

LUKE – CHAPTER 3 AND 4

PRAY

Spend a few moments together in prayer asking that you would be open to God's voice speaking through his Word today.

READ

Take time to read through Luke chapter 3 and 4.

EXAMINE

In these chapters we see the preparation for, and the beginning of, Jesus' ministry. The word of God comes to John the son of Zechariah, whom we've already learned was "filled with the Holy Spirit even before he was born" (1:15). Luke identifies John's ministry as fulfilling the prophetic words of Isaiah 40:3-5. Take note of the people who ask John "what should we do?" It starts with the crowd, then the tax collectors, and then soldiers (Romans). Each is given a response that requires of them equity and fairness; something the last two groups were not well known for. Luke, though, is beginning to lay the groundwork for these unexpected heroes throughout the gospel.

Luke also provides a short account of Jesus' baptism, yet it is filled with important messages. Jesus is praying. The Holy Spirit descends upon him. The Father's voice is heard affirming his identity as the "Son of God." Immediately after this, the genealogy (which we tend to skip over) affirms this declaration. Starting with Joseph and working all the way back to Adam, Luke demonstrates that Jesus is "the son of God."

1. I hope by now you are beginning to notice the frequency of the appearances of the Holy Spirit. Skim through these two chapters and discuss the place of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry at this starting point.

The Spirit has already acted as the "divine obstetrician," bringing forth both John and Jesus in unexpected ways (Elizabeth was barren, Mary was a virgin). Now the Spirit works in the life of John to prepare the way for the people to receive the coming Messiah. The Spirit comes upon Jesus in his baptism as a sign that God's power and presence is with him and then leads Jesus in and out of the wilderness where he is tempted. The Spirit is surrounding Jesus' ministry from the very beginning.

2. The wilderness was a place of loneliness and danger. It also represents, for the people of Israel, the place through which the rescued people of God had to travel before reaching the promised land (the "40 days" of temptation echoing the "40 year" journey). Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness before his ministry commences. He responds to the devil's temptations with quotations from Scripture (each from Deuteronomy, interestingly). The temptations are for self-fulfillment, a shortcut to power and authority, and testing God's faithfulness to God's word. We all will face temptations. What can be learned from Jesus' responses that come even in the

midst of suffering?

It would seem that Jesus had been meditating on Scripture during his wilderness journey. It's probably a practice he learned as a child, as did all Jewish children, and this continued into adulthood. His immersion in Scripture throughout his life, and particularly during his time of wandering in the wilderness, meant that his responses didn't come from his physical need but from his spiritual grounding in God's promises. His trust in God's promises would not waver even when his immediate circumstances would suggest God's absence.

3. From the wilderness Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and commences teaching in synagogues throughout the region. It would seem that his reputation as a teacher spread and he returns to his home synagogue in Nazareth where he's invited to be the guest preacher for the day. He reads from the scroll of Isaiah (standing) and then sits down (the posture of preaching). Everyone is focused upon him as he prepares to teach them from the Scripture. Yet, when he suggests that the passage is referring to him they are indignant; to the point of driving him out of town and preparing to kill him. Why would the people in his home synagogue react in such a violent way?

It's very difficult to accept that "one of our own" can become a spiritual authority. The people of Nazareth were used to Jesus being "Joseph's son" but, having heard of the praise of nearby towns and now his preaching in person, couldn't accept his emergence into the role of teacher and authority on the Scriptures. Those places were reserved for people who had been trained into these positions from a very young age. Luke is also beginning to demonstrate how Jesus' ministry will be accepted by the unexpected (e.g. tax collectors, soldiers, women etc.) and rejected by the expected (his family, Pharisees, etc.).

4. Read again Jesus' "mission manifesto" (Luke 4:18-19; citing Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6). Who is Jesus' ministry for?

In Luke's gospel in particular Jesus' ministry is focused upon the "poor," "prisoners," "blind," "oppressed," etc. In short, those who are on the fringe of society.

5. Finally, take a look at the healing stories at the end of chapter 4. Both demons mentioned identify Jesus correctly as "the Holy One of God!" and "the Son of God" yet Jesus rebukes and silences both of them. Again, this is unexpected. Why, though, do you think Jesus would silence the demons, especially when they identify him correctly?

This is known as the "Messianic Secret." It emphasizes what Jesus wants from those around him; faith not fame. If his identity is revealed *only* through the confession of demons and the performance of miracles then he will only become a famous wonder-worked around town. Instead, Jesus wants to be identified as the "Holy One of God" and the "Son of God" through the eyes of *faith*. Later, in Luke 9:20, Jesus' question to Peter will emphasise this point – "Who do you say I am?"

REFLECT

1. The crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers as a really important question (3:10-14); “what should we do then?” Think about what God is calling you to do in response to his call to “produce good fruit.” Try to respond in very practical ways (e.g. those with two shirts give up one, don’t collect more than you are required to, and be content with your pay.)
2. The Spirit is active throughout Jesus’ ministry, including those times when he is wondering through the wilderness. Identify a wilderness time in your life. In what ways was/is God present by his Spirit during that time?
3. Rejection can be hard, especially when it comes from those close to you. In Australia the “tall poppy syndrome” is regularly at play. Has there been a time when you’ve stepped into a new ministry only to find those close to you reacted in unexpected ways? How did you respond?

IMAGINE

1. List three things that have really stood out from this passage.
2. Without worrying about any restrictions, what would the church look like if those things were always present? You might like to consider this from a global or local perspective (or both).

PERFORM

1. What action can you take today (taking account of real world restrictions) that is a step towards that dream becoming a reality?

PRAY

Spend time in prayer for each other, particularly for the actions you’ve committed to.

For next week....

1. Long Slow Read (LSR). Read chapters 5-6, slowly over the course of week. You can do this as many times as you like.
2. Tempo Read – Read and reread Chapter 5 several times. Take note of verses/phrases/characters that stand out – e.g. Jesus, Holy Spirit, poor, women.
3. Repeats – Choose one verse to memorise. Repeat it many times throughout the day and over the course of a week or so. Meditate on the verse and pray it in and out. Repeat the verse many times throughout your day.