

The Wisdom of Christ

Parables Study from Luke

While on earth, Jesus told many short, pointed stories designed to teach specific truths. Many of these parables have been recorded throughout the Gospels, but it is Luke who has recorded the most parables of the Gospel writers. Nearly half of Luke's gospel is quotation from Jesus. It is to this man, whose purpose in writing his gospel was to deal with the facts of Jesus' life, "having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, (writing) it out in consecutive order... so that the exact truth might be known," whom we must turn.

Luke's gospel is an exemplary literary work, and of special consideration is the portion in which Jesus travels toward Jerusalem, in which some 10 chapters are all arranged and detailed masterfully. We will seek to investigate this portion of Scripture and select various parables to clearly examine the truths which were so bold when spoken, that the hearers were moved to weep, argue, abandon, follow or plot murder against the speaker. These stories contain as much gunpowder as before, but in order to be moved as the original hearers were, we must seek to grasp the literary and cultural facets which are two thousand years beyond our fingertips. This study will seek to explain the key facets of each parable and the context in which it was spoken, and hopefully, we will be more devoted to Christ as a result of seeing these stories anew through trained eyes.

Goals:

- 1) To be able to describe the core truth of each parable in a sentence.
- 2) To be able to explain crucial cultural and literary facets of each parable.
- 3) To be able to describe how each truth challenges the way you live your life day to day.

Expectations:

1-2 hours of prep work (reading the parable, answering the questions and preparing to discuss your findings and create a plan for real life application)

Note:

Much of the information in this study, especially the cultural observations, was taken from Kenneth Bailey in his books *Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. Both would be wonderful for additional reading.

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Bible Study 1- Introduction

Suggested Homework:

- 1) Print out these studies.
- 2) Complete the following questions after the introduction.
- 3) Come to the group with 2-3 observations from the text/study and 2-3 ways you need to apply the lesson.

- 4) Meet with another member of the group to discuss issues of accountability and growth this semester.
- 5) During the week, Read Luke 9-19, the “Jerusalem travel document,” which is discussed later in this study.

Introduction to the book of Luke

This section adapted from Charles Ryrie

Instructions: I gave a lot of extra material here. Please read all of the **bolded** text within the sections and all of the material under “Jerusalem travel document” and following. Don’t feel the need to look up every reference included. Much of the information in the first couple sections (i.e. Authorship, Methodology and Distinctive Approach) are background and additional information.

Authorship: Luke, the “beloved physician” (Col. 4:14), close friend and companion of Paul, was probably the only Gentile author of any part of the New Testament. We know nothing about his early life or conversion except that he was not an eyewitness of the life of Jesus Christ (Lk. 1:2). Though a physician by profession, he was primarily an evangelist, writing this gospel and the book of Acts and accompanying Paul in missionary work. He was with Paul at the time of the apostle’s martyrdom (2 Tim. 4:11), but of his later life we have no certain facts.

Purpose: **Luke’s purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of Man, come to save the world through his death.** The parables we will study this semester will articulate different parts of that main thrust- the Son of Man’s sacrificial death for all as Savior. The Son of Man is a distinctive title of note as well. It comes from Daniel, and the emphasis of this particular name was to show that Christ was not only the Messiah as foretold by the Prophets, but one from among us. Luke contains a distinctive approach to the people in the book (as noted below), and an emphasis Luke also carries is Christ’s humanity and his role as Messiah.

Audience: Luke is writing specifically to Theophilus, and more broadly to Gentiles, especially those who are disenfranchised or ostracized by society. **Luke wants those people to know that the Son of Man cares for and died for them.** (I bolded material in “distinctive approach” which highlight this truth)

Methodology: In his prologue, Luke states that his own work was stimulated by the work of others (1:1), that he consulted eyewitnesses (1:2), and that he sifted and arranged the information (1:3) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to instruct Theophilus in the historical reliability of the faith (1:4). This is a carefully researched and documented writing.

