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The Gospel of Luke:
Major Themes, Narratives, and Theology.

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Introduction

Luke was the only Gentile author of the gospels (Edwards 9). As an author of Luke and Acts, a two-set volume, Luke intertwines rich theology as a discipleship tactic to his disciple, Theophilus. Within this paper, major Lukan themes are portrayed. The birth narrative is reimagined with major themes of the narrative, especially the purpose of the birth narrative to Theophilus. The paper defines and identifies Christology and discipleship which is formed from Luke. The paper illustrates what Jesus really means by stating the first century was an "evil and adulterous generation" (Luke 9:41). The essay concludes with the passion narrative and personal challenges that I have faced as studying the book of Luke.

Luke 4:14-30; Lukan Themes

Within the passage of Luke 4:14-30, the major Lukan themes that surface the passage are "Jesus carries out his ministry in the power of the Spirit (4:14), he engages in a vigorous teaching ministry (4:15), and 'everyone praised' his ministry (4:15)" (256 Green). Within Luke's themes from the passage, Christ is glorified always. The Christology of Jesus is defined within this passage in five diverse ways. Jesus announces, "five purposes' that God sent him: to preach good news to the poor... to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (4:18-19)" (1239 Adeyemo). Luke foreshadows Jesus' ministry to Theophilus when Jesus teaches in the synagogues of his hometown. Nazareth, a small, impoverished town, all the people's eyes in the synagogue were fixed (4:20) and spoke highly of Jesus (4:22). Throughout Jesus' ministry, people listened to him in such a demeanor, that their gazes were also fixed on Jesus his name was also known

throughout all of Israel. Yet at the end of the passage the people in Jesus' hometown, who once marveled at him, tried to throw him off a cliff. Similarly, Jesus was betrayed by Judas one of his twelve disciples, and killed by the disciples that once marveled at him. Jesus gave all people of Israel new eyes to the kingdom of God by Luke's account.

Birth Narrative

The Old Testament serves as a strategic conceptual background for understanding the theological message of Luke's birth narrative in a plethora of ways. Firstly, the prophecy of the Messiah coming from the line of David (2 Samuel 7:12-14; Amos 9:11) is fulfilled (Green). To continue the line of David is a strategic background part that illustrates God fulfilling his promises. Secondly, Luke states that Jesus shall be called the "Son of the Most High" (1:32), thus granting Jesus a royal identity that directly corresponds with 2 Samuel 7:12-17 and Psalm 2:7. Names in the Ancient Near East were given honor by future generations (335 Wilkins, Garland, Strauss). Lastly, when Jesus was born Mary wrapped him in cloth (2:7). Israel has been compared to being like a baby, yet no one cared for her (Ezekiel 16:4), Jesus on the other hand, was cared for and showed affection by Mary. By having a deep understanding of the Old Testament, then the birth narrative becomes rich with many theological factors that shape the narrative.

The major themes in the birth narrative are the identity of Jesus Christ and God using the lowly, outcasted, and commoners that bring the Messiah into the world. A Messiah that will govern in power and glory and will seek the lost and pariah (Luke 1:32-33). These two themes

created a firm foundation that shaped Jesus' entire ministry by his purpose to bring the gospel to the "humble, the poor, and the outcasts" (339 Wilkens). These significant themes related to Luke's discipleship of Theophilus because Theophilus was enlightened that this birth narrative is impossible with human will, it is supernatural. Elizabeth and Zechariah were unable to conceive without the help of God. Making their son take up with the authority of the Spirit that he would be able to later use to baptize Jesus Christ. The people in the narrative are real, with real emotions. Luke also brought back the narrative to the beginning like he told Theophilus he would prior in the account. Theophilus is from a Greco-Roman world where status is found in family status. Yet Jesus' status was not found in his parents for Joseph was a teckton and Mary was a woman that gave birth before her marriage. Shame was found in Jesus' family and yet he was the Son of God. Luke disciples Theophilus by illustrating God's glory and power through Jesus and his mission.

Christology and Discipleship

Discipleship is critical for Christology. George MacDonald states "To be a disciple of Christ is the end of being, to help others become disciples of Christ is the end of teaching". The relationship between Christology and discipleship in Luke's gospel is vastly interconnected throughout the entirety of Luke's gospel. Luke starts his gospel with John the Baptist's multitude of followers (Luke 3:7). Within this mass of people, many scholars believe that the people of the crowd were not nobles or high-ranking officials or leaders, but common people (StepBible.org). The Christology of Luke is embedded within the disciples for they both mirror Jesus' theology and main purpose to preach the gospel to the sick, wounded, poor, oppressed, and hungry.

Throughout the gospel of Luke, discipleship is intertwined with Christology. Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, was a mere fisherman, a commoner (Luke 5:8). Even when Peter denies Jesus three times, Jesus stuck with Peter to show love and ensure Peter's success (cf. 2 Kings 2:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:2-6). Disciples were imitators of Christ thus they too, had to leave their homes, family, and cultures to cleave to Christ (Luke 12:51-53). It was within their transformation from a commoner to stewards of Christ and a royal heir to Christ. Jesus serves as a model for discipleship to his adherents because Jesus followed all that he asked for his disciples. Jesus left his family, culture, and home to cleave to the will of the Father. Jesus acted out what he preached.

