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God's Mercy, Repentance and Forgiveness in Luke

Luke is primarily about *God*, although this is not immediately obvious. God is behind the plan for Jesus. God is called "God my saviour" (1:47) and God's purpose is revealed through the Scriptures, through angelic messengers, and through the Holy Spirit which even comes down on Jesus. "It is necessary" is a common Lukan term and one which Jesus uses to complete the mission of God. It is what drives Jesus, including what drives Jesus on the journey to Jerusalem.

Jesus' ministry is embedded in God's will for Israel and the whole world, from Old Testament times. Indeed the coming of Jesus is embedded in the covenant relationship of God with the people through Abraham and David.

Luke wishes to portray a merciful God who in the course of history blesses the creatures regardless of how "good" they are. Danker writes:

It is illegitimate, says Luke's Jesus, to infer that the Galileans who were put to death at Pilate's order were worse sinners than all the rest of the Galileans [13:1, 2] ... The fact is, says Luke through his juxtaposition of the parable of the interceding gardener (13:6-9), God is patient and grants all of them further time to repent.¹

The way of the believer in the Kingdom of God involves repentance. In this movement the believer sees that Christ is supreme over all other claims to power in human existence. This act of repentance will usually be an act of recognition either of specific sins or of contradictory loyalties.²

Repentance and forgiveness are intertwined in *Luke* and *Acts*. Examples are the story of Zacchaeus and the parable of the Prodigal Son. Elsewhere we have

3:3, 8; - John the Baptist's message
5: 32 - "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance"
10:13-16 – the unrepentant cities
11:4 – "forgive us our sins"
11:32 – the people of Nineveh repented
13:3, 5 – "unless you repent, you will all perish..."
15:7, 10 – more joy in heaven over a sinner who repents
16:30 – the rich man and Lazarus
17:3-4 – "if there is repentance you must forgive"
18:13 – "God be merciful to me a sinner"
23:39-43 – the thief on the cross
24:47 – repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed

and many more occasions in *Acts*. Repentance and forgiveness of sins becomes shorthand for what Luke means when he writes that characters preach the good news or the gospel (24:47).

¹ Frederick W. Danker, *Luke* (Proclamation Commentaries; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 53.

² Danker, *Luke*, 54.

24:47:

...repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations
...

Forgiveness for each other comes from God's forgiveness of ourselves. Forgiveness for even an enemy comes from love of enemy and requires us to seek to do them further good (6:27-38). "Repentance, in fact, is Luke's model for how one begins discipleship (5:8)."³ The Resurrection is the acting out of God's willingness to forgive and the supreme evidence of God's good intentions toward humanity.⁴

Luke's Theology of the Cross

Matt 20:25-28 has the Son of Man coming to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. The parallel passage in *Luke* omits the reference to ransom. 24:21 includes the hope of redemption.

Jesus is portrayed as the righteous sufferer in chapters 22-23. Verse 22:20 particularly demonstrates the inauguration of the new covenant with God. Bock argues that his offer of life to the thief on the cross also demonstrates life through death (23:36-49).⁵

Jesus who Dies and is Raised in Glory

Jesus doesn't deny the scandal or the horror of the cross but he seems to take some of the darkness away. Luke does not report Jesus' scourging or the actual kiss of Judas (Judas is going to kiss Jesus but the actual kiss is not stated).

Jesus isn't quite the suffering silent person of say Mark's Gospel but he is one who can make several announcements during his suffering:

"Father forgive them for they don't know what they do" (Luke 23:34 - no parallels)

No "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

No loud cry but when he dies it is *"Father into your hands I commit my spirit."* – a pious, supreme dedication, like the Jewish evening prayer.

The centurion saw what happened and praised God - it is almost a moment of glory.

In the trial scenes *Luke* is the only account which describes his appearance before Herod as well as Pilate, indicating that one simply can't have a distant curious interest in Jesus - more is required

Jesus describes himself to those travelling to Emmaus as coming into glory after he suffered (24:26):

³ Richard B. Vinson, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2009), 16.

⁴ Danker, *Luke*, 54.

⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke. Volume 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 34.

“Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

More emphasis is given to the ascension of Jesus in *Luke* and *Acts*. Indeed there is no ascension in *Mark* at all. Jesus goes through death to the heavenly throne. But Jesus doesn't just depart this earth in the ascension up to a little cubby-hole in the sky. Jesus continues to be active in the decisions, actions and lives of the disciples through the Spirit. What happened to Jesus opens the way for disciples.

The crucifixion scene in Luke's gospel (23.26-43) includes unique reports of Jesus' words to 'the daughters of Jerusalem' (23.27-31) and to one of the criminals crucified with him (23.43); some versions include his words of forgiveness to those who carried out this crucifixion (23.34). Jesus' death (23.44-9) is reported with distinctive Lucan touches: Jesus dies not with a cry of agony (cf. Mark 15.34) but with a serene confidence (23.46); the centurion declares him to be *dikaios*, translatable as 'innocent' or 'righteous' (23.47); the crowds who are present (23.33) mourn what they have observed (23.48); and those watching from a distance are identified as 'all his acquaintances' (23.49), including, but not limited to, women from Galilee (cf. Mark 15.40-41). All these Galilean women also witness his burial (23.55-6). Jesus is buried by Joseph (23.50-6), a man identified as 'good and righteous' (23.50), harking back to the similar description of Zechariah and Elizabeth (1.6) in such a way as to place Jesus, even in his death, back within the heart of faithful Judaism.⁶

Salvation in Luke

Comparison with the Synoptics

Salvation is a major theme for Luke. He uses the noun form "salvation" (*sōteria* or *sōterion* seven times.) These words are not found in *Mark* or *Matthew*. The verb form (*sōzō*) is used 17 times (only once in *Mark* and once in *Matthew*).

The term "Saviour" (*sōtēr*) is not found in *Matthew* or *Mark*. The term only occurs in Luke 2:11 (to you is born a saviour), but it also is used in *Acts*. The title was often applied to gods, philosophers, physicians, emperors etc. however now in *Luke-Acts* it is applied to Jesus. (*Acts* also uses these Greek words 27 times).

In the general theme of salvation generally Luke parallels *Matthew* and *Mark* however there are some particular Lukan emphases. Luke makes some emphasis on the name "Jesus" (which is the same as "Joshua") meaning "saviour". Jesus' name is embedded in Israel's history of their hero Joshua bringing "salvation" for the people.

Luke doesn't include the Markan 10:45 reference to Jesus as a "ransom to many".

Luke alone describes Jesus' work as salvation (1:69, 71, 77; 19:9; see also Acts 4:12; 13:26; 13:47; 16:17).

⁶ John T. Squires, "The Gospel According to Luke" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 164-165.

The Birth Stories as the Overture to Salvation

Marshall describes the birth stories unique to *Luke* as an “overture to the story of salvation”, which sets out the themes of the ensuing drama but “doing so with their own distinctive music.”⁷

In 1:47 Mary, in her song, rejoices with God’s people in God the saviour, bringing good news to the poor and humble. In Zechariah’s song, salvation is connected with the coming of the Messiah (1:69). The people of God can serve God righteously without fear of attack (1:71). Salvation is associated with forgiveness of sins (1:77).

“... the whole drama is summed up in the comment of Simeon that he has seen the salvation which the Lord has prepared – a salvation which is for all peoples ..., including the Gentiles (Lk 2:30-32).”⁸

The notes of the “overture” of salvation are intended to resonate with the reader throughout the Gospel.

The Nature of Salvation

Luke 4:16-30, describing the manifesto of Jesus’ mission while he is in the synagogue in Capernaum, is typical of the overall tendency of Luke to consider salvation as including both physical healing and inclusion in the “eschatological people of God.

For example, salvation is healing in 8:36, 48; 18:42; Acts 4:9; 14:9; it is inclusion in the eschatological family in 8:12; 13:23; 17:19; 18:26; 19:10; Acts 11:14; 15:1; 16:30.⁹

Salvation brings in the Kingdom, the Reign of God. It delivers the sinner, salvation means forgiveness of sin. It is salvation which provides the Holy Spirit, and calls for committed and faithful living in the context of the kingdom’s future fulfilment.

In chapter 19 with Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus he proclaims that salvation has come to his household (19:9). Here there is a new way of life for Zacchaeus as he is saved from the sinfulness of his past.

God’s salvation is in the presence of the people (2:30, 31). It is meant for all people (3:6). Luke particularly makes the openness of salvation clear. In *Luke* the genealogy of Jesus goes back to Adam the ancestor of the entire human race (3:38). In 3:6 the quote from Isaiah is expanded to include “and all flesh”. The Gentiles are named as being included in 2:14, 32, something unique to *Luke*. Afterwards we hear of Jesus’ manifesto in ch. 4. In the synagogue in Nazareth we hear of the Gentile widow and Naaman the leper as the good news is for those outside Israel as well (4:28). Jesus responds to the Gentile centurion who was seeking healing (7:2-10).

⁷ I.H. Marshall, “Salvation I: Gospels,” in *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 998-1003, here 1001.

⁸ Marshall, “Salvation I,” 1002.

⁹ Charles Talbert, *Reading Luke: A New Commentary for Preachers* (London: SPCK, 1982), 55.

The disciples are sent to all nations (24:46-47) which will be spelt out further in *Acts*.

“Jesus acts as God’s agent to restore the fullness of the covenant to Israel and to begin the process that will incorporate the Gentiles into this covenant community. In this way, Jesus will both inaugurate the kingdom long promised by the prophets and establish guidelines for the church as it continues his mission in subsequent years.”¹⁰

In Luke, Jesus’ mission is “to seek and save the lost” (19:10), a verse which perhaps sums up Jesus’ mission of salvation. Thus salvation can be seen in Jesus (2.27-30) and God’s redemption becomes a present reality through him (2.38; 21.28; 24.21).

In Jesus’ parables, the message of salvation is implicit (8.12) and in reflecting on his deeds, he can declare that ‘salvation has come to this house’ (19.9). Sometimes, when Jesus heals sick people, he declares that the person’s faith has saved them (8.50; 18.42; cf. 7.50). Questions regarding salvation can rightly be put to Jesus (13.23; 18.26). To the careful reader of this gospel, then, the taunting of Jesus as he hangs on the cross, to ‘save himself’ (23.35, 37, 39), is full of irony, for Jesus is the Saviour!”¹¹

“Salvation signals the restoration of the integrity of human life and the commissioning of the community of God’s people to put God’s grace into practice among themselves and toward ever-widening circles of outsiders.”¹²

The Last Supper, Arrest and Passion Accounts in Luke (21:1-23:53)

Charpentier writes:

To enter into Luke's account you must not just read it, but meditate on it as the two disciples were doing on the Emmaus road, when the words and the presence of Jesus as he explained the scriptures to them made their hearts burn within them. On this *via dolorosa*, Jesus is going with us, even if our eyes are still prevented from recognizing him. Luke's whole account is stamped with delicacy and tenderness for his Lord Jesus. He cannot bring himself to report some details which were too distressing: he does not say that Jesus was scourged; Judas does not kiss Jesus, but simply 'draws near' to do so. However, Luke is aware of the magnitude of the terrible struggle which takes place between Jesus and the powers of evil. The passion is the last decisive combat. Jesus comes out of it as victor through his patience, a word which is not a very good rendering of the Greek *hypomonē* (that word suggests the attitude of the believer enduring blows in his trial because he is sustained by God, see Luke 8.16). The whole of the passion is internalized. The decisive struggle takes place in Gethsemane: it is in this inner struggle, an agony, that the blood of Jesus flows. Comforted by God, as Elijah once was (I Kings 19.5f.), Jesus emerges victor, and now at peace, held in his Father's arms, he can forget his own suffering, to be entirely at the disposal of others. He welcomes Judas gently, heals the servant's ear, gives Peter heart again by his glance (22.61), speaks to the women who lament his fate, forgives his executioners and those who

¹⁰ Squires, “The Gospel According to Luke,” 170.

¹¹ Squires, “The Gospel According to Luke,” 170-171.

¹² Achtemeier et al, *Introducing the New Testament*, 152.

condemn him. Pilate proclaims him to be innocent three times, as do the women, the people, the thief on the cross, the centurion. Jesus can die at peace. The cry which he utters on the cross is no longer the scream of human suffering confronted with death; it is the evening prayer known to every Jew: 'Into your hands I commend my spirit'. However, Jesus prefaces it with the term which marks his unparalleled intimacy with God: 'Father'. In this way Luke invites us to enter with Jesus into his passion: with Peter to recognize our weakness and to feel upon us the forgiving gaze of our Lord; to carry his cross behind him, like Simon of Cyrene; and with him to abandon ourselves to the Father's arms.

Tiede adds:¹³

During the Roman trial (23.1-25) Pilate declares three times that Jesus is innocent. The account of the appearance before Herod doubtless indicates that one cannot simply have a curious interest in Jesus.

At Calvary (23.26-49), Jesus declares his innocence to the women who are lamenting him, and consoles them. He asks the Father to forgive his executioners. He opens up paradise to the thief confident enough to call him by his first name, and dies in peace in the Father's arms.

The burial (23.50-57) is prepared for affectionately by the women. However, with all these spices they are wanting to keep him dead. They do not yet know that the light of the sabbath is already dawning (v. 54), and better still, the light of the resurrection.

