

The Upside-Down Kingdom Luke Chapters 1-8 Review

Last semester we took a deep look at the first eight chapters of Luke's Gospel. Before we begin our study this year, let's go back and look at a highlight reel of what we discovered.

Background

Who was Luke?

Paul describes Luke as "the Beloved Physician" in Colossians 4:14. Luke was a Gentile convert who traveled with Paul during his missionary journeys and was imprisoned with him for two years in Caesarea. He is only mentioned three times in the New Testament (Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24, 2 Timothy 4:11). Unlike most biblical authors, Luke was a Gentile who never personally met Jesus. He was a convert of the early church. Based on the classical Greek he used in Luke 1:1-4, it is assumed he was a highly educated man. Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. When combined, these two books comprise almost a third of the New Testament.

When was the Gospel of Luke written?

Scholars have proposed that Luke and Acts were written between 60 and 70 AD.

What was the Purpose of Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts?

Luke is writing to Theophilus (Greek for "friend of God"!) an orderly account of all of the things pertaining to the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1-4) and the early church (Acts 1:1-2). His purpose is apologetic, "to set forth a convincing narrative of the truth of the Christian gospel. Luke is the first evangelist to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a two-part story of salvation, beginning with the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT messianic expectation and concluding with the expansion of the gospel into the Gentile world of the Roman Empire"¹

What are some of the distinctions of Luke's Gospel?

There are things that distinguish Luke's Gospel from Matthew, Mark, and John's accounts; two are explained below.

First, Luke seeks to establish the telling of the Gospel of Jesus within the context of world history. He cites particular names and eras of rulers, geographical locations, primary source materials and eyewitness accounts.

¹ Edwards, James. The Gospel According to Luke, Pillar New Testament Commentary, p. 14.

Second, Luke paints a picture that the Gospel of Jesus is for everyone- Gentiles, women, the poor, the least, the lost, the lonely and the left out. Luke shares multiple stories of where Jesus turns upside the Jewish perceptions and expectations of who the Messiah is – His purpose, His ministry, His mission. Set against the backdrop of Israel being occupied by the Roman Empire, Luke paints a picture contrasting the Kingdom Jesus is ushering in and the Kingdom of Rome.

Let's look together at what we learn about this Upside-Down Kingdom in the first eight chapters of Luke.

Chapter One

Starting off in the first chapter of Luke, we read about the announcement of the birth of a prophet and the Son of God. Both announcements are made by angels to two unlikely mothers. The first announcement was made to Zechariah, a temple priest who was very respected in his community. The angel appeared to Zechariah and announced that his very old and very past child-bearing years wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son to be named John and will be great before the Lord (1:5-24). The second angel appeared to Mary, a poor teenage, unwed girl. The angel proclaimed to her that the Holy Spirit would descend upon her, and she would give birth to the Son of God (1:25-38).

In Mary's Magnificat (1:46-55), Mary's soul magnifies and sings about the God who is upside down. She proclaims the strength of a God who has and will work with strength and power. In these verses we see how God begins to flip the narrative of who is in power, who is on top- and who gets what. Mary proclaims, "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts" (1:51); "He brings down the mighty rulers from their thrones" (1:52); and "[He] sends rich people away hungry" (1:53) Instead, we see a God who "exalts those who are humble," (1:52) and lavishly feeds the hungry (1:53). Mary is singing about a God who is not bound by what people expect of him nor is He a God who does what people do!

Through John's circumcision and naming, we see an upside picture of a bris – the Jewish circumcision ceremony performed on Jewish boys when they're eight days old. During the bris, the son would be given his name. It is customary for son to be named after father or other blood relative (grandfather). This name was given extoling the child to live up to his noble qualities of that relative. At John's circumcision, when the time came for the baby to be named, Elizabeth stops the show and proclaims that their miraculous son would not be named after his father, Zechariah, but instead would be called John (1:60). What a cultural faux pas! John was the name the angel Gabriel gave to Zechariah for his son. God delivered John's name and destiny through His messenger Gabriel "He will be great before the Lord."

Chapter Two

Happy Birthday, Jesus! As we look at this familiar and beloved passage detailing the birth of King Jesus, let's look at His upside birth announcement. Who were the first people to receive it? Shepherds! The shepherds were not these cute little pictures we see on hallmark cards and nativity scenes. Instead, they were considered social outcasts. While shepherds could be romanticized (as was King David), they were usually ranked with ass drivers, tanners, sailors, butchers, camel drivers, and other despised occupations. Being away from home at night, they were unable to protect their women, hence considered dishonorable. In addition, they often were considered thieves because they grazed their flocks on other people's property.

