

## **Luke 1**

Luke Chapter 1 has so much happening all within the words of 80 verses, from the historical introduction at the beginning where Luke himself states that he himself (I) has personally investigated from the beginning the accounts of Jesus' life, and so Luke's words are entrusted to us. Luke gives us the account of the promise of a Son to Zacharias and Elizabeth, which in itself was a miracle. Zacharias a Priest in the Temple, married to a woman from the Jewish lineage, where bearing a child was deemed a must, and only through God's love and grace for His faithful servant, Zacharias and Elizabeth were rewarded with a Son, and his name was to be John, not a family inherited name.

God's wonderful but also terrifying message to a young Mother to be, in Mary, via the angel Gabriel showed the blessedness of Mary, with her heart being filled with wonder, great joy and privilege, but also that same blessedness was to be a sword to pierce her heart. From the joy of birth to the witnessing of seeing her Son on the cross. The humble and revolutionary words of the Magnificat, Mary's Song, enables us, as well as Mary, to see ourselves, recognising that Christianity is the death of pride, the end of world's labels and prestige, the end of economic unfairness.

Christianity brings about a revolution in individuals, so to be chosen by God so often means at one the same time a crown of joy and a cross of sorrow. God does not choose a person for ease and comfort and selfish joy, but for a task that will take all that head, and heart and hand can bring to it. God chooses us in order to use us.

“Y mae fy enaid yn mawrygu yr Arglwydd, a gorfoleddodd fy ysbryd yn Nuw, fy Ngwardwr.”

## **Luke 2**

Years ago, while I was engaged in evangelism in Manchester, a few local Muslims claimed the Bible had been changed. I did not believe this but wanted evidence. After work one day, I travelled to an area with a large Jewish population and was shown a Hebrew/English *Tanakh*.

*Tanakh* is an acronym of the three portions of the Jewish Bible: *Torah* (law), *Nevi'im* (prophets) and *Ketuvim* (writings). As I opened it, my eyes fell upon the words of Micah, chapter 5:

“Bethlehem, Ephrathah, you are too small to be among the thousands of Judah, but from you someone will emerge for Me to be a ruler of Israel, and his origins will be from early times, from days of old” (Stone’s Tanach).

The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon, he would not die before he saw the Messiah, seeing him at the temple for his presentation, inspired his words, known now as the ‘Nunc Dimittis.’ Anna, an elderly widow constantly in the temple, upon seeing Jesus, shared his redemption hope with many.

Back at Jerusalem, twelve years later for Passover, when the group was returning to Nazareth,

Jesus had been left behind. He was found asking questions of the teachers, astonishing them all.

Jesus is the eternal Son, fulfilling all scripture, comforting to the end, but easily lost in our rush.

Yet if we, like Jesus, are subject to the Father, we will also increase in his wisdom and favour with God and with others.

### **Luke 3**

Where do you come from?

One of the most difficult things about living in the internet era is knowing who to trust when they tell you things. We all know the problem- someone asserts something online but you don’t know who they are and what their purpose is and, not knowing that, it is very hard to know how much to trust what they say.

But this problem has always been with us, even if we have an extreme form of it.

Luke is trying to write an account of the life of Jesus that is trustworthy, orderly and true (Luke 1.3-5). So here in Chapter 3 he almost begins the story again, having hooked us with the accounts of the births of John and Jesus. For this restart, he is keen to establish the context of what Jesus says, so that the reader can trust what Jesus says. Luke wants to show that he does not just emerge out

of nowhere but is part of a world, a history and a tradition that his first readers would have understood.

First of all, he establishes the context of time and place with the names of Emperors, Governors and High Priests. This is not a story that happened ‘once upon a time’. If the deductions of some scholars about when the gospel was written are right it would be like someone today saying, “This happened when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister and Ronald Reagan was president of America and Robert Runcie was Archbishop of Canterbury and John Paul II was pope”.

Then he establishes the context in terms of what was happening in the religious life of the nation- John the Baptist was calling people to change their lives for the better, to do right because God was about to do something amazing in the world and they needed to be ready for it. That amazing begins when Jesus comes for baptism and the Spirit descends on him like a dove and the voice from heaven, silent for so long, speaks clearly a message of love and acceptance.