You should read one after another the various disciples' passions which Luke has constructed on the same pattern. The passion of Stephen makes present that of Christ (Acts 4.23-31); Stephen is condemned for the same reasons; he dies forgiving his enemies, his eyes fixed on the Risen Jesus (Acts 6.8-15, 54-60). Paul goes up to Jerusalem, like his master, to bear witness there (Acts 20.22; 21.11).¹⁴

Lukan Apocalypse (21:5-38)

The passage 21:5-38 contains the Lukan "apocalypse" which parallels Mark 13 and Matt 24:1-38. Luke adds a few special features. Unlike the other gospels, Jesus is speaking within the Temple with all, as opposed to only some disciples in the other gospel accounts. It is argued that the Temple is the goal of Jesus' journey which started in 9:51.

In this section Jesus announces judgment on the Temple and the city (vv. 6-24). Yet in the second section (vv. 25-38) Jesus also announces apocalyptic predictions for a later stage of the redemption of the faithful in v. 28 and the reign of God in v. 31 and the coming judgment of the Son of Man (vv. 34-36).¹⁵

The Parousia (the future coming of Christ) has already been raised in 17:20-37. The signs of the end are false messiahs and calculations (21:8), conflict (21:10) and natural disaster and terror (21:11). The entire cosmos will be affected, however

¹³ David L. Tiede, *Luke* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 355.

¹⁴ E. Charpentier, *How to Read the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1982), 87.

¹⁵ Tiede, *Luke*, 355.

before the end there will be a time of witnessing (21:12-19). Much of what is predicted here in *Luke* is fulfilled in Acts (see Acts 4-5 [before synagogues], Acts 24-26 [before governors and kings]).

What is described in 20-24 is the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 66-70CE. Luke's point seems to be that believers were not to interpret the end of Jerusalem as the clear sign of the end of the world. What remains is "the times of the Gentiles" (v.24). This may be a reference to the Gentile mission which went out from Jerusalem, the record of which is provided in Acts.¹⁶

Thus the judgment on the Temple and city is different to the last judgment.

The splendour of the Temple is contrasted with the picture of Jesus as the visitation of the prophet, similar to Jeremiah's oracles of the Temple in Jer 7:1-15; 23:11. The atmosphere is apocalyptic however there is an assurance expressed in v. 9.

In vv. 12-15 there is the note of faithful witness, with the possibility of martyrdom. Notice even in this time of persecution we see the Lukan emphasis on the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 18 cannot be taken literally on the physical level (cf. what happened to believers in Acts and see also v. 16) It probably implies a promise of resurrection after death. It seems to be contradicted in Acts where disciples did suffer death (Acts 7:54-60; 12:2; 22:4). Craddock suggests: "Perhaps verse 18 is a misplaced saying (12:7; Matt. 10:30), or it may mean that the persecutors can kill in a physical sense but in a far more important way disciples will be kept safe."¹⁷

In v. 25 Jesus' own death is included in the sequence of events. Then in verses 25-36 the people are called to be alert to the coming redemption, kingdom of God and the day of the Son of Man.

From v. 25 Luke talks of the end times when even the Gentiles who had just been acting out judgment on Jerusalem, are now also confounded. The one coming in the cloud is taken from Daniel 7:13. Now it is not just one like a son of man it is *the* Son of Man.

In vv. 25-26 Jesus speaks in images of Isa 17:12 and 24:18-20.

In vv. 29-31 Jesus speaks of the coming nearness of the Reign of God. Here there will be the full disclosure of God's reign of the exalted Jesus.

What is meant by this generation not passing away until all these events have taken place? Many suggestions have been made. Tiede sees these as the children of the world as in 16:8, i.e. the generation which rejected Jesus.

Gruenler offers the following:

¹⁶ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation Series (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 246.

¹⁷ Craddock, *Luke*, 245.

If we view the verb as an ingressive aorist and translate it from the perspective of initiated action the saying may be rendered, 'I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things *begin* to come to pass.' this nuance of the same aorist form may also be seen in the angel Gabriel's words to Zechariah (Luke 1:20): 'And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day ...' should be [completed] 'begin to happen'.¹⁸

Verses 34-36 now call for prayerful watchfulness.

The entire section closes with a narrative and a mention of the Temple again, which is especially significant for Luke.

"Jesus' apocalyptic discourse is now primarily a word of assurance, identifying the limit of 'the days of vengeance' and encouraging endurance for the future."¹⁹

Chapters 22-23

In chapters 22-23 particularly, as Jesus moves to the cross, he is very much in control.

Betrayal (22:1-6)

Chapter 22 moves directly into Judas' intent to betray Jesus without having the intervening anointing scene outlined in *Matthew, Mark* and *John*.

The Passover setting for the betrayal is ironic. It was the joyful reminder to the gathered families of Israel of God's salvation and liberation of Ancient Israel from Egypt and looks forward to God's ultimate deliverance. As Bock notes: "In the midst of this holiday season that celebrates life, the leadership schemes to end the life of one who comes to bring life. He is seen as a threat to their faith."²⁰

Luke specifically mentions the role of Satan (similar to John) in Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Although this simple brief statement opens up many cans of worms. At the very least we see the handing over of Jesus as part of a larger cosmic battle.

Unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke clarifies the act of Judas' betrayal as being after the meal, after receiving the bread and the wine, thus highlighting the breaking of a covenant relationship. Craddock notes that at this meal, like the feeding of the 5000 (9:16) and the meal at Emmaus (24:30), Jesus took, blessed, broke and gave. "... no meal among the disciples is just a meal."²¹

In Jesus' trial it is apparent that justice is not present. The responsibility for Jesus' death widens in the account. "The Innocent One dies, a criminal is freed – a cameo of the significance of Jesus' death. Jesus is crucified between two thieves: one derides, the other believes and receives the promise of life in paradise, providing yet another cameo of the significance of Jesus' death and the reaction to it."²²

¹⁸ Royce Gordon Gruenler, "Exegetical Insight" in William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 193.

¹⁹ Tiede, *Luke*, 357.

²⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke. Volume 2: 9:51-24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1703.

²¹ Craddock, *Luke*, 255.

²² Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 26.

The Last Supper (22:7-38)

In the Last Supper scene we see Jesus presented as a pious Jew right to the end as he observes the Passover in Jerusalem. Although usually celebrated with one's family, here Jesus is seen as participating with his apostles as Luke calls them, in the wider family of God.

Again the meal commemorates salvation and deliverance but it points now to Jesus' death. The account follows Mark fairly closely except that in Luke's account it is Jesus who initiates the discussion about the meeting place and names Peter and John as the disciples who are to set it up.

We see Jesus in control of the situation, and fulfilling another event in God's plan. "As the disciples prepare a Passover lamb, another innocent life is being readied for death ..."²³

The Passover meal is the farewell meal. There are differences among the Synoptics when it comes to the description of the meal itself. Matthew's and Mark's accounts are closer to each other than to Luke's. Luke's description of Jesus' words of institution is more similar to 1 Cor 11:23-26 suggesting that two accounts were circulating from early on. Thus it is difficult to discern what Jesus' original words of institution may have been.

Meal scenes are particularly important in *Luke* and this is no exception. Luke holds the two motifs of Exodus salvation and Jesus' salvific death together. The bread is his body given for all who believe and the wine is his blood shed for this new covenant. Thus it inaugurates the new covenant.²⁴

Jesus' preliminary remarks in vv. 15-18 are unique to Luke. Verse 16 (Jesus not eating before the fulfilment in the kingdom) is a little awkward. Bock writes: "The point is that with Jesus' return in the consummation, there will be a celebration of fulfilment that will parallel the original meal."²⁵

In 22:19-20, we have the words: "this is my body this cup ...' Craddock writes:²⁶

In time this language came to be interpreted in sacrificial terms as atonement for sin. However Luke's account is governed by the Passover, and the Passover lamb was not a sin offering. The lamb sacrificed for sin was another ritual; the Passover lamb was the seal of a covenant, and the Passover meal commemorated that covenant offered to the faith community by a God who sets free. Jesus' blood seals a new covenant offered to the faith community by a God who sets free. Jesus' blood seals a new covenant offering a new kind of freedom, a release from captivity to sin and death, a new covenant extended by the liberating God to all who believe, both Jew and Gentile.

²³ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1714.

²⁴ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1718.

²⁵ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1721.

²⁶ Craddock, *Luke*, 256.

Luke's account proposes two cups (v. 17 and v. 20). There are also textual variants here. See Bock for further discussion about this.²⁷

At the Passover celebration four cups may have been used. The first was given to bless the day. It would seem then that Jesus is now acting as the patriarch at the feast and offering the prayer like "Blessed are you who created the fruit of the vine".²⁸ And so now Jesus gives thanks (*eucharisteō*).

Thus the table gives thanks for God's salvation and providence. Verse 18 suggests that Jesus did not partake of the second cup in v. 20. This second cup is the new covenant. Only Luke and Paul mention the newness of this covenant. Jesus institutes the meal "in remembrance" of him (unique to *Luke* and *1 Corinthians*).

While they had gathered to look back in a meal of celebration, now Jesus presents it as a looking forwards to his salvific sacrifice and the memory of that event in the future of the Church. It is now a new age. He also indicates that his death is not the final end. The kingdom will be consummated and Jesus will sit with his disciples in a future meal.

The order of the announcement and the supper varies between the Synoptics. Bock suggests that Luke has structured the material the way it is presented to give due focus to the meal itself and then to focus on the discussion and events during the meal. This then acts to highlight the contrast between the meal and the discussion about greatness and servanthood.²⁹

The Last Supper (22:14-38) is above all the farewell meal in which Jesus expresses his trust in God and gives his last commands to his disciples. It is also the prophetic action by which he expresses the significance of his martyr death: the inauguration of the new covenant.³⁰

We then move to the Garden scene (22:39-46) Note how Jesus is devoted to prayer. Luke particularly highlights Jesus' prayer.

The agony followed by the arrest (22:39-53) is the decisive moment when Jesus emerges victor over the power of evil. The new Elijah, fortified by God, he goes forward into the night of his passion, at peace, entirely submissive to his Father's will.³¹

The Trial

In Luke's version of the trial scene before the religious authorities (22:66-71) there is no mention of the high priest presiding, there are no witnesses summoned, there is no charge about destroying the Temple and there is no specific charge of blasphemy. In fact his accusers are charged with this.

²⁷ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1721-23.

²⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1723.

²⁹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1734.

³⁰ Charpentier, *How to Read the New Testament*, 87.

³¹ Charpentier, *How to Read the New Testament*, 87.

Jesus instead is asked whether he is the Messiah and the Son of God. "... from the lips of the highest authorities in Judaism come the affirmations central to Luke's presentation of Jesus."³² The charges before Pilate are that Jesus was a revolutionary, forbidding taxes paid to Caesar (see 20:25), and that he claimed to be a king (23:2).³³

The Crucifixion

The meaning of Jesus' death is presented differently in *Luke* than in *Matthew* and *Mark*. Throughout his innocence is declared (23: 4, 14, 15, 22, 41, 47, 48, 51). This is contrasted with the guilty around him (Barabbas – 23:13-25; the two criminals – 23:32; the nation rejecting Jesus – 23:27-31, 48).

Jesus' crucifixion between two criminals is the fulfilment of Isa 53:12, which was referred to in 22:37. Mark's account of Jesus' death has Jesus' final words "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Yet in *Luke* from the cross Jesus is able to promise Paradise to one man crucified next to him.

Jesus, instead of expressing forsakenness in *Luke*, places confidence in his own imminent presence in Paradise. When he dies, instead of quoting Ps 22:1 he uses Ps 31:6 "into your hands I commend my spirit." This is a more reverent, serene, prayerful and trusting scene than Mark portrays.³⁴

Luke's condemned Jesus is in control as he speaks with the women (23:28-31), the two crucified criminals (23:39-43), his closing words of trust in God (23:46) and his prayer to his Father God (23:34, 46).

Resurrection Appearances and Ascension (Chapter 24)

Luke places more emphasis on the physical form of the resurrected Jesus. The disciples are invited to touch his hands and feet. He tells them he has flesh and bones. He also asks for a meal which is eaten in front of them (24:39-43).

Luke makes it clear that he encounters the disciples in Jerusalem and not Galilee. This is unlike *Matthew* and *Mark*. Indeed the angel at the tomb adds emphasis: *Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee ...* (24:6).

Jerusalem is now the focus of the Resurrection appearances and the centre of the proclamation of the good news for Luke. This fulfils the prophecy of Micah 4:2:

*and many nations shall come and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.'*

³² Craddock, *Luke*, 266.

³³ Craddock, *Luke*, 268.

³⁴ Marsh and Moyise, *Jesus and the Gospels*. 43.

*For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

The fact that the angel reminds the women what Jesus has told his disciples indicates how much the women are included in Jesus' circle of disciples.

In 24:8 the women share the experience with the eleven and "to all the rest". In verse 33 the eleven are gathered "and those who were with them."

While Luke regards the apostles as a special group, he does not limit the special experiences with Christ and the Holy Spirit to them alone. The reader of such accounts, although removed by time and place, is made to feel that he or she is not merely an observer but a participant in the story of the church made up of believers, both men and women.³⁵

Lent 1 – Luke 4:1-13 – Temptations of Jesus

While this is a discreet unit there are still connections with the surrounding passages. There are references to the wilderness near the Jordan (3:2-4, 21; cf. 4:1 and 14), there are the connections of the work of the Holy Spirit (3:22; cf. 4:1), and issues of the sonship of Jesus (3:22, 38; cf. 4: 3, 9 and 41).