The message that was proclaimed to these first eyewitnesses was that a baby was born in Bethlehem: a Savior who is Christ the Lord! This arrival was GOOD NEWS of GREAT JOY for ALL PEOPLE. Instead of entrusting this news to highly reliable and important royal messengers, God chose to send His Heavenly Host to social outcasts. After they witnessed for themselves what the angels told them, the shepherds went and shared this amazing news with others.

When Jesus was eight days old, He was presented in the temple. Instead of being received by the high priests and rulers of the time, he was instead received by an old man, Simeon, who had been waiting for the consolation of Israel. Upon seeing Jesus, Simeon proclaims Jesus will be "a light of revelation to the Gentiles for your glory to your people Israel" (2:32). He tells Mary that "this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul) also so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (2:34). Another unlikely messenger, the prophetess Anna who was a devout widower, told everyone she could about Jesus. Here we see two more unlikely, upside-down prophets and messengers.

Chapter Three

In Chapter Three, we pick up with John the Baptist fulfilling His destiny of being a messenger who will prepare the way for people to meet King Jesus. Fulfilling Isaiah 40:3-5, John calls people to prepare themselves to meet the King. During this time, when a king would come to visit an area, messengers would be sent proclaiming their eminent arrival and spur people on to prepare for his arrival. Roads would be paved in; crooked paths would be straightened to make his arrival as smooth as possible. John calls for God's people to prepare themselves for meeting King Jesus by calling them to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Hearing the news of needing to partake in a baptism of repentance would have offended the Jewish people because baptism was reserved for "filthy Gentiles." They thought their birthright as the sons and daughters of Abraham would give them a get-out-of-jail free card from this practice. John levels the playing field and tells them: "Nope! It's for everyone!" Theologian Leon Morris writes "The sting in John's practice was that he applied to Jews the ceremony they regarded as suitable for unclean Gentiles. John denounces those who expected that in the judgement God would

deal hardly with Gentile sinners, but that the Jews, the descendants of Abraham, would be safe. John removes that fancied security.”²

When people ask how they are to show fruit of repentance, John gives them examples which goes against the cultural norms of “socially acceptable behavior” for the listeners. He told them things like: how they should give away their inner tunic; how soldiers should treat people under their protection; how tax collectors should be content with their pay and not take more money than is required and how both soldiers and tax collectors should act righteously.

Luke contrasts the fruit of repentance of the people who wander into the desert to hear John (tax collectors, soldiers, common folk) to that of Herod the tetrarch (3:19-20): someone in a position of power and influence. While the first group responds to John's message and are baptized and seek to produce fruit of their repentance, Herod responds differently. He does not respond to John's call to repentance, but rather uses his power and influence to continue to sin and oppress others. In Jesus' upside kingdom, who is showing fruit of repentance? It's not the people in positions of power; it's people in the sticks: the outcasts and “unclean sinners.”

Chapter Four

In Chapter Four, we first see the temptation of Jesus' by the devil who attempts to lure and trick Jesus through the misuse of the Scripture. We then witness the first of Jesus' upside-down teaching when He goes into the temple and reads from Isaiah 61: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” Upon reading this, Jesus states that (thru me) this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Jesus challenges the hearers when they respond in disbelief by sharing about the widow of Zarephath and Naaman (two Gentiles) to whom the Lord showed favor. Jesus is expanding and fulfilling who this Good News is for: it's for everyone, not just the Good Old Sons of Abraham club. Jesus goes on and begins showing how this scripture is being fulfilled in their hearing: setting the captives free (demon possessed in the temple 4:31-37), healings (4:38-41) and teaching with authority (4:36-37, 42-44).

Chapter Five

In Chapter Five, we see King Jesus call his first followers: two sets of brothers who are fisherman (5:1-11), and a tax collector (5:27-31). Through this calling, Luke shows us that Jesus' Kingdom is for all people. We witness Jesus showing deep compassion on those who are sick and suffering when he heals the leper (5:12-16), and the paralytic (5:17-26).

