

# The Gospel of Luke: THE PERFECT MAN

by Ray C. Stedman

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The third Gospel presents Jesus as the Son of man. That was our Lord's favorite title for himself, one he used more frequently than any other name. As you read the Gospel of Luke, the one you meet here is, of course, the same person you read about in Matthew and Mark. However, in Matthew the emphasis is upon his kingliness. Matthew is the Gospel of the King, and in Mark you see him as the servant of God, busy in his ministry, constantly giving himself. But in Luke, the emphasis is quite different.

Here is the Gospel of the Son of man -- Jesus, the man. His essential manhood is constantly being set forth throughout this Gospel. The key to the Gospel, which forms a brief outline of the book, is found in chapter 19, verse 10. This is a very well-known passage spoken by our Lord, in which he said of himself, "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" {Luke 19:10 RSV}. Or, as the King James version has it, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost" {Luke 19:10 KJV}, which is really a bit more accurate.

He is not talking only about coming to save lost people; he has come to save that which is lost. Well, what is lost? Perhaps you say it is men who are lost. No, it is man, the secret of our humanity. We no longer know how to be what we were intended to be. The whole dilemma of life is that we still have, deep within us, a kind of racial memory of what we ought to be and what we want to be, but we do not know how to accomplish it.

Man has never forgotten God's commandment to subdue and master the earth and to discover all its forces. This is what drives him continually in scientific endeavor to unveil the secrets of nature, master them, and turn them to his own use. But we do not know how to be man. The secret of humanity is lost.

I remember reading some years ago of a group of astronomers who were discussing the progress of the science of astronomy. They were facing the many theories that have to do with the expanding universe and trying to explain some of the phenomena they had discovered in the far reaches of space. No one can work in that field without at times feeling something of the littleness of men and sensing, perhaps, the full thrust of David's question in the eighth Psalm, "When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man...?" {Psa 8:3-4a RSV}. What is man?

In this group of astronomers someone posed that question. "Astronomically speaking," they said, "what is man, compared to the vastness of this universe with its impossibly large distances and its great whirling bodies thousands of times bigger than our sun? Someone stood up and said, "Man is the astronomer." That is the mind of man. Even in its puniness, it is nevertheless coming to grips with these vast questions and issues. That marks something of the mystery of man. There is something unaccountable about man. One of the questions we are puzzling about is, "What is the difference between man and animals?" We are aware that there is a vast gap, but no one can quite put his finger on it. There is a deep and unexplainable mystery about man. It is this lost secret, this impenetrable mystery, that our Lord came to reveal and which he particularly set forth in the Gospel of Luke.

Look again at that sentence: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost," {Luke 19:10 KJV}. In it you have the divisions of this Gospel. First, the Son of man came, and, in the beginning of this Gospel, Luke tells us how he came into the race. Then, he came to seek. The first part of his ministry consists of seeking man out -- of moving into the heart of humanity, penetrating into the emotions, thoughts, and feelings of mankind, discovering the innate centers of human motivation, putting his finger upon them, and showing his mastery over these areas. Finally, he moves on to save by means of the cross and his resurrection.

You can see these divisions clearly. The first three chapters and beginning of the fourth give us the entrance of the Lord into the race, beginning with his genealogy; how he was born and made one of us. Then chapters four through nineteen trace for us the first part of his ministry among men, and especially, his journey toward Jerusalem:

**When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. {Luke 9:51a RSV}**

The record of this journey occupies chapters nine through part of 19, and recounts incidents along the way.

Finally, we read:

**And when he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. {Luke 19:28 RSV}**

That marks the close of his ministry of penetrating into the character and nature of man, and the beginning of his work to save man. It introduces the last section of the book, in which he enters the city, comes to the temple, goes up to the Mount Olives, then to Pilate's judgment hall, to the cross, to the tomb, and to the resurrection day.

Now, as you know, the author of this book is Luke, the great physician, the companion of Paul. It is fitting that Luke should be the one to write this Gospel of the manhood of our Lord. He is writing, as you see in his introduction, to another man, a Greek, about whom we know little or nothing, but who was evidently a friend of Luke (chapter 1, verses 1-4):

**Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely [or accurately] for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been Informed. {Luke 1:1-4 RSV}**

Here is his explanation for writing. Theophilus is evidently someone who had become briefly acquainted with the Christian faith, and Luke now attempts to explain it more fully to him. Luke was a Greek himself, and is writing to a Greek. This is most interesting, for the ideal of the Greek was the perfection of humanity. They sought constantly to discover ways to achieve a perfect humanity. And it is this which is so fully unfolded in the Gospel according to Luke.

In this introduction there is one word to note particularly, because it is obscured by the way it is usually printed. Luke is writing about a person, as much as John wrote in his Gospel about a person. Though it is often obscured, Luke uses the same name that John does. Do you remember how the Gospel of John begins? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," {John 1:1 RSV}. Now notice this -- verse two, "...as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word," {Luke 1:2 RSV}. It is not capitalized here, as it is in John, but there is no good reason why it should not be; it is the same person. Here, evidently, the translators have thought Luke meant the spoken word, but Luke is writing about the final Word from God who reveals the mystery of manhood.