Jesus to this point has often been in a passive role. Now from 4:14 onwards, he will begin to take on the more active role in ministry, and yet his active role is understood to be under the power of the Spirit. This scene serves as a kind of hinge point in Luke's description of Jesus. As Jesus moves into his ministry he is tempted as to whom he will be serving in this ministry.

As ancient Israel was tested in the wilderness for their faithfulness (for 40 years), now Jesus will undergo this testing in the wilderness and will be proven faithful to God. Here, however, Jesus will be tested as Son of God. As Green states: "the devil seeks specifically to controvert Jesus' role as Son of God either by disallowing the constraints of that relationship or by rejecting it outright."³⁶

What is presented is a clash between Christ, the Son of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, versus the diabolical. This battle will continue through both *Luke* and *Acts*.

Green lists the following similarities (and differences) between Jesus' and Israel's temptations in the wilderness:³⁷

- divine leading in the wilderness (Deut 8:2; cf. Luke 4:1);
- "forty" (Exod 16:35; Num 14:34; Deut 8:2, 4; cf. Luke 4:2);

³⁵ Talbert, *Luke*, 282-83.

³⁶ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 190–196.

³⁷ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 190-196.

- Israel as God’s son (e.g., Exod 4:22–23; cf. Luke 4:3, 9);
- the testing of Jesus is analogous to that experienced by Israel and the scriptural texts he cites derive from those events in which Israel was tested by God (Deuteronomy 6–8); and
- though Jesus was full of the Spirit and followed the Spirit’s guidance, Israel “rebelled and grieved his holy spirit” (Isa 63:10).

Green also notes:³⁸

According to Deuteronomy, (1) Israel was allowed to hunger in order to learn that one does not live by bread alone (8:3); (2) Israel was instructed to worship the one and only God, and not to follow after any other god (6:4–15); and (3) Israel was commanded not to put the Lord God to the test (6:16). In each case, however, Israel failed in their obedience to God (e.g., Exod 17:1–7; Deut 9:6–29; cf. Acts 7:35, 39–43).

And so the wilderness trials of Ancient Israel provide a strong background to this passage. Similarly, Jesus responds to the devil by quoting from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13; 6:16).

While the devil does not deny that Jesus is the Son of God, he tempts Jesus by encouraging him to use his power in his own way to serve his own ends; “Jesus’ reply, borrowed from Deut 8:3, does not minimize his need for food; in fact, he thus identifies with the starving people of God in their hunger while at the same time he affirms his trust in divine provision (cf. Deut 28:1–14; Pss 33:18–19; 34:10; Wis 16:26).”³⁹

Now we move into verses 5–8 where Jesus is shown all the kingdoms of the world. God will give Jesus an everlasting kingdom (1:32–33) but the devil is now acting to displace God. The devil is asking for Jesus’ allegiance instead of Jesus’ relation to God as Son.

Jesus replies to this temptation by resorting to a quote from Deuteronomy, rejecting the devil’s sovereignty and claiming his faithfulness to God as his Son.

Green writes:⁴⁰

Fundamentally, the issue here is akin to that in the first test. Jesus is radically committed to one aim, God’s eschatological agenda; the devil has an alternative aim, a competing agenda. He wants to recruit Jesus to participate in a test of the divine promises of Psalm 91. In doing so, the devil overlooks the critical reality that the psalm is addressed to those who through their fidelity to God reside in God’s presence; even in the psalm faithful obedience to God is the controlling need. Moreover, the devil fails to recognize an even deeper mystery, known already to the believing community of which Luke is a part, that divine rescue may come *through* suffering and death and not only *before* (and *from*) them. Jesus, then, does not deny the validity of God’s promises as quoted by the devil, but he does deny

³⁸ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 190–196.

³⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 190–196.

⁴⁰ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 190–196.

the suitability of their appropriation in this context. He recognizes the devil's strategy as an attempt to deflect him from his single-minded commitment to loyalty and obedience in God's service, and interprets the devil's invitation as an encouragement to question God's faithfulness. Israel had manifested its doubts by testing God, but Jesus refuses to do so (cf. Deut 6:16).

Craddock reminds us of the peculiarities of the Lukan account compared to the other Synoptics:

Since all three Synoptics tell this story, the preacher would do well to separate Luke's record and focus on its particular accents. Even though Luke has much in common with Matthew, noticeable differences appear. In Luke, Jesus' not eating 'in those days' (v. 2) is not formalized into a forty-day fast, as in Matthew 4:2. Luke says the devil's showing Jesus the kingdom of the world is a temporal experience ('in a moment of time,' v. 5), whereas it is spatial in Matthew ('to a very high mountain,' Matt 4:8). Luke seems to have reserved mountains for experiences of prayer and revelation. Also in Luke's order of the temptations, Jerusalem and the temple are the site of the final struggle. This is an appropriate climax, since Jerusalem and the temple are so central to Luke-Acts, being the destination of Jesus' journey and the scene of both triumphs and trials for Jesus and the church. Finally, it is noticeable that Luke, for all his comfort with angels, has none here, as do Mark and Matthew. Luke concludes the temptations not with relief but with foreboding: the devil 'departed from him until an opportune time' (v. 13). This expression anticipates the passion, for the tempter will reenter the narrative through Judas (22:3).⁴¹

Now having faced these temptations as God's Son he can continue his ministry faithful to his allegiance to God.

For the Preacher

During the period of Lent (itself symbolic of 40 days), the church will think about the role of temptation in the life of the believer and of the church, and so it is appropriate to begin the season of Lent with this passage.

If Jesus struggles with temptation, why won't we? As Craddock notes, just because the Holy Spirit is present, doesn't mean we won't be tempted. However the presence of the Spirit is available power to help the believer.⁴²

Craddock writes:⁴³

We may surmise that Jesus is struggling with what it really means to be about God's business. This first temptation is not only personal but social: Will Jesus' ministry be one of turning stones to bread? The second is political: Will Jesus submit to the ruler of this world in order to achieve good for the people of this world? The third is religious: Will Jesus win Jerusalem by coercing faith, avoiding death by the display

⁴¹ Craddock, *Luke*, 55.

⁴² Craddock, *Luke*, 55.

⁴³ Craddock, *Luke*, 56.

of supernatural power? It is important to keep in mind that a real temptation beckons us to do that about which much good can be said. Stones to bread – the hungry hope so; take political control – the oppressed hope so; leap from the temple – those longing for proof of God’s power among us hope so. All this is to say that a real temptation is an offer not to fall but to rise. The tempter in Eden did not ask, ‘Do you wish to be as the devil?’ but, ‘Do you wish to be as God?’ There is nothing here of debauchery, no self-respecting devil would approach a person with offers of personal, domestic, or social ruin. That is in the small print at the bottom of the temptation.

The preacher could reflect on the nature of temptation, its subtlety, or even the phrase: “The greater the strength, the greater the temptation.”⁴⁴ They could also reflect on the trial of the people of Israel in the wilderness, compared to the trial of Jesus and seek insight into what we teaching for the modern-day follower of Jesus. What are the doubts that we confront about our relationship to God? What are the temptations in the Lenten period of self-serving rather than self-giving? The preacher might also consider both the devil’s and Jesus’ use of Scripture, and what discernment is required in the appropriate use of Scripture. Luther claimed that Scripture can be twisted like a wax nose. Do we interpret and choose Scripture to serve our own benefit or of the one who calls us?

Lent 2 – Luke 13:31-35 – Lament over Jerusalem

This unit connects the journey in *Luke* with Jesus’ coming fate in Jerusalem. It parallels the necessity of the cross of discipleship in following Jesus in the parallel passage 14:25–35.

Throughout *Luke* we find Jesus committed to the way, the will of God. Here in this passage his chosen track is contrasted with Herod’s intentions.

Of the Synoptics, only Luke includes vv. 31-33.⁴⁵ Jesus will now ignore the threat posed by Herod’s intentions and will choose to continue with his ministry in Galilee for as long as it was intended.

v 33 re-expresses v 32 precisely in the journey context. Jesus’ travel here is no running away from Herod. It is rather a continuation of his ministry of exorcism and healing, as in a leisurely but deliberate manner he makes his way to Jerusalem and to the real threat to his life that Herod (under the sovereign hand of God) could never be.⁴⁶

Jesus now speaks a lament expressing the paradox of the abandoned city which has for ages been central to God’s dealings with the people, and yet it has persistently rejected those sent to it by God.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Craddock, *Luke*, 56.

⁴⁵ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, vol. 35B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 738–739.

⁴⁶ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 738-739.

⁴⁷ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 738-739.

Nolland writes:⁴⁸

Herod can offer no threat to Jesus' ministry. Jesus has a God-ordained ministry laid out for him. He goes to his destiny in Jerusalem and not to his demise at the hands of Herod. But the final, ugly response of Jerusalem to Jesus is not some deterministic necessity; it is the tragedy of the spurning by Jerusalem of its redeemer. The leaders of Jerusalem turn destructively upon the only one who could offer them protection and safety in their own threatened situation.

Since there is no tradition of the need for prophets to perish in Jerusalem (one [later?] tradition suggests that false prophets, as other capital offenders, should be tried in Jerusalem, and the executions performed there during one of the major feasts [*m Sanh.* 11:1, 5, 6]), the final clause should be taken ironically. It combines the idea that Jerusalem is the heart and center of Israel with the tradition that the Israelites have persistently rejected the prophets God has sent to them (see at 4:24; 6:23; and cf. 13:34 to follow): "if you must reject those sent you by God, you should do it properly, by doing it at the heart of all Jewish affairs in Jerusalem" (see Fitzmyer, 1032, for traditions linking the perishing of particular prophets with Jerusalem). That Luke intends no deterministic fatalism here is indicated by the very different language of the following verse.

The necessity for Jesus to go to his fate in Jerusalem is matched by the necessity in 14:27 (developed in vv 26–33) for the one who would follow Jesus to take up his [*sic*] cross and follow him.

After rejection by Jerusalem's children, Jesus will be taken off into heaven (via death), there to await the time for his role at the end. He will not be seen again before that day when he comes to be welcomed into Jerusalem as the end-time messiah (see Acts 3:17–21). The words of welcome are taken from Ps 118:26 and are used by the crowds of disciples in an anticipatory way in 19:38.⁴⁹

For the Preacher

Wes Campbell describes this passage as "the hen meets the fox!"⁵⁰ We can only be amazed at Jesus' determination to follow the Way, the path to his cross. This is ample reminder to those who would follow Jesus on the way on which God calls them, that it can be a costly way. Discipleship may not be easy.

The preacher may reflect on the powerlessness of human opponents to Jesus' way and yet also note that these opponents of evil were the ones to whom Jesus willingly submitted.

Soards, Dozeman and McCabe write that the "text calls us to think about God, the world, and ourselves in a manner that relates God, world, and ourselves in a thorough and vital fashion. In the mix, the text also calls us simultaneously to let God

⁴⁸ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 738–739.

⁴⁹ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 743–744.

⁵⁰ Wes Campbell, "26th February" *With Love to the World* Vol 12, (10), 2010, 18.

be God, not merely a misty 'other,' and to take seriously our responsibility in relation to God's will."⁵¹

"As we 'let God be God' and as we devote ourselves to doing God's will, we find the freedom that allows us to live without fear and into the fullness of life that God intends for us."⁵²

Jesus indicates his desire to (maternally!) gather people to himself, but this is usually met with rejection. Not all will be willing to be gathered under Jesus' loving arms. This is the heartache of God expressed in Jesus' heart-wrenching lament. While Jerusalem had been meant to be the centre of worship here it is the place of the rejection of God's word. How do we reject the word of God?

Lent 3 – Luke 13:1-9 –The Galileans who suffered

This passage is set in a long section of Jesus' teaching in *Luke*. While it appears to interrupt the sermon, closer analysis suggests this is not the case. Jesus has been discussing various topics related to the theme of vigilance especially about the eschaton (end times - e.g. 12:35-40). Now Jesus' listeners are called upon to examine their lives and repent, so that they might be fruitful and avoid judgment.

While the incident concerning the Galileans is otherwise unknown it is certainly in keeping with the character of Pilate known from other sources. Green writes of this passage:

... mention of these Galileans is a rhetorical device on the part of some, designed to shift Jesus' attention toward people whose appalling deaths obviously (obviously, i.e., according to widely held conventions that drew a direct line from iniquity to judgment) marked them as deserving the sort of judgment of which Jesus had been speaking (cf. 12:47–59). Jesus will not allow such comparisons, either of Galileans or of Jerusalemites. Instead, he insists, people who are able to interpret the present (12:56), with its signs of present and future judgment (12:49–59), would respond with repentance with the consequence that their lives would be characterized not by sterility but by fecundity. Jesus pushes his message even further, insisting that his auditors had thus far escaped a fate like that of these Galileans or of those Jerusalemites not because of their relative sinlessness or goodness but because of God's temporary clemency.

... It is true that Deuteronomy 28–30 (to name only one example) insists that judgment will overtake those whose lives are characterized by disobedience, but this is not the same thing as arguing that disasters come only to those who are disobedient. In fact, Jesus' reply does not deny sin its consequences, nor that sin leads to judgment; instead, he rejects the theory that those who encounter calamity have necessarily been marked by God as more deserving of judgment than those who do not. The progression of his argument, then, is that judgment will overtake people, whether Galilean or Jerusalemite or of some other origin, unless they

⁵¹ Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year C Lent/Easter* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 37.

