

Today we begin a new sermon series... opening one of the finest records of Scripture – THE GOSPEL OF LUKE. This book is the longest of the 4 Gospel records (Matthew... Mark... LUKE... and John.) ... It contains many “extra details”... events... and parables... that are not included in the *other* three Gospels. For example: the entire content of the first two chapters will detail the advent of Christ... beginning with the histories of Zechariah and Elizabeth... then the Annunciation to Mary... culminating in several other “extra details” surrounding the Nativity. ... So... we will be celebrating Christmas ***in August*** (apart from all of the distractions and pressures of the normal holiday celebrations in December... although I won’t decline any present that you might want to give me...)

We can thank Luke for the stories of Zacchaeus... the penitent thief on the cross... the two disciples on the road to Emmaus... and several others... along with **15 parables** - which are only found in Luke’s Gospel.

(Now... here are a few interesting facts about Luke – himself.) ... Luke is the only one of the Gospel writers who did not know Jesus when He walked on this earth. (He was not present during our Lord’s three-year ministry and did not witness His death and Resurrection.) ... Luke’s sources for this Gospel (however) are eyewitnesses of these events.

Luke seems to have written his Gospel sometime between 63–68 A.D. ... give or take a few years. ... Luke (a pretty humble guy) shows his humility by keeping himself in the shadows in both the book of Luke... and Acts... which he (also) penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... as volume TWO of this Gospel.

The details of Luke's conversion are unknown. We do know... however... that he became a very close friend of the Apostle Paul. ... He joined Paul at Troas... but remained at Philippi until Paul arrived back there some six or seven years later... toward the end of Paul's third missionary journey.

From his evident familiarity with matters relating to ships and the sea... some Bible commentators have suggested that he had probably been (at one time) a ship's doctor. ... Evidence also would infer that he might have been a native of Antioch.

But no one (really) knows anything of Luke's history before he joined Paul in his travels. ... He isn't an apostle... He wasn't even Jewish! ... Suddenly (without explanation) in the Book of Acts... Luke starts narrating the story with a plural pronoun ("we")... in chapter 16. "*We traveled to...*" (So it is easy to conclude that Luke joined Paul on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey.)

Luke stayed with Paul during his second imprisonment... right to the end. Shortly before his martyrdom... Paul wrote to Timothy: "*Only Luke is with me*" (2 Timothy 4:11). ... What happened to Luke after the apostle's martyrdom is a secret of history.

(Now back to the content of what Luke wrote.) ... The key message for this book that we are about to study is:

**Luke 19:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.*

Luke presents Jesus Christ as the compassionate Son of man... Who came to live among sinners... love them... help them... and die for them. Why did Luke focus on this...?

By the time Luke wrote... the gospel message was spreading rapidly around the Roman Empire. Paul marched boldly into city after city. Everywhere he left converts and churches fired with his own passion for souls. ... As a result... **Gentile** converts were pouring into the church. ... The need for an authentic version of the gospel to be written *in scholarly Greek*... with a Gentile's perspective... (that Christ came to seek ALL who are lost - including Gentiles)... and based on a careful and systematic investigation of the facts - was growing. Luke *the physician* (with experience in careful research) was the Holy Spirit's choice. He had the training... the temperament... and the time.

So with this... as our background... let's take a look at our passage of study for today.

### **Luke 1:1-4**

#### **- Pray -**

We see a lot of "Now Hiring" signs in front of businesses today... don't we? ... Businesses cannot keep enough workers... and are barely able to stay open. ... One of the consequences (to American life)... is that it has dulled our senses and lowered our expectations about the products and services that we need. ... We have come to accept (and even expect)... mediocrity on the job... and in the marketplace... just as certainly - as we have (for YEARS) in government.

"First-rate" used to be our minimum standard. But now... it is considered rude or unreasonable to expect excellence from the

under-staffed and inexperienced “new-hires” with whom we (now) do common business with.

Unfortunately... we are also seeing that the cancer of mediocrity has invaded our Christian churches. ... Never before has there been a time in America’s history... when people have been so illiterate... when it comes to reading the Bible.

Americans have a positive view of the Bible. And many say the Christian scriptures are filled with moral lessons for today. ... However, more than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible. ... Less than a quarter of those who have ever read a Bible have a systematic plan for reading the Christian scriptures each day. ... And a third of Americans never pick it up on their own, according to a new study from Lifeway Research. ... Small wonder many church leaders worry about biblical illiteracy, said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research.

“Most Americans don’t know first-hand the overall story of the Bible—because they rarely pick it up,” McConnell said. “Even among worship attendees less than half read the Bible daily. The only time most Americans hear from the Bible is when someone else is reading it.”

Folks... that is mediocrity!

