

Luke-by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

At long last—after thousands of years of waiting, longing, hoping, and praying (which you see everywhere in this chapter!)—God's great promises of redemption are coming to fulfillment, and the first chapter of Luke is full of action. John's birth is prophesied, Jesus' birth is prophesied, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and lastly, the birth of Jesus—*"to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace"* (vs.77-79). And that is definitely the heart of things in today's reading. But let me draw brief attention to vs.1-4. Each of the four gospels opens in its own unique way, and each opening reveals a lot about that gospel's "style." This opening is written in excellent Greek, the kind of writing one finds in historians and other highly educated writers of learned literature of the time. Luke is rightly and fully setting Christ and his gospel on the stage of world history.

Chapter 2

Much of this chapter is quite familiar to us, as "the Christmas story," but I encourage you to reflect on it deeply and carefully today, when it is not Christmas. Try reading it as if for the first time, right now. Sometimes it's the familiar things that become so overly familiar to us that they suffer the fate of mushy sentimentalism or they simply become politely safe, domesticated, and mundane—something so conventional that they can be safely ignored. May that never happen to the Lord Christ in your heart nor in your mind. That would be the ultimate folly. Remember the wisdom of that wonderful lady, Dorothy Sayers: *"The people who hanged Christ never, to do them justice, accused him of being a bore—on the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild' and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies."* Not today.

Chapter 3

John ("the Baptist," we call him, to differentiate him from the other John in the gospels) sometimes gets sparse attention from us. But in the Bible his appearance and his work inaugurate the real beginning of Jesus' saving and healing intervention in this world. Consider how the Apostle Peter began his review of the gospel in Acts 10.37: *"you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed."* The witness that John bears to Jesus signals the end of the old age of promised hope and the beginning of the new age of fulfillment. It's the transition from promises made to promises kept. See what Jesus himself will say in Luke 16.16: *"The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached."* The work of John is so important to the history of this world that Luke gives us a half dozen ways to date it, in vs.1&2. Reflect deeply on the three paragraphs (vs.7-9,10-14,15-17) of John's teaching that we are given in Luke. Verse 18 calls this *"good news."*

Chapter 4

When Israel was in the wilderness, they were called to trust, love, remember, honor, listen to, and obey the Lord their God (**Deuteronomy 6-8**). But Israel regularly failed the wilderness tests

and trials. In today's reading Jesus is "*led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil*" (vs.1,2). (Remember, there is no such thing as an untested faith. This is how God treats his sons and daughters, to strengthen them. Even his Son with a capital S.) But whereas Israel failed the wilderness tests, our Savior prevailed. This is the point of the whole Bible: he is our hope, his is the only righteousness that will deliver us. Jesus is first tempted to distrust his Father's care of him. He turned this temptation away with the sword of the Spirit (the Scriptures, see Ephesians 6.17b), making use of **Deuteronomy 8.3**. Secondly he was tempted by the (false) promise of immediate glory, apart from God's way. Again, the sword of the Spirit, **Deuteronomy 6.13**. Thirdly, the devil tried to press *the Scriptures themselves* into the service of evil. Jesus turned to **Deuteronomy 6.16**. Are you ready for the fight today, Christian? Seek to be mighty in the Scriptures.

Chapter 5

This reflection will be published on Valentine's Day. And that day always reminds me of my friend in St. Louis who, when telling his testimony—which he would do at every available opportunity—would forever say, "*... and so, it was on February 14, Valentine's Day, that I gave my heart to Jesus.*" Which, frankly, always struck me as a smattering too much cheesiness for a testimony. And yet, it was a beautiful testimony, bearing witness to both the redeeming grace of God and the sheer love of a friend (of his) who took time out, away from his wife, on Valentine's Day evening, to talk to my friend about the shocking difference between Jesus' kingdom of grace and mere-empty-religion's collection of rules and laws. And today, on Valentine's Day, I invite you to study that difference once again. From 5.1-6.11 there are seven different incidents related. In the first two Jesus calls sinners to himself and reveals his power to heal. In the next five Jesus' kingdom of grace is set in sharp contrast to the self-righteous sneering of mere-empty-religion. Enter the Pharisees.

