

Introduction to Luke's Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bibles, and you'll see, I think, on the sheet that it says we're going to be reading at the beginning of Luke's Gospel. So I'd like you to turn up the beginning of Luke's Gospel, page 885.

But I'd like you also, if you would, to just keep your finger there and turn over to the very beginning of the book of Acts, which you'll find in the Church Bibles on page 909.

We're starting this morning a study in Luke's Gospel. It's some years since we studied a whole Gospel on Sunday mornings. We've had many parts of the Gospels in different ways at different times.

But there is something very helpful about looking at a whole Gospel, which is what we're aiming to do. Because, after all, Luke wrote not just extracts, but a whole book.

And he expects it to be read as a whole book, and not just as selected chunks. It's very important, isn't it? Today, I think it's more and more of a challenge to us to read something coherent in that way.

[1 : 0 7] We're so used to, aren't we, flicking from one short thing to another in the little sound bites that we get on the Internet. That coherent consideration of a long piece of writing is something that is getting less and less common in our society.

I was reading recently that some of the scientists are very concerned that the Googleization of our world is causing changes in the wiring of our brains, would you believe? Making it harder for us to think, especially in a very ordained and coherent way.

Well, Luke, the writer of this Gospel, as we'll see, has written very deliberately an ordered, coherent account to be read all the way through.

And we'll see that it all hangs together. It's a very important message. In fact, he's written two books. That's why I've asked you to turn up to the beginning of the Acts. If you look there at Acts chapter 1, verse 1, you'll see that he says, In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

To them he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom. And while staying with him, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, You heard from me.

[2 : 3 8] For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So Acts tells us all that Jesus continued to do after his resurrection and ascension from the dead and through the power of his Holy Spirit as it came upon the church to direct the church's witness, bringing this gospel right to the very ends of the earth.

By the way, if you take these two books together, you will see that Luke is the major author of the New Testament. Do you realize that?

He is the biggest single contributor to our New Testament teaching. And that means that his books are very, very important. He's important as a theologian as well as a historian.

So the ascension to glory is, if you like, the pivot point of Luke's writing. It ends Luke's gospel and it begins at the Acts of the Apostles.

And it's very, very important indeed. Just turn back to Luke chapter 24 at the very end. You may think we're going completely backwards here, and we are, but there's reason for that. Acts begins with the ascension and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 57] And Luke chapter 24 ends there. Let's just read a few words from verse 44 of Luke 24. And notice what Jesus says.

Notice carefully some of these key words. These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you. That everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, that's the Old Testament scriptures, must, must be fulfilled.

Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ must suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I'm sending the promise of my father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up to heaven, and they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God.

[5 : 15] Well, turn back to the very beginning of Luke's gospel, and let's just read the first four verses there, where Luke introduces both these books to Theophilus, his first reader.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished or fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers, servants of the word have delivered them to us.

It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Amen. Well, may God indeed bless us, his word, and help us as we come to begin to study the words of this great evangelist, Luke.

Well, let's turn in our Bibles then to the beginning of Luke's gospel, and we'll look at this together.

[6 : 35] What is the purpose of this longest story that forms the backbone of the whole New Testament, these two books of Luke? Well, let me suggest that we could sum up Luke's message as being about giving his readers certainty about salvation for the world, which is to be found in Jesus Christ alone, who is the Savior for the world.

Just as the pivot point, ending the gospel and bringing Acts into its beginning, is the ascension of the Lord to glory, so Luke begins and Acts ends with the proclamation of the good news of salvation.

So we have the birth stories in Luke chapter 1 and 2, which ring with the joy of salvation. Mary in her song praises God as Savior. Zechariah speaks of the horn of salvation in the house of David, who will save their people from their enemies.

The angels tell the shepherds of one who is born as a Savior, Christ the Lord. Old Simeon in the temple in his song says, Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, prepared in the sight of all peoples.

Notice all peoples, not just for Israel, but for the world. And the very last verses of the book of Acts speak about this salvation, as going out to the Gentiles.

[8 : 08] The very last few verses speak of Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God in Rome, at the very heart of the world empire of the day. And so this is a book all about salvation, salvation for the world, through the Savior of the world.

And that's favorite language in Luke's writing. Neither Matthew nor Luke ever called Jesus Savior or speak of salvation. Of course, they have their own language. They speak about it in different ways.

