

PREFACE

A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES

"...a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Luke 2:32)

The gospel according to St. Luke is so universal in contents and inclusiveness. It is impossible to write an introduction to the gospel according to St. Luke, because there is a danger that the introduction will be longer than the text. So it is summarized with a brief preface.

First, Luke, the author.

Luke is known as a Gentile and a historian because of his universal point of view. But when we study the Bible broadly, we don't find any hint that Luke was a Gentile. Still, people call him a Gentile. Maybe it is because his gospel is universal: He included Gentile people for their salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord as much as Jewish people. In his gospel, he is known as a medical doctor. In the ancient time, especially in Jesus' time, medical doctors were eminently honored and well treated. Among the Jews, famous medical doctors became responsible persons for the health care for kings of many nations. Humanly speaking, for Luke to remain as a medical doctor was very reasonable. But since he was converted to Christianity, his priority was changed to Jesus first, and to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus to the whole world. Especially, in his narrative, "a light for the Gentiles" was his key to understanding the vast Bible book and the principle of his gospel ministry. He really included the Gentile people as equal with the Jewish people, even though Jewish people regarded the Gentile people as "not chosen" people and "not privileged" to be called the children of God. But Luke had no prejudice of traditional Jews for the Gentiles. This may be the reason he was recognized by the Jewish people as a Gentile.

Luke is also an eminent theologian, because he sees everything from a universal point of view: There is no hint of a localistic point of view. Luke's most beautiful part of life was his personal service to St.

Paul, from the time of Paul's second world mission journey to Paul's prison life in Rome. Luke dedicated himself to Paul as a private medical doctor.

Second, Luke gives a special position to women.

In short, the gospel according to Luke is universal, it applies to all mankind. In Palestine, the place of women was not regarded. For example, when Jesus was carrying out the Messianic ministry around the Galilean district, many people, around 5,000 men, gathered (Lk 9:14). They did not include women and children in the count, because at that time women's human dignity and equality were not appreciated. Children were also not numbered because the bigoted Jewish people were all money lovers. So children who had no labor power or could not earn money were unimportant.

But Luke gave women a special place. Luke's gospel starts with the story of the birth of Jesus. Chapters 1-2 are all about the stories of women. The story of Mary the mother of Jesus was astounding, especially to our brothers and sisters in the former Soviet Union. Still, many classic churches do not distinguish between Mary the mother of Jesus and the Savior Jesus. At the time of Jesus' birth, Mary was a country damsel. She was betrothed to Joseph, a descendant of David. One day the angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (1:28 ff.). Mary was indeed afraid. But the angel told her that she would be the mother of Jesus before marrying Joseph the carpenter. She asked, "How can it be, since I am a virgin?" Luke 1:35 says, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Then she learned that it is from the Lord and said in 1:38, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

How could a teenage girl accept this unutterably great mission from the angel as the favor of God? It is because the angel told the prophecy concerning the Savior Jesus in verses 31-33. It says, "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He

will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Even though she asked, "How can it be?" she accepted the angel's prophetic tiding. Here we learn that Luke gave a special place to a woman, who had no human rights or equality with men at that time.

In Luke chapters 1-2, there appear Elizabeth and Anna. Humanly speaking, they were useless. They were no more than senior citizens who deserved food stamps. But Luke saw with spiritual eyes and recognized them as the lamp of God. They were old and useless. But in the sight of God they were praying women. Right before Jesus' coming, the world was in the darkest dark time. But their prayer was a shining lamp to the dark world, and Luke gave them great honor and a special position.

Luke dealt with godly women, but also had great sympathy with those women who were in need of God's mercy. Without mercy, these women would perish. In chapter 7, there is a story about a very sorrowful widow in a town called Nain. She married, but her husband died young. She did not remarry for the sake of her only son. One day, her only son died without any notice. She could not even cry because her mind became blank and his sudden death was totally unbelievable. But since her son died, she had to proceed with the funeral procession. We never heard such a sorrowful story. She was not walking straight, but just tottering after the bier. When Jesus saw her, his heart went out to her, and he said, "Don't cry." The Savior of the world gave the dead boy a new life and wiped away his mother's sorrow.

There are endless stories in Luke's gospel which give a special place to women. Among many events, one fact is very impressive. Luke 8:2,3 say, "...and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means." Even though Jesus is the Son of God, while carrying out the earthly Messianic ministry he needed necessary funds. In addition, his jobless, young and energetic twelve disciples consumed

three months' portion of groceries in one month. Where did the financial resources come from? That's a good question. Nobody mentions these financial resources. But Luke, who had a special place for women, recorded that some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases were helping to support them out of their own means. These women had been worldly. As a result, they suffered and were corrupted in the world and finally they became the women of sorrows. But because of Jesus' healing touch they became completely new creations. In actuality, they did not have regular jobs. They could make only minimum wage because they were women, even if they worked harder. But they supported Jesus and his disciples from the beginning to the end. What a surprising story! Here we learn that the heart of women is most beautiful and most powerful. But in Jesus' time, people looked down on women. How ignorant they were. How they needed the light of life of Jesus.

