

CHAPTER FIVE

Luke-Acts

It has frequently been said, echoing the words of an influential English commentary, that Luke has 'no theology of the cross'. If we were to accept that judgement, there would be no justification for this chapter! But can it be right?

If we look more closely at the original comment, we find that it contains an important qualification: 'There is indeed no *theologia crucis* beyond the affirmation that the Christ must suffer, since so the prophetic scriptures had foretold.'¹ We have seen already that the narratives of both Mark and Matthew are dominated by the belief that Jesus had to suffer because the scriptures decreed it, so that it is hardly surprising if this same theme plays an important role in Luke also. It is important, moreover, to recognize that this affirmation is in itself an interpretation – in other words, a 'theology' – of the cross. But Professor Creed's comment was intended to point to what he felt to be a lack in Luke's gospel – to the absence of what he terms 'Pauline interpretation of the Cross', and to the fact that Luke omits crucial words from the sayings in Mark 10.45 and 14.24. How significant are these omissions?

We will return to this question in a moment, but first let us consider what Luke *does* say about Jesus' death – both in references to the fulfilment of scripture and in other ways.

We find the first hint of the passion already in 2.34f., where Simeon tells Mary that Jesus is destined to be a sign that will be rejected, and warns her that a sword will pierce her soul. This prophecy is one of a number made by Spirit-filled persons in Luke 1–2 (Mary, Zechariah, Simeon and Anna) whose words, like those of the angels and the Spirit-filled Jesus, are authoritative announcements of what will take place, and thus the equivalent of scripture. Like many

of the references to scripture, this passage gives no hint as to *why* Jesus must be rejected.

A second premonition of the passion occurs in Luke 4.28–30, at the conclusion of Jesus' sermon in Nazareth. In that sermon Jesus claims that scripture has been fulfilled – the Spirit of the Lord rests upon him, and he has been anointed to carry out the tasks described in Isaiah 61. He goes on to suggest that his message will be rejected by his own people, since 'no prophet is recognized in his own country', and that, like Elijah and Elisha in times past, his mission will be to Gentiles. This idea is remarkable in itself, since Luke depicts Jesus as confining his ministry to Jews, and it is only in his second volume, Acts, that Gentiles receive the gospel. Jesus' words therefore point forward to what will happen after his death and resurrection. His words infuriate the congregation in the synagogue, who drive him out of town and attempt to lynch him, but he mysteriously escapes. The story is thus a mini-presentation of the passion narrative, with one interesting reversal: instead of Jesus' death and resurrection leading to the mission to the Gentiles, it is the suggestion that Jesus is bringing salvation to the Gentiles that rouses his countrymen's fury and leads them to attempt to kill him.

The first clear prediction of the passion occurs in Luke 9.22, the equivalent of Mark 8.31. But Luke omits Mark's comment that Jesus spoke plainly, as well as Peter's protest and Jesus' rebuke. He gives no indication here as to the disciples' reaction, but after the second and third predictions (9.44; 18.34) he emphasizes that they did not understand what Jesus was saying and that they could not grasp it because its meaning was concealed from them. Luke also omits the conversation between Jesus and his disciples which follows the transfiguration in Mark, in which Jesus points forward to the resurrection and links the sufferings of Elijah with those of the Son of man. Instead, he tells us the subject of conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the mountain: they spoke, he says, of his departure, which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (9.31). The term translated 'departure' is in Greek *exodus*, and though it is occasionally used elsewhere of someone's death it is not the normal term: it has clearly been used here in order to link Jesus' death with the Exodus, the great redemptive action of God which rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. This is confirmed by the fact that Jesus is said to be about to 'accomplish' or 'fulfil' it: the verb *pleroō* used here is the

¹ J. M. Creed, *The Gospel according to St Luke*, London 1930, p. lxxii.

word used frequently in the New Testament of 'fulfilling the scriptures'. Jesus' death, then, is seen by Luke as a new Exodus, a great redemptive act whose results will presumably be parallel to those achieved by the Exodus from Egypt.

