

The priority of Christ in Luke's gospel

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 1, and I'm just going to read a section out of chapter 4, and then I'm going to come back and read chapter 1 in a moment. In Luke 24, Jesus is on what's known as the road to Emmaus, and there are two people there who are disheartened because Jesus has died on the cross, and they haven't heard that he is alive again, and Jesus comes along and starts speaking with them, and this is some of the conversation they had. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found that it was just the women who said, but they did not see, and he said to them, O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe, all the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them all the scriptures, all in the scriptures, things concerning himself. And of course, he leaves, and the men say, did not our hearts burn within us? Jesus says something there really, really important, and that is if you read the Old Testament and you don't see

Jesus, you're going to have to reread it because you've not read it properly. Jesus is in all the scriptures, not just the New Testament, but in all the Old Testament as well. And one of the ways that Luke writes his gospel is he's a historian. He's incredibly detailed. He wrote both Luke and Acts, which is very much a detailed account of everything that happened. And so his account is very different.

from Matthew or Mark or John. John's not even a synoptic, but it's different than that anyway. But he is a very detailed writer. And so these first four verses really just explain why Luke wrote his gospel.

If, when we get to John, not next week, because I'm in Sunday school, or the week after, but after that, when you get to John, you read the whole gospel before you, before he even tells you why he's written.

Would have been nice to say that at the beginning. But John has his reasons. Here in Luke, he tells you right at the beginning why he's written the gospel according to Luke. So I'm going to read the first four verses. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us. It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught. There you go. Now you know why the gospel according to Luke has been written. Well, we're going to come back to that in its message form in a moment after this next hymn. All from the point of view of the priority of Christ. That is what Christ makes priority and how we are to make Christ our priority. He makes us his priority and vice versa.

[3 : 5 0] So the gospel of Luke, as you've seen right from the very beginning, is a detailed account of all that has taken place recorded for this person, Theophilus, but of course to be shared. Hence, you know, we have it now in the canon of scripture. And it's detailed in a way where you learn things that you're going to learn in other gospels, but perhaps you're going to learn them from a different angle. In other words, you're looking at the same island out at sea, but you're looking at it from different geographical points. One's looking at it from one side, the other's looking at it from the other side.

It's the same island, but you're looking at it in a different way. The reason why that's important is because not everybody gets everything there is to see on one angle. And so you have to move around, let's say, the whole of Christ to be able to truly appreciate him. In simple terms, the Bible is a big book and it is quite difficult to learn. It's fairly easy to read, but when it actually comes to learning these things and applying these things, it takes a long time. You know, I can remember the minister saying to me, you're not even going to begin to begin to be ready until you spend eight years doing this. Two years in thinking, oh, I must be getting all right. You know, I was a long way away, eight years in, and then you might just be allowed to be called a minister of the word. So that kind of strictness, at the time when you're going through your studies, you don't appreciate it because you think, you know, how hard can it be? But having gone through all of that, you begin to realize why the standards are high because the book demands those kind of things. Now for Christians, why is it such a great privilege for you to enjoy the same things? Well, God has given you the same spirit of God that he's given to me. And therefore, while it's true that God sets apart pastors, teachers for the church, there is a distinction there. It doesn't leave you at a disadvantage when it comes to knowing the word of God. If you put in the same kind of devotion and study to God's word as the top theologian in the world, okay, you're going to get there. You're going to get there. Why? Because God never disadvantages his people at any point in any way, shape, or form. Now God has different purposes for his people.