Finally, by tracing Jesus’ family tree through Joseph, the gospel writer shows that he grew up in a family which linked him with the long story of how God had always loved and saved his people- through Joshua and David and Isaac and Abraham and Noah. We are prepared that their descendant will also be part of some mighty demonstration of God’s power and love.

Jesus’ words and actions can be trusted because they come out of the long tradition, because he was recognised and singled out by John the Baptist and because this happened in the world we know.

At least, Luke thinks that is enough to win your trust, is it?

## **Luke 4**

### **A mighty and personal saviour I**

If I say the word temptation to you, various thoughts may pop into your mind. Whether it’s going back to the fridge for the fifteenth time to level off that rich, velvety cream-filled cake, or maybe it’s the temptation to pick up your phone again before putting on another Netflix series to fill up yet another evening!

We all face the attractiveness of temptations, and with this, there are consequences, which can lead to destruction.

What can you do?

In Luke chapter 4, we see that Satan, the king of liars, is out in the wilderness tempting Jesus. However, Jesus did not stumble or fall; he remained strong and faithful to his call to come and save us. He is our rescue plan.

What can we learn from Jesus in chapter 4 to keep us turning from temptation?

Jesus was rooted in scripture! Therefore turn away from **distractions and delve into devotion!**

Jesus walked in the power of the holy spirit! God will turn your **weaknesses into power**

Jesus was focused, he knew his purpose was to save, and he knew he came to proclaim the good news. We must **move from procrastination to purpose.**

So let's stay focused because of how easy it is to wander into the wilderness. We must remain steadfast and anchored to the hope we have in Jesus. And because of this hope we have, we cannot stay silent in a world that is so noisy with its offerings of alternatives to salvation.

## **Luke 5**

In this passage, we see Jesus calling the first disciples.

Jesus noticed something about these fishermen, these first disciples. He noticed that they were people of peace. They were people that God had already prepared their hearts to be ready for His mission and Kingdom.

There are 4 principles He mentions in Luke 10 when identifying People of Peace, and we can see these in this passage in Luke 5 too. Jesus seeks people who *welcome Him (v3)*, *are open to Him (v5)*, *listen to the Gospel (v4)* and *would serve Him (v3)*. This is something He speaks about later in Luke, when sending *out* these very same disciples – but here He shows that He uses the same principles for *choosing* the original disciples.

Of these original disciples, Simon Peter's moment of realization in verse 8 shows the level of revelation He has through this encounter with Jesus. He uses 2 different phrases in relation to Jesus in "verse 5; Master" and then "verse 8; Lord" and then verse 11; He leaves everything to follow Jesus. As we grow in discipleship, we should pray that we encounter people who go through a similar period of revelation and they themselves will hear Jesus's call to leave everything to follow Him.

To end, we see in Verse 4; "Now go out where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish." I wonder, as we look at discipleship this year and we ourselves becoming fishers of men – Is Jesus calling out to us saying "now go out, where it is deeper, and let down your nets to catch some fish"?

## **Luke 6**

### People first

In all of Jesus' encounters, he did put people first, that is to say he did exactly what he came to this world to do, It never ceases to both excite and amaze me, how he kept the main focus of his life which is 'that not one should be perished', "For God so loved the world that he sent his only son so that no one should be lost" John 3:16. Up front and central to all he did.

I believe that this was his mission statement, he lived by its emphasis and implication and eventually died on a cruel cross to reveal the fullness of its reality.

Throughout the history of Judaism and Christianity human beings added their own perceptions to the revelations of God, that these perceptions soon enough became the main focus of these revelations, and often by this they hid the original meaning and focus of such revelations.

In Luke 6 we see such attempts, God revealed the value of the Sabbath, and human beings exaggerated its demands and implications on daily lives so that they can have authority and control over people. Jesus will have nothing of it, he restates the purpose of the Sabbath In the light of the value of each individual and God. The Sabbath was instituted for humans and not the other way round and to make this statement effective for future generations he refers to himself as the Lord of the Sabbath.

