

LUKE 23

Luke 23:1–7. The First Hearing before Pilate

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1057–1059.

The divine necessity that hangs over the Savior now comes to further, deeper fulfillment. Earlier, Jesus intones that He “must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes” (Luke 9:22). Since His arrest, this humiliation has been ongoing. In addition, as part of His suffering, “he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated” (18:32). It is the necessity expressed in the verb “must” (Greek *dei*) that undergirds this and the previous scenes (see 9:22 and 19:5). Jesus’s experience not only forms an integral part of the divine plan that must go forward but also offers salvation to people everywhere.

Luke alone records the charges that authorities bring against the Savior in Pilate’s presence, who is in residence at Herod’s old palace on the west side of town, intimating that he acquires his information about Jesus’s kingship by interviewing a person present at the trial. The other Gospels do preserve a hint of the charges when they report the same first question from Pilate, “Art thou the King of the Jews?”¹ But they give no account of the Jewish authorities raising accusations that prepare Pilate to ask such a question. For his part, Luke quotes the accusers as hissing, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King” (23:2). When Pilate finds little weight in their charges, they push harder: “He stirreth up the people . . . from Galilee to this place,” painting Jesus as a national threat because of His teaching (23:5). We readily sense that they know their accusations lack substance; they are now beginning to grasp at straws. Moreover, Luke’s characterization of their response to Pilate as “more fierce” points not to Jesus as one who stirs up the people but rather to the authorities (23:5).

The untamed response of Jesus’s accusers to Pilate’s dismissive, “I find no fault in this man” (Luke 23:4), leaves the prefect himself grasping at straws. What to do? Then the authorities unknowingly hand him a possible solution. Jesus is from Galilee, they say. Pilate concludes to send the prisoner to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, and get rid of this problem or, at least, learn whether he finds this Galilean innocent or guilty of some crime in his territory. In this connection, Luke alone will record the hearing before Antipas (23:8–12).

Thus far, Luke establishes Jesus’s innocence in two ways. The first is through the authorities’ accusations before Pilate. They differ completely from their findings in the hearing before the council (22:66–71). Luke thereby exposes their charges as creative lies, especially the charge that Jesus forbids “to give tribute to Caesar” (23:2) because Luke records Jesus’s earlier words about this very issue (20:21–25). Luke’s second piece of evidence comes from Pilate’s declaration, “I find no fault in this man” (23:4). Effectively and consistently, as we shall see, Roman justice declares Jesus innocent.

This initial hearing before Pilate does not last long. To be sure, Luke is abbreviating the encounter in his writing, and the conversation between the prefect and Jesus’s accusers would surely be filled with innuendo and spiteful language, particularly on the accusers’ side. In Luke’s reckoning, the earlier hearing before Jewish authorities takes place soon after sunrise (22:66). The accusers arrive as a group with their prisoner at Pilate’s temporary residence perhaps at about eight o’clock in the morning, not at sunrise as hinted in the other accounts.² Because Jesus will be crucified around noon, “about the sixth hour,”³ the hearing before Herod Antipas lasts only an hour at most. Counting the time for the crowd to walk to and from his temporary residence, also on the upper west side of town, Jesus and His accusers will arrive back at Pilate’s residence around ten thirty or so, allowing another hour for the second hearing before Pilate (23:13–25). Because of the notations of time in the other accounts, these accounts indicate that the hearing before Pilate lasts from about six thirty to eleven thirty in the morning—a very long time. Luke sets out the events of that fateful morning in a more compact, accurate manner.

Luke 23:8–11. The Hearing before Herod Antipas

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1062.