Chapter 6

There are occasions in life when we have to make momentous decisions; it's not the vexatious chocolate or vanilla dilemma; it's a choice that will touch multiple generations and influence literally everything, for the rest of our days. Jesus had to make those kinds of decisions from time to time as well—choices that suddenly advanced his whole world-healing ministry to the next stage of its development. And whenever he had that kind of choice before him, we see him pull away from the crowds to spend significant time in prayer. (Which should teach us something huge, if we are his disciples and students!) In verse 12 he goes out to a mountain, where he continues in prayer all night long. And when the day finally came (v.13), he was ready to take 12 men—out of the much larger company of those who had responded to his ministry—and name them as his "*apostles*," the ones whom he would especially "*send out*" to the world, in his name. That was a momentous day for the whole of the world. Corrie ten Boom once asked, "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?"

Chapter 7

So far Luke has shown us the advent of Jesus (in fulfillment of Old Testament promise), the childhood of Jesus, the baptism of Jesus, the family tree of Jesus, the tests of Jesus, the good news of Jesus, some of the fights that Jesus thought worth fighting, and the teaching of Jesus to his disciples. And today—*also very important; 50 straight verses in a row worth of importance!*—Luke shows us the **compassion** of Jesus. If you want to understand the character of the God who made you, and who is now revealing himself to you in the Christ, you will need to drink this chapter in fully and thought-fully. In Jesus, God has visited a world in bondage to the curse of sin. What is his primary posture toward this world? Is it cold judgment? Is it harsh anger? Is it contemptuous indifference? No... it is fully engaged

compassion, demonstrated in acts of sheer mercy. And this is a vital part of what it means when we pray *"thy kingdom come."* It means that we are asking God—in his perfect compassion—to reverse the dominion of sin and misery through the power of our King, Jesus.

Chapter 8

Jesus taught short parables earlier in Luke, but here he starts developing more extended, full-bodied parables. The first parable given here (vs.4-8), on the surface, just seems to be a simple description of some seed being sown on a field and the differing fortunes that the seed experienced on differing qualities of soil. But it ends with Jesus calling out, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear,"* which indicates that something deeper is being described here than simple adventures in agriculture. What is it? Well, much could be said, but in v.10 Jesus gives us the ABC's of understanding parables. Those who respond to Jesus are given a knowledge of *"the secrets of the kingdom of God"*—meaning, God's plans concerning his kingdom, which have been somewhat mysteriously hidden up until this point, but were now being disclosed and revealed through the work of Christ. But to those who refuse Jesus, those same secrets were now being presented in a veiled form. If they don't make true effort to understand and believe, they fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, which Jesus quotes.

Chapter 9

Much of chapter 9 is taken up with Jesus' developing relationship with *"the twelve,"* whom he is maturing for mission—for much of the future household of God will be built upon the foundation of their work (Ephesians 2.19-21). In verses 1 and 2 he shares with them some of his power and authority, and sends them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. So, off they go, from village to village preaching the gospel and healing (v.6). But if a town refused the message of gospel and kingdom which they preached, Jesus instructed them to shake the dust of that town off their feet as they leave, *"as a testimony against them"* (v.5). What kind of testimony is *that*? It was a symbol that those townspeople—in rejecting Jesus—had cut themselves off from the True Israel (Galatians 6.16). They were no longer living in the land of God's promise, for all of his promises are bound up with and fulfilled in Jesus. Gregory Dix once said, "The opposite of faith is not doubt; it is personal opinion." Are you living by faith in Jesus? Or by personal opinion?

Chapter 10

"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (v.22). What a statement! What does it mean? Let's start with the word *"know."* In the Bible this verb often means deep, personal knowledge—something much more than mere acquaintance with a fact. *"Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived"* (Genesis 4.1). It can also refer to our choice of a person. *"You only have I known of all the families of the earth"* (Amos 3.2, God singling out Israel). No one knows who Jesus is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except Jesus. Jesus is here referring to the deep mutual union and communion that the Father and the Son share (we see this everywhere in Jesus' prayers and teaching, Mark 14.36, John 10.15, etc.). So... who alone is qualified to reveal the Father to you? The Lord Jesus Christ. Don't let your life be so full of *service* to Jesus that you take no time to truly *learn* from him (see vs.38-42).

