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Reading Salvation in Luke's Gospel: Christ's Ministry as a Saving Charge from a Black American Context

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Preface

There is a God the Maker and preserver of all things, who will as sure as the world exists, give all his creatures their just recompense of reward **in this and in the world** to come,--we may fool or deceive, and keep each other in the most profound ignorance, beat murder and keep each other out of what is our lawful rights, or the rights of man, yet it is impossible for us to deceive or escape the Lord Almighty. (bold is my emphasis) from David Walker's, "Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World"

See the hundreds and thousands of us that are thrown into the seas by Christians, and murdered by them in other ways. They cram us into their vessel holds in chains and in hand-cuffs--men, women and children, all together!! O! save us, we pray thee, thou God of Heaven and of earth, from the devouring hands of the

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white Christians!!! from David Walker's, "Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World"

> Blessed is Lord God of Israel, because he cared for and gave deliverance to his people. He raised a horn of salvation in the house of his servant David.[2]
>
> Luke 1:68-69

Introduction – Reading Context to Read Scripture

The history of African-descended peoples in the United States is long and diverse. A significant portion of this story has been the arduous struggle for freedom and safety characterized, unfortunately, by a constant presence of violence and death. As a consequence, the last six centuries have witnessed various expressions and interpretations of Black life that articulate hope for equality, redemption and salvation. This tripartite hope takes on varied forms, at times, looking forward to the Divine's recognition of Black people's spiritual equality, redemption and salvation in heaven, while at other times demanding the recognition of, and struggle for Black people's humanity, socio-political equality, redemption and salvation by both church and society. A look at two exemplary American writers of African descent is instructive for understanding an aspect of Black American discourse and the intimate relationship between interpretations of black life and salvation.

The first person of African descent to have their poetry published was Gambian-born Phillis Wheatley. Kidnapped from Africa as a child and sold into American slavery, Wheatley became a noted poet and ardent Christian. Her poem, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," addresses the theme of theodicy as she identifies her knowledge of Christ as a positive aspect to her bondage. Through this acknowledgement, Wheatley subtly uses God's eternal salvation to charge her White audience with the responsibility of remembering and acknowledging their spiritual equality. Warning all Christians to, "Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain, May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train," Wheatley's captivity brought knowledge of a Saviour, the same Saviour claimed by her White Christian captures.

Though salvation, within this poem, is an issue of knowledge and soul, less concerned with the body or life, Wheatley situates her life

[2] Unless otherwise noted, translations are the author's.

story in the context of salvation and redemption. It is useful to note the contrast between title and subject. The poem's title invokes the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the heinous practice of American slavery. To contextualize these practices, Wheatley contextualizes the slave trade in poetic terms about salvation. Salvation, in this instance, becomes the means by which Wheatley interprets her status, and simultaneously appeals to oppressive individuals and systems to fully realize the gravity of Christ's life, death and salvation. While salvation remains primarily a concern of the spirit, knowledge of salvation infers a responsibility and behavioral change from the master.

A century later, Frederick Douglass would give an account of his life in, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Miserable under the yoke of slavery, young Douglass spoke with God struggling with the same questions that Wheatley's poem addresses:

> Why am I a slave? Why are some people slaves and others masters? These were perplexing questions and very troublesome to my childhood. I was very early told that "God up in the sky" has made all things, and had made the black people to be slaves and white people to be masters. I was told too that God was good, and that He knew what was best for everbody. This was, however, less satisfactory than the first statement. It came point blank against all my notions of goodness.[3]

Resisting these simplified notions of God's will on his life, Douglass' autobiography recounts two important events that were integral to his liberation. At one point during his childhood, he overhears his master, Mr. Auld, chastising his wife for teaching Douglass to read. Mr. Auld chided his wife explaining that to teach a slave to read, would ruin the slave and make him forever discontent. It was at this moment that Douglass realized literacy was his path to freedom.

The second event is what Douglass describes as a "humble epoch in my history", and begins his description of how a slave becomes a man. Douglass was subject to numerous mistreatments by a ruthless, yet Christian, man with a strong reputation for breaking slaves named Mr. Covey. Covey, as Douglass states, "had more respect for the day [Sabbath] than for the man for whom the day was mercifully given...[W]hile he would cut and slash my body during the week, he

[3] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (NY: Cosimo Classics, 2008), 29.

would on Sunday teach me the value of my soul, and the way of life and salvation by Jesus Christ." Confronted with a salvation that was powerless to save him from the whip, and unable to find any measure of salvific grace amongst the slave holding class or liberating affect in a conjuring root, Douglass stood up to Covey and refused to be whipped. Douglass describes a two hour ordeal where he wrestled Covey. Refusing to submit himself passively to a whipping, he fought Covey as an equal without a drop of his own blood being drawn. Douglass' action was dangerous and bold, and for many slaves this type of action against a White man led to severe punishment, at times including death. Yet, due to Covey's pride, other circumstances and providential grace, Douglass' resolve to resist whipping went without grievous consequence. After this event, Douglass was on a new path and, in time, learned to read, which aided his liberation and eventual escape North.

The testimonies of Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass exemplify two ways through which people of African descent in America have sought to understand their existence in light of salvation. Confronted with systems of terror and oppression, the need for saving surpassed an esoteric notion of the spirit, but demanded some translation into the physical realm. For Wheatley, acknowledgement of spiritual salvation required White recognition, and for Douglass salvation necessitated reprieve from the inhuman torture and oppression of slavery. In a way, Wheatley's call for recognition is a critique similar to Douglass' observation of Covey's Christian character where both Douglass and Wheatley use salvation discourse to depict the need for a changed state of existence that corresponds to the change proclaimed as the gospel, or rather, the good news.

