

No.9, Luke – Christ in His Priestly Ministry

As its title shows, this third Gospel was written by *Luke*; and that he was the author is also the testimony of early church tradition. Luke is known in Col 4: 14 as “*the beloved physician...*” and was obviously a close and faithful companion of the Apostle Paul; see 2 Tim 4: 11 – “*only Luke is with me...*” and Phil v.24 where Paul refers to him as *Lucas* and calls him one of his *fellow-labourers*. Luke was also the author of the book of Acts: note Acts 1: 1 – the same recipient is addressed, Theophilus; thus since the third Gospel was written by Luke and is addressed to this man Theophilus, it is the view of all orthodox students of Scripture that *Acts* is the work of Luke. In *Acts* Luke sometimes writes in the first person, thereby indicating that he was a fellow-labourer with Paul, a close companion with him in his ministry, e.g. Acts 16: 10 & 11.

The preface to Luke’s Gospel is in these first four verses. Some important facts are laid down by Luke immediately --

The source of his Gospel -- as we noted with *Mark*, the writer of this third Gospel was not an apostle either. But he was obviously closely associated with the school of the apostles and was recognised by them as a faithful man of God. However, he wrote his Gospel by divine inspiration, a claim that he forthrightly makes in the preface to this book, v.3. Here, the words “*from the very first...*” mean – “from above” thus Luke unreservedly presents the fact of the divine origin of this Gospel in its very preface.

The scope of his Gospel – that is, its purpose; seen in v.4 – “*that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.*” The scope or purpose of all Scripture is to bring assurance to the hearts of God’s people concerning the Gospel – the assurance that what is believed is true and trustworthy. But such certainty is only possible when there is an infallible record on which it rests. The two are inseparably related – the divine source of the Gospel gives it its certainty.

The subject of his Gospel – v.1, “*those things which are most surely believed among us.*” What those things are is what Luke proceeds to record in the rest of the book following on from his preface. What follows on is Luke’s history of the life of Christ, in the same way as the other Gospel writers pen their histories of the Saviour. As noted before, apostolic teaching depends on the historical reality of the events that revolve around the person and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the Gospels are indispensable. Without them the rest of the NT would have no authority and would be meaningless.

The inspired history of the life of Christ is the foundation of the Gospel. Gospel doctrine rests on Gospel history. Liberalism and then the Neo-Orthodox movement holds that God does not reveal Himself in the facts of Biblical history and these movements also cast doubt on the veracity of Gospel history. But if the history is untrue then there is no foundation for believing anything; and there is nothing substantial to which a person may hold in order to the salvation of the soul. However, Luke assures Theophilus that he can be sure of what he believed because it rested on the infallible foundation of an inspired history of the life of Christ.

LUKE’S PARTICULAR EMPHASIS

As noted, each Gospel writer deals with a particular aspect of the Saviour’s life; and in the case of Luke Christ is set forth in His priestly ministry for His people. It is this office of Christ as the Mediator and Saviour of His people that is especially in view in this Gospel, a fact clearly seen in various ways – one of them being the emphasis in this book on much that pertains to the Levitical system. Note in the first few verses of the opening narrative a number of details that point us to the Levitical & ceremonial system: vs.5, 8-11 – “priest”, “the course of Abia”, “Aaron”, “the priest’s office”, “to burn incense”, “the temple of the Lord”, & “the temple of the Lord”. Thus, the book opens with a clear focus on matters pertaining to the Levitical order, the priestly office. See then, how the book closes, ch.24: 53 – the temple again & the disciples offering up their spiritual sacrifices.

Taking Luke’s emphasis on Christ as priest there are a number of features in this Gospel to note with respect to this particular office of the priesthood as occupied by Christ.

1. THE SENDING OF CHRIST THE PRIEST

One of the basic features of the ministry of God’s high priest was that he was chosen and sent by the Lord – he did not arrogate this position to himself, and this was certainly true of Christ; Heb 5: 4 & 5. Thus, Christ was sent by His Father to be the High Priest of His people; see Heb 3: 1 where two titles are employed of Christ, showing this matter of His being a high priest sent and commissioned by the Father.

The sending of Christ the priest was *miraculous* – the chief emphasis of the early chapters of Luke. Note ch.1: 26-35 in which the writer goes into much detail concerning the conception of Christ’s humanity and His birth from the virgin’s womb. Christ could only fulfil His role as High Priest for sinners by taking their nature, yet sinlessly so – thus the absolute necessity of the virgin birth. By that miracle of all miracles He was sent and came forth to do His entire priestly work.

2. THE SYMPATHY OF CHRIST THE PRIEST

Again Paul spells out in Hebrews that one of the necessary qualities of the high priest is that of sympathy, Heb 5: 2. Note that the high priest has compassion “*on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way.*” Here is a remarkable definition of the sinner whom Christ came to save – in ignorance of God and lost in sin. But for such there is the greatest sympathy in the heart of Christ. Note Heb 2: 17 & 18 where it said that Christ the merciful high priest is able to succour those tempted or tried.

In Luke’s Gospel this aspect of Christ’s great sympathy is clearly in view. One of the dominant lines of thought in *Luke* is that Christ is shown to be the Saviour of the worst of sinners. In many of the chapters of this Gospel there is the record of a variety of sinners – men and women both – for whom there seemed to be no hope, yet Christ saved them and transformed them. Moreover, most of these people receive no mention in the other Gospels, showing Luke’s decided emphasis on this point of the sympathy of Christ the Great High Priest. The woman in ch.7; Zacchaeus in ch.19; the repentant thief in ch.23 – these are a few of such cases. Then there are parables found only in *Luke* that show the same issue of Christ’s great sympathy – *the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son &, the publican in the temple.*

3. THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST THE PRIEST

The chief aspect of the work of the high priest was that of offering up sacrifice for sin; again Heb 5: 1. In *Luke*, with its emphasis on the Levitical & the ceremonial, there are clear references to the offering of the sacrifice in connection with Christ’s work. See ch.2: 22-24 where at Christ’s birth and in obedience to the ceremonial law, sacrifice was offered up to God. This detail is only found in this Gospel, plainly emphasising this feature of the sacrifice of Christ the priest; that He came to offer sacrifice to God for sin and that He is that sacrifice. Chs. 23 & 24 then present to us Christ Himself offering up that one & only sacrifice for sin.

4. THE SUPPLICATION OF CHRIST THE PRIEST

See Heb 5: 5-7 – where reference is made to Christ as high priest engaging in supplication during “the days of His flesh.” Once more, in *Luke*, and especially early in the book there is emphasis on prayer; again ch.1: 9 & 10. But with regard to Christ Himself, His prayer ministry is most prominent – ch.3: 21 & 22, 5: 16, 6: 12 etc. Note also ch. 23: 34 & 46 – first and final words from the cross were in the form of prayer.

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