

# The Gospel of Luke: Jesus, Justice, and the Politics of God

Welcome to this journey through Luke's Gospel, where we will discover how Jesus transforms not only individual hearts but entire communities and systems. Luke invites us to see faith as something deeply personal and profoundly public, a force that reshapes the world according to God's vision of justice, mercy, and inclusive love.

## Opening Reflection Questions

- When you hear "Luke," what's the first story or theme that comes to mind, and why does it resonate with you?
- What makes a Gospel "public" instead of just "personal," and how does that distinction matter for the way we live our faith today?



# What Kind of Gospel Is Luke?

The Gospel of Luke stands as a remarkable first-century narrative written in sophisticated Greek, offering us a window into how early Christians understood the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Luke belongs to what scholars call the "Synoptic Gospels," meaning it shares significant material and perspective with Mark and Matthew, yet brings its own distinctive theological voice and concerns to the forefront.

This Gospel represents the first volume of a two-part work, Luke and Acts, which together tell the comprehensive story of how God's saving work in Jesus extends outward to transform the entire known world. What sets Luke apart is its insistence that the Jesus story is not merely about private spirituality or individual salvation. Rather, Luke presents a world-historical claim: God is doing something unprecedented in human history, establishing a kingdom that challenges earthly empires and social hierarchies.

Luke situates Jesus' birth, ministry, and death within the larger framework of Roman imperial power, naming specific rulers and dating events with historical precision. This literary choice signals something profound: the Gospel is not myth or legend disconnected from reality but rather an account of God breaking into actual human history, in a specific time and place, to accomplish divine purposes that reshape everything.

## Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Luke ties the Jesus story to public history instead of only spiritual lessons? What difference does it make when we read Scripture as something that happened in real time and space?
- What changes when we read Luke as "God doing something in the world," not just "God helping me"? How does this shift affect our understanding of discipleship and mission?

### First-Century Narrative

Written in Greek for educated readers

### Synoptic Gospel

Part of Mark, Matthew, Luke tradition

### Part of Luke-Acts

Volume one of two-part work

### World-Historical Claim

God acting in public history

# Historical Setting: Writing Under Empire

The Gospel of Luke was likely composed between 80 and 90 CE, a generation after the death and resurrection of Jesus and in the aftermath of the devastating Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. This historical moment profoundly shaped how early Christians understood their identity and mission in a world dominated by Roman imperial power.

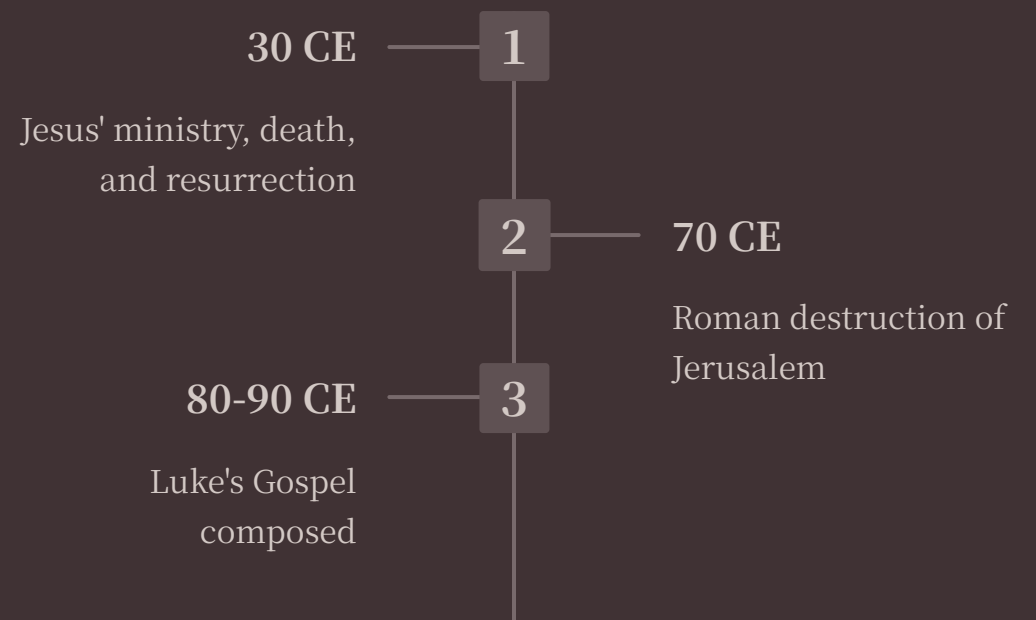
Luke takes great care to anchor the Jesus story within the larger political framework of the Roman Empire. The Gospel names specific rulers, emperors, and governors, placing Jesus' birth and ministry squarely within real, verifiable history. This is not accidental. By naming Caesar Augustus, Quirinius, Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, and others, Luke makes a bold theological claim: Jesus' story is not a private religious tale but a public account of God's intervention in the world at a specific moment in time.

Consider Luke 2:1-2, which sets the nativity story against the backdrop of a Roman census ordered by Caesar Augustus. Or Luke 3:1-2, which dates the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry with astonishing precision, naming six different political leaders. These references serve a dual purpose: they establish historical credibility and they signal that the Gospel addresses political realities, not just spiritual ones.

## Key Passages: Luke and Political Time

**Luke 2:1-2:** "In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria."

**Luke 3:1-2:** "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness."



## Discussion Questions

- What does it signal when Luke names emperors and governors? What is Luke trying to prove or establish by placing Jesus in this political context?
- How does "empire" show up in our context today, even if it looks different from Rome? Where do we see concentrated power, wealth disparity, and systems that marginalize people?

