



Thank you for your interest in The Upside Down Kingdom—an eight-week study of the Gospel of Luke.

The pages which follow include:

- An overview of this series (2 pages)
- A sample sermon/class outline (6 pages)
- A sample handout (4 pages)

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- phone: (800) 863-5665

**1730 Coachman's Court
Brentwood, TN 37027
800-863-5665
lookpress@aol.com
www.lookpress.com**

The Upside Down Kingdom

These lessons on Luke are not strictly expository. I do not deal, verse by verse, with the great passages of this book. But neither are they simply topical—pick a subject and find some Scriptures that seem to fit. I would call these lessons “thematic.” They are based a broad understanding of Luke (the big picture) and are rooted in texts found in Luke.

Each of the sermon outlines in this series is 4 - 6 pages in length. They are coordinated with handouts for your congregation—visual cues that lead your people through the points you are making in the sermon.

Sermon Title	Text	Page #s Outline	Page #s Handout
1. The World According to Luke	Overview	1-6	1-4
The first readers of Luke’s gospel were only 40-odd years from the cross, yet—already—they were trying to invent a less dangerous Christ. They wanted to be good disciples. But, like us, they found some of what Jesus said and did difficult. These Christians were trying to smooth Jesus out a bit, make him fit what <i>they</i> thought, create a Jesus who looked more like them. But Luke will have none of it. He knows how tempting it will be to domesticate Jesus, to pull his teeth, to make him just a bigger version of ourselves. And, so, he writes a gospel that portrays a Jesus who will not be tamed.			
2. Building the Hard Way	Lk 4:1-14	7-12	5-8
The Temptation Narrative tells us what methods Jesus <i>rejected</i> for building the kingdom of God. Read on in Luke, however, and you discover what material Jesus <i>did</i> use for building his kingdom. Cross-people are the bricks Jesus uses to build his house. It’s not the fastest way to build. In fact, it’s slow and painful. It’s not the easiest way to build. The way of the cross is hard. But in the end, Satan will never prevail against a kingdom built from people who will deny themselves and take up their crosses daily to follow their Lord.			
3. Religion from the Bottom Up	Lk 18:9-14	13-18	9-12
In the parable of the tax collector and Pharisee, Jesus teaches something many people, especially <i>religious</i> people, seem to forget. There are not <i>two kinds</i> of people in this world: the sick and the healthy, the sinful and the righteous, the failed and the successful, the right and the wrong, the good guys and the bad guys. There is only one kind of person— <i>sinners in need of God’s mercy</i> . But Jesus does say there are <i>two kinds of sinners</i> : those who tell the truth about themselves and those who won’t; those who are quick to confess and those who refuse. Those who humble themselves and those who think that if they can highlight their good points, God will overlook the rest.			

4. The Backwards Community Lk 9:46-48; 14:7-11 19-24 13-16

Humbling yourself before God is not the only kind of humility Jesus demands of his followers. He also wants disciples who are willing to humble themselves before their fellow man. In this upside down kingdom, the one who volunteers to be on the bottom who is really on top. The slave is the king. The servant has real power. The one who makes himself least is made greatest. The one who submits is dominant.

5. In the Mean Time Ethics Lk 12:35-46 25-30 17-20

It's been 2000 years since Jesus spoke his hard words and set his high standards. It is hard for those of us living 2000 years removed to keep living at the door, watching for him to come back. We all want to be the servant who is dressed and ready and doing what Jesus wants when he comes again. But truth be told, we are more like the servant who says, "My master is taking a long time in coming." We have ceased to *anticipate* that Jesus is coming soon. And where there is no *anticipation*, there is little *motivation* to run like tomorrow will never come.

