

March 25, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 1:1-4.

1. What other book of the Bible did Luke write?
2. What was Luke's source of information?
3. What was Luke's most important source?
4. According to verse four, why did Luke write this account to Theophilus?
5. What is the theme of Luke's Gospel?
6. Thinking about "the things learned," which topic does Luke give more attention to, the birth of Christ or the cross of Christ?

THAT YOU MAY HAVE CERTAINTY

Luke 1:1-4

The New Testament begins with four historical accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. Three of those accounts are very similar, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Those three records about Jesus are called the Synoptic Gospels. The word "synoptic" comes from the word synopsis which means taking a common view. Indeed, Matthew, Mark, and Luke record much of the same information, while John's account is less dependent on the other three. These books are called Gospels because that is what they present. The story about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is the story about God's good news to

provide the Savior from sin, to provide salvation for sinners who so desperately need to be forgiven their guilt.

Only in John's account do we read the details of the Last Supper where Jesus told the disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for His people and then would come back and take His people to the place He prepared. According to John's record Jesus said, "*And you know the way to where I am going*" (John 14:4). Thomas said to him, "*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*" (v.5). Jesus said to him, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (v.6).

Luke picked up on that concept of the way and explained how Jesus Christ brought to completion all of the promises in the Old Testament about this "new" way. Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, said that John would fulfill the promise of Malachi 3:1, "*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways*" (Luke 1:76). And John would fulfill the promise of Isaiah 9:2, "*To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace*" (Luke 1:79). Luke wrote that John himself confessed that he was preparing the way of the Lord. *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'"* (Luke 3:4). According to Luke, Jesus affirmed the same truth when He told the people, *This is he of whom it is written, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you"* (Luke 7:27). Even Jesus's enemies acknowledged that He accurately taught the way of God. *So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God"* (Luke 20:21).

The Gospel according to Luke is the story about the "Way." It is the record about how God has made a way for sinners who offend Him greatly by their sins, to come to Him their Creator, and be at peace with Him. Peace with God is possible through the "Way" that God Himself created through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In a sense, Luke's story about the "Way" is still being written as multitudes of sinners around the world continue to learn about Jesus's sacrifice for their sins, confess their sins, receive forgiveness from God, and join

the millions of recipients of God's love who are walking in the "Way."

Is it the only way to God? Is Jesus's sacrifice the only possible way to God? Is the story of Jesus the only story about how to receive forgiveness? It is the **only** story. He is the only way. Luke wrote this Gospel account to assure us that this alone is God's plan. As we read it and study it over the next several months, we will grow in our certainty of the truth of the gospel story.

The Nature of the Book (v.1).

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us (v.1). The opening words of Luke's Gospel tell us that it is a compilation of truths like previous ones. Many had already undertaken the task. Therefore, we must conclude at the outset that Luke's writing of a historical account of Jesus was not original. Others had already accomplished this. Not the least of those "many" were Matthew and Mark. It is likely that Mark's account was completed in the 50's and Matthew's account was about the same time as Luke's in the early 60's.

We date Luke's writing in the early 60's because he had to have written it some time before he wrote *The Acts of the Apostles*. *Acts* as we call it by a shortened version was Luke's second book. He acknowledged this fact in the opening words of the second writing. *In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1:1-2).* In that writing, Luke mentioned Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28) which was in the year 61, but never mentioned his release.

Therefore, the Gospel, Luke's first book to Theophilus had to be earlier than 61. Other than Matthew and Mark, those other written narratives of Jesus's life that Luke referred to have disappeared. That, in spite of the fact that many had compiled such narratives. A narrative is a story. But often these narratives were an oral account which could easily be changed. A written account wouldn't change if one could appeal to the original.

Nevertheless, Luke didn't write in an attempt to correct inferior accounts previously published. He wrote *a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us (v.1b)*. A narrative of the things accomplished is a good definition of a Gospel account. The "things accomplished" includes much. In a very short explanation, Luke well expressed all the things accomplished in Acts 1:1. *"In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).* It is most important to realize that what "has been accomplished" is Jesus Christ's sacrifice for sins in order to provide salvation for all who believe. The narrative of Luke is the story of God's mercy toward needy sinners. Luke's account focuses on salvation. Luke stated the concept of salvation five times as in the angels announcing the "Savior who is Christ the Lord." This is the good news for all people, the light to the Gentiles Simeon promised (Luke 2:10).

Luke's Gospel is a story about things accomplished among us. These amazing works of God were the miracles Jesus did to prove His divinity, that He came from God the Father. It is His teaching that He brought to us from the Father. The pronoun "us" in this context is a wonderful term. As far as we know, Luke never saw Jesus. But he, like us, was part of the human race among whom God accomplished the works of salvation.

