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Sermon 24 October 2021

Title: Meet the Gospels 3 (Luke)

- Good morning to our friends and family, and welcome to church. We are so glad to have you with us today, wherever you are and whenever you're listening, you are welcome here—and I hope that you are experiencing the presence of God right where you are, and I want to remind you that whatever your situation, God is right there with you—you can be assured of that fact
- If you're new here, we are glad to have you with us -- we hope you'll take some time to view some of our previous services, and get familiar with what's there, and we'd love for you to become a regular and continue to join us here each and every week—or if you're in the Largs area, come join us at the church on Sunday morning. If you are a regular attender with us, we appreciate your dedication and your faithfulness to the church.
- You know this morning I believe that God has something profound and life-changing to say to each and every one of us if we have ears to hear.
- Now if you've been joining us for the last couple of weeks, you'll know that we are today just over the halfway point in our sermon series called "Meet the Gospels." And in this series we're looking at the four gospels—the four versions of the story of the good news of Jesus' life and ministry—the things that He taught and the things that he did—the way that He died and was raised again—and each of the gospels tells that story in a slightly different way—they have

different styles and they use different details in order to accomplish the goal of proclaiming the gospel—the good news about the crucified and resurrected Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

- We began with the gospel of Mark, which most scholars believe to be the earliest gospel, and we saw how Mark's is an urgent, apocalyptic gospel—we saw how Mark gives us a streamlined, no-frills, cut-to-the chase gospel that, without taking too much time to get into the details of things like Jesus' birth or what happens after the resurrection, broadcasts the breaking news that Jesus is the Messiah, that the Kingdom of God has come near, and that not only is Jesus the Messiah, but he was crucified and rose again from the dead—Mark's gospel lets us know quickly and directly that the apocalypse—the revelation of the identity of the Messiah and the advent of his Kingdom—has arrived—Mark's is a testimony to the end of the world as we knew it—and as Mark lets us know, his gospel is the beginning, the *arche*, of the good news—the *euangelion*
- And that good news is communicated even more fully by Matthew's gospel, the second of the synoptics—and we saw how Matthew includes in his gospel almost everything that Mark has said, but asks “what more should we say?” “what details remain to be added?”
- And so we said that while Mark's is an urgent, apocalyptic gospel, Matthew's is a prophetic, Hebraic gospel—because in addition to Mark's urgent news, Matthew shares with us, in a more relaxed and detailed way, how Jesus' genealogy and his birth and his teachings and his life and death and resurrection all fulfill the Hebrew scriptures—Matthew shows us how Jesus is the Messiah the Jewish

people have been expecting—and so it is Hebraic—and not only that, but Matthew demonstrates how Jesus, like the prophets of old, calls his followers to repentance, challenging them to exceed the righteousness of the professional holy men—and Matthew shows us how God uses and has used through the ages, prophets and ordinary everyday folks to bring redemption and salvation to his people and to the world despite the hindrances put up by those in authority. Matthew's is a prophetic, Hebraic gospel.

- And today we will be considering the last of the three synoptics, those 3 gospels that can be viewed together, that see things similarly, and are connected by the 4-source hypothesis that we talked about last week—those 3 are of course Mark, and Matthew, and today's gospel, the gospel of Luke.
- And as we have been thinking about the characteristics that distinguish each gospel, I want to suggest that if we can think of Mark's as an urgent, apocalyptic gospel, and Matthew's as a prophetic, Hebraic gospel, then we can think of the gospel of Luke as a two-fold, global—a two-fold, global gospel.
- And as we walk through the context, the content, and the key passage from Luke's gospel, we'll understand what those two terms mean.
- But first I want to tell you a story from my teenage years, and so I want you to turn your mind back to those golden days of yesteryear, way back to the 20th century, the early 1980s—a simpler time—the Reagan-Thatcher years—when like most teenagers, I had a record collection—I was gradually acquiring a cassette tape collection as well, which would eventually become a CD collection, but early on I had a record collection, and in that record collection were several

albums by the Beatles—a family friend had given me most of his record collection when he had gotten married—I guess he figured he wasn't going to have time to listen to music anymore, but he was a bit older than I was and so there were several Beatles albums and I was glad to have them—but as it turned out, I owned more music by the Beatles than any of my friends at school or at church—most of them didn't have any at all--none of us were old enough to have really experienced Beatlemania when it was at its height—I mean the Beatles had split up in 1970, when I was only 4 years old—Pastor Tasha hadn't even been born yet—and we didn't have the internet back then where we could just find any music we wanted to hear and see what we thought about it—that was still a couple of decades away—but anyway I had these two friends—Mike and Dave, who were my age, and they were curious about the Beatles' music, and so they asked me, they said “if we wanted to buy just one record album by the Beatles that would give us a good overview of what the Beatles' music sounds like, which one would you recommend?”