6. Uncommon Economics Lk 18:18-25; 16:1-9 31-36 21-24

Once upon a time (in a kinder, gentler age), there were some things you just didn't talk about at church. You wouldn't even mention the word "sex." You didn't talk about mental problems or business failures or scandals of any kind. But those days are long gone. We live in a time when we'll talk about anything—out front and in public. Except, of course, for money. Money is perhaps the last *personal* subject left. Raise the subject of money from the pulpit or in the classroom . . . suggest that God may have something to say about what we possess . . . and notice how uncomfortable and defensive people become. But if we are uncomfortable talking openly about money, Jesus isn't.

7. Amazing Grace Lk 15:11-32 37-42 25-28

There is a surprise in Luke which takes our breath away and drives us to our knees. We meet in Luke an unexpected God . . . a God who surprises us not by what he can *do*, but by who he *is*. The God of Luke could have been a *whip-cracker* ("Toe that line! Keep that Law!"). But Luke tells us about a God who is kind even to the ungrateful and wicked. He could have been an angry God, resentful of sinners. But, in Luke, we find a God, rather, who loves sinners and rejoices over those who repent. God could have been judge, jury and executioner in this gospel. Instead, Luke portrays our God as the God of the 2nd—and 70th—chance.

8. Resurrection Everywhere Lk 7:36-50; 7:11-17 43-48 29-32

We thought the cross was the end of Jesus' story. Put the body in the tomb. Roll down the stone. Everybody go home and weep through the weekend. The cross was the end—we thought. But Jesus doesn't end his stories as we have learned to do. There is not a story Jesus ever told . . . there is not a life Jesus ever touched . . . that does not end in resurrection! Including his own.

The World According to Luke

Move One: Setting the Metaphor

Take Interstate 40 west until you hit the Pacific Ocean, and head south on Interstate 5 to San Diego. Take the exit marked: “Sea World Drive.” Drive into the world’s most popular theme park. Pay your \$35 fee and you can do it all.

1. Take in the tidal pools. Talk to the dolphin. See the dreaded shark.
2. But it’s *Shamu Stadium* that makes the \$35 worthwhile.
 - The arena seats 5000 people. The sea-water tank holds 6 million gallons.
 - Swimming in that tank is one of the most majestic creatures in nature.
 - “And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, for your viewing pleasure—Shamu, the Killer Whale!” (Cheers, whistles, applause!)
3. Killer Whale Characteristics:
 - They can grow to 30 feet in length, weighing up to 20,000 pounds.
 - Their jaws open wide enough to swallow a sea lion in a single gulp.
 - 50 teeth, three inches long, designed for grasping and tearing.
 - Killer Whales are called the “gentle giants” of the ocean. But, in fact, they are the supreme predator of the sea.

But it is not just the *presence* of these creatures people pay money to see. They come to *Oooh* and *Ahhh* at how the Killer Whale has been tamed by humans.

- Some slip of a girl—110 pounds in her wet suit—will command the beast, and it will tear around the pool, leap high into the air, and douse the crowd with one flap of its mighty fluke.
- She will mount its back and ride the monster like a horse.
- It will flip her high into the air with its tail.

The crowd, of course, loves it. They cheer and applaud and gasp. And they leave, at the end of the show, impressed by the whale . . . but far more impressed that even a creature like this can be bent to the purposes of man.

1. Occasionally, however, Shamu declines the honor of doing our bidding.
 - Eleven years ago, while working with one of these “Gentle Giants,” a trainer named Jonathan Smith was knocked violently into the air.
 - The whale caught him in those massive jaws, dragged him 40 feet under, smashed him against the bottom of the pool, and released him.
 - Mr. Smith suffered a lacerated liver, heavy internal bleeding, and a broken back, hip, pelvis, leg and ribs. He lived, but barely.
2. No matter how we train them, what tricks we teach, how docile they appear—these are wild animals.
 - They are huge and powerful and capable of great violence.
 - They are ruled by a different nature. They answer to a different call.
 - They may allow us to cage them. But don’t think we have *tamed* them.

They are bigger than that. Just ask Jonathan Smith. Would you pray with me?

