

AFTER PENTECOST - PART 2

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Authorship and Dating of *Luke*

As with the majority of Biblical books it is difficult to know for sure who wrote them. It is often assumed that Luke the “beloved physician” (mentioned by Paul in Col 4:4) wrote *Luke*, nowhere does it say this in the Gospel itself. We are not sure exactly when the title “The Gospel According to Luke” was added, and how reliable this is.

Some cite the use of medical terminology in *Luke* to support the case that it was the “beloved physician” who wrote it. Upon comparison with other ancient literature, however, it is apparent that the author uses vocabulary that any educated person could use, without necessarily having to be a doctor.¹ For example, the words that are used for illnesses and cures are found in other non-medical writings of the day, e.g. the Septuagint, Josephus, Plutarch and Lucian.²

Interestingly, however, there are some places in *Luke* where he seems to be more sympathetic than Mark to doctors. This comes out very noticeably in the story of how Jesus healed a woman with the haemorrhage. Mark 5:26 records that she had been treated by many doctors, and then comments, perhaps cynically, ‘She had spent all her money, but instead of getting better she got worse all the time,’ while Luke 8:43, on the other hand, simply comments that ‘no one had been able to cure her’.³

Whoever is the writer of this Gospel, most would agree that it is the same person who wrote *Acts*, and would most likely have been a companion of Paul at least on parts of the journeys listed in this second volume. Several times the narrator of *Acts* uses “we”.

Some note apparent differences between the Paul of *Acts* and the Paul we see in his letters. The historical detail in *Luke-Acts* is often questioned. Was the Paul of *Acts* generated by an author who was not really with Paul the way that the “we” passages in *Acts* imply? It must also be said that the “we” passages “come and go” throughout the book. This topic is a large can of worms and we don’t have the facilities to explore this fully here. I am simply trying to sketch some of the difficulties when it comes to the concept of authorship. The reader can consult the commentaries on *Luke* and *Acts* if they wish to pursue this topic further.

Many believe that *Luke* was written by a Hellenistic Jewish person. The author does not betray an intimate knowledge of Palestine however he (or remotely possibly “she” but unlikely) shows a sound knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures and the Jewish tradition. Yet the author shows great Greek literary skills. It has been noted that the author shows some affinity to the Romans, as he portrays them quite positively throughout *Luke* and *Acts*.⁴

As with all the Gospels, dating is difficult. *Luke* seems likely to have been written after the fall of Jerusalem in 70CE. It must have been written before 150 CE since this is when Irenaeus notes it is part of a four-Gospel collection. Most scholars would date it between 70 and 90CE.

As already indicated, Luke’s style is good polished Greek. There are many times when he smooths out incongruities in Mark’s account, removes unnecessary detail, and more so than Matthew, uses different words for variety.

¹ Drane, *Introduction to the Bible*.

² Richard B. Vinson, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2008), 3.

³ Drane, *Introduction to the Bible*.

⁴ V. George Shillington, *An Introduction to the Study of Luke-Acts* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 11.

He likes using contrast in colouring the stories. Thus we have:⁵

An old woman and young girl discuss their sons-to-be (ch. 1)

Angels and shepherds (ch. 2)

Blessings and woes (ch. 6)

The prostitute and faithful woman (chs. 7,8)

Pharisees rejecting and befriending Jesus (ch. 13)

Hearing the prayers of saints and sinners (ch. 18)

Luke shows a great deal of psychological insight in the stories he relates

Jesus Who Is Compassionate

The predominate picture of Jesus which Luke paints for us is one of compassion.

Stories of Compassion

Similar to Luke's compassionate treatment of these groups are the stories of Jesus that he records which don't appear in the other Gospels and show compassion or grace of Jesus:

- the story of the 2 debtors (7:41-43) - 500 and 50 denarii
- a "sinful" woman (7:36-58)
- the good Samaritan (10:29-37)
- lost sheep, lost coin, lost son (ch 15)
- the prayer of the Pharisee vs the prayer of the tax-collector (18:9-14)
- Zacchaeus (19:1-10)
- Jesus forgives his executioners (23:34)
- compassion for the thief on the cross (23:39-43)

7:13 speaks of Jesus showing compassion. Jesus calls the disciples to show compassion also (10:33). Jesus seems to be a person who really cares and who cares for people who might be on the underside of life, or who are somehow abused by the system or the authorities.

We shall now discuss a few particular passages in Luke as they appear in the lectionary readings.

⁵ Craddock, *Luke*, 6-7.

Pentecost 10 – Luke 12:49-56 – Division in the Household

This section continues the theme of watchfulness which has appeared in the previous passages. The focus now, however, comes to Jesus discussing the reality of judgment *already at work* in his ministry. It speaks of confrontation with serious choices with Jesus' coming.