Although the Savior stands as a prisoner before the tetrarch of Galilee (Herod Antipas) and is surrounded by enemies who “vehemently accused him,” He exudes the power of the one in charge (Luke 23:10). Even in the old Hasmonian palace, with its impressive trappings and intimidating surroundings, Antipas’s constant questioning “in many words” does not push Jesus into defending Himself (23:9). Instead, He remains silent, effectively allowing events to play out and, not incidentally, to exhibit His innocence. During the prior evening He places Himself in a spot, Gethsemane, where Judas and the arresting party

will surely find Him.⁴ Hence, it is Jesus who starts and subtly guides the process that carries Him to the hearings before both Jewish and Roman officials.

Among the Gospel records, Luke's account alone reports the scene with Herod Antipas. Its effects are twofold. First, it breaks up the hearing before Pilate in not only a literary but also a historical sense, adding texture and depth to Luke's portrayal of Jesus's accusers as they rush from Pilate to Antipas and back again. Second, Luke establishes Jesus's innocence in the eyes of Rome. Two of Rome's representatives, Antipas and Pilate, conclude that Jesus's case does not lead to serious consequences for Him under Roman law (see 23:14–15). Instead, He is to be beaten and released, with the charges dropped (23:16, 22). But more than anyone, Jesus knows that He will not be released, as He has been telling His disciples throughout most of His ministry.⁵

Many suggest that Psalm 2:1–2 shapes the way that Luke reports these events. To be sure, we cannot brush away the possibility that Luke may have fallen under the influence of this passage, as many claim. But no substantial reason exists to show that the language and order of Psalm 2:1–2 undergirds or inspires Luke's record even though Luke later cites these verses in connection with the hearings before Pilate and Herod (Acts 4:25–28). Instead, the scene with Antipas strikes the notes of historical authenticity.

Luke 23:13–26. The Second Hearing before Pilate

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1070–1071.

The Savior's innocence strides visibly and forcefully across these verses. Both Pilate and Herod Antipas, official representatives of Rome, find nothing in Jesus's conduct and demeanor that warrants more than a beating to satisfy the crowd's bloodlust (Luke 23:16, 22). Although Herod is said to seek Jesus's death on an earlier occasion for an unspecified reason (13:31), when the tetrarch finally meets the man from Nazareth, his interest lies in seeing "some miracle done by him," not in punishing him (23:8). His sentence, virtually quoted by Pilate, specifies that Jesus does "nothing worthy of death" (23:15).

Pilate's verdict mirrors that of Antipas exactly: "I . . . have found no fault in this man" and "I have found no cause of death in him" (23:14, 22). These findings stand opposite to the claim of Jesus's accusers: "We found this fellow perverting the nation" (23:2). Under the harsh glare of Roman justice, Jesus stands guiltless and completely sinless. And this is Luke's point. Pilate spends time early in the morning interrogating Jesus and then repeats the process later. His double interview produces nothing actionable under the law. In Pilate's view, Jesus is free to walk away. But more than the law is at play here.

The loud, unrelenting barrage of angry voices begins to roar through Pilate's residence: "They cried out all at once" or, better, "they shouted all together" (Luke 23:18). The palace built by Antipas's father vibrates with the shrill demands for Jesus's death from His accusers and from those who join them from

the city (23:13). Pilate tries to shout above the din but “they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him” (23:21). Somehow, Pilate gets the attention of the threatening multitude and says again that he will “chastise [Jesus], and let him go” (23:22). The bellowing voices of the angry crowd howl again—“they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified.” In the end, Pilate loses his nerve, and “the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed” (23:23). In a complete turnabout from the prefect’s usually stiff interactions with his subjects, he decides “to preserve peace rather than to promote justice.”⁶ “Pilate gave sentence” (23:24). Jesus will die.

Inside Pilate’s palatial residence, the voices of “the chief priests and the rulers and the people” exhibit complete unity against Jesus (23:13). But not all in the city share that unity. The first person we see to break from this unity is Simon of Cyrene who arrives at the feast and who is promptly commandeered to carry Jesus’s cross (23:26). Simon does not stand with Jesus’s accusers; in fact, Luke separates him from them. Moreover, as we shall soon see, the voices of the “great company of people, and of women,” the penitent thief, and the centurion all fracture the unified voice of the accusers (23:40–42, 47, 48). Not all turn against the Savior.