Hence, Luke, God obviously gave Luke the ability to be able to do this. I don't feel that I could ever do something like this. But one of the reasons that I feel that way is because God hasn't given me the ability to do so. So it's not Luke who did it, but Luke who did it with the ability of God. And I think these are the things that we need to remember when we read these gospel accounts, that what these people do with God's ability is to reflect on God, not them. In the same way, pastor teachers who are able to teach the word of God are not to think, well, he can do it and I can't. He's only able to do it because God has given him the ability to do so. But no one gets disadvantaged here. Detailed accounts like Luke's gospel is to be understood by every person who reads the gospel according to Luke. But like a lot of people, Luke suffers from the 45% readership, which means that 100% of the people get 45% of the way through. Okay? 100% of the people or 90% of the people get 45% of the way through. I bet, without scratching too many heads here, you can think of more books that you haven't completed reading than the ones that you have. Okay? Generally speaking. Because that is just the way we think, yeah, I'll get through it, I'll get, and we never seem to finish. And that is something that we have to overcome, especially when considering the things of God. So Luke here in verse 4, Luke's intention is so that you may be certain of the things that you have been instructed. Luke wants to stabilize young Christian believers and he wants to remind those who have been instructed in the gospel, but not yet converted, let's say, to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I have written this account so that you may be certain. So that you may be certain of the instruction that you have received. And of course, I'm assuming, rightly so, that Luke would want his whole gospel read by the person who reads it. Right? If he wants you to be certain in all these areas, then it follows, doesn't it, that you have to read all of these areas to be certain in all of them. In order to have the kind of stability in all of these areas, it naturally follows that you have to study and read all of these areas to have that stability from. So it's a simple principle that if you want the kind of stability that the gospel can provide, it naturally follows that you have to read the entire gospels. Okay? It's just how the blessing works there. Now, Luke simplifies his gospel message in a fairly simple way by saying that Christ demands total loyalty. That what we find in the gospel of Luke is that loyalty to Christ triumphs over any other loyalty that you might have to any other person or any other thing, occupation. And what that means is this, that loyalty to Christ will naturally change your relationship with your husband, whether he is a believer or not. It'll naturally change your relationship to your children, whether they are believers or not.

It'll naturally change your relationship to your occupation, to your home, to any material goods that you might have, to any holidays that you have planned. Everything gets changed the moment you recognize that Christ is your primary loyalty. Now, one of the things that are enjoyed when a person doesn't know this is absolute peace. There is a peace that comes from this kind of ignorance.

That when a person doesn't know that Christ demands absolute loyalty, there's peace in the home. Total peace in the home. But I've seen on many, many occasions where one person's been converted, like the mum or the dad or perhaps one of the children, and then all of a sudden, there's no peace.

[10 : 28] That loyalty to Christ, that loyalty, when Jesus comes into the family, causes massive disruption. And Luke points out that Jesus didn't actually come to bring peace, but a sword separating those kind of family relationships. And Luke is using this very strong language, not to say Christ is a disruptor, but rather loyalty to Christ disrupts all other types of loyalties, even in the closest knit of all relationships. His point is simple then. To follow Jesus in a world where others don't understand God is incredibly difficult. To follow Jesus Christ in a world where others don't understand God is incredibly difficult. But Luke's gospel makes the point is, it is the right thing to do.

Yes, it's incredibly difficult, but it is the right thing to do. And so the comfort that you have is in the truth of the matter, but the comfort comes from the truth. It doesn't come from necessarily peace at home or peace at work or peace anywhere else that has been disrupted by your new loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Okay? So following Christ in a loyal way, the way that we are meant to, is incredibly disruptive, even more difficult in a world that doesn't understand Jesus, but it is the right thing to do.

So as we make our way then through the gospel of Luke, one of the things you'll begin to notice is who Jesus makes friends with. Jesus loves sinners and he loves tax collectors. He is a friend of sinners in tax collectors. He is also the one who has come to seek and to save the lost, which is actually the very first message that I ever preached in this church as a pastor from the gospel according to Luke.

Luke. And I was trying to make the point to the church, and hopefully it was remembered. You can recite it back to me now if you like. Obviously not. But we'll get there in the end. Is this, that my hope for the lost being saved is in the true seeker. And so should yours be.

[12 : 54] Luke points out very, very clearly that the true seekers in this world, or the true seeker in this world is not your friend, is not the person you've been evangelizing to. No one seeks God as Romans, as Paul says in Romans, no, not one. No one seeks God. They may seek things from God, and they might even pray to him. They're not seeking God, they're just seeking what they can get from him. And of course, there's plenty of human relationships where that there is amplified.