The social status of Blacks in the United States has greatly changed since Wheatley and Douglass wrote. Nearly 150 years after the end of slavery, and forty years after the demise of Jim and Jane Crow policies, the President of the United States is a biracial Black man of black Kenyan and White American ancestry. In the midst of this progress, Black Americans continue to disproportionately experience the effects of poverty and violence. Many children and teens, young men and women, marginal and elderly continue to need a salvation that translates into their daily existence, and alters the way

in which they encounter their life circumstances. I can scarcely forget a conversation with my maternal grandmother that echoes both Wheatley and Douglass' concerns for salvation. While talking about the blessings the Lord bestowed on her, and her gratitude for wonderful children and grandchildren, my grandmother paused and expressed her desire to meet Christ in heaven. This hope, she explained, had little to do with an anticipated casting off of worldly struggles, but centered in her desire to be in the direct presence of her Lord and Saviour, and through eternity to fully know and understand the will of God. Continuing to opine on the after-life, I can only paraphrase her words; she added, "I know the Lord works and has a will, but I just want to know why our people had to endure such pain. Why did we have to suffer this place..." Confident in the saving, spiritual, and social power of her Lord, she hoped for a saving discernment that would explain the ambiguities, contradictions and means by which Christ worked.

It is out of this context that the following essay seeks to query salvation in the Gospel of Luke. Class, education, color, nor neighborhood can save one from the presence of violence or terror. Through my grandmother's questions, and by contextualizing the topic of salvation within Wheatley's, "On Being Brought from Africa to America", and Douglass', *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, it becomes apparent that the topic of salvation can entail more than one's eschatological hope of spiritual saving. Following a discussion of the contemporary need for diverse and enlarged descriptions of salvation, a contemporary reading from a Black American Christian context explores Luke's presentation of salvation by raising the questions, "saved from what?", "saved for what?", and "saved by what?"[4]

[4] This paper claims neither to represent the views of all Black people, nor to present a comprehensive view of Black Christianity or identity; Black identity is diverse and dynamic. The use of the Black American Christian context seeks to contextualize and identify the authors own subject-position, and offer allow various aspects and interpretations of Black America to inform and be informed by the texts in question. Additionally, while this paper is written from and as a response to certain conditions identified in the presented Black context, the findings and insights are in no way restricted to people of African descent. It is intended that readers, regardless of background, will find relation and resonance with various aspects of this analysis and their particular subject positions.

A. Salvation(s), Need(s) and Danger(s)

Selecting Luke's Synoptic Difference as a Lens for a Black American Context

> The agent was a Christian, and often preached to us. He had two texts: 'Thou shalt not steal;' 'Servants, obey your masters.' His successor preached with the whip.
>
> Rev. Steven Duncan, 1879[5]

> Coase es a rule people don't bel'eve in de Bible. I wuz talkin tuh er white man tuther day en he sed people is done lef Jesus Christ. Yuh know de Bible says dat yuh is saved in Christ 'fore de World began. People in muh section uv de country don't bel'eve dat.
>
> Henry Baker, 1938[6]

In the midst of life's hardships and trials, many Christians find solace and hope in the saving power of Christ. While salvation is an essential component to most Christians' religious identity, the ways in which Christians conceive and reflect upon salvation is wide ranging and diverse. Whether through cognitive recognition, experiential observation, apophatic epiphany or anticipated realization, promise of the Divine's salvation plays an integral role in how countless people who attest to having been saved by Jesus Christ shape their life, ideologies, theologies, and consequently, their actions. In describing the New Testament's diverse, yet central role among Christian communities, David E. Aune makes an insightful observation:

> The basic explanation [of the New Testament's central, yet diverse use] centers on the fact that each socio-religious group that calls itself "Christian" has a particular shared understanding of who Jesus was and/or is and how "salvation" (which can be defined in many ways, but always refers to a particular perception of what it is that humans lack) was made possible by God through him. The basic religious or theological convictions shared by these groups (which can be very small or very large and complex) read the New Testament in such a way that it provides authorization for their belief systems.[7]

Implicit among a number of these individuals and their "socio-religious" communities is a view of human existence as inherently

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5 John W. Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 623.

6 Ibid., 667.

7 David E. Aune, "Introduction," in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*(Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1.

being in need of saving: spiritual and physical. Though people often feel the need for the Divine's immediate saving from life's circumstances, discussions of salvation too frequently restrict discourse on salvation to descriptions of God's saving power as singularly concerned with saving the soul from an eternal after-life in Hell. When such descriptions, valuable and legitimate in their right, begin to reflect the totality of soteriological discourse, they neglect the various ways that people need saving from the very real and immediate struggles, systems, and situations encountered in daily life.

Whether considering the parent whose child is ill (Lk 7:11-17; 8:40-42a, 49-56, 9:37-43) the person marginalized because of social location (Lk 7:36-50, 17:11-19) the doomed patient with dwindling hope and resources (Lk 4:38-40; 5:12-16, 8:43-48; 18:35-43) or the falsely indicted defendant (Acts 5:17-42; 6:8-8:1; 12:1-11), both scripture and modern experience witness to life situations where the Faithful appeal to Christ in search of a promise and power that is rooted in their understanding of Christ's identity as saviour. As varied as there are testimonies of God's goodness, views of the cross and perspectives on soteriology affect how people discern hopes and needs amid lived-experiences and anticipated after-life. Some may view this diversity as an obstacle to overcome, a hindrance to proper theological formation and uniformity. This author, alternatively, understands the diverse conceptions of salvation as a testimony to the countless lives and life-situations impacted by Jesus' ministry. Looking towards a teological last judgment where God fundamentally re-establishes divine order and justice, or focusing on God's localized deliverance from life's physical, emotional and psychological afflictions, an array of soteriological perspectives reflects Jesus' pervasive relevance to every aspect of Christian experience.