The second section in this passage (vv. 54–59) speaks once again of end-time judgment.

Verses 49-53

Jesus talks in terms of his having a “baptism with which to be baptized” (v. 50). Here baptism can be seen as something into which someone is *plunged*. Here he is probably speaking of his own suffering which he must endure as part of his mission. He is constrained for this mission as he endures its completion.⁶ The Greek word *synechein* shouldn't be translated as “being distressed” rather: “to be preoccupied” or “taken up [with]”.⁷

The image of verses 49-53 seems to clash with the announcement of Jesus as the beginning of peace on earth. Of John the Baptist in 1:17 it was said that he would “turn the hearts of parents to their children”. The angels appearing to the shepherds in 2:14 sang of the peace coming to the world. How do we explain this paradox? Nolland writes:⁸

Though it is not said so here, of course he will bring peace. The point is that end-time expectations involve properly the prospect of a time of great distress before the full realization of the hope of God's peace is possible. Jesus himself becomes the point of division that will set people against one another, in conflict and not in peace. This conflict will penetrate even into the heart of family life, with family members set firmly against one another. This passage echoes Mic 7:6, a text that had clearly influenced Jewish expectations of Jesus' day about the shape of the end period. The conflict anticipated here has been reflected already in the challenge in 12:1–12 to make a clear-cut acknowledgment of Jesus no matter what the opposition or the personal cost.

Jesus states that judgment has already begun.

The new followers, by the nature of their beliefs, will naturally come into conflict with their family members, and so antagonism is understandable. Such antagonism is not the will of Jesus' mission but an outcome of it, as forces of good come into contact with forces of evil. Jesus himself will be the victim of such conflict as he moves towards the

⁶ R. T. France, *Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 226.

⁷ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 508–512.

⁸ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 707–713.

Cross. Indeed this lack of peace sadly becomes a sign of the mission as Jesus and his message is rejected.

Green continues:⁹

Jesus' reference to "baptism" might serve less as a metaphor for judgment and more as a reference to this event in his own life, since Luke presents Jesus' baptism, in part, as an episode of commissioning. It would be this divine mandate that consumes Jesus or drives him forward. Again, the choice of the verb, "to complete," conveys the idea that Jesus is concerned in this co-text to stress the divine nature of his charge. Judgment, from this perspective, is not a surprising consequence of his ministry and is not a contradiction of his mission; rather, it is integral to it. He had come as God's representative to bring division, so the dissolution of family bonds (which, in the Lukan narrative, has as its consequence the formation of a new kinship group around Jesus) should be taken as confirmation that he is God's agent and that he is bringing to fruition the purpose of God. Jesus' phrase "from now on" further locates the significance of the division Jesus describes within the interpretive framework of his mission; it is from this statement of his divine charge that division within families will take its meaning.

Luke will later honour the commandment to love one's parents (18:20) but already in 8:21 Luke talks about family in terms of readiness to do God's will. This is what will create division.

Peter describes the "content" of the gospel message as "peace" (Acts 10:36). Yet earlier in Luke Jesus' speaks to the sinful woman amongst the rejection of his companions at table with him (7:36–50). Both Simeon and John had prophesied about Jesus as one who would divide Israel (2:34–35; 3:17)

Verses 54-56

In Palestine, the west wind would bring moisture inland from the Mediterranean Sea and with it the rain (cf. 1 Kgs 18:44–45). The south or south-westerly wind, on the other hand, would bring the heat from the Negev desert, the Arabian desert, or even from Africa, "a furnace blast of desert air (common in late spring) that can raise the temperature thirty degrees in an hour."¹⁰

Jesus is critical of those who know how to read those weather signs but cannot understand the signs of the present time.

Key to his message is the label he gives the crowds, "hypocrites." The usage of this term here corroborates our earlier view that, in the world of Luke, "hypocrite" does not refer to someone who simply plays a role (see above on vv 1–3). Jesus plainly regards the crowds not as deceivers or phonies but as people who "do not know." His question, then, is not why they say one thing and do another, but why they have joined the Pharisees (see v 1) in living lives that are not determined by God.

⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 508–512.

¹⁰ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 508–512.

Misdirected in their fundamental understanding of God's purpose, they are incapable of discerning the authentic meaning of the signs staring them in the face. What signs are these? Others have been noted previously (cf. 7:21–22; 11:20, 29–32); here, the sign requiring interpretation is the reality of family division—itsself a manifestation of Jesus' divine mission and a portent of coming judgment. "The present time" is thus to be read in apposition to Jesus' earlier phrase "from now on" (v 52).¹¹

So now Jesus focuses on coming judgment. Jesus has the role of the endtimes judge. While that still awaits a future time we see in Jesus' own immediate earthly future the heartbreak that will occur with the division that his mission creates.