## **Luke 7**

### The freedom of forgiveness

The woman who anointed Jesus' feet is fascinating. She's the uninvited guest at the party. She's a sinner. She's so unimportant that we're not even told her name. And yet, she's a woman who's vulnerable, authentic, and who loves Jesus without holding back. She's a woman who understood the enormity of what it means to be forgiven, and she provides for us an example of what it means to love in complete freedom.

She is the extravagant outcast who is free to love without holding back. She is poor, but freely gives the best of what she has to Jesus. She is not mindful of the opinions and judgement of others. She is free to be vulnerable, free to focus only on Jesus. To be fully alive, fully present, fully herself with him. She knows that in forgiveness from Christ she is justified, and because of that she is free to love without restrictions.

The freedom of Christ's forgiveness, means that we are not shackled to our past or to the judgement of others. We are free to love wholeheartedly, and free to forgive others as He has forgiven us. We cannot live in true freedom if we are bound to others through un-forgiveness.

Without forgiveness, we not free to be who God created us to be. Forgiveness is where we find our true identity in Christ, and where we find the ability to love Jesus, and those He calls us to serve without limits.

## **Luke 8**

## ***Luke 9***

In this Chapter we are given the example of those who follow Jesus without question (vv 1-6) and those who choose to make excuses (vv57-62) The former, the Twelve Apostles go out to do the work of the Gospel with limited or no resources and see that their ministry is rewarded by God by the Good News being heard and healing miracles accompanying this. The latter however try to make any excuse they can to ensure that they don't have to follow when called, some giving what appear to be valid reasons such as burying dead parents or saying goodbye to loved ones first.

The true disciple follows the Master regardless of the cost, without turning back and for us this must be one of the hardest parts of Jesus' teaching. We live in a world where there are all sorts of calls on our time and our lives. Is it realistic or even possible to give up all to follow Jesus as his disciple or follower?

Which group do we belong to? For myself I would think I fall somewhere in the middle, yes, I have made sacrifices for the sake of my calling to be a disciple of Christ, but I am equally guilty at times of make excuses why I can't always do what is asked of me either through a sense of unworthiness or even fear. It make me uncomfortable I don't deny it. What does it mean to be a disciple in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

## **Luke 10**

## **Luke 11**

St Luke is known as a New Testament theologian who reveals certain interests in his two books: his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, two of his interests appear in chapter 11 of the Gospel.

One of them is prayer, which takes up the first 13 verses of this chapter. What we learn is that Jesus was praying, and thereby modelling the life of prayer to his Disciples. It appears that Jesus had not been teaching his Disciples how to pray, but that he had waited for them to ask him about prayer before telling them. (Interestingly, Matthew presents Jesus as taking the initiative in the

Sermon on the Mount chapter 6). Jesus teaches a spare version of the Lord's Prayer in which some of the familiar content is pared down. However, the revelation of God as Father is more intimate than in Matthew's version ("Father" in Luke compared with "Our Father" in Matthew). The radical nature of Jesus' prayer life is quickly revealed in the petition "Your Kingdom Come", which can only mean come on earth. Jews were familiar with the Old Testament concept of God's Kingdom in Heaven. Jesus lived that Kingdom life on earth, and taught his Disciples to seek that for themselves in prayer. In the book of Acts Luke teaches the Church how his second interest – the Holy Spirit – began the process of making God's Kingdom a present reality on earth.

The movement of this first part of chapter 11 is towards the subject of the Holy Spirit. After a rather mysterious parable about perseverance in prayer, Jesus concludes by encouraging his Disciples to ask "the Heavenly Father" to give them what he desires for them most of all: the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It is evident that "Disciples" are not restricted to first century Jewish Disciples who travelled with Jesus, but Disciples of every place and time. Luke wrote for us, as well as for them.

## **Luke 12**

Luke encourages us to truly look at ourselves in this chapter, not to be hypocrites, but rather have the correct attitude to life, knowing that we are all individuals in the sight of our Lord God, as God cares for each and everyone of us.