A significant turning-point takes place in Luke's narrative at 9.51, at the beginning of a long section which is usually termed the 'travel narrative'. It begins in solemn style: 'When the time approached for him to be taken up . . .'. The introductory phrase is literally 'It came to pass in the completion of the days', suggesting once again the idea of fulfilment: the time appointed had arrived. It is the time appointed for Jesus' 'assumption': the word *analempsis*, lit. a 'taking-up', is a rare one, but is apparently used here of Jesus being taken up to heaven. In setting out to Jerusalem, therefore, Jesus has his eyes set on the ultimate goal – not just the cross but on the vindication which lies beyond.

Luke 9.18–51 thus occupies a pivotal position in Luke's story. Within the space of a few verses, Jesus has been recognized as Messiah by Peter and declared to be Son of God by a voice from heaven; he has spoken to his disciples twice about the future sufferings of the Son of man, and has discussed his 'exodus' with Moses and Elijah on the mountain. Throughout this section the themes of glory and suffering are intertwined even more clearly than in the Markan and Matthaean parallels. Jesus is Messiah – but as the Son of man he must suffer; the Son of man will come in glory – but he will be ashamed of those who were not prepared to suffer for Jesus' sake; Jesus is revealed as God's Son in glory – while discussing the necessity for his own death; he sets out to Jerusalem – and his goal is the 'taking-up' which lies beyond the cross. Woven into this is the theme of discipleship: the disciples, like Jesus himself, must be prepared to lose their lives if they want to save them (9.23–27). This passage is almost identical with Mark 8.34ff., but Luke makes one significant addition in 9.23, where Jesus' followers are challenged to take up the cross 'daily'. The addition blunts the metaphor, since one can be crucified only once – though Paul is led to make similar exaggerated statements (Rom. 8.36; 1 Cor. 15.30f.; 2 Cor. 4.10–12). But Luke is not watering down the saying – rather he is spelling out just what renouncing self may entail: those who wish to be Jesus' followers must be prepared to accept his way of self-sacrifice as their calling.² They must learn, too, that

greatness belongs to those who are content to be least (9.46–48). The disciples are slow learners, however; they cannot understand Jesus' words about his own suffering (9.45), and neither do they understand their own calling, for they start arguing about which of them is the greatest (9.46). The disciples fail in another way in this section also, first in that they are unable to exorcise a demon (9.37–43), even though Jesus gave them the authority to do so in 9.1, and then because, having failed themselves, they try to prevent someone else casting out demons (9.49–50).

The juxtaposition of the first of these two stories – the healing of the epileptic child – with those of Peter's confession and the transfiguration, makes us aware that the authority over demons which Jesus possesses is of a piece with his Messiahship-through-suffering: Jesus has authority over the demons because he is the obedient Son of God who accepts God's way for him. In Luke 4, Satan tempted Jesus to prove his authority 'as Son of God' by exercising power and accepting human glory. In 9.35, Luke reminds us again that Jesus is God's Son – and immediately afterwards we are told how he defeated a minion of Satan and healed his victim (9.37–43). If the disciples fail to drive out the demon, is this because they cannot comprehend Jesus' teaching about suffering (9.43b–45) and are still hankering for human glory (9.46–48), and so are unable to exercise his authority? Luke has followed Mark's order throughout this section, but by cutting out Mark 9.9–13, 21–24, 26–29, and by adding the references to the Exodus and the taking-up, he has made the links between glory and suffering even more stark, and reminded us that what is taking place in Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection is also a defeat of Satan.³

We are not surprised, therefore, when we come to Luke's passion narrative, to find that Judas is in the power of Satan (22.3). Luke thus offers an explanation for Judas' behaviour – but far more important, he reminds us that through Jesus' death, Satan is being defeated. To be sure, Satan is seen here as the agent of Jesus' death, but in attempting to destroy Jesus he is in fact bringing about his own destruction.⁴

² A similar emphasis is found in the saying in Luke 14.26f.

³ In a famous study, *The Theology of Saint Luke*, E. Tr. 1960, Hans Conzelmann argued that Satan was 'absent' from Luke's gospel between 4.13 and 22.3. It seems more accurate to say that during the ministry of Jesus he is in retreat. See 10.17f. and 11.14–20.

⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 2.8.