You don't want me, you just want what I can give you. Okay? The world is full of those type of relationships. And of course, people treat God in the same way. They don't want him, they don't seek him. They don't mind getting stuff from him, but they don't want him. So Paul says no one seeks God. It's not that they don't acknowledge that there could be a God, but no one's seeking him. Hence Luke says, well, joy, joy, because Christ Jesus is the one who has come to seek and to save the lost. Your hope for sinners being saved is not in the fact that they one day will hopefully seek Jesus. It's in the fact that Jesus is constantly seeking them. And that's what Luke is putting across here, that Jesus Christ is a friend of tax collectors and sinners, the one who will seek and save the lost. Our hope should never be in people, that this person is never going to come to faith unless I do something or that person do something. You know, they're not seeking Jesus. How are they ever going to come? Well, look at what the Bible says. They don't have to. They don't have to because Jesus is seeking them.

Our hope is not in them, but it's in God who seeks and saves the lost. That's what Luke wants to get across to each and every one of us. So if some of you are at home having a hard time with those who are not saved, you think it'd be a lot easier if they were, don't give up if they're not seeking Jesus.

Don't even consider it a disappointment. Consider it something which the Bible considers to be quite obvious. But consider also the true thing that Jesus Christ is seeking them. And many, many people come to Christ thinking that they're seeking Jesus when all along God was seeking them, enabling them to seek him. And how many of us on conversion go, when I look back, all these things just started coming together. I thought I was seeking Jesus, but God was enabling me to seek him, meaning that Jesus is seeking me first. That's what Luke wants to get across. Okay? Jesus is the friend of sinners who seeks and saves them. That's the priority that Luke wants to get across in his gospel, or at least one of them.

So in Luke chapter 7, when it says Jesus is a friend of sinners, it's actually said by those who are criticizing Jesus, because they also call him a drunkard and a glutton, because he's gone off with these type of people. And the natural assumption is, is what's known as, you've probably never heard of this, you might have done, but second person separation. Second person separation, which simply means that if that type of person eats with those type of people, then he must be like them and not like us.

[16:15] Okay? If Jesus goes and eats with tax collectors and sinners, then he has to be a glutton and a drunkard. Right? And that's what he gets accused of. They don't look at Jesus in any kind of way as in who is Jesus. They just associate Jesus with the type of people he eats and drinks with. So instead of Jesus being seen as God the Son, instead of Jesus being seen as the Son of God who will bring life, who will seek and to save the lost, who will give his life a ransom for many, all they see is a glutton and a drunkard. Second person separation. That because he eats with people like this, then he must be like that. Because he eats with those type of people, then he must be that type of person. And so what Luke wants to carefully point out is that Jesus is the one who's come to preach good news to those type of people. Those type of people who are sidelined in the world, as in you don't quite make our standard, then Jesus has come for you. In Mark, which we looked at last week, Jesus effectively says,

I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Not that there are any people in the world that are righteous, but there are plenty of people in the world who think they are. And you can't get through to a person who thinks one thing when the opposite is true. We all know, and we've taught this in the leadership lessons. We've taught this in Bible study. I've even taught it here. That there is a learning pyramid. And on the very bottom rung of that learning pyramid is, I don't know that I don't know. I don't know that I don't know. It's only when you get to the second stage of, I know I don't know, do you begin to learn. Okay? Then the next one is, I know I know. Okay? And the fourth one is, now I know I can teach. Because not everybody who knows they know can teach, but there are some who know that they know and can teach. But at the very bottom is, I don't know that I don't know.

You cannot teach a person who doesn't know that they don't know. You just can't get through to them. It's impossible. You try as hard as you can, and they'll, right, just can't do it. Only at the point when I know I don't know, do I begin to change? Do I begin to learn? So Jesus is coming into a world full of people who believe they are righteous, but don't know that they don't know that they're not.

How do you get through to people like that? Well, only God can eventually break that kind of stubbornness in mind and heart. Jesus is the one who has come to set the captives free. He's the one to come to preach good news to the poor, to give sight to the blind, to give liberty to those who are oppressed.

