



The Case For Christmas



Luke: Son of Man - December 15, 2019

OPEN

Have you ever had a Christmas tree catastrophe? Today we consider another type of tree...a sycamore-fig tree, as found in Israel. Our series of sermons is "The Case for Christmas" using the helpful book by Lee Strobel, *The Case For Christmas* (Zondervan, 2005).

Today we look at Luke's case for Christmas. He was a physician (Colossians 4:14) and a member of Paul's ministry team (II Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24). He was a skillful storyteller and featured Jesus as "Perfect Man". The title Luke used was "The Son of Man". Author N. T. Wright suggests that in Luke we are "**seeing Jesus, thinking God**".

To examine Luke's case for Christmas it would be natural to gravitate to the Christmas story in chapter 2. But we are going to consider an account in which Luke employed the title Son of Man. When we hear "Son of Man" we might think of Jesus' humanity. In fact, this is a "divine figure in the Old Testament book of Daniel who would come at the end of the world to judge mankind and rule forever." (Strobel, 28)

Luke's Gospel highlights Jesus' divine nature, as it makes an **incarnational intersection with humanity**.

DIG

In Luke 1:1-4 we learn that the purpose for this Gospel was provide a carefully crafted portrait of Jesus for Theophilus. Described as "most excellent" this points to his social status. He was likely Luke's patron and publisher. Giving an "orderly account" in two volumes, Luke wrote more of the New Testament than any other writer. He wrote for a non-Jewish audience. His grammar and vocabulary is superior. And his writing style reflects the Septuagint – the ancient Greek language translation of the Old Testament. As one of the four Gospels, Luke is a "fusion of sermon and biography" (*Recovering Jesus* by Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, Brazos Press, 2007, 53). Consider five characteristics about the Gospel of Luke which gives great credibility to his case for Christmas.

- **History** - Luke's Gospel is firmly rooted in history - see Luke 1:5; 2:2; and 3:1 for details relating to history. Consider the global events that converged at the time Jesus was born and walked this earth. Luke does an extremely careful job ["orderly account"] of chronicling Jesus' life in the historical context.

- **Genealogy** - The genealogy which Luke provides in 3:23-38 is from a maternal perspective, through Mary. It shows the purposes God through humanity. In Luke 2 we not only have the narrative of Christ's physical birth. Later we have a brief description of His growth in obedience, intellect, body, and relationships (verses 51-52).
- **Prophecy** - In Luke there are three prophetic passages involving Mary (1:46-55), Zechariah (1:68-79), and Simeon (2:29-32). Though his audience was not Jewish, these still serve to give certainty that Jesus is the Messiah. Mary declared, "He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to His offspring forever." (1:54-55).
- **Soteriology** - According to Leon Morris, Luke "sees God's action in Christ as the great, central intervention of God in the affairs of men." (*TNTC-Luke*, IVP, 1984, 35) Luke's major theme is **salvation [soterios] history**. This is further emphasized by Luke's companion book, *Acts of The Apostles*. More accurately, Acts is the ongoing work of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the disciples.

Let's see a specific snapshot of Jesus, bringing salvation to a real person, in real time. How did Luke paint a picture of Jesus as the Son of Man, God's promised Redeemer, who offers salvation? Let's visit the ancient town of Jericho and a sycamore tree. Read **Luke 19:1-10**.

Seeking, not seeing - The first few verses help us understand that Zacchaeus was a tax-collector and also wealthy. His riches came from collaborating with Roman oppressors and exploiting his countrymen. Yet, he was "he seeking to see who Jesus was" – verse 3. Why? There was hunger and emptiness in his heart that money or power could not fill. So he climbed a sycamore-fig tree. As we read, Zacchaeus was vertically challenged or a "wee little man" as we used to sing in Sunday School. Though he was seeking he was unable to see because of the crowd. Zacchaeus' failed attempt to see Jesus physically represents his inability to reach Jesus apart from the intentionality of Christ.

Seeking, and saving - In verse 5 we learn that Jesus, arriving at the tree, looked up and spoke personally to Zacchaeus. Jesus invited Himself to Zach's home. Now this was much more than a social call. It represented the way in which Jesus seeks us out, and offers to insert Himself into the brokenness of our lives. It is a vivid portrayal of an **incarnational intersection with humanity!** It is the fact that the Creator of the Universe took on flesh and blood that we celebrate at Christmas. So this apparently random encounter of Jesus with Zacchaeus is actually a case-in-point that God came to dwell with humanity. As Charles Wesley put it, "*veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity; pleased as Man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.*" The Incarnation that we celebrate this season is the grandest demonstration of God initiating relationship with us.

