

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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## *Editorial*

### FAINT NOT

HAVE YOU NOTICED how often these words occur in Scripture? The Lord Jesus Christ, for instance, says that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1. He commends the Church at Ephesus because they laboured for His sake and had not fainted (Revelation 2:3).

Here is a word we shall do well to note. The pressures of life are tremendous and they take their toll; our own resources are quite inadequate. However, provision has been made for the believer, who is urged to "wait upon the Lord". Though youths unaided may faint, the Christian will have his strength renewed (Isaiah 40:30-31).

When God deals with us and corrects our wayward tendencies we are not to become bitter, developing a grudge. Rather we are to fix our minds on Christ, "lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:3).

With regard to Christian service, the Bible says: "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." There is in all of us the tendency to tire and flag. We need vigorously to resist the temptation to give up. We must not expect Christian work always to be straightforward and encouraging; there are sure to be disappointments to contend with.

The Apostle encouraged his own soul, as well as those at Corinth in these words: "As we have received mercy, we faint not." Amid overwhelming difficulties and discouragements, he persevered, and so by grace can we.

# “Luke, the Beloved Physician”

A Sermon by the Editor

*“Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you”  
(Colossians 4:14)*

LUKE IS ONLY MENTIONED by name three times in the whole of the New Testament; here in our text, in 2 Timothy 4:11, where Paul says, “Only Luke is with me”, and in the Letter to Philemon, verse 24, where he speaks of Luke as “my fellow-labourer”. But Luke was a companion of the Apostle Paul, both in work and in prison. It seems that he possibly joined Paul at Troas, of which we read in Acts 16:8, because that is the first of what are the autobiographical sections of the Acts of the Apostles. Luke joined the Apostle, no doubt, as his physician because Paul had a malady; he spoke of the “thorn in the flesh”, so he was his physician as well as a fellow-worker. He continued with the Apostle Paul over many years. He went, for instance, with Paul up to Jerusalem, and we get that rather graphic phrase in Acts 21:15 where Luke says, “we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem”, but he was not afraid even to go to Rome with the Apostle Paul, and there at the end of the Acts of the Apostles, having survived that tremendous shipwreck (and what an experience that must have been!), Luke records in Acts 28:30: “And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him.”

Concerning Luke's nationality we are not certain; he was possibly of Palestinian ancestry — maybe a Jew of the Dispersion. Tradition says he was a native of Antioch in Syria, and this is possible because Luke goes into great detail concerning the founding of the Christian Church in Antioch and the establishment of the Gospel in that place. But Godet, the commentator, says that Luke was possibly one of the two disciples who went to Emmaus on the first Easter Day. Again, this is possible, because that beautiful incident is recounted in such great detail. But the Christian Church is tremendously indebted to Luke, not only for his missionary endeavours as the companion of Paul, but for his literary labours as the writer of the third Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles.

Let us look at this great man, of whom Paul says he is “Luke, the beloved physician”. We find, for one thing, that *he was a very accomplished personality*, undoubtedly one of the best educated men of his day. From the very beginning of the Christian era, the Gospel has attracted the most learned as well as the very simple-hearted. They have all found their unity in Christ. What a close observer Luke really was! If you turn to the beginning of his Gospel (1:3), he says he “had perfect understanding of all things from the very first”. He takes us into his confidence as to why he sits down to write his Gospel. He says he was dissatisfied with the attempts of others to recount the life and times of Christ. Luke **does** not

**give** that which costs nothing. He did not put pen to paper until innumerable journeys were made and until he had gathered together all the available material. He spared neither time nor trouble for his work; he investigated all the relevant facts and so when we read his Gospel we have the result of diligent research, exhaustive enquiry, scrupulous accuracy and an orderly presentation; "having that perfect knowledge of all things from the very first".

Another thing that strikes us is this, that *he was a self-effacing writer*. He never mentions his own name and he only refers to himself in the Preface, both to his Gospel and to the Acts of the Apostles; and, in the autobiographical section of the Acts, he uses the plural and not the singular. He is a humble and disciplined writer who keeps himself in the background and lets all the light shine on his great theme — the Saviour of men. Today, names count for everything, but how we need the self-effacing quality as it is exhibited in Luke, the beloved physician. He could testify of Christ and keep himself well hidden in the background.

