

Reading Luke 24...

As we make our way through the Gospel of Luke, we will come across a very important passage as it relates to the interpretation of the Old Testament. In Luke 24, we read about Christ's post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. Let's look at what Jesus said to them.

First, he appeared to two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus and asked them what they were talking about, and not recognizing that it was Jesus, they explained it to him, being sad and disappointed because they thought that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. They heard of reports about the empty tomb, but apparently, they did not believe. Jesus responds:

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:25-27 ESV)

Later, Jesus appeared to many disciples gathered together:

Then he said to them, "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 must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should 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. (Luke 24:44-47 ESV)

Note that Jesus had clearly taught this same approach to the OT before his death and resurrection. Speaking to the Jews, he said:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, (John 5:39 ESV)

If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. (John 5:46 ESV)

What can we take away from these statements? First, if Christ taught his disciples to read Scripture centered on him, *should we not also do the same?* The Bible itself instructs us to read it as one story, centered on Jesus. Second, we should look for Christ in the OT. The question is not *where* is he in the OT (as if certain passages speak of him and others don't), but rather *how* is he spoken of in a given passage (either directly or indirectly). Third, by implication, since Christ is the center of the story and all Scripture speaks of his person and work (to one degree or another), you can see the gospel from *anywhere* (e.g., Acts 8:32-35; cf. Isa 53:7-8). Not surprisingly, the rest of the NT reflects this same approach to the OT, with the Apostles following the very method that Jesus taught them. So, in obedience to Jesus' teaching, we should always ask how the OT speaks of him. Enjoy your Savior this week and keep reading!

Jason Hunt

Reading the Gospels: *Birth Narrative of Christ*

This week, in the SAPC Reading Challenge, you will read Luke 1-3. These chapters, like Matthew 1-3 and Mark 1, contain narratives surrounding the birth of Christ. The inspired authors not only recorded true historical information about His birth, they also arranged their material in such a way as to *cue* their readers (and us) to certain things which highlight the significance of Christ's advent. In particular, there are a number of Old Testament (OT) connections that we *should* make as we read Luke 1-3. This is merely another way of reading Luke 1-3 in its *canonical* context. The following are just a sample of such connections:

- His way as Lord ('Yahweh [LORD]') in the OT would be prepared by John (the Baptist) (1:17, 76; 3:4—Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1; 4:6)
- He will be the Davidic Ruler, whose kingdom will have no end (1:32-33—2 Sam 7:11-13; Isa 9:6-7; Jer 23:5-6; Dan 2:44; 7:14, 18, 27)
- His birth will be miraculous, like Isaac's birth ('offspring' of Abraham) (1:37—Gen 18:14; cf. Gal 3:16)
- God has shown the 'strength with His arm' in Christ's coming (1:51a—Isa 51:9)
- Christ's coming will involve 'scattering the proud,' 'bringing down the mighty from their thrones,' and 'exalting those of humble estate' (1:52b-53—Dan 4:37; etc.)
- Christ's coming is God helping His servant, Israel (1:54—Deut 33:29; cf. Isa 41:8-9; 49:3)
- Christ's coming fulfills the promises to Abraham and his offspring (1:55, 72-73—Mic 7:20; cf. Gal 3:16)
- Christ gives light to those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death (1:79—Psalm 107:10, 14; Isa 9:2)
- Christ's coming is the 'consolation of Israel' and the 'redemption of Jerusalem' (2:25, 38—Ps 130:7-8; Isa 40:1; 57:18)
- Christ is a light to the Gentiles and for glory to Israel (2:32—Isa 42:6; 46:13; 49:6; 52:10; 60:3)
- Christ is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (2:34-35—Isa 8:14)
- Christ's coming will involve 'every valley being filled,' 'every mountain and hill made low,' 'the crooked becoming straight,' 'rough places becoming level,' and 'all flesh seeing the salvation of God' (3:5-6—Isa 42:16; 45:2; 49:11; 52:10; 57:14; Zech 4:7; cf. Eccl 1:15; 7:13, 29)
- Christ comes with a 'winnowing fork' in His hand for the 'harvest,' including judgment (3:17—Isa 30:24; Mal 4:1)
- His genealogy connects to such figures as David, Judah, Jacob, Isaac, Shem, Noah, and lastly, Adam, the 'son of God' (this sets the stage for the temptation in the wilderness [Luke 4]—to be read with the backdrop of Adam & Eve's temptation in the Garden) (3:23-38—all the OT significance, by way of promise, concerning the individuals listed; Gen 3:1-24)

When encountering these familiar passages during this Advent season, consider their connection to the larger story of Scripture and be amazed. This would be a great way to gather fuel for prayer and praise. Keep reading!

Jason Hunt

Reading the Gospels: *The Transfiguration*

Later this week, the SAPC Reading Challenge will cover the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-39). This event has come up before in your reading (Matt 17:1-8; Mk 9:2-8). It is an amazing display of the glory of Christ. However, you may be wondering *what* exactly took place and *why*? Was it merely to show that Jesus was God, or is there more going on?

