



# Cultivate

A Christ-Centered Way of Life

*... as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built up in him and established in the faith... Colossians 2:6-7*

---

## GETTING TO KNOW JESUS THROUGH THE 4 GOSPELS – PART 4

By Marius Gradwell

### **The Gospel of Luke: Jesus the Man - The face of a Man**

Luke begins in this way,

*Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you, most honourable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught (Luke 1:1-4, NLT).*

This is Luke's main statement about his work, why he did it and how he did it.

From a historical perspective, Luke displays an elevated literary style reminiscent of the classical historians of the ancient world like Thucydides, Polybius, and Herodotus. Luke's writing style matches closely to the style of ancient technical writings and because he has claimed to have researched his material carefully, he places himself among the ancient historians of his day. This is shown by the way Luke sets his work within a historical and validated context.

For example, he gives the date of Jesus' birth in the reign of Augustus Caesar and a sevenfold dating of the ministry of John the Baptist (noting as John's contemporaries one Roman emperor, four local rulers, and two high priests). Luke sees it as vitally important that the Christian faith have a solid historical foundation .

Furthermore, Luke is seen as a highly credible account of the life of Jesus because "when Luke's sources can be identified and examined, he appears to be trustworthy. In his presentation of customs, locales, and settings, he shows a remarkable concern for accuracy".

It is known that Luke is not an eyewitness to Jesus but is someone who wants to make a strong case for Jesus. Luke is strong in language skills, a careful researcher, and a meticulous writer who lays out a masterful piece of literature which will be used to tell who Jesus is.

### **Direct Descriptions about Jesus**

Luke states that Jesus is the instrument of salvation.

Luke uses the language of salvation more than any other New Testament evangelist. This is also shown from Luke's recurring mentioning of Jesus making progress towards the city of

Jerusalem. Numerous times Jesus is said by Luke to be approaching the city of Jerusalem as demonstrated in 9:51; 10:38; 13:22; 17:11; 19:11, 41. Luke's constant mentioning of Jesus' progress toward Jerusalem, starting in chapter nine is showing Luke's readers where Jesus' journey is leading (Jerusalem) where he will be crucified and later rise from the dead.

Luke also wants to show that Jesus is the promised fulfilment of the Messiah prophecies. Luke carefully notes the ancestors of Jesus back to Adam in 3:23-38. Luke bookends his gospel with his own way of affirming Jesus as the Messiah.

At the beginning, Luke tells of:

- the true John the Baptist (1:5-25, 39-45; 3:1-20),
- an angel appearing to Mary (1:26-38),
- Jesus' prophetic birth in the town of David (2:1-7),
- angels and shepherds singing to honour Jesus as king (2:8-20),
- the prophesy of Simeon (2:25-35),
- the prophesy of Anna (2:36-40),
- Jesus' baptism (3:21-22), and
- the ancestry of Jesus to David and Adam (3:23-38).

Luke ends his gospel telling of Jesus miraculously being taken up into Heaven in 24:50-53,

*Then Jesus led them to Bethany, and lifting his hands to heaven, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up to heaven. So, they worshiped him and then returned to Jerusalem filled with great joy. And they spent all their time in the Temple, praising God.*

This miraculous ascension after Jesus has risen from the dead affirms what Luke spoke directly about in the beginning of his gospel and what he sought to show through the middle as he displayed Jesus' ability to teach and heal.

### Other Characters' Responses to Jesus

Luke uses responses from seven characters in the first three chapters to show who Jesus is.

1. The angel **Gabriel** is the first person in the book of Luke to attest to Jesus being the son of God by saying to Mary, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!" (1:31-34).
2. **Mary** appropriately responds to Gabriel affirming what she has just heard, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true" (1:30). Mary believes what Gabriel told her about her son being the son of God and that he would come to save others. In Mary's song of praise in Luke 1:46-56 she reveals that she believes that God's promises will come true and that the seed of Abraham will be the Saviour.
3. **Elizabeth**, the wife of Zachariah and mother of John the Baptist also affirms Jesus as the Son of God when she sees the pregnant Mary and states, "Why am I so honoured that the mother of my Lord should visit me?" (1:44). Elizabeth knows that Mary is carrying her Lord.