The Source of Information (v.2).

Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us (v.2). From the beginning there were eyewitnesses and ministers. But who were these people from the beginning to which Luke referred? That group had to include the eleven apostles. Then there were the many different women who had ministered with and to Jesus. We know of 120 disciples who met after Jesus's ascension, received the Holy Spirit, and with whom Jesus began to build His Church. Surely Luke talked to them. And there were 500 followers of Christ who met with Him after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:6). Plus there had to be other disciples like Mark who may have seen Jesus. And we can imagine that there were even adversaries of Jesus who came to faith after He returned to heaven, from whom Luke could gain information.

They were all eyewitnesses. The word of the eyewitness is reliable. An eyewitness to any event is considered credible in the courtroom. Multiple eyewitnesses of the same event, whose testimony agrees, is considered indisputable. Luke was not like a modern news reporter who seeks to report the sensational in an effort to gain listeners because listeners equate to money. Luke was concerned to know the truth about Jesus.

Those eyewitnesses and ministers delivered the “word.” The word is the story of the gospel. The word is the good news that God has provided salvation through Jesus Christ. The eyewitnesses to this good news did exactly what Jesus told them to do. To at least the eleven disciples (Matthew 28:16), though it is possible others were included, Jesus commanded, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:19-20). Likewise, as Jesus ascended to heaven He commanded the eleven disciples, “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). The eleven disciples, as well as the 120, and probably all of the 500 became ministers of the “word” and delivered it to people like Luke who had not seen Jesus.

The ministers of the word gave Luke the details about the Word of Life. We need to remember that the term “word” can also refer to the person Jesus Christ who is the living word. The “word of life” (1 John 1:1). The Word who was in the beginning with God and equal to God (John 1:1).

Furthermore, what Luke wrote was not just the message and testimony of those who had been with Christ the “Word” but was exactly what God determined he should write. Luke was one of those chosen instruments of the Holy Spirit to write Scripture. Peter described the process as, *Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (2 Peter 1:20-21). What Luke wrote was breathed out by God and is profitable to us, the children of God. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable*

for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). In our study, we will find Luke to be just that.

The Author (v.3a).

It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account (v.3a). “Me” in this verse is Luke. He was the good doctor and companion of Paul. It is good to compare Luke’s Gospel to the book of *Acts* which is considered by many to be “Luke vol. II.” The *Acts* contains the same excellent Greek writing and much of the same vocabulary as this Gospel of Luke. In fact, most people are convinced that Luke is the other part of the “we” passages in Acts (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5; 21:18; 27:1-28:16). For example, “We sought to go into Macedonia . . .” or “Setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage . . .” and so on.

We know that Luke was near Paul while he was imprisoned the first time because Paul wrote to his friend Philemon, “*And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers*” (Philemon 1:24). We also know that Luke stayed by Paul’s side right up to the end. Writing to Pastor Timothy Paul said, “*Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry*” (2 Timothy 4:11).

And yet for all that faithfulness to Paul, Luke was a virtually unknown servant of the Lord. There just isn’t much other mention of him in Scripture. We assume he was a Gentile because Paul referred to his Jewish companions while he wrote Colossians from prison separately from his reference to Luke. Paul wrote, “*And Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me*” (Colossians 4:11). But we know that Luke was also there because in the next sentence Paul wrote, “*Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas*” (Colossians 4:14). Obviously, Luke and Demas were not “men of the circumcision” that is, they were not Jews.

Maybe Luke is relatively unknown because he practiced the wise principle of *be diligent to be unknown*. That is a good practice

because attention, notoriety, and fame play into the hands of our natural desire to be king of our life. Being unknown is no guarantee of humility but it has to help.

Luke revealed in these opening words that he desired *to write an orderly account (v.3c)*. His writings, both in this Gospel and in *Acts*, are an example of excellence and accuracy. Luke's style or writing (especially in this prologue, vv.1-4) is equivalent to the classic Greek works of ancient history. It is actually comparable to the works of Greek and Roman historians Herodotus, Thucydides, or Josephus. It begins with this very precise one-sentence prologue similar to the historical account of 2 Maccabees or the work of Greek historian Lucian. We can see that the four opening verses of the Gospel are one long sentence greeting telling us to whom the account is written and why. But after this precise prologue the body of the writing is excellent in form, but in the koine Greek – the common language of the people.

Critical investigation proves that Luke was precise and accurate as a historian. Past archaeologist William Ramsey wrote: "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense; he seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at greater length, while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purposes. In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians." (William Ramsey, Quoted in Philip Graham Ryken, *Reformed Expository Commentary*, "Luke," vol. 1, Phillipsburg, N.J., 2009, p.6)

Luke stated that he wrote about things he followed closely. *Having followed all things closely for some time past (v.3b)*. The "things" were the works and teachings of Jesus Christ. But Luke's history of Jesus is more than a chronological listing of "things." Sometimes he ignores chronology and groups events or teachings according to theme.

