

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 1

Foundational Topics

Biblical attitudes towards studying God's truth:

- To “know” God and His truth requires a person to engage his whole being energetically in the pursuit of that knowledge, i.e. mind, feelings, spirit (eg prayer and worship), body, will/decisions
- To “learn” God’s truth requires a person’s willingness to integrate the truth learned into every dimension of daily life, relationships and work

Biblical attitudes and responses to the Person of Jesus:

When we come to the study of the life and teaching of Christ, we are at the very core of our Christian faith. We must make sure that we approach and study this most important subject matter in a truly godly and biblical fashion.

We must guard against treating this study material either in a very simplistic manner or in an overly academic manner – i.e. “simplistic” meaning that we look upon this study as just a study of some simple stories about Jesus’ life (things we already know); “academic” meaning to or “intellectualise” the truth so that our learning is only taking place in our minds without any impact upon our whole being.

Rather we must come as “worshippers” as well as true “disciples” of Jesus. We must give heed to the following biblical injunctions:

- To know Jesus (Phil.3:10)
- To grow up into Christ (Eph.4:15-16; 2 Peter 3:18)
- To love Jesus with our whole beings, as our “first love” (Rev.2:4; John 21:15-19)
- To allow God’s Spirit to transform us into the likeness of Jesus (2 Cor.3:18; Rom.8:29)

- To live and serve with one motivation bring honour and glory to Him (Rom.16:25-27; Eph.1:12; 3:20-21)
- To proclaim Him as God’s Good News to others both to believers and to unbelievers (Mark 1:1; Acts 8:12)

Aims for this course:

- To strengthen your faith in the biblical witness to the Lord Jesus, recognising that a true follower of Jesus is a person who believes firmly in a core set of truths concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ and that all these truths are indispensable to your maturing in the Christian faith and your effectiveness in Christian service
- To expose you to the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ so that your life and ministry will be increasingly impacted by the witness of His life and ministry – for that reason this course is designed:
 - To deepen your understanding of the Person and Work of Jesus in order to enrich and strengthen your witness, preaching and teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
 - To help equip you to expose the lies and false beliefs of unbelievers concerning “Jesus of Nazareth” so that you can then proclaim to them the truth according to God’s Word
 - To help you challenge unbiblical and unholy thoughts concerning the Person and Work of Christ held by Christians and to teach and disciple them according to His teaching and commands (see Matt.28:20)

Foundational truths undergirding our study of the life and teaching of Jesus:

- The core subject matter is the earthly life and ministry of Jesus. It is not a doctrine course in which we focus on the major Christological themes rooted in all parts of the Bible.
- We will focus our attention upon the revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as recorded by the historian/theologian, Luke.

- Our study will be largely based in the Gospel of Luke and the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke/Acts was originally one book and should be read as one book made up of two major parts – the latter part completes the story of the former. At times we will compare Lucan texts with what is recorded in the other Gospels.
- The Gospel of Luke clearly reflects the person of Dr. Luke as a scholarly historian with a passion for accuracy, a penetrating thinker and theologian with a passion for the truth and a Gospel messenger, wholeheartedly committed to teaching and proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (Remember that he was one of Paul’s most devoted co-workers – one of Paul’s constant companions in many of his apostolic journeys as well as an active participant with Paul in the ministry of the Gospel to the nations.)
- This Gospel reflects the humanity of Dr. Luke – a person with a compassionate heart, a love for people and in particular, for the poor, the downtrodden, the social outcasts in the society of his day (eg women, children, “aliens,” “sinners” etc.). In other words, there is both “head” and “heart” in all Luke records in his Gospel.
- Another reason for choosing the Gospel of Luke as the foundation text for our study is that Luke wrote his account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ for non-Jewish readers, i.e. people who did not grow up with the revelation of God as given in the OT. Luke himself was most likely a Gentile (Col.4:14; cf. vs.10-11 – this was also the tradition in the Early Church) so he understood and could relate to the particular mindset and spiritual needs of Gentiles.
- In the context of the growth of the God’s work in a context like modern day India, Luke’s Gospel can have a strong appeal to the minds and hearts of people from a polytheistic or animistic background.
- It is important to note that in Luke’s Gospel (and the other three Gospels) we are not reading or studying an attempt by Luke or the other writers to give us a condensed biography of Jesus’ life. For example, Luke and the other Gospel writers focus primarily on just three years of Jesus’ life, concentrating only on the life, activities and ministries of Jesus in His last

week prior to His crucifixion and resurrection. The early years are covered in just a few short statements.