Luke 23:27–33. The Longest Walk

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1075–1076.

Luke finally leads us to the cross. He repeatedly discloses his aim throughout his Gospel, beginning with the words of the aged Simeon and continuing throughout the Savior’s sayings about His fate at Jerusalem.⁷ But with stunning counterbalance, out of the ashes of Jesus’s death on the cross springs the promise of the Resurrection—“raised the third day” and “the third day he shall rise again” (Luke 9:22; 18:33).

In these verses about Jesus’s trek to the place of execution, preserved only by Luke, we read not about distance or destination or noise but about what happens along the path that Jesus trudges in pain on His way to Calvary. Remarkably, we witness Jesus reaching out one last time, beyond His own terrible discomfort, to get the attending crowd’s attention and warning “a great company of people, and of women” about events that, ominously, will descend upon the city and their children (23:27–28). His loving compassion obviously is not stunted by His own troubles. That future scene in Jerusalem will become intolerable, bringing down “great tribulations . . . upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; such as was not before sent upon Israel, of God, since the beginning of their kingdom.”⁸ It will be the very worst of times. So much so that citizens will say, “Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare,” and will cry out “to the [nearby] mountains, Fall on us” (23:29–30). Plainly, He agonizes that the city which crucifies its king will suffer as the king suffers.

Jesus directs much of what He says toward the women of Jerusalem, some of whom are probably followers. Throughout His ministry, He pays attention to women and their needs, as exemplified in His encounters with the widow of Nain, the “sinner” woman “in the Pharisee’s house,” His female disciples, the woman with the issue of blood, Jairus’s daughter, and Martha and Mary.⁹ Often His sayings and observations feature women, such as His words about a person who lights a candle, the Queen of Sheba, suffering widows, and the poor widow who gives to the temple.¹⁰ In Jerusalem, He does not set aside His concern for women. In fact, as His impassioned words indicate, He tries to warn them about the looming disaster that hangs over the city and will eventually crush both them and their children (23:28). Their experience, if they do not flee, will gauge the severity of the suffering that lands on them and their fellow citizens (21:21–23). And, as Josephus eventually records, the situation in the city deteriorates dreadfully and the women and children suffer unimaginably.

Luke 23:34–38. On the Cross

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1081–1082.

The Joseph Smith Translation’s stunning addition to the Savior’s plea for forgiveness in Luke 23:34, which forms the heart of these verses because of the abuse that He receives (“Meaning the soldiers who crucified him” and not those who sought His death [Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 23:35], pushes forward the issue whether certain wicked acts can be forgiven. To be sure, some cannot, such as blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (Luke 12:10; Doctrine and Covenants 132:27). But what about other serious sins? Are there limits to divine mercy? Are there bounds to celestial clemency? In response, we notice that in the only existing sample of the Savior’s intercessional language in modern scripture, He limits His appeal to His Father, seeking the Father’s graciousness only for those who “believe on my name,” begging Him to “spare these . . . that they may . . . have everlasting life” (Doctrine and Covenants 45:5). This engaging framework fits snugly with other passages from latter-day scripture that set out a limit to salvation—it is only for those who believe and repent.¹¹ Why? Because saving the wicked, particularly those who “have willfully rebelled against God . . . and would not keep [the commandments of God]” cuts across God’s justice: “salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such” (Mosiah 15:27).

From a different angle comes God’s mercy for those swallowed up in the days of the Flood. After God says to Enoch, “A prison have I prepared for them” (that is, for those who will perish in the Flood), He goes on to declare about the Savior, “That which I have chosen hath pled before my face [for these people]. Wherefore, he suffereth for their sins.” More than this, God holds out the possibility that they can repent and receive forgiveness: “Inasmuch as they will repent in the day that my Chosen shall return unto me.”