# Authorship and Audience: Writing for Theophilus

## Anonymous Authorship

The Gospel itself does not name its author. Early church tradition, dating to the second century, attributed it to Luke, identified as a companion of the Apostle Paul and described as a physician in Colossians 4:14. However, the text itself remains anonymous, a common practice for ancient biographical and historical works that emphasized the subject rather than the writer.

## Educated Greek-Speaking Christian

Whoever composed Luke wrote in polished Greek, demonstrating familiarity with Hellenistic literary conventions, Jewish Scripture in the Septuagint translation, and the complex political landscape of the Roman Empire. This author possessed education, resources, and time to research sources and craft a sophisticated narrative for a broad audience.

## Writing to Theophilus

Luke addresses the Gospel to "most excellent Theophilus," a title suggesting social status or official position. Theophilus may have been a patron who sponsored the work's production and distribution, or the name (meaning "lover of God") may represent all readers who seek truth about Jesus. Either way, Luke writes with an awareness of educated, potentially skeptical readers who need a credible account.

The Gospel's literary sophistication and careful attention to historical detail suggest an author writing for an audience that values evidence, coherent narrative, and theological depth. Luke seeks to convince readers that the Christian movement is not a passing fad or dangerous cult but the fulfillment of God's ancient promises and the inauguration of a new era in human history. This rhetorical strategy makes Luke especially concerned with how the Gospel appears to outsiders, those with power, education, or social standing who might dismiss or oppose the Christian community.

Importantly, Luke writes as someone embedded in the broader Christian community, drawing on shared traditions, eyewitness accounts, and earlier written sources. The author's voice is both individual and communal, personal conviction shaped by collective memory and theological reflection. This Gospel emerges from a community wrestling with its identity under Roman rule, its relationship to Judaism, and its mission to the Gentile world.

## Discussion Questions

- Why might Luke aim this Gospel toward an educated or socially connected reader like Theophilus? What strategic or missional reasons might motivate this choice?
- What would it mean for a church today to write its faith story in a way that "outsiders" can take seriously? How do we balance conviction with credibility, passion with persuasion?

# Cultural World of Luke: Pressures and Tensions

To understand Luke's Gospel, we must first understand the complex, often oppressive cultural world in which Jesus lived and ministered. This was not a neutral or simple context. It was a world shaped by overlapping systems of power, each creating its own forms of pressure, exclusion, and violence. Luke's Gospel speaks directly into these realities, offering a vision of God's kingdom that confronts every system that diminishes human dignity and flourishing.



## Roman Occupation and Emperor Cult

The Roman Empire ruled through military might, economic exploitation, and ideological domination. Emperors were worshiped as divine, and loyalty to Rome was enforced through taxation, conscription, and brutal punishment for resistance. The imperial cult declared "Caesar is Lord," a direct challenge to Jewish monotheism and early Christian confession that "Jesus is Lord." Living under empire meant navigating constant surveillance, economic extraction, and the threat of violence.



## Patriarchal Family Structures

Society was organized around patriarchal households in which men held authority over women, children, and enslaved people. Women's roles were constrained, their bodies controlled, their voices silenced in public spaces. Honor and shame codes regulated behavior, with women bearing disproportionate consequences for perceived violations. Yet Luke consistently elevates women as witnesses, disciples, and agents of God's work, challenging these structures.

## Discussion Questions

- Which pressure point feels most familiar today: empire, class, patriarchy, or ethnic tension? Why does that particular reality resonate with your experience or community?
- In Luke, Jesus forms an "alternative order" that resists these systems. What would an alternative order look like in your local church or community? What would need to change first?



## Class Stratification and Economic Injustice

First-century Judea was marked by extreme wealth disparity. A small elite, including Roman officials, Herodian rulers, and priestly aristocracy, controlled vast resources while the majority of the population lived in poverty or precarity. Peasant farmers faced crushing debt, landlessness, and hunger. The economy was extractive, not productive, funneling wealth upward while leaving the masses vulnerable. Luke's Gospel speaks directly to this economic violence.



## Ethnic Tensions and Boundaries

Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles lived in proximity but profound separation. Religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries created mutual suspicion, prejudice, and occasional violence. Samaritans were despised by many Jews as heretics and traitors. Gentiles were viewed as unclean outsiders. These divisions were not merely social but theological, raising questions about who belonged to God's people. Luke's Gospel systematically dismantles these walls.

# Luke's Sources: Building on Community Memory

Luke does not claim to be an eyewitness to Jesus' ministry. Instead, the Gospel opens with a prologue (Luke 1:1-4) that explicitly acknowledges dependence on sources: "many have undertaken to set down an orderly account," and "I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you." This transparency about method is remarkable. Luke is a researcher, editor, and theologian who draws on multiple streams of tradition to craft a comprehensive narrative.



## The Gospel of Mark

Luke uses Mark as the narrative backbone, following its basic structure and incorporating much of its material. However, Luke edits, expands, and recontextualizes Mark's account, adding birth narratives, extensive teaching material, and a different emphasis on social justice and inclusion.



## Q Source (Sayings Tradition)

Scholars hypothesize a now-lost collection of Jesus' sayings, called "Q" (from German "Quelle," meaning source), which both Luke and Matthew used independently of Mark. Q likely contained parables, teachings, and prophetic sayings that shaped early Christian identity and ethics.



## Special Luke Material

Luke includes unique stories found nowhere else: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Rich Man and Lazarus, Zacchaeus, the penitent thief on the cross, and the Road to Emmaus. These "Special Luke" passages often emphasize mercy, reversal, and inclusion, reflecting the Gospel's distinctive theological concerns.