But Luke loves to speak about salvation. Today, salvation has come to this house. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

That's what he says to Zacchaeus in chapter 19, when Zacchaeus' whole life has been transformed by Jesus. And that's what Luke's message is all about.

It's about our certain salvation. And this morning, I want to just introduce Luke's gospel and try and look at a few of his distinct concerns so that it'll help us get the most out of our study of Luke as we read through the gospel together.

[9 : 18] And it wouldn't be a bad thing if you set yourself the task of reading through the whole of the gospel sometime this week. Sometimes reading a blurb on a book cover on the back or just a short review of the book just really helps us, doesn't it, to get the sense of the story, especially if it's by an author that we're unfamiliar with.

Or maybe if you go to the opera, say, and you're not very familiar with opera, it's helpful, isn't it, to read on the program, the plot line, the story of what's going on so that when all the warbling and wailing starts, you actually have some idea of what's being said.

At least that's how I find it. I need that. And sometimes, too, when you're coming to a book of the Bible, just a synopsis of what's going on helps us to understand as it unfolds.

So let me suggest a summary statement for Luke's concerns in writing what he does in this two-part story, and especially in the first part in Luke's gospel. And it comes largely, I think, from what Luke himself tells us in his introduction in Luke verses 1 to 4 of chapter 1 and also in Acts 1 verse 1.

Luke sets out to document and defend and declare the good news of Jesus the Savior, both fulfilled on earth in the person of Jesus and continuing through his Spirit from heaven so that his gospel continues to be believed in and declared to all nations until Jesus returns.

[10 : 52] Luke sets out to document, defend, and declare the good news of Jesus the Savior, both fulfilled on earth in person and continuing from heaven by his Spirit so that it continues to be believed in and declared to all nations until Jesus returns.

So Luke writes first to document. He is a historian. He tells us in this opening paragraph that he wrote an orderly account from eyewitnesses, from testimony delivered directly to him during his close lengthy and personal investigation over considerable time.

Now scholars will point to the very great similarities there are with Luke's precise and ordered manner in recording history to many of the Greek historians and others of his time and it's a matter of fact that he is acknowledged to be extraordinarily accurate in his portrayal of the ancient world.

We don't have time to go into that but there are many books and commentaries that if you doubt that you can read and you can see what they say. But Luke is more than a mere historian.

He wrote, he says, about things that were accomplished, that were fulfilled among us. That is, things from the Old Testament scriptures that were fulfilled. So that means that Luke's message is a theological message.

[12 : 15] It is a book about historical truth but it's also about religious truth. And so second, we need to realize that Luke is also an apologist. That is, he wrote to defend, to defend the gospel of Jesus as being real and genuine and also to show that it is genuinely a good thing and a blessing for the world not something harmful to the world.

Now, Theophilus is probably a Roman, very possibly somebody of rather high rank and Rome, of course, although it was tolerant to religion, rather like today, it did not like and it did not tolerate religion that was fundamentalist, that was full of troublemakers, didn't like religion that caused a public nuisance, that offended people, that might disrupt society.

And certainly, it would not tolerate any religion that would in that way threaten the Pax Romana, the Roman peace of the empire. Now, it's important then that Luke points out all through these two books that no Roman official ever found fault with Jesus or indeed with his apostles like Paul.

You see that all through Acts. He also shows us that sane Romans of repute like Cornelius in Acts chapter 10, like the centurion in Luke chapter 7, that they believed and trusted and followed Jesus.

In fact, the Roman centurion is a model of faith in Luke chapter 7. That was important because the Christian way had been vehemently opposed by the Jewish religious authorities and this religion that was supposed to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament then, if it was that way opposed by the authorities, well, it would make you question, wouldn't it, whether it's genuine and real.

[14 : 05] You'd want to say, well, can I reasonably associate with these despised and rejected people? But Luke shows us that the violence and the wickedness never came from Christ and his followers but always came, in fact, from that religious establishment.

Jesus, even when they came for him to arrest him with weapons, refuses to allow his disciples to take up swords. And all the way through the book of Acts, too, even when the apostles are violently persecuted, believers never turned violent.

They never used coercion. They never retaliated. It's just as important today to make that point, isn't it?

When our secular world is equally suspicious of all religion that is too extreme, too fundamentalist, too radical. These are words that are used. But Christian evangelists do not force by coercion converts.