4. **Angels** in 2:11-14 are declaring that Jesus, the Saviour has been born. (Luke “found no difficulty in recording accounts of angelic activities as historical fact”.) These angels play a strong role in Luke’s gospel to affirm Jesus as the Messiah. And, this was not the only time the angels arrive to announce Jesus as the Messiah.
5. After Jesus had been born and taken to the temple to be dedicated as every first born son was, he is again affirmed when **Simeon** sees him and says, “I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people” (2:30-31). What is interesting about this is that “seeing God’s salvation is linked directly to seeing Jesus, so that a strong tie exists between salvation and the one who personifies it”. With this statement Simeon affirms Jesus as the Saviour. Simeon is a unique character in the book of Luke because Simeon was given a special divine revelation about the coming Messiah. With this special revelation Simeon responds appropriately with words of praise when seeing Jesus.
6. **Anna**, a godly woman who is always at the temple (probably hoping to someday see the Messiah) also knows that Jesus is the Messiah. Anna’s message hints at a remnant concept, since she addresses her remarks only to those who await the consummation of God’s plan. For those ready to hear, fulfilment has come. With the sight of Jesus, Anna perceived that her prayers would be fulfilled through Jesus (2:38).
7. The final character’s response Luke uses to show that Jesus is the Messiah is in 3:22 when the “Holy Spirit, in bodily form, descends on him like a dove. A **voice from Heaven** says, ‘You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.’” This is located at the end of the first section of Luke’s gospel where he shows that Jesus is the Messiah, God affirms that Jesus is his Son. This statement by God shows that Jesus enjoyed the full approval of his Father, God. Furthermore, “The words from heaven were more than a divine appointment; they were the divine approval of the course to which Jesus committed himself in accepting baptism”. With this baptism it is clear that heaven has spoken, God has made his choice, and Jesus is the son of God.

### **Jesus’ Own Words and Thoughts (Not about Himself)**

With chapters one through three of Luke primarily focused on affirming Jesus as the Messiah through others’ responses to Him, chapter four moves onto using what Jesus says to discover who he is.

Discovering who Jesus is can be done by noticing who he calls father. On the Mount of Olives praying to God about his *coming* judgment and crucifixion, he does not address God as God, but instead says, “Father” (22:41-42). Later, when being *nailed* to the cross Jesus addresses God as “Father” (23:34). Again, in Jesus’ last words *while on* the cross he addresses God as “Father” (23:46). In light of the previous revelations by Luke at the beginning of his gospel, Jesus’ statements addressing God as father cast him as the son of God.

Referring to John the Baptist (the one who prepares the way for Jesus) Jesus says, “Were you looking for a prophet? Yes, and he is more than a prophet. John is the man whom the Scriptures refer to when they say, ‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, and he will prepare your way before you’” (7:26-27).

If John the Baptist was the prophet who was to prepare the way for Jesus, Jesus is therefore the one for whom John prepared the way for. “Both Jesus and Luke believed this would be sufficient to demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ who was to come. If these things were taking

place in Jesus' ministry, then God's kingdom, i.e., the messianic age, has already begun; and the one who has inaugurated that age must be 'the one who was to come.'" Zechariah prophesied about John the Baptist, "And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord" (Luke 1:76). By Jesus affirming John the Baptist, he affirms himself as Saviour.

The story of Jesus and the sinful woman in 7:40-50 is one of the most moving and impactful stories of how Jesus reveals who he is. While having dinner with a Pharisee an immoral woman brings a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. She kneels behind Jesus at his feet, weeping. As her tears fall on his feet, she wipes them off with her hair and then keeps kissing Jesus' feet and putting perfume on them.

When the Pharisee objects to such a sinful woman touching Jesus, Jesus shares a story with the Pharisee. In the story Jesus tells of a man who had one large debt owed to him by one man and one small debt owed to him by another. The man who loaned the money forgave both debts. Jesus asks, "Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" (7:42).

With that he leads into the point of his story, "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only a little love" (7:47). This moving story shows that Jesus is the Saviour here to forgive sins and to come to those who know they are sinners. With Jesus taking on the right to forgive sins, he is showing he has the authority of divine judgment, which is only the authority of God. With this claim of divine judgment and the ability to forgive sins Jesus is also claiming to be God.

### **Self-Characterisation of Jesus by Jesus**

The first words spoken by Jesus in Luke are a self-characterisation of Jesus about himself.

