresies of his day. It was recognised as Christian scripture in the early Muratorian canon (180AD), which contains most of the NT books. Other church fathers like Eusebius (269-339AD) and Jerome (400AD) also attributed authorship to Luke.

Since the author wrote hardly anything about himself, little is known about Luke except what

PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF JESUS

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Figure 1: Map of NT Palestine (used with permission)

can be gleaned from Paul's letters. From the internal evidence, Luke is considered to be the author of both his gospel and Acts, as both volumes begin their address to the same recipient Theophilus. Luke was a close loyal companion of Paul. We can infer that Luke accompanied Paul on several trips when he uses the word "we" in certain passages in Acts. Among Paul's many fellow-workers, Luke was actually a Gentile (Col 4:11,14), and was the only one to stay with Paul in the last days before Paul's second trial and execution (2 Tim 4:11). For a Gentile who was not an eyewitness, his contribution to the NT is very significant: the two volumes of Luke and Acts account for 28% of the NT, more than any other single NT writer. According to early Christian tradition he was a native of Syrian Antioch, although he began the second missionary journey with Paul from Troas (Acts 16:8-11), entering into Europe and settling down in Macedonia for the next seven to eight years.

Luke's final compilation of the gospel probably would have been completed while Paul was imprisoned either in Caesarea (58-59AD) or in Rome (60-62AD), with the second volume, Acts, written shortly after (62AD). Acts 28 ends abruptly at the end of Paul's two year house arrest, with no further events mentioned in Jewish or Roman history, such as Paul's release. The timespan that Luke covered in his gospel is approximately 7BC-30AD, assuming Jesus died in 30AD (there were two possible years when the Passover fell on the Friday: 30 or 33AD; Friday 7th April 30AD is to be favoured).

Luke's Audience

In the prefaces of both Luke and Acts, a man named Theophilus is addressed (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). His name means "lover of God", but little is known about the recipient of these writings. The fact that he is entitled as "most excellent" would suggest that he was an important Roman dignitary or official (cf Acts 24:2; 26:25 in the cases of the governors Felix and Festus). Certainly, Theophilus was well known to Luke; he may have been a patron sponsoring Luke's work or he may have been a recent believer who needed written clarity to his faith (1:4). With Theophilus's sphere of influence, Luke's gospel would reach a wide Gentile audience (24:47). People fluent in Greek recognise that Luke was by far the most polished of the NT writers. The opening sentence (v1-4) reads as if he were speaking to the Queen. The rest of the gospel has a narrative style which all could follow.

From the address we find that many wrote before Luke. What accounts may have been written by this time that we have now? Luke painstakingly investigated all the events and sayings with diligence. Why was it necessary for Luke to compose another narrative even though he was not an eyewitness? Do you think he was seeking a stronger faith in himself as well as his listeners? Judging from the time Paul met Luke, Luke most likely was a disciple for at least 10-15 years before he wrote the gospel, so he would have been a mature disciple before writing. Many Gentiles became disciples having heard only the spoken word of God (Jews were often convinced apologetically by the use of the existing OT). Imagine reading a small portion of the NT for the first time that testifies to the "certainty" of the gospel and hence strengthens your faith. It's like seeing archaeology that gives credence to the Bible and strength to faith even for those who have been disciples for years. In the preface we find the first medical term that Luke uses to describe the "eyewitnesses" of Jesus' ministry, from which we get the English word "autopsy", which denotes a careful examination of the events. Luke would have been in contact with many eyewitnesses, but only some wrote narratives – inspired or otherwise.

When Luke decided to write an "orderly" account after years of diligent research, chronology may have been important to him as a careful historian, showing Jesus' early ministry in Galilee (4:14-9:50), His mission as He headed towards Jerusalem (9:51-19:27), and His time in Jerusalem (19:28-24:49). However we can also see that he arranged some of his accounts thematically and topically.

Themes

One of the most prominent themes that runs through both volumes of Luke-Acts is the universal salvation of God, available for all mankind. God's indiscriminate redemption plan is seen in Jesus' ministry and in the life of the church. A distinguishing feature of Luke-Acts is that unlike Matthew or Mark, Luke mentions "salvation" six times in the gospel and seven times in Acts. Also, God's redemptive purpose, both physical and spiritual, is revealed in named and unnamed individuals more than any other gospel (7:50, 17:19, 18:42, 19:9-10).

Women and children were not highly esteemed in the first century, especially in Jewish and

Roman society. Luke recognised many named and unnamed women as recipients of God's love, including those who served and supported Jesus' ministry (8:2-3).

Luke also held up the disenfranchised in society and those of disrepute. Jewish publicans (known as tax collectors) were educated men working in Roman administration. Their cooperation with local Roman governments meant that they would be despised for the betrayal of their own people and for the severe economic austerity imposed on the Jews. Certainly there was corruption and greed in this type of office (3:13; 19:8), adding to the hostility, but Luke did not demonise the office, only how the office was abused. Similarly with Roman soldiers, repentance and forgiveness was also extended to them, requiring a change of behaviour but not necessarily a change of job role (3:14). For a Jew it was inconceivable that God's salvation would be extended to a Gentile (non-Jew) or a Samaritan (mixed race descendant of lost Israelite tribes) unless they converted to the ways of Judaism. In Jesus' early ministry He emphasised ministering to the Jews first (Matt 10:5). In Luke's parallel passages (9:1-6, 10:1-11) no such exclusion is directly mentioned. Quite often it is the prostitute (7:36-50), the Samaritan (10:25-37; 17:11-18), the tax collector (18:9-14; 19:1-9) or the Roman soldier (7:1-9) who is the recipient of God's mercy or the hero in God's story.

It would be hard not to notice the essential role of the Holy Spirit, beginning with the births and ministries of both John the Baptist and Jesus (1:15,35,67; 3:16; 4:1,18; 11:13; 12:12) and continuing throughout the life of the church in Acts. The power of the Holy Spirit behind the scenes is shown with greater prominence than by any other gospel writer. Although time and space does not permit an extensive study of the Holy Spirit in this series, we can briefly see how the Spirit is integral in salvation, in prophecy, and in miracles and wonders that confirm spoken prophecy and the identity of the Messiah himself.

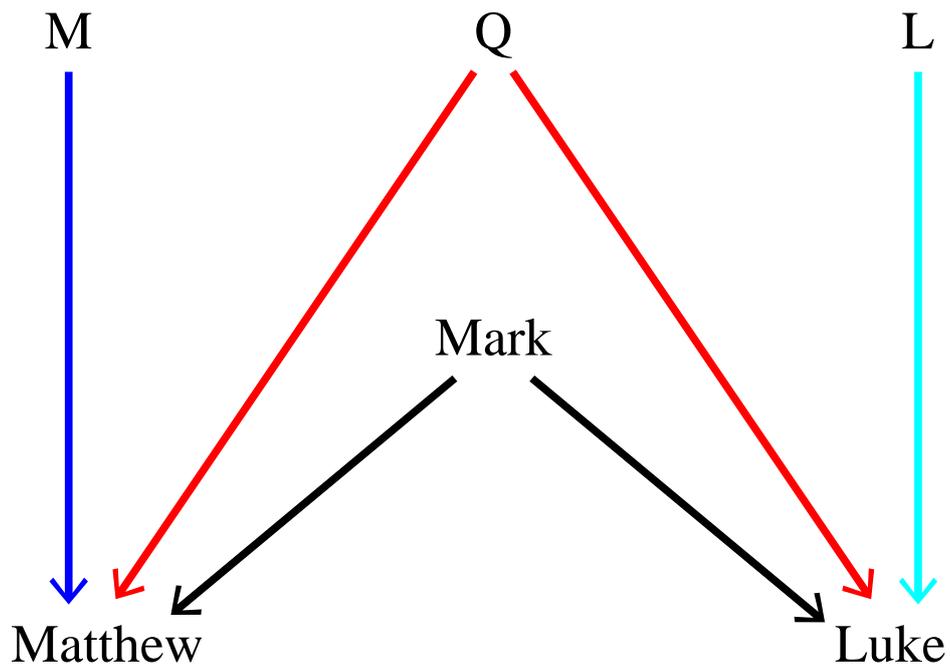
Luke and the Other Gospels

It would be difficult to discuss the gospel of Luke in isolation without any comment on its relationship with the other gospels including John. Have you ever wondered why there is so much variance even amongst the similar passages, or why each gospel has sections of narrative that are exclusive to that gospel?

It is generally accepted that the gospel Luke is one of the three "synoptic" gospels with Mark and Matthew. The word synoptic basically means the "same view". All three gospels share roughly the same narrative content and chronological order. Having said this, there are also distinct differences between similar narratives. How do we account for the relationship between the gospels without negating the divine inspiration of each gospel in its own right? Many unproven theories have been proposed by scholars for many years, mainly based on statistical and literary analysis of the content. One famous proposal, called the "four source theory" is shown in Figure 2; such a model presupposes literary dependence between the gospels with Mark as the first written source. It also assumes that Matthew and Luke used Mark and used a shared source not found in Mark. Additionally, Matthew and Luke may have had their own independent sources that were exclusive to them alone. Following this assumption, the usage of Mark varied between Matthew and Luke. For those who like statistics, it is interesting to find that 600 of Mark's 661 verses (90%) are found in Matthew; only 351 verses of Mark (53%) are found in Luke. Furthermore, there are 250 verses that are common to Luke and Matthew, but not found in Mark. Commonalities between Mark and Luke alone and Matthew and Mark alone are much smaller by comparison. There are limitations to theories like the one above, which lack any historical or archaeological evidence to substantiate the proposed proto-sources.

Another idea proposed was personal interdependence. Mark, Matthew and Luke would have been strong acquaintances, sharing both space and time either in Rome or Jerusalem. Although Luke was aware of the early witness accounts which may have included Mark and Matthew, Luke still investigated independently "from the beginning" (Luke 1:1-3); Luke was no plagiarist.

The most credible explanation is that just like many of the OT prophets who were contemporary and who shared similar themes and events with different perspectives, the contemporary gospel writers also wrote independently with different styles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20-21).



- (Q) “Quelle” shared source for Matthew and Luke
E.g. the healing of the centurion’s servant (Matt 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10)
- (M) source for Matthew alone
E.g. parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13)
- (L) source for Luke only
E.g. Jesus raises the widow’s dead son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17)
- Mark source used by Matthew and Luke
E.g. feeding of the 5000 (Mark 6:30-44; Matt 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17)

Figure 2: The four source theory

Historical Tables

Herods of the New Testament

Name	Reign and Territory of Rule	Significant Events	Bible References
Herod the Great	37-4BC King of Palestine (Samaria, Galilee, Judea and Idumea, Iturea, Trachonitis, Perea)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marries into Jewish high priestly family • Expansion of second Jerusalem temple (from 20BC) • Massacre of Bethlehem's male infants (4BC) 	Matt 2:1-16
Archelaus	4BC-6AD Ethnarch of Samaria and Judea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Herod the Great by fourth wife Malthace • Deposed and exiled in 6AD • Procuratorship of Judea begins 	Matt 2:22
Herod Antipas	4BC-39AD Tetrach of Galilee and Perea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Herod the Great by fourth wife Malthace • Executed John the Baptist • Cross-examined Jesus 	Matt 14:1; Mark 6:14; Luke 3:1; 13:31; 23:6-12
Herod Philip I	Stayed in Rome (not Philip the tetrarch)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Herod the Great by third wife Mariamne II • First husband of Herodias 	Matt 14:3; Mark 6:17
Herod Philip II (Philip the Tetrarch)	4BC-34AD Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Herod the Great by fifth wife Cleopatra of Jerusalem • Marries her grand-niece Salome (daughter of Herodias) 	Luke 3:1
Agrippa I	37-44AD Governor; 41-44AD King of Judea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grandson of Herod the Great • Appointed governor of Trachonitis/Iturea (37AD) • Appointment extended over Galilee and Perea (39AD) • Appointment extended over Samaria and Judea (41AD) 	Acts 12:1-23
Agrippa II	50-100AD Ruler over Trachonitis/Iturea Batanea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Agrippa I • His sister Drusilla marries the Roman governor Felix • Presides at the hearing of Paul 	Acts 25:13-26:32

Jewish High Priests of the NT

High Priest	Date of Office	Key Events	Bible References
Annas	6-15AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed by Roman governor Coponius • Deposed by Valerius Gratus • Father-in-law of Joseph Caiaphas • Presided at the first hearing of Jesus' trial 	Luke 3:2; John 18:12-14,19-24; Acts 4:5
Joseph Caiaphas	18-36AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointed by governor Valerius Gratus • Presided at the second hearing of Jesus' trial • Interrogated and cautioned Peter 	Luke 3:2; 22:50,54; Matt 26:57; Mark 14:53; John 11:49; 18:24; Acts 4:5
Ananias	49-59AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presided over the Jewish court • Attended the Gentile court summons of Paul 	Acts 23:2; 24:1

Roman Emperors in the NT: Julio-Claudian Dynasty

Emperor	Reign	Biblical Significance
Augustus	27BC-14AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreed Roman census (Luke 2:1)
Tiberius	14-37AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus' ministry and crucifixion during his reign (Luke 3:1; 23:2; John 19:12)
Caligula	37-41AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appoints his friend Agrippa I to higher office twice
Claudius	41-54AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread famine in the empire (43AD) • Appoints Agrippa as king of Judea (41AD) • Expulsion of Jews from Rome (Acts 11:28; 18:2)
Nero	54-68AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:11-12) • Stewards/servants of Nero's household become Christians (Php 4:22) • Nero instigates the fire of Rome and blames the Christians

Roman Prefects and Procurators of Judea in the First Century

Prefect	Reign	Significance
Coponius	6-9AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replaces Archelaus as first Roman governor (Matt 2:22) Judas the Galilean revolts in protest to the new census tax by Quirinius 6AD (Acts 5:37) Appoints Annas as the new high priest
Marcus Ambibulus	9-12AD	
Annus Rufus	12-15AD	
Valerius Gratus	15-26AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deposes Annas; Caiaphas later appointed
Pontius Pilate	26-36AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trial and execution of Jesus for sedition
Marcellus	36-37AD	
Marulus	37-41AD	
Procurator		
Fadus	44-46AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theudas's revolt is quelled (45AD; Acts 5:36)
Tiberius Alexander	46-48AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sons of Judas the Galilean (not Iscariot) killed for Zealotry like their father (47AD; Acts 5:37)
Cumanus	48-52AD	
Antonius Felix	52-59AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brother in law of Agrippa II, whose sister was Drusilla (Acts 24:24) First trial of Paul in Caesarea
Porcius Festus	60-62AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Second trial of Paul, with Agrippa II presiding
Albinus	62-64AD	
Gessius Florus	64-66AD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confiscation of temple treasury funds by the governor Many Jewish peasants unemployed after temple renovation ceases in 64AD Jewish discontent mounts after 60 years of Roman taxes that serve Italy and the frontier

Quiet Times

Luke 1:1-25 — Divine News for a Priestly Couple

Mon 5 Oct

Luke begins the gospel account in the days of Herod the Great (37-4BC). Herod was appointed the title of “King of Judea” by the Roman senate, and his overall kingdom of Palestine, which was within the Roman province of Syria, was subject to Roman concessions. It is in the last three years of Herod’s reign (approx. 7BC) when he narrates an amazing event concerning a priestly couple. This couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, had a lineage traceable to Aaron the first high priest and older brother of Moses. Remarkably, this genealogy extended back 1500 years from Zechariah’s day. Most people, except royalty and important dignitaries, would not know even the name of their great, great grandfather. Jews for centuries were faithful to their heritage of keeping accurate family records, both before and after the exile. With the priesthood this was especially important since it was a divine decree that only descendants of Aaron could perform the sacred ritual obligations, while the remaining Levites assisted in the general temple duties (Numbers 3; 4; 18:1-7).

