

Luke

Journey to Jerusalem



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Introduction

The gospel of Luke is considerably longer and more complex than any of the New Testament letters, and as such is not typically an intro-level Bible study. Further, foundational concepts like prayer and confession and community and evangelism are not taught in the same straightforward matter as they are in the epistles. So, why is Luke a foundational study in the Cru Community series? Simple—it's *essential* that we *get* to know Jesus, and the gospels are the best way to do that. We need to see Jesus performing his many signs and wonders, hear him teaching the crowds, and feel his joy and agony. This, I think, is why John begins his first epistle with “[that] which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched —this we proclaim concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).

Another benefit of this study is that, once you become familiar with the content of Luke, you'll have a foothold in understanding Matthew and Mark, as they both record many of the same events and teachings and organize their material in similar ways. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic gospels because of this correspondence in content. Once you get a grasp on the gospel of Luke, you're well on your way to understanding Matthew and Mark along with Acts, which Luke also wrote. Having read and understood Luke, you'll want to continue on and read his account of the early Christians and the spread of the gospel.

That leaves only one question: why a study on just chapters nine through fifteen? The answer is practicality. For a weekly Bible study to discuss all twenty-four chapters of Luke, that could easily take an

entire year, and other important studies would have to be dropped from the Community curriculum. But a lot happens in these seven chapters, and if you can follow along, you'll find that by chapter fifteen you'll have a good sense of what's going on as well as what's going to happen.

The way the study guide is formatted is as follows: First, there's an overview of the gospel as a whole—who wrote it, when, why, etc. Then, there is the text, the entirety of chapters nine through fifteen. This is followed by nine studies. Each study begins with a short commentary on the text, followed by discussion. Answers to the discussion questions can be found in the back of the study guide. Oh, and one final comment: each study contains more questions than can probably be discussed. Choose those you think will be most fruitful for the study, and may God bless you as you study his word.

Rick James

Publisher, Cru Press

July 2019

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himself for the journey and begins the long march to his execution. While the final journey to Jerusalem extends from Luke 9:51 to 19:28, the study focuses on chapters 9-15.

The Gospel of Luke

Chapters 9–16

9

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³ He told them: “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. ⁵ If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶ So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

⁷ Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, ⁸ others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. ⁹ But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him.

¹⁰ When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, ¹¹ but the crowds

GROUP STUDIES 1-9

I Know You: Luke 9:18-36

Introduction

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Christ" serves as the major hinge in the structure of content—but it's not a literary device. Peter's confession truly marked a turning point in Jesus's ministry, dividing what came before from what came after. The many signs and miracles that Jesus performed demonstrated his identity as Israel's Messiah but, more than that, they were a demonstration of deity and his unique status as the son of God. Peter's confession marks the disciple's comprehension of Jesus's true identity. It's only after this that Jesus can begin to prepare them for a stunning series of events they could have never foreseen: the Messiah will be rejected and crucified. Further, his disciples, too, will have to carry their cross.

Discussion Questions

Starting the Discussion

1. One reason people didn't recognize Jesus as the Messiah was because of national and political expectations. How has politics obscured Jesus in contemporary culture? Would we recognize him today?

Exploring the Text

READ LUKE 9:19-20

2. Prophets such as Elijah and Elisha had performed miraculous

signs; in what ways did Jesus distinguish himself and his ministry from theirs?

3. While the Old Testament contains hundreds of messianic prophecies and allusions, what made them confusing was that they appeared to describe two very different types of Messiah. Look up the following passages, and observe differences: Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; and Isaiah 53:1-6.

4. Read Matthew 16:13-20. What additional information does Matthew add in his account?

5. In Matthew 16:17, why does Jesus say, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven?"

6. In Matthew 16:18, what does Jesus mean when he says, "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it?"

READ LUKE 9:21-27

7. Following Peter's confession, why does Jesus abruptly begin to explain to his disciples that he must be rejected, suffer, and die?

8. What meaning do you think the disciples would have drawn from what Jesus says in verses 23-27?

9. What do these words of Jesus mean to you personally: "whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (verse 24)?

10. Whether it is a death to selfish desire, a death to materialism, a death to worldly ambition, a death to the approval of others, etc., it's clear that, in the Christian life, death is always being transformed into new life. How have you experienced this?

READ LUKE 9:28-36

11. Like Luke, Matthew and Mark record the transfiguration following right after Peter's confession. How or why are these events connected?