Before that happens, however, he is at work, not simply through Judas, but also through the machinations of the Jewish leaders, for this is their hour, and 'the hour of the power of darkness' (22.53). Even the disciples are subject to Satan's attacks and will succumb to his temptations, though they will later be restored (22.31f.).

Before we come to the passion narrative itself, however, we find more ominous hints of what lies ahead in Jerusalem. 13.22 marks a half-way stage on the journey, as Luke reminds us that Jesus is travelling towards Jerusalem, and in 13.31–35 we are reminded of what will happen when he arrives. A group of Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him and urge him to leave his territory,⁵ though their motives are not clear and Luke does not explain whether they are genuinely concerned for Jesus' safety or simply want to get rid of him. Jesus' response, enigmatic though it is, nevertheless indicates that he will not be deterred from his chosen course by Herod's wiles, which cannot in any case succeed, since 'it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem'. He will leave Galilee at the appointed time, and not when Herod or the Pharisees want him to. 'Today and tomorrow' – the phrase indicates that the time is limited, though imprecise – Jesus will continue his work of exorcism and healing, and on the third day he will reach his goal (*teleioumai*); this verb may perhaps mean simply 'I am completed/perfected' – in other words, 'my ministry is done'. We note once again the close link between Jesus' healings and exorcisms and his death.

This prophecy of what awaits him in Jerusalem is followed by a lament over Jerusalem – the city that 'murders the prophets and stones those who are sent to her'. Because Jerusalem has failed to respond, her temple is forsaken by God. Once again, the saying is enigmatic, but one thing is clear to us: Jerusalem has rejected God's messengers in the past, and is about to reject Jesus also.

In 18.31 we have the parallel to Mark's third prediction of the passion and resurrection, and the end of the journey is almost in sight. In 19.28–40 Jesus enters Jerusalem, hailed as king by his disciples. The Pharisees in the crowd protest, but Jesus refuses to silence his followers, and utters another

lament over the city which has failed to recognize the time of God's visitation and as a result will be razed to the ground.

After these two hints that Jesus' fate is closely linked with that of Jerusalem, we are not surprised to find that Luke spells this out very clearly in 21.20ff. Perhaps it is because he has made the link clear in other ways that he omits Mark's story of the withered fig tree – though he records a parable of a fruitless fig tree, a less dramatic story with a similar moral, in 13.6–9.

Luke also omits the story of Jesus' anointing by a woman, having already used a similar story (about a woman who anoints Jesus' feet) in 7.36–39. We move straight from the introductory statement that Passover was approaching (22.1f.) and the account of Judas' treachery (22.3–6) to the preparations for the meal (22.7–13) and the account of the meal itself (22.14–38). There are several remarkable things about Luke's version of the Last Supper. Jesus begins by telling the disciples how he has longed to eat this Passover before he suffers, and though the form of the saying suggests that his wish remains unfulfilled, in the context Luke has given it he presumably thinks that the meal in the upper room is a Passover. But the emphasis lies on future expectation: Jesus will not eat the Passover again until the meal finds its fulfilment in the Kingdom of God (v. 16). In a parallel saying in 22.17f. he says that he will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God comes. Jesus tells the disciples to take the cup he offers them and divide it among themselves, and we are left wondering whether Luke means that Jesus himself abstained. Did he think of Jesus as sharing in the meal or merely presiding? Perhaps the hints that he did not himself eat and drink reflect the beliefs of the Christian community that the meal is now symbolic of his death. It is at any rate clear that when Jesus declares that he will not share in the Passover or drink wine until the Kingdom of God is here, he expresses his confidence in God's final vindication; moreover, in stressing that he will not eat or drink again, while telling the disciples to share the cup, there is a hint that responsibility has now passed to them.

One of the strange features of Luke's account of the Last Supper is that the cup is passed round before the bread. In many mss, however, this is then followed by a *second* cup, while others break off after the words 'This is my body'. There is much debate about whether the shorter or the longer text is the original. The disputed passage, 22.19b–20,

⁵ According to Luke's narrative Jesus is no longer in Galilee. Either Luke, in placing the incident here, is thinking of Jesus as in Peraea, which was also under Herod Antipas' jurisdiction, or – more likely – this is an example of his scanty geographical knowledge.

is close to what we find in Mark and Matthew, though it adds the idea (found also in Paul) that the bread is shared as a 'memorial' of Jesus.

