

The Gospel of Luke

Luke 9:51-19:27

The Journey to the Throne: To Jerusalem and the Cross (9:51-19:27)

The largest section in the Gospel of Luke is often called the “travel narrative”. Luke uses this portion of his Gospel to address several key issues and theological challenges for his reader. For this section we will use the following structure²⁶:

Outline of the Travel Narrative	9:51-19:27
Intro: On the Way	9:51-56
<i>Transition #1: The Cost of Following Jesus</i>	9:57-62
The Do’s and Don’ts of Christian Discipleship	10:1-12:48
<i>Transition #2: The Cost of Following Jesus</i>	12:49-53
Understanding the Jewish Rejection	12:54-14:24
<i>Transition #3: The Cost of Following Jesus</i>	14:25-34
Seeking the Lost: The Gospel for all People	15:1-19:270

Intro: On the Way (9:51-56)

The signal that Luke is transitioning to a new narrative section is 9:51:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. --Luke 9:51

In “setting his face”, Luke is highlighting the nature of Jesus ministry as the fulfillment of the absolute commitment to the enduring obedience of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant who “set his face like flint” with absolute obedience and trust of the Father’s sovereign plan, secure in the knowledge that he would “never be put to shame”. (Isa. 50:7) Jesus is now singularly focused on his vocation to suffer and die as the Savior of the World. While Luke is telling the story of Jesus dedication to his call, he makes the application of the call of the disciple to the singularly-focused, costly vocation of servant ministry for the Kingdom.

²⁶ Outline adapted from Tan Geok Hock, *Is there a Structure to Luke’s Travel Narrative?* (Thesis submitted to the Seminari Theoloji Malaysia) 2012.

James and John wrongly misunderstood their kingdom vocation as one of prophetic judgment. They were eager to “tell fire to come down from heaven and consume” the Samaritans, but Jesus rebuked them. (9:54-55) Luke uses this episode to set the stage for the entire travel narrative. The call of the disciple is to earthly suffering, rather than violence and glory. The Messiah and the kingdom of God will be rejected by the Jewish leaders. But their rejection, means salvation for the world.

The Cost of Following Jesus (9:57-62, 12:49-53, 14:25-34)

Through the travel narrative, Luke emphasizes the difficulty of following Jesus on the path of discipleship. Jesus is asking for total commitment and focus from his followers. Many would say to Jesus “I will follow you wherever you will go.” (9:57) However, the would-be disciple must understand that following Jesus is a total and absolute commitment to the kingdom come what may. There will be suffering, persecutions, rejections. If the King faced a cross at the hands of the Jewish and Roman leadership, so too would the disciple. The disciple may find his own family members set against him. (14:26) Discipleship requires a total dedication to the kingdom, there can be no looking back once the commitment to follow has been made. Therefore, anyone who is contemplating the call to follow Jesus must count up all of the costs involved and make certain of their absolute commitment:

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

—Luke 14:28-33

On the Christian Life 10:1-12:48

The first section in the travel narrative focuses on the nature of discipleship positively and negatively. First, Luke tells stories that considers what the committed disciple of Jesus should do: proclaim the Gospel (10:1-24), do good (10:25-37), be devoted to God’s word (10:38-42), pray (11:1-13), cast out demons (11:14-32), be holy (11:33-36). Then Luke considers attitudes, practices and behaviors the disciple should avoid: hypocrisy (11:37-12:3), fear of persecution (12:4-12), greed (12:13-21), worry (12:22-34), complacency (12:35-48).

What Disciples should do (10:1-11:36)

Proclaim the Gospel (10:1-24)

The primary call of the disciple is to be a laborer in the plentiful harvest. Just as Jesus appointed and sent out the twelve (9:1-6), he now sends out 72. The focus in Luke's telling is on Jesus' instructions to the missionaries. Clearly Luke has in mind the vocation of his readers to also be sent out as "lambs in the midst of wolves". Jesus clearly warns that many would reject the message of the missionary of the Gospel. But with the return of the Seventy-two, we hear how excited both the disciples and Jesus is at the power of the Kingdom of God over the satanic forces and evil (10:17-19) Yet their enthusiasm over the power of the kingdom proclamation should always be tempered with the humility of knowing the grace of God personally:

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." –Luke 10:20

Zeal for the mission of the Kingdom can become an occasion for pride. But as Paul teaches in Romans 3: "we all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ." Or as DT Niles aptly put it, "Evangelism is one beggar showing another beggar where to find the bread."