All of those people who don't make it on the world standards, Jesus came for. Jesus came for those people. He starts bottom up according to the standards of the world. Luke also draws our attention to the fact that as Jesus does this, he does like being invited for tea. And all the way through Luke's gospel, he's either going out to tea and that he's being invited, or he invites himself.

[19 : 45] And of course, Jesus is allowed to do that. Jesus is allowed to invite himself for tea. On one occasion, he's invited to the house of Mary and Martha. And you will know that hospitality is a fairly big thing. And during the course of that interaction, lessons are always learned when you invite Jesus for tea. Okay, so if you don't want to learn the lesson, don't invite him to tea.

But if you're going to invite him to tea, then you need to be prepared at what comes with him. So Mary and Martha are busying themselves around the house, or at least at the beginning. And then Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, listening to him. Martha comes into the room, probably a house with only two or three rooms, maybe four possibly, comes into the room and says, Lord, can you have a word with my sister? She's not serving. She's not doing anything. And you think, well, that's a good point.

Here's Mary sat doing nothing. Jesus wants to honor service. He wants to honor work. He despises laziness. Of course, Lord, make her do it. Okay? And how many of us have prayed prayers like that? A Martha prayer?

Lord, I'm busting my gut here. Can you get him to pull his finger out? Right? No, so there's many of us who have prayed Martha prayers. And this is what Jesus says in return to Martha. No, Mary's chosen what's better.

In the presence of Jesus, when Jesus is speaking, it is better to sit at him because all other loyalties are second. Okay? Jesus comes before housework. Okay? Jesus comes before cutting the grass. I said comes before cutting the grass. Just want to make that one really important. Okay? But you can't use Jesus in that way. But it is true that if in the presence of Jesus, in the presence of listening to his word and coming in devotion and prayer, it takes precedent over every other thing. Martha didn't get it. Martha didn't get it. Martha thought that, you know, I can carry on with the dishes. Jesus is in the next room. He won't mind if I just wash up quickly. Okay? No, Mary's chosen what is better, to seat and listen at the feet of Jesus. Everything else can wait. On another occasion, Jesus gets invited to a house. Only this time it's Simon the Pharisee's house who invited Jesus to test him. He wanted to see if Jesus could really do what everybody said that he was able to do. However, during the course of the evening, the test turned into a lesson for Simon, which is what you'd expect to happen with Jesus, by a sinful woman entering the house. And in those days, it was not looked upon in a good way for a woman to let down her hair. But she was crying at the feet of Jesus, and her tears washed the feet of Jesus. They fell to his feet. And she let down her hair to dry those feet of Jesus.

[22 : 47] And the comments in the room are the same kind of comments that Jesus has around when eating with tax collectors and sinners. If only Jesus knew what kind of woman this was, there's absolutely no way he would allow her to touch his feet. There's just no way Jesus would allow that type of woman to come into physical contact with him at a feet level or any level. There's just no way. Jesus picking up on this, and I'm not going to go into the whole story, points out something simple, but which Simon doesn't see. He tells a parable that those who have been forgiven much, love much. The reason why the woman responds the way that she does to Jesus is because of the amount that she has been forgiven.

But those who have been forgiven little, love God little. But they all need forgiveness. And so one of the lessons that you begin to realize, which is a fairly simple one, but often overlooked, is that those people who think that God will never forgive them, those people who think God will have nothing to do with me, I'm just too bad, and I've just done too much, those people are mistaken.

They're wrong. God has everything to do with you. You are the very people that God has come for. But those people who think that the little bad that they have done is just not bad enough to warrant Jesus dying on the cross. They are sorely mistaken. And that's the point that Jesus is making in Simon the Pharisee's house. Those who have been forgiven much, love God much. It's not necessarily that they have more to be forgiven of. It could simply be the fact that they've recognized just how much they have been forgiven of in Christ Jesus. So Jesus is a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He doesn't mind a prostitute wiping his feet with her hair after crying and washing it with her tears. He doesn't mind that at all because he has come to love and seek and to save such people.