Another remarkable feature of Luke's narrative is the dispute between the disciples that takes place in 22.24–30, immediately after Jesus has spoken about his betrayer (vv. 21–23). At this solemn moment, when Jesus has been talking to his disciples about his death, they start arguing about which of them is the greatest! Nevertheless, Jesus' response is entirely appropriate to the context: 'Who is greater?' he asks, 'The one who sits at table, or the one who serves? Surely it is the one who sits at table. But I am among you as one who serves.' The passage is parallel to the one we find in Mark 10.42–45, but the bare reference to Jesus serving others replaces the famous saying in Mark 10.45: 'For even the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.'

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, some commentators have considered Luke's omission of the Markan saying at this point to be extremely significant. Certainly it seems strange that he did not use it, for the reference to Jesus' death would be highly relevant at this point. But did he *deliberately* reject it? It is important to recognize that in much of the passion narrative Luke seems to be following a tradition other than Mark's, and in this section (22.24–30) he is certainly not using Mark, since both the setting and the wording are very different from Mark's. But if Luke is here following a non-Markan tradition, why should we expect him to remember that Mark has used a similar story in another context or consider it necessary to add bits of the Markan version to his account? Would Luke not have been astonished to be told that he had deliberately cut out the saying about Jesus' death being a ransom for others? Moreover, if we read on in Luke's story, we find that the suggestion that Luke might have 'objected' to Mark's saying is contradicted by Jesus' next words. Jesus has already told the disciples that they must not take Gentile kings as their model (v. 25); the example he offers them is his own (v. 27). Now he goes on to describe the community in which they seek to be great as *his* kingdom, and says that he is entrusting to them the kingdom which his Father had entrusted to him. So by his death Jesus makes his disciples sharers in his kingdom: they will eat and drink at his table, and rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. The language may be different from the famous saying in Mark 10.45 about

the Son of man giving his life as a ransom for many, but the meaning is very close indeed.

One remarkable feature of Jesus' promise here is that it is made to the disciples on the basis of the fact that they have stood firmly by him in his times of trial. The irony of the words at this point in the story is striking, for they are addressed to men who are about to desert Jesus – as the very next saying, in 22.31–4, points out! The promise accords with Jesus' earlier challenges to his disciples to renounce themselves, shoulder the cross and follow him, and with the assurances that those who do so will be recognized by the Son of man.⁶ Up to this point in the narrative, of course, the disciples *have* (with the exception of Judas, whose betrayal is predicted immediately before this) remained loyal to Jesus. In Matthew, the promise that the disciples will rule the tribes of Israel forms part of Jesus' response to Peter when he reminds Jesus that the disciples have left everything to follow him.⁷ In using the saying here, Luke had to solve a problem: how could the promise be addressed to the disciples, *excluding Judas*? His solution was to omit the word 'twelve' before 'thrones', but the 'twelve' before 'tribes' remains. In its Lukan context, the saying does three things: first, it underlines the failure of the disciples, who in the event fail to stand firm; second, it is a challenge to would-be disciples to remain loyal to Jesus throughout the times of trial, and not to succumb to Satan's temptations, as did the twelve; third, knowing the rest of the story as we do, it is a hint that there is forgiveness and renewal, even for those who deny Jesus and run away: his promise stands, in spite of human weakness and failure.

The scene in the upper room ends with a conversation which contrasts the welcome given to Jesus' disciples during his ministry with the enmity that confronts them now. Conditions have changed – now they need not only money to support themselves, but swords to defend themselves. These words presumably reflect the realities of discipleship in the post-resurrection period. The experience of the disciples is linked here to that of their Lord: they will be treated as evil-doers because that is how he is treated, and this is because the words of scripture have to be fulfilled, namely that 'he was reckoned among transgressors' – treated, that is, as a common criminal. The response of the

⁶ Luke 9.23–6; 12.8f. 14.27; 18.28–30.