## The Septuagint

Luke draws heavily on the Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture, the Septuagint, for theological language, themes, and narrative patterns. The Gospel is saturated with echoes of the prophets, psalms, and Torah, demonstrating continuity between Israel's story and Jesus' mission.

Understanding Luke's use of sources helps us appreciate the communal nature of Gospel formation. These texts emerged from communities remembering, interpreting, and proclaiming Jesus' significance. The Holy Spirit worked not through individual inspiration alone but through collective memory, shared testimony, and careful composition. Luke's editing is not a weakness but a strength, demonstrating how God works through human processes of research, reflection, and writing to preserve and transmit truth across generations.

## Discussion Questions

- Does it bother you, or help you, that Luke uses sources and edits material? Why might transparency about method actually strengthen the Gospel's credibility and theological authority?
- If the Spirit can work through editing, compiling, and community memory, what does that say about how God works through us today? How might this understanding shape the way we approach Scripture study and teaching?

# Why Luke Is Political: Faith in the Public Square

Some readers approach the Gospels as purely "spiritual" texts, concerned only with personal salvation, individual morality, and life after death. But Luke will not allow such a reading. From beginning to end, this Gospel insists that Jesus' message has profound political implications. Politics here does not mean partisan affiliation or electoral campaigns but rather the organization of power, resources, and relationships in society. Luke presents Jesus as someone who confronts systems, challenges authorities, and reimagines how human communities should be ordered according to God's justice.



## Jesus in Imperial Time and Space

Luke frames Jesus' birth and ministry within the timeline of Roman emperors and local rulers. This is not background information but theological claim: Jesus' arrival represents God's response to empire. The Gospel juxtaposes Caesar's claims to divinity, peace, and universal rule with Jesus' announcement of God's kingdom, revealing empire as a counterfeit order that must be exposed and resisted.



## Wealth, Poverty, and Economic Justice

No Gospel addresses economic issues more directly than Luke. Warnings about wealth, blessings for the poor, parables about debt and generosity, and Jesus' confrontation with the rich fill the narrative. Luke presents economic injustice not as a secondary concern but as central to the Gospel. God's kingdom demands economic redistribution, not charity alone but structural change that ensures dignity and sufficiency for all.



## Public Clashes with Authorities

Jesus repeatedly confronts religious leaders about their misuse of power, neglect of justice, and exclusion of the vulnerable. These are not private theological debates but public challenges to leadership and legitimacy. Jesus' critique extends to political authorities as well. His ministry creates tension precisely because it names and resists systems of domination wherever they appear.



## Execution Under Roman Power

Jesus dies by crucifixion, a distinctly political form of execution reserved for those who threatened Roman order, rebels, insurrectionists, and enslaved people. The charge against Jesus is political: "King of the Jews." His death reveals the violence at the heart of empire and the cost of prophetic witness. The resurrection vindicates Jesus and exposes Rome's power as illegitimate and temporary.

Luke's political emphasis does not make the Gospel less spiritual, it makes it more so. The claim that "Jesus is Lord" means Caesar is not. The proclamation of God's kingdom means earthly kingdoms are measured and found wanting. Faith in Jesus cannot be privatized or spiritualized away from the public realities of justice, power, and systemic change. To follow Jesus in Luke is to join a movement that reimagines and reconstructs the world according to God's vision of shalom, peace, justice, equity, and flourishing for all creation.

## Discussion Questions

- What parts of Luke feel "too political" for some people, and what parts feel non-negotiable for faithful reading? Where do you draw the line, and why?
- Why do you think Jesus' message created enough threat to lead to execution? What does his death tell us about the power of prophetic witness and the cost of discipleship?

# Theme 1: God's Saving Plan and the Kingdom

At the heart of Luke's Gospel is the conviction that God is fulfilling a long-promised plan of salvation. This is not an afterthought or emergency response to human failure, it is the culmination of a divine purpose woven through Israel's history. Luke saturates the narrative with language of fulfillment: "it is written," "as the prophets said," "today this scripture has been fulfilled." The arrival of Jesus marks the decisive moment when God's promises become reality, not in some distant future but in the present, tangible, and transformative work of the kingdom.

Luke's understanding of salvation is holistic, encompassing physical healing, social restoration, economic justice, spiritual reconciliation, and liberation from oppression. Salvation in Luke is not merely about going to heaven after death, it is about God's reign breaking into the world now, transforming relationships, systems, and structures. The kingdom of God, central to Jesus' preaching, is both present reality and future hope, already inaugurated but not yet fully realized.

Jesus demonstrates the kingdom through healing the sick, casting out demons, welcoming sinners, challenging religious hypocrisy, feeding the hungry, and teaching a new way of life. Each act reveals God's character and intention: wholeness, justice, mercy, and inclusion. The kingdom is not an abstract concept but a lived reality wherever Jesus is present and active.

## 📖 Luke 4:18-19, The Kingdom Manifesto

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This passage, drawn from Isaiah 61, serves as Jesus' mission statement. He reads it in the Nazareth synagogue at the beginning of his ministry and declares, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The kingdom Jesus announces includes economic good news (for the poor), political liberation (release to captives, freedom for the oppressed), physical healing (sight to the blind), and jubilee restoration (the year of the Lord's favor). This is comprehensive salvation, God's saving plan enacted in history.

## Discussion Questions

- When Luke talks about "salvation," what all does it include besides forgiveness of sins? How does this expand or challenge your understanding of what Jesus came to do?
- What do you think it means that Jesus announces the kingdom before the cross happens? How does this affect the way we understand his death and resurrection?