Since the time of King David (1010-970BC), all the Aaronic priests either through Eleazar’s or Ithamar’s line were set up in 24 divisions (1 Chr 24:1-18), like a form of priestly rota, to perform their duties in the temple. Zechariah from division 8 was to perform the twice daily burning of incense in the holy place in front of the veil shielding the holy of holies, while prayers were being offered to God (cf Rev 5:8).

What was meant by the promise that John was going to be “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (v17)? Certainly this was a prophecy from over 400 years earlier (Mal 4:5) that would be fulfilled in John. John in his ministry had a similar purpose (besides wearing camel hair!): they both aimed to turn the hearts of the people back to the Lord (1 Kings 18:37; Luke 1:16). They were both fearless in condemning their rulers of their personal sin. This was no reincarnation; John knew he was not literally Elijah (John 1:21) but Jesus himself confirmed that like the real Elijah, the second Elijah would also share a ministry of reconciliation before the day the Lord comes. This was achieved through the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

- Why were Zechariah and Elizabeth considered righteous before God (v6)? Is it possible to be righteous before men and not before God?
- This was an elderly couple who had no children. They would have been married for decades. What do you think the Jewish cultural expectation was regarding marriage?
- Why do you think that barrenness would have been such a stigma in this society, especially for this godly couple?
- During the time of incense offering, what personal prayers do you think Zechariah offered (who else in Genesis prayed a similar prayer for 20 years)?
- In what way was Gabriel’s news to Zechariah miraculous?
- With the predicted birth of John, which OT prophecy was to be fulfilled and how old was this prophecy?
- What was the purpose of John’s birth? Why do you think he was to be raised while abstaining from alcohol (Num 6)?
- Why did Zechariah find it difficult to believe the message even though at first he was terrified of the unidentified stranger? What was his obstacle to faith?
- When we read the promises of God in Scripture, do we take God at His word or do we reserve doubts and human reasoning for what God can achieve?

Luke 1:26-38 — Divine News for a Lowly Peasant Girl

Tue 6 Oct

Galilee in Herod's day was a district north of both Samaria and Judea. In its history it had always been predominantly Gentile territory. The high priest John Hyrcanus I (135-104BC), in the fervour of restored Jewish independence, expanded his territorial rule by imposing ultimatums on non-Jewish states like Idumea (ethnic home of Herod) and Galilee; either they were to convert to Judaism or be exiled or even killed. Galilean proselytes (converts to Judaism), despite their devotion to the Law and Jewish tradition, were treated with contempt by Judean Jews as being an inferior, impure breed of Jews even after many generations. Some of the Judean Jews who migrated north to Galilee over time due to the fishing industry or the lucrative business opportunities in the cosmopolitan city Sepphoris (N. Galilee) were also treated with similar disdain. Nazareth itself in Mary's day was a small, insignificant agricultural village with no trade routes. It therefore had little economic importance and is never mentioned in the OT or other ancient texts. No wonder Nathanael was surprised to hear that the Messiah of Israel would come from Nazareth (John 1:46).

In the Jewish culture of that time, the betrothal of a virgin woman to a Jewish man was considered a legally binding contract (much more than an engagement). In Jewish law although the virgin woman would still be living at her father's house (Deut 22), the man and woman were still seen as husband and wife. Even though the marriage ceremony and later its consummation had not taken place, to break up the betrothal would require a divorce (Deut 24:1-4) in a similar way to a married couple. Any sexual misconduct during the betrothal stage (e.g. infidelity) was a serious offence on the same scale as adultery (Deut 22:22-23).

Luke in this passage gives a complementary account of the nativity story; Matthew tells the story from the time the betrothed Mary is pregnant with Jesus, whereas Luke begins his account a few months earlier, before Mary has conceived.

- At first, why do you think Mary was troubled by the visitation and the greeting?
- Why would Mary have been amazed at the content of the message? What also do you think her concerns were at the news?
- Why do you think Mary may have found it difficult to digest the news of her future son being king over Israel with an everlasting kingdom?
- Why do you think Gabriel announced to Mary that “nothing is impossible with God” (v37)? Did Zechariah set limits in his heart on what God could do for his family? Do we think and act as if everything is possible for God, or do we ourselves set limits?
- Consider the news of the births of both John and Jesus. In what ways were they similar and different? Why were both births miraculous?
- What roles did the Holy Spirit play in both births? Roles of the Holy Spirit in the Old Covenant include the power to create (Gen 1:2; Job 33:4), the power of leadership (Jdg 3:10; 1 Sam 11:6-9), and most of all the giving of the Law and prophecy (Zech 7:12).
- Despite the impossible nature of the message from a human perspective, Mary was totally surrendered in trusting God. What could we learn from this?

Luke 1:39-56 — The Magnificat

Wed 7 Oct

When visiting Elizabeth, Mary would have journeyed south at least 60-90 miles. Furthermore, she would have encountered a lot of hilly terrain, passing through hostile Samaritan territory before reaching Judea. If that was not challenging enough, it was likely that Mary was in the early stages of her pregnancy as Elizabeth was six months ahead of her and had not yet delivered when Mary arrived. There is no mention of Joseph either during the journey or at the visit. We know that Mary was not from a wealthy family that could have servants to accompany her. One could only speculate and wonder why a young girl (possibly a teenager), being as vulnerable as she was would venture to make such a dangerous trip alone. Had Joseph just found out about the pregnancy before the angel spoke to him? Did Joseph need some contemplation time alone to consider what to do

next? Was Joseph preoccupied with carpentry business in the newly developed city of Sepphoris? Maybe Mary was discouraged with the pregnancy and perhaps the rumours that would circulate in her hometown, and hence wanted to get away and get some one on one girl time with her relative. Try to visualise this trip of about a week or more, one way. The route is dry and hilly, and there is no bus, train, tube or car. Mary does not have a mobile phone and there are no phone kiosks along the way. With luck she would be riding on the cheapest transportation then: a donkey. Elizabeth with her husband would have lived in one of the nine towns of Judah that served as an inheritance for the Levitical priests (Josh 21:13-16).

- Why do you think Mary was hasty in visiting her relative Elizabeth?
- We see that Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit. What is the Spirit's purpose here? Do you think this a permanent indwelling of God's Spirit? Are Elizabeth's words prophetic? How would Mary have known that Elizabeth's words were inspired by God?
- In v45, Elizabeth declares Mary to be blessed for believing the fulfilment of prophecy from the Lord. Why would this encourage Mary?
- Do you have a friend who encourages you (not just with food and hospitality) to remember the promises of God in your personal life?
- Mary then sings a song of praise to God. Which other woman in the OT shared a similar prayer of praise (1 Sam 2)? In what ways are the prayers similar?
- One theme in her prayer is that God shows mercy to those who fear him; another is that God exalts the humble and the needy, but turns away the rich and proud. Is there a correlation? What about the heart level? If one feels one has no need of anything from God, one can be rich and proud of heart without knowing it. This is the opposite of being poor in spirit (Matt 5:3).
- Over the three months that Mary was staying with Elizabeth a stronger bond of friendship must have developed. With Mary returning to her hometown of Nazareth where everybody knew her, do you think she was fearful of the future now?
- Do God's promises embolden you to face any opposition that you encounter?

Luke 1:57-80 — The Prophet of the Most High is Born

Thu 8 Oct

For almost a year Zechariah was not able to speak since he was struck dumb in the temple for doubting God (v20). He and his wife Elizabeth, both in their old age, were about to be proud parents of a baby boy. Just to have a child was joy enough for the family, relatives, neighbours and friends who knew the couple. Why particularly was it a source of great rejoicing for this couple? On day eight the child was to be circumcised and named "John" (Yahweh/God is gracious). The Lord had certainly been gracious to show favour upon not only the couple but the whole Israelite community. John was to be a blessing that would reconcile the hearts of many to God, in preparation for the Lord Jesus.

- Why do you think that their relatives wanted to name the baby with a traditional name after his father (Zechariah means "Yahweh remembers")?
- As soon as the couple confirmed the name John in speech and writing, the father Zechariah was able to speak. Imagine Zechariah's joy. What were his reasons to be thankful to God do you think?
- Why was the community in fear and wonder?

In chapter one we see that both John's parents were prophetic as they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a theme that continues in the future ministry of John the Baptist. In Zechariah's prophecy he discoursed with joy that God would redeem his people by raising a descendant of David

as revealed by OT prophecy, that his people would be saved from their enemies, that God has remembered His Abrahamic covenant, that his people would serve God in holiness, and that his son would prepare the way for the Lord, giving people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

- Do you think Zechariah understood his own prophecy?
- What did being “saved from their enemies” mean for Zechariah and his people?
- Did the Jews of the OT expect a political Messiah to come who would free them from foreign oppressive governments like Rome? Did they equate deliverance with Jewish independence? Was it easy for them to overlook the spiritual meaning by ignoring terms like “holiness” and “forgiveness of sins”?
- What was the covenant oath promised to Abraham?
- Who and what are being described by: “the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death”? Which other OT prophet describes a similar theme and which gospel cites the prophecy as a fulfilment for the people living in Galilee?
- Even before John’s public appearance to Israel, why do you think he was to grow up in the wilderness (clue: Num 6)? Which OT prophecy is fulfilled by his wilderness appearance?

Luke 2:1-20 — Jesus Enters the World

Fri 9 Oct

Here we see the historical prowess of Luke as he narrates about the supernatural incarnation within a well attested historical timeframe. In 31BC Octavian (later known to us as Emperor Augustus 27BC-14AD) accomplished an expensive victory against Antony and his cohort Queen Cleopatra of Egypt at the battle of Actium. Veteran soldiers now needed to be given redundancy packages with the advent of Roman peace (Pax Romana) and the end of years of civil wars. In addition the Roman borders of the empire still needed protecting by regular and auxiliary soldiers estimated to be about 300,000 men. All of this needed extra money put into the imperial purse, and this was to be collected from the conquered provinces.

This chapter opens with Augustus issuing a decree that across the Roman empire everyone should be registered. This census involved each person in every province returning to their ancestral home for registration. This method had a dual purpose; one to enlist people for active duty like the Roman army; secondly to account for an efficient collection of taxes. Luke said that this first registration took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria (the Roman province of Syria included the annexation of Judea from 63BC). Critics and secular historians have always had a problem with this because secular records show that Quirinius was governor of Syria from 6AD which is years after Jesus’ birth. Both Josephus (Jewish historian) and Acts 5:37 describe a revolt that was led by Judas the Galilean in response to a tax census in 6AD. This certainly could not have been the first registration. According to some Egyptian papyrus documents, the Roman census was carried out every 14 years, so the first one would have been around 8-7BC, just before Jesus’ birth. Furthermore, an inscription has been found in Pisidian Antioch (Modern Turkey) which states that Quirinius was a high ranking military leader in Syria at this time. God controlled history so that the fulfilment of Jesus being born in Jerusalem would happen.

If both Joseph and Mary had to be registered in Bethlehem then both of them would have had a lineage from David. After travelling 80 miles south, possibly on a donkey, they would have found that ancestral towns and cities were congested at the time of the census. So we find that Jesus was born in an animal feeding trough in a barn.

Being a shepherd in that day was considered a lowly profession of little repute in Jewish society. Even young David was partly shown contempt due to his lowly profession (1 Sam 17:28). Like Jewish women, they were not allowed to give testimony in Jewish court or to enter the synagogue. However, God always exalted the role of a shepherd in the OT, describing his people Israel as sheep, and leaders, especially the coming Messiah, as shepherds. God also refers to Himself as being the

shepherd over Israel (Ezek 34:11-16,23) and He promised that His servant David, the future Messiah, would shepherd Israel. This is fulfilled in the Good Shepherd, Jesus (John 10:11,14).

- Clearly God's son entering the world is not grandiose. What do we learn about God here?
- Why would God choose shepherds to hear the good news of Jesus' birth (v10)?
- How does this passage fit with the infancy narrative in Matthew 1 and 2? Did the Magi see Jesus before the shepherds?
- Having seen the baby Jesus first-hand, the shepherds shared the news that the angels told them about the messiahship of Jesus. Why were their hearers particularly amazed at what the shepherds shared?

Luke 2:21-40 — Jesus Enters the Jewish Community

Sat 10 Oct

Circumcision in the ancient near east was quite commonplace. For the Arabs and related Semite nations this ritual was used as a puberty rite from the age of 13, which seems to follow a tradition from Ishmael when he was circumcised with his father Abraham (Gen 17:25). For the Jews this was a sacred initiation necessary to enter into God's holy covenant as revealed to Abraham (Gen 17:10-14). This applied to all boys from eight days old. Following the circumcision of the boys a period of another 33 days was needed as a Jewish purification ritual for the mother before they presented a sacrificial offering at the temple (Lev 12:1-4,6-8).