- And I thought about that for a while—I mean there are a lot of good ones—there's the White Album and Rubber Soul and Revolver and Abbey Road and Sgt Pepper's—but I knew they wanted an overview, with as broad a sampling as they could get, and so finally I told them, I said, “Your best bet is not just one album—it's two”—the two parts of a collection of greatest hits that were called the Red album and the blue album—the red album contained the Beatles' greatest hits from 1962 to 1966 (the year I was born by the way) and the blue album—that's it here—you see how the picture on the cover was taken in the

same place, but John, Paul, George and Ringo look very different—they're dressed different and their hair is long—and that's because the blue album contained their greatest hits from 1967-1970, when they broke up—and culturally, the late 60s was a very different time from the early 60s, and so the music on the red album is very different from the music on the blue album—and I told Mike and Dave that they needed both to really get a good picture of how the Beatles' music had developed

- And a few days later—I guess it was a few weeks later, really, after Mike and Dave had a chance to save their allowances and get a ride to the record store at the mall—I saw Mike and I asked him what he thought and he said, “Oh I just decided to get the red album”—and then I saw Dave and he said he'd just decided to get the blue album—he didn't think he'd care for their early stuff.
- And the truth is I really shouldn't have cared and I should have just let them enjoy the music they wanted to, but I was incensed and astonished—I said to them, “You can't just listen to their early stuff, Mike—you miss out on the whole psychedelic era—and you don't really have the Beatles' greatest hits without Hey Jude and Let it Be and the Long and Winding Road and Get Back, and they're on the other album—what's wrong with you?” And I told Dave he couldn't appreciate the later stuff without knowing about the early music like Love Me Do and I wanna hold your hand—and he was missing Yesterday and Eleanor Rigby, for Pete's sake—how could he do that?—they were going to get incomplete pictures of the Beatle's music—they needed to know the beginning and the end—they needed to know the rest of the story, not just part of it.

- Well it turned out that Mike shared his red album with Dave, and Dave shared his blue album with Mike, and we all spent time together listening to my records, too, so it all worked out in the end.
- But I tell you that story because the single most important thing that you can know about the CONTEXT of the Gospel of Luke is not who wrote it or when or where, but that the Gospel of Luke is the first part of a two-part work called Luke-Acts. It is TWO-FOLD. You can think of the Book of Acts as the sequel if you want, but the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts work in tandem, like two mules on the same team, or if you like baseball metaphors, Luke-Acts is a double-header—if you're a movie buff, it's a double-feature—Luke and Acts are like love and marriage—they go together like a horse and carriage, and let me tell you, brother, you can't have one without the other—despite the fact that the canonical editors have put the gospel of John between Luke and Acts as far back as anyone can remember pretty much—even though that's kind of like putting George Harrison's "All Things Must Pass" between the red and blue albums
- But it's important as we read the two-fold gospel of Luke to know that the rest of the story is coming in the Book of Acts—sometimes questions arise or events in the gospel foreshadow what will happen in the second part of the work—and it is meaningful when we read what happens in the Book of Acts, at Pentecost and in the lives of the Apostles and the growth of the church into all the world—that all that is happening has grown out of the birth and life and death and resurrection and ministry of Jesus, who was guided by and raised by the Holy Spirit and whose body and Kingdom we see alive and being built as the story

unfolds. In Luke's gospel we read about all that Jesus did and said, but we also read about the disciples and others who see and hear and interact with Jesus, and in the gospel but even more fully in the Book of Acts, we see what happens as a result—in the gospel we hear what Jesus tells his followers to do, but in the Book of Acts we find out what happened when they did it.

- Luke tells Theophilus at the beginning of his gospel what he intends to do, saying in verse 1 of chapter 1, "I . . . decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."
- Luke mentions Theophilus again at the beginning of the Book of Acts, saying:
- In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.
- And just who is this Theophilus? Well, William Barclay suggests that he might be a Roman official of some rank because of the way he's addressed, and other folks have other theories, but it has always seemed to me that the meaning of the name "Theophilus"—which means "friend of God" or "lover of God,"—could be taken to mean just that-- if that's you, or if you are one who is called to be a friend of God or to love God, and that's every one of us, then this gospel is written to you—this gospel is written for all of us—and as we will see, that's just what the content of Luke's gospel is all about.