12. What is the significance of the transfiguration? Why a mountain? Why Elijah and Moses?

13. Why do you think God specifically says, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" (verse 35)?

Implications and Applications

14. What were the circumstances of your coming to recognize Jesus's true identity?

15. In what ways has Jesus further disclosed himself to you?

16. What has it meant for you to "take up your cross?"

Considerations and Synopsis

Peter's Confession

It would seem that recognition of Jesus's identity as Israel's Messiah should have come quicker for the disciples, but putting together the

pieces was more difficult than it appears. Old Testament prophecy had much to say concerning the coming Messiah, but it painted two distinct and divergent portraits. One description is that of a mighty ruler and majestic king, found in texts like Daniel 7:13-14: "there came one like a son of man...And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion..." The second portrait is of a humble, broken servant suffering for the sins of his people, found in texts like Isaiah 53: "...he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities..." (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Obviously, Jesus is both, and the difference lies between his first and second coming: the first time as a servant dying for our sins; the second, to judge the nations and reign in glory. A second confusion concerning Jesus's identity, is that he was not merely Israel's Messiah but in fact God, or, put differently, Israel's savior was God. Thus, the signs that Jesus performed—raising the dead, calming the sea, walking on water, forgiving sins, etc.—were not typical signs, but actions that were the sole prerogative of God, and God alone.

Carrying the Cross

The point that the disciples recognize Jesus is the point he starts to prepare them for his death. This would obviously be overwhelming for the disciples as well as horribly confusing: Jesus is the Christ... and the Christ must die? Unfortunately for the disciples, Jesus still had more to say, and so he tells them: "I am the Christ...the Christ must be rejected and die...and you also must pick up your cross." But while it sounds morose, the life of a disciple is not about death at all, it's about life. In the Christian life, "dying to self" is merely the vehicle

for experiencing resurrection life and power through the Holy Spirit that indwells us. If the Christian life is a string of little deaths, it is only because, more accurately, it is a string of mini-resurrections.

The Transfiguration

In the transfiguration, Jesus allows his disciples a glimpse of the substance and reality of their faith. They know the truth but now they get to see the truth. They know the identity of Jesus but here they see his glory. Moses and Elijah represent, respectively, the law and the prophets, and as Jesus will later state, the Law and the Prophets both “testify” to his identity as Israel’s Messiah (Luke 24:27). The significance of God’s spoken testimony, “This is my Son…listen to him,” lies in the fact that Moses ascended Mount Sinai to retrieve the word of God (the commandments), but on the Mount of Transfiguration, God declares Jesus to be his word—“This is my Son…listen to him” (9:35). John, in his gospel, makes the same observation but with stunning poignancy: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:1,14).

How Much Does it Cost? Luke 9:51-62

Introduction

Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ marks the culmination of the greater portion of Jesus’s earthly ministry. Whatever their level of comprehension, the disciples now know that Jesus is the Christ, and that the Christ must be rejected and die. In verse 51, Luke tells us that Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem and this marks the final stage of his ministry—the march towards the cross. Luke 9:51 literally reads “Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem,” and it alludes to a messianic prophecy in Isaiah, which says: “Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame” (Isaiah 50:7). Jesus knows what awaits him in Jerusalem, and he steels himself for the journey ahead. The trek to Jerusalem starts at Luke 9:57 and goes to Luke 19. All of the warnings, conflicts, and corrections of these chapters should be viewed in the context of a looming cross—final preparations for the disciples, final warnings to religious leaders, final invitations to all who would follow. The train is leaving the station, so to speak, and it’s the last chance for Israel to get on board.

Fittingly, the first interaction on the journey to Jerusalem is with several would-be disciples who want to join Jesus, not knowing his ultimate destination was a cross and so not knowing what they were signing up for. Through the exchange, Jesus clarifies the nature of a love commitment and so clarifies what it means to follow him.

Discussion Questions

Starting the Discussion

1. Whose marriage relationship serves as a positive role model for you? What is it about their commitment to one another that seems exceptional? Is there a marriage you've observed that strikes you as a particularly unhealthy model? What seems to be lacking in their commitment to one another?

Exploring the Text

READ 9:51

2. This verse starts the next major section in Luke's gospel: Jesus's final journey to Jerusalem and the crucifixion that awaits him there. Scan through the next ten chapters and look for Luke's reminders that this is where he's headed.

3. Why does Luke say Jesus resolutely set out (some translations say "set his face") towards Jerusalem?

READ 9:57-62

4. In this passage, Jesus addresses three aspects of commitment crucial to discipleship. What aspect of commitment is Jesus describing in verses 57–58?

5. What relationship(s) in your life has required sacrifice? To this point, has your relationship with Jesus required sacrifice? If so, how? In love relationships, sacrifice doesn't always feel like sacrifice—have you ever experienced this?

6. Passion has been described as not only the willingness to sacrifice,

but the desire to sacrifice for someone or something. Passion views sacrifice as an opportunity to express and demonstrate commitment, as well as a means to satiate love's desire. Where or in whom have you seen passion demonstrated?

READ 9:59-60

7. What is the unique aspect of commitment that Jesus looks to emphasize here?

8. What sorts of problems and issues might there be if the man doesn't show up for his father's funeral?

9. To modern ears, Jesus's response seems cold, even unreasonable. Why? What is Jesus intending to communicate?

10. How have you struggled to prioritize Jesus over other interests and commitments? Where do you most feel the tension between the approval of Jesus and the approval of friends and family?

11. Priority is also expressed in the allocation of time. What do your time commitments suggest is more important to you than it should be? Less important than it ought to be?

READ 9:61-62

12. This third exchange seems similar to the second; what's different about it, or what does Jesus emphasize differently?