In a word, after the Savior’s ministry, after He endures mocking and mistreatment, after He suffers for the sins of all, He returns to His Father with the power and right to plead for the forgiveness of those who will repent in the next life, even though “they shall be in torment” in that prison until “that day.”¹² Will Jesus’s accusers receive forgiveness? Only He knows. Scripture shows us a door.¹³ They need to turn the lock.

As Jesus exits the city, reversal stands at every bend. Only days before, crowds greeted Him as the king at His entry into Jerusalem—“Blessed be the King,” they shouted (Luke 19:37–38). Now, at the place of execution the authorities and soldiers exhibit spite as they execute Him as a king (23:35, 37–38). As He leaves Jerusalem, “a great company of people, and of women, . . . lamented him” (23:27). Now, “the people stood,” silent and looking on as “the rulers . . . derided him” (23:35). As He approaches the place of execution, the crowd “bewailed . . . him” (23:27). Now He bewails the city and its inhabitants as He solemnly warns, “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children” because “the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren” (23:28–29).

On one level, it appears to passersby that Jesus is unable to turn His fate. For them, He lacks messianic power, leaving them silent (23:35, 48). But the misunderstanding about the nature of His messiahship rests on a lack of perception. Jesus announces long beforehand in another place that He does not fear those who are able to take life but then have no more power (see 12:4). His real, mercy-filled power manifests itself in forgiving others and, as we see in the current circumstances, in pleading with His Father to forgive His executioners.¹⁴ Jesus’s terrible situation on the cross, which seems to point to His defeat, really shows His power to remit sin and bring willing souls to Himself (23:34, 43).

Luke 23:39–43. With the Thieves

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1086–1087.

Luke’s epic saga of the Savior’s Crucifixion stretches to its apex in these verses. Here strides out the final taunt against Jesus; here stands another affirmation of His innocence; here unfolds—again—His merciful graciousness as it gently wraps itself around a condemned criminal.

Only Luke preserves the words that pass between the three men as they hang in agony, awaiting the inevitable. The desperation draped over the first felon that afternoon suddenly bursts out when, without hope, he calls for deliverance, any deliverance, from his dragging distress. In Luke’s language, he blasphemes as he demands, “If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (Luke 23:39). But the salvation that Jesus offers is not to deliver the three of them from their crosses but to deliver them through His own cross. If Jesus’s mercy is to extend to this first criminal, he will need to change, as the second man rightly notices (23:40–41). For by railing on Jesus, the first man not only takes sides with the authorities and the Roman soldiers but also with the devil, who hisses in the early part of Luke’s report, “If thou be the Son of God” (4:3, 9).

Remarkably, the other man seems to be at peace. He plainly accepts his fate. But more is at play than a stoic resignation to his punishment. In some way, as he hangs on his cross next to the Savior, suffering as Jesus suffers, struggling for breath as Jesus struggles, racked with pain as Jesus is racked, he comes to see Jesus for who He is. Unlike Jesus, the man is guilty; unlike Jesus, he deserves his punishment; above all, unlike Jesus, he does not control what happens on the other side of death. But he obviously believes in the next life. So with his newly discovered insight into who Jesus is, he prays and begs, “Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (23:42). Now he hears words that brim with mercy and grace, words that only Jesus can utter: “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” We can only imagine the reassurance and peace that settle upon the man’s soul. As one of Jesus’s disciples, he will be with Him; as one of those worthy to enter God’s garden, he will be in paradise, no questions asked (23:43).

Although the Gospels do not preserve the names of the criminals, their deaths are forever linked with that of Jesus, elevating them as His companions at life’s end. Together, their spirits pierce the veil of death linked arm in arm, as it were. Although one of the untold stories has to do with the final mental and emotional state of the first criminal, we can hope and trust that he responds repentantly as he hears the exchange between Jesus and the second man, an exchange that indirectly but warmly beckons him to join Him after their pain is past and their spirits are released from their bodies.

Luke 23:44–45. Nature Responds to Her King

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1090–1091.