Chapter 11

How does your heart respond to Jesus? How do you respond to his teaching? In v.27 a woman responded rather sentimentally, calling out a blessing on Mary, his mother. Perhaps she wished that she too had a son like this man, Jesus. But our Lord didn't thank her or get

embarrassed by the compliment; rather, he calls her (and our) attention to something much more important: how will we hear and respond to the Word of God which Jesus proclaimed? If we "hear" it and "keep" it (v.28), we won't be like the evil generation in vs.29-32, for whom the Word preached was not enough. They craved some kind of miraculous demonstration that would awe and amaze them (see v.16). They had heard Jesus was capable of such! But the Lord would not play that game with them; he would not "perform" under those conditions. Instead, he keeps teaching on the character of God, who is both our Judge and our Savior. The Queen of the South responded to Solomon's teaching. Nineveh responded to Jonah's preaching. How will we respond to Jesus?

Chapter 12

Jesus plainly knew that a crisis would one day come upon his people, simply because they were united and identified with him. And we know that he knew that because he spent time in his ministry preparing them (and us) for those times of crises. See 17.20-18.8. See 21.5-38. And also right here—see 12.1-13.8. Read these words in terms of the early Christians, persecuted by their Jewish brethren who rejected Jesus. Read these words in terms of the Christians living in Jerusalem when the Romans came to destroy it, in the wars of AD 66-70. Read these words in terms of the persecuted church around the world today. Persecution against Christians is actually more of a global reality right now than it has ever been, in all of history up to this point. Read these words in terms of the temptations that you personally face, to deny the Lord who bought you, when acknowledging your love for him publicly will cost you something. List all the commands: beware, do not fear those, fear him, fear not, do not be anxious, guard against covetousness, etc. Christian, stand firm.

Chapter 13

What is repentance unto life? The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers that question this way: *"Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience."* The Heidelberg Catechism offers us this: *"It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new."* And the dying of the old nature is *"to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it."* The coming to life of the new nature *"is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ, and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works."* Good works are *"only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the law of God, and to his glory, and not those based on our own opinion or on precepts of men."* Why is it so important to thoroughly understand repentance? Jesus, in vs.3 & 5: "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

Chapter 14

If Jesus is the Lord of everything, then he's also the Lord of the Feast. And in the first 24 verses of this chapter, we see the Lord of the Feast at the Table (see vs.1, 7, 12, 15), teaching us more deeply yet, just who he is and what that means for us. In **vs.1-6** the Lord of the Feast heals a man suffering from dropsy—a swelling of parts of the body due to fluid collecting in the tissues. Jesus longs to show you compassion. In **vs.7-11** the Lord of the Feast teaches us that God will humble those who are drunk on themselves, always looking to promote and exalt themselves. But he loves to exalt the truly humble, those who are impressed with him rather than being impressed with themselves. In **vs.12-14** the Lord of the Feast warns us not to do "good" merely for the sake of the tangible, earthly rewards such deeds give us in this life. Do lavish good to those who cannot give you anything at all in return, leaving the whole question of rewards and recognition and repayment to God alone. In **vs.15-24** the Lord of the Feast summarizes the whole history of the feast of salvation.

Chapter 15

The "lost" sheep (vs.4,6). The "lost" coin (v.9). The "lost" son (vs.24,32). Do you see the theme? This chapter celebrates "The Gospel for the Outcast." At this point in his ministry Jesus is constantly being criticized for his association with the lowest members of society: the untouchables, the unwanted, the unacceptable, the wretched castaways (vs.1,2). Jesus already answered this criticism very directly, back in Luke 5.31,32. Then, in Luke 14.15-24, he gave another declaration of his full intention to invite such people into the kingdom (rather than the "religious," who proudly despise the invitation). And now he speaks to this issue yet again, in a series of three parables. And these parables go even deeper and speak even more scandalously: God the Father is filled with sheer joy when a "lost" sinner is recovered and restored (vs.5-7, 9-10, 20, 22-24). As Jesus will reiterate in 19.10, he "*came to seek and to save the lost.*" Will the Pharisees and the scribes (v.1) share God's joy over the salvation of the outcasts? The "*friends*" of God (vs.6,9,29) certainly will!

