

# LUKE—WEEK 10

## THE INCARNATION MISSION



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Mary Magdalene*

*by Jan van Scorel (1495–1562) on display at Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam*

No one is ready for the concept of incarnation. Jesus shows who he is, and the demons know who he is, but for now, he's just setting things up for a later realization. It's all just too fantastic.

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Thank you.

Luke 8:1–33 — *The Incarnation Mission*  
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1 Luke 8:1–3 (ESV)

*Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.*

One of the beautiful things about Christianity is how it ignores many things that society treasures. Wealth does not make one important. High office doesn't transfer either. Neither does high education.

Mary Magdalene couldn't have less status. I wouldn't get within 50 feet of someone possessed by seven demons. She had zero friends when Jesus healed her.

But right there in the same sentence is Joanna, who's at the other end of the status spectrum. She was apparently healed of some sort of infirmity and has joined with Mary and the apostles following Jesus. They're all the same in the kingdom of God.

There's also *Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means*. Note how wealth does matter. Having the means to provide support isn't status in the kingdom of heaven, but it's still useful. Natural assets and talents aren't despised; they're just not idolized.

Everyone has a role in God's kingdom. They're all glorious. Humble tasks are often essential.

When blizzards hit the Washington, DC area, the radio stations announce, "Only essential employees need report to work."

This means the highest paid people can stay home. It's the worker bees who keep society from collapsing. They're the ones we can't live without—yet they're at the bottom of the pay scale.

I don't know why our society is so messed up like that, but the kingdom of God isn't.

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One of the most important jobs in every church is teaching children's Sunday School. It has a huge impact on kids and is typically one of a church's largest programs. Keeping it staffed is a never ending task.

Always pray for your church's Sunday School. Ask the Lord to provide more top quality teachers and other volunteers.

And encourage the teachers. They give up a lot to do this and the load can burn people out. Praise recharges their batteries.

Also consider helping directly. You don't need to feel gifted to give this a try. Every teacher started out as an assistant.

On the job training is one of the ways that God grows us.

2 Luke 8:4–15 (ESV)

*And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

*And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*

This passage is self-explanatory as long as you avoid the predestination issues. The explanation of the parable is tough, but the explanation of the explanation is tougher.

This is about how different people react to the gospel. The doctrine of limited atonement is obvious, but it’s not as stark as in other passages where Jesus describes “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It’s the doctrine of election here that’s gives people fits.

The phrase, “*for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand,’*” is a purpose construction in the Greek. The words, “*so that*” mean that the purpose of “*for others they are in parables*” is so that “*seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.*”

There’s no sugar-coating this. God **intends** for those folks to not understand.

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This is a hard lesson, but hard lessons are worth the work. They lead somewhere.

God is fully God. He’s never overpowered. He’s never inattentive. When something happens that you don’t like, don’t explain it away by saying that it’s outside of God’s control. God created **this** universe, not a universe where these things don’t happen. This isn’t easy to get comfortable with.

He is Lord. Some of the things He does don’t sit well with us, but that’s our problem. We need to grow in the knowledge and the wisdom of the one who invented knowledge and wisdom. This can only happen through prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit to help you grasp the magnitude of His holiness.

Worship the almighty Lord of everything—that was, and is, and is to come.

3 Luke 8:16–21(ESV)

*“No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.”*

*Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told, “Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.” But he answered them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”*

Many Christians are taken aback by that last sentence. They feel that Jesus is rejecting his family, or at least being uncaring. But that reads something into this passage that’s not there.

Jesus just made a one sentence teaching point. There’s nothing here about what He did next. The next passage begins with, *“One day he got into a boat ...”* That’s about another day, so the rest of this day isn’t recorded by Luke.

Jesus didn’t tell his family to go away; He didn’t tell them anything. They weren’t within earshot. This message wasn’t for them; it was for the people who could hear him (and for us). If his family had been closer they would have communicated with him directly.

Undoubtedly, He was happy to see them. They presumably they got together after he was done preaching. They didn’t ask to interrupt His sermon, or to get a front row seat. They just wanted Him to be informed of their desire to see Him. There’s no reason to think that Jesus ignored this news.