And so Luke wrote down an *orderly account*. We might conclude that he wrote very precisely and systematically like a doctor would be prone to do. Remember that Paul called him the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14). Maybe this is why Luke included all of the healings recorded by Mark, the healing of the centurion's salve

recorded by Matthew, and five other healings omitted by Mark and Matthew.

The Purpose for Writing (vv.3b-4).

Luke stated quite plainly that he wrote this Gospel to inform Theophilus. It was *for you, most excellent Theophilus (v.3b)*. One thing we can tell from this address is that Theophilus was important. The phrase *most excellent Theophilus* contains the kind of title that was reserved for important people. Paul used the same term to address Governor Felix (Acts 24:2) and Governor Festus (Acts 26:25).

The name Theophilus means "friend of God" but does not imply that the man came from a Christian family with Christian parents who named him as a friend of the one true God. Not enough years elapsed to allow for that. But it does seem obvious from the scant statements that the man had some knowledge of Christ. It is likely that he had respect for God much like Cornelius did, who was a God-fearing man respected by the Jews.

One thing that is almost certain is that Theophilus was a Gentile. In the first place, it is a Gentile name. Assuming that Theophilus was a Gentile, we can conclude that he serves as a great example of uninitiated people who might walk into a church meeting for the first time. We use special theological terms that probably sound like code language. Many of us grew up with words like salvation, redemption, justification, propitiation, and sanctification. Unchurched are unfamiliar with such terminology. People like that need an "orderly" explanation about such terms.

Likewise, we who worship the Lord do special things in our meetings like praying at particular times and singing songs that contain words that do not make sense to the uninitiated, and tunes that are unlike what they normally hear in the sinful world.

How can the uninitiated know the way? The Gospel of Luke is for the one who is searching for the way to God. It is Luke's orderly account of the way to God established through Jesus Christ. It is good news for people like the Gentile who was unfamiliar with the God of the Jews and how to come to Him. Indeed, the focus of the book is toward Gentiles. Matthew presented Jesus as the rightful King

of the Jews. Mark presented Jesus as the fulfilment of Isaiah's Servant of God. But Luke presents Jesus as the Savior of all people, Jews and Gentiles alike. That is why we see him change some Jewish names to the Gentile form. There are also times when Luke didn't include specific events that would only apply to the Jews.

The Gospel of Luke is also for the saint who desires greater certainty of this wonderful plan of God to redeem us (one of those "code" words) for eternity. The purpose of this book is to affirm truth learned (v.4). Luke said he wrote it so *that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught (v.4)*. The Gospel of Luke gives certainty. If we include Luke, vol. II, in our assessment, we see that Luke began with John the forerunner of Jesus and wrote all the way through the ministry of Paul, the last apostle. In that 50+ years span Luke reveals over and over that God will do what He said He will do. Therefore, the Gospel of Luke is the story about the fulfillment of dozens of Old Testament prophecies in Jesus Christ, God the Son.

The *things you have been taught* are the essence of the gospel. The theme of Luke is: The love of God revealed in God's sovereign plans and actions of providing the Savior from sin for Jews and Gentiles alike. It is the story of Christ's love for all classes of people. As we have already discovered, Luke addressed his history to a Gentile citizen of the upper class. But Luke included stories about Jesus's work with Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans. He tells us about Jesus's love for the sick, deformed, enemies, rebels, demon possessed, men, women, children, prostitutes, and lepers.

In comparison, we see that Matthew's account being directed toward Jews begins with Jesus's genealogy back to Abraham. Luke's record of Jesus's genealogy goes all the way back to Adam to include all people. It is the story of the cross of Jesus Christ, the only means for a sinner to come to a right relationship with his and her Creator. While Luke's Gospel is probably best known for the story of Christ's birth, the cross of Christ actually gets more attention. The cross is the focus of more than half of Luke's Gospel (beginning with 9:53 running through chapter 23).

For the next several months we will study this detailed account of how God our Creator has provided salvation for needy sinners. We will learn how God sent His beloved Son to be born of a virgin so that He would not inherit human sin. We will learn how people plagued with various manifestations of sin, just like we are, will come to Jesus to find healing – both physical and spiritual. We will learn how Jesus willingly laid down His life, shed His blood on the cross to provide the only acceptable price to pay for our sins. In this study, Christians will be greatly encouraged to be reminded in detail of God's love for us. This will also be a good time for people who have never confessed their sins against God, never asked for forgiveness, never embraced Christ's sacrifice for them, to come to Him in faith believing all that the Bible says about Him.