This variance is more than a product of contemporary ecumenism, deconstructionism, and political correctness. Even when looking at the biblical accounts left by the synoptic evangelists, each contributes a unique perspective to the Christ event. Each perspective then gives a nuanced view of the salvation therein provided by Jesus' incarnation, life, ministry, death and resurrection. Amongst the Synoptic Gospels' articulation of salvation, the role of the cross offers a striking point of distinction between Matthew and Mark's presentation as compared to Luke's presentation. Both Matthew and

Mark explain Jesus' death on a cross as an atoning act mediating humanity's salvation (Mk 10:45; Matt 26:28), while Luke affirms the necessity of Jesus' crucifixion (Lk 24:26) yet, fails to clearly correlate Christ's death on a cross to God's provision of salvation to humanity. Definitive in his conceptualization of Jesus as Saviour (1:42-55; 68-79) and Christ (4:16-30; 7:18-25; 9:1-50), the cross is integral for Luke's identification of Jesus as Christ, though its relevance to salvation remains ambiguous. Juxtapose Luke's blurring of the relationship between salvation and the cross to Luke's explicit use of 'saving' language through his preference for words from the root σώζω [sōzō, I save], and readers are able to identify a Christ mediated salvation in the Gospel of Luke rooted in the birth, life and ministry of Jesus.[8] As François Bovon notes, "the life of Jesus accomplishes this salvation...His ministry, summarized in this way, is marked by the coordination of action and word." [9] Through skilled narrative description and careful omission, the ambiguity in Luke's presentation of salvation allows Jesus' life and ministry to play a greater role in interpreting God's saving act. By diminishing the overt salvific agency of the cross, Luke's gospel performs a critical role by enhancing the relationship between Jesus' agency as Saviour and his life and ministry.

As outlined above, Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass are excellent illustrations of Black American musing on salvation. Equally illustrative are the ways Antebellum slave holders depicted salvation. While Wheatley and Douglass demonstrate that Blacks constructed their own notions of salvation, the impact of oppressively imposed soteriologies demonstrate the inherent dangers of singular, after-life oriented salvation. During various periods in history, individuals with institutionalized power use narrow constructions of salvation to dissuade the marginalized and oppressed from seeking saving, or even solace, from exploitation. Focused on the after-life, the Divine's omnipresence and salvific agency becomes hidden as predatory theologians misrepresent suffering as steadfastness and

[8] See, Robert F. O'Toole, *Luke's Presentation of Jesus: a Christology* (Roma: Biblical Inst Pr, 2004), 55-62, for a discussion of Luke's use of σώζω language; For statistics on Luke's use of σώζω and its cognates, see, François Bovon, Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research (1950-2005), 2nd rev. ed. (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006), 276.

[9] Ibid., 277-8.

salvation as merely a yet-to-be realized hope inconsequential to their daily needs and pains. Antebellum American history brings acute awareness to the precariousness of espousing a salvation solely concerned with the after-life, and predicated on one's willingness to submit themselves to unjustified arrest, torture and murder.

In order to develop apathy and docility towards slavery, the nineteenth century ruling class propagated "pie-in-the-sky", after-life rooted salvation. If slaves were good meek Christians, endured their hardships, and 'submitted to their masters', then they would inherit the earth and Christ's salvation would provide them with a spiritual reward in the after-life. Rejecting this exploitative and narrow conception salvation, David Walker, Sojourner Truth, Maria Stewart, Henry Bibb, Henry Highland Garnet, Harriet Tubman and countless other Black Christians employed speech, writing, song and action to articulate notions of salvation that encompassed both the physical and spiritual, immediate and future. Writing out of a Black American context, this essay believes that, in addition to expressing ambiguously broad notions of Christ's soteriological program encompassing both after-life and present and physical needs, Luke's Gospel offers the above depicted Black American Christian context an useful presentation of salvation capable of addressing the diverse salvific needs of Black Americans today.

B. Isolating the Gospel in Luke and Acts

Good-news as Told by Luke (-) Interpretations of the Good-news as Told by Luke

Withstanding the narrative distinctions between the Gospel of Luke and other gospel narratives, Luke's account of Jesus' life and ministry is unique because of its companion narrative, Acts of the Apostles, that chronicles the expansion of Christ's Gospel message following Jesus' ascension. A short note on this paper's approach to reading salvation in the Gospel will clarify the subsequent argument. Where other evangelists conclude their testimony with the resurrected Christ, Mark ending with the empty tomb and merely the pronouncement of Jesus' resurrection, Luke uses Jesus' post-resurrection appearance as a launching pad to depict Christianity's early growth. The presence of a second narrative alters the ways scholars have explored the subject of salvation. By narrating the expansion of Christ's gospel, readers have a natural intertextual text

in which they can compare language, figures, and themes between Jesus' ministry in the Gospel, and the early church's interpretation in Acts. The actions and speeches of characters, such as Peter, Stephen, James and Paul, offer readers with models for how Luke understands the first post-ascension communities of believers to have interpreted and re-iterated Jesus' ministry and gospel. As a consequence, a disproportionate amount of the scholarship on Luke's view of salvation rely heavily on intertextual readings of the speeches in Acts to construct and interpret the meaning of salvation in Luke's Gospel. This practice relies on testy debates about the relationship, literary unity, and dependence, or the lack thereof, between the Gospel Luke and Acts of the Apostles.