- But before we get to the content, let's talk a little bit about who Luke is—now, of course, if you read some contemporary Bible scholars and archeologists' opinions, they'll tell you that the identity of Luke is uncertain, but William Barclay thinks that Luke is a physician (which makes my heart happy—I feel some connection with him in that sense)—Barclay says Luke is the physician mentioned in Colossians 4, who was also a Gentile—in fact the only New Testament writer who isn't a Jew—he was the Apostle Paul's close companion for several years, including 2 spent in prison with him—
- traditionally, Luke was thought to have been an artist, and is often portrayed painting—by the way, it was the Feast Day of St Luke earlier this week—
- Luke's masterful use of language suggests that he was a person of considerable learning and ability—a historian and an artist who has produced what many critics have called the most beautiful book in the world, written probably in the latter part of the 1st century
- Now, as we move from the context of Luke's gospel to its content, I want to suggest that one way of appreciating Luke's gospel is by contrasting it to Mark's—while Mark has no time for details, Luke takes the time for the details—he is careful and meticulous—and unlike Mark's brief and abrupt gospel, Luke's is wordy (which may be another reason I feel a connection to him, I guess)—in fact, contrary to popular belief, it was not Paul who wrote more of the New Testament than anybody else, it was Luke—Paul wrote more books, but in Luke and Acts, Luke wrote more words, making him responsible for more of the New Testament than any other individual writer.

- One place we see the contrast between Mark and Luke is in the way that they tell us “when” something happens—Mark might say “*euthus*” or immediately or just then or next, and that’s usually about all we get—when Mark wants to tell us that John the Baptist is baptizing in the wilderness, he says John “appeared” in the wilderness—Matthew says pretty much the same and while that’s something, I guess—it tells us precious little about when that happened—contrast that with the way Luke describes the time when John “appears”—He does it in Chapter 3 of his gospel as we heard Pastor Tasha share with us—he writes—you’ll see it there in your listening guide
- In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius—well that’s pretty specific isn’t it? That’s a definite time period in history—but wait there’s more--when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea—oh, ok even more specifics—but hang on-- and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene—so verse 1 has given us a very specific time that this event is taking place—Luke is a careful historian—but hang on, verse 2 is coming--2 during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness.
- Where Mark leaves out the details in order to get straight to the point, Luke gives us more than enough detail so that there is no question about when things happen or who he is talking about—he is careful and accurate—but he is careful and accurate for the same reason that Mark is terse and abrupt—because this news is important—it is big news—and it is good news—it is the gospel—and so Luke wants to include as much as he can—and this inclusivity doesn’t just

doesn't just apply to Luke's historical details, it is also a key characteristic of the gospel that he wants to emphasize—because Luke's is a global gospel.

- You'll remember that we said that Matthew's was a Hebraic gospel because he includes so many connections between Jesus and Hebrew scriptures—his is a gospel that makes the case that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah in particular—and one of the many ways he does this is by tracing Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham, the Father of Israel—
- Now Luke has a point to make about Jesus' Messiah-ship, and it is a point that doesn't contradict Matthew's but fulfills it—fills it more fully—in Luke's gospel, Jesus is not only the Jewish Messiah but also the global Messiah, the Saviour of the whole world, and so when Luke gives us Jesus' genealogy in chapter 3, Luke goes beyond Abraham—Luke goes beyond Abraham all the way back to Adam, the Father of the whole human race—and of course you might say, well that's nothing unusual, every single person is a descendant of Adam—and that's just Luke's point, that through Jesus the whole world may know redemption— Luke's is a gospel with a universality that reaches beyond its Hebrew roots out into every nation and into every heart of every son and daughter of Adam who calls on the name of the Lord—the lowly, the Gentile, the poor, the outcast, the widow and the sinner—William Barclay—I mention him because his commentary on Luke's gospel is just wonderful-- Barclay says that Luke “of all the gospel writers sees no limits to the love of God,” and that “Luke refuses to shut the door on any man”-- and so Luke tells us Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, and his birth narrative includes not kings as in Matthew, but lowly

shepherds abiding in their fields, Luke includes not a sermon on the Mount that portrays Jesus as a Moses-like figure, but a sermon on a level place, to which he and the disciples descend—and in that sermon on the plain he says not “Blessed are the poor in spirit” as Matthew does, but simply blessed are the poor, blessed are the hungry, the hated, the excluded for his sake—and woe to the rich, the full, those with good reputations who are like the false prophets of old—and Luke uses language that a Gentile like Theophilus would understand—he rarely quotes the Old Testament, and he uses not the Hebrew term Rabbi for Jesus but the Greek term “Master,” in fact he often replaces Hebrew with its Greek equivalent—because Luke’s is a global gospel

- But I don’t reckon any other aspect of Luke’s gospel demonstrates its inclusivity as much as the role of women in it—in fact William Barclay goes so far as to call Luke not only “the gospel of praise, and the gospel of prayer and the gospel for the Gentiles, but also “the gospel of women,” and he has this to say about Luke—he writes:
 - In the Jewish morning prayer a man thanks God that he has not made him "a gentile, a slave or a woman." But Luke gives a very special place to women. . . . It is in Luke that we read of Elizabeth, of Anna, of the widow at Nain, of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. It is Luke who makes vivid the pictures of Martha and Mary and of Mary Magdalene.
- But of course the most striking example of the role of women in Luke’s gospel compared to the other synoptics must be his portrayal of Mary, the mother of