Through his healing of the paralytic and using a logical question, Jesus answers the question that the religious leaders in attendance were silently asking themselves “Who can

² Morris, Leon. Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentary, pp 104-105.

forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus asks them which is easier to say a) your sins or forgiven or b) rise and walk. It is easier to say your sins are forgiven (because no one know if it's true or not) than to say rise and walk because if you can't heal someone and make them walk, then it's obvious you are a fraud. Jesus then tells the people in the room "that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins," Jesus told the man to walk. The man immediately gets up and walks, thus proving that He also forgave his sins. The response of the crowds present know they are witnessing something new and upside-down and incredible exclaiming, "We have seen extraordinary things today," (5:26).

When the Pharisees question Jesus about His disciples fasting, He uses parables to explain that He is ushering in a new Kingdom which doesn't work with the preconceived ideas that religious rulers thought it would be like. Through this, Jesus is inviting his listeners and us, into the new thing, this new Kingdom. It doesn't work with the cast iron box we want to put King Jesus into. Jesus reminds us that we can't sew a new patch onto old fabric or pour new, unfermented wine into an old wine skin. If we want to have the space and capacity to allow the expanding fermentation and stretching of Jesus and His gospel in our lives, we need new wineskins and new clothes. We need to throw away the old to welcome the new.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six begins with us seeing Jesus' authority over the Sabbath. Jesus states He is Lord over the Sabbath (6:5) and that the Sabbath is for the restoration of God's people. When he heals a man with a withered hand in the synagogue (6:8-11) and is met with questioning (silent) opposition from the religious leaders, Jesus challenges them with the question, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" Jesus is realigning what God intended the Sabbath to be.

Jesus calls and sets aside 12 of the disciples (followers) and names them apostles (which means "those who are sent out," 7:12-16). If you look at the rag tag crew, it doesn't look like the dream leadership team for leading a kingdom. Among them are fishermen (blue collar workers), a Zealot (someone who lived and hid in the hills and would often attack the Romans), a tax collector and the one who would eventually betray Jesus.

Jesus continues to teach with authority. Chapter six ends with the Sermon on the Plain where He speaks the Beatitudes (blessings) upon his followers (6:20-26). He then throws down some hard, radical teachings and an invitation into a kingdom that was and is counter-cultural to how we are tempted to view ourselves, others and the world (6:27-42). He introduces us to a new economy of love, one that is not based on reciprocity of others, but on God's abundant grace and goodness to us that will continue to overflow (7:27-36). He is inviting us to view others not based on our rubrics of a critical spirit and pride but rather from a posture of humility and agape love (7:37-42). He is inviting us to not only listen and hear His teachings and say "Wow! That Jesus sure is a cool guy" but to do the hard, sweaty, costly work of putting the teachings into practice – to do the heavy lifting of digging deep and laying a foundation in these teaching that will withstand the storms and floods of life (7:46-49). These teachings are hard. Being a disciple and follower of Jesus lays claim to all of us: the relational, the verbal and the behavioral. All discipleship-foremost and forever- consists of coming to Jesus and being with Jesus. It's an invitation to

a life of abundance in His upside-down Kingdom and while it is costly and it will change us, it is worth it!

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven begins with Jesus healing the Roman centurion's servant (7:1-10). We see the great faith of a Gentile. Jesus marvels at the Centurion's faith healing his servant from a distance and acknowledging the great faith of this man, a Gentile outsider. Jesus proclaims, "Not even in Israel have I found such faith." Imagine how shocking that proclamation would have sounded to the pious, faithful Jewish listeners!

In 7:11-17, we encounter Jesus's compassion upon a widow who has just lost her only son. Jesus shows his authority over death by raising him from the dead. In Jesus' upside-down kingdom, he turns our weeping and mourning into joy and celebration. He provides us in ways we cannot even imagine or know to ask for!

Through the use of parables, Jesus beautifully lays out how he is ushering in the time of fulfillment. His upside-down kingdom is among us. Can you see it? Can you celebrate it? Or will you not be satisfied like the children playing in the marketplace? Will you be like the Pharisees who can't make up their minds what they want, a joyful dance or a dirge? Fasting or feasting?

We witness a beautiful interaction between a sinful women and Jesus and the reaction of Simon the Pharisee (an upright religious ruler). Again, Jesus uses a parable to paint a picture of what is happening right before them and asks us to consider: how are we coming to grips with the enormity of our sin and our desperate need for a Savior. When we experience the over pouring abundant grace from Jesus, how is it propelling us to love?

Chapter Eight

In 8:1-3, Luke shows us how women from different social classes and ranks of society partnered with the disciples in Jesus' upside-down Kingdom.

