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Jesus, The Saviour of the World - Part 1

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott gives one aspect of the fourfold portrait of Christ as painted by Dr. Luke in his gospel record. He shows that no one is untouchable by Christ, the healer of broken lives and hearts.

Transcript

[Music] Forgiveness that blots out our past and the gift of the Spirit to transform our future. That's what salvation is in the New Testament. There's two things.

Not one without the other, but two! And Luke is anxious to keep them together. That's why he records Peter on the day Pentecost's saying "Repent!" and Bebaptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[Music] Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott.

There are few evangelicals who have ever influenced the global church in the 20th century as much as John Stott. Always remaining faithful to the word of God and unswayed by current trends, the person of Christ blazed from the moment he preached. Whilst John Stott impacted the church across the world, his home church was always all souls, Langen Place and the heart of London's West End.

And it's from 600 sermons he preached there that we're marking his centenary with some of his most powerful messages.

[Music] Although art galleries contain many paintings depicting Jesus, no one knows what he really looked like. Our own image of Christ's face is likely to be based on paintings by artists who never saw Jesus.

But there are four portraits of Christ by people who did see him and recorded what they saw in detail. The four gospels of the New Testament give us a fourfold portrait of Christ, each from a different perspective, and John Stott is looking at one of them today. The background to study during the Sunday nights, as I mentioned before, is the many Jesus'

who are on offer in the world today.

I won't go into them again, but just as a little introduction, if you've not been lost two Sunday nights, we've thought of Jesus the clown, Jesus the ascetic, Jesus the superstar, Jesus the capitalist, Jesus the socialist, Jesus the revolutionary, and a whole list of different Jesus'. Attempted reconstructions, fantasy reconstructions of Jesus. From these we turn aside to the authentic Jesus of the New Testament witness, the fourfold portrait of Jesus that were given by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Matthew, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, presents Jesus as the Christ of Scripture, the fulfillment of many centuries of Old Testament expectation. Mark, topic last Sunday night, presents Jesus as the suffering servant at the center of whose life was the cross, which therefore becomes the center of our lives if we are true followers of his. Now tonight we come to Luke.

Luke presents Jesus as the savior of the world. The savior reaching out in saving compassion to everybody, whatever their race, nation, rank, age, sex, or anything else. Now before we develop this marvelous theme of Luke's, let's take a look at Luke himself.

You know, don't you, that Luke is the only Gentile contributor to the New Testament, all the other authors would use? By profession he was a doctor. Our dear friend Luke the doctor Paul calls him in his letter to the Colossians. So that means as medical students here would agree that he was a well educated person, a man of culture.

As you can tell from the well polished Greek in which he wrote, he was also a well traveled man. So that perhaps you know this little detail, the other evangelists all refer to the sea of Galilee. But Luke has traveled on the real sea, the Mediterranean.

So he refers to it as a puddle. At least the word actually means a leg or a pond. But it isn't a sea as far as he is concerned.

He is a man of wide horizons and broad sympathies. And as a historian he sets the story of Jesus against the background of the Roman emperors and their subordinate rulers. According to tradition, Luke is an artist.

Whether that is true or not he is certainly an artist in words. Renau, the 19th century liberal French theologian, said the Luke's Gospel is the most beautiful book that has ever been written. And it is a very beautiful story.

And since he wrote two volume work on the origins of Christianity, he is left behind him more material than the other evangelists from which to deduce what his major emphasis was. Now all that information and it's really a little minimal, but all that information about Luke is very important for our understanding of his message. Because in the process of inspiration, if you believe as I do in the inspiration of the Bible, think with me about what is meant by the process of inspiration.

In it, the Holy Spirit did not obliterate the personality of the human authors. He did the opposite. The Holy Spirit patiently fashioned and prepared the personality, the temperament, the background, the education, the upbringing, the experience of each biblical author in order to convey through each of them a distinctive and appropriate truth.

It is therefore not an accident that Matthew, the most Jewish of the Gospel writers, presents Jesus as the Messiah of the Jews. And if the Old Testament Scripture nor is it an accident that Luke, the only Gentile contributor to the New Testament presents Jesus, not as the Messiah of the Jews, but as the Savior of the world. It's a wonderful theme.

I hope it excites you tonight as much as it does me. So it's time to look at a text. I wonder if you mind opening your Bible in the New Testament that the Gospel of Luke chapter 3 and our text is verse 6. It's a good text because it's unique.

It doesn't come in the other evangelists. That's why I've chosen it. Here it is, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." All flesh, all humankind will see the salvation of God.