Though the Gospel of Luke and Acts' shared authorship is virtually universally accepted among scholars, there fails to be any evidence among early canonical lists or extant ancient manuscripts to suggest that the Gospel of Luke and Acts were linked and circulated side-by-side as a two volume set. The absence of extant evidence, however, is insufficient reason to cease identifying the texts' intertextual relationships. Whether speaking of Luke and Acts as distinct works by the same author (R. Pervo, M. Parsons, C. K. Rowe) or Luke-Acts (H. Cadbury, F. Bovon, R. Tannehill) as a two-volume work authorially intended to be read as a continuous work, neither the Third Gospel or Acts present a clear, systematic view of salvation.[10] As such, this paper follows Daniel Marguerat's suggestion that the acknowledgment of any unities between the Third Gospel and Acts depend on the reader's identification and signification.[11] Each text, conceived and planned at the same time or written independently decades apart, were produced as two entities, circulated as independent texts, and are, thus, capable of being analysed as independent narratives. This paper has particular interest in Luke's

[10] For discussions of the various views on Luke and Acts unity, confer, Henry J. Cadbury, *Making of Luke-Acts*, The, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999); Robert Tannehill, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Foundations and Facets) (English and Greek Edition), vol. 1 of *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation(*Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991); Mikeal C. Parsons and Richard I. Pervo, *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Andrew F. Gregory and C. Kavin Rowe, eds., *Rethinking the Unity and Reception of Luke and Acts* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2010).

[11] Daniel Marguerat, ed., "Luc-Actes: une unité à construire," in *The Unity of Luke-Acts*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leuven: Leuven University press, 1999), 57-83.

presentation of salvation with respect to Jesus' ministry, and intentionally focuses on the theme of salvation in the Gospel. Due to the focused attention on the Gospel's presentation of salvation, and the fact that the Gospel, regardless of literary interdependence, circulated as a free standing work, this paper refrains from advocating a position on Acts' dependence on Luke, and simply explores the Gospel's presentations of salvation. The preliminary discussions above have identified the history and context(s) out of which, and for which this reading focuses, as well as noting the reasons and impetus for focusing on Luke's Gospel. Following is an analysis of Luke's narrative presentation of salvation, and discussion of how this narrative offers Black American Christians a means of constructing a soteriology responsive to an anticipated after-life, as well as, a present socio-economic and political reality.

C. Reading Luke to Read Context

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, it has anointed me to announce the gospel to the poor; it has sent me to proclaim freedom to captives and recovery of sight to the blind in order to send out the oppressed in freedom to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.
>
> Luke 4:18-19

> And he [Jesus] said to them, "But you, who do you say I am? And answering Peter said, "The Christ of God!" Commanding them, he strictly ordered that they tell this to no one, saying that it is necessary for the son of humanity to suffer greatly, to be rejected by the elders, high priests and scribes, to be killed and on the third day to be raised. And he [Jesus] said before everyone, If anyone wishes to become my follower, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily; let him follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, this person, will save it.
>
> Luke 9:20-24

The topic of salvation has long interested readers of the Gospels, and as stated above, Luke's presentation is particularly intriguing.[12] I.

[12] There are a number of works available that discuss the history of scholarship on Luke's treatment of soteriology and the cross. It is beyond the scope of the current paper to recount the history of interpretation, but to offer a particular reading, deemed, applicable to the present Black American Christian context. For discussion of the history of scholarship on the subject, see: François Bovon, *Luke the Theologian: Fifty-Five Years of Research (1950-2005)*, 2nd rev. ed. (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2006), 305-328; Peter Doble, T*he Paradox of Salvation: Luke's Theology of the Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), page 1-22; Greg Herrick, *The Atonement in Lucan Theology in Recent Discussion* (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995); Hermie C van Zyl, "The soteriological meaning of Jesus' death in Luke-Acts. A survey of possibilities," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 23, [*Footnote continued on next page …*]

Howard Marshall argues that, "The central theme in the writings of Luke is that Jesus offers salvation to men. If we were looking for a text to sum up the message of the Gospel, it would undoubtedly be Luke 19:10: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost."" [13] The reading advanced in this paper focuses on Luke's narrative presentation of salvation within the Gospel. The theme of salvation recurs throughout the Gospel through a number of mechanisms. Through the Gospel's narrative, various individuals anticipate a community-oriented salvation represented by John and Jesus' presence and ministries, Jesus receives the title of Saviour and has his service and healing correlated to the recipients being saved. Each of these aspects of the text help place salvation at the heart of Jesus' actions and ministry. These mechanisms contribute to the construction of a Lucan view of Jesus' ministry, where saving and salvation play an integral role in characterizing Jesus' life, instead of simply characterizing his death. Below, this reading will outline the relationship between Luke's presentation of Jesus' salvific character and his ministry by looking at three stages of Luke's discursive representation of salvation: the character of salvation as implied by people's anticipation for the Messiah; salvation's defining qualities as presented as the reason for Jesus' ministry and appearance (Luke 4:16-30); the reactions and consequences of salvation visible throughout Jesus' encounters and teaching.

Early in the Third Gospel Luke introduces the theme of salvation as a defining characteristic of the Christ event. Prior to the introduction of Jesus' ministry, the first three chapters of Luke present Jesus' appearance as divine action and the fulfilment of prophecy of Israel's long awaited Messiah. Chapters one and two give account of the annunciations and birth narratives of John the Baptist (Luke 1) and Jesus (Luke 2). The account begins with John, instead of Jesus. By depicting the birth of John the Baptist as an important moment in Israel's salvation history, Luke associates John the Baptist with the prophet Elijah (1.17; 76-77; cf. Mal 3.1; 4.5-6). The presentation of John the Baptist as an Elijah figure, who in certain ancient Jewish

no. 2 (2002): 533-57.http://bible.org/seriespage/atonement-lucan-theology-recent-discussion#P144_46691 (accessed June 23, 2011).