Also, Luke excelled in what we might call three Firsts. He was *the first medical missionary* — "Luke, the beloved physician." Luke, in a very real sense, is a pioneer of a host of dedicated men and women who have devoted their medical knowledge and skill to the alleviation of the under-privileged people of the world.

Now the great Apostle Paul, who spent his days ministering to the souls of men, makes honourable mention of one who ministered to men's bodies — "Luke, the beloved physician" — and when you take up his Gospel (and, indeed, the Acts too) there is abundant evidence of Luke's medical knowledge. Let me give you just one or two illustrations. You remember the incident of Peter's mother-in-law being sick. Luke tells us that she was down with a great fever. Now Mark just says she had a fever. He did not know the difference between one type of fever and another, but this medical man of the day distinguished between a greater or lesser fever. Here is an indication of his knowledge. You remember also the man with leprosy who said to our Lord, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean". Now Luke says that he was a man *full* of leprosy; he was in a very advanced stage, but Matthew and Mark, not being medical men, content themselves with saying he was a leprous man. Then you remember our Lord's parable about it being easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. The word that Luke uses there for "a needle" is "a surgical needle". Interesting, isn't it? All these are marks of Luke's medical knowledge and skill.

Now medicine and surgery, of course, were known before the Christian era, but the sick had never been so systematically cared for as they have since the sojourn of Christ on earth, and someone has said you will not find any ruins of hospitals in Athens or Rome. Such blessings came, as it were, as a sideline to the Gospel. Now here is one of the pioneers of the early Church: Luke, the beloved physician. He was the first medical missionary. Thank God for medical missionaries today who go out to bring relief and healing in the Name of Christ, and use the opportunities of ministry to men's souls at the same time.

Then, Luke is *the first Church historian* and he brought to this task a keen and cultured mind. His is said to be the best Greek in the New Testament. Ernest Renan, the Rationalist, referred to Luke's Gospel as the most literary of all the Gospels and, says this Rationalist (and this is high praise from an unexpected quarter): "Luke's Gospel is the most beautiful book in the world." That is a most remarkable testimony — "the most beautiful book in the world." We would not have expected a man of his thinking to have said anything of the sort. How indebted we are to Luke who, of course, wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So, when you take up this Gospel and the Acts, you have got two documents that are outstanding for their fulness, their accuracy and their continuity, and they give an abundance of historical references. The first medical missionary and the first Church historian.

The third thing is this, *he was the first hymnologist*. You see we are further in his debt for his introduction of inspired songs into his Gospel. We are indebted to Luke for the Magnificat and the Nunc Dimittis and the Benedictus and the Gloria in Excelsis. Take up his Gospel and you will find at the very beginning he starts with a note of praise, for at the nativity a chorus of angelic song sweeps through the midnight sky, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men", and at the end of the Gospel we read that the disciples returned from the Mount of Ascension to Jerusalem with great joy, being continually in the temple praising God. This note of praise and joy continually surfaces in his writings. How much we are indebted to him for these Gospel canticles!

Let me suggest further regarding Luke that *he was essentially a man of prayer*. There are about fifty references in his Gospel to prayer, and someone has said that, like many another doctor, Luke had a favourite prescription and his prescription was prayer. He prescribed that it should be taken as required, being a certain remedy for all ills. That is a good prescription. He was a man of prayer. You will find that he emphasises our Lord's own prayer life. Our Lord prayed at His baptism, before He chose His Apostles, and at the Transfiguration where, says Luke, "as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered". Luke tells us of our Lord's prayer for Simon Peter: "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." It is Luke that tells us that Christ cried on the Cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do", and he tells us at the very end that Jesus said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit". Luke alone gives us three great parables on prayer; that of the importunate friend, the persistent widow and the publican and the pharisee — a man of prayer. How we should copy him in this, because this is the remedy for all ills.