First, as always, let's look at the immediate context. In all three Synoptic Gospels, the Transfiguration comes after Jesus speaks about *His return* (Matt 16:27; Mk 9:38; Lk 9:26). Jesus also refers to the fact that some of the disciples there with Him at that moment will not die until they see Him coming in His Kingdom with power (Matt 16:28; Mk 9:1; Lk 9:27). This is connected to the event that follows. Hence, the Transfiguration is a foretaste of His Second Coming, which will consummate of the Kingdom of God at the end of the age (cf. 2 Pet 1:17-19).

Next, let's explore the significance of the Transfiguration in light of the larger story of redemption. There are a number of allusions to the Old Testament (OT) in this event. The *mountain* location, the presence of the *cloud*, the *voice* of God, the appearance of Jesus' *face changing*, and the command to "*listen to him*" all evoke Moses at Sinai (cf. Exod 24:9-18; 34:29-35; Deut 18:15). Moreover, Moses himself appears with Elijah and they are speaking to Jesus! What were they speaking about? They were speaking about His "departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." It is interesting to note that the word used for "departure" here is the Greek word for "*exodus*." One significant OT theme, especially in the Prophets, is that the Messiah will accomplish a second and greater exodus than the exodus from Egypt. In other words, Jesus is "a new Moses and is inaugurating a new exodus" (Beale, *New Testament Theology*, 573). He is also the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets and the prophetic office as *the* Prophet. Unlike at Sinai, the voice heard at the Transfiguration does not continue to deliver an extended message (like Moses received), but rather it directs the disciples to Jesus and *His* speech—listen to *Him!* "Jesus' teaching is the fulfillment of the heavenly voice at Mount Sinai" (Poynthress, *Theophany*, 385-386).

Much more could be said (e.g., the significance of Elijah and his relationship to John the Baptist, Elijah's relationship to Moses, Peter wanting to make 'tents' [or 'tabernacles'], evoking the Feast of Tabernacles and its eschatological significance, allusions to the suffering Servant in Isaiah and the Davidic king in Psalm, both of whom are addressed as "Son" and "Chosen," etc.), *but* we need to move on to our last important consideration.

Lastly, we need to ask, *what is the significance of the Transfiguration for our lives today?* First, Christ is the final appearance and the final word from God—as the God-man. Second, God clearly told the disciples who were with Jesus to "*listen to Him!*" During this advent season, we honor the Lord Jesus by remembering His incarnation, but let us not dishonor Him by ignoring His teaching. "Listen," in this context, means more than merely hearing about Him—it means obeying and following Him (cf. v.23). Let us endeavor to follow after Jesus this advent season, as we remember His birth. Keep reading!

Jason Hunt

Reading the Gospels: Interpreting the *Parables*

Reading through the Gospels, you will encounter Jesus teaching through parables. In fact, there are about twenty-five different parables, with some appearing more than once in the Gospels. Luke, alone, has eighteen. Apart from their frequency, they are very memorable teachings. We remember parables like the Good Samaritan and the Sower (or Soils), but often, we do not have a consistent or clear approach to interpreting them. Without one, we run the risk of drawing conclusions that Jesus did not intend. So, *how should we interpret them?* I want to highlight five things to consider.

First, consider the *purpose of the parables* in general. Jesus tells his disciples (quoting Isa 6:9-10 in Matt 13:10-17; Mk 4:10-12; Lk 8:9-10) that teaching in parables has a *two-fold effect*—to reveal and to veil. The secrets of the kingdom are revealed to his disciples (cf. Mk 4:11; Matt 13:11; i.e. those who believe), while at the same time, they are veiled to those who do not believe. Hence, they either reveal or veil the secrets of the kingdom, depending on the heart condition of the hearer.

Second, consider the *relationship between the various parables and the kingdom of God*. If they reveal secrets of the kingdom, they are related to it on some level. Many parables are even introduced with the words, “the kingdom of heaven is like...” So, it is important to ask how a particular parable relates to the larger theme of the kingdom of God in the context of the larger redemptive story throughout the Bible.

Third, consider the *immediate context* of each parable. In particular, take note of the occasion in which Jesus tells it and how he introduces it. This will help you to detect his intention and purpose for application. In addition, pay attention to what He stresses or emphasizes at the end of the parable. This will also help you to understand its meaning and application.

Fourth, consider *the parables that Jesus interpreted for his disciples* as a guide (e.g., the Sower, the Weeds). He seems to interpret them in a controlled, allegorical way. For example, the seed represents the word of God and the various soils, different kinds of people and their responses to the word. In other parables, it seems possible that each main character represents a complementary teaching point. However, the immediate context considerations listed above should be a guide. This raises an important question and brings us to our last consideration.

Fifth, consider *how many points is Jesus making in a given parable?* It is common to conclude that there is only one point per parable (usually, in response to reading many things into a parable that are not actually there). However, many do not fit this conception—for example, the Sower (which point is the ‘one’?). Rather, it seems better to allow for more than one point if the content and context dictate it, but to also allow for the fact that there may be one main point with sub-points related to it.

As you continue to read through the Gospels during this Advent season, let us follow Jesus’ exhortation that appears in the context of the Parable of the Sower: “*Pay attention to what you hear*” (Mk 4:24). In other words, hear and *obey*. Keep reading!

Jason Hunt