It is impossible to read the Gospel of Luke thoughtfully, and perceptively, without noting some very remarkable similarities in the Epistle to the Hebrews. This is very significant, for it my personal conviction that Luke wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. At least he wrote it in its final form. It is my belief that Paul was the author of the thoughts of Hebrews, and that he probably wrote it originally in the Hebrew language and sent it to the Jews of Jerusalem. But Luke, wanting to make these same marvelous truths available to the Gentile world, translated it from Hebrew into Greek, partially paraphrasing it rather than actually translating it, so that many of his own expressions are found in it. Scholars recognize immediately in dealing with the original language that the thoughts of Hebrews are Paul's, but the words and manner of expression, in the Greek, appear to be Luke's. If that is true, then we have an explanation of some of the remarkable parallels between Hebrews and the Gospel of Luke.

The message of Hebrews declares the amazing fact that Jesus Christ became a man in order to possess men -- in order to enter man. It is built around the symbolism of the Old Covenant, and especially, the tabernacle in the wilderness. Now the tabernacle was God's picture of something, and the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us

what this is. When Moses went up onto the mountain he was given a pattern which he was to follow explicitly in making the tabernacle, a pattern of heavenly things. That does not mean something off in space somewhere, but realities which are invisible to us -- these are the heavenly things, of which the tabernacle was a picture.

As you read Hebrews, you find that the tabernacle was a very remarkable picture of man himself. The tabernacle was built in three sections: there was the outer court, which even the Gentiles could enter, available to everyone; then there was a building in the center divided into two sections -- the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. The sacrifices took place in the outer court. The priest took the blood and carried it into the Holy Place, where it was sprinkled on the altar there. But once a year, the high priest, only under the most precise conditions, was allowed to enter behind the veil, into the Holy of Holies. Apart from that single entrance no one was ever permitted to enter the Holy of Holies on pain of death, for the mystery of the Shekinah, the strange presence of God, dwelt in that sacred, awesome place.

Now, what does all this mean? It is a picture of man -- man in his fallen state. We are that tabernacle in which God was intended to dwell. We have an outer court -- a body -- which is made of the earth, and which puts us in touch with the earth and the material life around us. We also have a Holy Place -- the soul -- the place of intimacy, where the intimate functions of our being take place; the functions of mind, conscience, memory and other mysterious things. It is very difficult to understand what takes place in the soul and men have been struggling for centuries to study this psyche (the Greek word for soul). Psychology, psychiatry -- these are the attempts of man to probe the mystery of the Holy Place.

Then there is that other place, the Holy of Holies, behind the veil, impenetrable. We cannot enter there. We know there is something more, something deeper, underlying the soulish aspects of our lives. Some of the great thinkers of today are recognizing this very fact. Some of the leaders of psychological thought are telling us that we have not explained man when we deal only with the soul -- there is something underneath, but we cannot touch it; it is deep, mysterious, impenetrable. It is behind the veil. That is the place where God intended to dwell, and which is the intended center of human life. It is the spirit of man. Because it is largely inoperative in fallen man, men act like intelligent animals. Yet there is something mysterious, reserved, lying deep in an area which they cannot enter.

In the Gospel of Luke we trace the coming of one who at last penetrates into the secret place, who enters the spirit of man, the place of mystery, and rends the veil, opening it up so that man might discover himself and the mystery of his being, and thus fulfill himself.

That is what man everywhere is desperately looking for. There is nothing more exciting than a sense of fulfillment, of achieving the possibilities of personality. That is what we are all striving for, but we have lost the key, until that key is placed in our hand again by the Son of man who came to reveal and redeem man.

This is the good news of Luke. First, the Lord comes to the outer court, and in the first section, through chapter 4, verse 13, we have his entrance into his world stage. Luke records three things of him there. The first is his virgin birth. We hear a great deal of this today. There are those who openly deny the virgin birth, and who even stand in the pulpits, having taken vows to defend the sacred truths of Christian faith, and openly deny this truth, declaring that it is unimportant and unhistorical. But it is extremely important, it is supremely important. Luke (who was a doctor and, as such, put his physician's seal of approval on this remarkable biological mystery) tells us that here one entered the race who was born of a virgin; because Mary had never known a man. Yet she had a son, and his name was called Jesus. The wonder of that mystery is given in the simple, artlessly told story that Luke presents to us.

There we have it linked with his human genealogy. Have you noticed the difference between Luke's genealogy and Matthew's? Matthew traces him back to the King, to David, but Luke sweeps on into the past and does not stop until he arrives at Adam, whom he calls the son of God -- the first man, the first Adam. Thus he links the first Adam with the second Adam in this Gospel of the Son of man -- the Good News of the solving of the mystery of man.