- What was significant about Jesus being the firstborn son (v23)?
- From the type of the offering given and what we know in Lev 12, what do we learn about Jesus' family?
- In what way was Simeon righteous and devout? What or who was the "consolation of Israel" that the Holy Spirit allowed Simeon to wait for?
- Why did Simeon bless God? Notice the play on words: Jesus (Yeshua/Joshua) means "Yahweh saves" or "God's salvation". Who had access to this salvation?
- What do you think Simeon meant by Jesus being appointed for the "falling and rising of many in Israel"? The sword was a metaphor for pain. What did this imply for Mary?
- What can we learn from the prophetess Anna in terms of her lifestyle? This lady would have been a widow a lot longer than she was married. In a society with no economic welfare, widows were left in a very vulnerable situation as the husband was the main provider. Before Jesus' arrival she remained faithful to God in her circumstance. When she saw Jesus she gave thanks and told others ... amazing!
- Taking Matt 2 also into account, when do you think Jesus' family returned to Nazareth in Galilee?
- Jesus grew up filled with wisdom. What is wisdom, biblically speaking?

Luke 2:41-52 — The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Mon 12 Oct

Like other Jewish families in Palestine and across the Roman world, Jesus' family would have visited and stayed in Jerusalem three times a year for the Jewish feasts. The first one in the Jewish calendar (Nisan-March/April) was the Passover.

- Why was the Passover important? Why did Joseph and Mary want Jesus to go to the temple with them (also consider Exodus 12:26-27).

- Do we ask questions about our faith? Do we encourage our kids to ask questions about our faith?
- What opportunities do we use to teach children about God (this question is not just for parents)?
- From what we see of Jesus in the temple, what can we learn about Him?

Luke 3:1-22 — John the Baptist Prepares the Way

Tue 13 Oct

Luke sets the stage for the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry and the introduction to Jesus. Again Luke accurately uses a historical timeframe to date the beginning of both ministries. The "fifteenth year" of Emperor Tiberius (14-37AD) is usually taken to refer to the period from his coronation (i.e. 28AD).

Why were two high priests mentioned? The Jewish expectation was that the high priest would remain in office for life, and when he died his son would take over. When the Romans took control, priestly offices were purchased. Annas (6-15AD) had been deposed by the Romans, but continued to hold power (John 18:13-14, 19-24) with Jews who rejected Roman interference. After two of Annas's sons were given the priesthood for a short time, his son in law Joseph Caiaphas (18-36AD) became high priest.

Pontius Pilate was the fifth Roman procurator to govern Judea since 6AD, with his office being the longest (26-36AD). Imperial or border provinces like Judea usually required a Roman prefect and a standing army to police the area just for security especially if the province was known for revolts. Herod Antipas (4BC-39AD) was ruler over Galilee and Perea. This was the same man who divorced his own wife to marry his brother Philip's wife Herodias, who also happened to be his niece.

The word of God instructed John in the wilderness to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Baptism was not a new phenomenon that started with John, as it already existed for Gentiles converting to Judaism. This usually followed their circumcision and their recitation of the Shema (Deut 6:4-5). Purification washings were also used as a sign of ritual cleansing. While baptism was an ordinary Greek word for immersion, repentance carried the idea of deciding to turn away from the negative and turn to the positive.

- Why was John's ministry of baptism important? Remember that his ministry was to reconcile the people to God through repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- What do you think the difference is between John's baptism and Christian baptism (Acts 2:38)?

Whenever a royal dignitary or king was to enter a city, forerunners would enter first to prepare the royal highway. Isaiah 40:3-6 is a metaphor quoted with reference to John preparing for the royal king, Jesus. Notice that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" was messianic prophecy referring to salvation through Jesus being available to all mankind. It does not mean that all people will automatically be saved regardless of their response. Some millennial thinkers consider an eschatological interpretation: i.e. at the end of time all the dead and living will see Jesus at the judgement; although this interpretation is less likely.

- What does "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" mean?
- The Jews felt security of salvation from their heritage as God's chosen people, with Abraham as their father. Was that enough? What about your security in God? Is it enough that you are associated with a group or church of people that teach the truth? Is it enough that you grew up in the church as a kingdom kid, and that you have parents that are Christians? There is nothing wrong with having a great heritage, but this can not save you.

Out of the crowd came questions from two despised groups – tax collectors and soldiers – who asked what they needed to do in order to repent. The tax collectors were Jewish publicans who

administered collection of taxes for Rome. Often this office was corrupt as many collected bribes and extra benefits for personal gain. The Greek word used to describe the soldiers is originally a Latin term, which would suggest that these were actually Roman soldiers asking John what they needed to do to repent. In both cases John exhorted them not to be unfair or unjust, and to be content with their income. John did not tell them to quit their jobs.

- What did John mean by “he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire”?
- Why was Jesus baptised? Why do you think the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form as a dove (see John 1:32-34; Matt 3:13-16)?

Luke 3:23-38 — The Genealogy of Jesus

Wed 14 Oct

Genealogical record-keeping was extremely important in Jewish society. Often it was necessary to establish inheritance rights. In other cases it was to show legitimate qualification for the priesthood (Ezra 2:62; Neh 7:64). What about the qualification for messiahship? Jews were waiting for the coming “anointed one”, a descendant of David who would deliver Israel. The gospel of Matthew, which is addressed to a Jewish audience, shows how Jesus was legally descended from Abraham and David with Joseph as his legal (not biological) father. This was Jesus’ royal lineage and his qualification for kingship. Luke’s genealogy is somewhat different though they do share commonalities.

What similarities can you spot between the two? How can we explain the differences? Many have proposed that in Luke, Mary’s biological lineage was represented though for Jewish legal reasons it had to be passed through a patriarchal line. Here we see that Jesus is still a son of David and Abraham, but why go back further before Abraham? Luke wanted to identify Jesus with all of humankind, as the Son of Man (Dan 7:13) and the son of God.

Luke 4:1-13 — The Temptation of Jesus

Thu 15 Oct

Before Jesus began his ministry, he was tempted by the devil for 40 days in the wilderness.

- Is being tempted a sin?
- Satan firstly challenged Jesus’ authority and power: “If you are the son of God”. To abuse his power for his own self-satisfaction would have been contrary to God’s will. What did Jesus mean by “man shall not live by bread alone”? Why did Jesus quote from Deuteronomy?
- Do not underestimate Satan. He has control, under the sovereignty of God, over all earthly kingdoms past, present and future. Satan was appealing to Jesus’ ego, enticing him to worship Satan. In what ways can Satan appeal to you with the desires of the world (1 John 2:15-17)?
- What would have happened if the priests saw Jesus jump off the temple wing?

Jesus may have been tempted to save his people by a less painful way – why not show them how amazing I am then they will believe me. This would not have been God’s will. God would have been tested. Satan can use or twist Scripture to convince you to follow your sinful desires. When reading difficult or seemingly offensive passages of Scripture, wrestle to understand the wider context and compare scripture with scripture. Besides using other resource materials to shed some light you can share what you have been studying with other disciples to gain a wider perspective. All of us can have presuppositions and interpret things in different ways. So it is wise to test our understanding with others who have also studied out the same issues. If people present scripture to you to justify a lifestyle choice, ask them first what it originally meant before they applied it to themselves. If they can’t answer, then the likelihood is that scripture is being misused.

- Have you ever made a personally selfish choice and appealed to scripture to justify it?

Luke 4:14-4:44 — Jesus Begins His Ministry

Fri 16 Oct

The section begins Luke's account of the Galilean ministry of Jesus, which ends in Luke 9:50. Following on from Jesus' being tempted by Satan, Jesus returns in the power of the Spirit to begin his ministry of predominantly teaching accompanied with healing.

- v15,22: Why do you think they all spoke well of Jesus?
- What turned them from speaking well to wanting to kill Him?
- What do you think would be the response Jesus would have desired?
- What does Jesus say that his hearers were hoping for (v23)?
- How do you handle rejection or mistreatment when doing the right thing?
- v42-43: What can we learn from these verses about ordering our priorities?

Further Notes

Jesus started His ministry in Galilee in the synagogue. This Jewish institution developed during the Babylonian exile to provide a place of worship for Jews with no access to the Temple. Wherever there were 10 Jewish families you would find a synagogue. No sacrificing of animals, giving of gifts, etc. took place in the synagogue; these were reserved for the Temple. The synagogue was for teaching and a typical service consisted of prayer, a reading and teaching. There was no professional ministry or any one person to give the address. The president would invite any person he wished to talk. This is how Jesus gained entry into the synagogue.

We read that it was Jesus' custom to attend the synagogue. There must have been many things that He didn't agree with and the worship service must have been far from perfect and yet Jesus joined in with the people who wanted to worship God. This calls us to reflect, as imperfect people ourselves, on our attitude towards attending an imperfect church.

Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-2: "He anointed me" – Jesus applies this to Himself, representing a principal reference to the Messiah. Today this scripture is fulfilled in Jesus. Verses 38-44 give crucial insight into practical applications of loving God. Under intense pressure to help other people, meet their needs, and alleviate severe health challenges, Jesus does two things: firstly he goes to spend time with His Father. Secondly He is not afraid to declare that teaching salvation to the lost takes priority over physical healing: Proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God – the reign and lordship of Christ in human hearts.

Luke 5:1-32 — God Works in Unfavourable Circumstances

Sat 17 Oct

Jesus continues His ministry by calling His first disciples. He does this in a very natural way by taking part in the work activity of Simon and his business partners James and John. Under extremely unfavourable circumstance, Jesus helps His hearers witness the power of God.

- What excuses could Peter have made for not letting down his nets?
- What do you think made Peter simply do as Jesus said?
- What lessons can you learn regarding human wisdom and God's power?
- What can we learn from Peter's response, falling on his knees?
- Take some time to evaluate your commitment to "catching men".
- Jesus touched a leper (an untouchable); in what ways can you imitate Jesus' attitude in this area?
- Evaluate your friendships and your faith and how they can work together in meeting each others' needs.

Further Notes

“Because you say so” (v5): Peter appears to base his willingness to obey Jesus solely on the fact that Jesus told him to do it. In other words, it did not make sense to him, he did not agree, he did not want to, he didn’t understand the reason why, and so on. This challenges how we view the commands of God and how we might trust more in our own experiences and opinions rather than the power of God. In this case the fruit of Peter’s obedience is instant, however often the fruit of our obedience is not immediate. Peter, an expert fisherman, immediately recognised God’s power, as it defied all the experience and knowledge he had as a fisherman.

Verse 16 states how Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray. The “often” indicates that Luke and others noticed Jesus’ dependence on God through prayer, an example that would be good for us to strive to imitate.

Verses 17-26 are a key section showing the divinity of Jesus. The men who brought the paralytic to Jesus were determined to get him to Jesus by all possible means. It is fair to assume that their intention was for Jesus to provide physical healing for the paralytic. It is interesting that in this case it looked like Jesus initially did not address this need but rather addressed a deeper need, by forgiving his sins. By doing this Jesus also made a bold statement about His divinity. He wanted the listeners to know that He had authority to forgive sins, something only God can do.

Luke 5:33-6:16 — A Time for Feasting, a Time for Fasting Mon 19 Oct

Jesus is questioned by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law regarding what they judged in His followers to be signs of low levels of commitment to God’s Law. Jesus also addressed issues surrounding keeping of the Sabbath.

- v33: Why do you think this was an issue for the Pharisees?
- What aspects of your Christian life do you recognise as being legalistic and burdensome?
- Do you think you should live out your Christianity more like Jesus, with “eating and drinking”?
- Consider how you can grow in gaining new insight from reading the Scriptures.

Further Notes

The Pharisees and John’s disciples fasted twice a week (Mondays and Thursdays; Luke 18:12). The intention appeared to be to get God’s attention and also to publicise their sacrifice by giving an appearance of suffering. This appeared to be a tradition or ritual developed over time. The Mosaic law however required 1 day of fasting a year (Lev 16:29ff). Times in our Christian lives need to be characterised by “eating and drinking” and expression of joy (Php 4:4), while other times will be characterised by fasting and experiencing the challenges of the Christian life.

New wineskins can expand to accommodate fermenting wine, whereas old wineskins are dry and hard and unable to expand. Jesus is calling for us to be able to accept new teaching and new insights when we hear God’s word and not stick to rigid views of our faith.

Dt 23:25 allows picking of corn from a neighbour’s field. The Pharisees regarded this as unlawful on the Sabbath. Jesus effectively stated that the religious leaders were either ignorant (unlikely) or did not understand (humbling) what the scriptures were saying in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, demonstrating a principle that meeting human need is more important than practising religious ritual.

Luke 6:17-49 — God’s Values: Opposite to the World’s Tue 20 Oct

Jesus has just appointed the 12 apostles and now starts teaching. The sermon on the plain contains a series of Beatitudes (blessings) that contrasts what God values to what we as humans tend to value, calling us to abandon our world’s views and adopt those given by God.

- What is your understanding of the term “blessed”?
- Write down your understanding of “for yours is the kingdom of God”, “you will be satisfied”, “you will laugh”?
- What actions in the life of a Christian (you) do you think brings about the hatred, exclusion and insults that Jesus talks about?
- With the woes, what aspect of our lives is Jesus condemning?
- Consider ways to love your enemies (reading the notes below might help).

Further Notes

The Sermon on the Plain, described here in Luke, has many similarities to the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matt 5-7. The Sermon on the Plain is an extremely challenging call. It can be summarised by how we handle eternal choices. Will you focus on the world’s rewards or will you focus on Christ’s rewards? Will you make decisions based on what is right, or based on what brings you the most comfort or pleasure? Will you make financial gains by deceit, or will you rather choose to have less and enjoy the rewards that will be received in heaven?

The call to love our enemies, is not the *philia* love (that which exists within families, between brothers, etc.) nor *eros* (that which exists between opposite sexes) but rather *agape*, that associated with our thoughts, attitudes and actions that demonstrates that no matter what others do to us, even if they insult, mistreat or injure us, we will seek nothing but their highest good. It is the love of God that He teaches us to have, an unconditional love. It is therefore decision-based and not feelings-led and as such we all can express love in this way. The question may arise “who is my enemy?” Jesus presents an enemy as someone who we would not naturally display acts of kindness towards. So this could mean someone who is actively against us or indeed someone who we are indifferent towards.

Luke 7:1-17 — Great Faith, Great Compassion

Wed 21 Oct

Jesus responds to the needs of a centurion, someone who would have been considered to be an enemy of Israel, and indeed commends him for having greater faith than all in Israel. Jesus also responds to a widow in Nain, an account only reported by Luke.