The same skills used in observing the signs of nature are to be used as preparation for the day when we are answerable to God. "The events in the ministry of Jesus should make clear to all that the flow of world history is moving rapidly toward its appointment with the judgment of God."¹²

Nolland continues:

The following verses make it clear that Jesus does not stand over against the world as fiery judge, but that he also must make his way through the end-time distress for which it is his task to set ablaze the refiner's fire. Jesus awaits with eager anticipation the fulfillment of God's purposes.

A second matter, not unlinked with the first, also preoccupies Jesus' mind. He who is to spread a fire upon the earth is himself destined to be overwhelmed by disaster: he will be "immersed" in disaster. In the Lukan account, we find this preoccupation reflected in 9:51 and in the passion predictions. What Jesus anticipates here is no mere fate or accident but a destiny, which God has set for him to fulfill.¹³

After these two illustrations the point is made more generally: when it comes to earth and sky (the two divisions of the natural order), people bring to bear their interpretive skills to anticipate the future and so to be prepared for it. Jesus accuses the crowds of hypocrisy because they are not ready to apply the same shrewdness to the indicators contained in the unfolding of his own ministry (and perhaps also its precursor in the ministry of John). The events of "this [present] time" point just as reliably as any weather indicators to the coming day of answerability to God.¹⁴

For the Preacher

We must stand in awe of Jesus who was so constrained to complete his mission, despite the lack of peace that would occur as the result of the proclamation. Today we

¹¹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 508–512.

¹² Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 707–713.

¹³ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 707–713.

¹⁴ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 707–713.

can be so cautious about the impact of God's mission, and sometimes we need the wisdom to know how not to quench the fire of the same Spirit who can also drive us.

Jesus fully understood the implications of such a mission: it would not always be sweet, even causing division in the most basic of our relationships. This passage prepares us for the conflict surrounding Jesus' final presence in Jerusalem. The signs are there in Jesus' life, death and resurrection of coming judgment. How do we prepare?

What do you think of France's comment: "'being ready' is not a matter of calculating the possible date or of giving up the ordinary responsibilities of life. The steward's 'readiness' consists in faithful service, in fulfilling responsibilities at all times, so as not to be caught unprepared."?¹⁵

Pentecost 11 – Luke 13:10-17 – Jesus and Women

Luke alone reports this incident and, as Luke often includes stories about women, it is significant. For more notes on Jesus and women in *Luke*, see the earlier set of notes: "Pentecost and Beyond". It is pertinent to note here also that Luke often balances stories about men with similar episodes about women. See 14:1-6 for a similar story involving a man.

The context is Jesus teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus has already engaged in Sabbath activities which have led to him being criticized (6:1-11). Jesus in *Luke* has already proclaimed (again on the Sabbath) his coming to bring release. Here again Jesus acts out this releasing the oppressed and those held captive.

Was the synagogue leader addressing the crowd (instead of Jesus) directly because he found Jesus too formidable an opponent? Is he attempting to assert his own teaching authority?¹⁶

While the synagogue leader uses the Greek *dei* to say that it was not "lawful" or "ought" not be done on the Sabbath, now Jesus uses the same Greek word to indicate that this woman "should" indeed be healed. It was indeed necessary. Even people untie their animals on the Sabbath to provide water for them, how much more is it necessary for this woman to be similarly released to find the waters of healing and life.

Jesus elsewhere is compelled to act in the "today" (see 4:21 "today this is fulfilled" and 23:43 "today you will be with me in Paradise").

In verse 15 we see Jesus addressed as "the Lord". It is worth noting that it is not uncommon for Luke (unlike the other Synoptics) to address Jesus as such, in fact he has been doing it since 7:13. This is a title of deep respect and in the Greek version of the Old Testament it is the way to refer to God.

¹⁵ France, *Luke*, 226.

¹⁶ France, *Luke*, 232.

The word “hypocrite” is addressed to the ruler and his like, not to the crowd of v. 14. While there were restrictions on *how* the needs of animals could be met on the Sabbath, there was certainly the understanding that their needs *should be* met, even on the Sabbath. Jesus points to the hypocrisy of those who could care for animals but not for people including this “daughter of Abraham” (v. 16). (Jesus will later refer to Zacchaeus as a “son of Abraham”). Animals were not to be left tied up for one day however this daughter of Abraham has been tethered for eighteen years.¹⁷

And so, as Jesus has seen this woman in captivity, he offers her complete restoration and deliverance from her imprisonment. She then gives glory to the God who is behind her new-found freedom.¹⁸

“The Sabbath should be a day of joy rather than of suffering”.¹⁹ In fact according to Luke 6:1-11 the Sabbath is a day for doing good.