⁵² Soards et al, *Preaching*, 38.

repent. The universality of judgment, apart from repentance, is emphasized by the fourfold use of “all” in vv 2, 3, 4, and 5.⁵³

The parable of the fig tree in verse 6-9 is a tale of God’s mercy. For those who think that others are most justified in receiving God’s judgment than themselves, Jesus outlines the mercy of God who puts off judgment with the possibility that people can bear fruit worthy of repentance in their lives, even if up to this point they may have been fruitless. There is still a warning of judgment but also the possibility of hope.

Green notes the other occasions of fruit-bearing in the Gospel:

Especially significant is its development in the message of John (3:7–9), where repentance manifests itself in behavior (“fruit”) appropriate to repentance, and where those trees that do not bear good fruit are “cut down,” just as is anticipated here. In the Sermon on the Plain Jesus similarly notes the import of bearing good fruit (6:43–45), but this element is especially well developed in his parabolic teaching on sowing (8:4–15). There, “authentic hearing” of the word of God is demonstrated in “bearing fruit.”⁵⁴

For the Preacher

The preacher can, as Jesus, make the disconnect between those who suffer and their sinfulness. To continue this argument is to call all to repent, even those who think they may be “holier than thou”. Since the season of Lent is a season of preparation and discipline, it is incumbent upon all of us to be vigilant in how we live our lives and to repent of the things that keep holding us back. It is an opportunity for us all to commit ourselves in Christian discipleship. This is a particularly relevant message for those preparing for baptism or confirmation.

The open ending of the parable invites us to be warned and to respond. God does care how we live our lives and the call to repent is constant.

Lent 4 – Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32 – Prodigal Son, the Loving Father and the Bitter Older Son

Here we find Jesus’ parable (special to *Luke*) of the prodigal son. (“Prodigal” means recklessly wasteful.) And yet the parable has also been labelled the parable of the loving father, or the parable of the older brother, depending on from whose perspective we read this story.

Jesus’ association with tax collectors and sinners initiated this story (15:1, 2) and whatever way we read this parable we shouldn’t ignore the context. All the parables in this section (15:3-32) – the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son – indicate rejoicing over repentance. To quote v. 7: “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no

⁵³ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 513–516.

⁵⁴ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 513-516.

repentance.” (NRSV). And to quote v. 10: “I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The parable is one of love, forgiveness, and joy. It is not, in this context, a parable which focuses on depravity.

According to Jewish custom the younger son received 1/3 of the inheritance which was normally received on the father’s death. Thus, for the younger son to ask for his inheritance is to distance himself from his father, so that he treats him as already dead.

To eat swine was to become as a Gentile and therefore outside the covenant. The man has hit an all-time low. Not just distant from his earthly father but placing himself outside the covenant relationship with God.

While most readers can sympathise with the older son, and at first sight, the injustice to him, the following needs to be remembered: The father had 2 loved sons, he went out to both sons (vv. 20, 28) and was generous to his 2 sons (vv. 12, 22, 31). The embrace of the younger didn’t mean the rejection of the older. The younger son had received his share of hell, while the older son had always enjoyed the presence of the father and the life that he gave the older son. While the younger son had enjoyed the quick and shallow benefits of the inheritance and then the pursuing misery, the older son, in his wisdom, still had his inheritance, as well as enjoying the ongoing presence of the loving father and all that that relationship had meant.

The younger son now has to consider crawling back to his father, but no longer being able to expect being in a loving father/son relationship.

Nolland writes:⁵⁵

The parable itself helps us to see that in the ministry of Jesus, sinners, who in their need draw near, are finding the free and generous love of the heavenly Father. Despite the elder son’s misgivings, there is nothing here that should disturb those who are concerned with holy living; here the faithful are regaining lost brothers whom they should welcome and whose restoration they should celebrate.

Now, despite the son returning it is the loving father who takes the initiative in the restoration of the family relationship. This is truly undeserved grace and also a reflection of heaven’s joy over those who come under God’s reign (again).

Nolland rightly comments:

The story interprets Jesus’ involvement with tax collectors and sinners. It invites the righteous not to stand upon their own dignity and to be preoccupied with their own claims upon God, but rather to enter into the joy of welcoming these desperately needy sinners home into the family of God. It is not difficult to see the contemporary relevance to our respectable church membership.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 789–791.

⁵⁶ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 789–791.

Here in this story grace offends a sense of fairness.

For the Preacher

I would recommend that the preacher locate the parable in its context of the joy that Jesus shares with “tax collectors and sinners” (15:1) and how God graciously accepts those who come to God in repentance. Grace is always difficult to accept. We may reflect upon perhaps our own tendency to place ourselves in the position of the older son, and not see ourselves as needing, like the younger son, to find the welcoming grace of God for when we turn our backs on God and the way of Christ. Surely we need to understand the grace of God for ourselves as well!

Lent 5 – John 12:1-8 – The Anointing of Jesus

This story may have circulated in differing versions (cf. Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50), with different aspects added or subtracted.

The setting in *John* particularly is one of rich aroma and extravagant devotion. Jesus has just raised Mary’s brother Lazarus and we are told she is anointing Jesus’ feet in preparation for his burial. Jesus will shortly (next chapter) anoint his disciples’ feet in preparation of their sacrificial discipleship. Instead of being used for self-indulgence, the nard is used in preparatory service for Jesus. The whole scene is symbolic of the lead-up to Jesus’ death and the whole atmosphere is one of sacrificial giving and love. This is an appropriate passage to lead up to Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion.

While v. 8 may be seen to discourage a fairer distribution to the poor it is an allusion to Deut 15:11:

There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open handed toward...the poor and needy in your land.

Jesus is not denying the need to care for the poor, but is in this instance honouring the service of Mary, in contrast to the self-serving interests of Judas.

For the Preacher

This passage in the last Sunday of Lent before the commencement of Palm/Passion Sunday and Holy Week, provides a good opportunity for the follower of Jesus to consider what lies ahead for Jesus, and to consider their own commitment to following in loving, sacrificial service. It allows us to reflect back on the preparation time of Lent and again offer ourselves to the God who loves us so dearly and sacrificially.

We can be invited to place ourselves in the position of each character in this story. What can we learn from doing this?

The act of anointing in the passage follows immediately after Jesus has raised Lazarus, and is a prelude to Jesus anointing the disciples' feet and asking them to undertake this act for each other (13:14). It is an act of appreciation, of love and preparation, and a summary of a disciple's loving relationship with Christ who is present.

It also is a pointer for Christ's own sacrificial giving in laying down his life.

Palm Sunday – Luke 19:28-40

This is one of the few stories that finds parallels in all four Gospels. Luke, however, has already begun to outline Jesus long journey to Jerusalem in 9:51. He refers to this journey on several occasions (e.g. 9:31; 13:31-35; 17:11; 18:31 19:11). Now in this passage the journey has come to its climax.

Green observes the following about discipleship in this section:

Given the great concern of the travel narrative overall with the resocialization of Jesus' followers within the new community gathered around Jesus, the lack of interest in discipleship here may be surprising. However, following Luke's presentation of the disciples' incapacity to comprehend God's plan in 18:31–34, the disciples have receded more and more into the background. Indeed, at this juncture whatever had earlier distinguished the twelve from the others has been blurred. Luke's reference to "two of the disciples" (v 29) leaves open the question whether these are from the twelve, and his depiction of "the whole multitude of the disciples" (v 37) is reminiscent of the mass of Jesus' followers and hangers-on in 6:17–19. This gradual deemphasis on the disciples is matched in the narrative by a crescendoing preoccupation with christology. Begun already in 18:35–43 with the acclamation of Jesus as the "Son of David" and continuing with the parabolic material in 19:11–27 is Luke's renewed interest in portraying Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, a king. This itself recalls the birth narrative, where Jesus' identity was first broached so definitely by God's spokesperson, Gabriel (e.g., 1:32–35). And this emphasis moves even more into the limelight here, above all with the acclamation of Jesus as "the king who comes in the name of the Lord" (v 38).⁵⁷

And Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, at least in part, draws the focus towards the nature of Jesus himself as the king. It is the disciples who acknowledge this, using words similar to the praises of the angels before the shepherds at Jesus' birth in chapter 2.

Luke portrays Jesus with royal and messianic colours.

The references to Ps 118 and Zech 9:9 have eschatological overtones and are used to proclaim Jesus as eschatological (end-time) and long expected king. The Messiah has arrived. From Maccabees and Josephus (the ancient Jewish historian) the description of palm branches etc. describes announces someone who is already coming in victory. So in fulfilment of all that has been spoken of in *Luke* so far, Jesus is now arriving as the victorious Messiah and king.

⁵⁷ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 680–688.

In keeping with Zech 9:9: Jesus rides as the triumphant, victorious, yet humble king, riding on a colt. Within Israel's history, too, the heirs of David rode to their coronation in similar manner. The spreading of the clothes onto the pathway is appropriate to the greeting of a regal figure.

The Mount of Olives is mentioned twice (vv. 29, 37). This underscores the connections of this mountain with the end times and in relation to the coming of the Messiah (e.g. Zech 14:4).

Green writes:⁵⁸

First, the colt is tied and must be untied (mentioned five times!)—a possible echo of Gen 49:11, which speaks of a coming ruler who would tie a colt to a vine. The presence of such an echo would contribute to the royal reverberations of this scene, though this instance of intertextuality would also comprise an important element of parody: The ruler of the Genesis text is characterized by extraordinary opulence, whereas the colt Jesus rides must be borrowed. Such an emphasis comports well with the larger Lukan motif of a kingdom oriented toward the least and the lost, and the picture of Jesus as one who has “nowhere to lay his head” (9:58). Second, the colt is one “that has never been ridden” (v 30). This is likely a paraphrastic way of drawing out the sense of Zech 9:9 LXX, which refers to the king's advent on a “new colt,” since a new colt is one that would not yet have been broken for riding. Third, Jesus' instructions anticipate that the disciples will need a rejoinder for some who ask why they are untying the colt. In fact, its owners (Greek: “lords”) do raise this question, and the disciples respond with the words Jesus had given them beforehand, “The Lord needs it.” In this way, the claim of Jesus (as lord) supersedes the rights of ownership, just as the requirements of a king supplant those of his subjects (cf. 1 Sam 8:10–18). In these ways, the details of Luke's narration prove to be laden with royal significance, preparing for the more explicit affirmation of Jesus' kingly status in what follows.

The quote from Psalm 118 (in v. 38) is a reference to a psalm which was used in ancient Israel as a hymn of royal entry in the annual ritual of reenthronement.

Green writes of the later usage of palm branches:

Later, it was used in the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths), when palm branches would have been used celebratively in preparation for the building of booths. The absence of palm branches, along with the manifest presence of other royal meanings accruing to the Lukan account, indicate that Luke has in mind something other than the importance of Psalm 118 in times of festival celebrations. (Indeed, throughout Luke's account, Jesus has been portrayed as more than an ordinary pilgrim coming into Jerusalem.) Instead, in its Lukan co-text, Psalm 118 reverts to its earlier significance as a psalm of royal entry.

The phrase “one who comes” recalls the language used of Jesus in 3:15–17; 7:19–20; 13:35, with the result that, in this way too, his ministry and person evidence messianic tones.

⁵⁸ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 680–688.

The question is always being asked whether we can continue to praise Jesus knowing what is to come. Can we do more than the inanimate stones in terms of our praise to God?

For the Preacher

Keith Rowe writes:⁵⁹

Two processions entered Jerusalem at the beginning of Passover Week in AD 30. Through the west gate came Pontius Pilate, Roman Governor of the area, surrounded by imperial soldiers, a reminder of who was boss in this outpost of Roman power. Social, political and even theological realities were to be defined by Roman power, not by the dreams of reformers or the disaffected. The east gate witnessed the more modest procession of Jesus surrounded by Galilean peasant pilgrims attracted to his teaching about the Kingdom of God and the possibility of a just, peaceful, and free society. Pilate sought to reinforce the rule of the God-like Roman Emperor; Jesus embodied and proclaimed new ways of living within the servant-like love of God. His procession represented a challenge to Imperial power that had infiltrated into every area of Jerusalem's life. One procession was legal; the other sought truth beyond Roman legality. The contrasting processions represent two approaches to life that continue into our day. We probably have a stake in both processions, but in Holy Week we ask which one has priority in our living.

The preacher may wish to explain (briefly) some of the Old Testament allusions to give some of the background to Jesus' otherwise strange entry scene.

This text can inspire the reflections of Jesus as king, messiah, saviour, and help the preacher to consider how Jesus is ruler, messiah and saviour and what does this mean for us today, especially in the light of Jesus' impending arrest, trial and crucifixion.

As Jesus rides along receiving the praises of the crowds, we wonder where they were a few days later when the crowds were calling for Barabbas to be freed instead of Jesus. Where might we have been in the story? What was God thinking as this was happening?

Can we reflect on our own journey as we consider Jesus' climactic journey to Jerusalem? How has our preparation through Lent been going? Are we ready for Good Friday and for Easter and how may we respond to the coming ruler? Are there aspects of Jesus that still may surprise us and/or challenge us?