Chapter 16

The general theme of these 31 verses is found in Jesus' recurrent warnings against a love for wealth. In the center of this chapter the Pharisees are referred to as "*lovers of money*" (v.14), and you find symptoms of this "*root of all kinds of evils*" (1 Timothy 6.10) in every portion of this teaching. But there's another theme tightly interwoven with that one, and the two are much related to one another, as the second theme should form our attitude toward the first one; the second theme is the moral law of God. Love for money will *push against* a love for God. Every single time! But obeying the law of God with a gospel heart is the consistent way the Bible tells us to *express* love for God (Romans 13.10; Galatians 5.14; Matthew 22.36-40). To see Jesus' counsel to these same money-loving Pharisees, revisit 11.39-41. Jesus is constantly calling them to respond to the gospel and be cleansed... before it is too late (as it was for rich man in vs.19-31). This is just monopoly money anyway! Show yourself faithful with it, and you will be trusted with true riches (vs.10,11).

Chapter 17

You're reading this (presumably) on March 2. But I'm writing it on Thanksgiving morning, November 23... which makes me want to devote this reflection entirely to vs.11-19, and remind you that falling on your face at King Jesus' feet and giving him thanks (v.16) is not just for "turkey day." A life of deep gratitude to God is a part of saving faith. *However, I'm going with vs.1-10, actually.* In **vs.1-4** we are reminded that temptations to sin are inevitable in this present world. Nevertheless, Jesus gives us a stern warning that *we* should never, ever be the cause of other people sinning—either by tempting them or by setting a bad example. It would be better for us to literally drown before doing that evil work and suffering the fate of the tempters. Rather, the disciples should be ready to help any other disciple who has *fallen into sin*. We help by showing them where they have wronged God and by being ready to forgive. NO MATTER HOW OFTEN. In **vs.5-6** we are reminded that being ready to forgive is not primarily a matter of the size of our faith; **vs.7-10**: it's just our duty.

Chapter 18

From 18.9 - 19.10, there is another common theme of Jesus's teaching and ministry on display. Do you want to read those stories before going any further in this reflection, to see if you can discern the unifying idea—the thread that runs through the whole?... last chance!... okay.... In **vs.9-14** we see a despised tax collector standing far off—as outcasts will—humbly pouring out a confession of his sinfulness and simply appealing to God's mercy. He, Jesus says, was justified. In **vs.15-17**, over the strong objections of his disciples, Jesus not only

openly receives infants, but also brazenly proclaims that the adults who don't receive the kingdom of God like these little ones do, won't be getting in. In **vs.18-34** Jesus teaches some very crucial truths about salvation, but it's so shocking that *"those who heard it said, 'Then who can be saved?'"* (v.26). In **vs.35-43** and in **19.1-10** we have two final stories which continue the theme, showing how God (in Jesus) delights to seek and bring salvation to those whom "good" / religious / sophisticated society would normally exclude.

Chapter 19

We read this in **v.11**: *"he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately."* And then, in **21.37,38**, we read this: *"And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet. And early in the morning all the people came to him in the temple to hear him."* And what we have in between those two bookends is a collection of the things that Jesus taught and did—in *which he was teaching by doing*—as he comes to Jerusalem for the climactic, crisis moment of his ministry. Everyone is expecting him to proclaim his kingship, clobber and destroy all the enemies of the people of God, and immediately establish and inaugurate the eternal kingdom of God! Which is actually exactly what he did... but it didn't look anything like what the people expected. So, enter into these teachings with that in mind. Jesus is having to correct our ideas and expectations about how the kingdom will come, and what our role will be.

Chapter 20

As the stories pile up, it's becoming clearer and clearer how very different Jesus is from the religious leaders of the day, and why they began to move against him so venomously. Consider vs.1-8. In v.1 *"the chief priests and the scribes with the elders"* challenged Jesus as he was teaching the people and preaching the gospel. (It was from representatives of these three groups, by the way, that the "Sanhedrin" was composed—71 religious leaders who governed Israel, under the leadership of the High Priest.) These men—steeped in authority—want to know by what authority Jesus is doing all this. Jesus answers with a counter-question, about the authority of John the Baptist: was it from heaven or from man? The religious leaders recognize that they won't "win" either way they answer, so they give a pathetic and spineless *"we don't know"* reply. But the story is not merely illustrating Jesus' ability to outwit his opponents. Rather (and significantly), it's revealing that his adversaries were unwilling to admit divine authority, even when they saw it right before their faces.