How did the Son of Man affect the life of Zacchaeus? Jesus responded to three vital needs in his life: to be **known**, **pursued**, and **changed**. As a result of his encounter with Christ Zacchaeus' life was transformed. As we read in verse 8, his repentance was evidenced by restitution. Luke makes his summation to his case for Christmas in verse 10. There we learn that Jesus' mission is to "seek" but Jesus succeeds when He seeks – He saves! Jesus is both **seeker** and **saver** of lost souls. The lost are by very definition unable to find their way, regardless of the effort expended.

REFLECT

In Isaiah 62:12 we discover an interesting name which God gave to His restored people. The name *derusah* means "sought out" or "sought after" in contrast to the desolation and shame of "seeking, not seeing". Poet Helen Steiner Rice wrote that "peace on earth will come to stay, when we live Christmas every day." If this is going to be a reality in our lives, we must come to terms with our human inadequacy. We are not just vertically, but spiritually challenged! Apart from work of Jesus Christ in our lives we will always be "seeking, not seeing".

In *Re-Jesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church*, authors Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch write that the Gospels keep us from allowing "our glimpse of Jesus be more about us than about Jesus." (Hendrickson, 2009, 91)

Compare the prophecy of Zechariah in Luke 1:67-79 with the proclamation of Paul in Ephesians 1:3-14. Notice that this reveals a wonderful case for Christmas: "Blessed be God...He has chosen to redeem us...that we might live blameless before Him!"

Speaking of Christmas catastrophes... have you ever thought about how Jesus' Advent could have been scuttled? In *Ten People Who Could Have Destroyed Christmas* by Woodrow Kroll (GNB, 2008) we read about...

- Cain – the hateful brother – Genesis 4:4-6
- The Kinsman – the spineless relative – Ruth 4:6
- Jesse – the short-sighted father – I Samuel 16:7
- Saul – the jealous rival – I Samuel 18:14-15
- Athalia – the murderous mother – II Kings 11:2
- Jeconiah – the disobedient ancestor – Jeremiah 22:30
- Caesar Augustus – the burdensome Caesar – Luke 21,4
- Mary – the virtuous virgin – Luke 1:38
- Joseph – the conscientious fiancé – Matthew 1:20
- Herod – the ruthless king – Matthew 2:16

In his Gospel, Luke included the prophetic declarations of three individuals. Each one expressed God's salvation in Christ as the fulfillment of centuries of trusting Him regarding His covenant to Israel. Consider these prophecies and the Old Testament texts to which they refer.

Mary - Luke 1:46-55 - compare Ps 18:46; 98:1-3; 111:9; Isaiah 40:10; 61:10

Zechariah - Luke 1:68-79 - compare Gen 22:16-18; II Samuel 22:2-4; Psalm 105:8-9; 107:14; 111:9; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Isaiah 9:2; Micah 7:20

Simeon - Luke 2:29-35 - compare Isaiah 8:13-14; 40:5; 42:6; 49:6; 52:10

Consider some of the passages with "Son of Man" in Luke...

Luke 5:24 But I want you to know that the **Son of Man** has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed **man**, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Luke 6:5 Then Jesus said to them, "The **Son of Man** is Lord of the Sabbath."

Luke 7:34 The **Son of Man** came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'

Luke 9:22 And he said, "The **Son of Man** must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Luke 9:26 Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the **Son of Man** will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Luke 11:30 For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the **Son of Man** be to this generation.

Luke 12:8 "I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the **Son of Man** will also acknowledge before the angels of God.

Luke 12:10 And everyone who speaks a word against the **Son of Man** will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

Luke 12:40 You also must be ready, because the **Son of Man** will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Luke 18:31 [*Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time*] Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the **Son of Man** will be fulfilled.

Luke 19:10 For the **Son of Man** came to seek and to save the lost."

Luke 21:27 At that time they will see the **Son of Man** coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Luke 22:48 but Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the **Son of Man** with a kiss?"

Luke 22:69 But from now on, the **Son of Man** will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."