- What do you think would have been the typical treatment of a slave by his master in those days?
- What good qualities do you see in the centurion?
- What amazed Jesus about the centurion?
- Consider ways to compliment non Christians around you.
- What are some qualities in the centurion that you can build in yourself?
- What do you think led Jesus to have compassion for this widow?
- What helps you act on moments of compassion to help others in their need?

Further Notes

It would have raised concerns amongst the religious leaders of the day if Jesus had entered the house of a Gentile (see Acts 10:28). This is similar to cases where we may experience pressure to follow or consider religious tradition or “church culture” when the word of God says otherwise. Nevertheless Jesus started the journey to the centurion’s house with the intention of entering. The centurion was also aware and was sensitive to Jesus. Not wanting to put Him in a compromising position, he suggested that Jesus cure his servant remotely by a command. The centurion, a military man

overseeing a large group of soldiers, displayed unusual qualities that can be seen scattered throughout this passage. He cared for his servant, he had a good relationship with the Jews, he helped build a synagogue, and most importantly he had great faith.

In v11 Jesus felt compassion for a widow in Nain. He also acted on his compassion. Stoics believed that God was incapable of feeling. The argument seemed to be that if someone could make another person sad or happy, glad or joyful then he could influence that person. If he could influence that person then at that point he is greater than that person. But no one is greater than God, so therefore God cannot be influenced or have feelings. But we know that compassion is a characteristic of Jesus and therefore God. Jesus spoke to the dead man asking him to rise. Spiritually dead people are all around us and we too should be comfortable speaking to the “dead”.

Luke 7:18-8:3 — Doubt and Appreciation

Thu 22 Oct

John the Baptist is in prison and sends messengers to Jesus asking Him whether He is indeed the Messiah or not. Also, a woman demonstrates her appreciation for what Jesus has done for her.

- What do you think led John to ask this question of Jesus?
- Do you think the answer Jesus gave would have helped John? Why?
- What do you think verse 23 means?
- Have you ever been disappointed with events in your life that have led you to doubt the power and love of God? What kind of things make you doubt God's love and power?
- How do you feel when God does not do what you have asked?
- In v36-50, how do you think this woman felt about the life she had been leading?
- If you have ever experienced deep guilt and shame, has knowing Jesus helped you heal?
- Why do you think Simon did not display the minimum expected courtesy of the day?
- What can you do to show your appreciation of what Jesus has done for you?

Further Notes

John 1:29-36 and other passages indicate that before this, John clearly recognised Jesus as the Messiah. His doubt might be explained because perhaps he himself had misunderstood the ministry of the Messiah. Perhaps John thought that if Jesus were really the Messiah, He would perform works connected with a political deliverance of Israel – or at least the deliverance of John, who was in prison. It appeared that John earlier was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah but that because events were not turning out in his life according to his own expectations, he started to doubt.

In v30, we see the love of God in giving us free will, and in the same breath the tragedy associated with choosing to reject God's will. Jesus describes the human nature that may never be satisfied by what God does. He describes a grumbling spirit that cannot see the workings of God.

Luke 8:4-15 — Are You Hearing What God is Telling You? Fri 23 Oct

This is one of the most popular and well known parables of Jesus. It is hard to read it with fresh eyes as we often approach the parable believing that we understand it, armed with Jesus' explanation of the parable as well as having had it taught and explained to us over many years. Try hard to “hear” it as for the first time.

- Read v4-8 and try and imagine you are hearing this for the first time. Imagine you are a farmer, a soldier, a housewife, a fisherman, a carpenter, an accountant, a businessman, an IT specialist, an engineer, a doctor, etc. From the text only, what would you take away from the lesson?

- Read v9-10: what is a parable and why did Jesus speak in parables?
- What heart issue is Jesus addressing in v9-10? (Ezek 12:2; Is 42:20)
- How do you know whether you have “ears to hear”?
- What do you understand to be “the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God”?
- Consider what will help you be the fourth soil.
- If you were the sower, what encouragement can you get from the passage?

Further Notes

Jesus tells us why He spoke in parables. At first He seems to be saying that He does not want people to understand God’s words. But further reading suggests that he was using parables as a kind of filter to separate out those who wanted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God from those who didn’t. To those who were interested in understanding them He would reveal it, while He would hide it from those who didn’t care enough to try to understand. As Jesus put it, the key is, do you have ears to hear? The disciples didn’t understand the parable, yet they had ears to hear. Jesus gives an explanation as to why some people respond to the word of God and why others do not, even when presented with identical information. Jesus explains the parable by describing us as:

(a) receivers or listeners of the word of God: Jesus describes how the word impacts our lives – He could be describing aspects of our character or aspects of our Christianity at different stages of life, or both; and

(b) a sower: when we speak the word of God to others, although in many cases we may conclude that it had no effect, in reality we are part of a process where the word of God is working all the time in people’s hearts and will eventually produce good fruit in some.

Luke 8:22-56 — Jesus’ Authority

Sat 24 Oct

This chapter records a series of events linked by the theme of “Authority”, i.e. the authority Jesus has. When we think of authority, we think of concepts like power, the ability to get things done, someone others submit to, etc. Here Jesus demonstrates authority, but in ways that serve others and give further clues as to His true identity.

- Try to list the different ways Jesus shows authority in chapter 8. Why are these ways unusual? Do we know of any other people who have been able to demonstrate authority in these ways?
- Why did Jesus exercise authority in these situations? What would He achieve?
- How do people react to Jesus in the various accounts (the disciples in the boat, the demons, the people of the Gerasenes, the parents of the dead girl)?
- When you see Jesus in these situations, how does it make you feel about Him?
- What can we learn about the use of authority from Jesus and these situations?
- Are there situations where it is helpful for you to know that Jesus has authority?

Further Notes

v22-25: Severe storms on the lake (the Sea of Galilee) were common, as the lake was surrounded by steep hills allowing cool air from the hills to mix with warm air over the lake. As several of the disciples were fishermen, it must have been a very serious storm to scare them. Jesus responds to their request for help, then challenges their lack of faith.

v26-39: Parallel passages are Matt 8:28-34 and Mark 5:1-20. The two differences are (i) Matthew mentions 2 people, as compared to 1 in Luke/Mark; and (ii) Matthew’s location is the Gadarene region, whereas Luke/Mark’s is Gerasene. Possible explanations are that there were 2 people but

Luke and Mark choose to focus on one of them; the regional differences could be different ways of describing the same region – for example I (Tony) am from Stockport, but I often say I am from Manchester as most people are familiar with Manchester. Manchester is actually a city and a region, with Stockport lying in the region of Manchester. So am I from Stockport or Manchester? I am from both.

Are demons real? Regardless of the answer to that question, the account shows that people can be damaged by evil and that Jesus is more powerful than evil.

The bleeding woman: the law required that she be restricted from religious life (Lev 15:25-31).

Luke 9:1-6,10-17,37-56 — The Disciples and Authority **Mon 26 Oct**

In Luke 9, Jesus delegates his authority to the disciples, with interesting results. We see how the disciples try to use that authority, with some success and some failure. Luke 9 also contains teaching about Jesus' identity and our response to that, which we deal with in the next study.

- How would the disciples have felt to receive “power and authority” to drive out demons and heal diseases?
- What were some of the successes of this first mission?
- The disciples are unable to feed the 5,000, nor heal the boy of an evil spirit – why could this have been, given that Jesus had already enabled them to do miracles?
- In v46-56, what do we learn about how the disciples viewed power?
- What power and authority have you been given by God? How is this shown in settings like your home, your workplace, in church?
- How would you describe Jesus' view of power and authority compared to the world's view of power and authority?

Further Notes

v1-6: Parallel passages are Mark 6:6-13 and Matt 10:1-14. Though they differ in detail, all passages emphasise that the disciples are to “travel light” and to trust God for provision in the mission. The disciples receive the ability to heal and are to preach the good news about the kingdom, so the miracles support and validate the message. They are instructed to build relationships with those open to the message.

v10-17: Parallel passages are Matt 14:13-21, Mark 6:32-44, John 6:1-15. The miracle reminds the Jews of Moses (Ex 16, Num 11 – manna) and Elijah (2 Kgs 4:42-44), two major OT prophets. In this account no reaction from the crowd is recorded, but instead the initial discussion that ends with the miracle. Jesus seems to test the disciples when He challenges them to feed the large crowd, perhaps looking to see if their faith had grown whilst being out alone on the mission field. He is required to save the day however, and shows them that He provides for the needs of others.

v37-45: Parallel passages are Matt 17:14-21, Mark 9:14-29. Luke's version is the shortest. Jesus gives a very strong rebuke to “this generation”, which includes the disciples, who already presumably have the power to heal the boy. Luke's account doesn't clarify how the disciples failed, beyond lacking faith, whereas Mark's account includes Jesus' explanation that prayer (and fasting) are needed.

v46-48: In any group we often wonder who the boss is. Though Jesus was clearly their leader, the disciples were trying to find a structure for the rest of them, with the “greatest” at the top. In the culture of the day, children had little status, so Jesus' object lesson was to show that even the lowest person is important, or the “greatest”.

v49-50: Jesus welcomed the efforts of the unknown miracle worker whereas the disciples tried to stop him.

v51-56: This section begins the long running theme of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, which ends in Luke 19. Jesus wishes to minister to the Samaritans (traditionally hostile to the Jews) and sends

a group to prepare for his arrival – who are rejected. The disciples suggest using their new power to decimate the Samaritans, but Jesus rejects this – power is for healing and witnessing, not for judgement and retribution.

Luke 9:7-9,18-36,57-62 — Jesus’ Identity and Our Response Tue 27 Oct

We now look at some passages that pose the question “Who is Jesus?” This is a fundamental question that everyone needs to consider.

- Who did Herod think Jesus was?
- How does Jesus respond to Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ? Why did Jesus respond in this way?
- What are the implications for us of Jesus being the Christ?
- What effect did the experience of seeing Jesus’ transfiguration have on Peter (2 Pet 1:16-18)?
- What can we learn from the 3 would-be followers of Jesus in verses 57-62?
- Can you think of other “reasons” why people might in one breath say “I’m a Christian” and in the next say “Sorry Jesus, I can’t follow you *there*”?

Further Notes

v7-9: Herod is intrigued by the stories of Jesus, but notably relies on second hand accounts and “tries” to see Jesus to find out more.

v18-27: Parallel passages are Matt 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30. Only in Luke is the account preceded by prayer (v18). Peter takes a major step in understanding when he correctly identifies Jesus as the Messiah, but much more teaching is required before he grasps the significance of this. Jesus builds on that step by preparing the disciples for the suffering that will accompany his and their new lives (Jesus continues to teach this point throughout Luke). Jesus’ warning of secrecy (v21) may have been because he feared the multitudes would get carried away with wrong expectations that he was a military leader. The idea that the Messiah would suffer was difficult for the disciples to grasp, e.g. Luke 24:13-36.

v28-36: Parallel passages are Matt 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8. Again, in Luke’s account, Jesus is praying. The “transfiguration” of Jesus is actual changes in appearance as opposed to a vision seen by Peter, James and John. These changes may allude to Moses’ changes when receiving the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:29 – Moses’ radiant face). The account also alludes to Deut 18:15, and Moses’ prophecy of the prophet whom God would raise up.

Why did Moses and Elijah appear? Some possible views are: (1) to represent different kinds of life endings (burial versus being taken up to God); (2) to show to the onlookers that Jesus’ ministry is being endorsed by significant OT prophets; (3) to contrast Jesus’ new way of grace with the law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah); (4) to encourage Jesus before the challenges of his final days and crucifixion. Regardless of the answer, the disciples are confused and only later does the occasion make sense to them.

The cloud seems to provide the setting for the voice of God. The message for the disciples is clear – Jesus is God’s Son and they need to listen to Him. That message is the same for us today.

v57-62: Parallel passage is Matt 8:18-22. The three examples in Luke parallel the call of Elisha (2 Kgs 2:1-6). The clear message is that following Jesus must be a disciple’s first priority. Students of Jewish teachers (rabbis) in Jesus’ day would have lived with their teachers to learn Torah and see a model of a righteous life, which seems to be what the first man is offering to do. Jesus makes it clear that it will be harder to follow Him, as He is essentially homeless. The second follower offers what we would feel is a very reasonable response to Jesus’ call – that he has to attend to his father’s funeral, after which he will be happy to join Jesus’ group. Jesus’ response shows that disciples must let some tasks be left to others, whilst they prioritise “proclaiming the kingdom of God”. A disciple will sometimes be faced with a choice of letting go of something that is not “bad” but actually very

good, but where the right thing is actually to attend to something that Jesus would see as being more important. The third example is similar in that Jesus interprets the man's response as being a desire to hold on to the old life.

Luke 10:1-24 — The Mission of the Seventy Two

Wed 28 Oct

This section focuses on the growth in the mission, as more disciples are sent out by Jesus. It is similar to Luke 9:1-6. It looks at Jesus' view of mission.

- What did Jesus describe as “plentiful” and what was “few”?
- Why did Jesus send them out in pairs?
- What instructions did he give to help the disciples in the mission? Why did they need such instructions?
- How were the disciples to deal with rejection?
- How does Jesus respond when the disciples returned with good news? What does He remind them their focus should be?
- How do you feel about your mission? What encouragement or challenge do you get from applying these verses to yourself?

Further Notes

v1: Is it 70 or 72? The early manuscripts differ between the two numbers, so no-one knows whether it was 70 or 72.

v2-3: The NT uses agriculture to describe the mission for humans souls (Luke 8:10-15; John 4:31-38; Rom 11:16-24; 1 Cor 3:6-7). Jesus tells us many are open to the good news and expects both the existing and newly converted disciples to be sent out to reach the open people.

v4-5: The disciples are to travel light and remain focused on their mission, which could be dangerous (lambs amongst wolves).

v6-8: The disciples were to trust that God would provide food and accommodation for them. Verse 7 is quoted by Paul in 1 Tim 5:18. Later (Luke 22:36) Jesus gives different instructions however.

v9: This expanded group of disciples also had power to heal miraculously, but this power was to be accompanied with the evangelistic message (God's kingdom's arrival with Jesus). Healing was to support the message.

v10-16: Warnings of judgement accompany those who do not respond to the message conveyed by the 72. Jesus compares those who reject the message with Sodom, Tyre and Sidon, three cities commonly associated with sin and judgement (Sodom – Gen 19; Tyre – Is 23; Sidon – Jer 25:22). Yet these cities will be judged less severely than those towns who reject the gospel message, as the message is ultimately from God (v16).

v17-19: The reference to Satan “falling from heaven” is similar to the wording of Isaiah 14:12. Jesus' ministry is a turning point in God's battle against Satan and often described in such terms in the NT, e.g. Jn 12:31-32, Col 2:14-15, Rev 12:10-12. The disciples' authority over snakes and scorpions represents authority over Satan's power.

v20: The “book of life” (see Ex 32:32; Ps 69:28; Dan 7:10; 12:10; Php 4:3; Rev 20:12-15) represents being right with God. Jesus was clearly pleased that the disciples were successful in their mission but directed them to keep their joy rooted in God's love for them. We too should make sure our joy is not based on “success” but on being right with God, irrespective of spiritual “successes”.

v21-24: Jesus reminds the disciples how fortunate they are to participate in His ministry.

