



The Gospel of Luke

Luke 23:1-24:53: The Passion and Resurrection

For much of the last chapters of his gospel, Luke has followed Mark's sketch of the events of Jesus' ministry. In following the traditional outline of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, however, Luke adds many of his own motifs. We cannot know whether this is because he had sources of information that Mark lacked, or because he had his own theological and practical points to make, or because of some combination of the two.

We begin by noting some of the unique Lucan features of the passion narratives.

Luke 23:6-12

Only Luke includes the details of this game of hot potato between Pilate and Herod, though the other gospels include accounts of Jesus being mocked. Luke cares about the powers of this world and their complicity in evil doing. This passage reminds us that among the principalities and powers Pilate and Herod are equal opportunity destroyers.

Luke 23:26-31

Only Luke has the woe that Jesus pronounces on the women who bewail his death. This sets his death in the larger framework of history and perhaps even of the end of history. What happens to him is a sign of the judgment that will fall on Jerusalem, and on all human opposition to the purposes of God.

Luke 23:34

In some early manuscripts Jesus speaks the words of forgiveness to those who have crucified him. The words foreshadow the emphasis on forgiveness on Luke 24:37 and in Acts 7:60. The claim that the crucifixion was more a product of ignorance than of evil is repeated in Acts 3:17.

Luke 23:39-43

The conversation among Jesus and the two thieves is unique to Luke's gospel.

In Matthew and Mark both the criminals hanging beside Jesus revile him. In Luke's Gospel however, only one thief reviles him and the other demonstrates the two movements of Christian conversion.

He repents: "Do you not fear God, since we are under the same sentence of condemnation, and we indeed, justly."

And he believes: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

Jesus' assurance may suggest that Luke understands the promise of life after death in ways different from what we generally see in Paul and Matthew—where the promise is for resurrection at the last day. Jesus' assurance seems more in keeping with a considerable amount of contemporary funeral practice, at least in North America: "Today you will be with me Paradise."

The two thieves thus become not simply historical or anecdotal figures but examples for Luke's contemporaries. Each reader or hearer of this gospel is also asked to decide whether or not to repent and believe.

Luke 23:44-49

If, as we suspect, Luke had Mark's version of Jesus' crucifixion before him when he wrote his own, we see in these verses two ways in which Luke changed Mark's account.

First, instead of crying out the first verse of Psalm 22, "My God my God why have you forsaken me" as Jesus does in both Mark and Matthew, his last words in Luke are: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." Again, his death foreshadows that of Stephen in Acts 7. Jesus is no longer the abandoned son of Mark 15 but the obedient martyr who will provide an example for the apostles and those who follow him in their trail.

Instead of proclaiming Jesus "Son of God" the centurion says: "Truly this man was 'innocent' or 'just.'" This is surely not because Luke doubts that Jesus is Son of God. It is because the narrative now functions not so much as a description of atonement but as an exemplary model of faithfulness.

In his telling of the resurrection stories Luke also add his own features.

Luke 24:1-12

Luke shares the narrative of women coming to the empty tomb with Mark, but he changes the promise in Mark that Jesus will meet the disciples in Galilee to the reminder that while in Galilee, Jesus had predicted his resurrection. In Luke Jesus appears to the apostles, not in

Galilee, but in Jerusalem. This may be because Luke had traditions of Jerusalem appearances while Mark and Matthew had traditions of first appearances in Galilee. It may also be because Luke traces both Jesus ministry and the life of the church from beginnings in Jerusalem to a conclusion, at the end of Acts, in the world's capital, Rome. Jerusalem plays a theological as much as an historical role in Luke.

Note too that as in the other gospels women play a crucial role in the discovery of the empty tomb and the proclamation of what they have seen. Note that the apostles pay them no heed.

Ringe points out that twofold movement of faith that the women display. They remember, and then they proclaim. The disciples on the way to Emmaus do the same.

Luke 24:13-35

Sharon Ringe reminds us that "Mary, the wife of Clopas" appears in John 19:25 and wonders whether John's "Clopas" is the same as Luke's "Cleopas." If so, the companion disciple on the road to Emmaus may be Cleopas' wife. Acts has evidence of missionary/disciple married couples on the road, and Paul suggests that Mrs. Peter on occasion accompanied that apostle on his travels.

The story is a sermon. It is told to remind Luke's audience of where the risen Lord appears. He appears when scripture is proclaimed (in this case Jesus is himself the preacher); he appears when the bread is broken. The story is Luke's strong insistence that resurrection is not only a past event but a present experience.

Other features also seem true to ongoing Christian experience. Sometimes God's mercy arrives incognito. Sometimes we only know providential activity by looking backwards ("Did not our hearts burn within us.")

When we do remember and believe we are often sent off in a new direction, or back to the very city or situation we had just so exhaustedly left behind.

Luke 24:36-49

As in Matthew's gospel and John's, Jesus appears to the community of the faithful. As in Matthew 28 and John 21 he commissions them to keep the faith.

They are to keep the faith in three ways. By reading and interpreting scripture. By proclaiming repentance and forgiveness (the great themes of good news for Luke) and by bearing witness to what they have seen.

The Spirit that ascended on Jesus in his baptism and drove him through his ministry will now ascend on them (Acts 2) and drive them to bear witness to him—to the ends of the earth, to the end of history.

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