How was the world mission possible? Of course, it was Paul's faith in God Almighty. It was also the grace of God in his soul. Paul confessed his sinfulness. His sinful status was like a person untimely born (1Co 15:8). He was like a paralyzed man in the sight of God because of his sins and selfish ambition. But God forgave his sins when he was on the way to Damascus to annihilate the early Christians (Ac 9:1 ff.). On the way, he met the Risen Jesus. He fell down from his horse. It was the time of conversion. Despite his unforgivable sins, Jesus forgave all his sins and wanted to make him a servant of God for the Gentiles. Acts 9:15 says, "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.'" The grace of Jesus is indeed marvelous. The grace of Jesus is universal.

In the course of world evangelization, Paul went to Philippi. It was a Roman colony. On the Sabbath day, Paul expounded the gospel of salvation (Ac 16:11 ff.). In Philippi, there was a pimp who made use of a girl who knew how to perform magic arts. This pathetic girl was converted. Then the pimp stirred up people and put Paul and Silas in prison. But they sang and praised God in the prison. Through this event, God gave a life-committed convert, whose name was Lydia. When Paul was looking for a prayer place in the morning, Lydia grabbed the

shoulders of Paul and Silas and said, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house" (Ac 16:15). And she persuaded both. In this moment, Lydia seemed to have been more persuasive than St. Paul, who was known as the most persuasive in the world throughout history. In this way, Luke gave a special place to women. Especially, Luke gave an honorary position to Lydia. Lydia was good at business. She was a dealer in purple cloth. Since then, she began to support the expenses of Paul's world mission journey. Praise God that he made man and woman in his image and gave them the same honor, privilege and mission.

Third, the outstanding universality of Luke's gospel.

If we study Luke's gospel, we learn that, as a whole, Luke's gospel is the best literature and the most historical and evangelical. The outstanding universality of Luke's gospel is beyond comparison with other gospels. For example, Luke's gospel chapter 15 is known as the best story. Once an English novelist was convinced that he could write a better parable than Luke's gospel chapter 15. So the English government gave him five years of time and he tried to write a better parable of the prodigal son. The government was supposed to reward him with one million pounds. When the day came to hand in his parable, he pleaded with the government officials to give him three years more to write the parable, and after three years, another two years. Finally he surrendered himself to Luke's gospel chapter 15. In the gospel messages, Luke's gospel chapter 15 is the most difficult to deliver as a message, because it is already outstanding over all literature. We cannot subtract or add a word. That's what Oscar Wilde did. Luke's gospel chapter 15 includes the philosophy of all humanity, the theology of God's mercy and grace of salvation. We cannot tell all the story about Luke's gospel chapter 15. But this chapter reveals the beautiful and everlasting relationship between the Father God and his children. This chapter reveals that men are happy when they realize the love of God.

Only in Luke's gospel is there a parable of the good Samaritan (10:25-37). Luke was known as a Gentile, even though we don't know if he was a converted diaspora Jew or a secret orthodox Jew. Whatever the reason, he is worthy to be called a Gentile, or light for the Gentiles, after

the nickname of Jesus, because he loved all human beings with the love of God. The parable of the good Samaritan is a very familiar story to our ears. The characters are an orthodox Jew, a religious Levite, and a vigorous merchant. They saw a man badly wounded by gangsters. But the orthodox Jew turned around and ran away with an excuse that he must keep his worship service time. The religious Levite knew he should take care of the wounded man. But in order not to miss singing in the vocal team, he ran away with full speed. But the Samaritan, a Gentile, ruined his business and gave all his money and saved this man's life. This story is not at all dogmatic. But it reveals the universal love of God. Who could have been the most happy?

Luke the historian and evangelist wrote about ten lepers (17:11-19). Since they contracted leprosy, their bodies were decayed. And they lost most of their fingers. Their eyeballs were barely supported by the sockets. What is more, they were smelly. What is worse, they were hopeless, because of leprosy spread in their bodies. They heard the good news of Jesus Christ and secretly ran away from their lepers' shelter. As soon as they saw Jesus they asked his healing mercy. Luke 17:12,13 says "They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, 'Jesus, Master, have pity on us!'" He told them to show themselves to the priests and get a certificate of recovery. A very unusual thing happened. When they were healed, the nine Jewish lepers went to their mommies, or went around claiming that they healed their leprosy by their own effort. Jesus was very sorry that they did not come back to thank Jesus for the healing. Only one man came and thanked Jesus for his healing. He was a Samaritan, a Gentile. Jesus was very sorry that God's chosen people all forgot God's grace; they were saved from their leprosy, but they did not have a thankful mind. Jesus was very sorry, because they were supposed to be shepherds and Bible teachers and a blessing to the Gentile people. But they were really unthankful. Their root was totally corrupted because they did not thank God. Unthankfulness is the root of sin. Jesus was very sorry, because there were so many people who should study the Bible with his chosen people, but his people were worse than the lepers. On the other hand, a Gentile leper remembered his past agony being a leper, and came and bowed down his face to the ground and thanked Jesus with many tears. Here we learn that Luke did not concentrate on chosen

people. But he concentrated on God who is universal and whose grace extends to a Gentile leper. Thank God that his saving grace extends to all mankind.