[13] I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian & Theologian*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 1998), 116.

traditions was to prepare Israel for the arrival of the Messiah, allows Luke to foreshadow the arrival and importance of Jesus through the memory, credibility and popularity of John the Baptist. Within the narrative of John the Baptist's birth, Luke frames the entire Gospel as a period of divine action on behalf of Israel, fulfilling prophecy and fundamentally altering Israel's subject position in the world. Jesus' birth was to be a culminating period in the history of the world.[14]

John the Baptist, thus, is the medium through which Luke first introduces his audience to the character and nature of Jesus. For this reason, when Zechariah lauds the birth of his son John in 1:68-79, the first seven verses are referencing the Messiah, now anticipated more vigorously with the foreshadowing birth of an Elijah-like prophet, John the Baptist. This anticipation characterizes the coming Messiah as God's provision of deliverance [λύτρωσιν, *lytrōsin*] (1.68; cf Ps 110:9) and a horn of salvation for Israel. There are differing views on whether the metaphor, "horn of salvation" in 1.69 describes the Messiah as a weapon and instrument of salvation, and thus implies, "mighty savior" (NRSV) or a more general sense of abstract salvation. François Bovon references Dt 33:17 to argue that as a symbol of force, horn particularly denotes military power, and thus, this reference is a description of God or the Messiah as a saving-king, in the Biblical lineage of David.[15] The significant aspect for this reading is Luke's early use of John the Baptist's birth to characterize Jesus' impending presence as one of power and salvation.

Turning to the subject of his son, Zechariah announces that John's role in Israel's linnacle in Israel's history is to give "the knowledge of salvation to his [the Lord's] people by releasing [them] from their sins." (1:77). As Bovon notes, this knowledge exceeds the limits of intellectual information, but deals with something more practical and relevant to Israel's immediate reaction. Bovon believes John's Baptism is a portion of this response.[16] Advancing this view slightly farther, the knowledge, which Bovon likens to Greek

[14] For discussion of Luke's writings as primarily constructed as *Heilsgeschichte* [salvation history], confer Hans Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke*, New edition ed. (London: SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd, 1982).

[15] François Bovon, *L'Evangile selon Saint Luc: (1-9)*, vol. 1, Commentaire du Nouveau Testament 3a (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1991), 104-105.

[16] Ibid., 108-110.

philosophical notions of gnosis, demands lived reaction and response. The consequence of John's prophetic role, thus, is preparing the way of the Lord by instilling an active view of salvation where individuals who sought or attained salvation manifest this anticipation or experience through action and life.

Supporting this reading of Zechariah's pronouncement is Luke's later portrayal of John's ministry. John the Baptist required people to physically leave their life context to be baptized in the wilderness, which symbolizes an expectation for how they were to repent of their sins and change their means of conducting life (3:4-17). This message is visible in John's query and command; the query recognizes the people's "knowledge", "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the impending wrath?" and the command requires their consequent life, "Bear fruit worthy of [your] repentance." (3:8a).

Proclaiming, "All flesh will see the salvation of God," (3:6) John's later anticipation of Christ gives an explicit temporal and earthly tone to salvation. Each Synoptic Gospel connects John's ministry to Isa 40:3, yet, only Luke extends this citation from 40:3 to 40:3-5. Instead of leaving John's pronouncement vague, Luke opts to use Isaiah's use of the Greek term for flesh or physical body [σάρξ, *sarx*] to describe who would witness this salvation. While some scholars use this passage to suggest Luke's foreshadowing of Christ's universal salvation, it is equally plausible that this citation explicitly characterizes salvation as something pertinent to human life and conditions. The knowledge of salvation given by John the Baptist, thus, prepares the way of Christ by demanding a lived reaction to knowledge of salvation, and an assurance that, at the very least, salvation offered by Christ will be relevant to earthly existence, and not solely the spirit.

Continuing in the characterization of the Messiah's relationship to salvation, Luke emphasized Christ's salvific character in a titular sense by naming Jesus as a saviour (2:11).[17] The lone Synoptic Gospel to use the explicit term savior [σωτήρ, *sōtēr*], Luke uses the term twice in the Gospel; in 1:47 Mary uses it in the Magnificant as a reference to God, and in 2:11 an Angel of the angelic host from

[17] Savior is used as a title twice in Acts (5:31; 15:23). Both instances are references to Jesus.

heaven bestows the title on Jesus when announcing to the shepherds that the Christ was born. The explicit titles of saviour are intriguing when juxtaposed. Mary's Magnificant recognizes, in accordance with traditional Old Testament conceptions, that God is the ultimate Saviour. It is possible to reduce this example as a pious individual properly identifying the Divine as Savior. Inverting this recognition, Luke then has heavenly beings, Angels from the Most High, proclaim that Jesus is the Saviour. This inversion rhetorically uses pious tradition to enhance Jesus' identity as both Christ and Saviour.