Nevertheless, the mission of the Kingdom is exciting work and an occasion to rejoice and give thanks for the awesome privilege of being used mightily by God to carry out his plan of salvation for the world. (10:21-24)

Do Good (10:25-37)

"And who is my neighbor?" That is the question the Jewish lawyer seeking eternal life asks Jesus. Some may be tempted to define the term narrowly so as to limit the scope of the command to "love your neighbor".

The parable of good Samaritan turns the question on its head by asking the legalist to consider that if he was in desperate need, he would certainly need and accept "mercy" from anyone—even from a Samaritan. The implication for the lawyer is that if he would receive mercy from even a Samaritan, how could he exempt himself from the obligation to love and show mercy to the Samaritan as his "neighbor"? (Remember the desire of James and John to call down fire on the Samaritans.)

The story gets to the heart of every type of prejudice. Who are the Samaritans in our day who need our love and mercy?

Be devoted to God's word (10:38-42)

The story of Mary and Martha corrects the temptation to allow the needs of service to take priority over devotion and study of Jesus' teachings. While both are good things, the "one thing" of sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to his teaching is the better choice for our use of time.

Pray (11:1-13)

The devotion to study is paired with a focus on prayer. At the behest of the disciples, Jesus taught his disciples not only what to pray, but also to have confidence in the heart of the Father to answer prayer. God desires to receive and respond to the prayers of his people. He desires to bless his children with “good gifts”. Most of all, the Father will “give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 10:13)

Cast out demons (11:14-32)

Jesus uses the occasion of the exorcism of the demon possessed man to teach on the nature of exorcism. The liberation of people from demonic powers is a primary function of the Kingdom of God. However, it is only one half of distance to salvation. Liberation must be followed by conversion and sanctification: through “hearing the word of God and keeping it!” (11:28) Otherwise, new and more demons will just move back into the liberated home! (11:24-26) People love to see the signs of liberation brought about by the kingdom, but they do often do not accept the call to repentance and discipleship that is essential to inclusion in the kingdom. This is part of the problem with many in Israel. God is looking for the fruits of the Kingdom in his disciples. The history of redemption is replete with examples of what God is looking for by way of repentance. The story of Jonah and repentance of Nineveh, points the way. Queen Sheba revealed true faith. The two gentile examples of repentance and faithfulness should make the Jewish believer jealous to repentance! The Lord would see his disciples shine with the light of holiness! (11:33-36)

Unfortunately, the leadership of the Jewish people provide ample examples of what NOT to do as a disciples of the kingdom.

What Disciples should not do (11:37-12:48)

Avoid Hypocrisy (11:37-12:3)

The hypocrisy of the Pharisees is like a “leaven” which can spread through a loaf of bread.(12:1) It is to be avoided at all cost. Luke records Jesus’ prophetic “Woe” oracles against hypocrisy. (11:37-52) Jesus disciples are duly warned that they must be internally and externally genuine in their faith. The Lord perceives the inner workings of the heart. (11:2-3)

Do not fear persecution (12:4-12)

The disciple of Jesus must not be cowed by fear of man. The remedy to fear of man is fear of God. He is the greater danger anyway, for he can kill not only the body, but has authority to judge the soul (12:5)! The disciple will be persecuted and brought before authorities and rulers, but in those moment the call is to acknowledge Jesus publically. Fear not, God will provide the words! (12:12)

Beware of Greed (12:13-21)

The disciple must guard against the trap of love of money. “Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (12:15) The disciple is to be “rich toward God”, rather than himself! (12:21)

Do not worry (12:22-34)

The disciple is taught to avoid the trap of excessive anxiety and worry about food, clothes etc. The gentiles “seek after these things” rather than seek God. Paradoxically, when the disciple focuses properly on the kingdom of God, “these things will be added” too. (12:31) The heart of the disciple should be devoted to the kingdom of God, rather than the stuff of this world.

