

A SOLEMN ONE WAY TRIP BECOMES A JOYOUS ROUNDRIP!

A Study of the Structure of Luke 24:13-35

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Luke's distinctive literary style and his fascinating treatment of theological themes in both his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles have been recognized and widely discussed by commentators and Lukan specialists. Anyone who is interested in pursuing the resurgence of scholarly concern for aspects of Lukan artistry could do not better than start with *Studies in Luke-Acts* edited by Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn. Among the score of contributors of essays in this volume is Ernst Haenchen, who later completed his own commentary on Acts. Haenchen refers to Luke's "biblical style."¹ He declares that Luke writes history by relating short, impressive, and dramatic scenes in relatively independent succession using words and phrases of the Septuagint. He further suggests that Luke's literary intention is directed toward captivating and edifying the reader by joining these short, compact, and picturesque scenes together like the stones of a mosaic.

Chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel is a great mosaic of these very picturesque and impressive incidents of the wonder, grandeur, and mystery associated with Easter. The reader is irresistibly drawn to identify with the perplexed and terrified women at the tomb, the despondent travellers on the road to Emmaus, and the dumbfounded disciples in Jerusalem. In the center of this final chapter of his Gospel, Luke's three-part artistic story of the journey of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, Jesus' homily on the meaning of Scripture, and his breaking of bread capture the spotlight. Many familiar Lukan touches vividly underscore and add a lasting aura to the remembrance of the first day of resurrection.

On the Road to Emmaus

¹³Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶but they were kept from recognizing him.

¹⁷He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one living in Jerusalem

who doesn't know the things that have happened there in these days?"

¹⁹"What things?" he asked.

"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

²⁵He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³²They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.²

John Drury comments on this passage:

Here is one of Luke's best and most characteristic achievements, a short story whose spell-binding power comes about by a controlled line, a sober realism and a muted sense of wonder. It is his last great set piece, bringing together most of the themes he has handled throughout the work, yet with such skill that nothing strains or spoils the tale. Everything happens within it. That is typical of Luke, and so is the conjunction of ordinariness and marvel at the climax of the narrative, which so appealed to Rembrandt, the most Lukan of painters. The only things like it in the New Testament are the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan and the Christmas stories—all Luke's.³

Many of Luke's stylistic traits and favorite themes are found within this story. They include: precision in giving the distance

from Jerusalem to Emmaus and the naming of an individual; a journey motif to and from Jerusalem; two figures engaged in dialog; the setting of discussion and fellowship at the table with the breaking of bread; and the contrast of moods from uncertainty to joy. I. Howard Marshall, one who has devoted special attention to Luke's historical and theological emphases, has shown that these familiar characteristics are part of Luke's literary style, and far from obscuring the essential historicity, they may serve to enhance and to inscribe the events being recalled indelibly in the minds of the readers.⁴

Some questions inevitably arise, however, for the casual reader as well as for the seasoned exegete. Is it possible to grasp the essential message of this passage and the threefold division of the action of the story without knowledge and appreciation of a distinctive Lukan perspective? Do Luke's style and conscious choice of intermingled and repeated theological motifs add or detract? As pieces of a brilliant mosaic or the warp and woof of an intricately woven oriental carpet, can we dislodge the separate stone pieces or unravel the threads of the story in order to study and reflect upon Luke's essential craftsmanship? And, if we are bold enough to set our hand at doing so, will we destroy or distort his work, or will we be able to discover and display a renewed appreciation for Luke's artistry?

One exegete who has especially pursued the nature and technique of Luke's storytelling and who has affirmed the stylistic precision and literary quality of Luke is Kenneth Bailey. In his work *Poet and Peasant* he submits a series of Lukan parables to what he terms "Oriental Exegesis."⁵ His procedure includes examining what contemporary peasants in the Middle East have to say about the meaning of various parables, comparing the early versions and translations for insight into the nature and value of textual variants, and reflecting on the literary milieu of the New Testament period and the genre of literature current outside the New Testament books.

Bailey has pointed out convincingly in his analysis of selected parables in Luke that it is precisely in those sections where Luke has no parallel in the other evangelists that we may be able to identify a conscious literary pattern or structure despite the appearance of recognized Lukan trademarks and touches which often serve to embellish the basic pattern. Bailey's study of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son offers evidence of a poetic form of storytelling known as the "Parabolic Ballad."⁶ The structure of each of these parables is inverted parallelism or an ABCDBCA type pattern. The climatic center receives the major focus with an ordered set of elements leading up to the main point and a similar

set of points moving back in a balanced arrangement. He represents the story of the Good Samaritan as an ABCDCBA inverted parallelism as follows:

- A. The Robbers
- B. The Priest
- C. The Levite
- D. The Samaritan
- C. He goes to him and binds up his wounds
- B. He puts him on his own beast and carries him to the inn
- A. He cares for him and promised to return

Another feature of this parable is the comparison between the first and last stanza:

THE ROBBERS

- 1. took his money
- 2. beat him
- 3. left him half dead (and will not return)

THE SAMARITAN

- 1. spent his own money
- 2. cared for him
- 3. left him cared for and promised to return

The story of the Good Samaritan fits Bailey's description of the "Parabolic Ballad" and appears to suit the needs of the storyteller. There is a climatic center or turning point. This provides a means of establishing contrast and special emphasis. The second part calls for the listener to reflect and respond with an appropriate attitude and action such as is portrayed in the parable. Words, phrases, and sentence structure can be matched and contrasted in the two halves.

In chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel the threefold emphasis on "lost and found" in the three parables recorded there offers striking evidence of a recognized and repeated pattern with the usual Lukan variations. Perhaps the following diagram will serve to illustrate the basic staircase structure of these "Parabolic Ballads."