Distinctive Approach: Though specifically dedicated to Theophilus, the gospel is slanted toward all Gentiles.

(1) The author displays an unusual interest in medical matters (4:38; 7:15; 8:55; 14:2; 18:15; 22:50).

(2) Much attention is given to recounting of the events surrounding the birth of Christ. Only Luke records the annunciation to Zacharias and Mary, the songs of Elizabeth and Mary, the birth and childhood of John the Baptist, the birth of Jesus, the visit of the shepherds, the circumcision, presentation in the Temple, details of Christ's childhood, and the inner thoughts of Mary.

(3) **Luke shows an uncommon interest in individuals**, as seen in his accounts of Zaccheus (19:1-10) and the penitent thief (23:39-43) and in the parables of the prodigal son (15:11-32) and the penitent tax-gatherer (19:9-14). It is Luke who gives us the story of the good Samaritan (10:29-37) and the one thankful ex-leper (17:11-19).

(4) There is in this gospel a special emphasis on prayer (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 10:21; 11:1; 22:39-46; 23:34, 46).

(5) **The prominent place given to woman is another distinctive feature of this gospel** (chaps. 1, 2; 7:11-13; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 21:1-4; 23:27-31, 48).

(6) **The writer also shows interest in poverty and wealth** (1:52-53; 4:16-22; 6:20, 24-25; 12:13-21; 14:12-13; 16:19-31).

(7) The book preserves four beautiful hymns: the *Magnificat* of Mary (1:46-55), the *Benedictus* of Zacharias (1:67-79), the *Gloria in Excelsis* of the angels (2:14), and the *Nunc Dimittis* of Simeon (2:29-32). This is a gospel of the compassionate Son of Man offering salvation to the whole world (19:10).¹

Jerusalem travel document/chiasms: (Luke 9:51-19:48). The name "Jerusalem travel document" is a term I will use to refer to the section of Luke in which Jesus is preparing to offer his life on the cross. This beautifully constructed poetic tapestry's focal point is the coming death of Christ and the themes, structure and format all reinforce this central focus: Christ's death. This part of the book of Luke follows a literary format common in ancient literature known as an inverted parallelism or chiasm.

Luke used many literary devices to make the message he was communicating very clear, and an understanding of these devices will help us to more accurately detect the meaning Luke is highlighting. It will take reading through this next section a few times to understand these chiasms, but the effort will be needed. There are chiasms in every one of the parables we will be studying this semester, and a base knowledge is necessary for you to get much out of this study. If you are still confused, ask your Bible study leader so they can help you understand these literary features.

These structures are not only poetic features, but can also be used to isolate important points of meaning that would not always become apparent without knowing the author was drawing our attention. There are many ways in which we communicate ideas so that the hearer understands even in our culture. Think of exaggeration and sarcasm. You pick those devices out of conversations, tv, books and movies. The ancient Middle East also had ways of understanding meaning, but they were a bit different than ours. Below are three examples of chiasms we will see in this part of Luke.

¹ Ryrie, Charles C. *The Ryrie Study Bible: Expanded Edition (NASB-1995 update)*. Chicago: Moody Press.

Standard Parallelism

In the standard parallelism, **the second line gives fuller meaning to the first**. This way, it's easier to understand what the author is saying, because we have two lines describing the same thing. To find this, look for common terms or associated themes in consecutive lines.

Here's a silly one that I made up:

- A I love to play games all day
A' And Halo is good in the morning and the evening
- B But I find that it makes my studies suffer
B' And A's become C's with an XBOX LIVE subscription

The key thing to notice is that the second line is more specific or poetic than the first. A middle easterner reading this might not have a clue what two of the lines are, but they would be able to understand the meaning by seeing that there is a parallelism. This is most common in the Psalms and prophecy of the Old Testament, but it does occur occasionally in Luke. Spotting this is difficult, and scholars are the ones who do it best.