For the Preacher

The preacher may choose this passage as a springboard to discuss the place of women in *Luke*. Related to that are the implications towards women in our society and church today.

The preacher could encourage us to look within ourselves for evidence of hypocrisy in the way we treat ourselves and others (and even animals!) and yet forsake the needs of others enduring some type of social or physical bondage (e.g. the poor, the less able bodied).

In another direction, Luke interprets Jesus’ healing as a release from Satan’s oppression (13:10-17). What is the place of the concept of Satan in our current religious thinking? What are the implications for the origin of suffering in our theology?

Some scholars see a connection with the previous passage where the Tower of Siloam fell on 18 people (13:4), and the number 18 in this passage, perhaps an allusion back to that passage where Jesus makes it clear that those on whom the Tower had fallen were no worse sinners than anyone else. The implication is that this woman is no worse a sinner than anyone else. The preacher may choose to explore the question of suffering.

Carroll writes:²⁰

Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath, far from being an action counter to Torah and to the holy purposes of God, is in harmony with God’s character and ways. If the Sabbath is about restorative rest for human beings, in honor of God, who is alike Creator (Exod

¹⁷ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 722–725.

¹⁸ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 722–725.

¹⁹ France, *Luke*, 232.

²⁰ John T. Carroll, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 285.

20:8-11) and Liberator from bondage (Deut 5:12-15), then it is, in Jesus' perception, both fitting and *necessary* to free the woman from bondage on the Sabbath.

Are there times today when religious "practice" inhibits God's life-giving desire for our world?

Pentecost 12 – Luke 14:1, 7-14 – The Honourable and the Poor

This passage focuses on meals in different ways. To be at table with Jesus throughout *Luke* is an interesting exercise, as it always introduces significant teachings and parables of Jesus. (See, for example Jesus' encounter with a woman in 7:36-50. Jesus has a meal with Zacchaeus (19:1-10), and now here with a leader of the Pharisees. All three examples given here provide an opportunity for Jesus to make critical statements.)

Firstly, in this passage, Jesus notes how the guests were seeking to sit at the places of honour, prompting him to tell them a parable about seeking the places of low honour at the table. The places of high honour were those couches closest to the host.

This parable concludes with Jesus' saying "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." (v. 11) This saying reflects the exaltation of those who would sit at table with God.²¹ Indeed such a deeper interpretation of the parable will lead into another parable in 14:15-24.

We saw in the previous set of notes in "Pentecost and Beyond" how Luke ensures we hear about Jesus' concern for people who are not always at the top of the tree. In fact his mission in chapter 4 is described as to those who are oppressed and the poor.

Humility is an important feature of Luke's Jesus.

Jesus then proceeds in this passage to take his saying to its shocking conclusion, that when one invites people to their dinner, not to invite the people who are of their same social status, or who are people of means, but instead to invite the "poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." He concludes most pointedly "you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (v. 14)

To include such people in an invitation list would go against the norms of a society which was concerned with social status, and improving honour in the eyes of people in that society. One who could afford dinner parties would wish to invite the members of the elite. Reciprocation would also be expected. While giving to the poor was not outside the expectations upon the elite, nevertheless the act of inviting such people to banquets was not even considered. "By doing this, the host is dishonouring family and

²¹ Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 229.

rich neighbors and in their place is honouring the poor; or, in the eyes of the elite, the host is dishonouring himself by identifying with the poor.”²²

And so Jesus is dramatically turning upside down the societal norms. This is something which would have been shocking to the elite (and possibly even to the addressee of the Gospel, Theophilus, who in 1:3 is given the title “most excellent”).

Now the idea of reciprocity is upset, but Jesus notes that it is now in God’s hands so that those who exalt the humble “will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (v. 14).

For the Preacher

The exaltation of those who humble themselves may not always apply in human situations, but it certainly is the way that it works with the more-encompassing Reign of God. How might we seek the places of honour in our world?

The idea of questioning society’s norms was abhorrent in the time of Jesus. Are there norms in our cultures today which need to be questioned, even at the cost of losing personal honour amongst our peers?

How can the church be engaged in honouring the poor, and the people at the underside of life?

Pentecost 15 – Luke 16:1-13 – Parable of the Threatened Manager

This is one of the strangest stories we encounter in any of the Gospels. Is Jesus encouraging corruption in this parable? Isn’t the hero of his story a crook?! There have been a multitude of interpretations of this parable and we shall discuss some possibilities below. For all these reasons this passage is often by-passed when it comes to preparing sermons!