Chapter 21

In Deuteronomy 18.22 the Lord reveals the simple but profound test for evaluating a prophet to be either true or false: *"when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him."* The Lord Jesus is not merely a prophet; he is the eternal Son of God. But his work as the Messiah involves and includes his being our Final and Forever Prophet (and also our Final and Forever Priest and our Final and Forever King, by the way!). In his role as Prophet, Jesus made two enormous, plain-spoken, unmistakable prophecies during his ministry. **1.** His own death and resurrection (see, in Luke: 9.21,22; 9.44,45; 18.31-33). **2.** The temple in Jerusalem would be absolutely destroyed within one generation (40 years) of Jesus' earthly ministry (see vs.5-36 of this chapter; particularly vs.6 and 32). Concerning the first, we start reading the straightforward account of its fulfillment tomorrow. Concerning the second, google "A.D. 70."

Chapter 22

Today we enter the very heart of the Bible. At last, after centuries and centuries of prophecy and promise, the greatest work of God is now coming to pass. As Jesus himself says in v.37: "*what is written about me has its fulfillment.*" But what is this all about—this dreadful thing that happened to Jesus (vs.41-44), this terrible thing that was "*determined*" (v.22) long beforehand? Who determined it? Our Triune God did. As Octavius Winslow put it: "*Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews, for envy. But the Father, for love!*" In his grace and in his mercy, in the holiness of his love, God is sending his beloved Son to the cross, so that HE might pay the full penalty for OUR disobedience. Christ is ransoming us, purchasing us... at the precious and treasured cost of his own life. *What is there now left for us to pay?* Nothing. The Holy Spirit powerfully works within us repentance of our sins and a true and lively faith in the "*finished*" (see John 19.30) work of Jesus. "*Given for you*" (v.19). "*Poured out for you*" (v.20).

Chapter 23

In the first verse we see the transition from the Jewish trial to the Roman trial. The Roman governor would not care to preside over merely inter-Jewish squabbles (see Acts 18.14,15), so they had to rephrase the charges as sedition against Rome. Pilate found no such guilt in Jesus (v.4), but he had to take a report of rebellion against Rome seriously: that's why he's stationed in Jerusalem, after all. It's a tough situation. But the mention of Galilee (v.5) gives him an opportunity to duck this difficulty by sending Jesus to Herod. (*Note the picture of Herod here: a trivial ruler, just hoping to see some magic tricks. To such a man Jesus had absolutely nothing to say.*) But in the end, as the situation showed signs of spiraling out of control, Pilate was ready and willing to sacrifice an innocent man in order to keep the peace. He does so for *selfish* reasons, but there is great irony here. For the ready and willing and *selfless* sacrifice of the innocent Jesus is indeed our only hope for peace with God (see Romans 5.1). See also vs.34 and 43. "*He saved others*" (v.35).

Chapter 24

CHRIST IS RISEN! *He is risen, indeed.* And therein lies our only hope that sin and death have truly been conquered, and that all who are united to Christ by faith have been granted the benefit of his victory. He "*was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification*" (Romans 4.25). By his own self-sacrifice, Jesus has destroyed the power of death (Hebrews 2.14), and broken the curse of sin (Romans 6.23) that would otherwise have doomed sinners like you and like me to judgment (Hebrews 10.27). But there's another significant treasure in this chapter as well. Ponder v.27. And then mull over v.32. And then reflect deeply on vs.44-47. What you have meditated upon is a fundamental key to understanding the Word of God, and that is this: *the whole of the Bible is all about Jesus.* In the Old Testament Jesus is predicted. In the Gospels Jesus is revealed. In the book of Acts Jesus is preached. In the Epistles Jesus is explained. In Revelation Jesus is expected. You don't yet understand any Scripture until you see how it points you to Jesus.

-Reflecting on Luke-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Luke. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Luke before we move forward?

"Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." James 1.21