Luke 10:25-42 — The Parable of the Good Samaritan

Thu 29 Oct

These two sections cover the famous “Good Samaritan” and Jesus at Martha and Mary’s house. They challenge our love for people and God.

- Why did the Jewish teacher ask Jesus the question “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” If Jesus asked you that question, what would you answer?
- What does it mean in v29 “but he wanted to justify himself?”
- What type of people do the priest and Levite represent?
- List the different ways the Samaritan showed care to the injured man.
- What can you learn from the Samaritan about being a “good neighbour”?
- Can you sometimes be like Martha, distracted by practical things and not seeking time with God? How can you be more like Mary?

Further Notes

v25-28: The concept of eternal life is mentioned in the OT in Dan 12:2 yet implied throughout. Jesus pushes the question back to the lawyer and basically says “What does the Bible say?” The lawyer correctly answers that eternal life comes to those who truly love God, and that this also has a practical effect in loving others. Even though he is a Jewish lawyer, who we often portray as focused on rules, he understood the central message of the bible, which is love.

v29: The lawyer wanted to “justify himself”, i.e. set limits of who to love. He hopes Jesus will list some types of people who are not his “neighbours” so he doesn’t need to love them.

v30: The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was 17 miles, with caves that made good hideouts for robbers.

v31-32: Jesus takes the traditional “good guys” and represents them as “bad guys”, though there is no comment as to why they avoided the dying man. Noticeably, they both cross the road to deliberately avoid helping.

v33-35: The Samaritans were cultural enemies of the Jews. 1 Kgs 16:21-24 tells how, following the division of the kingdom, Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom. The Samaritans intermarried with non-Jews and worshipped at their own site (Jn 4:20-24), so in Jesus’ day, Jews still viewed Samaritans with suspicion. Using the Samaritan as the hero was yet another challenge from Jesus to the Jews.

Two denarii – assuming the cost of 1 night in the inn was 1/12 of a denarius, then the Samaritan paid for the injured man to be there for about 3.5 weeks. Jesus challenges the man (and us) to be a good neighbour to anyone and everyone. Such care and compassion will inevitably be costly – financially, practically and emotionally. This is the heart behind the mission of Lk 10:1-24.

v38-42: The account of Martha and Mary illustrates that we often face a choice between two “good” options – in this instance serving or listening to Jesus. The text points out that Martha is “distracted” by the preparations. She asks Jesus to defend her and intervene with Mary, but Jesus caringly (not harshly) corrects her and reveals that her attitude (worried and upset) is wrong. Mary however, has made the correct choice.

Luke 11:1-23 — Jesus Teaches about Prayer

Fri 30 Oct

Jesus provides guidance on how to pray. He then faces opposition from the Jews.

- Why did the disciples feel the need to learn how to pray? In what areas of your prayer life do you wish to grow?
- Do you think all prayers should follow this structure? If not, why not?
- Compared to how you normally pray, what is different in Jesus’ prayer?

- What is the point of the parable of the request for bread at midnight? What is Jesus trying to teach us about God and about us?
- Re-read Luke 9:50 – does this contradict Luke 11:23? What do the two sayings together mean?

Further Notes

v1-2: The prayer request by the disciples may have been a request for teaching on communal (group) prayers. The “you” in “When you pray, say ...” is plural. The word “Father”, which stems from the Aramaic “abba”, combines respect for the Father’s authority with intimacy, an intimacy that Jesus invites disciples to have with God. “Hallowed be your name” recognises that God is holy, set apart and different from mankind. “Your kingdom come” expresses the desire disciples have of seeing the world ruled once more by God as king, where evil, sin and injustice are done away with and disciples live in love with God and one another.

v3: Jesus now covers basic requests that disciples have of God, beginning with food (Greek – “artos”, covering basic food, not just bread). It is right to request necessities from God, even though we may feel we are the ones who provide such necessities through our own efforts. The prayer request helps us realise that even what we do is ultimately dependent on God’s providence.

v4: Sin is dealt with from the angles of forgiveness and temptation: Jesus’ prayer recognises that we need forgiveness from God, but that we also need to respond to the hurts we receive with that same forgiveness. Interestingly, Jesus does not say “help us not to sin”, but “help us not even to be tempted”. God can help us when we are tempted, but we need to be humble enough to recognise that.

v5-13: In Jewish culture, hosts were strongly obliged to provide room and food for guests, and as most people lived in one-room homes, Jesus’ parable shows a host with a dilemma: be rude to his neighbours or be rude to his guests. The listeners know that the solution to the problem is for the host to be “shamelessly bold” in his request to his neighbour, so that he can offer food to the guest. Jesus uses this example to teach that disciples need to be shamelessly bold in their prayers to God. Finally, Jesus gives the picture of God as the loving father who is eager to give his children what they need.

v14-23: In the miracle account, the focus is not on the miracle, but on Jesus’ opponents and Jesus’ response to them. The name “Beelzebub” appears to refer to the Philistine god Ekron (2 Kgs 1:2-3, 6, 16, meaning “Lord of the Flies”) and is used as a derisive characterisation of Satan. Jesus points out that it makes no sense to accuse him of being Satanic, as Satan would then be destroying Satan.

The Jews demand further proof of Jesus’ authenticity, but Jesus challenges them that God’s kingdom has indeed arrived. Jesus overcomes “the strong man” (Satan) and divides the spoils (salvation) to those choosing allegiance to Him (Christians). We can take encouragement that Jesus has won the ultimate spiritual victory.

Jesus introduces the idea that people need to respond to him: v23 challenges those who wish to remain “neutral”. Being neutral is equivalent to being against him.

Luke 11:24-54 — Jesus Demands a Response

Sat 31 Oct

This chapter continues the concept that Jesus and his teaching demand a response from his listeners. But the response has consequences.

- What is the meaning of the “seven-spirits” description?
- What do we learn about obedience in verses 27 and 28?
- In what sense are Jonah and the Queen of the South signs?
- In what different ways does Jesus challenge the Pharisees and Experts in the Law (v37-54)?
- Jesus insulted them – does this mean it’s okay to insult others?

- What are some ways we can be like the Pharisees and experts in the Law, e.g. being more concerned about outward appearances than inward heart (v39-41)?
- Is there anything you need to change or work on that you can see the Pharisees or experts in the Law were doing?

Further Notes

v24-26: The concept of a spirit looking for a place to reside was common in Judaism. Jesus uses the concept and the earlier healing of the man with the mute spirit to teach the importance of being filled with the right things – i.e. God’s Spirit, light, God’s word etc. If we are not active in being filled with the right things we leave ourselves open to further spiritual attacks (temptations).

v29-32: Jesus challenges those who want further proof. It seems enough proof has already been given (and more would be given), the issue now being an unwillingness to change. The “sign of Jonah” is the resurrection of Jesus after 3 days in the grave. In Jonah’s case, after being in the fish for 3 days, the people repented when he preached; Jesus condemns those who would refuse to repent after his resurrection. The Queen of the South condemns Jesus’ listeners because she responded to Solomon, whereas the current generation does not respond, despite Jesus being greater than Solomon.

v33-36: The meaning of the parable of the lamp on the stand in this context is also “Respond!”. Just as the purpose of a lamp is to provide light for people to see where they are, Jesus’ teaching is to show people where they are, to guide them. It is not an intellectual curiosity, but to be used in people’s lives. As we can be filled with “light” or “darkness”, it is important that we consider carefully how and what we are taking in. We can take in Jesus’ teaching, which will enlighten us, or we can take in worldly ideas and teachings, which will darken us.

v37-54: Washing before meals was a Jewish tradition, but not commanded in the OT. The Pharisees were too concerned about ritual cleanliness rules and not concerned enough about their own hearts, which Jesus said were full of greed and wickedness.

“Woe” was a cry, perhaps for God’s just judgement in response to some situation or action, or more likely an expression of horror. The first “woe” concerned the Pharisees’ giving to the Temple. The tithe was commanded in the OT (e.g. Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:21-32) yet Jesus challenged the heart of lack of love for God and people. Perhaps the Pharisees felt secure in making a show of giving a tenth of all their possessions – including their salt and pepper – while neglecting to have the right heart of compassion behind it.

Following the challenge to the Pharisees’ pride (occupying the most prominent public seats), Jesus then compares them to unmarked graves. The OT stipulated complex rules for those touching dead bodies (Num 19; Lev 21:1-3), and the Pharisees were careful to keep away from dead bodies. Yet Jesus says their hearts are as bad as a grave, and also implies that people who come into contact with the Pharisees become contaminated by their teachings. The very thing which the Pharisee felt Jesus was – unclean because of not washing his hands – is the point that Jesus challenges them most deeply on. The challenges continue for the experts in the Law, concerning their lack of heart to help people, combined with setting high expectations that people could not meet.

Luke 12:1-34 — Placing Trust in God

Mon 2 Nov

The running theme in these passages has partly to do with placing trust in man, things (our belongings) or God. There is some emphasis on how to we use our resources for God (v34).

- Consider v4-7. What fears do you have that may lead you to place your trust elsewhere but in God?
- How does God’s sovereignty help you reposition priority on God?
- Consider the parable of the rich fool. How can you be rich towards God?
- Reflect on v22-34. How does knowing about God’s care and providence help you?

Further Notes

The passage begins (v2-3) with what is probably a warning that the hypocrisy (yeast) of the Pharisees will be exposed by the truth of the Gospel and its proclamation. The gospel will make the motives of men evident.

The Pharisees and other leaders of the Jews instilled a culture where keeping in step with the religious status quo was of utmost importance. The parents of the blind man in John 9:22 reflect this fear that Jesus is addressing here. Yet, if well founded in a healthy fear of God, a God fearer will overcome fear of man, because he practically acknowledges the sovereignty of God, who has true power to judge and is of much greater consequence than the most powerful man.

Tied to this in v10, is the indication that the rejection of Jesus while on earth was pardonable but the rejection of the Holy Spirit was not, which in the context of this passages probably referred to the rejection of the Gospel because the Holy Spirit was active in the proclamation of the Gospel and the leaders of the people resisted this act of the Spirit (see Acts 7:51) .

The parable of the rich fool addresses the issue of wealth and the folly of putting it before God. Love of money risks eternal separation from God.

Verses 22-31 offer strong encouragement that God cares and provides for his people. He has our back and is not a distant God as the average Jew of the time may have envisioned.

Luke 12:35-59 — Spiritual Watchfulness

Tue 3 Nov

These passages centre on the theme of being prepared at all times for the return of Jesus, as his return would be without warning, so that no further opportunity would be allowed after his coming.

- What do you understand by being watchful spiritually? Day to day, how are you preparing to meet Jesus? What sorts of distractions can affect your watchfulness?
- All who lead others are held accountable by God. How can you support leaders so that they can lead diligently (Rom 12:8)?
- How does v48 apply to Christians? What point does it make about rewards from God?
- What does v50 refer to?
- Read v54-59 and reflect on your first moments of spiritual discernment. Can you recount how God worked to get you to that point?

Further Notes

Jesus' elaboration (the second parable) on Peter's question seems to emphasise the greater responsibility of leadership. Judgement of their deeds will be greater. But we have all been given responsibility by God, so we need to take this passage to heart.

The message Jesus brings would be one that causes division within families. The family in any culture hung together on its unity. Jesus indicates that his message and call to discipleship would compete with even the close human relationships within families, as followers are called to allegiance to God, which could spark rejection by family members.

In v54-56, Jesus makes a point that spiritual discernment is not unlike practical discernment of the weather. But many of his hearers were unable or uninterested in discerning their spiritual state. This statement by Jesus, like many others, was intended to jolt people into reflection on their true state before God.

Luke 13:1-17 — Repentance: A Paradigm Shift

Wed 4 Nov

These passages address the Jewish (and human) view of righteousness before God and the need for repentance as God intended. Man's perspective of human suffering and misfortune in relationship to God is also addressed.

- How do you view your standing with God when you experience misfortune? How does your response hold up to the biblical view of suffering?
- Is it healthy to examine yourself when misfortune happens?
- In our Christian walk, we all have to address wrongly conceived notions about God. How do you strive to correct your view of God?
- Considering repentance, are there areas in your life in which you frequently show yourself less open to God's teaching?

Further Notes

The Jews held a view of sin and punishment that was probably rooted in the passages on blessing and curses in Deuteronomy. In context, this was directed at the corporate obedience of Israel as a nation, but the Jews' way of thinking was to apply this on the individual level. So if a person suffered a misfortune, it had to be a punishment from God because of some sin. Likewise if a person received outwardly beneficial things like good health, belongings, wealth, he or she must be righteous. This probably led the Pharisees to overemphasise and seek wealth and de-emphasise modesty in their world view, consequently teaching the people to do the same.

Jesus frequently challenged this view and in these passages, He affirms that those who had misfortune were no worse sinners than those who did not. In fact, all would spiritually perish on judgement day without godly repentance.

Perhaps the passage in v6-9 drives home the point that judgement is certain and our time is limited, but God graciously, but not infinitely, gives us time to repent.

In v10-17, the legalistic attitude of the Jewish synagogue leader, which was rooted in a faulty theology or view of God, made him so removed from the needs of the people that he could not rejoice when the crippled woman was "unbound" or healed. He could only criticise a good thing.

Luke 13:18-35 — The Kingdom of God and its Requirements Thu 5 Nov

In these passages, Jesus describes qualities of the Kingdom, namely that it starts small and insignificant and grows to comparatively huge proportions and will grow to reach the ends of the earth.