⁷ Matt. 19.27–30; cf. Luke 18.28–30.

disciples, who (somewhat surprisingly!) produce two swords, together with Jesus' enigmatic reply – 'Enough!' – indicate their total incomprehension.

This is the only occasion in the synoptic gospels on which an explicit quotation from Isaiah 53 is applied to the death of Jesus – a remarkable fact, since to us this is the passage of scripture which above any other appears to be an appropriate description of the meaning of Jesus' sufferings. Even more remarkable is the fact that the quotation here is in no way applied to the *significance* of his death, but simply to the fact that he was put to death in the company of malefactors. When we remember that on the only other occasion in the gospels on which an explicit quotation from Isaiah 53 is used – in Matt. 8.17 – it refers to Jesus' acts of healing, we begin to realize that the early Christian communities did not always use scripture in the ways that seem to us to be obvious and appropriate! Luke's use of Isaiah 53 at this point, without drawing out the passage's deeper theological significance, is another reason why some commentators have regarded Luke as lacking a 'theology of the cross'. But since the other evangelists do not quote the passage at all, he cannot be understood as rejecting anything. It is better to recognize what Luke *has* done, rather than criticizing him for not interpreting the passage in the way we expect. What we have here is an example of the way in which the early Christian community searched the scriptures and interpreted them as having been fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The story of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (22.39–46) is similar to what we read in Mark and Matthew, but it is much shorter, since in Luke's account Jesus retreats to pray only once. The description of Jesus' agony in 22.43f. is unique to Luke: an angel appears from heaven in order to support Jesus, and sweat falls from him like drops of blood. But these two verses are missing from many early mss, and are almost certainly a late addition to the text. They remind us of the reality of the struggle: in spite of the evangelists' insistence that Jesus 'had' to die, the possibility of avoiding the cup of suffering was a real option at the time.

Luke's account of Judas' betrayal (22.47f.) is also much briefer than those in Matthew and Mark, since he omits the arrangement between Judas and the authorities, and it is by no means clear whether Judas actually kisses Jesus, or whether Jesus prevents him. But Luke *has* told us that the

disciples possess two swords, so that we are not unduly surprised when they produce one. Only Luke tells us that Jesus healed the man's ear: since this had been cut off, the detail appears to be a naive legendary addition, but perhaps Luke means no more than that Jesus staunched the flow of blood. In either case, the incident demonstrates the salvific power of Jesus, even toward those who are determined to destroy him.

Much of the material that follows is similar to that found in Mark and Matthew, though events are recounted in a different order. First Luke deals with Peter (22.54–62), which means that the stories of Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial are told in close proximity; nothing is said about the desertion of the other disciples. Then we are told about the mockery by Jesus' guards (22.63–5); this occupies the rest of the night. Luke is perhaps aware of the historical problems in Mark's reference to a night session of the Sanhedrin: at any rate, Luke tells us that the meeting took place at first light. He says nothing about the charges and witnesses mentioned in Mark and Matthew, and goes straight to the question posed by the high priest as to whether Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus' response is indirect: 'If I tell you,' he says, 'You will not believe me; and if I question you, you will not reply. But from now on the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God.' When the members of the Sanhedrin ask him 'Are you the Son of God then?' he replies 'You have said that I am'. What does Luke intend us to understand by these enigmatic words? They are hardly a clear affirmative reply. Yet Jesus' questioners certainly treat them as affirmative. The form of wording throws the responsibility back onto his interrogators – 'It is you yourselves who have said what I am'. As in Mark and Matthew, the truth about Jesus is found in the mouth of Jesus' accusers, who refuse to accept that it is the truth.