As the light-bearer dies, nature goes dark; as hate seemingly wins, the elements sound a warning. Thus, nature begins to mourn for her King, draping herself in dark hues and reacting as if pained, just as prophesied.¹⁵ This action—and we can only call it an action because of what Jesus says about how nature will respond if humans do not acknowledge Him as their King—“the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40)—breaches the seasonal situation in Jerusalem. The time of year is Passover, meaning that the vernal equinox has recently passed and, for the first time since the prior autumn, the glow of the sun and full moon mingle, producing a full twenty-four hours of light. At this moment of celestial illumination when the earth is delivered from its dim winter hues and people celebrate the radiant deliverance of the Exodus, all goes dark.

For such events and those that follow immediately, Luke slows down his narrative by introducing the first notations of the time of day into his Gospel—“the sixth hour” and “the ninth hour” (23:44). To be sure, the other Synoptists preserve these times of day (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33). And like their reports, Luke’s record allows readers to experience what the author narrates as he rotates events slowly, almost moment by moment, in this most critical yet promising time. For example, within this

three-hour period of darkness, recorded and unrecorded, we hear the conversation between the three men hanging on their crosses and listen to the divine words of forgiveness that Jesus is still offering as the life slips out of His body. We behold the darkness descending over both the city and the land as far as the eye can see, dimming the sunlight and lessening the Passover celebration that is in full swing. We turn to the cry of priests who spread the shocking news that the temple's veil is inexplicably damaged, torn from top to bottom.

We also come away from these verses knowing that God is in charge. To be sure, the lowering gloom seemingly signals to the disciples the authorities' victory over Jesus. After all, Jesus's enemies make their way inside the circle of Jesus's most trusted associates and engage one, Judas, as their agent. With a nighttime effort, they successfully arrest Jesus out of the gaze of the crowds and drag Him before some of their number for a hearing to determine what they will charge Him with when they take Him to the Roman prefect, Pilate. Their object all along is to get Jesus out of the way, and they need Pilate to legitimize their effort. Against all odds, including Pilate's ongoing reluctance to condemn Jesus, they succeed in gaining Pilate's assent to Jesus's death. They only have to raise their voices to get their way. So they win. Or so it seems.

But the damage to the temple's veil shows a different side to events. The winners are, in reality, losers. If they are paying attention, those who oppose Jesus, whether Jew or Roman, eventually learn that the veil, which hangs in the sanctuary and is visible only to those who participate in lighting the incense, can be torn inexplicably. We suspect that the ripped veil is replaced quickly because one is sewn as a replacement every six months as a matter of course.¹⁶ Even so, the God of the temple sends His warning.

Important for Luke's overall story, he begins his account inside the temple, in front of the sanctuary where Zacharias walks to light the incense (Luke 1:9). Now, Luke may not have any idea about the inner configuration of that building, but he effectively closes his story at the same place, where the veil hangs and separates the inner temple from the Holy of Holies, just a few feet west from where Zacharias earlier stood. In effect, he creates a literary *inclusio* by framing his record with clear references to the same element—that is, to the sacred space in front of the Holy of Holies. By doing so, he imbues his record with holiness.

Luke 23:46–49. The Great Redeemer Dies

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1094–1095.

Those who witness the Savior's death now stride into full view in Luke's narrative. The feet of many of them seem to tread the path of faith and the road of hope, although at the moment hope seems empty and faith seems vain. After watching Jesus die, many of "the people that came together . . . smote their

breasts” in sorrow (Luke 23:48). Some of their number are doubtless believers already, and others seem to be touched by Jesus as He dies. It seems safe to assume that they hear the derisive comments from the authorities and soldiers, even though they “stood afar off” (23:49). If they can hear the mockery, at least some of the conversation between Jesus and the second criminal reaches their ears. And they hear some surprising words from the centurion, recalling exactly what he says. Perhaps, they may think their faith is not in vain as they hear words of veneration from the felon and the centurion who spend these last, fateful hours physically close to Jesus. With all the people, we witness Jesus’s last moments and hear His loud voice as He addresses His Father and dies (23:46, 48). We look at the Roman centurion and then listen to his respectful benediction uttered at Jesus’s death: “Certainly this was a righteous man” (23:47).