My goal is not that you know how to spot this structure, just that you know that it means **the second line gives fuller meaning to the first** when I tell you there is one in the text.

(an example of standard parallelism from Luke 21:23-24)

- A Alas, for those who are with child,
A' and for those who nurse them in those days,
- B For great distress shall be on the earth
B' and wrath upon this people
- C They will fall by the edge of the sword
C' and be led captive among all nations.

Notice that here; **the second line gives fuller meaning to the first**. We get a clear picture of this apocalyptic event because the parallelism gives depth to each concept expressed.

Step parallelism

The step parallelism is designed to show relation similarly to the standard parallelism. Usually, there are repeated words, and the same progression of thought. It draws our focus to see how the two phrases or sets are different and similar. In summary, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

My silly example:

A The one *drinking Coke* will be *happy*,
B and he will also be *full of joy*.

A I *drink Coke* and feel *happy* inside,
B and within my heart my *joy is full*.

Here, we see common words used and a similar progression. The author then may be seeking to draw attention to this particular progression. In addition, the change from speaking about anyone who drinks Coke to personal experience further shows another facet to the truth of the material. Remember, a step parallelism seeks to **highlight a connection between two series of thoughts**.

(an example from Luke 11:9-10)

A *Ask*, and it will be *given* you
B *Seek*, and you will *find*
C *Knock*, and it will be *opened* to you
A For everyone who *asks receives*
B And he who *seeks finds*
C And to him who *knocks*, it will be *opened*.

Note the progression and shift of persons. The first example is addressed to the listener, whereas the second part is detailing with describing a person's experience. The questions to ask when looking at a step parallelism are: "How are these similar?" and "How are these different?" The author is linking them, so our job is to discover why/how they are connected and how they are different. When we do that, we get a fuller picture of what the author is trying to communicate. A step parallelism **highlights a connection between two series of thoughts**.

My goal is not that you would always identify a step parallelism, but that when presented with one (when I tell you there is one), that you would ask the above questions about their similarities and differences.

Inverted Parallelism

In the inverted parallelism, the **middle term or section is accentuated**. The reason why an author includes an inverted parallelism is to draw our attention to the middle feature. This is used commonly in Luke and helps us to understand the meaning of the overall discourse. This is seen below in the whole of the Jerusalem travel document, but it is easier seen at first in small examples. Look for common words (I will italicize this when I give you these). Once again, the goal is that you know what an inverted parallelism means, that the **middle term or section is accentuated**, not necessarily that you can now find them on your own.

My silly example of an inverted parallelism

- A I love eating Chocolate chip *cookies*
- B Their *chocolate chips* are delicious
- C My tummy is filled with *warmth* when
- D I think of my mom and the times she made them for me
- C' I am *warmed* by the memories as
- B' The *chocolate chips* melt in my mouth
- A' and the *cookies* are eaten.

In this case, the point is not the cookies, but the fact that mom made them. Each of the supporting phrases should be understood in regard to how they relate to the central item (D). Remember, the inverted parallelism focuses our attention and the **middle term or section is accentuated**.

(an example from Amos 5:4-6)

- A Seek me and live
- B and do not seek Bethel
- C and Gilgal do not enter
- D and to Beersheba do not cross over
- C because Gilgal an exile shall be exiled
- B and Bethel shall come to nothing
- A Seek Yahweh and live.

Here once again, the middle is the point of emphasis “to Beersheba do not cross over.” Each of the supporting phrases must be understood in light of this. Seeking Yahweh and live looks like not crossing over to Beersheba. Bethel and Gilgal are nothing and not worth the Israelites’ focus. They should avoid those places just like not going into Beersheba. In a way, the supporting phrases also give clarity as to why the central item is important. It works both ways. Our attention is focused on the middle, and that helps us understand what each of the other parts is there for. Also, we can understand the gravity and importance of the middle term because of the supporting phrases (i.e. they will be exiled, come to nothing). Once again, in an inverted parallelism, our focus is drawn to the middle term and it is accentuated. This helps us lock in on the meaning expressed.

