

Route 66

Luke: Son of Man

Part 42 – October 31, 2010

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the *Synoptic Gospels*. The word “synoptic” simply means “similar view”. They share many of the same stories, often in the same sequence, and sometimes even the same wording. And yet, there are striking differences in perspective, intention, and audience.



For instance: Matthew wrote to the Jews. His prophecy laden book emphasizes Jesus as the promised Messianic King who came to establish a spiritual kingdom.



Mark wrote to the Romans. His action oriented book portrays Jesus as the Suffering Servant; and it resonated with Rome's slave population.

Now we come to Luke, the last of the “similar view” Gospels.



Luke wrote to the Greeks. It's the only book in the entire New Testament written to a gentile, by a gentile (i.e. non-Jew). It's an unbiased investigative report, examining the humanity of Christ, and depicting Jesus as the compassionate Son of Mankind.

Matthew's genealogy stems from *Abraham*, in order to demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled God's covenant with the Father of Faith. *Luke* traces Jesus' genealogy *all the way back to Adam*, to show his *gentile* readers that the promise of a Savior predates the first Jew, and originates with the father of mankind. (*Genesis 3:15*) In Luke's genealogy we can see sin's start (with Adam) and finish (with Christ).

Luke's Gospel is all about the God of glory coming down to *our* level, entering *our* condition and becoming subject to *our* circumstances. It's the Gospel of Christ's humanity. And who better to offer the perspective on Jesus' compassion and humanity than a kindhearted, dearly loved doctor?



St. Paul by Rembrandt

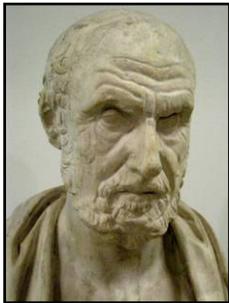
Luke became a traveling companion and medical missionary with Paul. And Paul writes in Colossians:

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings ... – *Colossians 4:14 NAS*

That term, “the beloved physician” tells us everything we need to know about Dr. Luke's bedside manner.

And we know he's not a Jew, because just before this salutation, Paul concludes a list of names, absent Dr. Luke's, with:

These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God ... -
Colossians 4:11b NIV



Hippocrates

Luke's highly educated writing style is the highest quality Greek in the New Testament. He likely received Hippocratic medical training at one of the renowned Greek universities. Hippocrates (the father of Western medicine), had revolutionized Greek medicine, arguing that disease was not a punishment by the gods, but the product of environmental factors, diet, and living habits. Hippocratic schools stressed observation, deduction, and documentation. They were the first to categorize illnesses as acute, chronic, endemic, and epidemic.

Graduating medical students *still* recite the Hippocratic Oath.



Here's an excavated doctor's residence that was buried by volcanic ash, in Pompeii, about five years before Dr. Luke died (79^{AD}). It's called The House of the Surgeon, because it contained an amazing, ancient surgical toolkit. These instruments are strikingly similar to those in use in the late 1800's. They include: scalpels, forceps, catheters and even arrow extractors. The house has a fresco of a doctor removing an arrow head.



And so, a highly educated doctor documents the humanity of Jesus.

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. - *Luke 1:3-4 NIV*

We don't know who this "most excellent Theophilus" is. He could've been a patient, friend, or patron ... or, all three. His title indicates wealth and position, and his Greek name means: "One who loves God".

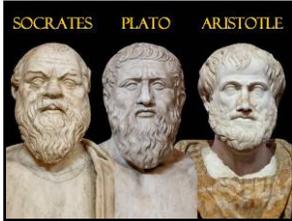
The Greeks were creative thinkers who pursued studies in a precise and systematic manner. And their sense of scientific accuracy in the recording of history was well developed.

So, Dr. Luke interviews as many eyewitness accounts, and visits as many locations as he can. And his resulting Gospel is as close to a modern biography as existed in his day.



Only Dr. Luke tells about Joseph and Mary traveling to Bethlehem and giving birth in a stable. Mary may have told him herself. And only Dr. Luke tells about Mary and Joseph searching for their missing twelve-year-old son, and finding Him reasoning with the teachers in the temple.

