

Luke's Portrait of a Perfect Man

***“There is one God,
and one mediator
between God and
men, the man
Christ Jesus.”
—I Timothy 2:5***

EACH OF THE FOUR GOS-
pel writers described Jesus
from quite different perspec-
tives. Matthew described
him as the King of Israel,
the Messiah. He mentioned

the wise men and the expensive gifts they presented to Jesus, but said nothing about the visit of the shepherds. Mark saw Jesus as the perfect servant of God, one who acted quickly and spoke seldom. John described Jesus as the Son of God, God's personal representative on earth. His was an account of Jesus' teachings, not a narrative of his life, and consisted largely of the words which he spoke.

Luke presented Jesus as a perfect man. His Gospel is the most comprehensive, comprising a prologue, a growing up period, and includes an account of his ascension into heaven after his resurrection. Luke traced Jesus' genealogy back to Adam, the first perfect man. His portrait of Jesus emphasized the relationships which Jesus had with others, including his Heavenly Father.

As followers of the Master, we should study Luke's portrait to see what we can learn from it—to see how we can bring our own lives into conformity with this image of Jesus as the perfect man. It was Paul who wrote, "Whom he did foreknow [true followers of Christ], he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."—Rom. 8:29

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

In Luke's portrait, Jesus is shown to be sympathetic to the poor, the despised, children, women, and even the hated Samaritans. On occasion he did associate with the rich, the powerful, and those of high social status, but few of those really interested him. We get a clearer insight into why this was the case from the account in Luke, chapter 7, beginning at verse 36. The following quotation is from the *New International Version (NIV)*: "Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them."—vss. 36-38

The Pharisee who hosted this dinner was named Simon. Although he said nothing outwardly, it is evident from verse 39 that in his heart he was critical of Jesus for permitting this sinful woman to act as she had. Jesus knew what was in his heart, and so he spoke a parable. "Two men owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred

denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more? Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled. You have judged correctly, Jesus said. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.”—vss. 41-43,47, *NIV*

At the time of Jesus, women were almost non-persons. They were rarely educated, and had almost no rights. Then, as now, those who became prostitutes were labeled sinners. Civil and religious leaders spent their time with other men, not with women. However, Jesus did not limit his fellowship to men—he was as comfortable with women as with men. We read, “As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.”—Luke 10:38,39, *NIV*

Jesus was also comfortable with publicans, or tax collectors, as we see from a criticism recorded in Luke 5:29,30: “Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”

Who were the publicans? This is what one Bible commentator says about them: “The publicans were hated as the instruments by which the subjection of the Jews to the Roman emperor was perpetuated. They were noted for their extortion and were tempted to oppress the people with illegal exactions so that

they might the more speedily enrich themselves. The publicans were regarded as traitors and apostates, . . . willing tools of the oppressor. They were classed with sinners, with harlots, and with the heathen. The scribes and the people alike hated them."

Considered still worse than publicans were the Samaritans. Another Bible commentator says this about them: "The Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans that they could possibly avoid. 'Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil' was the mode in which the Jews expressed themselves when at a loss for a bitter reproach. The Samaritan was publicly cursed in their synagogues; could not be adduced as a witness in the Jewish courts; could not be admitted to any sort of proselytism; and was thus, so far as the Jew could affect his position, excluded from hope of eternal life."

Jesus, however, refused to accept the common prejudices of those around him. Far from avoiding Samaritans, on appropriate occasions Jesus praised them. In Luke 10:30-37, we read Jesus' well loved parable of the good Samaritan. In Luke 17:16, it is recorded that after Jesus cured ten lepers, only one—a Samaritan—returned to give thanks.

The easiest way for us to live is to copy those around us, but that is not the way the perfect man, Jesus, behaved. We learn from Luke's portrait of him that Jesus considered all human beings to be valuable, and worthy of his time and attention. He indulged none of the common prejudices of his day. He willingly spent time with women, children, tax collectors, and even non-Jews like the Samaritans.

Since we are to be followers of Jesus' example, we do well to ask ourselves, How are we living today?

Do we share the prejudices of those around us? Do we think our time is best spent with others just like ourselves? Are we willing, rather, to follow the example of our Master and take time to associate with the poor, with children, the disadvantaged, and even those who are openly sinful or might be considered unacceptable to the leaders of society? We need to remember that God has predestinated that we should be conformed to the image of his Son.

RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

If we did not know differently from what we learn in the Scriptures concerning Jesus, we might think that a perfect man would have no need for outside support. We could assume he would have inexhaustible energy, and could tap his own source of inner strength at any time. However, that is not how Luke portrayed Jesus, the perfect man. From Jordan to the cross, Luke recorded many occasions not mentioned by the other Gospel writers which evidenced the fact that Jesus spent a great deal of time in prayer, seeking guidance and strength from his Heavenly Father.

Here are a few examples:

“Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened.” (Luke 3:21) The baptism of Jesus was described by others, but the fact that he prayed to his Father at that time is mentioned only by Luke. At the very beginning of his walk as a New Creature, we find him praying to his Heavenly Father!

“So much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear,

and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.” (Luke 5:15,16) As time passed, Jesus had built up a large following, but he did not take credit for this success. He knew that the credit belonged to his Father, and therefore he continued to approach him in prayer.

“He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.” (Luke 6:12,13) Selecting the twelve was an extremely important decision, and Jesus did not presume to make a choice without guidance from his Father. He spent the entire night in prayer, and on the following day he was prepared to take the proper action.