The downward drag of mediocrity... is not a new phenomenon. Having traveled with Paul and meeting many believers around the Roman Empire... Luke foresaw a particular danger (along these same lines)... looming on the horizon of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

As first-generation witnesses of Christ began to pass away... leaving fewer **firsthand accounts of the Lord and His teaching** - myths... fables... and Gentile speculations - **were taking the place of authentic reports about Jesus**. ... Luke knew that if the churches were to survive this erosion... they would need a comprehensive story of Christ (with both Jewish and Gentile “flavoring”)... to bind the Jews and Gentiles together. ... They needed a diligently researched and ruthlessly verified account that would equip them to separate truth from fiction... and to remain authentically Christian.

When the Holy Spirit compelled Luke to write... He drew upon Luke’s affinity for meticulous accuracy. Luke filled his gospel record with cautiously investigated details.

Why do I take time to emphasize this point...? Because **truth** has become a slippery subject in these latter days. ... Postmodernism denies the very **existence** of **truth**... so it is **not** surprising that postmodern Christians see **no difference** between disagreement and hostility. ... Consequently... they quickly set aside **truth**... to avoid any sense of **disharmony**... particularly with people of different belief systems.

I find this attitude confusing and appalling. I can think of few gifts more precious than **the gift of truth** - especially when knowing the truth will help someone avoid unnecessary difficulty... like eternal separation from God!

To set aside the pursuit of what is factual and real... might make things seem easier in the **short** run. ... But to set aside truth for the sake of an **elusive** sense of harmony with people... means sacrificing something of far greater importance - **an eternity with God**.

Luke pursued the truth with excellence... and the Holy Spirit kept him from error. ... And for about two THOUSAND years... the Lord has preserved this excellent... orderly... account for us. Why...? (As our passage today tells us)... so that we may have **certainty** about our trust in God's Son — what He taught and what He did on our behalf.

With this long history of excellence behind us... let's not settle for mediocrity now! ... We must (instead) boldly and lovingly proclaim what we know to be factual and true. Luke provides us with the material of which we can place such confidence.

### **Luke 1:1-2**

The second verse of the first chapter of the story tells us that Luke is reporting these events *“just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses ...and ...(WHAT?)... **ministers** of the word delivered them to us. ... He is not concerned about eyewitnesses who aren't ministers.*

By “ministers” he does not refer to professional pastors... or missionaries... or clergy (of any sort)... but to those people who are ministering and doing the will of God. ... We Protestants believe strongly in the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” — that **every** Christian is a minister... (serving Jesus Christ wherever he or she happens to be... in schools... shops... libraries... offices... homes... or neighborhoods.) ... Ministers like this were the sources for the gospel narratives that Luke checked-out.

The story is told (by Lloyd Ogilvie) about a man who was so intrigued by a Christian friend at work... that he came to him one day and asked how he could find God. ... His friend said, “*You need a theologian. You'd better talk to my pastor.*”

When he talked to the pastor he was told, *“I’m not a theologian, I’m just a poor preacher who learned some things in seminary. I suggest you see my seminary professor.”*

Undaunted... the man made an appointment to see the seminary professor. At the start of the visit... he asked: *“Are you a theologian?”* ... *“No, no,”* was the reply. *“I am just a teacher. I get my material from all these theology books in my library. You’d better go and see some of the authors of these books.”*

When he finally arranged an interview with one of the important authors... his first question again was: *“Are you a theologian?”* ... *“No, no,”* answered the author. *“I’m just a scientist who observes life and who writes about what I see. If you want a theologian, talk to somebody who is living out the faith day by day.”* ... ..

I think this points up what Luke is implying. He got his story from the “authentic theologians” of his time. (You see...) beyond being eyewitnesses... *they were living out their faith day by day.* They were not detached observers. They were men and women who were *vitaly involved* with the Word they preached.

What did Luke mean (though) in verse 1... when he wrote: *“Many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us”*? ... .. First of all... Luke is acknowledging that *other* Gospel versions had *preceded* his.

Matthew and Mark’s Gospels had (indeed) already been written. These two Gospels... and others (which are *unknown* today)... no doubt... are what

Luke refers to as the “*many other narratives*”. ... These earlier accounts undoubtedly would have been a considerable help to Luke. About 320 of Mark’s 661 verses — *nearly **half** of Mark’s gospel* — are found in Luke’s gospel. (He obviously found Mark’s Gospel very helpful!)

The Gospel accounts that were ALREADY WRITTEN (before Luke wrote his)... were based on the testimony of *people who were there*. This would include Jesus’ mother Mary and the Lord’s brothers... the various apostles and disciples... Philip the Evangelist... Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus... and many others... (“*eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.*”) The earlier gospels (before Luke’s) had come from people who had seen with their own eyes the events - beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist.