When Jesus' parents were frantically searching for him and finally found him, Jesus replied, "'But why did you need to search?' he asked. 'Didn't you know that I must be in my father's house?'" (2:49). With his rhetorical question Jesus states that he is the son of God. The way Jesus asks the question makes a statement: "do you not know" is designed to produce an affirmative reply from his parents.

Jesus knows that he has a special relationship with the heavenly Father which naturally leads him to be discussing the things of God in his "Father's house". Jesus has a "strong sense of identity with the Father and is committed to the mission God sent him to do. . . Jesus recognises himself as sent by the Father to reveal his will". Jesus clearly wants to indicate that he is the son of God, and that God is his father.

Perhaps Jesus' clearest self-characterisation is when the crowds have grown to thousands around him and he turns to his disciples to say, "I tell you the truth, everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, the Son of Man will also acknowledge in the presence of God's angels. But anyone who denies me here on earth will be denied before God's angels" (12:8-9).

Jesus points to himself as the one who saves, just as was prophesied about from various people in chapters 1-3 of Luke. The "open earthly confession of Jesus, the Son of Man, would bring open, heavenly confession of the believer by Christ himself in the presence of God's angels". This is Jesus' way of stating that he is the key to salvation; he is the one and only way

to eternal life. This “Son of Man” is a title that Jesus clearly uses for himself throughout the book of Luke.

The term “Son of Man” is “an indirect way for Jesus to refer to himself in his authority to forgive sin . . . [he] has a strong sense that he is God’s appointed eschatological agent, since he has a role in divine judgment”. Jesus is stating that he, as the son of man, is salvation.

### **Actions as a Clue to the Character of Jesus**

The middle of Luke’s gospel from chapters 4 through 21 is mixed with actions of Jesus exemplifying him as the Messiah.

In Luke 5:4-7 Jesus tells Simeon (later called Peter) to go out where the water is deeper and to fish there. Simeon objects because they worked hard the previous night and did not catch anything. However, Simeon still follows Jesus’ instructions to cast the nets and when they pull in the nets, they are so full of fish that they are tearing! This leads Simeon to fall to his knees before Jesus and say, “Oh, Lord, please leave me—I’m too much of a sinner to be around you” (5:8).

This story of Jesus showing that he has the power to do what they cannot do is the beginning of a theme of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The middle of Luke’s gospel (chapters 4-21) records that Jesus raises the dead twice, cures more than 22 people who are sick, casts out six demons, and feeds thousands of people.

These all have a clear message: **Jesus is God**. “Miraculous healing demonstrates the scope of Jesus’ authority. He heals the sick, exorcises evil spirits, and cures fever, leprosy, paralysis, a withered hand, epilepsy, dropsy, blindness, a flow of blood, and deafness. He resuscitates the dead and exercises power over nature. Jesus’ work testifies to his person and task”. Only the one who has power over these things could affect them in the way he affects them. From chapter four to twenty-one we see story after story of Jesus doing things that only the Son of God could do.

During Jesus’ earthly ministry he also shows a keen understanding for what people are thinking. In 7:40 it reads, “Then Jesus answered his [Simeon] thoughts.” In 9:47, “But Jesus knew their thoughts.” Luke 11:17 states, “He knew their thoughts.” And finally, in 19:1-5, “he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name.”

Jesus’ actions further show that he is son of God when he is able to give his power to others. The book of Luke records Jesus:

- healing others,
- casting out demons,
- feeding thousands,
- raising the dead, and
- showing knowledge of the thoughts of others.

Jesus not only has the power to do these things, but he also has the ability to give others this same power. Luke 9:1-2 records, “One day Jesus called together his twelve disciples and gave them power and authority to cast out all demons and to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.”

Just as Jesus’ work to do miraculous acts authenticates who he is, the fact that such work continues with his disciples suggests that Jesus’ authority continues through them.

## **Concluding Thoughts about Jesus in the Book of Luke**

The historical grounding of such a well-documented and researched book as Luke sheds light on who Jesus is. Direct descriptions by Luke that Jesus is the instrument of salvation, responses from other characters that Jesus is the awaited Messiah, Jesus' own thoughts and words addressing God as father, Jesus' self-characterisation as the son of man who saves, as well as his actions doing miracles all point to him clearly being the son of God, the Saviour.