- Considering v18-21, how have you noted these qualities in God's Kingdom?
- What does the parable of the mustard seed mean to you?
- In what way is God's kingdom like yeast?
- What is the man in v23 trying to come to terms with? Given Jesus' response, do you think it is fair that just a few enter?
- Compare and contrast ways people in the text (both good and bad) attempt to enter the Kingdom.
- What is Jesus saying we must do to enter the Kingdom?
- How does the parable of the door make you feel? What does it mean for you to "make every effort"?
- What qualities of God are highlighted in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem?

Further Notes

In an elaborate response to the question about whether a few will be saved (v23), Jesus implicitly answers “Yes”. He equates salvation with entry into the Kingdom (v29). He also points out that the narrow door – his teaching – will be difficult and unpopular and most will not enter. Those who enter will need to make every effort, indicating that there will be some element of struggle in the entry.

The theme of reversal (the first will be last and the last, first) again challenges the Jewish mindset of exclusive salvation for Jews only. In this story, people from distant lands (i.e. the Gentiles, Jewish sinners and Samaritans), will be welcome too as they share in the great feast with the spiritual heroes of the Jews (v28).

The next passage reports Jesus’ sadness and God’s heart to bring the Jewish city under his wing of protection (v34 – compare with Deut 32:11). It is also possible that Luke included this section to highlight the fate of Jerusalem which was eventually destroyed in AD 70. There is debate as to whether Luke’s Gospel was written before or after Jerusalem’s fall. Either way, there is a strong connection with God’s judgement of the city in the Old Testament where it (and the nation) did not repent of their rebellion toward God. Likewise, in the New Testament era, a similar judgement befell Jerusalem because the city did not recognise Jesus as Messiah.

Luke 14 — Kingdom Values

Fri 6 Nov

In this chapter, Jesus reiterates some of the points and lessons in the previous chapter and expands on some Kingdom attitudes and values.

- In v7-11, what attitude is Jesus trying to instil in his hearers? How does this affect our service in his Kingdom?
- Considering doing good to the type of people described in v13, what can motivate and make you grow in your service to such people? Do you know anyone who fits this criterion?

Further Notes

Jesus being invited to a Pharisee’s house provided an opportunity for him to reiterate the point of the earlier passage. The event must have attracted many other guests of the same type – distinguished, well off, religious leaders – who closely watched Jesus and were probably critical of him. Jesus wasted no time in confronting the issue of Sabbath healings with a direct question that went unanswered. The fact that the healed man was “sent off” by Jesus may indicate he was not originally invited to the meal.

Jesus then goes on to address the behaviour of guests and host. Starting with the guests He admonishes them to practise modesty and adhere to principles in passages like Prov 25:6-7. On the surface He seems to be giving practical advice to the guests present but taking into account that in the same seating He tells the parable of the wedding banquet, He is alluding to a general attitude of humility and gratitude subjects of the Kingdom (including Christians) should demonstrate. They should avoid the entitled and arrogant attitude of the Pharisees.

As it is human nature to do good to those who can repay your good acts, Jesus admonishes the host (and us) to seek to serve in a way that pleases God and will bring a reward in heaven, i.e. by doing good to those who cannot give back.

The banquet parable served as a warning to the entitled Jewish nation, who though originally chosen, were at risk of not making it into God’s kingdom as they did not recognise the Messiah. Also, it pointed to the inclusive nature of the Kingdom of God; by Jewish standards, the Gentiles, poor and the lame would not have been candidates for citizenship.

The target audience moves from Pharisees and dinner guests to the crowds, and the requirement for Kingdom inclusion is clearly in the context of discipleship as Jesus states his famous requirements.

The passages end with the admonition to retain saltiness. This follows the call to count the cost (in Matt 5:13 it follows the promise of blessing for suffering), and can be understood as a call to perseverance in discipleship to the end.

Luke 15 — Reason to Rejoice

Sat 7 Nov

Continuing from the theme in previous passages about God's willingness to associate with the lowly and unworthy, these parables were taught in the context of the Pharisees muttering about Jesus associating with "sinners".

- What aspect of the parable of the lost son surprises you the most about God?
- In times of faithful service as a Christian, what circumstances can make you doubt your worth to God?
- The older brother continued to serve faithfully but did not take on the heart or attitude of his father. How can you ensure you stay connected to God as your Father (rejoicing with Him) even as you make efforts to walk in obedience to Him?

Further Notes

The entire chapter shows God's heart toward his children being restored to him. In each of the three parables, there is a break or loss of some sort, after which there is a restoration leading to outpouring of rejoicing and celebration. Sin is associated with each one of the broken states so that sin equates to spiritual lostness.

With the understanding that the rejoicing stems from God and His subjects, this must have been a huge encouragement to the people. The first two parables also demonstrate that God values the lost who repent and He will diligently seek them out. The parable of the Lost Son goes further to show that even in the case of a willful break from the Father, God is willing to take back the repentant sinner with rejoicing.

The others who remained (sheep, coin, son) are not less loved or valued, as the father reassures the older son. However, the father pleads for the older son to rejoice like he rejoices. Note that the older son viewed his father like a slave owner and not the loving father he was. This may have reflected the huge gap between the Pharisees' view of God and the understanding of God Jesus was transmitting.

Luke 16:1-15 — Hearts Set on Heaven

Mon 9 Nov

The parable of the shrewd manager highlights the call for Christians to keep mind and consequently life set on eternity.

- In light of v9, what treasures on earth are you exchanging for treasure in heaven? Or put another way, how are you using your wealth or resources to make heaven-bound friends?
- Consider v10-13. How are you using your wealth and resources to be rich towards God?
- Reflect on v15. Is there any area of your value system you can invert so that it aligns with values of God?

Further Notes

The shrewd manager demonstrated the ability to think ahead and come up with a plan that would endear the debtors to welcome him into their homes when he was out of work.

The response of the master is surprising, as rather than pursue restitution and mete out justice to the dishonest manager, he commends the manager! This passage does not condone dishonest behaviour, as immediately afterward Jesus speaks of the importance of honesty (see v10-12). The commendation seems rather to be for his clever long term planning. In a spiritual perspective, the advice to gain friends with worldly wealth so as to be welcomed in heaven (v9) when it is gone is similar to that of being rich toward God (see 12:21) or storing up treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19-21). If the advice is heeded, at death, when worldly wealth is of no use, one would have invested in heavenly treasure. So people living life putting God first will embrace many godly attitudes including

an unselfish use of wealth, and a focus on outreach, service and doing good that will inevitably lead people to God and produce many, many other good things.

The sayings in v10-14 cause the Pharisees to sneer. Luke reports the underlying motivation – the love of money. This fundamental love for money intrinsically fed into a value system that upheld appearances, proud attitudes, showy lifestyles, seeking praise from men over seeking praise from God and not seeking to connect with the needs of the people, especially the poor, the humble, the downtrodden, the sick and “sinners”. This value system inverted the values of God (v15).

Luke 16:16-31 — Our Riches and Eternity

Tue 10 Nov

This passage starts with a collection of sayings of Jesus that may have been uttered in a different setting and then moves on to another parable that addresses the use of wealth and the eternal consequences of our choices.

- Why do you think the rich man ended up in Hades?
- Consider the poor and needy within and outside the church. How can you make sure you are connected with their suffering and not growing callous like the rich man?
- Is it OK to live a lavish lifestyle? Where do you draw the line between what is lavish and what is not?

Further Notes

Jesus uttered three sayings (v16-18), possibly in different contexts. The first (v16) is a statement that places John the Baptist alongside the well known OT prophets as the last of this line and points to the Kingdom of God being imminent. The phrase about forcing (compare with Matt 11:12) may indicate that men are trying to enforce their own worldly view on what God’s kingdom should be like rather than await God’s revelation or seek out the clues he has provided in scripture. So the people expect a political kingdom that will kick out the Romans, and a king of military and violent nature. The Kingdom of God, however, is not like this, as Jesus was of non-violent and gentle demeanor. Because of unrepentance from these views many failed to see and enter the kingdom of God.

The second (v17) is a statement about the perpetuity of God’s word which perhaps in connection with the previous verse pointed the people to the sure source of the qualities of the God’s kingdom rather than the loaded perceptions of the people and their leaders.

The third (v18), in a time when loose interpretations of the Law made allowances for men, particularly from the ruling class, to abuse the concessions God made for divorce (see Deut 24:1), Jesus is making a statement against this culture of men divorcing their wives for the sole purpose of remarriage to another woman.

Finally, Jesus teaches the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. This parable points once again to the judgement of God against those who misuse their wealth in a selfish way with disregard to the poor and needy. Lazarus’ poverty and extreme need were at the rich man’s door steps daily, yet the rich man chose to be callous as he indulged in a lavish lifestyle.

Again, the theme of reversion (the last becomes first and first becomes last) comes into play in this parable as the rich man ends up in a place of suffering (Hades) and Lazarus in the company of Abraham. This is a stark warning to keep our minds, hearts and souls focused on eternity, connected with God and not be seduced by the fleeting things of the world.

Jesus in this parable teaches about the finality of this situation – nothing can be done to reverse this situation after death because of the “great chasm” between the two destinations (v26). Jesus also teaches about the authority and sufficiency of the words and teachings of the Law and the prophets, the gospel and by extension the New Testament (v31). This is further encouragement for us today to listen attentively to the word of God.

Luke 17:1-19 — Faith

Wed 11 Nov

This passage starts with a collection of teachings of Jesus, and ends with Jesus healing ten lepers. The common theme is faith.

- v1-2: How do your actions and words influence others? How do you feel when you read v2? Threatened? Sobered? Convicted?
- v3-4: What do you do when you see a brother or sister sin? Is your response different if the sin is committed against you or not?
- Do you find it easy to forgive? What stops you? Why is it important to forgive?
- v5-6: What do you ask God for? Is your faith increasing?
- v7-10: Do you ever feel that God owes you something? Or that you deserve a reward or something better than what you now have? What attitude does this passage teach us to have?
- v11-19: How should we respond to God's provision, grace and answers to prayer? Think about what God has done for you this year. How have you responded?

Further Notes

“Woe” (v1) is an expression of horror at what was coming, and probably communicates regret or compassion, rather than a threat. “Stumbling blocks” (v1, NASB) or “things that cause people to sin” (NIV) are temptations (literally a “bait stick” used in a trap). We can not avoid being tempted, but the warning against tempting others or leading others astray is particularly strong. “Little ones” (v2) could refer to children (see the parallel passage in Matt 18:1-7), or also to people with a childlike faith (Luke 10:21; Mark 10:24).

Instead of leading others astray, Jesus calls us to correct each other. This is not just pointing out what is wrong in someone, but also showing God's grace (“forgive them”), even when sin is repeated (cf Matt 18:22). This requires “great patience and careful instruction” (2 Tim 4:2; see also 1 Th 5:14).

Perhaps v5 is the apostles' response to the call to forgive others in the previous verse. In any case, Jesus makes it clear that prayers are answered not because of the greatness of our faith, but because of God's greatness. The error of much modern thinking (e.g. the so-called “positive thinking” movement) is to place the emphasis on us instead of God.

v7-10: In many other passages (e.g. Luke 6:23,35; 18:29-30; Matt 6:4,6,18; 1 Cor 3:8,14) we read of rewards promised to the faithful. To put such promises into perspective, we need to realise that everything we have is according to God's grace, and that God does not owe us anything. Note that although we are called to have the attitude of a slave, Jesus does not treat us as slaves (Luke 12:37; 22:27). In this passage, “unworthy” means that we do not bring gain to God, no matter how much we do or how good we are (see also 1 Cor 9:16).

The lepers “stood at a distance” (v12) as required by the Law. Priests (v14) acted as health inspectors for contagious diseases (Lev 14:2ff). By appearing before the priests, the healing would be public (as evidence of Jesus' power and of the ex-lepers' right to return from quarantine). It required faith to set out to go to the priests before they were healed. In v19, the meaning could be that the man was “cured” or “saved” by faith.

Luke 17:20-37 — The Coming of God's Kingdom

Thu 12 Nov

Jesus answers a question about when the Kingdom of God would come and expands His response to warn of coming events.

- What do you understand by the term “the Kingdom of God”? What did first century Jews expect from the Kingdom?
- In what sense was the Kingdom of God already “among” Jesus' listeners?
- What event was Jesus warning His disciples about? What mistake did Lot's wife make (Gen 19:26)? Is there any lesson for us in this (consider Luke 9:62)?

Further Notes

Many first-century Jews looked forward to the restoration of the Israelite kingdom as in the days of David and Solomon, and they expected that the promised Messiah would bring this new kingdom into being. Jesus often addressed these false expectations during His teaching (e.g. Luke 19:11). In v21, Jesus explained that God's kingdom was already "within" or "among" His hearers. There are several possible interpretations: the kingdom is among you (in the person of Jesus, i.e. the king is present); the kingdom is within you (in the heart, Rom 14:17); the kingdom is within reach; or that the kingdom will come suddenly among you. The first option is best.

The "days of the Son of Man" could refer to Jesus' first or second coming, but could also be understood in the same sense as the "day of the Lord", an Old Testament expression for a time of judgement on God's enemies and vindication of those who serve God (cf Dan 7:13; Matt 16:27-28; Mark 8:38; 13:26; 14:62; Luke 22:48; John 5:27). Verse 22 could be looking forward to Jesus' second coming or back to the first; the following verses refer to the second coming (v23-25) and to a time of judgement (v26-36). Jesus addressed people's expectations and explained that His glory and power would not be revealed until after His suffering. At the time of God's judgement, most people take no notice of the warnings, just as Noah and Lot were the only ones in their times who listened to God and sought salvation.

At judgement, possessions are irrelevant (v31); similar words apply to the flight from Jerusalem before its destruction (Matt 24:17; Mark 13:15; Luke 21:20-21). Another parallel exists between 17:23 and 21:8. Here it seems that the meaning can be applied to both the judgement on Jerusalem and the final judgement.

In v33, Jesus repeats the paradox of losing your life to save it (Luke 9:24), that is, that we must place our lives in God's hands. "Taken" (v34-35) presumably means taken to be with God, as in 1 Th 4:16-17, rather than by persecution; at this time family or friends can't save us. Dead bodies attracts vultures; so also the spiritually dead attract judgement (v37).