Christian evangelists do not behead people or plant suicide bombs. Luke's message is quite contemporary. So Luke documents and he defends, but above all, he declares the gospel of Jesus.

[15 : 25] Luke is above all an evangelist. He declares that the good news of salvation has come to the whole world in Jesus Christ in fulfillment of what the scriptures have long promised. promised. As John the Baptist declares in chapter 3, all flesh shall see the salvation of our God, just as Isaiah the prophet promised.

And in the person of Jesus Christ and his works, we see in Luke's gospel all of what Jesus did. And we see through the acts of the apostles the power of his spirit as that message is proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Now he writes so that his readers from Theophilus and his contemporaries right through to his readers today. He writes, if you look at verse 4, that they might have certainty about what they've been taught.

Whether it be that Christians need reassurance of the faith that they have given their lives to or indeed those who are still exploring the message of Jesus and seeking its truth.

[16 : 31] And that means, friends, that whoever you are today, you can be sure that if you read and understand Luke's message, you will have certainty at the very least about what the genuine, historic, apostolic Christian gospel is really all about.

And you have it straight from the New Testament's major writer, Luke. Just look carefully at verses 1 to 4 of chapter 1.

You see, what Jesus accomplished, what he fulfilled among eyewitnesses, verse 1, was delivered to Luke by these ministers, by these servants of the word, verse 2, and his orderly account, his carefully worded message, will give certainty, verse 4, about all things pertaining to salvation, all things about Jesus, the Savior of the world.

This book is all about a certain salvation. And that's what we're going to be finding again and again and again as we read its pages.

So today, I just want to try and give a few broad brushstrokes to help us begin to see some of the distinctive concerns that Luke has throughout this gospel.

[17 : 51] And the first major concern is that Luke wants us to have certainty about the words of Scripture. Certainty about the words of Scripture.

We're to be certain, he says, that God's plan and God's purpose must be fulfilled just as he has promised. And therefore, his words must be believed and obeyed and not disbelieved and disobeyed.

God's set plan which must unfold as he has purposed is a vital matter all through Luke's writing. The word must or it is necessary occurs about 40 times in his writing.

Chapter 2, verse 24, I must be in my father's house, says the 12-year-old Jesus. Or I must preach the good news to the other towns also. Chapter 4, verse 43, and on and on and on.

Go through your Bible underlining every time you find that word. Above all and repeatedly, we're told the Son of Man must suffer and be rejected and killed and only then rise from the dead.

[19 : 06] Just turn back to Luke chapter 24, the very end that we read together a little earlier on. We see it so very clearly in this resurrection chapter. Look at verses 7 and 8 of Luke 24 when the angels rebuke the woman at the tomb.

Remember how he told you that the Son of Man must be delivered and crucified and on the third day rise. And they remembered his words.

Jesus' words must be fulfilled. Look at verse 26 on the road to Emmaus later on that afternoon. The risen Jesus himself tells the man, was it not necessary, must, that the Christ should suffer and then enter his glory.

And he explained to them how the scriptures must be fulfilled in him. Look at verse 44, that same night when he appears to the disciples again.

What does he say? These are my words that I spoke to you, that everything written about me in the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, that is the whole words of Scripture, must be fulfilled.

[20 : 17] You see, Jesus and Luke, therefore, wants us to be certain about the words of Scripture. They must be fulfilled because what God says, what God promises, he always, always fulfills.

What he says, he does. That's why it's no accident that in Luke chapter 1, verse 1, he calls these eyewitnesses of the gospel who proclaim the gospel to him, he calls them servants, ministers of the word.

And all through the gospel, he tells us of things that have been accomplished, have been fulfilled according to God's words of promise. From the shepherds in verse 2, remember they turn back to Bethlehem, back to their fields after being in Bethlehem, rejoicing over everything they've seen and heard, just as it had been told them.

And then the disciples after the resurrection, they understand at last what's written in the Scriptures. And it's been fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God's plan must be fulfilled according to his word. And therefore, his word must be believed and obeyed, not disbelieved and disobeyed.

[21 : 35] And above all, since in Jesus Christ we have God's ultimate word of promise, of revelation to the world, he at all costs must be believed and obeyed.

This is my chosen one, said the voice from the glory in chapter 9 on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is my chosen one. What does that mean? Listen to him.

Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, says Jesus, is someone who truly calls me Lord. Someone who builds his house on the rock for eternity and withstands the judgment.