### Fulfillment of Scripture

Israel's story reaches its climax in Jesus

### Holistic Salvation

Body, soul, society, and systems transformed

### Kingdom Present Now

God's reign breaking into history through Jesus

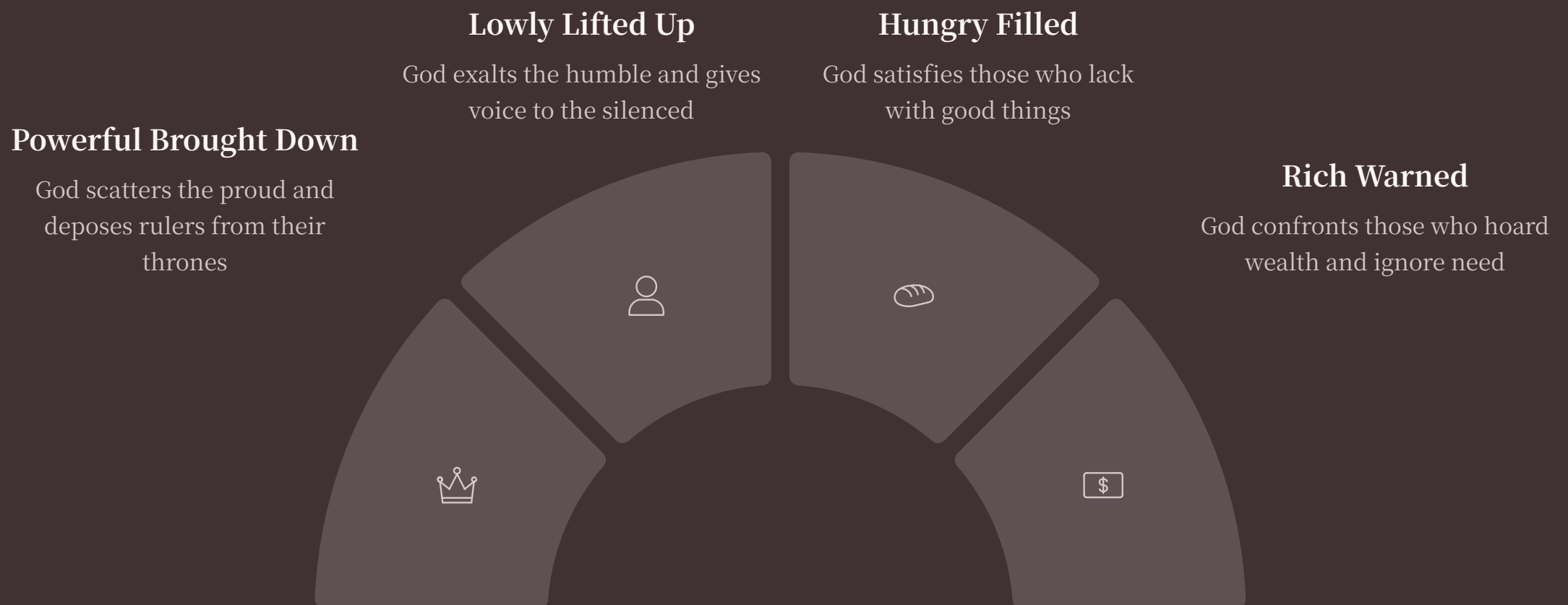
### Demonstrated in Action

Healing, exorcism, table fellowship, teaching



# Theme 2: Reversal and Justice for the Poor

One of Luke's most distinctive and challenging themes is God's commitment to reversing the social order, lifting up the lowly and bringing down the powerful, filling the hungry and sending the rich away empty. This is not a minor motif but a central theological claim that runs throughout the Gospel, from Mary's Magnificat in the opening chapters to Jesus' final teachings in Jerusalem. Luke presents a God who takes sides, who shows preferential concern for those pushed to the margins by society's hierarchies of power, wealth, and status.



Mary's song in Luke 1:46-55, known as the Magnificat, sets the tone for the entire Gospel. She declares that God "has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." This is not pious metaphor but concrete description of what God is doing in history through the coming of Jesus. The kingdom represents a dramatic reversal of the status quo, a reordering of society according to God's justice rather than human systems of domination.

Jesus echoes this theme in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-26), where he pronounces blessings on the poor, hungry, weeping, and hated, while issuing warnings to the rich, full, laughing, and well-regarded. These are not spiritualized conditions ("poor in spirit") but actual social and economic realities. Luke's Jesus addresses material poverty, genuine hunger, real grief, and social exclusion. The blessings are not merely promises of future comfort but declarations that God's kingdom is already arriving to transform these conditions.

Luke does not present poverty as virtuous in itself or wealth as inherently sinful. Rather, the Gospel exposes how wealth and poverty are created and maintained through unjust systems. The rich are not blessed because they have earned God's favor but because they benefit from structures that extract from the poor. The poor are blessed not because poverty is good but because God is committed to ending their suffering and restoring their dignity. Justice in Luke requires not charity but transformation, not generosity from the top but restructuring from the bottom up.

## Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Luke is so direct about money, poverty, and wealth? What makes economic justice a Gospel issue rather than merely a political or social one?
- What would "good news to the poor" require from a congregation, not just individual kindness? What systemic changes would need to happen for the church to embody this reversal?

### 📖 Luke 6:20-21, 24-25

**Blessings:** "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

**Woes:** "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep."

# Theme 3: Radical Inclusion

Luke's Gospel systematically dismantles the social, religious, ethnic, and gender boundaries that divided people in first-century Judea and continues to divide people today. The kingdom Jesus announces is radically inclusive, welcoming precisely those whom society deems unworthy, unclean, or unacceptable. This is not peripheral to the Gospel but central to it. God's love extends beyond the expected boundaries, and Jesus embodies that expansive grace by eating with sinners, touching lepers, healing Gentiles, elevating women, and honoring Samaritans.