Luke 18:1-14 — Parables about Prayer

Fri 13 Nov

Both of these parables are preceded by an introductory sentence from Luke which explains the purpose of the parable, making sure that we don't miss the point.

- Think about what things discourage you from praying. What encouragement do you find in v1-8?
- It may seem like a strange question in the second half of v8, but to what extent did Jesus find faith on the earth 2000 years ago? (See Matt 13:58; Mark 6:6; 16:14; Luke 7:9.) Is the situation different today?
- Do you find yourself falling into the same trap as the Pharisee in v11-12? Do you congratulate yourself for understanding or following God's word? How does God want us to pray?

Further Notes

Jesus corrected a false understanding of prayer. Jewish teaching at the time limited prayer to three times per day; more often was thought to bother God. God is not being likened to the judge in v2; the reasoning is: if an unjust and unloving man responds to a fair request for help, how much more will God answer the prayers of His children. The widow was helpless; she was unable to bribe or threaten. In v7, the delay could refer to judgement (to allow time for repentance) or to justice (to test and strengthen us). "Quickly" (v8; cf 2 Pet 3:8) does not necessarily mean "soon", but rather that it will be sudden when it happens.

Fasting twice a week was not required by God's law; the only required fast was once per year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27). The tithe was required for crops (Deut 14:22), but the Pharisees tithed herbs as well (Luke 11:42). Note that the Pharisee prayed only about his own goodness, and failed to see his sin or his need for God's mercy, unlike the tax collector, who humbled himself before God (Luke 14:11).

Here we see Jesus interacting with various types of people: powerless and powerful, popular and unpopular.

- How can we be like a child (v15-17) in our attitude to God's kingdom?
- What do you think of the ruler's question in v18? Can we obtain eternal life by what we do?
- Why did Jesus ask this man (and not others) to sell all his possessions? Why do you think the man was disappointed with Jesus' answer?
- Who makes it hard for the rich to enter God's kingdom? Is God biased?
- v31-34: Why couldn't the disciples understand Jesus' statements? In hindsight, the prophecies are clear and amazingly specific, showing that the crucifixion and surrounding events took place according to God's plan and foreknowledge.
- v35-43: Why did the blind man ask for mercy? Who did he think Jesus was?
- 19:1-10: Why do you think Jesus chose to stay with Zacchaeus? Why did people object to this? What can we learn from Jesus' example?

Further Notes

Children (v16) are characterised by trust in others rather than pride in themselves or their achievements or virtues (cf v11).

Jewish teachers (rabbis) would not describe people as good, but only God. Jesus used this to call attention to the meaning of the ruler's own words in v18, so that he would understand who Jesus is. Rabbis believed it was possible to keep the whole Law, but Jesus pointed the ruler to the Law (v20) so that he would understand his need for Jesus. (Scripture teaches that the Law leads us to Jesus, Gal 3:24.) In this case, the first Commandment, to worship only one God, was the issue, as we see from the ruler's response to Jesus.

It is clear from this passage that riches are not a sign of God's blessing or favour. Poverty is not a spiritual virtue, but riches can be a hindrance (v24); successful people find it hard not to rely on themselves. In any case, no one comes to God without God working in their lives.

The example of the camel is humourous overstatement, like swallowing the camel in Matt 23:24. Some think Jesus referred to a gate in Jerusalem which a camel could only fit through if unladen, but evidence suggests that this gate was built centuries later, and it was named after Jesus' saying, rather than the converse.

Christianity is not-for-profit; when we follow Jesus, we give up following material gain. God does however promise to meet our needs (Php 4:19) and reward us in other ways.

One of the themes of Luke is how God's purpose is worked out in history. Jesus made very specific prophecies about what would happen to Him (v32-33); this reassures us that even the crucifixion was part of God's plan. At the time, Jesus' disciples misunderstood Him, not taking Him literally (cf 9:23; 17:33).

The blind man recognised that Jesus was the promised Messiah ("Son of David", v38-39). This title combines Jesus' position as King with God's promise to David of an eternal kingdom (1 Chr 17:11-14).

Jesus' acceptance of Zacchaeus (19:5,9) is an example of God's grace even to the rich (cf 18:24-27). "I must" (19:5) expresses Jesus' divine mission. The Law usually required only 20% extra for voluntary restitution (Lev 6:5; Num 5:7), but stricter penalties also existed (Ex 22:1; 2 Sam 12:6), which may have been the basis of Zacchaeus's reaction (v8). He was considered a "Son of Abraham" (v9; cf Rom 4:12) by faith.

Luke 19:11-27 — Using What God Gives You

Mon 16 Nov

This parable is similar to the parable of the talents (Matt 25), but also differs in several important ways. We would expect that Jesus used the same or similar parables many times as He taught from place to place.

- Why did Jesus tell this parable (v11)?
- What expectations did the people have of Jesus?
- Who do the citizens represent in the parable? Who are the slaves?
- How does this parable apply to you? Make a list of the gifts God has given you. Are you using what God has given you?

Further Notes

The main purpose of the parable was to correct false expectations about the Kingdom of God, and to explain the time between Jesus' first and second comings. Going to a distant country to be appointed king (v12) might sound strange to us, but it was clear to His hearers, who had seen Herod the Great (king at Jesus' birth) and later Herod's sons go to Rome to receive their kingship. (In fact one son, Herod Archelaus, was refused the title of king, because he was not considered worthy.)

The parable illustrates how we should live out our faith. Everyone receives the same small amount (a mina, v13, was about 100 days' wages), and those who make good use of what they get will get more (v24-26; 8:18). The lesson for us is that even the smallest gift should be put to use (see also 1 Cor 12:7-11). Note that the reward here is not rest but wider service (v15-19). The fierce ending (v27) reminds us of the seriousness of God's judgement, and thus the importance of using our gifts.

Luke 19:28-48 — Jesus' Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem Tue 17 Nov

Jesus fulfilled the prophecy made about Him hundreds of years earlier, that a king would come to Jerusalem bringing salvation and great joy to the people (Zec 9:9; Matt 21:4-5).

- Why did the disciples and the people of Jerusalem welcome Jesus with such enthusiasm (v36-38; cf John 12:16)? What do you think they expected to happen?
- What did Jesus expect to happen?
- Why did the Pharisees (v39) object to what the crowd was saying?
- Why did the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus? What stopped them?
- How do you feel about Jesus being made King? Is there any part of your life that you do not want to surrender to Him?

Further Notes

We have to remember the context: Jesus had been threatened with death (Jn 11:57) and had been in hiding outside Judea as He taught His disciples. Now He boldly approached Jerusalem, publicly and triumphantly, leading the way (v28; cf Mk 10:32).

The fact that the donkey had never been ridden meant that it was suitable for sacred purposes (cf Num 19:2; 1 Sam 6:7). Riding a donkey was symbolic of a man of peace (e.g. a priest or merchant); a warrior would ride a horse. This showed what type of man the Messiah would be.

The spreading of cloaks on the ground (v36) was fitting for Jesus as king (cf 2 Ki 9:13). Most of the crowd wanted the Messiah to claim His kingdom (v38; cf Ps 118:26), whereas the Pharisees (v39) avoided force and didn't want to provoke the Romans. Jesus' response (v40; cf Hab 2:11) reminds us that the whole of creation was made for the time that Jesus would receive His kingdom, and it groans waiting for the fulfilment of its purpose (Rom 8:22-23).

While the crowd rejoiced, Jesus wept (v41), knowing that Jerusalem (the name means “city of peace”, cf Heb 7:2) had missed its chance to make peace with God. Its destruction was now inevitable, as had been prophesied centuries earlier (Is 29:3; Ps 137:9). As Jesus cleared out the temple for a second time (cf John 2:13-17), He used the words of the prophets (Jer 7:11; Is 56:7) to describe the corruption at the centre of Jewish religion.

Luke 20:1-18 — Jesus’ Authority

Wed 18 Nov

In chapter 20 we see a public showdown between the Jewish leaders and Jesus, where they seek to discredit Him in any way possible, so that they could get some public support for their plot to kill Him. Note the contrast: Jesus preached good news (v1) while His enemies sought to destroy Him. They start by challenging His authority.

- Why didn’t Jesus answer their question (v3-8)? Do you ever get drawn into pointless arguments with people who aren’t seeking the truth?
- What did Jesus’ reponse reveal about the Jewish leaders’ question?
- What does the vineyard (v9) refer to? What is the harvest?
- Did the Jewish leaders understand what they were doing (v16,19)? What was their motivation?

Further Notes

We see that truth was irrelevant to Jesus’ enemies (v5; John 18:38). We should not expect to be treated with justice by those who reject God. The parable in v9-18 was God’s last appeal to the Jewish leaders, who had systematically rejected His messengers (Neh 9:26; Jer 7:25-26; 25:4-7; Matt 23:34; Acts 7:52; Heb 11:35b-38). Jesus’ hearers clearly understood the meaning of the parable (v19). They would have been familiar with Isaiah 5:1-13, which uses a similar illustration and warning of judgement on Jerusalem and Judah. We see God’s compassion in giving further opportunities for the people to repent (v10-13), but it is clear that the sending of His Son is their final chance.

In Jewish law, occupiers of land were presumed to own it after 3 years, if no one disputed their claim. Here the tenants relied on the owner being distant and unable to assert his right. It was unthinkable to Jesus’ enemies that the priveleges of the Jews would be given to Gentiles (v16), but Scripture prophesied exactly this (Is 49:6) because they had rejected God’s son (v17; Ps 118:22; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7). The rock represents Jesus (v18; Is 8:14-15; Dan 2:34-35), and He will destroy those who oppose or reject Him.

Luke 20:19-21:4 — Jesus’ Wisdom

Thu 19 Nov

The Jewish leaders continued their attack with questions designed to trap Jesus into incriminating Himself no matter what He answered. They wanted either to undermine His popularity with the people so that they would be able to arrest Him themselves, or to have Him say something against the Romans, so that the Romans would arrest Him. God’s wisdom, however, is far superior to man’s, and Jesus’ answers left His enemies speechless.

- In v25, what things are God’s? Where is God’s image imprinted?
- What was the point of the question in v33? What did Jesus’ answer prove? Can dead people have a God?
- v41-44: Who did people understand the “son of David” to be? How did Jesus’ questions challenge their understanding?
- 21:1-4: How does God assess the value of our gifts? Does this change the way you think about generosity?

Further Notes

The Pharisees and Herodians (Matt 22:15-16) asked about paying tax to Rome. If Jesus objected to paying tax, He could be reported to the governor, while if He supported paying tax, He would undermine His popularity with the people, who typically resented Roman occupation of their land. Jesus taught that we are citizens of both heaven and earth, with responsibilities in both realms (v25; cf Ecc 8:2; Rom 13:1-7).

This silenced the first group of questioners, so the Sadducees (v27) tried a different line of questioning. The Sadducees (apparently descendants of Zadok, 1 Ki 1:8; 2:35) were aristocrats who cooperated with Rome and rejected Jewish oral tradition and the afterlife (Acts 23:8). Their question regarded Levirate marriage (Dt 25:5ff; cf Ruth 4:21): when a childless woman was widowed, it was the duty of the closest relative of the deceased husband to marry her, and to raise children in the name of the deceased who would then inherit the land of the deceased. The Sadducees imagined that if there were a resurrection, such women would have multiple husbands, an impossible situation in their minds.

But Jesus explained that the life to come is substantially different from this one: there is no death, so there is no need for marriage and having children; instead we are part of God's family. Jesus addressed the underlying question about resurrection, using a fundamental passage about who God is (Ex 3:1-6). If there were no resurrection, God would be the God of non-existent beings, which is absurd. A similar statement is found in the apocrypha (4 Macc 16:25). Jesus' answer silenced the Sadducees (v40), to the delight (v39) of those who had been embarrassed by Jesus' answer to the previous question.

Children were considered to be no greater than their parents, so the son of David (v41) would be inferior to David himself, the ideal king. Jesus cites Ps 110:1 to show that David in fact prophesied about a greater king and kingdom. Luke also records the virgin birth (1:34), which suggests Christ's pre-existence and independent greatness, without denying His descent from David (1:27,32,69; 2:4; 18:38f).

Jewish scribes were not allowed to charge for their teaching, but they could accept gifts. Jesus criticised them (v45-47) for acting dishonestly to impress people for personal gain. Likewise, the rich wanted to impress people with their generosity, but Jesus taught (21:3-4) that the value of a gift is determined by the amount **not** given, that is, by how much we keep for ourselves.

Luke 21:5-38 — The Future of Jerusalem

Fri 20 Nov

Jesus returns to the topic of the the future of Jerusalem (cf Luke 17:20-37) and gives very specific warnings to His followers about what would happen and how they should respond. While most of the passage applies to events in the first century, a few verses refer to events up until Jesus' second coming.

- What is the context, that is, what was Jesus asked about in v7?
- What result would the persecution of Christians have (v12-13)?
- What does the promise of v18-19 mean (cf v16)?
- What are "the times of the Gentiles" (v24)?
- Which events in this chapter have been fulfilled, and which are still awaiting fulfilment?
- Based on this understanding of future events, how does Jesus want Christians to live (v34-36)?

Further Notes

This passage and parallel passages (Mk 13; Mt 24) are difficult. Apparently, part refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and part to the end of all things. Luke is clearest in making this distinction. Jesus' language is best understood if we recognise the parallels to OT passages about God's judgement (2 Chr 15:6; Is 8:21-22; 13:13; Jer 34:17).

From v8, we note that those who announce the end in their own lifetimes are to be regarded as false prophets. Jesus warned that persecution would come from both Jews and Gentiles (v12; cf 12:11), but this would create opportunities to evangelise (cf Php 1:12-14). God does not necessarily promise deliverance from persecution (v16), but God's plan will be fulfilled. It is sometimes a great test of faith that we are not told what our role is in God's plan. Whether we live or die, suffer or experience God's deliverance, we are called to faith, endurance and constancy. Verses 18-19 appear contradictory to the preceding verses, but God is promising spiritual safety (see also Heb 11:32-40).

In times of war, people would come into walled cities for protection. Jesus warned against this in the case of Jerusalem (v20ff), and it is known that when the Romans attacked Jerusalem in 67AD, Christians fled to Pella in Decapolis based on this teaching. The "time of punishment" (v22) was God's punishment for sin (cf Ps 94:1; Is 34:8). The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that 97000 were taken prisoner and over one million killed (perhaps an exaggeration) at this time. The "times of Gentiles" (v24) could be understood in various ways: times to execute judgement, to be supreme over Israel, to enjoy the privileges previously reserved for Israel, or to hear the gospel.