In terms of the context of this story, while the addressees in this passage have changed (now it is the disciples), an underlying theme still continues, especially linking with 14:1-24 and 15:1-32 (parables of being lost and welcoming hospitality).

Nolland identifies three questions arising from this passage which are key to its interpretation:

- What was the manager doing?
- What was the point of the parable, as told by Jesus?
- What did Luke regard as the point of the parable?

²² Tannehill, *Luke*, 230.

Was the manager corrupt or, as others have interpreted this parable, was he actually acting quite legally? While this latter interpretation might seem surprising, Nolland notes that interest on the deferred payments could have been included in the original accounts. What the manager was then doing was writing off the interest owed to his master. Another suggested possibility is that he is taking off his own commission. And so the manager asked the debtors to rewrite their bills, by either taking out the interest, or by removing the manager's commission.²³

According to Jewish Law, the charging of interest was strictly illegal, although people had managed to find ways around this. Thus the manager can now be seen as acting legally and at the same time putting his master in a good light. Either that, or the manager could be commended by the master for forgoing his commission. A problem with this view, however, is that the question is then raised whether Luke's later (Hellenistic?) audience would have understood this Jewish law.²⁴

The manager in the Roman context could either be a slave or a freedman who acted on behalf of his master in business affairs. This was an enviable position of high status and so it is understandable that he is concerned about his future. If he is let go not only would he lose his lodgings but his only remaining options would be doing a job with hard labour, or begging for money. A drop in status indeed!

Throughout there is a play on the word "receive" which is more apparent in the Greek. His aim now is to be welcomed or received (vv. 4, 9) into people's homes, those who will "take" or "receive" their bills (vv. 6, 7). Elsewhere in *Luke* this verb is generally used with reference to hospitality, and this is the case in v 4. Who will offer the manager hospitality? Those who, as it were, "receive" their amended loan agreements.²⁵

Green continues:

The quantities involved in the renegotiation of debts are quite large (cf. Ezra 7:21–24), reflecting the produce, respectively, of a considerable olive grove and of an acreage twenty to twenty-five times that of an ordinary family farm. That this master has outstanding loan balances of these proportions marks him as a wealthy man indeed; similarly, these data indicate the enormity of the amount of the debt forgiven by the manager. What is more, given the stylized language of Jesus' narration ("one by one ... the first ... another ..."), we may easily assume that the scenario painted in these two instances is representative of the many times it was repeated, with many debtors having their rather substantial debts similarly relaxed.²⁶

Whether the steward acted legally or not may not be as pertinent a question upon further consideration. It was not so much his *actions* that were seen as praiseworthy but his *shrewdness* with looking towards his long-term future. Elsewhere Jesus is willing to use less than admirable characters to highlight "how much more" followers should

²³ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792–803.

²⁴ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792–803.

²⁵ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 588–594.

²⁶ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 588–594.

behave. (See an example of “how much more” God will behave in the parable in Luke 18:1-8.)

Interpretation of the parable has then differed as to whether the application is found in v. 9 where the disciples are commanded to use available money as wisely as possible in order to secure places for themselves in heaven (particularly to encourage almsgiving) or the message was simply to imitate the manager’s *shrewdness* in recognising the imminence of disaster and acting appropriately.²⁷

Nolland continues with the problem of interpretation and where the parable originally spoken by Jesus ends, and when, and if, Luke has added a secondary ending:²⁸

Here the commentators are of very varied minds (cf. Fitzmyer, 165–168). All are agreed that vs. 10–13 represent secondary applications of the parable or further developments of its theme. V. 9 is obviously meant to be an application of the parable by Jesus; similarly, v. 8b must be seen as a comment on the parable. But v. 8a could be regarded as a comment by Jesus (‘the Lord’) or as a statement about the steward’s master’s reaction. If the former view is correct, the parable proper concludes with v. 7. V. 9 shows how Luke understood the parable: it has to do with the proper use of wealth. If it is detached as a secondary addition, then the original application of the parable must be determined from the parable itself, the presence or absence of the whole or part of v. 8 making little difference to the verdict. In this case, both the ‘use of money’ application and the ‘act prudently’ application are possible.

Vinson offers the following:²⁹

This unrighteous – dishonest, yes, but more like amoral or undeterred by God’s laws – overseer is a good example of how non-moral people may do the right thing for the wrong reason.

He helped the poor, didn’t he? He scattered the rich man’s stuff, just as Mary said Jesus would do (1:51); he forgave debts, just as Jesus commanded (6:30, 35; 11:4). Sure, he did it with someone else’s money, and he did it to feather his own nest. But he gave away a boatload of cash, and so proves to have more wisdom than many so-called ‘children of light.’ Verse 9 then urges Jesus’ followers to do the same with their own ‘mammon,’ or money. Like the overseer, it too is called ‘unrighteous’ because it exists apart from God and God’s purposes. The point is not for Christians to give away any ill-gotten gain, but that all gain that they have not yet disposed of is outside God’s purposes, since Jesus has said, repeatedly, to give it all away. ‘Make friends’ who will receive you into ‘eternal tents’ – not so much the poor you help, but those in the kingdom of God who will welcome you to God’s tent one day.