## Sinners Welcomed at the Table

Jesus consistently shares meals with tax collectors, prostitutes, and others labeled as sinners by religious authorities. Table fellowship in that culture signified acceptance, community, and covenant relationship. By eating with the excluded, Jesus declares them worthy of God's love and belonging in God's family. He faces harsh criticism for this practice but refuses to change, insisting that he came to call sinners, not the righteous (Luke 5:27-32).



## Women as Disciples and Witnesses

Luke features women more prominently than any other Gospel. Women travel with Jesus as disciples, provide financial support for his ministry, receive his teaching, witness his resurrection, and become the first evangelists. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary and Martha, the widow of Nain, the woman with the flow of blood, and many others are not background figures but central participants in God's saving work. Luke challenges patriarchal assumptions about women's roles and authority.



## Samaritans Portrayed Positively

Samaritans were despised by many Jews as heretics and ethnic traitors. Yet in Luke, a Samaritan becomes the hero of one of Jesus' most famous parables (Luke 10:25-37), demonstrating what it means to love one's neighbor. Jesus heals ten lepers, and the only one who returns to give thanks is a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19). Jesus even rebukes his disciples for wanting to call down fire on a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56). These stories shatter ethnic prejudice and religious exclusivism.



## Gentiles Included in God's Promise

From the beginning, Luke emphasizes that Jesus' mission extends beyond Israel to all nations. Simeon declares that the infant Jesus will be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32). Jesus praises the faith of a Roman centurion (Luke 7:1-10) and heals the servant of a Gentile. The Gospel ends with the risen Jesus commissioning disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness "to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). Inclusion is not an afterthought but part of God's original plan.

This radical inclusion challenges every form of exclusion and prejudice. It confronts religious elitism that divides people into worthy and unworthy, gender hierarchies that silence and subordinate women, ethnic nationalism that demonizes outsiders, and moral self-righteousness that judges and condemns. The Gospel declares that God's grace is not scarce but abundant, not limited but expansive, not exclusive but welcoming to all who turn toward God in faith and humility.

## Discussion Questions

- Who are the people society still labels "unworthy" today, and how does Luke challenge that label? What does it mean to see them as Jesus sees them?
- Where does our church practice inclusion in theory but struggle in practice? What specific barriers, visible or invisible, prevent full welcome and participation for all people?

# Theme 4: Discipleship, Prayer, and the Holy Spirit

Following Jesus in Luke's Gospel is not a casual commitment or passive belief but a costly, transformative journey that reorients every aspect of life. Discipleship requires leaving behind old securities, embracing new priorities, and joining Jesus on the road toward Jerusalem, a journey that leads to confrontation with power, suffering, death, and ultimately resurrection. Luke presents discipleship as both gift and demand, grace and challenge, joy and sacrifice.

## Costly Discipleship

Jesus does not soften the demands of discipleship. He warns that following him may mean leaving family, possessions, and social status behind (Luke 14:25-33). He teaches that disciples must take up their cross daily, a vivid image of self-denial, suffering, and potential martyrdom (Luke 9:23). The cost is real, but so is the reward, life in God's kingdom, participation in God's mission, and the discovery of one's true identity and purpose.

Luke emphasizes that discipleship is not about achieving moral perfection but about ongoing transformation through relationship with Jesus. Disciples fail, doubt, misunderstand, and betray, yet Jesus continues to teach, correct, and restore them. Peter denies Jesus three times but is later reinstated and empowered to lead the early church. The paralyzed man's friends demonstrate faith by tearing open a roof to bring him to Jesus (Luke 5:17-26). The persistent widow models faithful prayer that does not give up (Luke 18:1-8). Discipleship is sustained by grace, not willpower alone.

## Prayer as Lifeline

Luke portrays Jesus as a person of constant prayer. He prays at his baptism, before choosing the twelve apostles, in moments of crisis, and in his final hours. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with persistence (Luke 11:1-13) and models dependence on God. Prayer in Luke is not merely private devotion but the means by which disciples remain connected to God's presence, power, and purposes. It is both conversation and communion, speaking and listening, asking and receiving.



01

### Called and Commissioned

Jesus calls disciples by name, inviting them to leave their former lives and follow

03

### Sent and Empowered

Jesus sends disciples out to proclaim the kingdom, heal, and embody God's justice

02

### Taught and Formed

Disciples learn through Jesus' teaching, example, and correction as they journey together

04

### Sustained by the Spirit

After resurrection, the Holy Spirit empowers disciples for witness and mission in Acts

The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role throughout Luke's Gospel, driving the narrative forward and empowering God's people for mission. The Spirit overshadows Mary at Jesus' conception, descends on Jesus at his baptism, leads Jesus into the wilderness, anoints him for ministry, and ultimately fills the disciples at Pentecost in Acts. Luke's two-volume work traces the Spirit's movement from Jesus to the church, demonstrating that the same power at work in Jesus is available to all who believe. The Spirit is not an abstract force but the personal presence of God, guiding, comforting, convicting, and empowering believers to continue Jesus' work in the world.

## Discussion Questions

- What does "costly discipleship" look like in daily life, not just in big dramatic moments? Where are you being called to surrender, sacrifice, or step out in faith right now?
- Where do you see the Holy Spirit's guidance in Luke, and where do you think we miss it today? How can we become more attentive to the Spirit's leading in our personal lives and in the church?