Jesus. In Mark's gospel, Mary is hardly mentioned at all—Jesus is referred to as the Son of Mary and his relationship with his family is less than harmonious, let's just put it that way—then in Matthew, the story of Jesus' birth has more to do with Joseph than with Mary—in fact in all of Matthew's gospel, Mary never speaks at all. But in Luke's gospel, the birth narrative is told from Mary's point of view. The angel Gabriel appears to Mary—Luke tells us about the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist, and it is Luke who gives us the stirring words of the Magnificat, Mary's song in the first chapter of Luke starting with verse 46: And Mary said,

- 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
- William Barclay says that in the Magnificat, Luke proclaims 3 revolutions that Mary announces—three revolutions that Jesus' arrival will bring about: a moral revolution from the God who scatters the proud—a social revolution from the God who casts down the mighty and exalts the humble, and an economic revolution from the God who fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty—Mary is a revolutionary, a prophet who lets us know what's coming—and we see these revolutions develop in Luke's gospel and throughout the Book of Acts
- Not only does Luke give Mary a voice in his gospel, he lets us know how prophetic and world-changing her words were by telling us the rest of the story—and Luke doesn't just tell us of Mary's poetic and magnificent words, he

also tells us of the way she asked the angel Gabriel what God was up to—“How can this be?” she says—and she tells a young Jesus himself, when he stays behind in the temple in Jerusalem that he’s scared them half to death—“why have you treated us like this?” she asks him—Luke portrays Mary with depth and humanity and power in a culture that viewed women as less-than, as secondary

- I mentioned that Luke traditionally has been thought to have been an artist, and so there are paintings of the Virgin Mary that are said to have been painted by Luke, and there are also paintings of Luke painting portraits of Mary, like this one by Guercino from the 1600s—but whether or not Luke painted Mary’s portrait, he has certainly left us with a beautiful and masterfully artistic portrayal in his gospel of the woman God chose to bear and raise the saviour of the world—the whole world, as our key passage points out—actually we have two key passages today and I want to refer to them just briefly
- Our key passage from Luke’s gospel is a scene that all three of the synoptic writers portray—John the Baptist’s proclamation just before the arrival and baptism of Jesus
- Mark begins his gospel with it—it’s the first thing that happens in chapter 1, where Mark writes, beginning with verse 1: The beginning of the good news[a] of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’”

- In Matthew also, in chapter 3 of his gospel—it takes him longer to get there—but there we find John the Baptist proclaiming those words from the prophet Isaiah—
“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”
- But in Luke’s description, we get the whole picture—Luke gives us all the details, all the words, as you heard Pastor Tasha share with us—Luke writes
- 4 as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 5 Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; 6 and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”
- Now Luke doesn’t quote the Hebrew scriptures often, so when he does you know it’s important—and it is no surprise that here in Luke’s gospel when John the Baptist makes his announcement, Luke is the only gospel writer who puts in his mouth the full prophecy of Isaiah, not only “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”—but also those details about filling the valleys and making the mountains low and the crooked straight,—and most importantly Luke gives us the reason for all this preparation in that last line--“and all flesh shall see the salvation of God—all flesh—not just Hebrew flesh but all flesh--all flesh shall see the salvation of God
- Now fast forward to the second part of Luke-Acts—the rest of the story--when Luke begins the Book of Acts we find another of Luke’s rare Old Testament references in chapter 2--when Peter preaches on the Day of Pentecost, he tells

the gathered crowd that what is being witnessed is what was prophesied by the prophet Joel, 'In the last days it will be, God declares,

- that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh—all flesh---it will be that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved—and this is what Luke is leading us toward in every word of his gospel—what is unfolded, what is revealed, what develops in Luke's two-fold gospel is a global gospel— FIRST in Jerusalem and THEN into all the world—
- And the simple message that I want to bring to you this morning is this—no matter where you are in this world—no matter how you are--no matter what you have been or where you have been or how you have been—no one is beyond the reach of the power of the global gospel—God's grace is sufficient for all flesh—and we are all flesh, every one of us, you and me and everybody else—and God's gonna pour out His Spirit on all flesh--Luke tells us of a global gospel this morning
- and hear this now--Luke's is also a two-part gospel--just as there are two-parts to Luke-Acts, just as Luke gives us the rest of the story, our lives are also two-fold—from where we stand in the present we can look back to the past and forward to the future to find the rest of our story—and I want to assure you this morning that there is no saint without a past in which they were a sinner—but there is also no sinner without a future in which they might become a saint—because whosoever will may come, and all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved—whatever your situation, whatever your station, you are in a location where you can find salvation, because the truth of the gospel, the power of the

cross, the promise of the resurrection reaches right where we are, where you are, where I am—reaches out to us just as we are, just as you are, just as I am