Luke's use of John the Baptist to highlight the saving character of Jesus, and the earthly relevance of salvation helps inform a reading of Jesus' ministry. This reading of Jesus' ministry is particularly instructive when discerned through the lens of the Nazareth episode at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry (4:16-30), an episode that numerous commentators identify as the Third Gospel's programmatic passage.[18] Having come to his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus enters a synagogue, takes a scroll in hand and stands in the midst of everyone, announcing,

> The spirit of the Lord is upon me; for which purpose it has anointed me to proclaim good-news to the poor; it has sent me to preach liberation to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to send out those who are oppressed in liberty [in order] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (4:18-19)

Here, Jesus appropriates Jewish scripture to define his ministry and self-identity as the Messiah. Luke 4:18 corresponds to Isa 61:1-2, and v19 to Isa 58:6. This scene in Nazareth is important for how it relates the role of the Messiah, Christ, to service. Through Luke's use of John the Baptist, these verses explicate Jesus' ministry as the divine articulation of humanity's salvation. It is the spirit of the Lord that set Jesus aside. The activities of Jesus deal not with institutions, but people and individuals. It deals less explicitly with systems or teaching, but is depicted through scripture, what Jesus pronounces as having been fulfilled, as being attendant to the impoverished,

[18] Referring to this passage, Joel Green says it has important for four different reasons. He asserts, "Subsequent summaries of Jesus' ministry refer back to this account (7:21-22; Acts 10:38)...[T]he ministry of Jesus in Nazareth at the outset of his public ministry is of central important to the Gospel as a whole..." in, Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 206-19; See also, Robert F. O'Toole, *Luke's Presentation of Jesus: a Christology* (Roma: Biblical Inst Pr, 2004), 29;

imprisoned, blind and oppressed. These activities are centrally focused on the lived circumstances and immediate hopes and needs of the least fortunate. According to Luke's narrative, Jesus' saving character is scripturally rooted, and directly pertinent to the lived circumstances of those needing saving. In Luke 4:21, Jesus further discusses the immediacy of his activity, and the assurance that this scripture referenced him by stating that, "Today, in your ears, this scripture has been fulfilled." The salvation, at least an aspect of it, provided to humanity was present with Christ and occurred by way of his presence, not necessarily his death.

A second aspect of this passage is worth note. Luke 4:18-19 contains a series of aorist infinitives: εὐαγγελισασθαι [*euangelisasthai,* to gospelize/proclaim goodnews] (4:18a), κρύξαι [*kēryxai*] (4:18b), ἀποστεῖλαι [*aposteilai,* to send out] (4:18c), κηρύξαι (4:19). Each of these words function as infinitives of purpose explaining the reason Jesus was anointed (4:18a) and sent out (4:18b-c). The lack of conjunctions, due not to Luke, but to the LXX, makes the subject of these infintives in series less grammatically explicit. The purpose of this observation is because of Luke's appendage of Isa 58:6 to 61:1-2. When reading these verses as Jesus' self-proclamation in 4:18-19 there are, at least, two possible readings. The most natural reading, which is also found in most all commentaries, identifies the infinitive κρύξαι in 4:19 in parallel construction with the preceding infinitives κρύξαι and ἀποστεῖλαι in 4:18b-c. This reading identifies κρύξαι in 4:19 as a modifer of the perfect active verb in 4:18b, ἀπέσταλκέν [*apestalken,* has sent out]. Consequently, 4:19 describes an additional reason that Jesus was sent, and comprises of a second message Jesus' ministry seeks to preach.

An alternative reading that this author has not seen advanced elsewhere, looks at the repetition of the infinitive κρύξαι. The traditional reading of 4:18-19 can be summarized as describing Jesus as anointed for a reason (4:18a) and sent out for three reasons: to proclaim a message to two groups (4:18b); to send out a group of people (4:18c); and to proclaim a particular message to an unspecified group (4:19). Assuming that Luke's copy of Isaiah was not different from extant versions and he intentionally added Isa 58:6 to the end of 61:1-2, one can conjecture on the reason. Already including a message that Jesus intended to preach, one is curious why Luke

included 4:19 at the end of v18 instead of inserted with the other preached messages at 4:18c. While the traditional view is legitimate, this paper argues that κρύξαι in v19 is able to modify its immediately preceding infinitive, ἀπέσταλκέν. With this reading, Luke's addition to Isa 61:1-2 is epexegetical. Instead of randomly adding another message, Luke explains the purpose for which Jesus sends out the oppressed in liberation. Rendered alternatively, "it has sent [ἀπέσταλκέν, 4:18b] me to preach [κρύξαι, 4:18b] liberation to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; [it has sent me] to send out [ἀποστεῖλαι, 4:18c] those who are oppressed [so that they will] preach the year of the Lord's favor."

The Greek text is able to support either reading, and it is undesired here to say only one reading is correct. By contrast, the current argument is that the text supports both readings, and the latter better explains Luke's addition to Isa 61:1-2. Additionally, this understanding of Jesus' ministry parallels John the Baptist's role as preparing people for the way of the Lord, through knowledge of salvation. Similar to John's preaching and Baptism, Luke presents Jesus' ministry and purpose as integrally related to how one lives, and requiring response and subsequent action. While salvation language is absent from 4:18-19, through recognizing the ways Luke foreshadows Jesus' saving character and ministry, this passage defines Jesus' ministry as salvific, in and out of time, and responsive to the social, political and health needs of people.

Later in the narrative (7:18-23), when John sends disciples to ask Jesus if he is, "the one who is to come", Jesus alludes back to his Nazareth pronouncement. Luke portrays Jesus citing the healing of diseases and afflictions, the recovery of sight to the blind and raising of the dead as an implied affirmative answer to whether Jesus was the Christ. The question of Jesus' identity as Christ and Saviour was answered, not by simply yes or no, but the associated service and saving activity of Jesus. Through this understanding of Jesus' ministry, Luke compels his readers to continue to understand Jesus' ministry as responsive and demanding. Jesus saves so that those who find themselves oppressed, have the ability to go out and proclaim the Lord's favor and agency.