13. Do you fear "turning back?"

14. It's not all that common for a Christian to abruptly turn their back

on Jesus; rather, it is a gradual “turning back” to old habits, friends, and lifestyles. What do you find calling you back? What previous experience(s) do you sometimes miss?

15. In traditional wedding vows you’ll find the phrases: “in sickness and health,” “forsaking all others,” “till death do us part.” Does this in any way give insight to what Jesus is really asking?

Implications and Applications

16. Given the costs of commitment, why would someone choose to love, serve, and follow Jesus? What is the alternative choice?

17. Are you wanting and willing to be a disciple?

Considerations and Synopsis

Articulating the Cost

What if signing up to be a soldier came with a full-disclosure agreement, where everything implied in putting on a uniform was stated explicitly? What about signing up to be a firefighter, gang member, astronaut, or a parent? To see in print the possible cost of any serious life commitment would be startling, and so what Jesus says to these potential disciples is...well, startling. But in fact, Jesus is merely articulating the cost and commitment of love. Love is not as nebulous as it would seem; it is a commitment measurable in three dimensions: the willingness to sacrifice, the willingness to prioritize, and the willingness to persevere in that commitment. This is the height, depth, and width of love. To view it from the negative angle: if someone says that they love you but will give up nothing for you

nor find time to be with you nor stick by you in difficult times—are they really telling you the truth? This is what is at issue in the call to discipleship; it is essentially a love commitment. What follows in the text is a clear articulation of these three conditions of love: sacrifice, priority, and perseverance.

Foxes and Birds

Like more than a few of Jesus’s sayings, we need some decoding help to figure out what he really means when he says, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” What he is saying to any would-be follower is that the life of a disciple involves sacrifice—and real love is willing to make that sacrifice. How do we know the depth of God’s love for us? Because “God so loved the world that he gave [*sacrificed*] his one and only son...” (John 3:16). The heart is hidden, but sacrifice is not; it is the lens through which we are able to view love and observe its intensity—or lack thereof. And yet, in the context of love, sacrifice doesn’t always feel like sacrifice. There is, for want of a better word, a sense of *joy* in sacrificing for those we love. Which is why Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus, “for the *joy* set before him, endured the cross” (emphasis mine).

But let’s take this even further: true love and commitment is not merely *willing* to sacrifice—it *wants* to. This is even true in sports, as few athletes would elect for pain, endurance, or sacrifice to be removed from their sport—they want it to be hard. Passion actively seeks out vehicles by which it can demonstrate the degree of its intensity. This component of sacrifice is certainly visible in Jesus’s love for us. The question Jesus asks is, “Will you sacrifice for me?”

Prioritizing

The second individual to approach Jesus also wants to follow him—so long as he can *first* go and bury his father. Jesus seizes on the word “first” in order to underscore the second aspect of a disciple’s commitment—priority.

Giving priority to Christ has a number of implications and applications—most significantly the priority of *person* and *time*. For this man not to return home and attend his father’s funeral would have caused a scandal in the family, just as it probably would today. It isn’t difficult to imagine what his friends and family would have thought of his actions, and that is a crucial point: for a disciple, the approval of Jesus is *more important* than the approval of family and friends. Clearly God calls us to love parents, friends, and neighbors, so this isn’t the issue; the issue is that, in an either/or situation, Jesus will not accept second.

The second priority is that of *time*. The priority of love shows itself in our daily and weekly schedule in our allocation of time. Had the man gone to the funeral, he could not have rejoined Jesus later because there was no later: Jesus was on his way to be crucified. For a disciple, daily time with Jesus is the highest priority. And so we see in this second exchange that, like sacrifice, priority is a measurement of love: what we prioritize reflects what is dearest to us.

Perseverance

While similar to the request of the second man, the distinct emphasis of the third exchange is the phrase “turn back.” The man asks to “turn back” and say goodbye to his family, and it is the notion of “turning back” that prompts Jesus’s response. Love is not a commitment that allows us to turn back: love endures and perseveres, and so must a disciple. Like sacrifice and priority, endurance or longevity

is a reliable gauge of love’s vitality: not how much or how often, but how long we love.

“Turn back” is a phrase used often in both the Old and New Testaments, and envisages both turning *away* in the pursuit of God and turning *back* to old habits and lifestyles. As Paul relates in his letter to the Philippians, a disciple is always “forgetting what is behind” and “pressing on” towards God’s calling.

I Do

In the traditional vows spoken by a bride and groom are the phrases, “in sickness and in health,” “forsaking all others,” and “‘til death do we part.” This is because love is not a nebulous emotion but a commitment that is defined by sacrifice, priority, and perseverance, and measured precisely by these dimensions. This is the height, depth, and width of love; it is how Christ loves us, and how he asks us to love him. That’s what’s happening in Luke 9:57-62. To all would-be disciples, Jesus is saying, “Will you marry me?” Jesus is totally committed to us, and he asks the same of us—for us to trust and follow him completely.

A Crupress Community Study



ISBN 978-1-57334-125-7



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