Of course... there were probably hundreds (if not thousands) still alive who had personally heard Jesus teach and had seen Him perform miracles just thirty years previously. ... In addition... Paul recorded (in 52 or 53 A.D.) that a great number of the five hundred... who all on one occasion saw Christ after His resurrection... *were still alive*.

**1 Corinthians 15:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.*

The word “*eyewitness*” is an interesting word. This word is a medical term which also means “*to make an autopsy or a detailed examination.*” Dr. Luke is saying in essence, “*we can make an autopsy or detailed examination of the events about Christ... from what is written in those books.*” ... He is telling us that he used them in researching his own Gospel. He studied them... and then checked - for himself - what they reported.



Luke wanted his readers to understand that his history of Jesus came from the best... most authentic written sources... and then double-checked by his own oral sources. ... Luke's work was grounded in solid historical fact that he (personally) verified. ... Luke diligently scrutinized the previously-written sources... and then as verse 3 will tell us... he meticulously did his own investigation... (closely... and taking much time)... in order to weed out specious material... fill in missing details... correct errors... and even disclose previously unknown events. ... And only then... (when he had assembled and vetted all the material he could find)... did he begin to write his own gospel.

We do know that Luke spent a lot of time with Peter and with Paul. Both Paul and Peter were able to give Luke accurate information. ... (And) we can be sure that he talked to every one of those people who Matthew and Mark had used as their eyewitnesses – plus others.

It was not just a random set of events and teaching that interested Luke. He used all these sources to select events and teaching that had a special character. Please look at the phrase at the end of verse one – “*a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us...*”

The Greek more accurately says: “concerning the events FULFILLED among us...” Περί τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων (*peri tōn pe-plē-ropho-rēme-nōn en hēmin prag-matōn*)... means “concerning the events fulfilled among us.”

Luke's emphasis in his gospel - and in the book of Acts (which is his “volume 2”)... is the fulfillment of God's plan. Luke researched and collected events and teaching which show **that:** the effect of Jesus' life...

death... and resurrection - lives on! Luke will chronicle the rise of the church in his second volume. His gospel leads us directly to that. In Acts... Luke makes the point that Jesus continues to work in the world... as the exalted Lord. ... The divine events of Jesus did not occur in a corner... and have no relevance for us today. These fulfilled events from the past... continue to color how we live in the present.

### Luke 1:3

The word “**closely**” is from the word **akribos {ak-ree-boce’}** which means “accurate, precise, or exact.”... Luke reaffirms that what he recorded has been carefully investigated from the very beginning of Christ’s life and was written in an orderly... accurate fashion for an honorable man known as Theophilus.

But I have a question. ... Does Luke mean: “*Since others have done such a poor job, I will do better*”? “*What others have somewhat rashly attempted I will remedy...? I will correct what those others have written...?*” *Matthew and Mark did not write an adequate Gospel... so here’s mine...?*”

No! An unbiased reading of 1:1–4 immediately shows that Luke does not say, “*I will do better than they,*” but rather, “*I will also put my hand to writing a narrative concerning these things.*” ... Note verse 3: “*it seemed fitting for me also.*” ... Luke joins himself to those others who have catalogued Jesus’ life. Luke wishes to add to this tradition of writing because he feels he has something to contribute.

The next question might well be: “*But if Luke is not finding fault with what others have already done, and perhaps even approves of it, then why does he also wish to write?*” ... The answer may well be... that although others

had written... no one as yet had composed as complete an account as Luke envisioned. Note verse 3: “*having followed **all things** closely **for some time past**...*” The others did not begin with the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist... and no other account extends all the way to the spreading of the gospel to Rome... through the apostle-prisoner Paul.

Luke’s 2 volume work (his Gospel and the Book of Acts) joins Jesus’ earthly life to church history. ... Luke adds more accounts to Jesus’ ministry and includes discussion of the church’s rise. ... He does so without necessarily downgrading his predecessors... who blazed a difficult trail ahead of him.

An “**orderly account**” in verse 3... also means Luke wants to be persuasive. ... He has “ordered” the events of his narrative... so as to bring out their significance... so that he might persuade Theophilus... (who is not so much concerned with the issue: *Did it happen?* ... as with the question: *What does it all mean?*) ... Luke hopes to “*light a fire*” for an active faith in Theophilus. ...Here is *how* he does it...

Luke’s order shows the progress of salvation under God’s direction. This complete message of salvation starts from the announcement of Jesus... and continues through Paul.... **It runs from Israel to the Gentiles.** ... *It moves from promise... to fulfillment in Jesus - and the church!* ... Luke does not just link certain events into a story. He spotlights that - *what has been fulfilled*... gives **assurance** about *what is **STILL** to be fulfilled*. The destiny of the Gospel will be a worldwide proclamation of the gospel - and Jesus’ return.

