

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, The Theology of Luke-Acts, Session 8, The Church in Luke, The New Testament People of God, Part 1

This is Dr. Robert A. Peterson in his teaching on the Theology of Luke-Acts. This is session 8, Robert A. Peterson, the Church in Luke, the New Testament People of God, Part 1.

We continue our lectures on Luke and theology with some of my own material on the church, the New Testament people of God in the Gospel of Luke. The church in Luke.

With a prologue, Luke begins his gospel designed to enable Theophilus, to whom the book is dedicated, to be assured concerning, quote, the things that have been fulfilled among us. Luke 1:1, Luke 1:1. These are the events of Jesus' life, beginning with his conception and birth, continuing through his ministry of word and deed, and culminating in his death, resurrection, and ascension.

That is, Luke speaks of the church's Lord and Savior and of the salvation he brings to sinners, that they might belong to God's people. He concludes his gospel in the same way, reminding his followers that scripture predicted his death, resurrection, and the proclamation of the message of repentance and forgiveness, quote, to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:47.

Luke points toward his book of Acts when he tells his disciples that they are his witnesses who must wait in Jerusalem for God to send the Holy Spirit to empower them for witness. Of course, Acts begins with this happening at Pentecost. At the very end of Luke's gospel, Jesus blessed his disciples and, quote, was carried into heaven.

This ties the Gospel and Acts together and points to the very first event Acts records, Jesus' ascension. Luke thus views his gospel in Acts as two books that belong together. The gospel moves from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, where Jesus found the church, while Acts tells of his apostles preaching the gospel from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, that more and more people, including Gentiles, might join the church and worship Christ, Acts 1:8. We'll investigate seven episodes in Luke's gospel that set a foundation for the New Testament people of God, Israelites, and Gentiles, Luke 2:25 through 32.

Let me start with verse 22. And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him, baby Jesus, up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male who first opens the womb

shall be called holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed, and a sword will pierce through your own soul also, so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

Joseph and Mary were godly but apparently poor Israelites. After the baby boy was circumcised on the eighth day, as God required (Genesis 17:12), they named him Jesus. The Lord saved them, as angels had instructed them.

Luke 1:21, Luke 1:31. The law required that a woman who gave birth to a son was unclean for the seven days before his circumcision, Leviticus 12:1 through 5. The offering that Joseph and Mary made for her purification indicated they were poor, verses 6 through 13 of Leviticus 12 still. Luke then presents two witnesses, as Howard Marshall notes, referring to Anna, the second witness, quoting Marshall commentary on Luke in the New International Greek Testament commentary series, quoting that, "her presence provides the second of the two witnesses required to testify to the significance of Jesus, Deuteronomy 19:15.

By the testimony of two or three witnesses, the matter will be settled like that. Our concern is with the first witness, Simeon. He's a godly man on whom the Holy Spirit rested, who'd been looking for the advent of the Messiah referred to by Luke as Israel's consolation.

Simeon received supernatural guidance, for it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, Luke 2:22. The Spirit also guided Simeon to the temple at the very time Joseph and Mary were presenting Jesus. Simeon saw Joseph and Mary, took baby Jesus into his arms, offered praise to God, and exclaimed, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel, Luke 2:30 through 32.

God had fulfilled his promise to let Simeon see the Messiah before Simeon died. His words are powerful. My eyes have seen your salvation.

The tiny baby Jesus was the savior of the world. He would go to adulthood, live a sinless life, die on the cross for sinners and be raised again, proclaiming his victory over our enemies. Moreover, here early in Luke's gospel, Jesus is said to be a light for revelation to Gentiles as well as glory to Israel.

Verses 31 and 32. Luke clarifies that all peoples in verse 31 means even Gentiles in verse 32. My eyes have seen your salvation that you prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, Israel.

