

[Various passages on certainty...]

Luke 1: “1 Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, 3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, 4 that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.

Acts 1:1 1 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

Acts 28: 28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. 30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

2 Peter 1: “12 For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, 14 knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. 15 Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. 16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Having Certainty in a Relative World”

An Introduction to the Gospel of Luke & Acts

This week begins a series on the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. This morning we briefly look at the introduction of each to see why Luke wrote his accounts and the impact they HAD on Theophilus and can also have on anyone else who reads these accounts honestly.

As a young church... [how much longer can we say that??]

We have done a short series on the Book of James and taken a lengthy trip through Ezra – Nehemiah. This is a good opportunity to remind ourselves why we have a sermon during our Covenant Renewal Worship Service.

When we studied the Book of Ezra, we saw that proper worship was restored before any of the work on the Temple, walls or city began.

In a series of sermons [almost two years ago!] we reviewed the elements of Covenant Renewal Worship:

Call

Confession

Consecration

Communion

Commission

But it is always a good thing to review!

Let's take just a moment to review what we mean by "consecration"

- **Consecration: Being transformed or changed by God's Spirit and Word to be His living sacrifices**
- **Consecration is where we are instructed and prepared for service, as His Saints... His people... His Church!**
 - 1) **Not simply the sermon**
 - 2) **The entire covenant renewal worship service is saturated with the Word of God**
 - 3) **Complete service is critical so the Spirit can use the Word to properly prepare us for service to God**
 - 4) **Romans 12:1,2 1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**
 - 5) **The other parts of the order of worship are NOT just filler.**
- **We are not simply observers, but participants: As members of God's Covenant Community no matter what our maturity or age:**
 - **Responsive readings**
 - **Psalms & Hymns**
 - **Lord's Prayer and our tithes & offerings**
 - **Those AMENS**
 - **Being consecrated or prepared to be disciples!**

The Scriptures present a sacrificial picture of the Word of God used as a powerful tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit

Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart"

Should help us read those sacrificial accounts describing instruments and procedures with new eyes.

The pastor or teaching elder has a solemn responsibility in his calling: The Pastoral Epistles:

II Timothy 2: 14 “Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

II Timothy 4:1 “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

- Important to remember today that to faithful preaching of the Word is not always the same as being “a great preacher.”
- The sermon is the Word of God preached!

First let’s look at what Biblical preaching is NOT:

- A lecture: This is not a seminary
-- though it is instructive
- A performance: You are not an audience
-- though it should be effective
- A self-help course: Not about me or what I get out of the message
-- though it must challenge us

Here is what it is:

- The Power of God’s Word
-- Peter begins & ends his final epistle with a focus on the Word
-- “The beginning of Wisdom is fear of the Lord”: We demonstrate this fear by HOW we treat His Word and respond in obedience!
- Wisdom builds the house: “3 Through wisdom a house is built, And by understanding it is established; 4 By knowledge the rooms are filled With all precious and pleasant riches.”
Prov. 24:3,4

What kind of homes/rooms we do we want in our lives?

- Where the Holy Spirit works
-- In the speaker & hearers
- God meets us in Word & Sacrament
-- Spirit prepares us to be living sacrifices
-- Son feeds us and sends us out!
- The sermon is an integral part of our Covenant Renewal Worship
-- Renewal collapses without the proper preaching of the Word
-- The sermon collapses if it is expected to carry everything

So we must keep all of this in mind as we trust the Spirit of God to take us on this journey through Luke & Acts: Why did Luke write these books?

- To help his friend Theophilus with “an orderly account”
- It appears that it had quite an impact “most excellent Theophilus” “O Theophilus”

Luke wrote to give Theophilus and anyone who honestly reads his account a CERTAINTY of about what happened and what it means.

- What a contrast to our relative world today:
-- That is your opinion
-- We can’t be sure this is what Luke even wrote

-- What if we find a dusty scroll in some clay pot in the desert that contradicts Luke's account?

-- Luke presents who Jesus really is: It would offend others to say they are wrong

Luke goes out of his way to ground his account in the reality of history:

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah.” Luke 1:5

Again when we study John the Baptist begins his ministry:

“Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, 2 while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.” Luke 3:1,2

And at the beginning of Acts with the Ascension of Christ.

Grounded in history: Not a leap of faith, but CERTAINTY!

A certainty that brought Theophilus to faith and can bring any honest listener to faith.

As Peter said in our morning reading from his final Epistle to those he loved in faith:

II Peter 1:19 “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

Lord-willing God will change us TODAY through His Word & Sacrament.

As we are commissioned today we must remember that we have CERTAINTY in a relative world—

Our thoughts, our actions, our lives must be “light shining in a dark place!

Communion meditation:

Luke 9:43 “And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, **44** "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men." **46** Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. **47** And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, **48** and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great." ...

51 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,”