Move Two: Taming Jesus

We've gone to church for 2000 years now.

We've gone to church so long and so often that we've grown quite comfortable with our crucified Savior and his eccentric teachings. Week after week, we come into his presence and speak our words and make our requests. It is so routine for us that we worship with hardly a shred of discomfort or a hint of unease. We sense no danger here, no threat or strangeness about this Jesus. He sits in our midst—and we hardly break a sweat!

We've read our Bibles for 2000 years now.

We've read our Bibles so much that we've actually grown comfortable with what they tell us. Even when we come to that part of God's word that ought to be most disturbing—when we come to the gospel accounts with their graphic portrayals of this alien Jesus and his unnatural ways—we have learned to take it all in stride . . . to swallow the bits of Jesus we like and spit out the rest. When Jesus starts stepping on our toes, all we have to do is close the book, put it away, and reach for the channel changer.

We've dealt with Jesus for 2000 years now.

And that's been long enough for us to build a nice enclosure for him—a place to put him where we can feel safe when we come to visit.

1. We can go there to marvel at his power and look at his beauty.
2. But we expect him to behave himself while we watch.
 - No unwanted impositions on our lives, thank you very much.
 - No sudden moves or threatening gestures.
3. We want the “kinder, gentler” Lord . . . a tamed Jesus who never offends.
 - We prefer a Jesus with the rough edges knocked off.
 - We want a Jesus who is domesticated to the point that we can go swimming with him whenever we want and have nothing to fear.

But there are times when Jesus refuses to be church-broken.

1. Just when we think it is safe to go in the water:
 - He says something that knocks us into the air.
 - He catches us with some unexpected idea, some radical demand, and drags us to a place we do not want to go.
 - He breaks us and humbles us and makes it clear who is really in charge.
2. This Jesus is huge and powerful and quite capable of eating us alive.
 - He does not think as we do.
 - He does not value what we value.
 - He is ruled by a different master.
 - He answers a different call.

He may allow us to cage him. But don't think for a moment we have *tamed* him. Jesus is bigger than that. Just ask Luke.

Move Three: The Purpose of Luke's Gospel

Evidently, you don't have to be 2000 years removed from the cross to find reasons to tame Jesus. The first readers of Luke's gospel were only 40-odd years from the cross, yet—already—they were trying to invent a less dangerous Christ.

1. The beginning generation of Christian believers was dying out by the time Luke wrote. Paul was gone. Peter was gone. Those who had actually seen Jesus with their own eyes were gone by and large.
2. In their place arose a new generation of believers—those who had not seen, but only heard. They had listened to the stories about Jesus. They memorized his teachings. They wanted to be good disciples.
3. But, like us, they found some of what Jesus said and did . . . well . . . difficult. He can be so demanding, so radical at times. Standing at a distance from him, separated by decades, without the privilege of a first hand experience with their Lord—these Christians appear to have faced the very struggle you and I now have.
 - “Yes, Jesus said that. But surely that's not what he meant!”
 - “I know Jesus told us to act that way. But it just doesn't make sense!”
 - “Of course, that's what *he* did. But he never meant for *us* to do that!”
4. Already, just a stone's throw from the events of the cross, here were Christians trying to smooth Jesus out a bit, make him fit what *they* thought, create a Jesus who looked more like . . . them.

But Luke will have none of it. He knows how tempting it will be to domesticate Jesus, to pull his teeth, to make him just a bigger version of ourselves.

And, so, he writes a gospel that portrays a Jesus who will not be tamed.

The last thing in the world Luke wants us to do with Jesus is:

- grow comfortable with him
- take him for granted
- figure him out
- think him predictable.

The Jesus Luke tells us about is surprising, unexpected, aggressive, even dangerous. This Jesus goes against the grain. He rubs the wrong way. He swims against the tide.

Luke's Jesus bites.