In the very next scene (23.1–5), Jesus makes a very similar response to Pilate when the latter asks him whether he is king of the Jews, but this time his reply is not taken seriously, and Pilate decides to dismiss the case. Luke now adds a story that is not found in the other gospels (23.6–12): Pilate tries to get rid of the problem by sending Jesus to Herod, on the pretext that, as a Galilean, Jesus fell under his jurisdiction, but Herod, after attempting to interrogate Jesus and mocking him as an imposter, sends him back to Pilate. The story serves to confirm the innocence of Jesus: neither Pilate nor Herod considers the charges brought against Jesus

by the Jewish leaders to have any foundation (23.13–16) but, as in the other gospels, the leaders force Pilate's arm and get their way. At this point in the story Luke suggests, even more clearly than do Mark and Matthew, that Barabbas is released *instead of* Jesus. He makes no attempt, as they do, to explain why the Jewish people might expect the Roman prefect to release any of his prisoners, so that the demand in v. 18 comes out of the blue: 'Away with this man! Release to us Barabbas!' Though Barabbas is irrelevant to the accusations made against Jesus, and though Pilate protests that Jesus himself is innocent, he nevertheless releases Barabbas and 'hands over Jesus (the verb is once again *paradidōmi*) to their will. Thus the way in which Luke tells the story points us to its theological significance: the one who has done no wrong dies in place of the man who has been justly convicted as worthy of death.

Luke's account of the crucifixion is punctuated by passages which have no parallel in the other gospels. The first comes in 23.27–31: as Jesus leaves the city, he is accompanied by a large crowd, and by women lamenting his fate, whom Jesus warns of the still worse fate that is to come on them and on their children. We are reminded of the occasion when Jesus rode into the city, accompanied by another crowd, and wept over Jerusalem, predicting its coming destruction. Once again we see the link in the evangelist's mind between the rejection of Jesus by the Jerusalem hierarchy and the city's destruction, which is interpreted as her punishment.

The second addition is found at 23.34, where Jesus prays for his executioners: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing'. The words are missing from many mss and may well be an early addition to the text, but if so they accord well with Luke's approach. The notion that those who put Jesus to death were unaware of what they were doing is found again in Acts 3.17; 13.27, and throughout both Luke and Acts there is constant emphasis on the theme of forgiveness.

The third addition is found in 23.39–43. In Mark and Matthew, both the criminals executed with Jesus taunt him, but in Luke only one of them does so, while the other acknowledges his own guilt and points out that Jesus has done nothing wrong: once again we are reminded of Jesus' innocence. The man asks Jesus to remember him when he enters his kingdom. Whether Luke thinks of the words as spoken wistfully or seriously is not clear and in any case

unimportant, since in this context they are an implicit christological confession, similar to that uttered by the centurion in Mark: Jesus is now at the point of death – yet this man speaks of him entering into his kingdom! Here is faith indeed, and his faith is instantly rewarded by Jesus' promise: 'Today you will be with me in Paradise'. There is no need to wait for some future 'coming' of the Son of man to earth, since 'from now on the Son of man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God' (22.69). If the criminal's words are an implicit recognition of who Jesus is, Jesus' response is an indication of the salvation and forgiveness which he offers to those who repent.

In Mark and Matthew, Jesus' last words are taken from the opening verses of Psalm 22 (Mark 15.34; Matt. 27.46). Luke tells us that his final words echoed a verse from Psalm 31 expressing confidence in God, and so avoids the suggestion that he died in despair. The centurion, 'seeing what happened', responded, not (as in Mark and Matthew) with a confession that Jesus is Son of God, but with the declaration that he must have been innocent. So now Pilate, Herod, one of the men who shared Jesus' death and his executioner have all declared him to be innocent. What was it that the centurion saw? Presumably Luke is thinking of the eclipse (vv. 44f.) and the manner of Jesus' death. The statement in v. 47 that he glorified God strikes one as absurd: why should he praise God that an innocent man has been put to death in this barbaric way? The words point to the hidden irony in the story: to human eyes, what has happened looks like utter disaster, but to the eyes of faith it is a cause for praising God. In contrast to the centurion, the crowd which had gathered for the spectacle, presumably expecting to enjoy it, went home beating their breasts, though whether this was because they recognized that an innocent man had been put to death or because, having witnessed the eclipse, they now expected retribution, is not clear.

Like the other evangelists, Luke tells of the visit of the women to the tomb on Easter Sunday morning, but the two angels who meet them there do not tell them to send the disciples to Galilee, and the appearances of the Risen Lord take place in or near Jerusalem. The heavenly messengers remind the women that Jesus himself had spoken of his betrayal, death and resurrection. This scene at the empty tomb is the first of three in which Luke is able to remind his readers that the death and resurrection of Jesus were

foretold, not simply by scripture, but by Jesus himself. This is the substance of the angels' words to the women, who report them to the disciples – but the men refuse to believe them.