But Simon the Pharisee indicates to us that there are people in the world who know that they may have done a few bad things. But it doesn't warrant Jesus dying on the cross. In other words, yeah, I've done a few bad things, but it doesn't warrant Jesus having to die for me. They just can't get it into their head that all sin is against God. And all sin, even the smallest one, requires the cross.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. On another occasion, Jesus invites himself for tea. And as he invites himself for tea, it's a little small man named Zacchaeus up a tree who just so happens to be a tax collector. And he goes to the tree and he says to Zacchaeus, who's up there to see Jesus above the crowd, he says, Zacchaeus, come down. And as the song goes, I'm coming to your house for tea. And sure enough, they go off to the house for tea. The people in the crowd say exactly the same thing. I can't believe Jesus has gone to his house. He's just a rotten kind of man. That's the kind of attitude that comes across. Jesus says to Zacchaeus, today salvation has come to your house, for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost. Luke brilliantly, wonderfully, allows us to see that Jesus seeks and saves the lost by calling a sinful man down from a tree.

[26 : 24] But by the time you get to the end of the gospel, you have another man up a tree. Jesus, dying for the sins of sinners and tax collectors. What Luke does with Jesus being up the tree, with Zacchaeus being up the tree and then follows it with Jesus being crucified on a tree, is simply to show us that the judgment that is meant for all sinners and tax collectors, that Jesus is the one that come and takes us down. He takes us down and then takes our place.

He takes us down from the place where cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. Jesus takes us down from that position, illustrated by asking Zacchaeus to come down, and then at the end of the gospel, goes on the tree himself, as Galatians points out, curses everyone who hangs on a tree, pointing to Jesus Christ being crucified on a cross, which is effectively a tree. It's not smooth and beautiful like this one. It's rugged and torn with very little work put into it, simply made for the purpose of crucifying an individual. That's what Luke does. So all the way through Luke, all of these invitations, you have the same lesson coming out over again and again and again and again, that Jesus Christ is a friend of tax collectors and sinners who has come to seek and to save the lost.

Okay. Loyalty then. A new kind of loyalty. Jesus allows us to see what sin is like in relation to what discipleship is like. He allows us to pay attention to the fact that he pays particular attention to men, to women, to children, to individuals, to groups, to families, to everyone.

But he does show us in Luke 6 in particular what sin looks like. A sinful person will love someone who will only love them back. Okay. A sinful person will love someone who will only love them back, but disciples are expected to love their enemies because of their new loyalty to Jesus. Sinners will do good to those who will do good to them back, but disciples are expected to do good to everybody regardless because of their new loyalty to Jesus Christ. Sinners lend money out to others.

Some sinners make it worse by doing this at interest and expect it back and even more with the interest. But disciples are expected to lend it out without ever expecting to get it back. Hence, because of their new loyalty to Jesus, it's not a new loyalty to Jesus. In other words, following Jesus means that we follow in a particular way. As I said in Matthew, one of the reasons why the humanity of Jesus is so incredibly important is so that we can't say we don't know what it looks like to follow Jesus Christ in the flesh. No, we do know. We do know. It is to renounce all things and trust God.

[29 : 32] It doesn't mean that you work hard. It doesn't mean that you do any of those other things, but it means when it comes to loyalty, all of those things go. Another thing to notice is that loyalty to Jesus affects our family relationships in quite a particular way. Jesus, at the age of 12, finds himself in the temple, not by mistake, but all of a sudden the parents feel that they've lost their son. They go looking for him and Jesus' response is very simple. Well, I'm about my father's business. In other words, Jesus, at the age of 12, already understood his identity and already understood his mission, that he is here to do the work of God on earth. Another story, when Jesus actually enters into the ministry, is when Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law, which I always find funny for some reason. But whether it's a mother-in-law thing, I'm not entirely sure. But, you know, if Jesus loves mother-in-laws, then I guess I should love mother-in-laws. I mean, is that the application? I don't know. Is there a way out? I've been looking.

No, it's a joke. I haven't been looking. Maybe. Okay, what does it mean? Well, really simply, it means this, that when Jesus called Peter away, he had a wife that he left behind.