It includes both, all peoples, including both Jews, of course, but also Gentiles, the nations. This is only properly appreciated in light of the plight of Gentiles in the first century. Thielman provides insight when he portrays Frank Thielman, Ephesians commentary, page 157, "Thielman, Paul's description in Ephesians 2:11 and 12 of the desperate situation of Gentiles prior to the gospel's advent is given there.

Here, Israel was God's people and the repository of God's word. Prior to the coming of the gospel, only those within the boundaries of Israel had hope for salvation from the wrath of God that he would pour out on the disobedient. Uncircumcised Gentiles were by definition excluded from this people and this hope, and were, therefore in an especially desperate position of hopelessness.

They were without God and without hope in the world. A major purpose of Luke-Acts is to show that God in his plan has reversed the situation of desperation and hopelessness. Now, believing Gentiles and Jews become part of the people of God.

Luke already in the infancy narrative points the way to this momentous shift between the testaments. Bock elucidates, Bock's first volume of his commentary on Luke, "in this context, it is clear that the Gentiles are portrayed as recipients of the revelation. The rest of Luke's gospel and acts reveal that Gentiles participate as equals.

Jesus brings salvation to all humankind, illuminating them into God's way, close quote. Already in Simeon's words in Luke two, therefore, readers are introduced to Luke's universalizing tendency. Jesus is the savior of the world, including Gentiles.

Understandably, Joseph and Mary are perplexed at Simeon's words. Verse 33, next he blesses them both and sends Mary a mixed message. Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is opposed so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

But he includes in there, and a sword will pierce through your own soul also. Again, we find here, at the beginning of Jesus' life, portends of what is to come. Simeon predicts that Jesus' life and ministry will provoke conflict among the Israelites.

He'll bring both curse and blessing to Jews, to those who reject him, the curse of God's judgment, and to those who believe in him, the blessing of salvation. Verse 34, in addition, as a result of Jesus' life and death, a sword will pierce Mary's soul. Indeed, she would suffer greatly as she witnessed the crucifixion of her son, John 19:23.

Howard Marshall shares in his *Luke Historian and Theologian*, "it is our thesis that the idea of salvation supplies the key to the theology of Luke" page 92. We agree and add that salvation is the foundation for the New Testament people of God. Here at the beginning of Luke's gospel, the infant Jesus is proclaimed as salvation.

In Simeon's prediction, we learn that salvation will extend to Gentiles. The New Testament people of God will consist of Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus and thereby experience salvation. Our second passage is *Fishers of Men*, Luke 5:4 through 10.

5:1, on one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the sound, to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch. And Simon answered Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word, I will let down the nets. And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish and their nets were breaking.

They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

For he and all who are with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken. And so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, do not be afraid; from now on, you will be catching men.

When they brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. Jesus was teaching the word of God beside the Sea of Galilee, and the crowd was pressing in on him. Luke 5:1. The word of God is an important theme to Luke, for, "it appears only once each. The words, the word of God appear only once each in Matthew 15:6

and Mark 7:13. But in nearly 20 instances, the word of God, those words, characterizes the proclamation of the gospel in Luke-Acts.” James Edwards, *Gospel According to Luke*, page 152. Jesus spotted two empty boats that were on the lake's edge.

The fishermen had fished on at night and caught nothing and were cleaning their nets. Jesus got into Simon Peter's boat and asked him to put out a land and he did. And Jesus sat in the boat and taught the people.

After concluding his teaching, Jesus told Simon to take the boat out to deep water and to lower the trammel, the trammel nets, T-R-A-M-M-E-L. These were heavy duty nets made up of three layers that were used for fishing at night. Simon, a professional fisherman, mildly protested in light of their night's fruitless efforts.

But Simon was also a novice disciple, and in spite of his instincts, he obeyed Jesus. The result was stunning. When they did this, they caught a great number of fish.

Their nets began to tear. They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled their boats so full they began to sink verses 6 and 7. Peter and his companions were startled at this.