Do not become complacent (12:35-48)

The final warning for the disciple of Jesus is to be on guard against complacency. The disciple is to always be ready and prepared for kingdom action and work. The call of the kingdom of God is a sacred responsibility that should never be taken for granted.

Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. –Luke 12:48

On the Jewish Rejection (12:54-14:24)

The second main section of Luke’s travel narrative focuses on the Jewish rejection of Jesus and as a consequence the announcement of the Kingdom. Many failed to see and rightly interpreting the times in which they were living. Jesus points out how savvy they are at recognizing the patterns in weather, but how inept they are at recognizing the coming of the Kingdom when it is clearly before them. (12:54-59)

The call is to repent or perish. (13:19) Jesus tells the story of a vineyard owner that has returned three years in a row to find fruit on his fig tree only to be disappointed again and again. Jesus is the owner, the leaders of Israel are the fig tree. (13:6-9)

The synagogue ruler rejects the healing of a woman with a disabling spirit for 18 years. Jesus accuses him of hypocrisy in that he would have “untied” his ox or donkey on the Sabbath to give it water. Why is wrong to untie this “Daughter of Abraham whom Satan has bound”?

Part of the reason for the Jewish rejection is that they were looking for a dramatic fulfillment of the Kingdom, rather than a progressive gradual coming of the kingdom, like a growing mustard seed or leavening dough. (13:18-21)

The Lord has defined the entrance into the salvation of the Kingdom of God as a “narrow door”. There is a limited window to respond to the invitation, but once the master of the house is “risen” and shut the door it may be too late for the mass entrance of the Jewish people. The patriarchs may be welcomed in but many of their descendants will be “cast out”. Their rejection of the kingdom will lead to a mass entrance of people from “east, west, north and south”. (13:29)

This section ends with the Lord lamenting over Jerusalem for its “unwillingness to be gathered into the kingdom at the day of visitation of its Lord and King. (13:34) The Jewish rejection of the Messiah means that their presumption of pride of place is completely off (14:7-11). Rather, their rejection of the wedding invitation meal has resulted in a mass invitation to everyone else. (14:15-24)

On the Repentance of New Believers 15:1-17:19

The third and final section of Luke's travel narrative expands on the global invitation to the wedding feast at the rejection of the original invitees and subsequent invitation to everyone else. The Messiah was rejected due to his own people's failing to take seriously the call to discipleship and repentance—with lots of excuses. (14:18-20) So the invitation to discipleship has now come to the poor, crippled, blind and lame, and then to the "highways and hedges" (the ends of the earth). Luke is now going to expand on the global invitation to become a disciple of Jesus. Again, this is a costly call (14:25-35), but it is nevertheless an invitation to be a member of the Kingdom of God, by the King himself.

The Lost Sheep, Coin and Son (15:1-32)

The inclusion of the repentant sinners of Israel (tax collectors and sinners) is the first stumbling block to the Jewish leadership. Jesus compares these "sinners" to a precious lost sheep, coin, son. The argument is from the lesser to the greater. The joy and celebration felt at the finding of a lost sheep or coin, no where compares to a parents delight at the repentance and return of a lost child. However, the Jewish problem is they are looking at the sinner through the eyes of a resentful brother rather than a forgiving father.

Expectations for Repentance:

The Lord is looking for repentance and holiness of life in the areas of stewardship of earthly possessions and wealth (16:1-15), in staying faithful to the commandments of God, in the honoring of marriage and eschewing divorce (16:16-18), in caring for neighbor and the poor (16:19-31), and in reconciliation through repentance and forgiveness (17:1-10). The invitation to salvation is open to all people, but all are called to a transformed life of faithfulness to the Lordship of Jesus.