After characterizing Jesus' saving character through John the Baptist and defining Jesus' ministry in Nazareth, Luke narrates Jesus'

ministry showing and elucidating the impact and saving ability embodied in the Christ. A last passage will suffice to demonstrate how this reading's view of salvation functions in Luke's portrayal of Jesus' ministry. The story of Zacchaeus is unique to the Gospel of Luke.(19:1-10) In this pericope, a chief tax collector, Zacchaeus, hears that Jesus is coming through Jericho. Moved to see Jesus, Zacchaeus climbs a tree in an effort to catch a glimpse of this great teacher. Upon seeing Zacchaeus, Jesus requests to visit his house. Luke informs the audience that the crowd was displeased with this action and grumbled at the sight of Jesus interacting with a man socially identified as a sinner. As chief tax-collector, Zacchaeus was likely a Roman imperial functionary, and achieved his wealth from the exploitative practices of Rome and the intimidation of Rome's brutal, merciless use of military might. Yet, Zaccheus gives no articulation of faith or belief, and seeks no cure or miracle. In opposition, Zaccheus gives up half of all his possessions and makes reparations to anyone he cheated to the sum of four-hundred percent the principle amount. It is after this statement that Jesus states, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because even he is a son of Abraham. For, the son of humanity came in order to seek, and to save the lost." (19:9-10). By invoking the reading of Jesus' ministry outlined above, one understands the presence of salvation as Zaccheus' repentence and act of proclaiming a new way of functioning and living. Despite his captivity to the social system and corrupt cultural standards of Rome's imperial regime, Zaccheus is sent out by Christ as one delivered from the former practices that oppressed and cheated. Announcing his new paradigm, Luke depicts Zaccheus' encounter with Jesus as life altering. This encounter changed Zaccheus' world-view, but indirectly changed the life of all Roman subjects in Jericho. As chief tax-collector, his just activity decreases the pain and suffering felt down the social ladder. It is Zaccheus' gesture that one might envision as a practical proclamation of the Lord's favor: a time when Christ's saving presence generates justice and service that relieves the lowest and least.

Salvation is a central component of Luke's presentation of Jesus. As Saviour, Jesus sought to impact the lives and conditions of those suffering from physical conditions, situations or limiting perspectives. This salvation meant more than the provision of liberation, but

provided the means and purpose by which followers of Christ were called to go out into the world affecting change and service. Salvation, more complex than simple recognition of an after-life oriented cognitive reality, demands an altered life orientation. Found in each of the Synoptics, Luke included the Jesus saying provided above that is found in 9:20-24 (cf Matt 16:13-28; Mk 8:27-9:1). Through a unique presentation of Jesus' ministry, Luke uses salvation as a means to build a Christian identity that centered its soteriological claims on active participation in the service of the world in recognition of God's saving power. Consequently, those who seek to save their ψυχὴν [psyxē, soul/self/life] will lose it. Playing on the dual meaning of ψυχή, in Luke's Gospel, this saying carries added value. Salvation, according to this reading of Luke, is something provided in the presence and appearance of Christ. Though Jesus had to suffer, his saving power applies to both the soul and physical life, and it is only those who will lose their life on account of Christ, that will consequently save it. The freeing power of being sent out, regardless of one's state of captivity, to work on behalf of the Lord to provide service to the world's oppressed is at the core of Jesus' example and ministry. Salvation, for Luke, is the principle by which Jesus appeared and encountered human systems and injustice, because within Christ's ministry disciples' found deliverance, forgiveness and power.

Conclusion: Saved by Christ, Through Life and Ministry

It is now appropriate to return to the three questions used to launch this study: "saved from what?", "saved for what?", "saved by what?" Based on Jesus' explanation of his anointing and ministry, the first question appears to point towards a universal type of saving. This universal saving refers, not merely to the ethno-political inclusion of the Gentiles, but to the encompassing salvific power of Christ to liberate and empower anyone regardless of their state. Captivity, illness, oppression and sin have a debilitating quality that renders their subjects sterile, ineffectual and powerless. Whether discussing the 10 individuals with leprosy and their social marginalization due to societal stigma, the centurion's sick slave, or Zaccheus' perpetuation of an unjust exploitative system, Jesus' ministry sought to find them in their powerlessness and captivity, releasing them from the powers of death and destruction. Jesus's

salvation functions as more than a way of saving individual's from an eternity in Hell; it saves individuals and communities from all types of death: social death, emotional death, cultural death, economic death, physical death and spiritual death. Visible in the testimonies of both Wheatley and Douglass, their contrived notions of salvation acknowledged the complexity and broad nature of Christ's saving power. Though remaining in bondage, Wheatley found voice and agency in the midst of her physical bondage. She, through her own understanding of Christ's message, affirmed her full humanity, regardless of physical state. Douglass, rejecting the soteriology of slave-masters discovered the power to struggle and seek both physical, intellectual and spiritual freedom. While the soteriology and theology of the slave masters taught an inquisitive young Douglass that God desired Blacks to be slaves and suffer under the yoke of an oppressive and hypocritical gospel of bad news instead of good, the saving power and liberation oriented ministry of Christ moved within Douglass. At a later point in his life, he again pondered on the question, "Why am I a slave?" This time it seems he came upon what resembles a Lucan knowledge of Christ's salvation:

> O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a brute! The glad ship is gone - she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me! God, deliver me! Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it. I had as well die with ague as the fever. I have only one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing. Only think of it; one hundred miles straight north, and I am free! Try it? Yes! God helping me, I will. It cannot be that I shall live and die a slave. I will take to the water. This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom.[19]

Christ's saving power permeated Douglass' existence, affirming him and encouraging him to perpetually struggle to find Christ's power and agency within his life circumstances. Liberated, while still in bondage, Douglass' conception of Christian salvation, like Wheatley's, demanded action and proclamation. They were saved from intellectual and social death, by an empowering knowledge rooted in Christ.

