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Luke

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Book Review

The book “Understanding the Bible Commentary Series: Luke” by Craig A. Evans, was a book that brought us factual as well as theological explanations to each verse that we read. The way Evans displays his commentary is a structure that is well organized and is also easy to understand. I also found the book to be quite informative and interesting in the information that it provided, as it helped me see certain passages, in Luke, differently in terms of meaning and also helped me to see certain aspects of certain parables that Jesus spoke of.

We can also see the credibility that Craig Evans holds as he is a theologian who did his doctoral studies at Claremont Graduate School. There he gained inspiration to write about the evangelist Luke, who was responsible for writing the book Luke in the Bible. After gaining much knowledge and insight he was invited by W. Ward Gasque’s invitation to write a commentary on Luke for the New International Biblical Commentary. For other contributions, one can see that he is extensively participating in the teachings of the Gospels, the Historical Jesus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as on archeology of the New Testament.

As a short preview to express certain points that I have seen within the book I will be giving some summaries regarding the first few chapters and the insight that was provided to me because of the knowledge that was presented.

In the introduction of the book, Evans speaks to us on the background of Luke based on traditions, context, historical facts. Some points that he speaks to us about is how, traditionally, people believe that the “author of the anonymous two volume work, Luke-Acts, was the physician Luke” (Page 1). He continues to prove this claim by giving some context from the New Testament in Philemon 23; Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11. By giving us this information it helps the reader to understand where the book of Luke came from in the first place.

In Chapter 1, Evans introduces us to the “prologue” of Luke and how it was “unique among the canonical Gospels” (Page 17). The reason why it was unique was because in the other passages, such as Mark and Matthew, they begin by going straight to the mentioning of Jesus. But, in Luke it is written in such a way where it appears that Luke is addressing someone under the name Theophilus and is expressing his gratitude for the opportunity to share this story with this individual.

In Chapter 2, Evans addresses the concerns that come between the gospels with the “distinctive features of the birth narratives” (Page 21). In this account it appears that Matthew contains events that are not stated in Luke. For example, in Matthew it mentions “an angelic announcement to Joseph, the Magi, a star, the flight to Egypt”(Page 21). However, in Luke it only mentions the angelic announcement to Mary and speaks more on John the Baptist and his birth. That being said, Evans continues to state that despite this difference between the passages that there are still some similarities or some events that are aligned with each other.

In Chapter 3, Evans draws a significant parallel between Zechariah’s belief that redemption has come and the “promise that God made to Abraham” as both were centered around the idea of redemption coming. This shedded light on the “crucial point” of the Davidic

messianic passage that stated “Galilee of the Gentiles” thus, further expressing how Jesus is highly likely to be the coming Messiah and Savior of the world.

Another book that we were introduced to is called, “Lent for Everyone: Luke, Year C” by N.T. Wright. This book is a book that is directed in a different direction than the book written by Craig Evans. Where this book is written in the setting of providing devotionals rather than just a commentary. Bearing this in mind, the material that is provided within this book is content that is for spiritual interpretation of the passages rather than just providing facts about the certain passage. Although this book is not so great when it comes to trying to see the background and culture of the passage, it does provide some valuable spiritual insight to the passages of Luke. The structure that the book is written is one that is based on spiritual insight on a certain part of a whole chapter. So in some chapters, N.T Wright, may focus on the parable that is presented in the passage, while in other chapters he may pull on just a particular part of the chapter that stood out and provided a spiritual lesson so as to provide a “devotional moment” for the reader.

N.T. Wright is a Bible scholar and was a former Bishop of Durham in the Church of England. He is one of the world’s leading bible scholars and is an New Testament scholar, as well as a Pauline theologian and Anglican bishop. Within his studying career, one would see that he studied in Merton College, Wycliffe Hall Oxford, Exeter College, and Sedbergh School. However, the amount of studying did not go in vain as we can see that he is greatly involved with questions that are provided in modern time and with the amount of books that he has written for the public.

There were some parts of the book that I found to be quite inspirational and have given me great insight into the passage or at least helped me to see the greater value of the passage that

was being read. The first part that I found to be quite moving was when N.T Wright addressed Luke 10:25-37 on the parable of the Good Samaritan. N.T. Wright addressed this passage by giving us a visual in the eyes of the Jewish man who was robbed and beaten close to death. Of how much pain the man must have gone through and how there was a great desire for help only to be disappointed two times. But, then on the third time you feel hope and feel warmth and healing and relief. However, he continues to address it by stating that it was not just any person who saved you, rather it was someone from a group that you abhorred. To have such a situation by which a person helps you in your greatest time of need even though they are considered to be your enemy expresses the love that Jesus is trying to stress in this message. We can really see how well N.T. Wright brings this message to light and how he guides us to understand and feel the love of God as well as how God is calling us to do the same.

Another point that N.T. Wright speaks on the passage Luke 14 where he addresses the statement that Jesus speaks of “[hating] your father, and your mother, your wife and your children, your brothers, and your sisters - yes, and even your own life! - you can’t be my disciple.” Initially I found this passage pretty confusing as well with how contradicting it is to many of the other things that Jesus speaks of during his ministry. But, N.T. Wright brings up a fruit for thought by speaking on how Jesus was “announcing God’s new way of running things” (Page 134). The old way of living was preparation for this moment where in the beginning the main concern was family and land. This is because “Israel was identified as Abraham’s family, a single ethnic unit. . . and. . . they were also identified as the people who lived in a special land” (134). With these two things in mind, N.T. Wright continues to describe how God’s people “are being redefined” because holding on to those old things is like “keeping the curtains closed when

the sun has risen” (page 135). I found this to be particularly interesting as it addresses the fact that life is like an adventure where in order to see or make a difference, we must get out of our nests and spread our wings. Obviously it’s very uncomfortable and out of our comfort zone, however, by doing so we would be able to see the light. Through the explanation that N.T. Wright provided within this book I find that this passage has become more clear to understand.

Overall, both these books had certain values to both of them. Though I would state that each of them would be considered more valuable than the other depending on the situation. When being viewed from the perspective of trying to gain information about the background of the passage, then I would state that the book written by Craig A Evans is more valuable as it contains more information on that perspective and also covers the entire book verse for verse. However, if you are looking for something that will give you some light or guidance through the day then I would state that the book written by N.T. Wright would be the better option. That being said, I enjoyed both books as it helped broaden my view on certain passages and also helped clarify some material on the book of Luke that I have been confused with. I would recommend both of the books to anyone who is interested in understanding the book of Luke whether you are a teenager or a scholar I feel that both these books would be able to appeal to your interests on the book of Luke and provide you with some insight.