

In the Gospel by Luke

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores the profound themes of loss, redemption, and the formation of a new humanity in the Gospel of Luke.

Scripture: Luke 15:1, Luke 19:10

Topics: "Redemption", "Gratitude"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of gratitude and the need for divine assistance in our lives, acknowledging God's mercy and faithfulness. He explores the Gospel of Luke, highlighting its focus on the mission and message of Jesus Christ, particularly how it addresses the lost state of humanity and the restoration offered through Christ. Sparks discusses Luke's background as a physician and his meticulous research, which underscores the significance of the message being conveyed through the messenger. He illustrates the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son to demonstrate God's relentless pursuit of humanity and the restoration of our relationship with Him. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper understanding of our identity as part of a new humanity redeemed by Christ.

Transcript

We do have very much for which to praise Thee, Lord, and our sense of continued need does not take from our thanksgiving. We do have to testify that Thou has been very merciful and very faithful with us. Having received the help which comes from God, we continue unto this day and while we have further requests to make, we do make them with thanksgiving. We bring, therefore, our petition this morning that we may have a fresh help from the Lord. We have our meetings, our ministries, we have our songs to sing, we have the blessing of fellowship but all this, Lord, will only pass with the time unless Thou dost an eternal work. We, therefore, ask that You will do an eternal work today. Do that which will remain in us all our life here and which will be shown in fruit in the life to come. Have mercy upon our foolishness, have mercy upon our weakness and help us to speak and to hear unto eternal profit. We do ask this for the glory of Thy dear Son, the Lord Jesus, Amen.

Luke, chapter 3, verses 23, 28:

"And Jesus himself, when he began, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of Heli... the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God".

By way of linking up with what we have already been talking about, let me remind you that we have said that the whole of the New Testament is occupied with three things - the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God - and we have said that every one of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament contains some aspect of that mission, that meaning and that message of Jesus Christ. That is, the whole New Testament presents Jesus Christ in three ways. Then we proceeded to see some of these aspects in the New Testament books. In Matthew's Gospel we saw the foundation of all Christianity, which is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. In Mark we saw the activity of the Lord Jesus as under the government of His Father. Working backward, we saw that all work FOR God must come out of subjection TO God. Of course, there is a great deal more to be said about both of those Gospels.

Now we go on to the third of these Gospels, the Gospel by Luke.

WHO WAS LUKE?

We must ask: Who was Luke? because we can only arrive at the message as we know the man. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that God's method is always to pass on His message through the spiritual history of the messenger; not to get a man to go to the library and study books, but to make the messenger the book. People have to be able to read the messenger and see the message of Christ in him. I think I dare not apply that any more closely!

This is particularly true in the case of Luke. We know that he was a companion of the Apostle Paul. He joined Paul at a certain time and in a certain place, and was his fellow-traveller for a great deal of the time of his ministry, and then, at the last, in the prison in Rome, Paul wrote: "Only Luke is with me" (2 Timothy 4:11). We know from the Letter to the Colossians that Luke was a physician, for Paul speaks of him as "Luke, the beloved physician" (4:14). I think there is a great deal bound up with that, for it is a little sidelight on a lot more. You know that the Apostle Paul is the only apostle who speaks about the Church as 'the Body of Christ', and in many ways he likens the Church to the physical body. He speaks of the members of the Body as hands and feet and ears and eyes, with all the members dependent upon one another, needing one another, and all making one Body. Paul uses a Greek word which our doctor friends will appreciate: "syndesmos". Syndesmology is the science of ligamentary tissues, and it is by the ligaments that all the members are joined together and function.

Now, where did Paul get all that? I can see Paul and Luke travelling along together on their long journeys and talking about the Church. Presently brother Luke says: 'Paul, isn't the Church very much like the human body, with all the members and all the ligaments and all the functions making one body?' And Paul says: 'Thank you, brother Luke. I am sure the Holy Spirit has taught me something. Some day, when I get time, I will put that in writing.' And Paul did get a lot of time in his room in prison, and he wrote his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, which are all about the Body.

That is all very interesting, but I think there is a message in it. We have several doctors here with us, and you doctors ought to have very special light on the Body of Christ and you ought to use your knowledge for spiritual purposes. But not only doctors. Surely this says that we ought to use all our special knowledge for spiritual purposes.

Well, let us get back to Luke. We know that he wrote two volumes. Volume 1 is his Gospel, and Volume 2 is the Book of the Acts. Again, who was Luke? Well, we have said that he was a physician, but he was a Greek, the only Greek of the four Gospels. Then he tells us that he spent a time in research. Now, in order

to be a doctor, of course, he had to do a lot of research; but then he turned from his medical research to research about the history of Jesus. In the first chapter of his Gospel he tells us that he made it his business to find out very carefully all that could be known about Jesus.