It is probable that the topic of v25-28,35 (cf Mt 24:29-35; Mk 13:24-27) switches to Jesus' second coming, but not all commentators agree. It is apocalyptic language, which is not to be understood literally. Verse 27 (cf Dan 7:13) speaks most clearly of Jesus' return, especially when the following context in parallel passages is considered (Mk 13:26-27; Mt 24:30-31). But then do verses 29-32 switch back to the previous topic, the fall of Jerusalem? It probably does, but a "generation" (v32), could also be an "age" and the way Jesus' words are described as eternal (v33) suggests a longer time span for fulfilment. (Similar uses of "generation" are: "you will preserve him from this generation forever" (Ps 12:7 NASB) and "the generation of the righteous" (Ps 14:5 ASV).) Also, based on Mk 13:32-33, where Jesus says He doesn't know when the end will come, He couldn't then limit it to a particular generation. In all three parallel passages, the switches of topic are marked by words like "these things" (the fall of Jerusalem) and "that day" or "that time" (Jesus' second coming).

Although our redemption was accomplished on the cross, its main effect is future, after death. Thus redemption is spoken of as past (Rom 3:24; Gal 3:13-14; Heb 9:12; 1 Pet 1:18), present (Eph 1:7) and future (v28; Rom 8:23; Eph 1:14; 4:30). We live in perplexing times, but Christians should not be downcast: deliverance is near (v28). Jesus calls us to live in view of the end times (v34-36): praying, being watchful that we don't fall into sin, and living a life of trust in God rather than worry.

Luke 22:7-20 — The Last Supper

Sat 21 Nov

- What are your thoughts after reading v7-13? Was the availability of the prepared room miraculously provided or was it that the man carrying the jar had prepared this guest room to hire out to whomever wanted to use it to share the Passover?
- In v14-16, do you think the apostles recognised that this was Jesus' last meal before his death?
- What do you think the apostles would have thought when Jesus used the word "suffer" in verse 15?
- What did Jesus mean in verse 16 "until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God"?
- What did Jesus mean when he said "this cup is the new covenant" (v20)?

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is also referred to as the Passover, though strictly speaking they are distinct, the former being the six days preceding the seventh, the actual Passover Day, when the lamb is sacrificed and eaten along with unleavened bread. The Passover meal which Jesus shares with his apostles in this passage may have been "a" Passover meal of the preceding six days rather than "the" Passover meal of the seventh day.

The "cup" (v17) Jesus shared with the apostles would have been the third of four cups drunk during the Passover meal, the "cup of blessing". According to Luke (Luke 24:35; Acts 10:41), Jesus ate and drank with the apostles after his resurrection, so from v18 we can conclude that the Kingdom of God had already come by then.

Traditionally, during the Passover meal, the head of the family would break bread and give thanks as follows: “Blessed are You, o Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” The eaters of the Passover were encouraged to identify themselves with their forefathers who were brought out of Egypt. Jesus clearly wanted his disciples to “remember him” when they break bread together as He was about to deliver them from the captivity of sin and into the kingdom of heaven, just as they remember the Passover.

In Exodus 24:8, Moses ushered in the Old Covenant between God and His chosen people through adherence to the Law. The covenant was confirmed by sprinkling blood on the people. The apostles had just been confirmed by Jesus as God’s chosen people of the New Covenant, which would come into effect upon the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Luke 22:1-6,21-23,47-54 — The Betrayal

Mon 23 Nov

- Read v1-6. Why didn’t the chief priests, teachers of the Law and the temple guard just arrest Jesus themselves at the first given opportunity? Why did they find it necessary to accept Judas’s help?
- In v3, when “Satan entered Judas”, did Judas then not have any choice in the betrayal? Was Judas a victim of control by Satan? If so, would this then absolve Judas of the guilt of his actions?
- Read v21-23. “The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed” (v22). Consider this along with Acts 2:23 and 4:28. How do you understand these verses? Was Judas framed, manipulated or controlled against his will to betray Jesus? Or did God, being omniscient (all knowing), anticipate Judas’ betrayal of Jesus and accommodate that into his plan from day 1 (creation)?
- Read v47-54. A kiss was a common way of greeting at that time and in that culture. It meant more than just “hello”; it expressed friendship, esteem and love. This makes this kiss of betrayal even more heinous an act. Why did Judas chose to identify Jesus to the arresting authorities with a kiss?

Luke 22:31-34,54-62 — The Denial

Tue 24 Nov

In v31-33, Jesus reveals that Satan still works as he did in Job when he asked to test Job, as he now asked to test Peter.

- How does it make you feel that Satan regularly seeks permission from God to test you? (See also 1 Cor 10:13.)

In response Peter declared his willingness to suffer trial alongside Jesus (v33). Just as Peter could walk on water while Jesus was with him (Matt 14:22-33) but lost faith when distracted by the wind, Peter would again falter in his faith when fear distracted him from fixing his eyes on Jesus. Read v54-62. If we’re honest, we’ve all faltered in our faith when something or someone distracts us from focusing on Jesus.

- Take some time to recall your times of struggle in the past. How did you lose your focus on Jesus before these times?
- What lessons, spiritual and practical, can you learn from these times? What can you put into place to remain fixed on Jesus and so be able to stand during times of temptation?

Luke 22:39-46 — The Garden of Agony

Wed 25 Nov

We know from Luke 21:37 that this place of prayer was visited by Jesus every night while he abided in Jerusalem. Judas would have known this and so would have been able to find Jesus quite easily when he betrayed Him. Jesus would have known Judas would know this.

- Why then did Jesus not choose somewhere else to pray that night? Compare Daniel 6:10-12.
- What is your prayer life like? Do you regularly humble yourself before God in private or just during times of trial or before big decisions? (See Luke 6:12-16).
- Why did Jesus twice urge his disciples to “pray that you will not fall into temptation” (v40,46)?
- The disciples were “exhausted from sorrow” (v45, NIV) or “worn out by grief” (NEB). Why were the disciples in such a state?
- Sleep can offer temporary escape from sorrow or worry. When have you been so worried or troubled that you were worn out and just wanted to retreat under the covers?

It was the custom of the day to pray standing up with eyes raised to heaven. Jesus, in verse 41, chose to kneel to pray on this occasion, not feeling bound by custom in his genuine relationship with his Father.

- Do you have any customs or traditions from your culture that might hinder your prayer life or indeed your discipleship?

In v42, Luke gives a condensed account of this time of prayer and supplication, in comparison to Matthew 26:36-46 and Mark 14:32-42, where Jesus prays three times.

- What is Jesus asking of God and why?
- In his prayer Jesus asks, “not my will, but yours be done”. Did Jesus’ will differ from God’s then?
- In v43, “an angel appeared to him and strengthened him”. Only Luke mentions this. See Matt 4:11 and Mark 1:13 and compare the setting and circumstances of Jesus receiving the attentions of angels.
- Men of faith had faced the prospect of certain death before, without as much concern as Jesus showed (e.g Daniel 3:16-17). Why then was Jesus in such anguish? Compare v44 to Matt 26:38 and Mark 14:33-34. Here we see Jesus’ soul was in anguish, troubled and distressed.
- Was Jesus in anguish because of the imminent death of His flesh or because of His separation from God by bearing the sin of all?

Luke 22:63-23:25 — The Trial of Jesus

Thu 26 Nov

The events of the trials of Jesus can be pieced together by referring to all four gospels (Matt 26:57-27:26; Mark 14:53-15:20; Luke 22:63-23:25; John 18:19-40). There are two stages, the Jewish trial and the Roman trial.

The Jewish trial itself is of two stages, the night trial (not recorded by Luke) and the day trial. The night trial itself was unlawful according to the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 4:1). In the event of a lawful day time trial it was not even lawful to pass sentence until the next day! Thus Jesus’ trial was an unlawful sham.

The Jews found Jesus guilty of blasphemy, but barred from exercising the death penalty by the Romans they took Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor, to obtain the death penalty on charges of sedition, inciting revolt and of declaring himself a king. Pilate saw no basis for conviction and referred the case to Herod who found no case against him either. Sent back to Pilate a second time Jesus was eventually sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate, who had tried everything (Luke 23:20) to free him.

- Not many of us have faced persecution for our faith like Jesus did in v63-65. What would it take for you to waver in your faith? Ill health, job loss, death of a loved one, debt, difficult or broken marriage, broken dreams?
- v66-71: Injustice and false testimony are hard to bear, even more so if it is against you personally. Whether at work, with family or even strangers, how have you dealt with this in the past and how would you now do things differently? Is there anything you can learn from Jesus' example?
- In Luke 23:1-25 the Jewish authorities wanted Jesus dead, out of their lives, causing no more trouble, demanding no more change of the status quo. Sometimes, if we're honest, don't we want the same so that we don't have to make painful changes in our lives in order to become more Christlike?

Luke 23:26-31 — The Crucifixion: Part 1

Fri 27 Nov

Jesus has been tried and condemned to death by crucifixion. What follows is the greatest expression of love the world has ever witnessed. The Luke account differs in several ways to the other gospels. The careful and eager student may wish to read all four accounts of our Lord's death. See Matt 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-32 and John 19:17-24.

In v26, Simon from Cyrene (North Africa, Libya) gets caught up in Jesus' story, apparently by accident. He was either visiting Jerusalem for the Passover or a migrant residing in the environs of Jerusalem. The soldiers "made him carry it [the cross] behind Jesus". There are two possible scenarios to consider here.

- a) Simon carried the cross while Jesus walked in front of Him. This is problematic as in the next verse we learn of large numbers of people mourning and wailing for Jesus, whereas the mourners' attention would have been directed at the one carrying the cross.
- b) Both Simon and Jesus carried the cross, Jesus in front of Simon. This is more likely as the condemned man would not have been so easily excused from the burden of carrying His cross. And the mourning and wailing of the large numbers of people would make sense as they would see Jesus carrying the cross before even noticing Simon behind him.

If we conclude that scenario (b) above is a more likely picture of what occurred then we must consider that Simon would have been so close to Jesus that he would have seen the partially clotted blood from the strips on Jesus' back, and heard His audible expression of pain and discomfort, his laboured breathing under the heavy weight of the cross. What an intimate encounter. Simon the Cyrene was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21), and at the least Rufus and his mother became disciples (Rom 16:13).

Take some time to recall your own intimate encounter with Jesus. It could be when you first came to faith for instance. Write this down in the form of a letter to someone who has never heard your story before, like Luke writing to Theophilus (Luke 1:3). Now post it to yourself (yes, post, not e-mail). When it arrives go to a place of solitude, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and read it thanking God for his Son on the cross.

Luke 23:32-49 — The Crucifixion: Part 2

Sat 28 Nov

Two criminals were also crucified with Jesus on that day. One somehow managed to find the strength to mock Jesus. The other mustered enough energy to defend Jesus from this abuse and to ask Jesus for nothing more than to be remembered by Jesus. Jesus responds by assuring the man of his place in paradise.

- When you, as a disciple, pick up your cross daily, do you find yourself trudging around with an attitude like the abusive criminal, blaming others (or God) for the burden you bear?

- Do you carry your cross with a broken and contrite heart, seeking God's approval through your Bible study, prayer life, sacrificial giving or church attendance?
- Or do you pick up that cross joyfully as a faithful servant, thinking not of the burden or yourself for that matter, but rather of those around you in mortal need of reconciliation to God through the sacrifice of the Son?

The temple curtain separated the holiest part of the temple, representing God's presence, from the rest of the temple. Only the high priest could enter this area, and only once per year (Heb 9:3-8). The curtain being torn in two was symbolic of Jesus' death opening the way for all to enter into the very presence of God (Heb 10:19-25).

- Jesus ushered in an unprecedented new level of relationship between you and God through His sacrifice on the cross. He turned the universe upside down and changed all the rules to give you a free lifetime pass to love and be loved by your Father, the Creator of all. Take some time next week to plan a special time with God. Make it special, a time you will be able to look back and remember with a smile for years to come.

Luke 23:50-24:53 — The Burial and Resurrection

Mon 30 Nov

After the crucifixion of Jesus there is a touching and unexpected scene of kindness by a member of the Jewish Council, Joseph of Arimathea. It was Preparation Day, the day before the Passover Sabbath. He, of all people, should have been keeping himself ceremonially clean, and certainly not cleaning, touching and dressing the torn, bruised and pierced body of the very man the Jewish Council had just succeeded in killing. It also would have been tremendously expensive, demanded real effort and would have jeopardised his standing in the Jewish Council.

- God used Joseph to be a source of inspiration as an "upright man" (v50) who would do the right thing despite the cost. What can you learn from Joseph's example and how would you grow if you were to emulate that heart?

Read 24:1-12. It is Sunday morning, the morning of the resurrection. The women carrying spices to the tomb to complete the preparation of Jesus' body for burial encounter two angels. Their reaction is typical of angel encounters: utter fear, bowing down, averting their eyes from the overwhelming sight. Only when reminded by the angels of Jesus' words which they themselves had heard Him speak did they then begin to understand what He had meant. We are so blessed to have God's word to read, memorise and refer to so that we do not forget the very words of Jesus.

- Do you make the time to immerse yourself in the Word regularly, reminding yourself of what God has to say to you personally?

Resurrection isn't a common event, and the disciples had not understood Jesus' prophecies about it. Thus the men didn't believe the women and ran off to investigate for themselves. The women probably wouldn't have believed it themselves unless actual angels had appeared and told them. In the Jewish society of the day the testimony of a woman was invalid in a Jewish court. This is one possible reason the male disciples did not credit the women's report of Jesus' resurrection.

- Were the men wrong to not believe the women's report? Or were they acting correctly in investigating the truth of it themselves? We should always check the validity of what we are told against scripture (Acts 17:10-12), but not be "slow ... to believe" (Luke 24:25).

Read v13-53. Over 40 days Jesus appeared to his disciples, wherever they were, calling them back to faith, rebuking when required (v25), encouraging them (v37-38), and even providing evidence to satisfy their doubts (v38-40). What a loving Jesus to have taken this time and have made every effort to provide the disciples with what they needed to stand firm in the faith again.

- What did Jesus do and where did he have to go to call you?
- As His representative here on earth, what are you willing to do and where are you willing to go, to continue His call to those He has predestined for salvation?