Meanwhile, the point He is made is important. Jesus is unveiling the doctrine that believers are adopted sons of God. Paul’s epistles will detail this extensively.

But it starts here.

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Pastors have it tough—and their families have it tougher. They make sacrifices they couldn’t have dreamed they’d be making.

While Christian weddings often include a message on how Christ is the center of the marriage, for most folks this doesn’t go nuclear the way it does with pastors. Every family plan is tentative—every moment subject to intruding crises.

They need our prayers, but it would be silly to pray that this burden be removed from them. We need them to carry this load for us.

Pray for your pastors regularly. May the Lord keep them close and let them feel His presence.

May His face shine upon them and give them His peace.

4 Luke 8:22–25 (ESV)

*One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”*

Slow learners of the world unite! The apostles have seen Jesus perform countless miracles, even raising a man from the dead.

Now Jesus changes the weather, and this time *they were afraid, and they marveled?!?* What’s so special about is this miracle?

Well, why do insurance companies call major weather events “acts of God”? This doesn’t really make sense, but we’re used to it. It seems that large scale things feel more grandiose and thus more “God like.”

The same secular mindset is working in the apostles, and so this miracle really impresses them. Okay, whatever floats your boat. Eventually, they need to figure out who Jesus really is, and if this helps, fine.

For now, Jesus has the apostles at the, “now that I’ve got your attention,” stage.

That’s progress.

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We tend to think of God when things get rough. We pray about the big things but assume we can take care of the rest. That misses the point.

We are supposed to grow in our dependency on God. We come to Christ thinking we’re able to do all things but, over the years, the list of what we can handle ourselves steadily shrinks. Great saints depend on God for every breath.

We forget that God is in control of everything and that things that may not look important to us can be important to Him. Frankly, we can be pretty bad at picking prayer topics.

Instead of lifting something or someone up in prayer, try asking God to lift us down. Ask Him to grow us small in our self-reliance and big in our dependency on Him.

This isn’t easy. Self-reliance is at the heart of usefulness and worth (in this world’s eyes anyway). Competence is a plus. For example, when someone makes coffee for the church, we expect them to not make lousy coffee; they’re supposed to try to make the best coffee possible.

It’s how we “try” that’s the key. Sure, you measure carefully, but do you think of God while you’re doing it? Are you mindful of His blessings or do you just measure carefully?

Practice the presence of God.

5 Luke 8:26–33 (ESV)

*Then they sailed to the country of the Gerasenes, which is opposite Galilee. When Jesus had stepped out on land, there met him a man from the city who had demons. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he had not lived in a house but among the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell down before him and said with a loud voice, “What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, do not torment me.” For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) Jesus then asked him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Legion,” for many demons had entered him. And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss. Now a large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside, and they begged him to let them enter these. So he gave them permission. Then the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.*

The demons know who Jesus is and announce it to everyone present. Presumably, this includes all the apostles plus the women who were traveling with them. They had just witnessed Him calming the waves and wondered aloud who Jesus really is—and now the demons tell them.

Does this sink in? No. Why? Because it’s too fantastic.

Modern Christians, who grow up getting presents every Christmas, never get a sense of how incredible incarnation really is. That’s better than disbelieving it, but our belief lacks the awe that made the first Christians so legit.

Try to imagine a composer incarnating himself as a note into one of his symphonies.

Right. Neither can I.

Okay, now try to imagine that Shakespeare incarnating himself into one of his plays (not just his being an actor in a *performance* of one of his plays, but actually becoming a fictional character whose existence is in acts and scenes, not years and days.)

Okay, I can’t do that either. That’s the problem with the idea of incarnation. It isn’t just an image of the creator projected onto a wall in his creation; it’s actually Him. It’s just too fantastic.

When the light bulb finally comes on for the apostles, it will fill their lives with light.

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What we can imagine is an author creating a character in his own image. Many people think that *David Copperfield* is a veiled autobiography. Surely many of the events in *David Copperfield* follow events in Charles Dickens’s life.

But that still isn’t incarnation. When David hurts, Dickens doesn’t really feel pain.

Christmas is our biggest holiday because incarnation is so awesome. We can’t even begin to grasp it.