Verses 10-12 continue to draw lessons from the parable. An overseer must be *pistos*, which means reliable – someone in whom the master can put faith. If the overseer proves reliable in small things, bigger responsibilities will come; but being

²⁷ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792-803.

²⁸ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792-803.

²⁹ Vinson, *Luke*, 524-5.

unrighteous (*adikos*, which is a different form of the adjective used to modify the overseer in v. 8 and mammon in vv. 9 and 11) or unreliable in small things will crush your chances for the big time. Verse 11 then argues that money – unrighteous mammon – is the small time, a proving ground for bigger things to come, like the eternal kingdom of God. The message is that if we blow this one – if we can't use 'filthy lucre' the way Jesus told us to – then why would he entrust us with his kingdom? Recall 12:32-33: 'Don't be afraid, little flock, because your father graciously intends to give you the kingdom. Sell your stuff and give alms!'

Talbert, when looking at v. 8b, highlights that the call for disciples is to act wisely in their use of the wealth under their control. Even the non-believers are shrewder in their thinking about future planning.³⁰

Geldenhuis writes:³¹

It was His object (as appears from the last words of verse 8) to use the parable to call attention to the 'wise' and diplomatic manner in which worldlings generally act towards their fellow men [*sic*] in order to achieve their own selfish aims... The Saviour Himself in verse 8 calls the dishonest steward 'unjust', there was no danger that His hearers would interpret His words as though he was recommending dishonest methods... he calls worldly possessions the mammon of unrighteousness, because injustice is so often involved in the accumulation and use of earthly possessions. But the Saviour nowhere teaches that material possessions as such are sinful and unclean... They should be so free from avarice and so inspired by real unselfish love that, as God leads them, they will whole-heartedly share their material possessions with those who need them. In this way they will gain for themselves an imperishable treasure in heaven.... ”.

Geldenhuis concludes:³²

... if anyone is unfaithful in connection with these 'borrowed goods' how can he [*sic*] be expected to receive God's eternal riches, the spiritual gifts given for time and eternity to the redeemed as their own?... Do we use our worldly possessions in such manner that there will be persons in Eternity who will be glad to receive us? Or will there be numbers who will point accusing fingers at us because we neglected or injured them through our unfaithful conduct in connection with the earthly goods entrusted to us?

Green writes:

Jesus counsels his disciples to make friends with mammon, to be sure, and this might take the form of giving to those in need or the more specific form of canceling debts (cf. 4:18–19; 6:35; 7:41–42; 11:4). *But Jesus provides no basis by which his followers might come to expect reciprocation from these friends.* This is due (1) to his earlier teaching that disciples should practice giving without expectation of return (6:32–35), and (2) to his expectation that the disciples would give to those who were

³⁰ Talbert, *Reading Luke*, 154.

³¹ Geldenhuis, *Luke*, 415-416.

³² Geldenhuis, *Luke*, 417.

incapable of reciprocation—that is, that they would give alms to the poor. Neither of these perspectives on giving can be ruled out; in the current co-text they are complementary. Like the former, the latter is commended within the larger Lukan narrative, where Jesus counsels the disposition of possessions (and hospitality) on behalf of the poor with the understanding that, while mammon will vanish, eternal treasure will have thus been secured (esp. 12:33; 14:12–14). Taken on its own, this form of “making friends” would create a patron-client relationship, with the poor now indebted to serve and honor those who had provided for them. Such an understanding is undercut, though, by Jesus’ related insistence that giving be done freely, with no strings attached, without expectation of return. In this case, “almsgiving” has as its consequence genuine social solidarity between rich and poor, who act toward each other as “equal friends.”³³

It appears then that the manager is honoured for his shrewdness in planning for the future and not for any apparent dishonesty. How much more should the children of the light act so?

The thought of being received into the heavenly realms by our actions in this age sound like “salvation by works.” Marshall writes: “the point is surely that the giving of alms is a testimony to the reality of discipleship and self-denial; in any case, Jesus makes it quite clear that it is the attitude of the heart to God that ultimately matters and not any outward show of giving charity.”³⁴

Nolland adds:³⁵

... chap 15 has emphasized divine initiative and heavenly joy, with repentance in the background; now human responsibility is stressed, especially in connection with the attitude to and the use of wealth, and the divine initiative is only briefly alluded to. A theme developed in the section is that the law of the OT and the gospel of the NT speak with a united voice about the need for a practical moral response to be lived out in the human interactions of life.