Move Four: The Threatening Jesus

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled ... It is he who humbles himself who will be exalted.

[Can you feel Jesus swimming up beneath you?]

Woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.

[Doesn't that knock you out of the water?!]

Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?

[Can you feel his teeth closing in around you?]

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

[Does that drag you to a place you are afraid to go?]

You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

[Is Jesus breaking you yet?]

There is an aspect of Jesus that chills even a disciple's heart to its depth and makes his entire spiritual life gasp for air. This unusual Person...is walking with great determination ahead of me, and He strikes terror right through me. He no longer seems to be my Counselor and Friend and has a point of view about which I know nothing. All I can do is stand and stare at him in amazement. At first I was confident that I understood Him, but now I am not so sure.

Oswald Chambers

Move Five: Luke and the War of the Worlds

Luke writes his gospel to tell us about a difficult Jesus and his difficult ways. He introduces us to an upside down king and his upside down kingdom. He tells us of a Jesus who is shocking, demanding, perplexing—precisely because Jesus is not from this world. He comes from some other place. He lives by some other rules. He swims in a completely different ocean than we have ever known.

- Jesus belongs to a place where God reigns, not self.
- It is a place where people are measured by character, not pocketbook.
- It is a place where righteousness is always the rage.
- It is a place where confession is prized and pride is poison.
- It is a place where servants wear crowns.
- It is a place where beauty has nothing to do with skin.
- It is a place where grace is the currency and everyone is rich.

That's where Jesus is from. That is the world he lives in.

But that is not our world. That is not the world with which we are familiar. Things don't work that way where we come from.

And that is why Jesus jars and troubles and disturbs and alarms. That's why he cuts against our grain. That's why he dares to offend us.

We cannot come to an understanding of who this Jesus is and what he wants of us without being caught and dragged and broken. We do not come to the kingdom of God comfortably. We have to be bloodied before we take Jesus seriously.

And Luke knows it.

What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

There is a kingdom of this world and a kingdom of heaven. And we must choose one or the other. We cannot live in both.

What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

These two kingdoms are locked in an inverse relationship:

- What is *important* for one is *useless* in the other.
- What is *reasonable* in the one is *folly* in the other.
- What is *effective* in one is *disastrous* in the other.
- Our world's *white* is the Kingdom of God's *black*.
- *Up* here is *down* there.

What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

- And that is why the Jesus we meet in Luke seems so alien and radical.
- Jesus is another kind of king than we have ever known.
- And *his* is another kind of kingdom.

Move Six: Overview of “The Upside Down Kingdom”

Review of Series:

Building a Kingdom the Hard Way. Embracing the way of the Cross.

Religion from the Bottom-Up. Learning to humble ourselves so God will us.

The Back-to-Front Community. Learning to serve so God will through us.

In-the-Meantime Ethics. Persevering in an upside-down lifestyle.

Against-the-Grain Economics. Money in the life of a disciple. (You may want to make plans now to be gone that day.)

A Head-Over-Heels God. The craziest, most unexpected thing of all—God loves us so much he would do anything for us.

Handouts: Talk about how handouts are to be used during this series.

Move Seven: Letting Jesus Run Wild Again.

[Adapt this to your congregation.] Drive up Granny White Pike until you come to Radner Lake. There you will find a church named Otter Creek. Park your car, write out your contribution check, and you can have the run of the place for the morning. Visit a classroom. Talk to friends in the foyer. Complain to an elder.

But its what goes on in the auditorium on Sunday that makes Otter Creek special.

- The sanctuary itself seats about 500 people.
- It features some wonderful singing and worship—even a passable sermon!
- But the main reason you come here is to see that *one majestic man* who is rumored to swim around this place about this time every week. Like me, you have come to see Jesus.