- What then we will be studying concerning the life and ministry of Jesus is truly about the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ – cf. Mark 1:1. What is presented to us is the very core (kerygma) or heart of the Gospel message concerning the Person of Jesus Christ.

The heart of the Gospel accounts focus upon the following details/facts:

- Jesus' miraculous birth by a young woman who was a virgin (born not of human seed but conceived by the Holy Spirit)
- Jesus' sinless, perfect life on earth – related to the Gospel truth that for Him to become our perfect, substitutionary Sacrifice, He must be as it were a Lamb without blemish – there is much to be gained from observing closely all of Jesus' ways, His conversation with people, His dealings with His disciples, His responses to His opponents and enemies et al – in all these His life and attitudes was a perfect likeness to the Father's – see Heb.1:1-3
- Jesus' miraculous and mighty works – in fulfilment of the prophecies given by the OT prophets concerning the coming Messiah (eg Is.35)
- Jesus' profound yet simple teaching, able to be understood by those who believed in Him as God's Son but unable to be understood or accepted by those who refused to place their faith in Him
- Jesus' death by crucifixion at a definite moment of time (i.e. that He and not someone else died on that Roman cross just outside the city walls of Jerusalem)
- Jesus' resurrection, with His frequent appearance to His disciples and others eye-witnesses
- Jesus' ascension back to heaven

(cf. John's Gospel differs from the Synoptic Gospels in the opening chapter focusing upon the pre-incarnate state of Jesus – John 1:1-3,14,18.)

- The Gospel accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus are inseparably linked to the preaching and teaching of the early apostles (who had been Jesus' most intimate friends while on earth). This means that one of the primary sources at

Luke's disposal to write his Gospel account of Jesus' life and ministry was the preaching and teaching of these apostles as well as to Jesus' mother, Mary, and other eye-witnesses who were His closest associates and friends.

However, Luke's opening words for Luke/Acts in his Gospel are very important statements. What can we learn from Luke 1:1-4?

- There were many stories and accounts of Jesus' life already circulating around at the time (v.1) – Luke, prompted by the Spirit of God using the whole person known as Luke, a trained thinker and historian as well as doctor, saw the need to write down an accurate account of the life and ministries of Jesus, based on the truth and not hearsay, an account that could be verified or proven rather than just a “spiritualised” account – cf. head vs. heart, people who believe anything that sounds good and appealing, unconcerned whether what they believe is based in fact or in fiction, believing that as far as “religious beliefs” are concerned, it doesn't really matter whether or not the stories actually happened or the details verified, just as long as people “believe” them to be true
- Luke was in personal contact with eye-witnesses who were a part of all that happened in the life and teaching of Jesus “from the beginning” – including Mary, many of Jesus' own disciples etc. (v.2)
- Luke carefully scrutinised and studied all the accounts of these eye-witnesses – he “investigated everything from the beginning” (v.3) – he was acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit – however this did not mean that there was no need for him to investigate the facts diligently – cf. a modern day journalist or reporter whose primary concern is to publish and to influence his readers
- Luke's primary concern was to provide a reliable and true witness to the life, ministry and teaching of the historical figure known as Jesus from Nazareth in order that the faith of God's people (his readers) would have a strong and enduring foundation, based on the facts, not myths or interesting stories that could have some helpful spiritual or moral benefit like the fables that all societies love to tell their children as a means for impressing upon them the beliefs or traditions of that tribe or clan

Conclusion

- What we read then in the Gospel of Luke is one of the primary teaching documents that was read and studied by the early Gentile congregations and used by them for teaching the new believers concerning Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man – who He was and what He did.

- Luke’s Gospel was received by the Early Church as being an authoritative and reliable teaching document compiled and written under the inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit for the purpose of establishing the faith of God’s people on the rock-solid foundation of God’s truth. In this way they were equipped and ready to respond to any false teaching concerning Jesus being passed around in the first century either by word of mouth or in a written form (i.e. letters and Gospel accounts that were supposedly written by an apostle but did not bear the hallmarks of a truly inspired Gospel account or apostolic letter).

- Through the Gospel of Luke as well as the other three Gospels, God has given to His church a reliable, true and faithful witness to the life and teaching of His church for all the Christian centuries to follow. It is our responsibility to both master these themes for ourselves and also for those to whom God has sent us as His servants and witnesses to the Person and Life of Jesus Christ.

These notes were written and prepared by Rev. Graham M. Roberts, M.Th. for the B.Min. “Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ” course at the Asian College of Cultural Studies – February 2004.