Responding to the Kingdom (17:11-19:27)²⁷

A Grateful Heart: The Ten Lepers (17:11-19)

The story of the ten lepers, reveals the proper attitude and response to the call fo the kingdom—gratitude. The fact that the one leper that returns is a Samaritan strikes at the heart of the dilemma of the Jewish rejection and resentment of Gentile repentance and inclusion—a sense of entitlement vs humility at grace.

Faithfulness at the coming of the son of Man (17:20-18:8)

Jesus is looking for a persistent and constant quality of faithfulness from his people. There is not going to be any type of last minute warning signs so a would be disciple can get himself right with the Lord at the last minute. As in the days of old (the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah), judgment just comes. It is best to always be prepared and expectant by persistently showing forth the fruit of repentance consistent with the kingdom. The persistent widow is representative of the "elect who cry out to God day and night." The key question:

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth? --Luke 17:8

²⁷ This portion of the outline comes from Joel Green, The Gospel of Luke

How to Enter the Kingdom: Faith (18:9-19:27)

Luke closes the travel narrative with stories that demonstrate “the faith” the Son of Man is hoping to find. The first example is of a repentant tax collector who cries, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” Humility leads to kingdom exaltation. (18:14)

The second example is a child. The disciples seek to prevent the children from coming to Jesus, but he lifts them up as examples of the type of faith that can “enter” the kingdom of God. One has to “receive the kingdom of God like a child. (18:17)

The question is again asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” This time by a rich ruler. Jesus tells him to renounce his idolatry to riches:

One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me. —Luke 18:22

When the disciple remark on the seeming impossibility for anyone to enter the kingdom with such a high threshold of total and complete self-sacrifice, Jesus agrees:

What is impossible with man is possible with God. —Luke 18:27

The man’s question was based in a false premise. He asked, “what must **I do** to inherit eternal life?” Salvation is a gracious gift given, not a payment owed for faithfulness to the Law.

As Paul taught the Ephesians:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. —Ephesians 2:8-10

The blind beggar actually has it right, we need to be asking Jesus to “have mercy” on us. We will not be saved by what we do for God, but by what he does for us. Jesus asks the beggar, what do you want me to do for you? Notice he does not ask for material provision, he says: “Lord, let me recover my sight.” (18:41) This is the type of faith the Son of Man is looking for; he says to the man “your faith has made you well.” (18:42)

The final example of the type of faith the Son of Man is looking for is in the seeking and the repentance of Zacchaeus. He is a man short in stature and reputation—someone others considered unworthy of the kingdom as he was a “sinner”. Yet, like the Blind man he wanted to “see” Jesus. And as a result of his seeking mercy from the Lord, he was granted salvation and repentance.

Zacchaeus is exactly the type of person that Luke knows will be receptive to the Gospel. His readers may relate to Zacchaeus, or they may know of people like him who are ripe for the message of the kingdom. Either way the main point is that “The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.” (18:10)

The Ten Minas

Luke closes the travel narrative with a vision of stewardship. Luke tells us the occasion for the parable. “he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.”(19:11)

The parable is about the delegation of a smaller citizenry to “servants” while the nobleman was away in a far country receiving for himself “a kingdom”. While he is away there is a rejection by the citizenry. From the context of the travel narrative, this could only point to the rejection of the king by the Jewish leaders and people. The servants would then be entrusted disciples. The emphasis in the story is not so much on the judgment of the citizens who reject the nobleman, but the servant who does nothing with the mina with which he has been entrusted.

To bring the narrative back to the missionary call of the “72” in the beginning of the travel narrative. The entire point of the travel narrative really comes down to a single question: are you willing to follow Jesus and be used by him to “seek and save the lost”. Yes there will be citizens who reject the nobleman, and they will be judged severely for their rejection of the King. But the real point is directed toward the reader who is insecure in his faith.

Will you be bold and take the risk of investing the Kingdom “mina”? Will you keep the gift of salvation, buried away in a handkerchief? (19:20)

Those who are faithful with “a very little”, will be given authority over much. (19:17)

I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. –Luke 19:26