Jerusalem travel document- a chiasm

Luke for us has laid out a brilliant example of this in the entire travel document. All 10 chapters sit as a great chiasm, which gives another sense that these poetic devices are meant to be seen. As we examine each parable, we will seek to discover where these structures are used and how their presence enhances the impact of what Jesus was expressing. **Please read Luke 9-19 now.**

Jerusalem travel document, aka Monster Chiasm (i.e. Luke 9-19)

A Jerusalem: Eschatological (looking to “the End”) Events (9:51-56)

B Follow Me (9:57-10:12)

C What shall I do to inherit eternal life? (10:25-41)

D Prayer (11:1-13)

E Signs and the present kingdom (11:14-32)

F Conflict with the Pharisees: Money (11:37-12:34)

G The kingdom is not yet and is now (12:35-59)

H The Call of the Kingdom to Israel (13:1-9)

I The Nature of the Kingdom (13:10-22)

J Jerusalem: Eschatological (looking to “the End”) Events (13:22-35)

(a) Salvation-“will those who are saved be few...enter by the narrow door”

(b) Judgment-“depart from me...thrust out of the kingdom”

(c) Vision-“you will see Abraham and the prophets in the kingdom”

(d) Fulfillment-the ingathering of the banquet of the kingdom

(e) Death-“Herod wants to kill you”

(f) Day-today, tomorrow, and the third day-I am made perfect

(f’) Day-“today, tomorrow, and the coming day- I go”

(e’) Death-“the prophet must not die away from Jerusalem”

(d’) Fulfillment-a failure of the messiah’s ingathering

(c’) Judgment- a lament over Jerusalem’s judgment.

(b’) Vision-“you will not see me until you say “blessed is he...”

I’ The Nature of the Kingdom (14:1-11)

H’ The Call of the Kingdom to Israel and to the Outcasts (14:12-15:32)

G’ The kingdom is not yet and is now (16:1-8)

F’ Conflict with the Pharisees: Money (16:9-31)

--Offenses, Forgiveness, Faith, and Duty (17:1-10)

E’ Signs and the present kingdom (17:11-32)

D’ Prayer (18:1-4)

C’ What shall I do to inherit eternal life? (18:18-30)

B’ Follow Me (18:35-19:9)

A’ Jerusalem: Eschatological (looking to “the End”) events

Introductory Observation Questions

1. **Question:** Re-read the breakdown of Luke 9-19, and skim the text, looking at the headings in your Bible to remind you of the material within. What similarities in the related passages (A to A', etc...) show that you might not have seen before? What is the overriding theme of the Jerusalem travel document (hint: look to the center of the inverted parallelism-chiasm)?
2. **Question:** How do you think the central themes in this section contribute to the major theme(s) of Luke as labeled above? Which theme strikes you most from reading these chapters?
3. **Question:** What do you hope to learn this semester? What is an area you see that you need to grow? How do you want to be different in 6 months from the person you are today?
4. **Question:** What will it take for you to get where you want to go? Discuss how you can help one another to grow together toward Christlikeness.

Answers: (Spoiler Alert)

- 1) Observations will be different depending on the group. The center of the chiasm is Jesus looking toward the cross. That is the center of this movement to Jerusalem. Every step that Jesus takes toward Jerusalem is a step further into the shadow of the cross. That must always be kept in mind. When Jesus is making statements about serving, following, loving, committing, etc..., he does so with the cross firmly at the center of his thinking.
- 2) Luke is about the Son of Man come to die for the sins of all man. Within these parables are many people, whose portraits are painted with astounding clarity. It is for these Christ died; and it is these who must decide how they will respond to the Christ. These parables only strengthen the call to follow Christ and spur us to respond to Jesus, just as these people did.
- 3) Answers will vary.
- 4) Answers will vary.