Starting in 8:4-15, Jesus tells a parable about a sower sowing seed which falls on different soils and their subsequent yield. When Jesus' disciples ask him what the parable meant, Jesus explains that the secret of the Kingdom of God is to ask. He goes on and explains that the parable was used to describe our hearts reception of God's Word being sown in our lives and leaves his hearers (and us today) to ponder which soil we are and what might be preventing us from being good soil. He continues explaining that just like putting a lamp upon a table, the purpose of the parables is to reveal and come to light. The measure we give (asking Jesus) will be the measure we get (more understanding).

Jesus redefines family in 8:19-21. Here, Jesus shows us that in God's upside-down kingdom, family is not based merely upon biological relationships, but on whoever hears Jesus' words and acts upon them.

In the fast-paced section of 8:22-56, we witness two storms: a storm at sea (8:22-25) and the fierce, internal storm raging within the demon possessed man(8:26-39). We witness Jesus' authority over both storms, calming the ferocious storm at sea and driving the destructive force of demons out of a man. In the story of the demoniac, we see that in Jesus' economy, one demon-possessed outcast (who it would have been easier to just ignore and let good enough be good enough) is more important than the town's capital assets and the lives of animals! To Jesus, one single messed up dude is more valuable than a herds of pigs and economic stability.

In 8:40-56, we meet two daughters. One is the twelve year-old daughter of an influential temple leader who is on the verge of death; the other is an anonymous woman who has been bleeding and suffering for twelve years. Jesus stops to heal and listen to the second daughter, not only healing her from her bleeding but blessing her into shalom (8:48). We see Jesus' authority over time and death. He was not bound by the tyranny of the urgent to rush to Jairus' house. He had enough time to attend to both daughters' desperate needs. In Jesus' kingdom, time is on a different curve. Jesus has all authority over time. He has the time to attend to the pressing matters of the most elite and influential BUT he also has the time to stop and see and listen and heal the least, the lonely and the forgotten!

Conclusion:

In these action packed first eight chapters of Luke, we witness King Jesus coming on the scene to usher in His new, upside-down Kingdom. This Kingdom is ruled by a powerful, compassionate King whose authority is over all things including teaching, Sabbath, sickness, time, death, and nature. His kingdom is for all people: Jews, Gentiles, men, women, the sick, the social outcasts and the oppressed members of the Roman Empire. His teaching challenges us to throw aside our old, preconceived notions of who Jesus is and what His Kingdom is about. These eight chapters set the stage for a question Jesus will soon ask, "who do you say that I am?" followed by Jesus' proclamation of what is to come as He looks ahead to Jerusalem.

As C.S. Lewis said in "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," Aslan is on the move! When Lucy asks if Aslan is safe, Mr. Beaver explains, "Safe? Of course He isn't safe, but He is good!" As we journey together into these next chapters of Luke, may we heed the words in Psalm 24:7-10:

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates,
And be lifted up, ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.

⁸Who is the King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
The LORD mighty in battle.

⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates,
And lift them up, ancient doors,
That the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰ Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
He is the King of glory!

Discussion Questions for Luke 9:1-16

Observations

1. Name the various characters in these verses. What are some brief facts you recall about each of them?
2. What do you notice about the places mentioned in these verses?
3. What does Jesus instruct his 12 apostles to do in v. 9:1-6? What about 9:10-17?
4. The story of the feeding of the 5,000 is probably one we all know well. Was there something new you saw in studying it again? If not, what are you reminded of in studying it again?

Interpretations

1. What do you think Jesus meant when he said "proclaim the kingdom of God" and "preach the Gospel?"
2. How does Jesus equip His followers for the work of the ministry He calls them to carry out?

3. Why do you think Herod the Tetrarch sought to see Jesus?

4. What do you make of all the names people were using to describe Jesus (9:7-9)? Where do you find truth in those statements? Why were these names not completely accurate about Jesus?

5. Compare and contrast the disciple's response to the crowds to that of Jesus' response to the crowds. Why do you think the disciples responded to the crowd the way they did?

Applications

1. Ponder a time and share if you are able when you have experienced a miracle like we find in the story of the feeding of the 5,000.

2. When have you experienced a season of life that felt like a "desolate place"? In what ways did you experience Jesus and His provision for you and your life?

3. What can be learned about loving God, loving each other and loving our neighbor in these verses?

Going Deeper

Compare and contrast the different Gospel writer's accounts:

- Sending out of the 12 – Matthew 10; Mark 6:7-13
- Feeding of the 5,000 – Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; John 6:1-15