The slowness of Jesus' followers to believe that he has been raised is a constant theme in this final chapter in Luke. In the second scene (24.13–32), Jesus meets two of them as they travel to Emmaus. 'How dull you are!' he exclaims. 'How slow to believe all that the prophets said! Was not the Messiah bound to suffer in this way before entering into his glory?' He then, says Luke, spelt out this theme to them 'from the whole of scripture'.

In the final scene, the two travellers rush back to Jerusalem, and are greeted by the news that the Lord has appeared to Simon. But when Jesus himself appears among them the disciples think that he is a ghost, whereupon he upbraids them for their lack of faith (24.36–43). This time he reminds them of his own teaching as well as that of scripture, since he had explained to them, he says, how everything written about him in the law and the prophets and psalms had to be fulfilled (24.44–6).

By including conversations between the Risen Lord and the disciples, Luke is able to spell out the significance of what had taken place in a way that Matthew and Mark were unable to do. His narrative thus helps us to understand the way in which the Christian community thought out the implications of its faith during the earliest period. The emphasis given to the theme of fulfilment throughout these resurrection scenes reflects the experience of the earliest believers. As they pored over their scriptures and recalled the words of Jesus they understood them in a new way: 'so that's what it means (or what he meant)!' they must have exclaimed, again and again. The doubts and fears of the disciples, too, would often be shared by Christians who had not seen the Risen Lord. In Luke's narrative, it is only the women who apparently have no doubts, and who accept the angels' message without even meeting Jesus (vv. 6–10)! The disciples refuse to believe their story (24.11), the two travellers fail to recognize Jesus throughout their journey (24.16), and the company in Jerusalem have doubts and are incredulous (24.38, 41). Like the other evangelists, Luke freely acknowledges the difficulty of believing in the truth of the resurrection.

The fact that the eyes of Cleopas and his companion were opened when Jesus broke bread and offered it to them

would also correspond with the experience of the early communities. For them, fellowship meals were certainly of great importance⁸ and were occasions, not simply to meet with fellow-Christians, but to celebrate the presence of the Risen Lord.

Finally, we find indications in this chapter of the ways in which Luke's community interpreted and understood the death and resurrection of Jesus. 'Was it not necessary,' asks Jesus of Cleopas and his companion, 'that the Messiah should suffer these things and so enter into his glory?' We have already met this idea that Jesus' death is a path to glory in 9.51. But what, we want to know, did his death and resurrection *achieve*? Perhaps the answer is given us in 24.47, where the Risen Lord tells the disciples that in his name they are to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins to all the nations: what Jesus himself proclaimed during his ministry⁹ is now available for all – through his death *and* resurrection.

* * *

In this final chapter of his gospel, Luke helps his readers to look back on the death of Jesus and to see its true meaning with the eyes of faith. But Luke, alone among the evangelists, has a second opportunity – in the Acts of the Apostles – of spelling out how the death and resurrection of Jesus were now understood. In the early chapters of Acts we find a series of speeches, attributed to Peter, which summarize the Christian gospel, and central to them all is the theme of Jesus' death and resurrection. Three points are made: first, 'you' (the audience, i.e. the Jews) are responsible for his death, having handed him over to Pilate with the demand that he crucify him;¹⁰ second, God raised him from the dead – in confirmation of which, appeal is made, either to scripture or to the apostles as witnesses;¹¹ third, in his name, forgiveness and salvation are now offered to those who repent.¹² In chapter 13, Paul is said to have made the same points in a sermon in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch.¹³

It is noticeable that in all these passages, the emphasis is on the resurrection, for while Jesus' death is said to be in

⁸ Acts 2.42, 46; 20.7.

⁹ Luke 4.18; 5.20; 7.47–50; 15; 19.1–10.

¹⁰ Acts 2.23; 3.13f.; 4.10f.; 5.30; 10.39.

¹¹ 2.24–32; 3.15; 4.10f.; 5.30; 10.40f.