The second item Luke gives us is the story of our Lord's presentation in the temple at the age of 12, and the way he astounded the doctors with his ability to answer questions -- his mental acumen. Here is the revelation

of amazing mental ability -- his mind presented to us as perfect. Just as his body was perfect, sinless, through the virgin birth, so he is revealed as having a mind that is perfect.

Third, he gives us the story of the temptation in the wilderness, where the Lord was revealed as perfect in the innermost recesses of his spirit. That is indicated in advance by the announcement at his baptism, when he was pronounced to be, "...my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." {Luke 3:22b RSV}. Then we see him passing into the Holy Place, beyond the outer court now, into the center of man's being, life, and thinking, where (as Hebrews tells us) he was "made like his brethren," {Heb 2:17b RSV}. This section begins with the amazing account of his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth, where the book of Isaiah was brought to him, and he found the place and read where it was written,

**"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."** {Luke 4:18- 19 RSV}

He is declaring here what he came to do -- to enter into the poor, the oppressed, the blind, the captives, and to set them free. The whole story of the following chapters is of his entering into the commonplace experiences of man, where men live in darkness, slavery, and death. Soon he begins his journey to Jerusalem, as we have already noted, when he begins to enter fully into the soul of man.

At last, in chapter 19, verse 28, we see him preparing to enter as the great high priest into the Holy of Holies of man, to restore that which has been lost for all these many centuries. You remember that in the Holy of Holies there were only two articles of furniture. There was the Ark of the Covenant, with its mercy seat under the over-arching wings of the cherubim, where God's Shekinah glory dwelt. Then there was the golden altar of incense by means of which the nation was to offer its praise up to God. These two are symbolic of that which is hidden in the depths of man.

The mercy seat speaks of man's relationship with God. Hebrews tells us that it is blood alone which can make that relationship acceptable:

**... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.** {Heb 9:22 RSV}

It was the blood upon the mercy seat that released the forgiveness and grace of God. Our Lord now prepares to enter into that hidden spirit of man and offer his own blood. As we are told in Hebrews:

**... he entered once for all into the Holy Place, [the Holy of Holies] taking ... his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.** {Heb 9:12 RSV}

The altar of incense speaks of the communication between man and God -- the place of prayer. Prayer is the deepest function of the human spirit. There is nothing that goes deeper than that. When you are driven to your knees by despair, or defeat, or need, you discover that you are dealing with the rock-bottom elements of your spirit -- unto God. That is what prayer basically is. Thus in the cross our Lord enters into that very foundational area of human experience.

As you continue through Luke, you see the Lord moving from the Mount of Olives down into the city, cleansing the temple, teaching and preaching in it, returning to the Mount to deliver the Olivet Discourse. Then he goes on to the upper room, to the Passover feast; from there to the Garden of Gethsemane, to Pilate's judgment seat, and from there to the cross, followed by the mob as they take him outside the city gates to nail him on the tree.

As we come to the closing chapters, we learn a remarkable thing:

**It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two.**

**{Luke 23:44-45 RSV}**

Why? Why was this curtain torn? Because the Holy of Holies was now opened up for the first time to the gaze of men. When the Son of man died, God ripped the veil wide open. He entered into the Holy Place, into the Holy of Holies, and the secret of man, the secret of humanity, was unveiled.

Then we have the wonder of the resurrection morning and the account that Luke gives us of the two men who were walking on the road to Emmaus when a stranger appeared to them and talked with them. Oh, the things he said -- the most amazing things -- as he opened to them the Scriptures concerning Christ and what had been predicted of him. They said afterward, when they knew who he was,

**"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" {Luke 24:32b RSV}**

Why? Well, a burning heart is a heart that is caught up with the excitement and glory of a fulfilled humanity. That is where Luke ends his Gospel. The secret is revealed. The man is fully possessed. The Holy of Holies has been entered.

I do not think we could do better in closing our survey of this Gospel than to turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews and read these words:

**Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, {Heb 10:19-20 RSV}**

That is where we stand now. The secret of every human heart is open to anyone who opens his own heart to the Son of man, to the one who penetrates the depths of the human spirit, and from there reestablishes that relationship with God which makes a man what God intended man to be. The writer continues,

**... and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, {Heb 10:21-23a RSV}**

After all, when Christ has entered your human spirit, something has happened to you that no one can gainsay, that no argument can have any force against. You have full assurance, from within; therefore, stand fast without wavering.

**... for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, {Heb 10:23b-24 RSV}**

All the possibility of a fulfilled humanity is available to anyone now, in whom the spirit of Christ dwells. All that you want to be, you can be, in terms of love and good works. The writer goes on...

**... not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. {Heb 10:25 RSV}**

That gathers it up in one brief paragraph -- the strange mystery of the ages -- answering all the questions that have been raised by philosophers and thinkers about the mystery of our race. Why do we act the way we do? Where are we heading? What is the aim of it all? Luke has unveiled it to us in the Gospel of the Son of man -- the Man who unveiled man.

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