That's his words in chapter 6, verse 47. That is, to believe and trust the message of the scriptures now fulfilled in Jesus Christ, that is to find salvation.

But to resist this true understanding of all God's word fulfilled in Jesus, that is disaster and judgment. We get a little cameo of that very early on in the very first chapter of Luke when the angel comes to Zechariah, do you remember?

[22 : 57] And Zechariah didn't believe this ultimate word about Jesus fulfilling all God's promises. And what happens? Well, the angel judges him for a time. He's struck dumb.

Of course, in God's mercy, he does come to believe. He does come to rejoice in the gospel. He repents. But Jesus gives very stark warning that those who reject his word in the gospel of Christ, who don't repent, that they will face eternal judgment.

The Father will give his Holy Spirit to all who ask him, says Jesus. But at the same time, he says, whoever blasphemes the Spirit by resisting the gospel of Jesus, they cannot be forgiven.

Not ever. God's plan must be fulfilled. His word cannot therefore be resisted successfully because it is a word of power.

The power of the Holy Spirit who is bringing all God's promises to fulfillment through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit actually is very, very prominent in Luke's writing.

[24 : 09] I hadn't quite grasped this until very recently. But Luke's gospel has far, far more references to the Holy Spirit than any of the others. And in fact, if you take Luke and act together, you could say that Luke is the major theologian of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

Speaks of the Spirit as much as Paul does in all of his writings put together. And the power of the Holy Spirit at work is a key indicator that the age of fulfillment of salvation has come.

John the Baptist says, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' last words, as we saw before he ascended, where I am sending the promise of my Father, the Holy Spirit, upon you to clothe you with power from on high.

And Luke shows us all the way through his writing that the Holy Spirit is in total control. He is overseeing and superintending everything that happens from the beginning to the end of the story.

So John will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb in chapter 1. Jesus' conception is through the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary. Elizabeth recognizes the miraculous conception of Jesus when Mary comes to visit her, when the Holy Spirit fills her.

[25 : 27] John in her womb leaps with joy in the Holy Spirit. Simeon is led by the Holy Spirit to the temple where Jesus is being brought with his parents. Jesus himself is anointed for his ministry by the Holy Spirit coming down upon him like a dove.

The Holy Spirit leads him into the wilderness to do battle with Satan. in the power of the Spirit he returns to Galilee to begin his great teaching ministry. And above all that is Luke's great emphasis that the Spirit comes to empower the ministry of the proclamation of the word of the kingdom of Christ.

And that is something he wants us to be certain about. That our Heavenly Father will certainly give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him through trusting Jesus, his Son.

And he will go on certainly filling his people with powerful witness so that the gospel will go to the very ends of the earth to make the Savior known.

The book of Acts shows us that happening. So Acts chapter 1 and verse 8 he says the Spirit will come with powerful witness. And that's what happened.

[26 : 43] You read on the day of Pentecost the Spirit gave them utterance and thousands heard the message of the Savior and were brought to salvation. And we'll see much more of that as we go through Luke's gospel.

But let's be clear one of Luke's chief concerns is that we should be certain about the words of Scripture that God's plan must be fulfilled as it is written according to promise and it will be fulfilled as the power of the Holy Spirit is upon Christ's people through their mission to the whole world.

Even even when there is great hostility even when there's great opposition that must not make us despair. It's so easy today isn't it to feel at times especially in our western world that we're on the back foot that somehow the church has lost the power of the Holy Spirit.

Not so says Luke. Jesus tells his followers that they will be dragged before religious authorities and secular authorities that there will be great hostility to the gospel to the very end.

But that's all in the plan Luke is telling us. So we're not to be anxious. He says in Luke 12 for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you are to say.

[28 : 10] It's all part of God's plan he says again in chapter 21 but this will be your opportunity for witness. Witness empowered by the Holy Spirit to help you proclaim the message of the gospel.

Now what a great encouragement there must have been for Theophilus and other first century Christians under pressure. What a great encouragement today for Christians under pressure in the world to have the certainty that the scripture gives us.

But the gospel yes will often be rejected often be opposed but that God's plan and purpose cannot be resisted. And so that for you and me friends to follow the Lord Jesus Christ even in great hostility will never mean and can never mean that we are the ones who are on the wrong side of history.

No, everything written about our Lord Jesus Christ in the scriptures must be fulfilled and of that we can be certain.