What of the Parable of the Rich Fool, and the place of material possessions in our lives, as the rich fool was self-centred, he never saw beyond this world, and what of us? How important are material possessions to us? Are we like the Roman proverb," like Sea water, the more you drink the thirstier you become," the more we have, the more we want. God provides for all our needs, and we do not need any more than that, be content, as God looks after the birds and the flowers, so how much more will He care for you?



God calls us to be prepared, to prepare to meet Him, any works that are unfinished, we need to complete. We need to be at peace with one another and at peace with our Lord God, and ensure our loyalty is unwavering towards our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be prepared for the different storms of this earthly life, never knowing when we have to face various issues, but we can be assured that Christ is with us if we, Seek first the kingdom of God.

Ceisiwch yn gyntaf deyrnas ein Duw.

### **Luke 13**

I arranged to meet a friend in Brecon at Sennybridge and I set out in good time, driving down the A40 until I came to a roundabout and the second exit was Llandeilo. I was on the right road but heading the wrong direction! I turned 180° at the roundabout and drove back to the east.

Repentance is not about shame, embarrassment, or guilt, but direction. When we realise, we are heading in the wrong direction and our back has been turned to God, repentance is a roundabout, to change direction to head back towards God. Our distance is not as important as our direction!

It is natural to think when disasters happen, that maybe the victims met their fate guilty of some sin. However, the word 'sin' means to miss the mark, as in archery. This issue is not shame and guilt, but we have been missing the point. Others who suffer are no more or less sinful than any of us.

Empty religion misses the point of true faith: healing and restoration. The Kingdom of God provides shelter, but the way in is narrow, the door is open for a time, but one day it will be shut to those who practiced religion, but never experienced true communion with God.

Jesus was casting out evil and curing sickness, he came to Jerusalem to gather, yet was rejected. He came to his own, and his own did not receive him. However, he will return, just as promised. Maranatha!

### **Luke 14**

How to behave at parties

For some of us, who get a little anxious at important social occasions, it has been a bit of a relief not to have to go to parties and gathering. For others of us it has been a huge loss, particularly not being able to gather to comfort each other or celebrate together the big events in family life.

In Chapter 14, we have a collection of Jesus' teaching organised around the theme of behaviour at parties and it is a social minefield- where to sit, who to invite, whether or not to attend in the first place.

Behind much of what Jesus says is the idea that occurs in the prophecy of Isaiah, that when things are the way God wants them to be, life will be like a great feast, a big party where all our tears are wiped away (Isaiah 25.6-8). So why, when we are invited to a party like that, aren't we crowding the doors to be let in? If we know a bit about how to behave at parties, why don't we transfer that knowledge to how we behave as we look for the Kingdom of God?

Jesus tells the parable of a man giving just such a banquet, but when he sends out invitations people are just too absorbed in the lives they have now to want to change for something better. One is busy about purchasing and inspecting land, another about trying out some new oxen he has bought, and one has just got married and does not want to leave his house. The man throwing the party fills up the space with people whose lives are so unsatisfactory right now that they know they need something better and, finally, with anyone random who happens to be passing.

The story suggests that discipleship is very hard for those whose lives are going well and are busy and full because it makes us unwilling to lose what we have in order to gain so much more.

So perhaps we need to start admitting, if only to God, that our lives are not perfect and are not complete. We need to feel how much we long to be in the warmth and light, joy and plenty of the feast of Heaven, how many tears we need wiped away. Then it becomes possible to lose the life we have in order to find better, even if that means the hard work of taking up our cross and following Jesus.

## **Luke 15**

## **Father of grace**

When You open Luke chapter 15, it hits you with a BANG straight away in the first paragraph. Readers are given an incredible reminder of who Jesus is and what he came to do. We can see that he had come to receive and save the lost.

The parables Jesus uses in this chapter- the Lost Coin and the Lost son illustrates the profound love of the father that welcomes and feasts with those that others may see as outcasts.

Do you see how valuable you are to the father when you read the lost coin? God frantically, meticulously searching for you, even death for you. **Jesus rejoices over you!** Let that sink in. And once the coin was found, did the women keep quiet? No, she told friends and neighbours.