Jesus’s death affects people differently—some harden themselves, others are softened to the point of repenting. This dappled view of the crowning event is part of Luke’s heritage that he hands to readers. Even in His death, the responses to Jesus are mixed. From His ministry, we think of the differing reactions of the healed demoniac and his neighbors (8:27–39); we recall the divergent responses of synagogue worshippers and the synagogue chief and his friends to Jesus’s healing of the woman afflicted for eighteen years (13:10–17). As in life, so in death, His presence creates division (12:51).

In these verses, the women from Galilee emerge from the shadows cast by other disciples. They are present and assisting from an early period of Jesus’s ministry (8:2–3). We suspect their presence, for example, in the preparation and serving of the Last Supper.¹⁷ Now, because they are among Jesus’s most devoted disciples and because they will step forward to prepare His body for proper burial, they walk to center stage. In coming verses Luke will feature them as the first witnesses of Jesus’s Resurrection. By doing so, he creates another *inclusio* in his narrative, another arcing connection between beginning and end, another partial tying off of his story that is coming to a close.

Luke 23:50–56. The Burial

The following is adapted from S. Kent Brown, The Testimony of Luke (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1100–1102.

Joseph of Arimathea, acting out of respect and affection, removes the Savior’s body from the cross and places it in his own sepulcher. Jesus’s body thus escapes a dishonorable burial in a common grave with the criminals who are crucified with Him. Even so, He will escort the wrongdoers’ spirits into the spirit world (Luke 23:43). For those who suffer capital punishment, Jewish custom demands that their bodies be buried before sundown (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). Such a custom puts pressure on Joseph not only to bury Jesus’s body before sunset but also to leave himself enough time to prepare for the coming Sabbath.

Once again, Luke notes the affectionate, hovering presence of the female disciples from Galilee. Events of this day do not push them to the side, as seems to be the case with most of the men. Instead, they remain

nearby, discussing and thinking ahead. Knowing that the time following Jesus's death on Friday afternoon is much too short to ready His body for proper burial before the onset of the Sabbath and its evening rituals, they begin gathering spices and ointments and preparing them even during the Sabbath. Any items that they have to purchase for Jesus's body will have to wait until Saturday evening. They will not let the body of their friend and Master suffer from lack of suitable, customary attention.

Luke here omits elements that he may have known about, such as the rolling stone, though he notes it later, and the posting of the guard.¹⁸ In their place he brings forward one *inclusio* after another, enhancing a sense of unity and interrelationship within his narrative. We first notice Joseph of Arimathea. Luke's introduction of this man also presents two arcing connections that bridge from the beginning of Luke's Gospel to virtually its end. Initially Joseph is called a just man (Luke 23:50). Such a term, which applied specifically to individuals can also mean "righteous," characterizes both Zacharias and Elisabeth as well as Simeon (2:25). The second characteristic of Joseph is that he "waited for the kingdom of God" (23:51). The same verb (Greek *prosdechomai*) applies to another individual, Simeon, who in his day is "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (2:25).