Now it's in a context about John the Baptist. All four evangelists refer to John the Baptist. They tell of him as the precursor, the forerunner of Jesus of Nazareth.

And all four evangelists quote from Isaiah 40, the voice crying in the wilderness. And they recognize in that voice John the Baptist. But only Luke continues the quotation from Isaiah 40 to include this phrase.

"All flesh will see the salvation of God. It's unique to Luke." And it tells us immediately what his message is. Three things.

One, Luke's message is good news of salvation. Well, I know as well I think as anybody here that the word salvation embarrasses some people and other people say, well, it's meaningless. It belongs to a traditional religious vocabulary long since discarded.

Well, if you think that, let's ask ourselves what Luke meant when he talked about salvation. According to him, salvation has two component parts. The first is forgiveness.

The forgiveness of sins is at the very center of what is meant by salvation. So, Luke records the prophecy of Zachariah, the further John the Baptist, that he would give the, listen carefully, the knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of our sins. So, you see in that what we call the Benedictus, the song of Zachariah, it's made very clear that the forgiveness of sins is the essence of salvation.

Then Luke describes that woman, that fallen woman, that prostitute, that's what she was, who came behind Jesus as he reclined at a meal. She wet his feet with her tears, she anointed them, she covered them with kisses. And Jesus said, you know, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven.

And you may know that because she loves much. But he to whom so ever little has been forgiven loves little. Only Luke tells that story, it's a story of forgiveness to a fallen woman.

Then Luke tells the incomparable story of the, or the parable of the prodigal son. You know the parable of the prodigal son, it's only in Luke's Gospel, about the boy who ran away from home and squandered his inheritance by dissolute living. And when he came to himself and decided to return in penitence to his father, what happened? He wasn't rebuffed, he wasn't rebuked, he wasn't condemned, he was welcomed with hugs and kisses and a celebration party.

That's forgiveness. And Luke tells the story of the salvation of that boy. Luke records his version of the Great Commission in this way that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all the nations.

And Luke portrays in the Acts the second volume of his two volume work. He portrays Peter and Paul the two great apostles proclaiming forgiveness. For example, Paul in one of his great sermons in the Acts, "Through this man Jesus, there is proclaimed to you the forgiveness of sins." Luke majors on forgiveness.

It's the first component part of salvation. It still is. Forgiveness is a universal need.

I need to be forgiven. Every day I come back to him for forgiveness. You need to be forgiven.

Have you been? Can you look God in the face, knowing that he has forgiven your sins? I think of a student from Newcastle University who came to Christ. He had been brought up in a spiritualistic home. And one night in a Christian Union meeting and after it, there was a great battle for his soul.

This is what he wrote afterwards. "The Decried to Jesus Christ in Despair to Save Him." And he wrote, "Then Jesus really came to Me. I felt actual real love.

I can't describe it. It was just pure beauty and serenity. And despite the fact I knew nothing of all the theological arguments about salvation and sin and didn't even know what it meant, I just knew that I was forgiven and I was unbelievably happy." Now, not everybody has precisely that experience, but that's an authentic experience of the forgiveness of Jesus Christ.

But then there's a second component of salvation. It's the gift of the Holy Spirit. Did you know that of the four evangelists, the one who shows the greatest interest in the Holy Spirit is Luke? The Holy Spirit who brings us new birth and a new life.

It's Luke who portrays Jesus having been filled with the Holy Spirit. It is baptism. Exercising his public ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luke records Jesus as saying that if we who are evil know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will I have and if I'll give the Holy Spirit to those who ask for Him? Luke describes the coming of the Spirit on the day Pentecost and how the Spirit-filled church went out on its mission to the world. So don't ever forget that, friends, will you? Salvation equals forgiveness plus the gift of the Spirit. That's what salvation is in the New Testament.

There's two things. Forgiveness to blot out our past and the gift of the Spirit to transform our future. Not one without the other, but two.

And Luke is anxious to keep them together. That's why he records Peter on the day Pentecost saying, "Repent." And be baptized, every one of you, for the forgiveness of sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit belong together in the salvation of God.

And this salvation brings joy. Luke is the evangelist of joy. Did you know that? There's more about joy in Luke's gospel than in all the others.

And Luke is clear. He begins his gospel. With the word of the angel, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which will be to all the people.

And he ends his gospel. They return to Jerusalem with great joy. Luke's gospel is a joy sandwich.

And in between, there's two references to great joy. He tells the story of Jesus, the Savior of the world. And Luke records the words of Jesus, "There is joy in heaven when only one sinner repents." I bet there's going to be joy in heaven tonight over sinners repenting.