So Luke wants us to be certain about the words of scripture but no less certain about the wonders of the salvation that he proclaims. What it really is who it's for and how it's found.

[29 : 27] What an important thing to be clear about especially today when our world is full of claims about how and where we can find wholeness and healing and well-being and peace and satisfaction.

Salvation. The Greek word salvation can mean all of these things and in fact you'll see through the gospel it's translated sometimes in different ways. Your faith has saved you or sometimes your faith has healed you.

Same word. Your faith has made you whole. Same word. So what is the real meaning of salvation according to Luke? Well he wants us to be certain that true healing that true wholeness that true well-being that true salvation is nothing less than ultimate and everlasting peace with God himself.

Without that no one can have wholeness or healing or well-being in their life whatever else they might have for a short time. And we are to be certain that salvation is nothing less than peace with God through forgiveness of sins which is the personal gift of the Savior himself the great healer Jesus God's son.

Now that is Luke's constant message through this book but it's all summed up right at the very start in chapter 1 in Zechariah's wonderful song. Just look at chapter 1 verse 77.

[30 : 55] Zechariah says of his son John you child will be called the prophet of the Most High for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death and to guide our feet into the way of peace the way of ultimate wholeness and satisfaction free from the shadow of death itself because there is forgiveness of sins.

Nothing less than that is human beings greatest need. But nothing less than that is the salvation that Jesus Christ brings.

And Zechariah here is full in his song full of allusions to the prophets especially the prophet Isaiah who spoke of a day when the darkness of death and the shadow of death would be removed by a miraculous birth of one who was both God and man who was a man who was a king in David's line but who also was the mighty God the everlasting father the prince of peace.

And that darkness of death that exile from God's presence was because of sin because of God's judgment because of God's anger upon sin that separates him from sin.

But Isaiah and the other prophets they foresaw a day when God would pardon his people's sin when that sin would be paid for when Israel would therefore be comforted when Jerusalem would be redeemed when good news of peace would be proclaimed to all flesh and the Lord himself would return to Zion his great city and all the ends of the earth would see the salvation of our God.

[33 : 06] And that is the salvation that Luke wants us to be certain has come in Jesus Christ. At last there is true and lasting forgiveness of sins that separated man from God that banished all humanity from the joy and the pleasure of heaven that put everybody under the dark shadow of death which is the penalty the punishment for sin.

But now you see he is saying to us all has been fulfilled God's anger is spent God is not at war any longer with people on earth there is peace between heaven and earth.

So the angel said to the shepherd peace goodwill with those with whom God is pleased. There is no longer war God is no longer angry.

The sheer wonder of this salvation is something that Luke wants us to be certain about. It is nothing less than the entire reversal of all the curse of sin and death upon this world.

It is the answer to every ultimate need of every human being. When we come to chapters 7 and 8 we'll see in that wonderful section just how great and marvelous the scope of that salvation is.

[34 : 31] That section begins and ends with Jesus saving from dying and death and the centurion's son and the widow of Nain's son raised from the dead. It ends with Jairus' little daughter being raised from the dead.

Salvation from death. It's full of illustrations of the reversal of that great curse as Jesus removes the curse even over nature as the wind and the waves obey him.

Every evil power is conquered and put away as Jesus heals a man from a legion of devils not just one. That demoniac is left sitting at the end of the story clothed and in his right mind liberated from a whole life of torment and conflict.

And that says Luke nothing less than that is the great salvation that the scriptures promise and the salvation that our savior Jesus brings.

And you see friends that means that we can be certain certain what the gospel of Jesus Christ is really teaching us and telling us that it is and that it must be the answer to every need every possible need of every human being on earth.

[35 : 49] It is the answer to every human question there is about suffering about death about evil about the dark shadow that we all in this world live under.

He came to bring the knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins and to guide them into the way of peace.

That's why Luke records Peter in Acts chapter 10 as saying the gospel is the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. For whom? Who are his people that Zechariah speaks about in this hymn?

Well it's another one of Luke's great distinctives. He has a great concern that we should be certain that as Peter says God shows no partiality.

That his people are from every nation. Anyone who fears him says Peter. Maybe it's because Luke himself was a Gentile that his focus is the most pluralistic of all the gospels.

[36 : 57] He has a world focus. You can see that even in the structure of the way he writes. His story begins and ends with a focus on the Roman Empire.