Who are these “children of the light” (v. 8)? Nolland writes:³⁶

“Sons of light” are in the Lukan setting illuminati who are, through a knowledge of God given in this eschatological [end times] period, aware of the larger shape of reality, its moral texture, and its orientation to the future judgment. Luke draws from the parable the lesson that, despite this state of awareness, Christians seem less effective at cutting their cloth to their situation than do the worldly wise. Is this a Lukan apology for the embarrassment to the cause of the gospel that Christians can sometimes be, or is it a challenge to Christians to rise to the occasion?

³³ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 588–594.

³⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 614–622.

³⁵ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792–803.

³⁶ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792–803.

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Jesus uses an dishonest character to highlight the shrewdness that believers are encouraged to use. The Greek word for shrewdness also has the connotations of acting wisely and with understanding. There is no calling by Jesus for corrupt behaviour, but even if a corrupt person can manage money wisely, how much more should a believer use money available to them for the sake of the Reign of God? The appropriate use of wealth will overstep social boundaries between rich and poor in order to participate in a form of economic redistribution grounded in kinship.³⁷

France has:³⁸

The mention of ‘eternal dwellings’ indicates that the ‘friends’ represent not earthly supporters but rather a heavenly reception committee. Just as the manager made sure he had a refuge after he lost his job, so disciples should ensure that they will be welcome in heaven when this life is over. A responsible and generous use of possessions is one way to make such preparation (cf. 14:14).

Nolland summarises:³⁹

The whole of the action has taken place in connection with the less than savory nature of what so often goes on in the world of business and high finance. The ethics are at a pretty low level. But what should attract our attention is that the steward has shrewdly appraised the situation in which he found himself, and acted to save himself. The challenge is for us to have the shrewdness to recognize and seize the opportunity that exists in the midst of threat. In the immediate context, the threat and opportunity are those created by the ministry of Jesus. But beyond that the story challenges all Christians to be as successful as the worldly wise in cutting their cloth according to their situation: to act committedly in the light of what we know (in knowing God in Christ) of the larger shape of reality, its moral texture, and its orientation to the future judgment.⁴⁰

Pentecost 17 – Luke 17:5-10 – Parable of the Mustard Seed

Here Jesus doesn’t “increase the faith” of the apostles. Rather he praises the power of faith. Even small faith can do amazing things.

France offers:⁴¹ “This response therefore brushes aside the request for *increased* faith: it is not the ‘amount’ of faith that matters, but the power of the God in whom that faith is placed” Tannehill says of the nature of “faith” here:⁴²

³⁷ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 588–594.

³⁸ France, *Luke*, 262.

³⁹ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792–803.

⁴⁰ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 792–803.

⁴¹ France, *Luke*, 273.

⁴² Tannehill, *Luke*, 255.

...faith here is associated with wonder-working power, as in the related passages in Matt 17:19-20; 21:18-21; Mark 11:20-24 (cf. also 1 Cor 13:2 and the description of Stephen as a 'man full of faith' who 'did great wonders' in Acts 6:5, 8). Such power was lacking in Luke 9:40-41, but in Acts the leading missionaries perform miracles just as Jesus did. Wonder-working power can lead to adulation and pride, which makes the following short parable relevant.

Slaves were not wage earners who could expect pay or favours in return for their work. The slave wouldn't have been invited to sit with their master at the table.

For verses 7-10 France says:⁴³

A slave, however tired he may be, does as he is told expects no thanks for it. This may seem a bleak model for discipleship: is our God a slave driver? But the point is that the best we can do is still less than what we owe to God as our sovereign Lord; there is no place for preening and complacency in discipleship. 'Unworthy' could also be translated 'useless'; the same word is used in Matthew 25:30 for the slave who gained no profit for his master. We can never put God in our debt.

While the disciples were being asked to consider how a master would have expectations of the slaves, Jesus now turns the story around for the apostles to put themselves in the position of the slaves. In other words, the disciple serves out of duty, not expecting a special favour. Tannehill notes that this parable of Jesus precludes the Last Supper story where Jesus will tell those who would be leaders that they need to renounce the desire to be great rather they are like those who serve.⁴⁴

For the Preacher

The preacher can explore either the nature of faith and our motivations for seeking faith, or encourage a healthy attitude towards the God whom we serve. This opens up possibilities of considering how we may serve God.

Pentecost 21 – Luke 19:1-10 – Zacchaeus

Here we have a story towards the end of the Travel Narrative (commencing at 9:51). It is in the context of connection between faithfulness and an identification with Jesus. Now, and unique to *Luke*, we have the story of a chief tax-collector who, although apparently being a person of some wealth, thinks nothing of climbing a tree in order to see Jesus.