# Structure of Luke: The Road as Classroom

Luke's Gospel follows a carefully crafted structure that mirrors the journey of discipleship itself. The narrative moves from promise and preparation through ministry and mission, building toward the climactic events in Jerusalem, crucifixion, resurrection, and commission. But what makes Luke distinctive is the extended "travel narrative" (Luke 9:51 through 19:44), in which Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem and uses the journey itself as a teaching opportunity. The road becomes a classroom, and the destination is not just a geographical location but a theological necessity, the place where God's saving plan will be accomplished.

## Chapters 1-2: Promise and Birth

Angels announce God's intervention. John the Baptist and Jesus are born into a world waiting for redemption. Mary's Magnificat and Simeon's prophecy frame the Gospel's themes of reversal and salvation.

1

2

## Chapters 3-4: Preparation and Manifesto

John prepares the way. Jesus is baptized, tested in the wilderness, and announces his mission in Nazareth with the Isaiah 61 reading. The kingdom agenda is set: good news to the poor, release to captives, freedom for the oppressed.

3

## Chapters 4-9: Galilean Ministry

Jesus teaches, heals, exorcises demons, calls disciples, and demonstrates the kingdom's arrival through mighty works and controversial associations. Opposition builds, but so does the movement of followers.

4

## Chapters 9-19: Journey to Jerusalem

The longest section of the Gospel. Jesus travels toward Jerusalem, teaching constantly about discipleship, prayer, wealth, inclusion, and the kingdom. Parables like the Good Samaritan, Prodigal Son, and Rich Man and Lazarus appear here. The journey is both geographical and theological.

5

## Chapters 19-23: Conflict and Crucifixion

Jesus enters Jerusalem, cleanses the temple, teaches in public, confronts authorities, shares a final meal with disciples, prays in Gethsemane, is arrested, tried, and crucified. The powers of this world converge to silence him, but God's plan continues.

6

## Chapter 24: Resurrection and Commission

Women discover the empty tomb. Jesus appears to disciples on the road to Emmaus and in Jerusalem. He interprets Scripture, opens their minds, commissions them to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations, and ascends, leaving them with joy and the promise of the Spirit.

The journey motif is central to Luke's theology. Discipleship is not a static state but a dynamic process of following Jesus on the way. The road is where transformation happens, where teaching is received, where faith is tested, and where community is formed. Luke shows us that the destination matters, Jerusalem is where Jesus will face the cross and be vindicated by resurrection, but so does the journey itself. How we travel, who we travel with, what we learn along the way, these are not incidental but essential to becoming the people God calls us to be.

## Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Luke spends so much time on the journey to Jerusalem instead of getting there quickly? What does this teach us about discipleship and spiritual formation?
- If "the road is the classroom," what experiences are teaching you right now? Where is God forming you through the process of the journey, not just the destination?

# Where God Is in Luke: The Primary Actor

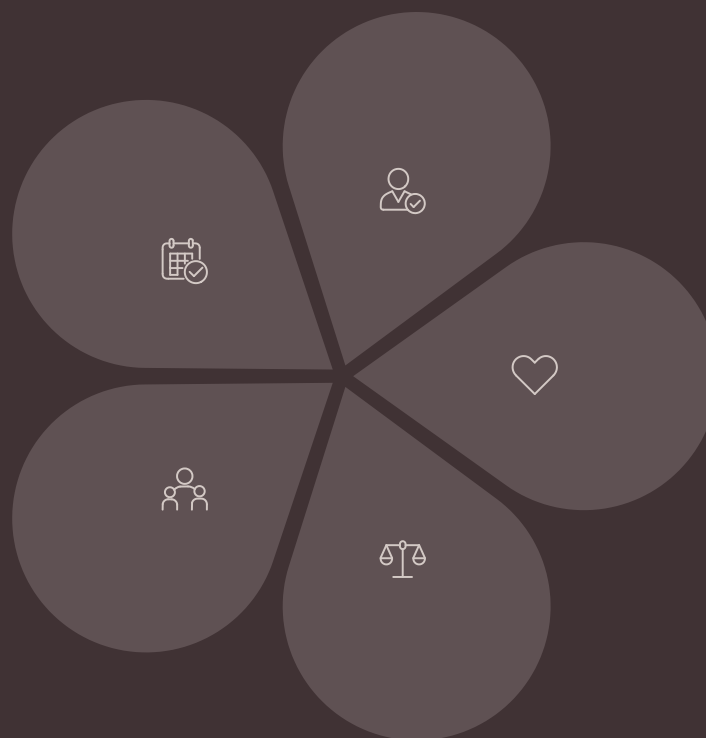
While Jesus is the central human figure in Luke's Gospel, God is the true protagonist of the story. Luke presents God as the primary actor, the one who initiates, sustains, and completes the work of salvation. Every significant event in the narrative happens because God wills it, empowers it, and brings it to fulfillment. Understanding where and how God acts in Luke helps us see not only what God has done in the past but what God continues to do in the present and promises for the future.

## Scripture Fulfillment

God's faithfulness spans generations, promises made to Israel now coming to fruition

## Inclusive Welcome

God's love extends beyond expected boundaries to embrace all who turn toward grace



## Divine Necessity

Repeated language of "it is necessary" shows God's sovereign plan unfolding in history

## Mercy for the Shamed

God consistently sides with those society rejects, restoring dignity and belonging

## Justice for the Oppressed

God confronts systems of domination and liberates those held captive by injustice

Throughout Luke, God acts through the Holy Spirit, through Jesus, through angels, through prophets, and even through unexpected people who respond to divine prompting. The conception of John and Jesus, the empowerment of Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon to prophesy, the guidance of Jesus in ministry, the forgiveness extended to sinners, the raising of the dead, the vindication of Jesus in resurrection, all these are God's work. Humans participate, but God initiates and enables.