Now Luke, not being a Jew, did not know the Old Testament to begin with, so the first thing he had to do was to get the Old Testament and he worked his way carefully through it right from the beginning. He has put it down here in chapter 3! He takes Jesus and then he works his way right back through history, all through the Old Testament, until he reaches Adam. That was a good piece of original research! Luke says that he wanted to give his friend Theophilus the most definite, positive data concerning Jesus. Not only did he study the Old Testament closely, but he took a journey to Nazareth to do a very delicate thing - I think a thing that only a doctor could do. He went to ask the mother of Jesus about His birth, and he puts it down here. Mary told Luke the secrets of how Jesus was born.

Well, evidently Luke took more than one journey to make some enquiries. It looks as though he went to Bethlehem to see the registrar of births and deaths and to find in the records the ancestors of Jesus. Need I go into more detail? You have it all here in the first chapters of his Gospel.

So Luke was a very careful, particular student, but note this: he intended to write all this down for his friend Theophilus. That was all that he had in mind, but the Holy Spirit had a great deal more in mind. Luke did not know that he was writing the Bible. It never occurred to him that twenty centuries afterward a group of people would be in a mountain village called Aeschi studying what he wrote to his friend Theophilus, and through all the centuries between his writing it and today people have been studying his writings. The Holy Spirit had greater thoughts even than Luke's.

We never know what the Holy Spirit is going to do with what we write. Although we do not write the Bible, we may write a letter, or a little booklet, and years afterwards we discover that someone has had a blessing all through the years from that letter or from that little book. Pray whenever you write! Ask that the Holy Spirit may make you do better than you know.

Of course, all these are just fragments of the message, and not the real message. We are going to get to that very soon.

THE CONTEXT OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

Luke takes up Jesus with Adam, then he takes him up as a little babe, and then he lands Him in glory. Do you notice the last thing that he says in his Gospel? "And he [Jesus] led them out until they were over against Bethany: and he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51).

Now we have come right on the line of the message: the son of Adam, the Babe of Bethlehem, the glorified Man in heaven. Luke takes up the Child of Adam and makes Him the glorified Man in heaven. Do you see the immense context of Luke's Gospel? The context is the whole human race from beginning to end. Adam was the first of the human race. Created by God with a great divine intention. It says concerning him: "Thou madest him to have dominion" (Psalm 8:6). God's thought in Adam for the human race was that it should have dominion. That is the revealed intention of God for the human race, but we know of the human tragedy: the human race in the first Adam lost the Divine intention. Put a circle round that word 'lost' and we have the heart of Luke's message.

The human race lost its Divine inheritance because it lost its right relationship with God. The whole of this Gospel by Luke is summed up in one verse: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (19:10). Note the terms: "The Son of MAN came to seek and to save." That is the mission and the meaning, and the message! In Adam universal dominion was lost to the human race. In Abraham an elect people lost their heritage; the seed of Abraham, AFTER THE FLESH, lost their heritage. The New Testament is largely about that. That elect race was called by God to fulfil a special vocation - a heavenly vocation amongst the nations of this world. God said to Israel: "The Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail" (Deuteronomy 28:13). They were called by God to be the governmental instrument among the nations, but that elect race lost their heavenly vocation.

"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost": lost to Adam, lost to Abraham, lost to Israel, but found in the Son of Man.

The whole of the Gospel of Luke is concentrated into one chapter, the best known chapter in the whole of the New Testament - chapter fifteen. Everyone knows what is in Luke 15! It is the chapter of lost and found things. Its setting is very significant, for it begins with these words: "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him (Jesus) for to hear him", and official Israel, in the persons of the Pharisees and the scribes, murmured: "This man receiveth SINNERS." That was a funeral march to the Pharisees and the scribes, but it was music to the sinners' ears! Then Jesus began to speak to the Pharisees and the scribes, and he gave them these three stories: The Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Lost Son.

THE LOST SHEEP

Israel had always been called 'God's flock', and God had always been called the 'Shepherd of Israel'. Jesus takes up that thought and says, in effect: 'Israel is no longer God's flock.' Really, He is implying that Israel, like the ninety and nine, is lost in its own self-righteousness and traditional security and exclusiveness. So He enlarges the concept and says: 'I have other sheep which are not of this fold, and those other sheep are these publicans and sinners.' In the rest of the New Testament the Lord's servants are called shepherds. Peter said to the elders of the Church: "Feed the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2), and "When the chief Shepherd shall be manifested" (1 Peter 5:4). We know that Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11) and when Israel is lost another Shepherd comes and has another flock. He makes up another flock out of Israel and out of the gentiles. Here is Luke! The new flock and the new Shepherd. From that which was lost He has found a greater flock than the one which was lost. How did this sheep get lost? The prophet Isaiah cries: "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6), and how did we go astray? How did we become lost sheep? "We have turned every one to his own way." That will take us back to the beginning of the human race when Adam chose his own way and the human race was lost.

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER

There are many interpretations of this parable, but the most commonly accepted, and I think the right one, is this.

When a young woman was betrothed and married in Palestine her husband gave her a string of silver pieces. I expect you have seen pictures of such a young woman. You wear your necklaces round your neck, but they wore them round their foreheads. You wear a ring on your finger when you are married. Your husband gave you that when you were married and said, or meant: 'I give you this ring as a token that you are mine. I have taken you to be my own. This ring, or this string of silver pieces round your head, is the token that you have accepted me as your master and lord, and husband.'