Then, notice that Luke was *a man of very wide sympathy*. Luke, more than any of the Gospel writers, gave prominence to the role of women and their plight, but especially of widows in Eastern society. The respect and attention he pays to women stands out against the callousness of the men of his day. Perhaps you know that the Rabbis in Hebrew liturgy used to thank God that they were not born

**women.** Now the place that Luke accords to women folk in his Gospel shows that, in a very real sense, he was a revolutionary, and shows us that the Gospel had **scally** gripped him; that in Christ there is "neither male nor female: for ye are all **one** in Christ Jesus". Luke is at pains to show that our Lord displayed a totally different attitude to women folk than did his contemporary society. Luke was a man of wide sympathy and he seemed to be very concerned about the socially **under-privileged**. He had a strong sense of social responsibility. So Luke delights to picture our Lord as the Friend of outcasts and sinners. He tells of our Lord's concern for the publican, for the prodigal and for the penitent thief. In the fourth chapter of his Gospel, he quotes those words from Isaiah relating to our Lord: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to **preach** good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are **bound**" (Isaiah 61:1). Luke was a man of wide sympathy. Are our sympathies as **wide**; are we concerned about the unchurched and those that have no interest in the Gospel? Here was a man who was moved to do something about it — a man of wide sympathy.

Also notice, **Luke was a man of insight.** Someone has said that "a minister sees people at their *best*, that a lawyer sees people at their *worst*, but a doctor sees people *as they really are*". If you read the Gospel with that in mind you will see how Luke really sees people as they are, in effect. So he writes two books about people as they are, without it being touched-up in the least bit. He shows us saints like Zacharias and Stephen and Barnabas, and he shows us sinners like Zaccheus, the corrupt civil servant, the dying thief, Saul of Tarsus, and he discloses the weaknesses as well as the virtues of the early believers. Yes, he was a man of insight.

Finally, **he was a man of steadfastness.** He was utterly dependable. When other of Paul's friends were called to other spheres of service Luke remains with the Apostle as the faithful companion, and so Paul has to write on the brink of eternity when he was waiting to face the executioner's block: "Only Luke is with me." "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." (2 Timothy 4:10 and 11). There is Luke with the Apostle right at the end: "Only Luke is with me." What pathetic words they are! But what strength would Luke impart to the Apostle! Indeed, Dean Farrar says that, "Luke's friendship was one of Paul's richest blessings in a sorely troubled life". He remained with Paul through thick and thin, through weal and woe — while others, in the interests of safety, fled, Luke stayed on. He was a singularly gifted and lovable character — a man who was unconsciously great — "Luke, the beloved physician."

Read Luke's Gospel again and thank God that Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave to us this priceless document, or documents — the Gospel and the Acts — and let us appreciate the Scriptures even more than we do. Thank God for such men whom He raised up as Luke, the beloved physician — a man of prayer, a man of insight, a man of wide sympathy, a man of steadfastness.

We cannot follow Luke in everything he did but we certainly can be men and women of prayer — men and women of wide sympathy — men and women of insight, and certainly men and women of steadfastness — those who go on to the very end, whoever else may fail and drop out by the wayside.

M.H.



## For Younger Readers

CARINE MACKENZIE

### SOWING THE SEEDS

THE OTHER DAY I bought a packet of sunflower seeds. In the one little packet were 75 seeds — the potential for growing 75 big sunflowers. The instructions on the back told us when, where and how to plant them and said that each plant could grow as tall as one and a half to three metres high. The picture on the packet looks most impressive and I am hoping to have some lovely sunflowers in my garden in the summer months.

If I keep the seeds in the packet I will not get any flowers. The seeds have to be planted in the ground. They also need plenty of water and the warmth of the sunshine. Only then will they grow and produce sunflowers. If you drive through France in the summer you may see whole fields of sunflowers. These are grown by the farmer to produce a crop of seeds which will then make sunflower oil. The little seed in the field does not only produce a beautiful flower but a useful crop.

The Word of God is like a little seed. If we keep our Bible, like a closed packet of seeds, in a cupboard or on the shelf, it will not produce any fruit. Merely owning a Bible is not enough. The Word of God has to be planted in our minds and take root in our hearts. The warmth of the Sun of Righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the watering of God the Holy Spirit will cause the seed of the Word to take root in our hearts and to grow good fruit in our lives. The Psalmist wrote: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" in Psalm 119:11. What a difference that would make in our lives if God's Word was influencing us so much that we hated sin and turned from it. It is good for us to try to memorise God's Word and to think about it whenever we can. God the Holy Spirit will bring to our memories the things that we have learned. "The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). If the Word of God is not already in our mind it cannot be brought back to our memory.