

# “Behold the man!”

**T**HE GOSPEL OF LUKE is unique among the Gospel records in its presentation of the life of Christ and the events and teachings recorded. The longest of the New Testament writings,<sup>1</sup> the Gospel contains some of the most memorable parables and Jesus’ most powerful teachings concerning, for example, the right use of wealth, so necessary for many of us today. It has vital lessons regarding prayer, an activity often neglected by us collectively and individually, and draws us close to the ordinary people that Christ sought out: the women, the poor, the outcasts, the lost and lonely, the children and the Gentiles.

Here is Christ the Saviour. This is a Gospel record that emphasises the humanity of Christ, that he was indeed the Son of man; and it shows him at work amongst humanity, seeking to save those that were lost. There are more uses of the word ‘sinner(s)’ in this Gospel than in all the other three put together; Matthew and Mark have five, John has four, but in Luke the word occurs seventeen times. Here is the essence of this Gospel record: that the grace of God is extended to all, not just to the Jews but also to Gentiles, not to those who thought they were righteous but to the sinners. This is not, it must be said, a gospel of universal salvation, as many of the commentators describe it. Rather it is a gospel that reaches out to all kinds of people. There are no boundaries it cannot cross or borders that can hold it back, as Luke so eloquently demonstrates in his sequel, the Acts of the Apostles. Not everyone will be saved, but the repentant sinner can be saved.

Luke’s account opens with praise and rejoicing in Mary’s song, in the words of Zacharias once John is born, in the multitudes in heaven praising God, in Simeon and Anna rejoicing and giving thanks. It concludes with the disciples of Christ returning to Jerusalem after Christ’s ascension “with great joy: [being] continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (24:52,53). Men and women had just cause to rejoice, for in these events was seen the outworking of God’s great and precious promises and prophecies. Here was the one who brought the salvation of God, who would be “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and

the glory of Thy people Israel” (2:32). Although the Jews would reject their Messiah and crucify him, they could not prevent the work of God in bringing salvation to those who had eyes to see and ears to hear amongst their own nation. Nor would they be able to hold back that salvation of God being sent unto the Gentiles.

Luke in writing this Gospel appears to address it to one whose name suggests he was a Gentile, Theophilus, although that cannot be established conclusively. In setting out the ancestry of Christ he traces it back to Adam (3:23-38), and not Abraham as in Matthew’s account. He includes Christ’s words at Nazareth, which highlight that Elijah and Elisha worked miracles for Gentiles (4:24-27). He did not exclude the Samaritans, presenting the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10:30-37; 17:11-19). And, strikingly, although all the Gospels record the coming of John the Baptist and refer to Isaiah 40, only Luke includes the words, “and *all flesh* shall see the salvation of God” (3:6), intimating even in John’s ministry the broadening out of God’s purpose to the Gentiles.

Only in Luke will we find people’s questions to John the Baptist and his answers (vv. 10-14). Only in this Gospel do we come across Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (19:39-44), and are taken into the darkness of Gethsemane that we might appreciate the bloody sweat as Jesus submits to his Father’s will (22:44). Only Luke tells us that Jesus was sent to Herod during his trial (23:7-12), and records the words to the women who followed him to the cross (vv. 27-31). In all these are we drawn nearer to our Master and to those who both rejected him and sought him.

In this Special Issue we have not set out to provide a verse-by-verse exposition. Rather we have selected some of the strong themes that permeate this record of our Master’s life, so that, as we read this Gospel twice a year, we might be drawn closer to our Saviour, and truly appreciate the grace of God extended to us, who are but sinners.

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1. Attributing both the writing of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles to Luke means that Luke contributed approximately twenty-eight per cent of the New Testament, more than any other author.