THE LOST SHEEP 15:1-7 "One out of Ninety-Nine"

You
 One
 Ninety-Nine
 Lost
 Found
 Joy
 Restoration "back home"
 Joy
 Found
 Lost
 Ninety-Nine
 One
 You

THE LOST COIN 15:8-10 "One out of Ten"

Lost
 Found
 Joy in Celebration "with friends"
 Found
Lost

THE LOST SON 15:11-32 "One of Two Sons or Two Sons of One Father"

A Son is Lost
 Goods Wasted
 Everything Lost
 The Great Sin
 Total Rejection
 A Change of Mind
 And Initial Repentance
 Total Acceptance
 The Great Repentance
 Everything Regained
 Goods Used in Celebration
 A Son is Found

The Sequence dealing with the second son is equally as balanced and intriguing in that Bailey's structure leaves the parable open-ended with the response of the second son not stated in the parable, but implied if the parable is, in fact, to have the first and second halves balanced around the center. Bailey's structure is as follows:

Second Son comes

Your Brother is Safe; There is Feasting

A Father Comes Out to Reconcile

Complaint No. 1 Look How You Treat Me!

Complaint No. 2 Look How You Treat Him!

A Father Tries to Reconcile Still a Second Time

Your Brother is Safe; There is Feasting

(Will the Second Son Come Inside?)

Bailey's efforts in finding an essential structure for Lukan parables deserves more attention than can be devoted in this survey. His work calls attention to the need for greater appreciation of the nature and form of the "Parabolic Ballad." Perhaps even more significant has been his discovery of what he calls "Theological Clusters," namely, the clustering of theological motifs within the parables so arranged as to impel a listener to identify with and to respond to the parable in terms of repentance, faith and discipleship.⁷ His thesis seems to be that the symbols and the structure of the parables call for a response.

If, as John Drury states, the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus belongs to same literary and narrative structure as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, it appears that this threefold story should be able to be analyzed in a manner suggested by Kenneth Bailey. A survey of leading commentators has revealed that while most see the three different sections of the story, none have observed elements of a "Parabolic Ballad" as part of the essential structure. Generally, the parable has been divided into three standard sections. E. Earle Ellis calls this passage "The Emmaus Appearance: The Message of Jesus" 24:13-32. He sees the structure as consisting of the opening conversation of "the stranger" (13-24) followed by the Lord's exposition of the Scriptures (25-27) with the climax occurring at the supper scene (28-32) in which the disciples recognize Jesus and recall how he "opened the scriptures" to them.⁸

Is it possible to observe another structural arrangement within this three-part story? If we keep in mind the possibility of inverted parallelism as forming the backbone of the entire passage, then perhaps the following division may be made:

Disciples in Conflict Flee Jerusalem 13-24

The Character of Jesus Revealed 25-30

Disciples with Renewed Hope Return to Jerusalem 31-35

Since the journey motif figures prominently in both the parable of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, it is not surprising that this motif provides the setting for this parable. Although Emmaus

is mentioned only in verse 13, the actual arrival there falls in the center of the story and provides another type of emphasis:

Jerusalem 13

Emmaus 28-29

Jerusalem 33

The inner experience of the disciples offers a further contrast within the parable. In the first half the disciples are filled with uncertainty. They suggest a picture of despondency and misery in the opening of the parable. Within the second half they have become transformed by joy and are seen running back to Jerusalem. The following scheme may be suggested.

Two disciples flee Jerusalem 13

Uncertainty characterizes their walk 14

Jesus joins them in their walk 15

The two do not recognize him 16

Their faces are sad 17

The two disciples talk to Jesus 18-24

Jesus talks to them 25-27

They arrive at Emmaus 28-29

Jesus breaks bread with them at the table 30

The disciples share the bread 30

Their eyes of faith are opened 31

They recognize him 31

Jesus vanishes from their sight 31

Joy and certainty characterize their response 32

Two disciples hasten back to Jerusalem 33-35

It appears that Luke consciously or unconsciously drew the elements of sacred tradition together to form a pattern which he had already used widely earlier in his Gospel. One is left with the intriguing question: Did Luke intend the structure to be a parable for the reader of the early church as well as later readers? Luke's masterful control of the passage suggests that the appearance of the Risen Lord and his explanation of God's plan for believing disciples were intended to convince and confirm these believers in the Risen Messiah. For a brief moment the spotlight shines on Emmaus, but the walk and response of the disciples are seen as essential to the meaning of the parable. At Emmaus they invite Jesus to be their guest; while at the table he becomes their host. The climatic center, the orderly arrangement of phrases, sentences and movement, and the artistic incorporation of clusters of theological motifs will continue to provide a rich treasure for all who take time to appreciate Luke's style and structure. Chapter 24 will continue to offer a mosaic which upon closer examination may lead to deeper

faith and discipleship for anyone who will let the symbols speak. Robert J. Karris has summed up the abiding contribution of this passage:

When all is said and done, the meaning of Jesus' resurrection remains a mystery which eludes our grasp. Pondering its meaning through images is extremely helpful, but is like viewing a precious Rembrandt painting through venetian blinds. Flashes of insight and appreciation must substitute for total comprehension.⁹

FOOTNOTES

¹Ernst Haenchen, "The Book of Acts as Source Material for the History of Early-Christianity," *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L.E. Keck and J.L. Martyn (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), pp. 259ff.

²*The New International Version* is quoted.

³John Drury, *The Gospel of Luke* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1973), p. 217.

⁴I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), pp. 28ff.

⁵Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), pp. 29ff.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 49ff.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 37-43.

⁸E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke, in the New Century Bible Commentary* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1974), p. 276.

⁹Robert J. Karris, *Invitation to Luke* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1977), p. 277.