Luke understood Luke 2:32, "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." It is amazing that Luke accepted the universal love of God for the helpless.

Fourth, the kingdom of God.

When we study Luke's gospel, there are many events. Therefore, sometimes we are confused about what the main focus of this gospel is. But the main focus of this gospel is the kingdom of God. Luke mentioned "the kingdom of God" 39 times in his gospel. When we compare Luke's gospel with Matthew's gospel, the quotation of "the kingdom of God" is quite different. Matthew emphasized the kingdom of God or Jesus is the Messiah King. For this he gave many kinds of illustrations and parables and stories. But Luke's gospel's teaching of the kingdom of God is far superior to Matthew's gospel in planting the kingdom of God in the hearts of vulgar people who are suffering under Satan's rule. Luke tried to plant faith in the kingdom of God in many ways. Luke 1:33 says, "his kingdom will never end." Luke 6:20 says, "for yours is the kingdom of God." Luke 8:10 says, "the kingdom of God has been given to you." Luke 9:11 says, "and spoke to them about the kingdom of God." Luke 10:9 says, "the kingdom of God is near you." Luke 10:11 says again, "Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near." Luke also talked about the happiness of the kingdom of God. Luke 13:29 says, "feast in the kingdom of God." Jesus told them in 17:21 that "the kingdom of God is within you." It means that those who truly believe can taste the kingdom of God on earth.

Why did he talk so much about the kingdom of God? Luke the historian knew what the world is like. The world is under the rule of Satan, in which innocent people suffer endlessly. People who suffer most are those who achieved something through their bone-crushing efforts. The kingdom of God teaches us that man is flesh and spirit. John 6:63 says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life." Peter said, "For, 'All men are

like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever" (1Pe 1:24,25a). It is true. Luke 9:25 says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" Since modern men do not read the Bible, they lost the knowledge of who God really is and what man really is. They only think about money and future security. There is no future security except the funeral home.

But the evangelist accepted Jesus' words of promise; he believed eternal life. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This is God's ultimate promise. In order to give us eternal life, our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross. God raised dead Jesus on the third day and made him King of kings and Lord of lords. And God made him the Judge. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

Fifth, Luke's view of Jesus' discipleship training.

Luke's view of Jesus' discipleship training is far superior to those of other gospels. Luke chapter 24 explains concisely. First, Luke saw that Jesus' discipleship training is based on the word of God. Luke did not quote the Old Testament references as frequently as Matthew did. But he mastered God's purpose of world salvation and his proclamation of the gospel was entirely based on the world salvation purpose of God. For this Luke emphasized the gospel of Jesus: that Jesus is the Son of God and the only salvation from sin. In Jesus only, man has eternal life and receives the kingdom of God. However, Luke's gospel is a little different in color, even though basic accounts are the same. According to Luke's account Jesus emphasized to his disciples that he should suffer and be handed over to the Gentiles and should die on the cross and rise again on the third day. Whenever Luke emphasized this, he related that Jesus' suffering and death is to fulfill the will of God and the will of God is that he would become the Lamb of God for the sin of the world. The disciples, who had been clumps of desires, were not willing to understand the way

of the cross.

What did this do to them? We cannot explain all the details how Jesus had tried to plant a few words of gospel faith. Literally, Jesus failed until he was crucified on the cross on the hill of Golgotha. But there is no failure in Jesus.

Second, Jesus' discipleship training helped them open their spiritual eyes. The Risen Christ appeared to the women, who came to the tomb to anoint his dead body, in shining form. Right after the women heard his voice, their sorrows were gone. The heavenly sunlight smeared into their hearts. The Risen Christ appeared to two persons who were running for their lives after the crucifixion of Jesus. They despaired. They were tragic. But the Risen Jesus had a living hope in them and taught them the Bible all over again on the way to Emmaus (24:27). At sunset, they and Jesus went into a house. Jesus began to teach them the Bible. Finally they recognized it was the Risen Christ. Then the Risen Christ disappeared from their sight. When they met the Risen Christ, their dead hearts came back to life. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us?" (24:32) In this part, we learn that Jesus raised disciples by teaching the Bible until their spiritual eyes were opened. May God raise us as Bible teachers like Jesus. May God open our spiritual eyes to see the Risen Jesus. May God help us study the Bible truth, and believe in our hearts, and see from God's point of view with universal eyes so that we can really understand God is like the Father in the parable of the prodigal son in chapter 15. May God give us universal love, so that we can embrace all kinds of sheep without any prejudice like Luke, a servant of God.