Luke uses the language of divine necessity throughout the Gospel. Repeatedly, we read that something "must" happen or that it is "necessary" for events to unfold in a particular way (Greek: *dei*). This is not fatalism but the recognition that God has a plan and purpose working through history. Jesus "must" proclaim the kingdom in other cities (Luke 4:43), "must" stay at Zacchaeus' house (Luke 19:5), "must" suffer and rise on the third day (Luke 24:7). This language of necessity reveals God's sovereignty and intentionality.

Crucially, Luke reveals God's character through God's actions. God is merciful, not harsh, choosing to show compassion rather than condemnation. God is just, not indifferent, actively confronting oppression and vindicating the powerless. God is faithful, not fickle, keeping promises made centuries before. God is inclusive, not exclusive, welcoming all who turn toward grace regardless of their past, identity, or status. The God of Luke's Gospel is not a distant deity unconcerned with human affairs but an engaged, passionate, liberating presence committed to the flourishing of all creation.

### 📖 God's Priorities in Luke

- The poor and marginalized
- The sick and suffering
- The excluded and rejected
- Women and Gentiles
- Sinners seeking restoration

## Discussion Questions

- In Luke, what does God seem to care about most, based on who God keeps showing up for? How does this match or challenge your assumptions about God's priorities?
- Where do you see God's mercy and God's justice working together, not competing? Why is it important to hold both in tension rather than choosing one over the other?

# Obery Hendricks and the Politics of Jesus in Luke

Theologian and biblical scholar Obery Hendricks Jr. has written powerfully about the political dimensions of Jesus' ministry, and his work helps us read Luke with fresh eyes. Hendricks argues that Jesus was not simply a religious teacher concerned with individual piety but a prophet and activist who confronted the systemic causes of human suffering. Reading Luke through Hendricks' lens illuminates how the Gospel speaks to issues of power, economics, and social transformation in ways that are deeply relevant to contemporary struggles for justice.

## Jesus Confronts Systemic Causes of Suffering

Hendricks emphasizes that Jesus does not merely offer spiritual comfort to the suffering, he confronts the systems that create suffering in the first place. In Luke, Jesus challenges religious authorities who "devour widows' houses" (Luke 20:47), critiques the wealthy who ignore the poor at their gates (Luke 16:19-31), and overturns the tables of money changers who exploit worshipers (Luke 19:45-46). Jesus' ministry is not about helping people cope with injustice but about dismantling injustice itself.

## Jubilee Has Economic Teeth

When Jesus announces "the year of the Lord's favor" in Luke 4:19, he invokes the biblical Jubilee tradition from Leviticus 25, a radical economic restructuring that included debt forgiveness, land redistribution, and the release of enslaved people. Hendricks argues that Jesus takes Jubilee seriously as an economic program, not just a spiritual metaphor. The kingdom Jesus proclaims requires real material change: wealth redistributed, debts canceled, captives freed, and systems of exploitation dismantled.

## The Marginalized Gain Power, Not Just Pity

Hendricks insists that Jesus' concern for the poor and marginalized is not about patronizing charity but about empowerment and dignity. In Luke, those pushed to the edges are not passive recipients of help, they are active agents in God's work. Women like Mary and the widow of Nain are not objects of pity but figures of strength and faith. Zacchaeus is not merely forgiven but transformed into a agent of economic justice who repays those he defrauded fourfold (Luke 19:8). The Gospel restores agency, voice, and power to those society has tried to silence.

## Truth Told to Religious and Imperial Power

Jesus speaks truth to power without fear or compromise. He calls Herod a "fox" (Luke 13:32), criticizes Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Luke 11:37-54), and stands silent before Pilate, refusing to legitimate Rome's authority (Luke 23:1-25). Hendricks highlights that Jesus' crucifixion is the direct result of his political challenge to both religious and imperial power structures. His execution reveals the violence at the heart of empire and the cost of prophetic witness. Yet resurrection vindicates Jesus and exposes the rulers' power as illegitimate and temporary.

Hendricks' work helps us understand that Luke's Gospel is not apolitical or otherworldly. It addresses real power dynamics, real economic systems, and real social hierarchies. The Gospel calls believers not to withdraw from the world but to engage it, not to accept the status quo but to work for transformation, not to remain silent about injustice but to speak truth boldly. Reading Luke through Hendricks' lens challenges comfortable Christianity that privatizes faith and ignores systemic evil. It calls the church back to its prophetic vocation as a community that embodies and proclaims God's justice in word and deed.

## Discussion Questions

- What's the difference between charity and liberation, and where does Luke land? How does this distinction affect the way your church approaches service, mission, and justice work?
- What structures would have to change for Luke 4:18-19 to be "real" in your community? What would it actually look like to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, and freedom to the oppressed in concrete, tangible ways?

# Why Luke Still Matters: Faith as Public Witness

Two thousand years after Luke wrote this Gospel, its message remains urgently relevant. In a world still marked by empire and exploitation, poverty and prejudice, violence and exclusion, Luke's vision of God's kingdom offers both critique and hope. The Gospel refuses to let faith be privatized or reduced to personal spirituality disconnected from public life. Instead, Luke insists that following Jesus means embodying an alternative way of being in the world, a countercultural community that lives by kingdom values even when surrounded by empire's logic.

## Faith Is Public, Not Private Only

Luke will not allow us to reduce Christianity to a personal relationship with God that has no implications for how we organize society, distribute resources, or treat our neighbors. Faith in Luke is inherently public, a witness that confronts systems and transforms communities. To confess "Jesus is Lord" is to make a political claim with social consequences. The church is called to be a visible sign of God's kingdom, demonstrating what it looks like when mercy, justice, and inclusion shape common life together.