The third *inclusio* ties to the women of Galilee. They appear first in Luke's narrative at an early juncture while Jesus is still ministering in Galilee (8:2–3). They reappear now near the end of Luke's story as concerned, affectionate followers and full participants among His disciples, determined to take action to honor the Savior (23:49, 55–56). Fittingly, these women will become the first eyewitnesses of Jesus's Resurrection and the first heralds of His renewed life (24:1–10). The fourth *inclusio* also involves the women. We read that they "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (23:56). This notation underscores in bright colors their obedience to law, a feature that characterizes the first persons associated with Luke's story—namely, Zacharias and Elisabeth, Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna, and even Jesus Himself.¹⁹

The voice of prophecy points to another omission that all four Gospels share—that of Jesus's ministry among the departed spirits of the dead. A broad hint exists, of course, in Jesus's words to the second criminal: "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (23:43). But we lack a treatment of this most important facet of Jesus's ministry. Its significance rests in God's words to Enoch the prophet when describing events associated with Jesus's Atonement: "As many of the spirits as were in [spirit] prison came forth, and stood on the right hand of God" (Moses 7:57). How these spirits come to associate with God in this lofty portrait of the future we do not learn either from Enoch's prophecy or from the Gospels. Instead, we turn to the first epistle of Peter to find out that Jesus, after "being put to death . . . went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (1 Peter 3:18–19). Because "the gospel [was] preached also to them that are dead . . . they [will] be judged according to men in the flesh" (1 Peter 4:6).

Besides the hint in Jesus's words to the second criminal, His quotation from Isaiah 61:1 in the Nazareth synagogue carries a strong allusion of this future moment between His death and Resurrection: "The Spirit of the Lord . . . hath anointed me . . . to preach deliverance to the captives" (Luke 4:18).

In addition to this, the most intense intimation of Jesus’s postmortal activities pushes out from His sayings when casting out devils. Within these words, He sets out a scene of “a stronger [one]” who dispossesses “a strong man” and takes away his goods. In this sketch, the strong man represents the devil and the stronger person is Jesus Himself. The struggle for control of the palace or home is made fiercer by the struggle for control of the goods that the devil initially controls and then loses (11:21–22). These goods are human souls, and the struggle is not limited to the mortal sphere but carries into the next life.²⁰ In this light, we behold with sharp clarity a pointer to Jesus’s labor among the departed spirits, a loving labor of deliverance.

Notes

- 1 Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; John 18:33.
- 2 Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; John 18:28.
- 3 Luke 23:44; Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33.
- 4 Luke 21:37; 22:39–40; Matthew 26:36; Mark 14:32; also John 18:1.
- 5 See the commentary on Luke 9:18–22.
- 6 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 811.
- 7 Luke 2:34–35; 9:22, 44; 12:50; 17:24–25; 18:31–33; 22:15, 37.
- 8 Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:18; Joseph Smith Translation, Mark 13:20.
- 9 See Luke 7:11–12, 37; 8:2–3, 41–43; 10:38–39; 23:49, 55.
- 10 Luke 11:31; 20:46–47; 21:2.
- 11 See, for example, 2 Nephi 2:6–7; Mosiah 3:17–19; Alma 12:15; Doctrine and Covenants 29:43–44.
- 12 Moses 7:38–39; see also Moses 7:57. Compare the distant “times of refreshing” in Acts 3:19.
- 13 Luke 13:24; also 12:48; Moses 7:39. “He hath suffered for their sins.”
- 14 Luke 5:20; 7:47–48; 23:34; Joseph Smith Translation, Luke 23:35; see also Doctrine and Covenants 45:3–5.
- 15 Moses 7:55–56; 1 Nephi 19:11–12; Helaman 14:20–24.
- 16 Mishnah, Shekalim 8:5.
- 17 See the comments on Luke 22:7–13.
- 18 Matthew 27:60, 62–66; Mark 15:46; Luke 24:2.
- 19 Luke 2:4–5, 22, 24, 27, 36–37, 39, 42, 51; 4:16.
- 20 See the comments on Luke 11:14–28; Doctrine and Covenants 88:99; 138:18, 30–31.

Credits

Author: S. Kent Brown

New Testament Insights Series Editor: John W. Welch

General Editor: Taylor Halverson

Associate Editor: Morgan Tanner

Senior Editor: Sarah Whitney Johnson

Assistant Editors: Sam Lofgran, Verlanne Johnson

Content Manager: Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye

Source: *New Testament Insights: Luke*, by S. Kent Brown