Passion Sunday – Luke 22:14-23:56 or 23:1-49

⁵⁹ Keith Rowe, "24 March," *With Love to the World* Vol 12 (10), 2010, 33.

The events immediately leading up to Jesus' arrest, his trial, crucifixion and resurrection dominate each of the Gospel accounts. Luke spends 5½ chapters on Jesus' last days since he came into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

See the section above "The Last Supper, Arrest and Passion Accounts in Luke". The following represents a few extra notes on this lengthy and dense passage.

The Passion narrative itself begins with Jesus observing the Passover meal and continues until his burial. Either reading for Passion Sunday is quite lengthy and the preacher may consider how to break it up, have it read dramatically, or only use part of these readings.

The Passover Setting - Jesus' Exodus

Way back in chapter 9, Luke has been pointing us to this moment as Jesus is observed speaking with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration, as they speak of his "departure" (or "exodus" in the Greek). Now Jesus celebrates the saving exodus by God for the people to exit from Egypt, as they observe the Passover. God is bringing people into a covenant commitment.

The Betrayal

We encounter the betrayal of Judas which raises many questions about this involvement. Craddock summarises:

The church has never been fully persuaded by its own efforts to explain Judas Iscariot. 'Satan entered into Judas,' but Judas had to let him in, 'for the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!' (v. 22) Here is one who was chosen after a night of prayer to be in the inner circle of Jesus. He was taught and then sent to minister with apostolic authority. He enjoyed the same success as the others on those missions to preach, to heal, and to cast out demons. He was in every sense of the word an apostle. What happened? There would be no value in attempting a new theory to explain Judas. The church is at its best when it stops asking, 'Why did Judas do it?' and instead examines its own record of discipleship.

The Last Supper (22:7-38)

See the section above: "The Last Supper (22:7-38)"

22:35-38 – Now the world has made its decision about Jesus and those who follow need to be fully prepared. Jesus is not preaching violence here as 22:49-51 outlines Jesus' rebuke of the use of the sword. Also in *Acts* we see the church's nonviolent response to persecution: Acts 4:25-31; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; 12:1-5. Thus here in this passage Jesus' use of the sword is symbolic of readiness and self-sufficiency, not revenge.⁶⁰

We then move to the Garden scene (22:39-46). Note how Jesus is devoted to prayer. Luke particularly highlights Jesus' prayer.

⁶⁰ Bock, *Luke. Volume 2: 9:51-24:53*, 1747

Craddock writes:⁶¹

The Jesus whom Luke describes on that night of prayer is not one who does not know death; rather he is one who knows God. Jesus the man of prayer is therefore the model of the Christian life, from baptism to death, and especially in the sense that a lifetime of prayer can be a source of strength on those occasions when one is not only seeking God's will for oneself but also called upon to help others who seek desperately for guidance and strength.

The Trial

See the section above: "The Trial".

The Jewish trial (22:54-71) opens with the account of Peter's denial. In this way Luke tells us, 'If you cannot follow the passion as a saint, you can always follow it as a forgiven sinner. The gaze of Jesus can always bring about a new being in you.' Luke makes the high priest repeat his question. In this way Jesus proclaims clearly that he is Christ and Son of God.⁶²

The Crucifixion

Only Luke has the account of Simon of Cyrene who is required to carry the cross beam. He actually becomes a model of discipleship as he goes behind Jesus in v. 26.

Jesus' crucifixion between two criminals is fulfilment of Isa 53:12 which was referred to in 22:37.

Only Luke has "Father forgive them ..." ⁶³ which is also on the lips of the martyred Stephen in Acts 7:60. Forgiveness is certainly a Lukan theme (17:4; 6:35; 24:47; see also Acts 2:38).

Jesus' last words in *Luke* are different to Mark's account where we hear Jesus saying: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In *Luke* from the cross Jesus is able to promise Paradise to one man crucified next to him.

Jesus, as stated earlier in these notes, instead of expressing forsakenness in *Luke*, places confidence in his own imminent presence in Paradise. When he dies, instead of quoting Ps 22:1 he uses Ps 31:6 "into your hands I commend my spirit." This is a more reverent, serene, prayerful and trusting scene than Mark portrays.⁶⁴ Luke's condemned Jesus is in control as he speaks with the women (23:28-31), the two crucified criminals (23:39-43), his closing words of trust in God (23:46) and his prayer to his Father God (23:34, 46).

Craddock writes:⁶⁵

⁶¹ Craddock, *Luke*, 262.

⁶² Charpentier, *How to Read the New Testament*, 87.

⁶³ Although not present in all ancient manuscripts.

⁶⁴ Marsh and Moyise, *Jesus and the Gospels*. 43.

⁶⁵ Craddock, *Luke*, 276.

In the brief accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and death, Luke has managed to weave into the narrative more theological reflection than may at first be apparent. From the lips of his deniers and detractors he is called God's Christ, the Chosen One, and King of the Jews. Both a Roman officer and a criminal dying with him acknowledge his innocence. The rulers, the soldiers, and one of the criminals speak of him, in derision to be sure, as one who saves, and in his dying hour he does save a sinner. From the cross Jesus announces forgiveness, for Luke the very heart of the Gospel (24:47; Acts 2:38), and in that word of forgiveness is stated the fundamental problem plaguing both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 3:17; 13:27; 17:30): they act out of ignorance even though the sources of knowing (Moses and the prophets in the one case, creation and conscience in the other) were available to them.

While ignorance and hardness of heart led to Jesus' death, God's plan is fulfilled after all as Jesus moves through death on to resurrection, exaltation and Pentecost. Instead of moving away from the plan of God, Jesus is the suffering righteous One of God submitting to the will of the Lord of all history.

Jesus moves through death to a throne and allows his followers to follow him there through his Holy Spirit.

For the Preacher

The preacher may choose to focus on any of the themes outlined above.

Jesus' Passover, how does his death bring salvation?

Do we as disciples of Jesus "betray" Jesus?

What messages can we give our congregations relating to the words of institution of Jesus at the last supper?

How can we appropriate the language of "covenant" that is used?

How do call to remembrance what Jesus has done for people today?

What can we learn about Jesus' message in Luke about servanthood and dogged commitment to God's will?

Jesus in prayer gains particular attention in Luke, as exemplified in the Garden scene. What can we learn from this?

What does it mean for us to name Jesus as Messiah, Son of God, or ruler? Can we unpack this for our present context?

What does it mean for us to carry a cross?

What is the place of forgiveness in our lives? What can we learn from Jesus' words of forgiveness?

Is there anything significant for us in Jesus' dying words?

Good Friday – John 18:1-19:42

While the Good Friday and Easter Day readings are from *John* and not *Luke*, I shall still include a few notes here.

18:1-19:42 appear to be arranged as three long inverted parallel structures as outlined below. Such literary structures were not uncommon in ancient literature.

They serve to highlight particular elements of the story and emphasise the central element.

And so 18:1-27 is can be laid out as follows:

1 - 3	Judas' betrayal	Jesus with disciples, but betrayal of one disciple
4 - 9	Questions of identity	Jesus protects disciples
10 - 11	Peter's violence	Violence of a disciple
12 - 14	The arrest	Jesus alone
		"It is better for one man to die for the people"
15 - 18	Peter's denial	Denial of a disciple
19 - 24	Questions of the high priest	Questions about disciples
25 - 27	Peter's betrayal	Denial of discipleship

Notice how the first element matches the last, the second element matches the second last etc. Issues of discipleship thus appear to be emphasised here. Jesus is arrested without the disciples who deny and betray him. Yet one man can die for the people. Jesus is left alone (cf. the prediction in 16: 32 "yet the Father is still with me"). The central emphasised element is the phrase "it is better for one man to die for the people", a significant and ironic comment indeed!

18:28-19:16a can be summarised:⁶⁶

I	Outside (18: 28 – 32)	
	The Jews demand death	
	II	Inside (18: 33 – 38a)
		Pilate questions Jesus about kingship
		III
		Outside (18: 38b-4)
		Pilate finds Jesus not guilty; offers Barabbas
		IV
		Inside (19: 1 – 3)
		The soldiers scourge Jesus
		"Hail king of the Jews"
		V
		Outside (19: 4 – 8)
		Pilate finds Jesus not guilty; "Behold the man"
		VI
		Inside (19: 9 – 11)
		Pilate talks with Jesus about power
VII	Outside (19: 12 – 16a)	
	The Jews obtain death	

Here in this inverted parallel structure we see the alternating scenes of "inside" (the place of truth) and "outside" (the place of falsehood). In the centre Jesus is ironically named "king of the Jews"

So here there are the themes of kingship, power, and Jesus as ruler. Worldly powers and authorities have failed to address that. The scenes move between interviews with "the Jews" outside, and with Jesus inside.

19:16b – 42 can be structured:⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Based on Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI* (New York, Doubleday, 1970), 859.

⁶⁷ Based on Brown, *John II*, 911.

Intro	19: 16b – 18	Crucifixion The elevation of Jesus on the cross
	I	19: 19 – 22 The royal inscription (Jesus as king) Pilate refuses the Jews' request
	II	19: 23 – 24 The seamless tunic (Jesus as priest?) Executioners divide Jesus' clothing Fulfilment of Scripture
	III	19: 25 – 27 The future: Jesus' mother and beloved disciple
	IV	19: 28 – 30 Jesus thirsts, hands over the spirit Executioners offer Jesus wine Fulfilment of Scripture
	V	19: 31 – 37 Flow of blood and water Pilate grants the Jews' request
Concl'n	19: 38 – 42	Burial The deposition of Jesus from the cross

The structures seem to reflect the flow of the narrative, however one would have thought at first that the focus of this section (19:19–42) would have been the final words of Jesus as he hands over the spirit.

Why would the structure emphasise the interaction of the Beloved Disciple and the mother of Jesus? Thus one is left to wonder whether such structuring as proposed was intended or whether there is something significant about this scene of the Beloved Disciple and Jesus' mother. I shall propose an idea about this below.

There is a great deal of irony and contrast in these scenes. Senior,⁶⁸ for example, sees the darkness of evil and notes they become instruments of grace.

The Arrest In The Garden (18:1-11)

The scene begins in chapter 18 with Jesus crossing the Kidron Valley to go to the garden. The "Kidron Valley" suggests 2 Sam 15:23 (where David was betrayed by Absalom) or perhaps 1 Kg 2:37:

The day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley, you can be sure you will die; your blood will be on your own head. (NIV)

Throughout these scenes there are images of light and dark, and meagre torches. We know that when Judas left the final meal to betray Jesus in 13, John specifically says that it was night (v. 30).

⁶⁸ Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991).

All the way towards his death Jesus knows what is going to happen and Jesus is portrayed as master of his own destiny.

In v. 4 the narrator presumes to know what is in Jesus' mind and relates the story as though Jesus is in control of this scene. Note the repetitions in narrative:

⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" ⁵ They answered, "**Jesus of Nazareth.**" Jesus replied, "I am he." ["I am" – **egō eimi**] Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

⁶ When Jesus said to them, "I am he," ["I am" – **egō eimi**] they **stepped back and fell to the ground.**

⁷ Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "**Jesus of Nazareth.**"

⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. ["I am" – **egō eimi**] So if you are looking for me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." (NRSV)

The "I AM" sayings repeat around the party's request for Jesus of Nazareth. The Galilean human pilgrim is contrasted with the I AM, the divine name of Jesus (see Exod 3:13-15) and repeated many times through John's Gospel. As the arresting party encounter Jesus they fall on the ground in response to the manifestation of "I AM" as though in awe of something divine. Perhaps it is the power of Jesus' word. There may also be a reference back to 13:19:

"...in order that you may believe that when it happens I am."

Jesus is in control in the whole arrest scene, knowing what was about to happen, and what must be done. He is committed to the will of God and whatever events transpire he has the power, if he chose, to prevent them.

Peter's Betrayal & The First Trial Of Jesus (18:12-27)

The hearing before Annas contains general assertions concerning the questioning of Jesus "about his disciples and his teaching" (v. 19) and the inconclusive dialogue (vv. 20-23). Note again the emphasis given to "disciples" here.

In the account there seems to be confusion over who is high priest - cf. 18:13, 19, 24. Annas had been high priest in 6–15 CE and was succeeded by several of his sons as well as by Caiaphas his son-in-law.⁶⁹

Caiaphas was high priest from 18 CE for nearly 20 years. Thus it appears from this source that while Annas was alive at Jesus' trial it was Caiaphas who was high priest at that time.⁷⁰ Some scholars have suggested that Caiaphas is absent from the scene as he desired to remain pure for the Passover celebration. John has no interest in Jesus before Caiaphas (18:18). Rather there is an extended focus on the Jesus-Pilate encounter (18:29-19:16).

⁶⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.198 and 18.35, 95.

⁷⁰ D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 334.

Now we hear of Peter with an unnamed “other disciple” (v. 15). He⁷¹ is not named as the Beloved Disciple and his presence is not mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels. His acquaintance with the High Priest might suggest that he was from Jerusalem. The Beloved Disciple (BD) is only known in Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem thus suggesting that this unnamed disciple is the BD. If so, it would make the identity of the BD as John, son of Zebedee, less likely. This John came from Galilee.