Evil and Adulterous Generation

Jesus called his generation an "evil and adulterous generation" for a surfeit of reasons (Luke 9:41). The context of verse 41 is a story of a boy who had an evil spirit in him for many years. Looking for healing, his father asked first the disciples to cast out the unclean spirit and they were unsuccessful (9:40). Thus, bringing a hopeless child bearing the weight of an unclean spirit to the feet of Jesus. In the Spirit longing for power, the spirit convulsed (cf. Matthew 4:24) in front of Jesus. The people lacked hope. They saw a great power within an evil spirit and forgot that Jesus was the same God that calmed raging storms, defeated demons, raised the dead, fed multitudes, healed the blinds, ate with tax collectors, and protected the widows and orphans (1250 Adeyemo). Jesus saw his closest followers forget his majesty and started to doubt. Therefore, Jesus' proclaiming "O unbelieving and perverse generation" corresponds to Israel's unfaithfulness and disobedience (cf. Deuteronomy 32:20). The Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees,

Essenes, Zealots, and Herodians alike forgot what Jesus did and lacked the faith of the identity of Christ.

I believe in the twenty-first century we also can lack the same proclamations. It is easy to be caught in the undertow of the spiritual warfare current. To be lost in fear, isolation, shame, and the great power of evil spirits. For this upcoming generation, I find that technology is the greatest hindrance to the power of remembering the works of God. It is so simple to be caught up in technology and the busyness that can entangle the Christian walk. Therefore, we lose sight of the past because we are so focused on being perfect in the present and achieving greatly in the future. We often lack remembrance and the spiritual discipline of rest. Often in the twenty-first generation, we forget to write down everything that the Lord did so we can remember his glory and power (cf. Habakkuk 2:2; Revelation 1:2). Lacking writing down the deeds God did, we become like the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, and Herodians and forget what God did prior. Therefore, we in the twenty-first century also are an “unbelieving and perverse generation” (9:41) just like the individuals of the first century.

Passion Narrative

I believe that the five major theological emphases of Luke’s “Passion Narrative” are demoting Jewish corrupted law (11:37-54), discipleship in the face of rejection (14:25-35), authority of scripture (20:1-8), Jesus’ innocence of the Lord (23:4, 14-15; cf. 23:47), and a lowly death on the cross, a crucifixion made for “sinners, slaves, and lower castes” (Green 260-261). I believe that within Jesus’ ministry, he started to demote Jewish law. Jesus cleansed the temple

due to the Scribes and Pharisees' lack of protecting the holiness of the house of the Lord. Rather they filled the courts of the temple with shops to buy offerings (19:45-48). Jesus' walking into Jerusalem in the passion narrative knowing his death on the cross will break the hindrances that all people suffer from due to the corrupted law. Secondly, Jesus taught his disciples to imitate his disciples in the face of rejection. Jesus being beaten, spit on, shamed, and crucified innocently, still was silent in the presence of rejection (cf. Isaiah 53:7). As imitators, Jesus' twelve disciples were also martyred and persevered amid denunciation. Thirdly, Jesus proclaims the authority of scripture. When Jesus did speak in the courts, he spoke scripture. By the authority of scripture, Jesus rebutted strictly from the words of the Old Testament.

Fourthly, Jesus was innocent. Pilot and Herod found Jesus' innocent (23:13-14). It is critical to understand that Pilot only sent Jesus to be crucified because of the crowd. Pilot pleased the crowd and sent an innocent man to die. This is critical for Theophilus because Jesus did not die because he was sin-filled nor due to his lack of being the Messiah, he died rather due to the uproar of the crowd. Lastly, Jesus died on a cross meant for lower casts. From the start, God called common folk to carry out his will. Moses had a stutter, Abigail was a woman, Ruth was a foreigner and a widow, Tamar was a prostitute, and Mary was a virgin and a woman. Jesus was born from a commoner. Although all people the Messiah would come on a horse, born into a royal family, wealthy, just like Caesar. Yet Jesus came to earth humbly, lived subserviently, and died obsequiously. In the death of an innocent savior, Jesus was able to bear the sins of the entire world society may have a relationship with the Father. The five major themes are essential to Christian discipleship because Jesus is the one to imitate. Therefore, his themes are indispensable to the breadth of understanding of how to live like Jesus and the genuine cost of discipleship.

Personal Challenges

I have been challenged a copious amount. For I have been stretched, shaped, and molded as I have deepened my assimilation of Jesus through the gospel of Luke. For example, by the innate modesty of Jesus even on the cross, I have found that I need to remember that Jesus was not a famous pastor. I have thought about my aspirations of authoring a book, being an international speaker, and creating a non-profit for women, men, and children in sex trafficking. Yet as I look at Luke's gospel Jesus was none of my ambitions. This is not to disarm my goals, but in a posture of humility looking for after Jesus. It is easy for me to see female pastors like Christine Caine, Sadie Robertson, Priscilla Shire, and Jackie Hill Perry and long to do a similar lifestyle. Although my yearnings are high, I must be like Luke and find key eyewitnesses of the gospel that I may find as mentors to model me into a disciple of Christ and not a disciple of the world. For earthly desires are tempting and rewarding, but the heavenly rewards are greater by tenfold. I believe that Luke has challenged me to process my goals in life and cross-reference them with scripture so I may emulate Christ fully.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the gospel of Luke is a complex theologically rich book that enhances the perusal of the Gospel to Theophilus. As a result, in this paper, major Lukan themes were portrayed, all glorifying Christ. Luke writes to his disciples to teach Theophilus how to disciple, teach, and live out the good news of the gospel. Luke was not just the only author of the gospels that was a Gentile. His book and he was so much greater.

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