It's important that Luke mentions other disciples, lest we see this pericope as only about Jesus and Peter. As usual, he's the leader, but he's not alone; he is part of a band whom God will use mightily. Peter responded in faith, kneeling before Jesus and exclaiming, go away from me. I'm a sinful man. Lord, depart from me for I'm a sinful man. Oh, Lord.

At least three elements of Peter's response are noteworthy. First, he recognizes the great difference between Jesus and himself and asks Jesus to help him. Second, he acknowledges sinfulness, he acknowledges his sinfulness and unworthiness. This surprises us at first because Jesus' act did not display holiness, but divine guidance and power.

Nevertheless, confronted by Jesus' divine act, Peter is convicted of his sins. Third, Peter calls him Lord. The use of this word here falls in between the customary sir in the vocative and an acknowledgment of divinity.

Although some interpreters see a full Christological understanding of the term here, so Edwards, the gospel according to Luke, we disagree and side with Green that here, quote, Peter recognizes in Jesus the agency of God. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, page 233. Jesus then turns his miracle into a teaching moment when he tells Peter, don't be afraid; from now on, you'll be catching people, verse 10.

The catcher of fish will become a catcher of men and women for God. At this early point in Jesus' training of the disciples, he has an eye toward evangelism. These words will only be fulfilled in the apostolic preaching in Acts, but already Jesus impresses upon them the importance of evangelism.

The response of Peter, Andrew, James, and John is remarkable in verse 11; when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. They had had previous contact with Jesus, Luke 4, 38, and 39, but to leave their livelihood and huge catch of fish, to leave everything and pursue Jesus is amazing. Bach wisely sums up the message of Luke 5, 4 through 10.

Again, Bock's first volume on Luke, first Luke volume commentary, 460 to 462, "Jesus promises Peter what his vocation will be. The promise, specifically, is that Peter will catch people. The point is the idea of catch, gathering, and rescue.

So the life of discipleship begins for all the witnesses of this event. Upon returning to shore, they leave their ships behind. The subject here is plural, so other men leave in addition to Peter.

The priority of their lives is no longer fishing but following Jesus. Luke 14:27, and fishing for people. These disciples will become the great witnesses of the book of Acts.

According to Luke 5:4 to 11, sinners become the people of God by responding to Jesus as Peter and his fellow disciples did. We do not need to experience miracles or use Peter's words, but to join the church, we must believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Granted, Peter's faith was nascent and had to grow, but his faith was real, as is evidenced by his immediate response to Jesus, and more importantly, by his ongoing dedication to him.

True disciples leave all and follow Jesus. He occupies first place in their lives. Second, the chief message is a necessity of evangelism for the church.

God transforms sinful, selfish human beings into fishers of men and women for his kingdom. Members of God's New Testament people love sinners and pray for opportunities to share the good news with them. The New Testament people of God, number three in Luke, are forgiven sinners.

Luke 7:36 to 50. Luke 7:36. One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

And behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner, when she learned he was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment and standing behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears

and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now, when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, if this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner. And Jesus, answering him, said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you.

And he answered, say it, teacher. A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, and the other 50.

When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now, which of them will love him more? Simon answered the one, I suppose, for whom he canceled a larger debt. And Jesus said to him, you have judged rightly.

Then, turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, do you see this woman? I entered your house, and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much, but he who was forgiven little, loves little. And he said to her, your sins are forgiven. Then those who are at the table with him began to say among themselves, who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, your faith has saved you, go in peace.

Jesus spent time with sinners, and not only despised ones, he also spent time with quote, respectable unquote people, like this Pharisee. A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus to a public meal, Luke 7:36. Different from private meals, public meals had open doors, and people could just drop in and hear the discussion.

A woman in the town who was a sinner did just that. In public meals, people reclined on their sides on couches, with their legs pointing away from the table. The woman carried an alabaster jar of expensive perfume, stood behind Jesus' feet, washed them with her tears, and dried them with her hair, while kissing and anointing them with the perfume, verses 37 and 38.