The Greeks were lovers of music, poetry and art. So, it's not surprising that only Dr. Luke records the inspired song of the Virgin Mary, and then Zechariah (John the Baptist's father).



Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle

But, perhaps more than anything, the Greeks were philosophers. And the central aim of Greek philosophy was to understand what perfection would look like in a human being. It is to these people that Dr. Luke presents Jesus as the *Perfect Man* who came to bring salvation to *sinful* man. He became like us that He might bring us back to God. Luke's key verse is when Jesus says that ...

The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. - *Luke 19:10 NIV*

And this is why God inspired a Greek doctor to write a Gospel. As a gentile, he presents Jesus' attitude toward gentiles. As a doctor, he relates Jesus' compassion to the hurting.

In fact, Luke puts so much emphasis on Jesus' great concern for the poor, the sick, the despised, and the powerless, that his book has earned the nickname: The Gospel of the Outcasts.

And it begins with baby Jesus' first visitors: Shepherds. Matthew tells about the Wise Men who come to announcing Jesus as the King of the Jews. But only Dr. Luke tells about the angel appearing to the humble shepherds, and announcing Him as *Savior*.

... I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. - *Luke 2:10b-11 NIV*

This great joy is "for all the people". And only Dr. Luke reports that they found their Savior in a feed trough. He came in humility to be fully involved in human affairs.

Only Dr. Luke conveys what old Simeon, moved by the Spirit, proclaimed when Jesus was dedicated in the temple.

... my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. - *Luke 2:30-32 NIV*

Only Dr. Luke tells about the Roman centurion who, knowing that some rabbis avoid contact with gentiles, asks Jesus to give a healing order from where He is and, "My servant will be healed".

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." - *Luke 7:9 NIV*

This gentile soldier simultaneously recognized and confessed his own unworthiness while trusting in the goodness and worthiness of Christ.

Only Dr. Luke gives us Jesus' parables of:

- The Good Samaritan; where the kindness of a despised outcast to a stranger shows up the Jewish leaders, and reveals the detested Samaritan to be the true neighbor.
- The Prodigal Son; where the father welcomes with open arms, the son who had squandered everything that had been given to him and lived a wretched life away from home for so long.
- The Pharisee and the Publican; where it's the sinner who recognizes his shame and cries out for mercy who's justified.

Only Dr. Luke informs us of how a reviled chief tax collector named Zacchaeus climbed a tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.'" - *Luke 19:5-7 NIV*

And Zacchaeus was so moved by Jesus' grace and compassion and kindness that he vows to give half of his possessions to the poor, and to repay four-fold anyone he has cheated.

You know the old saying: No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. Our faith must be expressed to others through our hands and hearts and mouths.

Who are you relating to, reaching out to, and having active compassion on? Don't use the excuse that you have enough troubles of your own to worry about. Only Dr. Luke tells us that even while Jesus hung dying on the cross, He was extending kindness, compassion, and salvation to a common criminal.

[The thief] said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." - *Luke 23:42-43 NIV*

This crook was saved the same way you and I will be: he put his faith in the Son of Man, who died to pay the penalty of his sin.

Even the gentile centurion who guarded the crucifixion said:

Surely this was a righteous **man**. - *Luke 23:47 NIV*

Only Dr. Luke reports how a risen Jesus walked and talked with two unsuspecting disciples on the road to Emmaus, demonstrating He's the same understanding, caring friend He'd been before His death.

Only Dr. Luke describes how Jesus had to convince his frightened disciples that he was still the Man they knew, just *glorified*.

"It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. - *Luke 24:39b-43 NIV*

And being fully man, our risen Savior is able to understand, empathize with, and take compassion upon us all.

Luke ends his Gospel with a proclamation from Jesus:

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name **to all nations**, beginning at Jerusalem. - *Luke 24:46-47 NIV*

Luke is definitely the Gospel of gentiles and sinners. And that makes it extra special to me, because I'm both of those things!