## Jesus Confronts Power Without Becoming It

One of the most striking features of Luke's Gospel is how Jesus wields authority without dominating, challenges power without seeking to control, and resists empire without becoming imperial. Jesus exercises power through servanthood, not force. He builds community through love, not coercion. He transforms society through suffering, not violence. This model of prophetic witness offers an alternative to both passive acceptance of injustice and violent revolution. Jesus shows a third way, active nonviolent resistance rooted in sacrificial love.

Luke matters today because the challenges it addresses, poverty, oppression, exclusion, and the abuse of power, remain with us. The specific forms may differ. We do not face Roman emperors or temple authorities in the same way, but we confront analogous systems of domination and marginalization. Economic inequality persists, creating massive wealth for a few while leaving many in precarity. Racism, sexism, xenophobia, and other forms of prejudice continue to divide and dehumanize. Political and religious leaders still abuse authority for personal gain. Empire takes new forms but still demands ultimate loyalty and crushes those who resist.

In this context, Luke calls us to remember who we are and whose we are. We belong to God, not to Caesar. Our ultimate allegiance is to the kingdom, not to nation, party, or ideology. Our primary identity is as disciples of Jesus, members of a community that transcends all human divisions and embodies God's reconciling, liberating love. This identity should shape every aspect of our lives, how we spend money, how we vote, how we treat neighbors, how we organize our churches, how we engage the world.

## Gospel Addresses Systems and Souls

Luke refuses the false choice between personal salvation and social transformation. The Gospel addresses both individual hearts and structural realities. Jesus forgives sins and heals bodies, teaches prayer and confronts economic injustice, calls for personal repentance and systemic change. A gospel that only saves souls and ignores suffering bodies is incomplete. A gospel that only addresses systems and neglects spiritual renewal is shallow. Luke holds both together, calling for holistic transformation.

## Church Called to Embody God's Alternative Order

The church is not meant to be a chaplain to the status quo, blessing and legitimating existing power structures. Rather, the church is called to be a living embodiment of God's alternative order, a community where the kingdom's values are practiced, where the poor are honored, the marginalized welcomed, and power shared. The church demonstrates what the world could be if it organized itself according to God's justice rather than human greed and violence. This is not easy or comfortable, it requires risk, sacrifice, and constant discernment, but it is our calling.



## ☐ Luke's Call to the Church Today

- Practice economic justice, not just charity
- Welcome the excluded without qualification
- Speak truth to power without fear
- Embody the kingdom's values visibly
- Sustain hope through prayer and community

## Discussion Questions

- If your church fully lived Luke, what would change first: worship style, budget priorities, leadership structures, or community relationships? What would be the most challenging shift to make, and why?
- What is one concrete practice your congregation could start this week that would look "Luke-like"? What small, tangible step could you take toward embodying the kingdom's values in your local context?

# Looking Back, Leaning Forward

As we conclude our journey through Luke's Gospel, take a moment to pause and reflect on what has stayed with you. Which stories moved you? Which teachings challenged you? Which images of Jesus surprised you? Luke has shown us a Savior who stands with the poor, confronts the powerful, welcomes the outcast, and calls us to costly discipleship. This Jesus is not a distant figure from the past but a living presence who continues to call, challenge, and transform us today.

## Finding Yourself in Luke

Every reader finds different entry points into Scripture. Perhaps you connected with Mary's trust in God's impossible promises, or the persistent widow who refused to give up. Maybe you saw yourself in Zacchaeus, seeking Jesus despite what others thought, or in the disciples on the road to Emmaus, confused and grieving until Jesus opened their eyes. Wherever you found yourself in Luke, notice how the Gospel both comforted and disturbed you, affirming your worth while challenging your assumptions.

## Jesus on the Road with the People

Luke has shown us Jesus in constant motion, walking with people, eating at their tables, entering their homes, engaging their questions, healing their wounds. This is not a distant deity but an incarnate God who meets us where we are, on the road, in the mess, amid our struggles and questions. Jesus does not wait for us to get our lives together before drawing near. Jesus comes to us, calls us, and walks with us on the journey of transformation.

## Preparing for John's Gospel

Luke has shown us *what Jesus does in the world*, healing, teaching, confronting injustice, welcoming sinners, embodying God's kingdom. Now, as we prepare to enter John's Gospel, we will be pressed into deeper questions about *who Jesus is*. John will invite us into the mystery of the Word made flesh, exploring themes of light and darkness, belief and unbelief, love and truth. If Luke is action and mission, John is contemplation and identity. Both are essential for faithful discipleship.

## Reflection and Discussion

- Which Luke story or theme did you connect with most deeply, and what did it reveal about you, your fears, your hopes, your calling, or your understanding of God?
- As we prepare for the Gospel of John, what questions about Jesus are you carrying forward? Questions about identity, belief, power, love, truth, or the cost of discipleship?
- How has studying Luke changed the way you understand faith, not just as personal belief but as public witness and participation in God's transformative work?
- What is one commitment you want to make coming out of this study? How will you live differently because of what Luke has shown you about Jesus and the kingdom?



"Luke shows us Jesus on the road with the people. John invites us into the mystery of the Word made flesh. Both Gospels call us to follow, to believe, and to be transformed."

May the journey continue. May the Spirit guide you. May the God of Luke and John, the God who lifts up the lowly and makes all things new, bless you and keep you as you seek to live faithfully in a world still longing for justice, mercy, and love.