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19 Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (publication place: Cosimo Classics, 2008), 83.

The second query, "saved for what", is a poignant continuation of the first. Salvation has purpose, and that purpose expands beyond the provision of comfort, privilege or socio-political power. Jesus' saving power, as witnessed in 4:18-19 and Luke's portrayal of his ministry, saves to spur action. The proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor is the result of Christ's preaching. It is divine empowerment provided to those oppressed and weary. Witnessing to this notion of power, both Wheatley and Douglass illustrate how Christian notions of salvation can prompt service and proclamation. Wheatley, still enslaved and subject to the whims of her owner, used her voice to teach, critique and remind Whites that Blacks are also children of God; Blacks are also the recipients of God's love, mercy and saving. Through her identification of Christ's presence in her life, Wheatley spoke to the powers that be from a position of social marginality. As one of those oppressed, she went out empowered by Christ to preach a "knowledge of salvation" that demanded recognition of all persons humanity. Her poetry was liberated action. Douglass, a staunch abolitionist, became a champion of the oppressed and marginalized. Their, both Douglass and Wheatley, liberation became the means out which they served, and advocated an understanding of Christ that demanded people to view the Divine's intention for peace and justice.

The final question, "saved by what?", is implicit in the answer given for the first two. As demonstrated, Luke's Gospel suggests that Jesus provides salvation by means of his life, ministry, and love. The fruit of Christ's ministry are witnesses who serve and proclaim Christ's message of service and sacrifice. It is when Christ appears that salvation occurs, and Jesus, God's "horn of salvation" works on behalf of all those caged by various aspects of human existence. While I, like my grandmother, will wait to hear from God, why our people endured such trials, I cannot help but wonder, if part of the reason is that people professed to having been saved by Christ more readily use their life giving power to establish control and privilege, instead of sacrifice and service. How much of the Black Diaspora's suffering can be attributed to the saved waiting for Christ to proclaim God's favor for them, instead, them accepting Christ's charge to preach to the oppressed in action, deed, and life?

Reading from a particular Black American Christian context, this paper began by exploring various Black Americans' expressed

understandings of salvation. In an effort to identify a teaching on Luke's presentation of salvation, this paper queried whether the Gospel can offer a view of salvation, rooted in Jesus' ministry, that is responsive to the needs of contemporary Black America. In conclusion, a single question is left to serve as a prompt that hopefully moves this reading from analysis to social critique and impending action: "Are you saved?"

In a mere three words, countless Christians engage strangers, casual acquaintances, friends and family with a single question that seeks to position respondent on a binary scale of saved or unsaved. Reducing life's complexities to a vocalized yes or no, the question, "Are you saved?" attempts to split humanity into two camps where one's professed relationship to salvation predicates their relations in society. The individual who says, "Yes," gains recognition as sister or brother; the person, however, who responds in the negative becomes other and outsider, quite often symbolizing the unrepentant, the ignorant, or the enemy. This question, so often, fails to reflect on individuals' real world living situations, and consequently, requires people to feign a state of comfort and stasis. The above reading of the Gospel of Luke, however, suggests that the question, "Are you saved?" ought to function as a unifying call for the Church to jettison stasis and accept the dynamism and life-giving power modeled by Christ's life, ministry, death on a cross and resurrection.

If Luke's soteriological description of Jesus' saving character is to having meaning within people's life context, then it is imperative that "saved" and "salvation" be freed from a stale intellectual recognition of creeds, tenets or biblical teachings. Salvation must become the perpetual and on-going liberation of the exploited and oppressed, those with imprisoned minds, bodies or souls. Jesus has not "saved"; through the established reading here, Jesus is saving, constantly, and in various aspects of people's lives.

This reading is useful within Black America today, because the Black American Christian community is in dire need of saving. It needs socio-economic saving, educational saving, socio-political saving, and cultural saving. By looking at Luke's depiction of Jesus' ministry, this paper has attempted to offer a view of Salvation that highlights God's current interest in the plight and lives of humanity, but also, the requisite action, on the behalf of, required of those who

have experienced any aspect of Christ's saving presence. Salvation need not be a topic of division, but a means to recognize God's activity throughout history, and current call to service and discipleship.

By promoting a "knowledge of salvation", the Black American Christian community must celebrate the myriad of soteriological articulations advanced within its tradition, and respond by becoming advocates for those, rich like Zaccheus or on the margins like the sinful woman in 7:36-50, to be empowered to experience Christ' salvation. It is on account of Christ's life and ministry that those who have experienced salvation are able to walk in Christ as disciples, servants hand-in-hand announcing the Lord's favor, and providing glimpses of God's love. Luke's narrative presents an image of salvation where faith in Christ motivates action and transforms those once shackled captives to social and lived-circumstances to Christ's co-workers. Unlike an atonement soteriology found in Mark and Matthew, where the Cross mediates God's salvation, Luke inserts his own "Great Commission" in 4:19 that understands salvation as the core being of Jesus, and liberation in Christ as responsive recognition of, and response to salvation. The teaching for Black American Christians is to identify a Christ centered soteriological agenda that emphasizes corporeal and spiritual freeing power of sacrifice: modeled by Christ. As Jesus told Zaccheus, "For, the Son of Humanity came in order to seek and save the lost." (19:10) As a consequence, the Faithful, those followers delivered and motivated by Christ's power and love, must proclaim this, now, the time of Lord's favor by seeking and serving the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed, equipping them to go forth too, joining those able to witness to the good-news of Christ's salvation: anticipated in the afterlife, as well as empowering, and responsive to the here and now.