So in chapter 2 verse 1 he tells us about Caesar Augustus and his decree that made Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem. In chapter 3 verse 1 he tells us that it was in the reign of Tiberius Caesar that John began his ministry.

And he tells us that Jesus' ministry began in Galilee which was known as Galilee of the Gentiles. Jerusalem and it went on through Judea and Samaria and climaxed at Jerusalem.

And Jerusalem is where all his disciples are told to stay until the Holy Spirit comes. And when the Holy Spirit comes he sends them out from Jerusalem through Judea and Samaria to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.

And the book of Acts ends. What is Paul doing? Preaching the gospel of the kingdom from Rome, the very heart of the world empire. This gospel is for the whole world.

[38 : 02] And we'll see that that's evident in all kinds of details all the way through the gospel such as in Luke chapter 3 verse 6 where I just said Luke quotes from Isaiah that all flesh will see the salvation of our God.

Matthew and Mark stopped their quotation in the verse before but Luke wants to include so we're in no doubt this is a salvation for all the world, all flesh.

And Luke is also at pains to point out to us again and again that it's not just for all nations but it's for all kinds of people.

Maybe again it's because Luke was a physician that he's so interested in these human stories of so many different lives who are saved, so many people who are healed, who are delivered, who are made whole by Jesus the great physician.

salvation. And he goes on in so many little portraits to show us all the wonders of salvation. The Samaritans and the Gentiles who are despised in polite Jewish society.

[39 : 07] Well it's only Luke that tells us of the good Samaritan who was such an example of faith. It's only Luke who tells us of the one of the ten grateful lepers who came back and thanked Jesus who was a Samaritan.

There's women everywhere in Luke's gospel. Women whose lives Jesus transformed. Think of the way he speaks of Mary and Elizabeth, of the prophetess Anna, of Mary and Martha, of the prostitute in the house of Simon the Pharisee, of the women at the beginning of chapter eight who were saved by Jesus and who followed him and paid for his ministry.

It's full of tax collectors and sinners who again were despised. But abound everywhere in Luke's gospel. Like Zacchaeus, the cheating financier.

Like the prodigal son who was rejected. Like the thief on the cross whom only Luke tells us was saved by the words of Jesus. And indeed all the poor, all the dispossessed, all the sick, all the unwanted, all those who count for nothing in this world's eyes.

These are the ones that Jesus tells us explicitly in that wonderful parable of the great banquet in chapter 14 that he is determined will fill his household and come to his banquet.

[40 : 25] The poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. In fact, he goes on, doesn't he, to tell us that unless everybody becomes like that, no one can become his people.

In other words, this great salvation is for everyone who realizes is that they need a savior, that they are lost and sick, that they need to be found, that they need to be made whole because they know that in themselves they have no hope and that there is no hope, other hope under heaven.

How, though, is that salvation received? Well, God shows no partiality. And Luke wants us to be certain that you join the people of God and that you find that peace with God through humble penitence towards God, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Repent. Repentance. That's a classic characteristic of Luke's languages, all through the Gospels. It means a turnaround in life.

It's another word that Luke often uses, all through Acts. Repent, therefore, says Peter on the day of Pentecost and turn again that your sins may be blotted out.

[41 : 45] That was John's ministry. He preached repentance which showed itself by its fruits. Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. Show that your turnaround in life is real.

And Jesus says just the same. Don't call me Lord, he says, without doing what I tell you. Hear my words and do them. No bad tree bears good fruit.

My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. Humble penitence towards God, seeking his mercy through the Savior.

That alone is the way to this great salvation. You can't have it without that salvation also transforming your life and transforming your ultimate loyalties.

That's something that we see in so many portraits through Luke's gospel. We see the sick being healed by the great physician who comes to save sinners. We see the lost being found, the humble being exalted, the defrauding greed of someone like Zacchaeus turning into generous joy in a life of giving.

[42 : 59] But perhaps above all, that heart, that fruit of true repentance towards God is seen, isn't it, in the response of the sinful woman in Luke chapter 7, the lady who wet Jesus' feet with her tears and whom Jesus said to her, your sins are forgiven, your faith has saved you, go in peace.

While at the same time he says to Simon, the Pharisee, the face of respectable religion, you gave me no water, no kiss, no oil for my head, no fruit indicating real love in his heart for Jesus, no evidence of turning to him to seek his grace and penitence.