Sadly, some of us will be content to sit in our pews and watch some slip of a preacher—180 pounds in his 3-piece suit—putting Jesus through his paces. We look forward to cheering and clapping and gasping at every trick. And we will leave impressed by Jesus ..and with ourselves—that we know him so well, that he is just who we thought, that there were no surprises to this Jesus after all.

Some of us, though, will not be content to sit where it is safe and comfortable. We’ll want to dive into Luke’s gospel and swim with Luke’s Jesus. It’s not the safest place to be. There is risk involved. But if we’re lucky, Jesus just might grab us and drag us and shake us to our core.

To those of you who decide to go swimming with Jesus during this series, could I give you two words of advice?

1. Always keep your eye on him. Don’t ever turn your back. You can never be sure what he will do next.
2. And if he does manage to latch onto you—if ever he gets his teeth into you—remember: your only hope is to play dead.



the **W**orld according to **L**uke

The Gospel according to Luke presents Jesus as a king—God’s king. But he is a different sort of king than we might imagine. Luke tells us of a surprising, unexpected, counter-intuitive Jesus.

This is a king who defines himself as the champion of the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. He chooses tax-collectors and fishermen to be his disciples. He offends the powerful and defends the weak. He always sides with the underdog. He does not take expected positions on the religious questions of the day. He tells stories; he does not deliver exegetical homilies. He serves and commends to others a life of humility and suffering. He predicts his death on the cross and goes to

Calvary with eyes wide open.

These themes are not unique to Luke. The other gospel writers sound some of the same notes. But in Luke, this is the dominant melody which gives consistency to the words and actions of Jesus. Jesus is an “upside down king,” a different kind of Lord from popular expectations.

Who could have known? How could the world have prepared itself for a God of the stable, of the nobodies, of the prodigal, of the cross? That kind of king was hard for his contemporaries to accept.

This surprising, upside down, anti-king is still hard to accept. We keep trying to domesticate Jesus, to chip off

his hard edges and mute his confrontive message. Luke writes to a Christian community struggling with a king who goes so against the grain. But rather than taming Jesus to accommodate their sensibilities, Luke paints a portrait of Jesus that confronts and counters and challenges the “way of the world.” Then, Luke invites the church not to fix Jesus but to follow him.

Jesus is an upside down king. But he is so, not because he is contrarian or idiosyncratic, but because he rules “another kingdom”—a kingdom “not of this world,” a spiritual realm that runs counter to the rules which govern daily life in the flesh—and-blood world we know too well.

*For what is highly
valued among men is
despised in God’s sight.*

Luke 16:15

Personal Study

Monday

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world are not just in competition. They are locked in an inverse relationship. What is important for one is useless in the other. What is reasonable in the one is folly in the other. The world's white is God's black. Up here is down there. The very skills and behaviors that make you useful to one Lord make you dangerous to the other.

Luke is famous for his *reversals*—bald statements which contradict the “common sense” of this world. Read the following words of Jesus. What is radical about these statements? What worldly wisdom do they contradict?

- Luke 4:18-19 (Jesus defines his ministry.)
- Luke 5:27-32 (Jesus defines his audience.)
- Luke 6:20-26 (Jesus defines his disciples.)
- Luke 6:27-36 (Jesus defines kingdom living.)
- Luke 9:24 (Jesus gives the “motto” of kingdom living.)

Tuesday

Read Luke 16:13-15.

Think about Luke’s gospel through the lens of these verses. How does Luke demonstrate this principle in his story? Consider what *men* value and what *God* values regarding the following:

- People (Lk 18:9-14)
- Money (Lk 12:16-21)
- Position (Lk 11:43; 20:45-47)
- Power (Lk 9:46-48)
- Legalism (Lk 11:42)

Wednesday

Luke highlights the upside down kingdom of God by presenting us with a confrontive and discomfiting Christ. Jesus is (in one author’s words) a “controversialist.” Read the following passages. What is the situation? How uncomfortable would people have felt in these circumstances?