The theme of Jesus and the disciples has been carefully woven into this denial scene. Smith says:⁷²

Although such episodes as the denial and trial may be given by tradition and history, the typical Johannine irony shines through them. While Jesus is being arraigned before the representative of Jewish authority, his chief disciple is outside busily denying him. Jesus was handed over by one of his disciples, denied by another, and abandoned by all. Yet precisely through these events and their dismal culmination in a horrific death Jesus saves his disciples; indeed, he protects them from such a fate (17:12; 18:9).

The Trial Of Jesus By Pilate - (18:28–19:16)

The 'evidence' is presented for Jesus being:

Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, King of Israel, the Prophet, from God.

Judgment/judging is also a recurring theme in *John* (3:18; 5:30, 45; 8:15-6).

Juel writes:⁷³

The trial is the culmination of the development of the 'witness' and 'testimony' image in (John) ... The testimony offered to Pilate against Jesus is at the same time testimony for the reader that all the claims made by, and for, Jesus are true ... On the one hand Pilate is depicted as an apologist for Jesus ... nevertheless, when forced to choose between the King of the Jews and the favor of Caesar ... he, too, belongs to the darkness.

It is ironic that the officers concerned with Jesus’ arrest are actually concerned for maintaining ritual purity for the feast (18:28).

Jesus is still portrayed as being in control. It is Pilate who appears to be alternating between “inside” and “outside” throughout the episode as illustrated in the structure proposed above. In the trial before Pilate a great deal is to do with who is ruler.

Jesus states in this scene that neither he nor his reign is *ek tou kosmou* (“from the world”). John’s use of *ek* (“from”) implies the source of one’s being, the roots out of which something comes. The source acts to define the nature of one’s being. Jesus is saying that his authority comes from another source outside this world.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Some have even suggested this mysterious disciple might even be Mary Magdalene. I shall continue to refer to the person as “he” without necessarily implying that this was their gender.

⁷² Smith, *John*, 338.

⁷³ Donald Juel, *An Introduction to New Testament Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 284-5.

⁷⁴ Kysar, *Preaching John*, 138.

This phraseology is used elsewhere in *John* and is particularly significant in Jesus' dispute with the opponents in Chapter 8 about divine or diabolical parentage. It also clusters in Jesus' Farewell Prayer in Chapter 17 about not being "from the world" (vv. 14–16).

Another irony of the situation is that it is the person who would usurp political power who is released (Barabbas), while the true King of the Jews is held captive (18:39–40).

19:11 notes that earthly political power is nothing compared to God's. Finally the true ruler is ironically robed in mock attire or royal robe and crown (19:5). In 19:13 does Pilate actually seat Jesus on his own judgment seat? Here there is the ironic cry "Here is your king!" (19:14). To complete the irony, the sign on the cross labels him as king and it will not be changed.

Rensberger analyses the trial from a political perspective.⁷⁵ He notes that because Jesus' kingship is not of this world that there is confrontation. Pilate had cunningly extracted a cry "we have no king but the Emperor" (19:15) from the crowd. In *John*, freedom comes from knowing the truth (abiding in the word of Jesus – 8:31–32). It is the Good Shepherd who lays down their life for the sheep (10:1–13) not the *lēstēs* ("robber" or "insurrectionist"). (Barabbas is also described as a *lēstēs*.) Jesus' enthronement is on a cross.

Rensberger:

The Fourth Gospel, for all its sectarianism and inwardness, does not offer a mere retreat from political relationships ... The Fourth Gospel confronts the issue of Israel's freedom in the late first-century Roman Empire with an alternative to both zealotry and collaboration, by calling for adherence to the king who is not of this world, whose servants do not fight but remain in the world bearing witness to the truth before the rulers of both synagogue and Empire.⁷⁶

The Passion

Jesus is presented as "behold the man/human" (19:5) illustrating his humiliation in flesh. Thus Jesus is presented as a real person. We are still reminded of the humanity of Jesus here.

Then chapter 19 describes the abuse of the flesh, the crown of thorns, the striking on the face. Finally in the bitter end, the flesh is thirsty and all he can have is sour wine. Yet through all of this it is the hour of glory. Although mocking, the royal robes, the crown and the sign on the cross reflect a deeper truth of the real king.

In v. 20 the sign on the cross is mentioned, as it is mentioned in all Gospels. *John* alone makes note that it was written 3 languages, apparently to emphasise the universal importance of what was happening.

⁷⁵ Rensberger, *Overcoming the World*, 87-100.

⁷⁶ Rensberger, *Overcoming the World*, 99-100.

Only in *John* is it recorded that Jesus' tunic is seamless. This is reminiscent of that of the High Priest.⁷⁷

The only disciples recorded around the cross are four women (his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene) and the Beloved Disciple. In the Synoptics the women are only mentioned after the death of Jesus and they are watching from a distance (Matt 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; Luke 23:49).

Throughout the “hour” of Jesus' death, runs the theme of “accomplishment” or “completion” to which John has been focussing. See how the same Greek word is used here:

“Jesus knew that all was now finished” (*tetelestai*) (19:28). In the same verse, Scripture is fulfilled (*teleiōthēi*) and when he dies in v. 30 he says “It is finished” (*tetelestai*).

Earlier on Jesus had said to the Samaritan woman “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete (*teleiōsō*) his work” (4:34). Now the moment had come for the completion, for the glorious finishing of God's work. It is his hour that had been anticipated all along.

Zumstein says “the Johannine Christ's death is not an ordeal but an achievement.”⁷⁸

Jesus' thirst is symbolic. He is now ready to offer up his life because he has completed the work which the Father gave him. Already in 18:11 Jesus has indicated that he needs to drink the cup which the Father has given him. The sour wine represents this cup which Jesus has agreed to drink. In his thirst and suffering, Jesus' flesh becomes symbolic of the glory of God.

In John, Jesus is portrayed as being in control of his death. Is there an allusion here back to 10:17-18?:

“... because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

The scene with his mother and the Beloved Disciple is a strange one and unique to *John*. Certainly it's an expression of Jesus' tender love for his own mother from the cross. In John's heavily symbolic gospel one also suspects that there could be even more happening here.

Other theories have been suggested, however I propose that possibly this scene marks a new relationship between Jesus and his disciples. While probably a real character, the Beloved Disciple also seems to symbolise elsewhere in *John* what Jesus' disciples are called to be like. It is interesting, that from this point on, Jesus doesn't refer to his disciples as such, but calls them his “brothers”. By naming his own mother as the mother of the Beloved Disciple it seems as though he is naming

⁷⁷ Smith, *John*, 367.

⁷⁸ Jean Zumstein, “Story, Plot and History in the Johannine Passion Narrative”, SBL Conference, Boston, 2008.

his disciples from now on in a new relationship as his own brothers (and sisters). There is now a new sense of community at the Cross.

As noted above, it is only in John's Gospel that it is mentioned that "the Jews" asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken away so they don't remain on the cross during the Sabbath and that the soldiers found Jesus already dead (19:33). It is also in John alone that there is the testimony of the piercing of the side (19:34). In 19:37 we have the fulfillment of Zechariah 12:10. Yet looking at the context of this reference is helpful:

Zech 12:10 reads in full (NRSV):

And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.

and then in Zech 13:1:

On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

Notice the theme of a fountain which cleanses and the pouring out of the spirit. At various places in John's Gospel water is alluded to as depicting the giving of life through the Spirit.

Thus as already noted, *John* stresses Jesus' physical death. While there is not the same picture of suffering that we have in, say, *Mark*, Jesus definitely died. This is not a docetic Christ but real flesh and blood.

There is a connection here back to the Prologue. Jesus saw this time as his hour of glory. See 1:14:

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (NRSV)

But here we have a contrast. The Word in flesh has not only lived among us but now died among us, and yet it is still glory. It is especially glory. The Word has been tabernacling (see the Greek for John 1:14) among us, a reference to Jesus as fulfillment of what the Temple was intended to do.

Jesus said in John 2:19–22 (NRSV):

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body.²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

So now at the crucifixion the Temple is destroyed, but it will be raised up again. The *shekinah* glory of God is here still.

The cross, as Grigsby⁷⁹ observes, is to be seen. Way back in the Prologue we had (1:14) “we have seen his glory”, the cross is compared to the bronze serpent (3:14) to which people were called to look, the crucifixion itself is witnessed (19:35, 37).

Thus Grigsby states: “Above all else, the Johannine cross is meant to be ‘seen’, and as such, it might fairly be described as a kind of ‘divine marquee’, shining with a heavenly message for all.”⁸⁰

Here he deliberately uses the light imagery to connect with the images of light throughout the Gospel.

What happens next after the death of Jesus is quite deep. Again the details in John are usually symbolic. Jesus’ side is pierced and blood and water flow out. Jesus’ body was real. His flesh was real, he bleeds and dies.

There has been much discussion about the meaning of this event. The following are some suggestions:

- Blood and water are symbols of eternal life in the Gospel (see 3:5; 6:53–56; 13:1–13; 15:1–8).
- Water is symbolic of the Holy Spirit (7:37–39) and the ‘living water’ which Jesus discussed with the Samaritan woman.
- They are also connected with the Eucharist and Baptism.
- The glory of God is coming forth from the flesh of Jesus.
- Spirit-filled life is coming from his body.
- Grigsby⁸¹ proposes that they represent the cleansing from sin.

Admittedly all these interpretations are much debated and it is not impossible to accept more than one reading of this event. However the symbols may be interpreted, the notion of giving spiritual life through Jesus’ death seems to be present.

Notice when Jesus dies, literally the Greek reads: “he handed over the Spirit”. Every occurrence of this word *paradidōmi* - “hand over” or “betray” (15 times in total) - in *John* relates to Jesus’ betrayal, or his being handed over for execution; every occurrence except for one. This one exception is Jesus’ final act of “revenge” for betrayal – he offers or hands over his Spirit for humanity (19:30).

Factors Which Led To Jesus’ Death

The first fact which needs to be noted is that *John* stresses opposition from “the Jews” – Jesus’ own people. This is particularly emphasised in *John*.

Antagonism has been developing throughout *John*. In 5:9-16 there was the breaking of the Sabbath with the healing of the paralytic. Similarly their antagonism is

⁷⁹ Bruce H. Grigsby, “The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel” in Stanley E. Porter & Craig A. Evans *The Johannine Writings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 69-94.

⁸⁰ Grigsby, *The Cross*, 70.

⁸¹ Grigsby, *The Cross*, 93.

described in chapter 9 with the healing of the blind man. Jesus also upset the people with his comments which were interpreted as he saying he was equal with God (5:17, 18). Jesus in 8:56-59 says “before Abraham was, I am” and then they tried to stone him. The same thing happened in 10:29-33 when Jesus said “I and the Father are one”.

The charge made by them to Pilate in 19:7 said “he has made himself the Son of God”. While John displays the antagonism of certain Jews throughout the Gospel, whom he even enigmatically sometimes calls “the Jews”, it was not all Jews who crucified Jesus, as it was not all Romans who did so. Neither does one today have licence to hold the entire present Jewish race accountable as some have sought to do with tragic consequences.

Jesus also described the factors leading to his death as Satanic.

6:70: *“one of you is a devil”*

13:2: *the devil had put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him*

13:26-27: *“Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him”*

Finally in 14:30 Jesus states that “the ruler of the world is coming” but then says that “he has no power over me”.

Jesus in Control

While there was antagonism towards Jesus and attempts on his life, they were unsuccessful because his “hour had not yet come” i.e. God was still in control e.g. 7:30, 44; 8:59.

When Jesus was to be arrested in the garden the soldiers at first fall down (18: 6).

Jesus refused help from his disciples and submitted to the soldiers (18:11).

When he was before Pilate he was portrayed as being in complete control of the conversation, in fact it almost appears that Pilate is on trial. Jesus tells him he would have no power except that it was given to him from above (19:11).

It is Jesus who lays down his life for the sheep. “No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again;” (10:17-18)

“It was, beyond all else, the force of divine love that brought Jesus to the cross.”⁸²

The Importance of Jesus’ Death

Jesus died as the Son of God. The Father/Son relationship is stressed throughout *John*. Jesus also died as King of the Jews (only in *John* is it recorded that the sign on the cross was written in 3 languages suggesting he is King of all). Jesus’ death is the revelation of his identity.

The crucifixion is the honouring of the Son of Man. Jesus is not a victim in the passion. He is sovereign and Lord.

⁸² C. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Jesus' death is the fulfilment of Scripture. This is stressed at the point of Jesus' death. (The Synoptics also note the fulfilment of Scripture but they cite different OT references.)

Glory

Jesus' death is seen as glory (12:23–24; 13:31). Pain is not highlighted.

Jesus is described as being "lifted up". As we have seen, this term is ambiguous - it can mean the act of crucifying, but it can also mean exaltation (as was seen, for example, in 3:13-15). Jesus' lifting up (12:32) draws all to himself. Also in 3:14 where in comparison with Moses lifting up the snake, Jesus' lifting up brings eternal life for those believing in him and so deliverance from judgment upon sin.

Jesus' glorification is the final step in the offer of new life which is prominent throughout *John* (e.g. 1:12-13; 3:3; 7; 6:51; 12:50). While "glory" is used to describe Jesus' faithful and obedient ministry and in the incarnation itself, it is in his death that it is supremely shown. Therefore there is no cry of dereliction as in Mark, instead it is a cry of victory "It is finished!"

Van der Watt even describes the cross as the throne of Jesus as he is crucified under the banner "King of the Jews (19:19) in his glorification (12:18; 17:1-5).⁸³ This underlines the use of Johannine irony.

