

2.2 The Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

The passage following is one of the many 'bridge' passages which provide a link between one scene and the one following. The bridge passage Lk 4.14-17, firstly tells the audience that Jesus, moved again by the Spirit, now returns to Galilee, and second provides a summary about Jesus teaching activity which is presented as taking place in the 'their' synagogues and positively received.

In Lk 4.16-30 is chosen by Luke as 'opening scene', as first detailed account of Jesus public ministry. In this he differs from the three other Gospels. In fact they all focus on a different aspect of Jesus' ministry in their presentation of the opening of scene of Jesus' public ministry (cf. Mt 5-7; Mk 1.21-28; John 2.1-11).

In this opening scene the narrator presents in an exemplary way the core of Jesus' teaching and ministry. In fact, Jesus' ministry as a whole is explained and interpreted here *in nuce*, including his later rejection.

The reading of Isaiah 61.1-2 in public, in the context of visit the synagogue on Shabbat emphasizes that Jesus is entirely embedded in the traditions of his people. He interprets a passage from the prophets contextually. As such this is nothing extraordinary. The specific dimension consists in the application of the prophetic hope to the present. In its literary setting it discloses what the nature of Jesus' mission is. The presentation of his ministry in relation to the promise of Isaiah indicates that his function is first of all prophetic, but the birth narratives have already established that this dimension is enhanced by the royal dimension as they clearly point towards the link with the Messiah-king David.

It is worth noting the emphases in the characterization of Jesus' ministry here: he is sent to preach the good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives, to recover the sight of the blind, and to set free the oppressed. (4.18). Although Jesus does not apply the prophetic promise to himself, but only proclaims that it 'has been fulfilled in [their] hearing' (4.21), this is received as a bold claim and rejected by the people close to home. There is nothing in this man they know which would render his interpretation and claim trustworthy.

The main function of this passage however is to present a summary of Jesus' teaching and ministry. Thus in the following chapter of the Gospel of Luke the themes mentioned in the prophetic text reappear repeatedly: at the beginning of the sermon in Lk 6.20 Jesus preaches good news to the poor through the beatitudes for poor and hungry; in Lk 7.22 Jesus summarizes his ministry to John the Baptist in similar words clearly alluding to the same prophetic verses.

The parable of the Great Banquet could be seen as a narrative variation of the prophetic promise, as the poor, the blind and the lame are listed as those who surprisingly end up being invited to the dinner party. The parable of the great banquet reflects on what is happening in Jesus' ministry where the poor receive the surprising good news of an invitation to God's banquet.

Two aspects are of particular significance here:

1. The Scriptures in Luke-Acts

Jesus introduces his mission and message here with an extended reference to the Scriptures of Israel. This indicates that this mission and message in the narrator's perception is inherently related and thus cannot be understood detached from this tradition. It is embedded in it and is only significant and understandable in the context of this tradition. Although the references to the Scriptures in Luke-Acts are not as frequent as in the Gospel of Matthew their significance should not be underestimated. It is an aspect which is important for the entire work of Luke-Acts and will thus not be dealt with in a separate unit but is an aspect which will be a focus throughout the module. What is worth noting here is the topic of 'seeing' and 'the light'. Second Isaiah frequently refers to the light as an image of hope and the fulfilment of promises. Thus, already in the context of the birth narrative we find Simeon saying 'my eyes have seen'

(Lk 2.30), and proclaims that through this child there will be 'a light for revelation to the nations...' (Lk 2.32). 'Seeing' and 'the light' are closely related metaphors/topics when the narrator of Luke-Acts refers to the initiation of the process of salvation through the coming Jesus the Messiah. These are no doubt allusions and quotations from Isaiah, which indicate the theological influence of this prophetic book in Luke-Acts. (cf. Isa 58:8;20 'light rising from the darkness'; and Isa 49:6; 42:6-7 'light of the nations'). Interrelated passages from Isaiah function to express the divine promise which is realized through Jesus and his witnesses (e.g. Acts 13. 47). The importance of this theme is confirmed by the fact that at the very end of the Book of Acts, in Paul's last major speech in 26.16-18, Paul summarizes his mission in words which are strongly alluding to Lk 4.18ff. The topic of eye-opening and 'light to the nations/gentiles are clearly related to each other.

2. Social-science approaches to Luke-Acts

The significance of social-science approaches to Luke-Acts needs to be highlighted here. To social and political context of the mission and message of Jesus in first century Judaea and Galilee has been highlighted by a number of recent publications (cf.e.g. Esler 1987, Neyrey 1991, Balch 1999). Without taking into account that the mission and message of Jesus was situated in a particular social and political context of the first century CE many of the references, metaphors and emphases of Luke-Acts remain on an abstract theological level. Social-science approaches have drawn attention to the relevance of the socio-political context of the narrative which illuminates its theological dimension in a specific way. Thus the particular focus on issues of poverty and wealth is seen in its economic and social dimension in the first instance rather than as a theological metaphor. If we keep in mind, that in the first century context the sick and disabled people were among the poorest of the poor the blessing of the poor and hungry in Lk 6.20-21 has status quo challenging dimension. Under conditions where the majority of the population may just about be able to sustain themselves, if at all, those sick and disabled have no other option than begging. The healing of people struck by mental or physical illness is thus an inherent part of the mission to the poor, and a clear sign that the kingdom of God is in the process of arriving.

Essential Readings

- ** 2.4 Sanders James A., 'Isaiah in Luke', Evans,C.A., Sanders, J. eds. *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1993, pp. 14-25.
- ** 2.5 Doble Peter, 'The Psalms in Luke-Acts' in Moyise S. et. al., eds.,*The Psalms in the New Testament*. London, New York: T&T Clark 2004, pp. 83-117.