And Luke tells us that each person who received salvation, like the Ethiopian eunuch, went on his way miserable. No. Rejoicing salvation brings joy.

Well, that's the first thing. The message of Luke is good news of salvation. Secondly, the message of Luke is good news of salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

For he is the Savior. And when he says in Luke 3, 6, "All flesh will see the salvation of God." He is referring to the person to whom John the Baptist was bearing witness, namely Jesus Christ. So Luke tells the incomparable story of Jesus.

How he was born of the Virgin Mary in great loneliness to be the Savior of the world. How the old man, Simeon, took the baby in his arms and said, "My eyes have seen your salvation." What he actually saw was a baby. What he said he saw was the salvation of God.

Because the salvation of God is Jesus Christ. And Luke describes how Jesus said in the story of Zacchaeus that was read earlier, that he had come to seek and to save the lost.

So he forgave that prostitute.

He declared to Zacchaeus this day, "Salvation has come to this house." And then Luke describes how Jesus died on the cross for our sins and how even on the cross he turned to the thief beside him and said, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." He saved the thief even while he was crucified. Then he was raised from the dead exalted to heaven as prince and Savior. And from that position of saving authority he bestowed the Holy Spirit upon the waiting church.

And still from that position of authority at the right hand of God he gives salvation forgiveness and the Holy Spirit to anybody who repents and believes. Now because Jesus is unique in his birth, death, resurrection and exaltation, his salvation is unique. Because in nobody else but Jesus of Nazareth has gone ever become man and died for our sins and been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father for unique events, there is no other Savior because there is no body else with the competence to save but Jesus.

That's why Luke records the saying of Peter in Acts 4, 12, "Salvation is found in nobody else, for there is no other name under heaven given to human beings, but the name of Jesus by which we may be saved." Are you with me, Sir, Sir? One, the message of Luke is good news of salvation, meaning forgiveness and the Spirit. With great joy. Two, the message of Luke is good news of salvation in and through the unique Jesus Christ who died rose and was exalted to the right hand of the Father.

Now thirdly, Luke's message is good news of salvation through Christ for the whole wide world. All flesh shall see the salvation of God. Not a loss that all the world is saved or will be saved, but salvation is on offer to the world and to everybody without exception.

Dante called Luke the writer of the story of the compassion of Christ. And in Luke's Gospel we see the compassion of Jesus reaching out to all sorts and conditions of men. He depicts Jesus deliberately going out of his way to honor the people society despised, to welcome the people society repudiated and ostracized.

So let's quickly think of some of the categories on which Luke lays his emphasis. First, the sick and the suffering. Well, of course all the evangelists tell Jesus compassion to the sick and the suffering, but Dr. Luke was specially concerned about them.

In 1882, a scholar called W.K. Hobart wrote an interesting book called the Medical Language of Luke, in which he tried to argue that about 400 and more of Luke's most favorite words occurred in the writings of the medical authors of Greek antiquity. Now, scholars nowadays think that Hobart greatly exaggerated his case, and it cannot be made out as he tried to do it. Nevertheless, William Berkeley, a modern commentator, has said instinctively, Luke uses medical words.

He takes a doctor's interest in medical symptoms and in the diagnosis of disease. And you notice, touch, when Mark says that a poor woman who is hemorrhaging had suffered much under many physicians and spent all her money and wasn't any better but rather getting worse, Luke took it as a personal affront to the medical profession. So he turned it down a little bit, and all he says is she couldn't be healed by anybody.

(Laughter) But Jesus healed her. So Luke was concerned or she says Jesus was concerned for the second suffering, second for the women and children. Now, in the ancient world, both were despised.

The women were rejected, and any babies that were unwanted were simply abandoned on the local rubbish dump. But Jesus treated women and children with courtesy and respect, and although all three of them, or synoptic evangelists, record Jesus saying, "Let the little children come to me." Luke calls them babies. And Luke says Jesus put one by his side, close to him, probably put his arm around him, and Luke is the one who tells the only story that has survived from the boyhood of Jesus when he was twelve.

(Music) John Stott has been sharing us Dr. Luke's portrait of Christ, and will continue this message at the same time next week. Of course, Matthew, Mark, and John also gave us portraits of Christ in their gospels. And you can listen to John Stott preaching on each of them by visiting the All Souls website.

Every week we recommend a particular book by John Stott that ties in with his message. Today's is simply entitled "The World." Our website has the details along with sermons and videos of John Stott preaching at venues around the world. Just visit premierchristianradio.com/JohnStott.

(Music) The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing, touching every level of society across the world.

Today, Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this and other ministries, John Stott founded, go to premier.org.uk/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

(Music)

(buzzing)