The lost son is like another WHACK with the saving grace for the lost. A messed up son, broken, and expecting punishment, is met with open arms. A robe, signet ring and sandals are then placed on him restoring his place as the son—someone who didn't deserve any favour, who had blown it big style. Yet stood now in grace deeper than any oceans.

If you are broken, come

If you are an outcast, come

If you don't think this is you come [pride]

If you carry shame, come

If you are fearful, come

If you are LOST come, come to the father he is eager to be with you, he is the God of Grace.

## **Luke 16**

This is one of Jesus's most confusing stories that He shares. The story of the shrewd manager is one that we don't often think of with discipleship....or

maybe at all! But gladly, Jesus clearly states what the main message is in verses 9 and 10; <sup>9</sup> *Here's the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.* <sup>10</sup> *"If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones...."*

Jesus showed that He knew what to value, and what was truly valuable enough to invest in. Jesus invested in people. He invested in disciples. He invested in you. On this journey of discipleship, He challenges us to know what is truly of value and to be a faithful steward that invests in things truly of value.

When the COVID crisis first hit, we saw clearly what was of value. Celebrities stayed at home. Sports people stayed at home. The people we noticed were those who brought our deliveries of food. Those who picked up our bins in the morning, even when we worked from home. Those heroes who helped us in the NHS. We saw last year, what was truly of value. Let's never lose sight of this lesson – That we should know what is truly of value and invest in that. As we look at a year of discipleship ahead, we move with the lesson of knowing we should *use our worldly resources to benefit others.... And if we are faithful with little things, we will be faithful in larger ones too....*

## **Luke 17**

## **Luke 18**

Pray pray pray!

Jesus interprets the parable of the persistent widow for us. Until He returns, we are called to pray, pray, and pray some more!

Simple. Pray everyday! Except life is busy. I don't have time. I'm too busy to exercise, too busy to volunteer, too busy to cook from scratch, to busy to pray!

Every prayer we pray is an act of faith. There may not be a professed belief, but there *is* faith, even small as a mustard seed. Where there is prayer, there is faith. And the more we pray, the more that faith is strengthened and encouraged, especially when our prayers are answered. But if they're not answered?

In the face of constant rejection the widow does not give up. She is persistent. She reminds us that prayer only works when we pray! Our natural response to disappointment can be to stop praying. But when we do that, our faith is weakened and can wither.

We are called to be persistent in prayer, not so that we might get what we want (this is not a 'nagging works' scenario), but so that we might continue to seek after God's heart, to better understand His ways, and to find His joy and peace. Which of course, builds faith.

Prayer is a gift. God's gift to us, to strengthen our faith and to bring us into a deeper relationship with Him. The question we must ask ourselves therefore is, am I really too busy to pray?

## **Luke 19**

### ***Luke 20***

From where does Jesus get his authority? This is a constant theme not only for his opponents but also for his followers. For the priests, scribes and elders, Jesus was seen as a maverick element who claimed authority that they felt that they had. Though none claimed to be Son of God, they were inheritors of the Promise and were the leaders of the Jews in all things religious.

Time and time again they seek to question Jesus, but not with the hope of finding out what makes him tick or what his authority actually is, rather it is trying to trip him up to make him say something that will give them the upper hand or allow him to be shown up as a fraud or fake. Jesus' response is similar to that of a politician, he answers their questions with a question or starts to tell a parable or story. However, unlike an obfuscating politician, Jesus' counter

questions seek to open new truths and realisation from his hearers, they seek to expose the hypocrisy or lack of authority of his opponents.

At the end of the chapter Jesus condemns the hypocrisy and self-importance of those who claim religious authority. Those who go about in public with the view of being honoured and respected by others for what they are not who they are, who seek to benefit from their position or status. This is a stark warning to those of us who hold office in his church on how we use our role, surely we need to ensure that we only act to point the way to Christ and not ourselves?

## **Luke 21**

## **Luke 22**

Chapter 22 in Luke's Gospel is well known for several dramatic incidents: Judas Iscariot's treachery, the institution of the Last Supper, the arrest of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and Peter's denial of Christ. Underlying all of these is a theme which is characteristic of Luke's understanding of Jesus, which is that of humility expressed in service.

