

# Inside Looking Out



## **INSIDE, LOOKING OUT**

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Today, I'm going to share an overview of the Gospel According to Luke. Though there are three other Gospel accounts, Luke offers a unique perspective of the great life of Jesus. And his compassionate perspective speaks to our present day.

Luke was the only Gentile among all the writers of the New Testament. He was probably converted under Paul's ministry, with whom he traveled several times. Luke recounts many of the same events and teachings as did Matthew and Mark. But, with the perspective of an outsider, and the heart of a physician, he also gives the Gospel message an emphasis of inclusion that the other writers could not.

Luke emphasizes the stories of people who knew what it meant to be standing on the outside looking in. For instance...

Elizabeth, the wife of a country priest, who was unable to conceive a child of her own. Or, her niece, Mary, a young Jewish girl, who found herself pregnant by the Holy Spirit before her wedding day. Such stigmas remain to this day.

Luke tells the glorious birth announcement of Jesus, as did others, but from the perspective of lowly sheep herders. It was they who got to entertain the angel choir.

He lists the genealogy of Jesus (as did Matthew), but Luke chose to trace the ancestors of Joseph, who was only a step-father to Jesus, yet traces his line all the way back to God Himself!

Luke alone records Jesus' own rejection in His hometown of Nazareth. Familiarity bred contempt.

Only He records the raising again to life of a widow's only son who had died. A nobody in the town where they had lived, but the source of his mother's livelihood and joy.

It is Luke who recounts the tender compassion toward Jesus of a woman-of-the-streets who anointed His feet, and of the other women who followed Him and provided for Jesus' ministry.

He gives us the story of the kind Samaritan man who took care of a Jew who had been mugged and robbed and left for dead beside the road.

Luke urges persistence to those who feel like their prayers—their needs and complaints—are not being heard. Who hasn't been there at times?

He recounts the healing of the crippled woman in the synagogue. He pulled her from the crowd and called her a “daughter of Abraham.”

He tells the story of the prodigal son who was restored by the tender mercy of his father.

He shares Jesus' saving visit to the home of Zacchaeus, the lowly and despised chief tax collector.

Luke also hits religious hypocrisy hard, for nothing erects so great a barrier to outsiders as the self-righteousness of insiders.

He tells of the forgiven servant who refused to forgive his friends, and of the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus, whom the rich man scarcely noticed.

Luke tells of Jesus' disappointment with the nine lepers whom He healed, who did not return to give thanks. And of Christ's revealing comparison of a haughty Pharisee and a penitent tax collector.

For various reasons, many of us have found ourselves on the outside looking in on life (and which of us has not at least felt such pain at *some* point?). But Jesus flings the doors open wide, calling us all and welcoming us all into God's saving presence and enduring love.

The danger to those who respond to His welcome, of course, is that once on the inside we may also become self-righteous and begin to exclude others, saying in effect, “Us four, no more.” Jesus is not soft on such spiritual hypocrisy. Yet even He does not seem to exclude anyone (not even the hypocrites), but to restore them through repentance and renewed faith. Through Christ, *anyone* can change for the better! But it does require a trusting response.

Jesus asked:

*NLT Luke 6:46* “So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say?”

“Lord” means “master,” from the Hebrew *Adonai* and the Greek *Kurios*. To call Him “Master,” yet do your own thing is blatant hypocrisy, or delusion. And it is desperately foolish. He continued:

*NLT Luke 6:47 I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it. <sup>48</sup> It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. <sup>49</sup> But anyone who hears and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins."*

Jesus is not concerned for His own prestige; He seeks no man's approval. It matters not at all to Him what people on the earth may think of Him. He is not thin-skinned. But He was very concerned, in the short time that He was here, to help people escape from the grip of spiritual pride, prejudice, and hypocrisy.

It happens everywhere. Just about everyone has been there at one time or another. Eugene Peterson captured it so well in the same passage of *The Message*:

*MSG Luke 6:46 "Why are you so polite with Me, always saying 'Yes, sir,' and 'That's right, sir,' but never doing a thing I tell you? <sup>47</sup> These words I speak to you are not mere additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundation words, words to build a life on.*

*<sup>48</sup> "If you work the words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who dug deep and laid the foundation of his house on bedrock. When the river burst its banks and crashed against the house, nothing could shake it; it was built to last. <sup>49</sup> But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a dumb carpenter who built a house but skipped the foundation. When the swollen river came crashing in, it collapsed like a house of cards. It was a total loss."*

We quickly learn how to say the "right things" in order to please or placate people, to smooth the ruffles. We say what we need to say to keep our jobs. We say what we need to say to get what we want. But using words in that way doesn't impress the Lord.

The Mighty God, who has real authority and power, is not seeking to be appeased, but to be *trusted* and *obeyed*. So He asks us to listen and carefully work His words into our lives, like a baker works yeast into the dough.

Beware that the slack you give yourself — in terms of judging your own thoughts, words, and actions — does not turn into hypocrisy. We all *need* slack at times — you need it, *and* so do others. Grace gives latitude for extenuating circumstances, but not for any-and-every reason or whim. There are times when we simply need to tighten our belts and cinch our shoelaces and run for the Lord — whether it is convenient or comfortable, or not.

Christ's words are true and purposeful — they are not just for Bible studies, or intellectual sparring; they are for practical living.

Luke also emphasized this theme, addressing the subject of spiritual foolishness in two accounts: this story about home builders which we just read (6:46-49), and another story about a greedy farmer (12:13).

It is foolish to take in the words of the Son of the Living God, yet do nothing with them besides admire them. It is foolish to trade our opportunities of service for earthly pleasures or things that cannot last.

*Only one life  
'twill soon be past;  
Only what's done for Christ  
will last.*

Are you letting your spiritual life, and the time that you have to build it up, slip through your fingers?

It would be better for you to never pick up or read a Bible, than to read it and do nothing with what you've read. Can you see that?

Nothing is as fatal as moving from the inside to the outside, drifting away from one's faith, rejecting God's plan of salvation.

Luke emphasized how Jesus confronted the hypocrisies of the religious Jews, who thought that keeping the Sabbath was about what they *disallowed* instead of their devotion to God and His purposes.

Luke was very concerned (as is Jesus) for the many people who feel marginalized, who feel like they don't fit in, who feel unwelcome. Most, if not all of us, have tasted that.

So, don't wear your religion like a badge.

We must let God's words into our lives to *teach* us and *shape* us.

We must let them into our gut to *motivate* us.

You won't practice His words perfectly or consistently (that's not even the point) — none of us do. But you can be persistently open to receive God's truth and let it grow in you.

Let His words correct you, where needed, and respond with repentance and renewed faith, instead of excuses.

Let His words guide you, instead of assuming you know what's best for your life.

*Let His words in.* And His words will bring you *inside* His Kingdom of love and purpose, and turn your heart *outward* to the lost and troubled people of your world.

Luke has shown us what it can mean to be inside God's Kingdom, enjoying His vast grace and love, and at the same time, looking out for others, to bring them Christ's mercy and truth.

May it be so.