Note that the resurrected Christ is not distinguished from the exalted Christ. Crucifixion is exaltation of which the resurrection is an expression. Therefore there is no ascension scene in *John*.

Atonement

As well as the revelatory nature of Christ's death there is also the sense that Jesus' death takes away the sin of the world (1:29).

The mention of the Passover at the beginning of the Farewell Discourses suggests that the events are a Passover story. Jesus dies at the same time that the Passover lambs were being slain although John does not make anything of this (unlike Mark 14:12 and Luke 22:7). Indeed John notes the fulfilment of the Scripture relating to the preparation of the Passover lamb (legs not broken - Exod 12:46; Num 9:12) ironically while the soldiers ensure the death of Jesus prior to their celebration of the Passover feast (19:31–37).

While the Passover lamb is not a sacrifice of atonement, nevertheless the Passover theme is one of salvation so that his death is indeed a sacrifice to take away the sins of the people. Grigsby⁸⁴ argues that by New Testament times the blood of the Passover lamb "was clearly regarded as expiatory."

The specific mention of hyssop as the means by which Jesus is offered wine recalls again the Passover account (Exod 12:22) although it must be admitted that the analogy is not precise. This point is emphasised by Caiaphas' prophecy 11:49-50

⁸³ Jan Van der Watt, *An Introduction to the Johannine Gospel and Letters* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 19.

⁸⁴ Grigsby, *The Cross*, 73 n. 22.

that one dies for all the people, that the whole nation not perish. The author emphasises that this was Jesus dying not just for the nation, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad (11:51-52).

The context of the Greeks coming to see Jesus' and Jesus' reply about the wheat dying suggests that there is a scene of a huge harvest of Jews and Greeks which would be harvested into God's kingdom after Jesus died.

Gail O'Day proposes that reconciliation does not occur at the point of Jesus' death: "For the Fourth Gospel, then, a theology of reconciliation does not focus exclusively on the death of Jesus, but on the Incarnation itself, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and on the interrelationship of God and Jesus in love that the Incarnation reveals."⁸⁵

She continues:

"the Fourth Gospel insists on *the Incarnation* as the starting point for any conversation about atonement and reconciliation and does not isolate Jesus' death on the cross as the sole agent of reconciliation. Jesus' glorification, the events of his 'hour', complete what began in the Incarnation (see 12:28), but the Incarnation itself is the locus of reconciliation."⁸⁶

Saviour

While Christ as Saviour is rarely mentioned directly (see 3:17 and the comment of the Samaritans in 4:42; note also 12:47), the notice that if people believe in Jesus as the Christ and Son of God then they shall have eternal life, suggests the role of Christ as Saviour. All that Jesus says and does happens with the view to salvation, to receive divine life. The signs are for belief and belief is for salvation.

The Work of the Cross and Community

John 12:24 describes Jesus' death as necessary and life-giving. Community is formed ("much fruit"). Discipleship is serving Jesus and the goal of service is a restored relationship with God and Jesus (12:25, 26). In Jesus' being lifted up, through his death all people will be drawn to him (12:32) i.e. again a focus on relationship.

In 12:23-36 the connection between Jesus' death and the life of the believing community is repeatedly stressed. This community are those who

redefine the meaning of life on the basis of Jesus' death (vv. 24 - 26). The faith community is the fruit of Jesus' death for those who believe that leads to the repeated expressions of temporal urgency in 12: 23 - 36 (note, for example, the frequent use of 'now' in these verses). It is critical to believe in Jesus so that one can share in the gift of his life, the gift that leads to eternal life, to the confident assurance of God's and Jesus' abiding presence.⁸⁷

Thus for Jesus' death to bring about reconciliation with God then one decides to believe in Jesus.

⁸⁵ O'Day, 203

⁸⁶ O'Day, 203.

⁸⁷ O'Day, 202.

The Burial Of Jesus (19:38-41)

Two interesting characters appear in John's account of the burial. The first is Joseph of Arimathea who is described as a disciple of Jesus "though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews". Joseph appears now to have "outed" himself by publicly coming to Pilate to ask to bury the body. In all the Gospels Joseph is responsible for Jesus' burial.

Similarly Nicodemus makes a public move with helping to place the body in the tomb. The reader is specifically reminded that Nicodemus had originally come to Jesus at night (v. 39). Do we have here an indication here that discipleship is to be a public confession without "fear of the Jews" or indeed fear of anybody?

It is noteworthy that some effort is made to highlight that Jesus is buried in accordance with the traditional Jewish custom (v. 40, note also v. 42). Jesus, whose public life is recorded in conjunction with the Jewish festivals and customs, although he gave these meanings fulfilled in himself, is now buried in accordance with these customs.

Unlike the Synoptics, there is no record of the women observing the location of his burial. In the Synoptics the women are recorded as going to the tomb on Sunday morning to anoint the body.

Here in *John*, Nicodemus is reported to have brought myrrh and aloes, weighing "about a hundred pounds" (v. 39, NRSV). The Greek states *litras hekaton* -100 Roman pounds (i.e. about 35kg!). Sylva⁸⁸ considers that the large amount of spices mentioned accentuate the failure to see that Jesus would live beyond death. De Kruijf⁸⁹ proposes that the 100 measures refer to volume not pounds - a more manageable load. Other suggestions are that the exorbitant amount represents a royal burial similar to Herod the Great's (where Josephus⁹⁰ records that 500 servants carried the aromatic spices). Another proposal is that it is another example of Johannine humour in exaggeration (cf. the huge amount of wine at the wedding at Cana and the large catch of fish in John 21).

For the Preacher

How does Jesus die for the people?

What sort of king is crucified?

The notes above outline various ironic features in John's narration of the Arrest and Passion. Are there times today when we don't perceive the work of God?

John portrays the crucifixion as the hour of glory, as Jesus' enthronement. How could we preach about this concept?

The preacher could explore the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus as offering life for the world.

⁸⁸ D.D. Sylva, "Nicodemus and the Spices (John 19.39)" *NTStudies* 34 (1988), 148-151.

⁸⁹ T.C. de Kruijf, "More than a hundredweight' of Spices (*John* 19:39 NEB). Abundance and Symbolism on the Gospel of John" *Bijdragen* 43 (1982), 234-239.

⁹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities* XVII.vii.3;199.

How can we translate the words above under the section "The Importance of Jesus' Death" into words appropriate for today?

Easter Day – John 20:1-18

Background on belief in resurrection

There is little in the Old Testament relating to the resurrection of the dead. Here are some snippets:

Psalm 49:14-15 (NRSV)

*Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home.
15 But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.*

Note also Psalm 6:5 (NRSV):

For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?

In 2 Maccabees 7:21-23 a mother grieves over the loss of her children:

*She encouraged each of them in the language of their ancestors. Filled with a noble spirit, she reinforced her woman's reasoning with a man's courage, and said to them,
22 "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. 23 Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of humankind and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws."*

Daniel 12:2 has:

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

The Resurrection in John

In John's Gospel the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension have become rather blurred. As Kysar says the enthronement of the crucifixion occurs with the resurrection accounts. The glorification of the cross is also the glory of the risen Lord.

The time sequence of when, for example, the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples, when Jesus ascends to the Father does not seem important to John. It is quite the opposite with the accounts in *Luke* and *Acts*.

Comparison with the Synoptics

John's account of the Resurrection is the longest of the Gospels.

Each Gospel records different events around the Resurrection appearances, particularly with regard to the women at the tomb. Marsh⁹¹ says John is concerned,

⁹¹ John Marsh, *Saint John* (Harmondsworth/Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 18.

“even more than the other evangelists, to tell us not just what took place, but what was going on in what took place”.

Jesus ensures that he is seen by the disciples and can even be touched and indeed is very much alive. He also prepares them for the new situation, when he will not be physically with them, but it is the time of the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit (promised by Jesus in chapters 14 to 16), when disciples will believe without seeing. It is now the time of mission that was begun in Jesus.

The resurrection is not predicted as clearly in *John* as it is in the Synoptics. Verses 10:17-18 allude to it but there is no specific resurrection language here:

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."

It almost seems as though Jesus returns to divine glory via the crucifixion. Indeed Bultmann said that nothing is added to the revelation of the glory by the resurrection of Jesus, because what Jesus accomplished he accomplished through his death.

Does the resurrection accomplish anything besides what has been done through Jesus' deeds, words, and death? Smith says that "The resurrection allows Jesus' ministry and message to be seen for what they were, and are. Jesus' resurrection means for John, as for other early Christians and the New Testament writers generally, that God authenticates Jesus as his Son."⁹²

2:19–21 also points to the resurrection using the analogy of Jesus as the Temple which will be raised up again. As indicated earlier, the power to take up life again (10:17f) is claimed as Jesus' authority and mission.

The appearance of the resurrected Jesus will lead Thomas to the momentous confession "my Lord and my God". This appears as the ultimate confession of the Gospel.

Chapter 21 especially emphasises the significance of the resurrection for the church.

The Discovery of the Empty Tomb (20:1-10)

In this passage Mary Magdalene is the first to discover the empty tomb. We then see Peter and this mysterious Beloved Disciple (BD) come to the tomb. Peter and the BD usually appear together in *John* and it is notable that they are portrayed here together at this significant event.

Generally the BD appears to be what good disciples are meant to be and usually acts as a foil for Peter's shortcomings. Here he sees and believes even though yet he hasn't seen the risen Lord (see below). We are not sure what he believes, however this apparently isn't relevant for John's narration of the story.

⁹² Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*, 123.

- v. 1 John states that it is still dark. (Mark 16:2 states that the sun had come up) Mary finds the tomb empty. Is this symbolic that the light of the world is not there?
- v. 2 Mary chooses to tell Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple that the tomb is not there. Although Mary has been the only one mentioned, she says “we” do not know where they placed Jesus’ body. Does this a reflection of other traditions apparent in the Synoptics which note several women at the tomb?
- v. 3-4 The BD reaches the tomb first (note this is another situation where the BD ends up looking better than Peter. Moloney suggests that this indicates a greater eagerness and the beginnings of belief that God has entered the story.”⁹³
- v. 5 The BD sees the grave clothes (*ta othonia*) from outside. Peter will go in and see them, but more.
- v. 8 Is this the catalyst for his belief? Schneiders⁹⁴ sees a link with Exod 34:33–35, the veil of Moses. The word *soudarion* is also used to describe Lazarus’ grave clothes (11:44).
Thus, among other reasons, Stibbe equates the BD with Lazarus. Byrne⁹⁵, without drawing that conclusion, still believes that the connection with the Lazarus story is pertinent. He argues that Lazarus’ grave clothes had to be removed by others, however, for the BD the fact that the *soudarion* was lying separately was a sign for him that Jesus himself had removed it and thus he believed. He notes that both disciples saw the other grave clothes from without the tomb, but that it wasn’t until one entered the tomb that the *soudarion* laid separately could be seen. It is given some emphasis in the narrative by means of the repetitions.

Lee⁹⁶ also notes several parallels in the accounts of Lazarus’ and Jesus’ raising:

- the arrival at the tomb (11:38; 20:1)
 - the grief and faith of the women present
 - the cavelike tomb with its heavy stone, which has first to be removed (11: 38-39, 41; 20:1)
 - the reference to the headcloth (*soudarion*, 11:44; 20:7) as noted above
 - the need to be freed from the grave-clothes (11:44; 20:6–7)
- v.9 Nigel Watson⁹⁷ argues that this comment is more appropriate if the disciples were bewildered, rather than that one 'believed'. Smith writes:⁹⁸ “the simplest explanation suffices: the Beloved Disciple’s belief is grounded in his seeing, even if he does not yet know the scriptural prophecy.”

⁹³ Moloney, *John*, 522.

⁹⁴ Sandra Schneiders “The Face Veil: A Johannine Sign (Jn 20.1-10)” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 13 (1983), 94-97.

⁹⁵ Brendan Byrne, “The Faith of the Beloved Disciple and the Community in John 20” in Stanley E. Porter & Craig A. Evans *The Johannine Writings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 31-45.

⁹⁶ Dorothy Lee, *Flesh and Glory: Symbolism, Gender and Theology in the Gospel of John* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 219.

⁹⁷ Nigel Watson, “John’s Witness to the Resurrection” in Hugh McGinlay (ed.) *The Years of John* (Melbourne: Joint Board of Christian Education, 1985), 81.

⁹⁸ Smith, *John*, 375.

Mary Magdalene's Encounter with Jesus (20:11-18)

There are some questions in the narrative:

How/when did Mary Magdalene get back to the tomb?

Why did the two disciples depart without talking to her?

Is it that the story of the disciples' coming to the tomb has been inserted into the earlier narrative of Mary's finding the empty tomb?

Who is seen at the tomb? Mark records a "young man" (the same word used of the boy who ran away naked in the garden). Matthew records an angel who has rolled the stone away. Luke records two men in dazzling clothes and John has two angels in white although the word for "angel" can mean simply "messenger".

The best we can do is to pick the important information out from the passage that John wishes to communicate to us as the reader.