- Lk 4:14-30
- Lk 5:4-11
- Lk 6:1-11
- Lk 11:37-44
- Lk 20:9-19



Worship

Thursday

We try to do with this confrontive Christ what people throughout history have done. We attempt to tame him, to knock off his rough edges, to keep him from seeming so *counter* to the world as we know it. Notice the following situations in Luke where people tried to do that with Jesus. What was his response?

- Lk 4:1-13
- Lk 5:27-32
- Lk 7:36-50
- Lk 10:38-42
- Lk 13:10-17
- Lk 15:1-7

Friday

Here are some statements of Jesus we often feel are too outrageous to be taken literally. How do we “tame” these statements and make them more palatable? What would it mean if we took these statements literally?

- “Give to everyone who asks you.” (6:30)
- “Love your enemies.” (6:35)
- “Deny yourself and take up your cross daily.” (9:23)
- “He who is least among you is the greatest.” (9:48)
- “You cannot serve both God and money.” (16:13)
- “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled.” (18:14)

What exactly is worship? Many have diminished it to an event, a time-slot or a congregational activity. We may then limit worship to set times and places.

Paul states in Romans 12 that our spiritual act of worship is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. So, the hard message of the Upside Down Kingdom is carried on. It would be much easier to think of worship as something we can take time to do once or twice a week, when in reality, we are called to live worshiping lives. Christ’s messages are hard to swallow because we prefer to concentrate on the outside and ignore the inside, to restrict God to Sunday mornings and keep the rest of our week for ourselves.

Anytime, anywhere, in any circumstance, the Father is ready and willing to change our hearts, to refresh and renew us, to revive and put meat back on dry bones. Always, he invites us to worship. The only thing he asks is a willingness to be emptied of ourselves and be filled up with him....to be transformed!

This week as you spend time in personal meditation, prayer and praise before the Lord, ask him to show you the parts of this world’s kingdom that you may be allowing to take the place of his greater filling. In a world that teaches us to be full of ourselves, Christ asks us to empty ourselves and experience a greater filling. Meditate on the words to this song by Chris Christensen.

More than anything, more than anything,
I love you, Jesus, more than anything;
More than worldly wealth, more than life itself,
I love you, Jesus, more than anything.

Small Group

Most of us have horror stories about trying to tame pets. Can you share a few with the group?

Domesticating animals is the attempt to make them fit into our lifestyles, bend them to our will, train them to be convenient to us. When they decline this honor, how do we feel?



Read Luke 7:36-50
(see also 5:27-32; 7:34; 15:1-2; 18:9-14; 19:1-7)

One of the most unpopular of Jesus' traits was his penchant for tax collectors and sinners. Certain individuals simply did not like the class of people with whom Jesus associated.

So they tried to tame Jesus—domesticate him to the facts of life.

As a group, spend the next 20-30 minutes discussing the following ideas:

- What did the Pharisees think of tax collectors and sinners? What did they believe God thought about such people?
- Did good, religious people associate with these riff-raff? What must they have thought of people (like Jesus) who

claimed to be spiritual, but spent time in the company of sinners?

- Do you see how the Pharisees tried to tame Jesus? What methods did they use to get him to conform to their standards and prejudices?
- How did Jesus respond to their attempts to domesticate him?
- How do you imagine the Pharisees felt when Jesus declined the honor of seeing the world their way? In fact, how do you think they felt about Jesus *preferring* sinners to them?
- Finally, could it be that what really frustrated the Pharisees was not the people Jesus befriended but the fact that they could not control him; he would not be tamed?

Jesus still refuses to be “church-broken.” He will not be controlled or tamed. Do we handle that any better than the Pharisees did? Jesus stubbornly insists he is Lord and we are not. Does that frustrate you?

Go around the group. Ask each person to confess that Jesus is Lord. Then spend some time encouraging each other to live that confession this week.

Finally, pray together that God might tame us to his will and free us from our attempts, rather, to tame him.