So (now) who is Theophilus? Who is Luke writing to... in order to stoke the fires of his faith...? ... I wish that I could tell you... but we don't know.

However... here is what we do know.

Theophilus was probably a Roman official... who had trusted Christ... and now needed to be established in the faith. Luke mentions in verse 4 that he had already been taught things about Christ. The word translated *taught* in Luke 1:4... gives us our English word *catechumen*, "someone who is being taught the basics of Christianity."

How do we know that he was a Roman official...? ... Because look how he is addressed at the end of verse 3. The title "most excellent" was reserved for Roman political officials.. Luke used it two other times... Both were for Roman officials (Felix and Festus) in Acts chapters 23... 24... and 26.) Using the term "*most excellent*" is like saying "*your Honor*" to a judge. It denotes considerable rank.

### **Luke 1:4**

Theophilus has been instructed in certain concepts... but Luke wants him to *know*. ... I learned this week that teaching someone to know a person can be a lot easier than teaching someone a concept. It is VERY difficult to teach specific rules to govern relationships. We may try.

This week... my 3 year old and my 5 year old granddaughters launched their Olympic (and probable professional) soccer careers. Their very first (ever) soccer "scrimmage" was yesterday... for which they met their coach (for the first time) and practiced twice this week. They have never even been on a soccer field.

There was so much to tell them before meeting all the other kids... and their coach. I was amused listening to their Mom... before their practice. *“Now... sweetie... it’s OK to hug and to kiss your **family**... but it’s not OK to hug and kiss someone you have just met...”* *“Sweetie it’s OK to aggressively go after the ball... even though other kids will also want it...”* *“You should always be polite... but on the soccer field... you don’t have to step aside and let another child take the ball past you...”* *“When you meet the other kids... this is what to say... and what not to say.”*

Trying to teach people how to behave in a relationship is HARD work. ... But Luke is saying to Theophilus: *“This is not a new teaching about **the concept of God**. I want you to know the truth of God - in the **Person** of Jesus.”*

Luke wishes Theophilus... and those who have uncertainty like his... to know Christ Jesus. Theophilus’s uncertainty seems to be: “Is Christianity what I believed it to be... something that is for a Gentile (like me) ?

Perhaps such doubt resulted from the judgment the church suffered... especially as a result of including Gentiles. ... Why should a Gentile suffer frustration for joining what was originally a Jewish movement? ... Is the church suffering God’s judgment... because it has been too generous with God’s salvation? ... Will the rest of God’s promises come to pass?

Can we really be sure that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise... and that He brings God’s salvation both now and in the future? ... By the emphasis on fulfillment in Jesus... and the truthful character of the previous Gospel accounts... Luke intends to answer these questions with a resounding “yes.” ... The gospel of Jesus is from God and is available for all - Jew and Gentile alike. ... Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises and

the fulfillment of salvation - which is now available directly to all nations. Be certain Theophilus!

What about you...? Are YOU certain...?

In 1972, NASA launched the exploratory space probe Pioneer 10. According to Leon Jaroff in *Time*, the satellite's primary mission was to reach Jupiter, photograph the planet and its moons, and beam data to earth about Jupiter's magnetic field, radiation belts, and atmosphere. Scientists regarded this as a bold plan, for at that time no earth satellite had ever gone beyond Mars, and they feared the asteroid belt would destroy the satellite before it could reach its target.

Pioneer 10, however, accomplished its mission and much, much more. Swinging past the giant planet in November, 1973, Jupiter's immense gravity hurled Pioneer 10 at a higher rate of speed toward the edge of the solar system. At one billion miles from the sun, Pioneer 10 passed Saturn. At some two billion miles, it hurtled past the planet Uranus, then Neptune at nearly three billion miles, and then Pluto at almost four billion miles. By 1997, twenty-five years after its launch, Pioneer 10 was more than six billion miles from the sun.

Despite that immense distance, Pioneer 10 continued to beam back radio signals to scientists on Earth. "Perhaps most remarkable," writes Jaroff, "those signals emanate from an 8-watt transmitter, which radiates about as much power as a bedroom night light, and takes more than nine hours to reach Earth." The Little Satellite That Could was not qualified to do what it did. Engineers designed Pioneer 10 with a useful life of just three years, but

it kept going and going. By simple longevity, its tiny 8-watt transmitter radio accomplished more than anyone thought possible.

So it is when we offer ourselves to serve the Lord. God can work even through someone with 8-watt abilities. God cannot work, however, through someone who quits. May we be continually refreshed and re-fueled.

If you want to be a refreshed and refueled servant of Christ... then do an autopsy of the living Word... Jesus Christ... and the written Word - the Scriptures. ... Examine the reports about Jesus carefully for yourself. See for yourself the wonderful truths of Scripture. Dive-in with us as we study the Gospel of Luke. We are admonished repeatedly to get our nose in the Book.