When Jesus is out walking around Galilee and Jerusalem and all of these places, Peter's with him and his wife's at home. And so the call of discipleship and the call of loyalty to Jesus has high demands, high demands, that it could actually mean that I have to leave my home. It could actually mean that I have to leave my occupation. It could actually mean that I have to leave my loved ones behind. So loyalty to Jesus is not a small thing. It's not something that we can do alongside other things. It's things that actually overtake them. It overtakes the importance I have to the location where I live. It overtakes the importance of the occupation I have. It overtakes the loyalty and love that I have for all the other people in my relational body, as it were. It overtakes all of that. So whether Jesus calls me for a short time or a long time, I begin to realize that it's going to affect everything. Why? Because the truth sets us free. The trouble is, is not a single Christian, I think, immediately thinks that when we hear those words, the truth of God will set you free, that Jesus

Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and the truth sets us free, that we'd imagine for a moment that that truth could mean separation from our family. We don't see it that way, okay? We see it separated from all the other bad things in the world, which is true. But it could also mean I have to follow Jesus, or I'm now going to follow Jesus, and leave my wife, my mother-in-law, and perhaps children at home. And, you know, Paul makes this in 1 Corinthians 9. So it is tempting, isn't it, to dumb down discipleship as though it can be done alongside all of these other things. And what Luke says is, no, it can't. Jesus calls us to be his disciple. In fact, he says in chapter 13, verse 33, that if you do not renounce all that you have, you cannot be my disciple. He didn't say you wouldn't make a very good one. He said you wouldn't make one at all. You wouldn't make one at all. That's pretty tough going. Very tough going. But it is because the truth sets us free. Here's the exhortation then, as we close. The priority of Jesus is to seek and to save the lost, to be a friend of tax collectors and sinners. The priority of Jesus is to point out to those people who think that they're just too bad to belong to God, that they've just done too much for too long, and there's no possible way that they could ever belong to Jesus, is to come to them and say, that's just not the case.

I have come for such people like you. But it's also to point out to those who think that, yeah, they're willing to admit that they've done a couple of things that are not necessarily good, but it doesn't require the cross. He points out to them that they are sorely mistaken.

[34 : 02] For every sin, even a little one, is against an eternal God and therefore doesn't go away unless it has been forgiven by God through giving his son to the cross. Then it's forgiven.

Then they are separated as far as the east is from the west from you. Loyalty to Jesus is really tough, really difficult, really difficult. You lose friends.

Your family may not necessarily treat you in the same way as they did before. They may not love you in the same way. Things become incredibly difficult. And this is the place where it becomes the most difficult place at all. Not in the world, but in the church. For there is nothing more difficult than to live as a disciple in the church and not somehow be accused that you are somehow taking Jesus too seriously.

If we are really urgent and serious about living for God and bringing up our children to the standards of God, then we must understand what they are.

Okay? There is nothing more damaging to Christian families and to other Christians in the church than see other Christians that go by such a name living in a totally different way to the way following Jesus actually looks.

[35 : 29] Loyalty to Jesus is really difficult. But as the New Testament points out, the reason why it's so important is because of the damage it can actually cause to the church if not done properly.

You understand that? I can remember a lady saying to me, when I just got married, and I just had my first child, or we just had our first child, not claiming, you know, that it was all my work.

And she said to me, and I deeply respect them both, she says, Daniel, you need to understand that when you raise children, and she's raised her children with her husband, and she's adopted too, and, you know, something which I feel that I could never, I'd love to do, but, you know, God shapes us in a different way.

She says, when you raise up your children, the ones that you have to protect them from is not the children in the world, because they understand that they don't believe in Jesus. But it's the ones who claim they do believe in Jesus, but still do all the things that the world does.

Do you understand why loyalty to Jesus is so crucial? Because it's the very thing that protects the very life of children. Hence why Jesus says, don't you ever hinder one of these little ones from coming to me.

[36 : 45] It is better for you to have a weight thrown around your neck, and you thrown into the sea, than to prevent or hinder one of these children from coming to me.

The loyalty of Jesus to us is that he's come to seek and to save us. The loyalty of us to Jesus is to recognize that that took the cross, and our life must be shaped by it.

Amen.