Now there was a superstition connected with that string of silver pieces. If a woman lost it, or even one silver piece, everyone said: 'That means she has been unfaithful to her husband! She is not faithful to her marriage vows.'

Do you see the meaning of the story? Israel was the lost bride - the prophet Jeremiah said that the Lord espoused Israel to Himself, but they forfeited their honour as the Lord's bride. Israel lost the wonderful relationship of a bride to her husband, and the cry of all the prophets was that Israel was an unfaithful wife. You see what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees and the scribes? 'You have been unfaithful to your marriage vows to Jehovah! You have lost the most sacred relationship that anyone can have.' No wonder this woman is seen lighting the lamp and searching every corner of the house until she finds her lost piece of silver! Jesus enlarges the idea of the lost bride. Yes, there may be some in Israel who will be found in the Bride of the Lamb at the end, but that Bride is a bigger thing than Israel. He is making His Bride out of publicans and sinners.

I may not take the time to carry you over to the later New Testament to show you the NEW Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God "as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2), nor to speak about the marriage supper of the Lamb, but by these very references you can see that something was lost, but that which has been found is very much greater than that which was lost. The human race lost its honour because it lost its Lord, but the Revelation in the New Testament is of a Bride "without spot or blemish or any such thing" presented to the Bridegroom.

THE LOST SON

Israel was formerly called 'God's son': "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, my firstborn: and I have said unto thee, Let my son go..." (Exodus 4:22-23). Israel occupied the most wonderful position that it is ever possible to occupy. There is nothing more wonderful than to be sons of God, to be those whom God Himself has begotten, to be those who have been born out of heaven, to be those who bear the Name of God, to be those whom God brings alongside of Himself and honours them to represent Him. All that, and much more, is meant by sonship.

Now the Lord Jesus, when He saw what Israel had lost, came to seek and to save that idea of God, to recover sonship. Sonship is a special Divine conception and is the dearest thing to the heart of God. Therefore it is the most wonderful thing that can ever be true of man, and it is that principle which is at the heart of this parable which we call 'The Prodigal Son'. All the wonderful privilege and honour of sonship has been despised by this prodigal. All that Divine conception has been regarded as of no account, and he goes out into the world and repudiates his sonship. Of course, he comes in the end to recognize what he has done. Jesus is very true to principle, and He makes this prodigal son say: "I have sinned AGAINST HEAVEN, and in THY SIGHT: I am no more worthy to be called thy son" (verse 21). There are principles in every one of those sentences. Israel forfeited that high position and honour. It is the PRINCIPLE of sonship that is the supreme factor governing!

Why did this son leave the father and the home? The prince of this world deceived him and told him that he could have something better in the world. Oh, that is what the great deceiver is always doing! He deceived Adam that way. He has deceived the whole human race in that way. He deceived Israel in that way: 'You can have something better in this world.' Jesus said that he was a 'liar from the beginning', and men are finding out today what a lie this world is.

THE MESSAGE OF A NEW HUMANITY

Now, having said all that, I have only now come to the message. What is the message of Luke? The Son of Man has come to secure a redeemed, new humanity. Paul calls Jesus 'the second man, the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45,47). Out of Jews and gentiles Jesus is redeeming a new humanity. Listen carefully! The message of this Gospel, and of the New Testament, is this: God is not now particularly interested in Jews, nor in gentiles, nor in Protestants, nor in Roman Catholics, nor in Baptists, nor in Methodists, nor in Dutch Reformed, etc. God is not interested in those things at all! He is interested in men. All God's interest is in man, let the man be British, or Swiss, or German, or French, or any other nationality, white, black, yellow or brown. That does not matter to God, for His only concern is with MAN. Are you a man - and God called both woman and man 'one man' - and are you of the human race? God is interested in you as mankind, to take out of the nations, and out of the denominations, a people for His Name. Are you a "minister"? God is not particularly interested in you as a "minister", but He is interested in you as a man, and that is true of every other category. You do not think, do you, that because a man is a "minister", a servant of God, God lets him off when things are wrong? God does not say: 'Well, he is my servant so I will overlook all his faults.' Nor does He say: 'Oh, he, or she, is My child, so I will not take any notice of what is wrong.' No, God's concern with us is as people. The Son of MAN came to seek and to save a lost humanity, and to make Himself the Shepherd in that humanity, to make His Bride out of that humanity, and to make His sons out of that redeemed humanity.

Where do we end? Where Luke ends, with the Son of Man, as the representative of the new mankind, glorified in heaven.

I hope I have not made you tired. It is all too wonderful and too big! I could only give you a little hole through which you see a new world, but do remember that in all God's dealings with us He is seeking to make another kind of humanity.

We are cast upon Thy goodness, Lord. We did ask that eternal values might be secured in this hour. May the eternal Spirit take hold of something that has been said and turn it into eternal value for the glory of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

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