¹² 2.38f.; 3.19–21; 4.12; 5.31; 10.43.

¹³ 13.28f.; 30–7, 38f.

accordance with God's plan or with what the prophets foretold¹⁴ – though where is not specified – the resurrection is described as the direct action of God himself, reversing what men have done: Jesus is now enthroned as Christ and Lord, leader and saviour.¹⁵ The forgiveness and salvation offered in Jesus' name seem to stem from this, rather than from his death.¹⁶ These passages correspond with the pattern set out in Luke 24.26: it was necessary for the Christ to suffer before he could enter into his glory.

There are two passages in Acts, however, which refer to the death of Jesus without specifically mentioning the resurrection. The first is found in 8.26–40, where the Ethiopian eunuch is said to have been reading from Isaiah 53. Remarkably, the section of that chapter that is quoted – part of vv. 7–8 – breaks off just before the statement that the righteous one who suffers unjustly is put to death for the transgressions of others. The passage is used as a simple proof-text, showing that the prophets spoke beforehand of the sufferings of the Messiah, but there is no hint of the rich theological meaning to be found in that passage. Knowing as we do the centuries-long tradition which has taken the description of *vicarious* suffering in Isaiah 53 as a prophecy of the atoning death of Christ, we are surprised that Luke apparently ignores this theme. We have to remember, however, that he associates salvation with the whole ministry of Jesus, and that the message of repentance and forgiveness proclaimed by the apostles arises from the fact that Jesus has been *raised* from the dead.

The second reference to Christ's death occurs in Acts 20.28, where Paul is said to have urged the elders at Miletus to 'care for the church of God, which he obtained for himself through the blood of his Own'.¹⁷ The word 'blood' is used here as a synonym for 'death': it is to the death of

¹⁴ 2.23; 3.18; 13.27, 29.

¹⁵ 2.36; 5.31.

¹⁶ The theme of the resurrection is also central in Paul's speech at Athens in 17.18, 22–34. So, too, 26.23. Cf. also 23.6–10 and 24.10–21, though here the issue is the general resurrection, rather than the resurrection of Christ himself.

¹⁷ There is a difficult textual problem here. Some mss read 'the church of the Lord', in which case the final phrase is understood in its more natural sense as meaning 'his own blood'. The alternative reading, 'the church of God', is the more difficult (and therefore perhaps more likely to be the original) because it involves understanding the Greek word *idios* as meaning 'his Own [Son]'. It has to be added that though Paul himself uses

Christ that the Church owes its existence. We have met the idea that a new community is established through Jesus' death already, in Luke 22.28–30 and 23.42f. If it is unusual to find a reference to his death without any mention of the resurrection, this is perhaps partly explained by the fact that in this passage Paul is contemplating his own future sufferings and death, and also the trials which are going to come on the Christian community he is leaving behind.

Reference to Paul's own sufferings reminds us, finally, of another way in which Luke, alone among the evangelists, is able to draw out the implications of Jesus' teaching about his sufferings and death. All the evangelists tell us that Jesus warned his disciples that if they were to follow him they must be prepared to share his fate: Luke alone is able to show how they did in fact do so. Thus we read how Peter and John, Paul and Silas are thrown into prison,¹⁸ how Paul and Silas are flogged;¹⁹ how Stephen is stoned to death and how James, brother of John, is beheaded.²⁰ At other times, the apostles have to flee for their lives.²¹ Nor are 'ordinary' Christians immune from attack.²² Luke and his readers are in no danger of falling into the heresy that supposes that the sufferings and death of Christ secure his followers from danger and pain, suffering and disaster. The joy that they experience comes to them only because they are prepared to take up the cross and follow their master on the road to Calvary.

the expression 'the church of God' in his epistles, the alternative phrase, 'the church of the Lord', is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, though it does occur in the LXX.

¹⁸ Acts 5.17f.; 12.3–5; 16.23.

¹⁹ 16.22f.

²⁰ 7.57–60; 12.2.

²¹ 9.23–25; 14.5f.; 17.5–10. Cf. 21.30–36; 23.12–30.

²² 8.1; 9.1–2; 22.19; 18.17.