After the twelve apostles had been very successful in their preaching and healing efforts among the people, “it came to pass, as he [Jesus] was alone praying, his disciples were with him.” (Luke 9:18) Again, he went to his Heavenly Father in prayer to thank him that the ministry of his apostles had been blessed.

“As he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.” (Luke 9:29) Matthew and Mark both have accounts of the transfiguration scene, but neither recorded that Jesus prayed on that occasion. There, as the three especially favored apostles received a transcending vision of the kingdom in glory, Jesus prayed.

“It came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray.” (Luke 11:1) The disciples were aware of Jesus’ constant

communication with his Father, and they knew his relationship with God was one that they did not have the privilege of enjoying. They asked to be taught how to pray as he did, in order that they could enjoy a similar communion with God.

“He was withdrawn from them [his disciples] about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:41,42) Up until the close of his earthly ministry, Jesus again and again went to his Father in prayer to have fellowship, to receive guidance and assurance, and strength.

It is clear that he drew his strength from his Father, not from within himself. If he or his associates had success, he prayed about it. If he had a decision to make, he prayed about it. At his baptism and at the cross, he prayed for insight and guidance. It is by his example that we see how vital prayer is to our spiritual health—it is indeed the very foundation of our relationship with God.

WEALTH

Luke believed that there was no better test of a man than to look at how he used his money. Jesus himself was born into an exceedingly poor family. This is confirmed by the fact that at the time of Jesus’ circumcision, Mary brought two turtledoves, a practice which the Law permitted only by those who were too poor to bring a lamb. (See Leviticus 12:8) Paul wrote concerning Jesus that “though he was rich, . . . he became poor.”—II Cor. 8:9

Luke was the only gospel author who recorded a parable of Jesus that contrasted false riches with

the true. “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores things up for himself but is not rich toward God.”—Luke 12:16-21, *NIV*

Clearly the parable indicates that this rich man did not understand the difference between earthly riches and true riches. As recorded a few verses later, Jesus spoke to his followers to build on the lesson of this parable. He said, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”—vss. 32-34, *NIV*

Where is our treasure? We will know by discovering where our hearts are. It could be our businesses, our investments, our careers, our homes, or any of a variety of places where “moth destroys” and thieves “come near.” These words seem to imply that to the degree that we are interested in the treasures of earth, to that degree we will have less treasure in heaven.

In another parable, a good Samaritan—with no hesitation—gave of his time and his money to help another person, one whom he did not know, and who was obviously not his nationality. In Luke’s recounting of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we see the insensitivity of a rich man who did not do anything to help someone in great need who had been laid “at his gate.” (Luke 16:20) The commendations and reproofs expressed by Jesus clearly indicate the attitude he favors.

Those with much of this world’s goods may tend to have more difficulties along this line. Will they love earthly things so much that they lose an opportunity for spiritual things, or will they willingly sacrifice what they have in the interest of others? No matter how great the sacrifice, nothing can compare to Jesus’ sacrifice, when he gave up his position of preeminence and authority in heaven as the only begotten Son of God. He was the archangel over all the creatures of heaven, and yet came to earth as a man to die for us.

Paul expressed Jesus’ understanding of the matter, when he wrote, “Doing nothing from party-spirit, or vain-glory; but in humility esteeming others as excelling yourselves; not each one regarding his own interests, but each one also those of others. Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, though being in God’s form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested himself, taking a bondman’s form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—Phil. 2:3-8, *Emphatic Diaglott*

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Luke's portrait of a perfect man is magnified by his description of how God showed his love for all mankind. The purpose of Jesus' ministry is summarized in Luke 19:10, which reads, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Luke compiled his account as a historian through interviews with those who were eyewitnesses of the events. Throughout his account, he emphasized those events that prove God's love is not limited to the Jews. He quoted Simeon's words that Jesus will be "a light to lighten the Gentiles." He quoted Jesus, giving examples of God's favor to non-Jews—a Sidonian widow, and Naaman the Syrian. He quoted Jesus commending the faith of a non-Jew as exceeding any faith found in Israel. He quoted Jesus as saying, just before his ascension, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached . . . among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."—Luke 2:32; 4:25-27; 7:9; 24:47

Why did Luke emphasize these points which the other Gospel writers did not? Unlike the other writers, he was a Gentile, an outsider, despised by the Jews. He was a convert to Christ, one who accompanied Paul in bringing the Gospel to other Gentiles. We know this is true, because in Colossians 4:10-14, it is stated that Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus are "of the circumcision." Epaphras, Luke, and Demas—mentioned next—were not included among those listed as being in the category "of the circumcision" and, therefore, were not Jews.

Like Luke, we have received a knowledge of the will of God because someone was faithful to the

commission to preach the name of Jesus among all nations. Let us draw lessons from Luke's portrait of a perfect man and apply them to our own lives. Since we must become conformed to the image of our Master, let us:

1. Not draw arbitrary distinctions among ourselves or others, based on age, gender, wealth, or social standing. As James said, "Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?"—James 2:5

2. Recognize the importance of prayer in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Following the example of Jesus, we should come to the Father in prayer and thankfulness at all times, especially when he grants us success in his service, when he grants success to others, when we must make important decisions, or when we must endure a particular trial.

3. Pay special attention to the way we use our money. The rich young ruler who wanted to inherit eternal life thought he had been reasonably successful following the commandments. Yet, it was impossible for him to do as Jesus said, "Sell everything you have and give to the poor." "Jesus looked at him and said, How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! . . . Peter said to him, We have left all we had to follow you! I tell you the truth, Jesus said to them, no-one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."—Luke 18:22,24,28-30, *NIV* ■