Each tree is known by its fruit, says Jesus. Each human heart is revealed by its response to Jesus the Savior.

And Jesus said this woman loved much. She came to Jesus in humble, penitent faith, and she found salvation. And her whole life was transformed forever.

She bore fruit in keeping with true repentance. And so very briefly, as we come to a close, that is the final thing that Luke really wants us to be certain about in this gospel.

[44 : 20] It's gloriously true that all without distinction may find the wonders of salvation through penitent faith in Jesus. But it's equally true that none without exception can do so without the total transformation of life that Jesus brings.

All must follow the way of the Savior. And in fact, the greater part of Luke's gospel from the end of chapter 9 right through to his crucifixion is all about that.

It's almost all unique teaching to Luke. Luke wants us to have certainty about the way of the Savior. And he's on one long journey to Jerusalem.

Indeed, a journey to the glory of heaven for Jesus. And it does end with his ascension to the glory of heaven. But all the way he is teaching his disciples that it cannot be without the road to the cross.

So he sets his face toward Jerusalem. And as he walks that road, he teaches the disciples what it means to follow him in the only way to the wonders of his salvation.

[45 : 28] And Luke wants us to be certain about what to expect as we follow Jesus in this world so that we're not discouraged when we find things very hard at times.

Following Jesus as his people means that we also must share the pattern of Jesus. There will be great joy in the Holy Spirit always as we see the advance of his kingdom.

But also there will be the pain of rejection. As many reject Jesus and reject his people. That's what Luke teaches us.

All followers who are in the way of Jesus must therefore share his priorities. Seeking first his kingdom, looking for the treasure on heaven and using our treasure on earth, which can so easily blight our lives otherwise, to find treasure in heaven.

Every disciple is to spend his life preparing for the glory to come, not falling back, being like the wise manager who is found to have been a fruitful steward and a good steward when Jesus returns.

[46 : 33] And as we shall see, the way of the Savior is deeply challenging teaching for the church today, for all of us, just as it was to Luke's first readers.

And yet it is also very, very encouraging. Because it teaches us to be certain that the way of the Savior is also the way of great privilege and joy.

Because we also are called, aren't we, into participation in the glorious advance of that kingdom of joy. Unlike the first disciples, we're not witnesses, are we, of the words and works of Jesus on earth?

Luke wrote these for us. But we are witnesses that what began on the day of Pentecost is still going on all over the world today.

We're witnesses to the fact that repentance and faith is still being proclaimed in Jesus' name. We just need to look around us this morning to see that there are people here even today from many nations, from many different backgrounds, people who have found in the Lord Jesus Christ this great salvation.

[47 : 48] And we have the Savior's promise. We have a two-fold promise that is as certain today as it was to those who first received it. We have the promise of the Holy Spirit from heaven who has come with power and who will lead us to glory and through us will lead others to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have the Holy Spirit from heaven and we also have the promise of the Savior who will return from heaven. Power and great glory just as he was seen to ascend by those first disciples.

How wonderful it is to have certainty of that. Especially when we look at the world today and we see that the world is just as Luke told us it would be.

Nation rises against nation. Kingdom against kingdom. Earthquakes, famine, pestilence, terror, persecutions. Many of Christ's people being persecuted, put to death today for their love to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We may well be hated by all for Christ's namesake. That's what Jesus says. But he also says, not a hair of your head will be perishing.

[49 : 11] By your endurance you will gain your lives. Everlasting life in the resurrection glory of his kingdom which he has promised to all who are his and which he will return to bring.

How wonderful to know with certainty from Luke's pen, Jesus' wonderful words in Luke chapter 12. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

I think it's lovely to think, isn't it, that Luke so wanted his friend Theophilus to know with certainty these wonderful truths about Jesus the Savior and about this great salvation that he devoted what must have been so much time and so much effort to just put it all into words that were accessible and understandable to his friend.

For you and I might not have Luke's gifts and skills as a historian, as an apologist, as an evangelist, but surely we can all at least aspire to his example.

That by our words, however feebly, that we might lead our friends, our loved ones to certainty about the words of Scripture and the wonders of salvation that are fulfilled in the way of our Savior.

[50 : 49] Well, let's ask God that as we study his gospel together, that would be so. Let's pray. Almighty God, who called Luke the physician, whose praise is in the gospel, to be an evangelist, and physician of the soul, may it please you that by the wholesome medicine of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed through the merits of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.