In verse 24 Luke slips in the observation that "a dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest". This may have been in reaction to Jesus' prophecy that one of them would betray him; it could also have been in response to the symbolic act of service by Jesus in washing their feet (not recorded by Luke, but presumably something of which he was aware, and may have been "understood" in his record). Jesus' response in verse 25 is very revealing: "the Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors". Lordship can include rule and power. If not checked and held to account it may become oppressive, even among leaders who begin with good intentions and benevolent declarations.

But what about those in authority who are called benefactors? Surely we approve of them? Think of the philanthropists who have given away generous proportions of their personal wealth towards the improvement in health and well-being of sections of humanity. Names like Lord Nuffield, Bill Gates, Lord Lever of Port Sunlight spring to mind; and in Wales, the Harding family of Admiral Insurance. We admire them. Jesus does not criticise their good deeds. Instead he goes to the root of the issue. Verse 27 reads "but not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves". That is true radicalism. Our world cries out for this kind of servant-leadership.

Luke is advancing two important principles: one is that function (by which I mean both purpose and delivery) is much more important than status, in which western society has always been interested. The other is that authority is of two kinds: one is extrinsic, bearing definitions and titles of rank and seniority; the other is intrinsic, revealed in the quality of the action carried out, the service performed, the delivery achieved.

I have scratched the surface. Will others carry on the dig?

## **Chapter 23**

A disciple is simply Jesus' pupil: to be a disciple is to practise following Jesus each and every day. It isn't about religion: it's about life. In Luke, the most direct of all the Gospels, Jesus pulls no punches with his disciples and pleads with His Father to the point of sweating blood but remains obedient to the brutal end. In Chapter 23, the Roman Governor tries his best to avoid executing Jesus. Pilate pronounces him innocent, sends him to Herod, only to have Herod send Jesus back, also refusing to condemn him. Pilate tries to release Jesus but the chief priest, the Sanhedrin, and the people, demand Jesus' death. "He delivered Jesus over to their will."

Jesus is led out, Simon of Cyrene, whose sons Alexander and Rufus later become disciples, carries the cross. Crowds of women follow lamenting. Jesus, definitely not meek and mild, tells them in no uncertain terms what the result of this will be. Knowing what is to come, Jesus "sets his face like flint," as sometimes, we must. He prays for those who are crucifying him and hangs there being mocked and reviled. He keeps his faith in God's purposes despite all, saying to the penitent thief, "today you will be with me in Paradise" and as death comes, commits His spirit to God the Father. It ends. Joseph of Arimathea gets permission to bury Jesus' body, the women make sure they know where so that when the Sabbath is over, they can bury Jesus properly. All is lost but the disciples are still disciples of Jesus.

## **Chapter 24**

Many people respect Jesus' teaching, respect that He was prepared to die but cannot accept that "on the third day, He rose again, according to the scriptures." Proclaiming the resurrection is the first task for disciples of Jesus. In Chapter 24, we are told that when the women who had come to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body were anxious because it was gone, two men appeared and told them that Jesus has risen, reminding them that he had told them this would happen. The women went and repeated this to the male disciples who "thought it an idle tale." Don't always expect to be believed.

Next, Luke tells us how despite talking to Jesus for ages on the Emmaus road, the disciples only recognised him when he broke the bread with them later at the evening meal. They rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the Eleven who regaled them with the news that Jesus had already appeared to Simon. Then Jesus appears to them all, encourages them to touch him so that they can see for themselves, he is flesh and blood, evening eating something in front of them. Before Jesus leads them out to Bethany, blesses them and is carried into heaven, He promises them they will be His witnesses across the world but for now, they are to stay in Jerusalem "until you are clothed with power from on high."

Just as it is our duty as disciples to proclaim Jesus' resurrection, it is also our duty allow God to fill us each day afresh with God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit isn't an idle tale either. It is as we open ourselves as individuals, as congregations and as a Diocese to the Holy Spirit, that we will be able to learn to be Jesus' disciples together.