⁴³ France, *Luke*, 274.

⁴⁴ Tannehill, *Luke*, 256.

Jericho was an administrative centre and so was a suitable location for a chief tax collector. As such he would probably have been well-known and unpopular within that community.⁴⁵

“It is right to speak of a ‘bias toward the poor’ in Luke’s portrayal of Jesus, and it may have seemed at times that the rich are regarded as irredeemably bad (16:19-31; 18:18-27); but here is a rich man who also finds salvation. Even he can be a true son of Abraham.”⁴⁶

Jesus eating with Zacchaeus upset other onlookers because of the low esteem such tax collectors had in the Jewish community. This was not just because they gathered taxes, not just because they often pocketed too much of these, but also they were working for the Romans (and thus Gentiles). It was therefore a significant thing that Jesus should eat with someone of a class of people who were so often seen to be unclean.

His encounter with Jesus must have been so positive that his life turns around and he offers to reimburse those whom he has defrauded and to give generously to the poor. The fourfold reimbursement is by reference to Exod 22:8 and 2 Sam 12:6 a confession of theft.⁴⁷

The statement that salvation has come to the house is an indication that salvation also implies a sense of turning from corrupt ways. (See Luke 10:5; John 4:53; Acts 10:1-48; 18:8 for other examples of salvation involving other people in the household.)

The story occurs just prior to the Passion account as Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. Thus Jesus’ comment to Zacchaeus in closing this account (v. 10) is pertinent for what is about to follow in *Luke*: “*For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.*”

Geldenhuis comments in relation to this story:⁴⁸ “When Jesus comes into a person’s life, and gains authority there, selfishness and dishonesty are irresistibly eradicated.”⁴⁹

There is an interesting possible post-script to this account: According to Clement of Alexandria (Hom, iii, 63), Zacchaeus was afterwards bishop of Caesarea.

This story is in the form of a healing story (cf. 5:18-26 – the healing of the paralysed man and 18:35-43 - the healing of the blind man). In this comparison it appears as though Jesus sees Zacchaeus’ situation as requiring spiritual healing. Finally Jesus has brought *salvation* to a wealthy person, something which Jesus has said is humanly impossible (18:27).

⁴⁵ France, *Luke*, 297.

⁴⁶ France, *Luke*, 299.

⁴⁷ Geldenhuis, *Luke*, 469.

⁴⁸ Geldenhuis, *Luke*, 471.

⁴⁹ Tiede, *Luke*, 319.

For the Preacher

Parsons writes:⁵⁰

The story of Zacchaeus ... is one of several in Luke/Acts in which the relationship between one's outer physical appearance and inner moral character is examined (see Luke 13; Acts 3-4; 8)... For the Luke Jesus, one's moral character is *not* determined by the color, shape, size, or limitations of one's body. Luke has radically redrawn the map of who is in and who is out. ...Luke's vision of this Abrahamic community is based also on his understanding of the teachings of Jesus, which include holding up an otherwise despised Samaritan as an example to follow (Luke 10) and declaring a 'bent woman' and a 'short man' as daughter and son of Abraham. For Luke, finally, the covenant messianic community, the 'whole' body of Christ, includes even, perhaps especially, those who do not themselves have, in the eyes of the larger culture, a 'whole' body. The kingdom of God belongs to these, and they to God's covenant community.

Do we as a Church, consciously or subconsciously exclude people? Do we as a society privilege the "good-lookers", able-bodied people? Do we see both the poor and those on the underside of life, as well as those on the upper side of life as needing to hear the good news?

A Summary of the Travel Narrative (9:51-19:27)

In keeping with this theme, throughout the entire Travel Narrative (beginning 9:51) Wenham and Walton identify 3 characteristics of disciples:

1) **Welcome**, including welcome of the weak, the poor and needy, children (14:7-14; 17:1-10)

2) **Openness to others** because God's kingdom is open to all. The birds of the air are the nations in 13:18-19. And people will come from all parts of the world (13:22-30). Even sinners are welcome (15:1-31) and outcasts (including lepers and Samaritans - 17:10-19)

3) **Response to God's invitation.** (14:15-24). Jerusalem will ultimately reject Jesus. This response is costly and takes priority over wealth (14:25-33; 16:1-15).⁵¹

These themes have had their prelude in Jesus' manifesto in 4:18, 19 and in the Magnificat of Mary in 1:51-53 about Jesus ushering in the Reign where the proud and mighty will be brought low and the poor and oppressed raised up.

⁵⁰ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 285-286.

⁵¹ Wenham and Walton, *Exploring the New Testament*, 245.