The Pharisee was offended when he saw Jesus let such a sinful woman touch him, for the Pharisee would do no such thing. From the early episodes in Luke, Pharisees are known as “monitors of legal observance, who distance themselves from sinners,” Green, Gospel of Luke, page 308. Though he kept his thoughts to himself, he concluded Jesus was not a prophet, for surely a prophet would know the woman's identity, verse 39.

As the story unfolds, we see the Pharisee was wrong on both counts, as Marshall explains, "Jesus is able to read the Pharisee's thoughts and reply to them, and also, not only is Jesus willing to accept the touch of a sinful woman, he even suggests that her action is more welcome to him than that of his host." Marshall, Commentary on Luke, pages 309, 310. Jesus told the Pharisee, whose name was Simon, was now revealed, that he had something to tell him, and Simon told him to proceed.

Jesus then told a little parable of a creditor and two debtors. The first owed nearly two years wages, 500 denarii, and the second owed two months wages, 50 denarii. Neither debtor could repay his debt, and the creditor graciously forgave them both, Luke 7:41, 42.

Jesus then asked Simon which debtor would love the gracious creditor more. Simon responded I suppose the one he forgave more, verse 43. Jesus commended Simon for his answer and turned his attention to the woman. Jesus pointed out that Simon had neglected matters of social courtesy.

He had not had Jesus' feet washed. He did not welcome Jesus with a kiss, and he did not anoint Jesus' head with olive oil. By contrast, a woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

She kept kissing his feet and anointed his feet with expensive perfume, verses 44, 45. Jesus delivered the punchline to his parable. Verse 47: 'therefore I tell you this, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much, but he who is forgiven little loves little.'

She is like the debtor forgiven the greater debt in the parable. However, someone forgiven a lesser amount also shows less love. With these words, Jesus invites Simon to apply the parable to himself.

Amazingly, Jesus then told the woman, your sins are forgiven, verse 48. As on a previous occasion, observers were inwardly astonished. Compare Luke 5:21, that Jesus claimed to forgive sins as only God can, verse 49.

Jesus then pronounced, your faith has saved you, go in peace, verse 50. The episode ends here, and like a number of Jesus' parables, this story is open-ended. Compare Luke 15:25 to 32, the parable of the lost son, the prodigal son, and Luke 18:9 through 14, the Pharisee and the tax collector.

However, this calls for a response from Simon, the other hearers and readers. On a prima facie reading of the pericope, someone could conclude that the woman was saved because of her devotion to Jesus, and that conclusion would be a mistake. The

parable showed that the forgiveness of debts precedes the relative responses of love and gratitude, and Jesus himself explained, her many sins have been forgiven.

That's why she loved much, verse 47. Thus, love for God and Christ is a grateful response to knowing that sins are forgiven. The story of Simon the Pharisee and the sinful woman increases our understanding of the people of God in the New Testament.

Luther said correctly that there were only two kinds of people in the world, and they were both sinners, unforgiven and forgiven ones. This story shows that God's grace reaches out to everyone, and Jesus had a heart for the despised, including the sinful woman in the story. Religious people would do well to avoid the self-righteous attitude of Simon, who was shocked that Jesus would allow a prostitute to touch him.

The church is comprised of forgiven sinners who love Jesus much because he has forgiven them much. Our next passage is those who take up their cross daily, Luke 9:23 to 27, our fourth passage. Luke 9:23 to 27, a little one.

Jesus had foretold his death in Luke 9:22. The Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Then our parable comes, Luke 9:23 to 27, and he said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever would lose his life, whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the son of man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.

Next follows the transfiguration. After Jesus had confessed that, after Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Messiah, God's Messiah, Luke 9:20, and Jesus had predicted his passion, death, and resurrection, verses 21 and 22, he applied the message of the cross to his disciples' daily lives. Jesus spoke of people coming after him, which overlaps with the idea of following him.