- v. 12 The two angels at either end of the stone slab where Jesus' body had been laid recalls the two cherubim covering the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 37:7–9).
- v. 13 Mary speaks as a disciple - 'my Lord' (*ho kurios mou*).
- v. 15 Jesus addresses Mary (*gunai* – "woman") as he has his mother (2:4; 19:26) and the Samaritan woman (4:21).
Kysar points out that the two questions asked of Mary by Jesus are basic questions of life: "Why are you weeping?" and "Whom/What are you seeking?" (in terms of the human quest for meaning and fulfilment.)
- v. 16 Interpretation for non-Hebrew readers. The naming of Mary alludes to 10:1–18 where the Good Shepherd knows the sheep and calls them by name. The Good Shepherd brings life by laying down his life.
- v. 17 The present imperative in the Greek (*haptou* - "hold") denotes an action already happening. In other words the meaning is probably more: "Stop holding on to me".
Her response of holding Jesus was natural (Jesus will later invite Thomas to touch him). Yet she cannot prevent him going to the Father so that the Spirit may be given.

She must go to Jesus' brothers and sisters (*adelphoi*). This term is used for the first time in relation to the disciples. Jesus' relationship with the community has changed as they are children of the Father (cf. 1:12). We shall see this term again in 21:23.

The distinction between "my Father" and "your Father" and between "my God" and "your God" has sometimes been interpreted to mean that Jesus intends to emphasize how different his relationship is compared with that of the disciples. But that is to miss the intention of the Evangelist. He really intends to say that the God of Jesus is now also the God of the disciples ... the distinction in relationship to God between Jesus and the disciples has been abolished and not continued, as will be repeated in verses 21f in another form.⁹⁹

Jesus' ascension and resurrection are now being brought together in *John*.

⁹⁹ Haenchen, *John II* (Fortress Press), 210.

- v. 18 Mary's testimony to the disciples is extremely simple and yet profound: "I have seen the Lord" bringing in the theme of seeing. The perfect tense of the Greek adds the nuance that what was seen in the past still has an effect now in the disciples' present.

It is significant that it was a woman in John's account who is the first to see the risen Lord and goes and announces to the disciples. By such declaration she has been called the "apostle to the apostles".

For the Preacher

The theme of seeing and believing at the beginning of this chapter will continue to a blessing for those who don't see the resurrected Lord and yet still believe (20:29). The preacher may explore the concept of believing in the resurrection (see also John 20:30, 31).

What is our response to this belief? How might it compare with the reaction of Mary, Peter, the Beloved Disciple, or Thomas (at the end of the chapter)?

While in the first part of *John*, Jesus performs various significant "signs" which point to something about Jesus (e.g. "I am the Bread of Life" ch. 6, "I am the Light of the World", ch. 9, or in the Lazarus account, "I am the Resurrection and the Life", ch. 11). The preacher may choose to peel apart this statement "I am the Resurrection and the Life", especially in terms of what that means for us.

Is there anything that can be said about the place of women in the Resurrection account in *John*?

How did the Resurrection change the lives of the disciples, the Early Church, the Latter Church, our lives?

Easter Day Alternate Reading – Luke 24:1-12

See also the section above "Resurrection Appearances and Ascension (Ch 24)".

While this passage is key in the readings for the Church's year, it nevertheless is a bridge between the Cross and the resurrection and the ascension accounts (Luke 24:13-53), plus the living out of the resurrection gospel message (Acts), all of which are to follow this passage. For Luke, while this scene here is important, it is nevertheless a scene of absence. The tomb is empty. The resurrected Lord hasn't been seen yet. And yet this scene serves to make known the announcement of the men in dazzling clothes (cf. the angels announcing the birth of Jesus to the shepherds) that he has risen!

Joel Green writes:¹⁰⁰

The theme of incongruity Luke weaves into the story line of this scene serves a further function. It also underscores the import of Jesus' earlier teaching regarding how he would fulfill his divine role in his passion, how his suffering was neither a contradiction of his status before God nor the last word in God's plan for him. The

¹⁰⁰ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 836–840.

Evangelist has repeatedly noted the incapacity of the disciples to grasp this truth (e.g., 9:44–45; 18:31–34), but now he signals a breakthrough on the part of the women. If the male disciples continue in their obtuseness, and thus lack of faith, at least Peter responds to the witness of the women by going to the tomb. His behavior portends at least the possibility of a more full understanding of Jesus' message on their part.

It cannot be overlooked, though, that the move from perplexity to clarity on the part of the women disciples is enabled by the angelic call to remember Jesus' words. The empty tomb is little more than a mystery apart from its place in the sum of Jesus' ministry; only in light of his appraisal of the divine plan is interpretation conceivable. And it is precisely here that the parallel between the women and Peter breaks down. Both come to and enter the tomb, both find Jesus' corpse missing, and both return from the tomb. Only the women receive heavenly communication about these goings-on, however, so only they receive insight into their significance. Peter's "amazement" may represent an advance on the women's original bewilderment, but it is not yet faith or even comprehension. As Luke has it, events require interpretation, and the key to interpretation is Jesus' own articulation of the purpose of God.

All the Gospels have differing accounts of the Resurrection. Nolland writes:¹⁰¹

Apart from Mark (who only *anticipates* a meeting with the risen Jesus in Galilee), all of the Gospels also report encounters with the risen Jesus. But although there are any number of common motifs between accounts, no two of the accounts of an encounter with the risen Lord are straightforwardly versions of the same episode.

Each of the Gospels with resurrection appearances has "informal" encounters with Jesus prior to any meeting with the Twelve (Eleven). Matthew and John agree in having Mary Magdalene be the first to encounter the risen Lord (in Matthew not alone), but the circumstances and content of the encounter are quite different, except for the agreement that a message is to be conveyed to "my brothers."

Luke ensures the women see where Jesus is laid (23:55) to state that they fully expect to find the body of Jesus still there on Sunday morning. While their account is sadly not believed by the other disciples, it is confirmed by Peter (alone?) finding the empty tomb plus the grave clothes. Luke wishes to make it very clear that Jesus is no longer in the tomb but is alive.

Reference is made back to Jesus' teaching in Galilee (see 9:22, 44). Thus the Son Man has suffered and is vindicated. And so the women have been reminded of the teaching that they received from Jesus and thus there is no doubt that they are and have been truly disciples of Jesus. (See also 8:1-3; 23:49, 55.)

Nolland's comments are pertinent:¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, vol. 35C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1177–1194.

¹⁰² Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1177–1194.

It can hardly be doubted that some powerful and life-transforming experience overtook the early disciples. The beginnings of the early Christian movement cannot credibly be built on a fraudulent claim on their part, or on a delusion built up solely upon the disappearance of the body of Jesus, or upon a Jesus who only nearly died, or upon a merely theoretical conviction that Jesus must have been vindicated by God beyond his tragic death.

The question is often raised concerning whether the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples from heaven or from earth. But to answer such a question calls for a level of interpretation of the experience that goes beyond what is available in the core elements, and it may ultimately set the alternatives inappropriately. The resurrection appearances would seem to have constituted some kind of transitional phenomenon. The resurrected Jesus could no longer be thought of as having a continuous history in the spatio-temporal sphere, but neither had he decisively withdrawn to a heavenly sphere as would later be the case. His proper realm at this stage was in a resurrection sphere of existence not immediately identified with either the heavenly or the earthly; from this resurrection sphere, he would appear to have had access back to the spatio-temporal sphere and on into the heavenly sphere. The Jesus who was being encountered was the Jesus whom the disciples had known, rather than an alien, transcendent Jesus, but there was, nonetheless, a certain resurrection otherness to him.

Most of what Luke thinks of the resurrection can be seen from *Acts*. It is God's overruling a false verdict. (See Acts 2:23–24; 3:13–15; 5:30; 13:29–30). “The resurrection makes clear the divine affirmation of Jesus as both Lord and Christ (2:36). The resurrection was a necessity because of the impossibility of death keeping this particular person in its grip (2:24); because of who he was, “his flesh” could not be left to “see corruption” (2:31). The resurrection means that there is a living Jesus in whose name (and it is a power to be reckoned with) the disciples are able to proclaim and heal (3:15–16; 4:10). The resurrection is the public assurance that Jesus is the man appointed by God to judge the world in the name of God (17:31; cf. 10:40–42). Though in many ways unique, the resurrection of Jesus is nonetheless the kind of resurrection that, according to Pharisaic piety, was the prospect for all (23:6–9; 24:15, 21; 26:8). Possibly in 4:2 the resurrection of Jesus is made the basis for the resurrection hope of others (cf. 26:23).”¹⁰³

Remembrance is a key theme in this account. The call to remembrance for the women is important because the significance of the resurrection is unable to be separated from Jesus' earlier announcement of the necessity of both his suffering and his vindication as Son of Man.¹⁰⁴

The other disciples still find it difficult to remember and connect, and sadly they cannot believe the women's account, except maybe for Peter. He too, seems to be only developing in his resurrection faith.

For the Preacher

¹⁰³ Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1177–1194.

¹⁰⁴ Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, 1177–1194.

The Luke account provides a gradual opening up of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. The empty tomb itself is not proof of the resurrection and not all the disciples understand it yet. They haven't yet experienced the resurrected Lord. In fact as the weeks to follow are revealed (in part) to us by Luke, we see how this faith has to continue to grow and develop in understanding of the plan of God and the power of the Spirit. The preacher may choose to focus on this growth of faith in the life of their audience, and what is the relevance and meaning of the empty tomb for them. How does their own encounter with the resurrected Jesus in their lives today help them and others to grow in faith?

Easter Evening – 24:13-49 – The Road to Emmaus

The story of the two men travelling to Emmaus is unique to Luke. It goes according to God's plan again as the disciples are prevented from seeing and then they have their eyes opened. It is only after the disciples can perceive the risen Jesus that their eyes can be opened to the Scriptures and God's plan. Now all the scriptures are reinterpreted in the light of the resurrection.

It is intriguing that Luke mentions that the risen Lord has appeared to Simon, however Luke doesn't include this story in his account (as none of the gospel writers do, but see 1 Cor 15:5). The risen Jesus is appearing to other disciples besides the Twelve (Eleven).

With the Resurrection appearance to the disciples on the road we have a connection with the book of *Acts* with Jesus being known in the breaking of bread. In this encounter we see the unfolding plan of God, something which even included the death of Jesus.

Jesus' resurrection was a vindication of both Jesus and the plan of God.¹⁰⁵ Tiede notes how Luke's presentation of the resurrection "is focused on the incomprehensible wonder of God's reign."¹⁰⁶

For the Preacher

Craddock marks the following theological themes in this passage. Each of them could be a topic for a sermon in its own right. I have only summarised Craddock here with his headings:¹⁰⁷

Christ is known by revelation

A summary of the gospel recited by the travellers and by Jesus

The Old Testament Scriptures witness to Jesus

Christ is revealed in the sacramental meal

The disciples understand by remembrance

The disciples witness to what they have seen and heard

¹⁰⁵ Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 26.

¹⁰⁶ Tiede, *Luke*, 433.

¹⁰⁷ Craddock, *Luke*, 285-287.

Ascension Day – Luke 24:45-53 – The Lukan Commission and Ascension

In this passage we have a commission, a plan, and a promise.

Tiede notes that “In raising Jesus, God has demonstrated righteousness in the face of rejection of God’s reign (v. 46), given repentance to sinful humanity (v. 47), restored Israel’s election to be ‘witnesses to the nations’ (vv. 47-50), and revealed the definitive character of the kingdom in the exaltation of Jesus (vv. 50-52).”¹⁰⁸

The disciples are reminded of the Scriptures and Jesus’ fulfilment of them in the Resurrection in 24:45-47.

The plan is to bring the good news to all nations beginning with Jerusalem. The unfolding of this plan is laid out in *Acts*.

It is in *Luke* that we have the promise of the Holy Spirit (24:49) which will unfold in *Acts*.

Jesus’ parting words contain in a nutshell key features of Luke’s good news message:

- Fulfilment
- The Messiah suffers and rises from the dead
- Repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed to the whole world
- The task of witness
- The coming of power in the Holy Spirit

The ascension in *Luke* (24:50-51, also repeated in *Acts* 1:6-11) is located in Bethany. It is the exaltation predicted while Jesus is on trial in 22:69.

Luke finishes with the disciples in the Temple. This is where the story of Luke began. “The Gospel closes with the disciples rejoicing that, out of the ashes of apparent defeat, victory and promise have arisen. The new way is still alive and the risen Lord shows the way. Theophilus can be reassured.”¹⁰⁹

Now the story moves on into *Acts* where the commission of the disciples is enacted in the light of the risen and exalted Jesus.

Only the living Christ Himself was able to conquer the fear, perplexity and doubt of His disciples and to prepare them to enter the world as preachers of the glad tidings. And in like manner to-day it is only the risen Saviour Himself who can banish all fear from our hearts, and give us the inward rest and peace to enable us to act as living witnesses of our living Redeemer. And all the spiritual equipment that we need, he gives us through the Spirit, already given to His church in His fullness on that first Pentecost and to every believer in the moment of regeneration. And now

¹⁰⁸ Tiede, *Luke*, 439.

¹⁰⁹ Bock, *Luke* 1:1-9:50, 27.

there rests on every regenerate man and woman the responsibility of being so completely surrendered to Him and of so looking up to Him in faith and obedience, that He will from moment to moment equip us with His divine strength for the task to which we have been called.

For the Preacher

The summary list above could be a guide for the preacher:

- Fulfilment
- The Messiah suffers and rises from the dead
- Repentance and forgiveness is to be proclaimed to the whole world
- The task of witness
- The coming of power in the Holy Spirit