Jesus challenges all who want to follow him. If anyone wants to follow me, verse 23, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. There are three elements to following after Jesus.

First, people must deny themselves, a concept appearing only here in the New Testament. It means to put God ahead of oneself, to devote oneself to God. It

involves giving up any trust, any notion of auto-soterism, of earning salvation through one's own efforts.

Instead of that, it means trusting Christ totally for salvation and pledging highest allegiance to him alone. Jesus' next words illuminate what denying oneself means. Second, Jesus' prospective followers must take up their cross each day.

People in Israel knew what this meant literally from their own experience of seeing Roman crucifixions. When they saw someone carrying his cross beam to the place of execution, they knew he was not coming back. He was going to die.

Does taking up the cross mean becoming a martyr for Jesus? Not necessarily, but it involves a willingness to die for him who died for us so that we might gain eternal life. Taking up the cross is not literal but metaphorical. It means dying to oneself, denying oneself.

Jesus insists this must be done daily. It's not something a disciple can do once and for all. Rather, it describes a Christian life as a life of dying to oneself and one's desires and of living preeminently for God.

Green amplifies, quote, one is to live on a daily basis as though one had been sentenced to death by crucifixion. Disciples then are called upon to identify with Jesus in his suffering. Green, Gospel of Luke, page 373.

Third, they must not only begin with Jesus, but follow him, continue as his disciples by following his example. Marshall explains, the point is that the disciple who takes up the cross is doing what Jesus does. He's following in the same way as the master.

Marshall's commentary on Luke 374. Jesus next speaks ironic words that sound like a riddle. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. Saving one's life by living for oneself does not characterize followers of Jesus. Instead, they lose their lives in love and service for him.

Ironically, in doing so, they gain life indeed, eternal life now and forever. Bach notes how this idea is similar to that of repentance and faith expressed in acts. Jesus goes on, for what does it benefit someone if he gains the whole world and yet loses or forfeits himself? Verse 25.

This rhetorical question reinforces Jesus' message. Gaining everything except Christ means wasting one's life now and losing forever in the age to come. Jesus then puts discipleship in eschatological terms.

Verse 26. Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels? Being ashamed of Christ by denying him points to a lack of salvation. Supposed disciples who persist in being ashamed of him risk being rejected by him in turn at his majestic and triumphant return.

Jesus turns from this stern warning to encouraging words. Truly, I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.
Verse 27.

These words have puzzled interpreters. Some critical scholars understand Jesus to be predicting his soon return, which failed to come to pass. Also relevant is that the very next words in Luke's gospel depict Jesus' transfiguration before Peter, James, and John.

Although interpreters struggle to understand Jesus' saying, it seems best to see its fulfillment as foreshadowed in his transfiguration that points to his death, resurrection, and session at God's right hand, which in turn looks to his second coming in glory. Bach understands Jesus' words as fulfilled, quote, in his resurrection and exaltation and enthronement as Messiah in Acts 2. While regarding a transfiguration as a preview of when Jesus will fully manifest his authority on the earth in the future, as Luke 21, 27 suggests. Bach, volume one of Luke commentary 854 and 55.

What does Luke 9, 23 to 27 teach us about the New Testament people of God? Jesus paints a tough picture of authentic discipleship. He describes his people as dedicated disciples who live for him and not themselves. Even if it means their death, people of God die to self and live for him who loved them and by dying, redeem them from the slavery of sin.

Christ will own his people before the Father and angels when he comes again. As a result, the New Testament people of God will gain eternal life and glory on the new earth forever and ever. In our next lecture, we'll finish up my uh, study of some of these passages in the gospel of Luke that present the New Testament people of God.

We'll see recipients of grace in Luke 15:11 to 32, Parable of the Prodigal Son. We'll see those whom Jesus saves in Luke 19, one to 10, which is the story of Zacchaeus. And finally, we'll see Jesus witnesses in that very important chapter of Luke 24 verses 44 through 49.

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