

That You May Know

Luke Series #1

Luke 1:1-4

David Sunday

November 18, 2012

Dan Huff:

We are beginning a new sermon series, having just gone through a year-and-a-half of going through the entire Bible—the Behold Our God Series. Now we’re beginning a journey through the Gospel of Luke. Pastor David Sunday will be leading us through this but I’d like you to consider this quote from a 19th Century English church leader, J.C. Ryle:

“It would be well if professing Christians in modern days studied the four Gospels more than they do. No doubt all Scripture is profitable. It is not wise to exalt one part of the Bible at the expense of another. But I think it should be good for some who are very familiar with the Epistles, if they knew a little more about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

“Now why do I say this? I say it because I want professing Christians to know more about Christ. It is well to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principles of Christianity. It is better to be acquainted with Christ Himself. It is well to be familiar with faith, and grace, and justification, and sanctification. They are all matters ‘pertaining to the King.’ But it is far better to be familiar with Jesus Himself, to see the King’s own face and to behold His beauty. This is one secret of eminent holiness. He that would be conformed to Christ’s image and become a Christ-like man, must be constantly studying Christ Himself.

“Now the Gospels were written to make us acquainted with Christ. The Holy Ghost has told us the story of His life and death—His sayings and His doings, four times over. Four different, inspired hands have drawn the picture of the Saviour. His ways, His manners, His feelings, His wisdom, His grace, His patience, His love and His power are graciously unfolded to us by four different witnesses.

Ought not the sheep to be familiar with the Shepherd? Ought not the patient to be familiar with the Physician? Ought not the bride to be familiar with the Bridegroom? Ought not the sinner to be familiar with the Saviour? Beyond doubt it ought to be so. The Gospels were written to make men familiar with Christ and therefore I wish men to study the Gospels.”

Pastor Sunday is going to introduce the Gospel of Luke from the perspective of Theophilus. So let's begin with a word of prayer:

Oh Lord, may we, Your people, come hungry to be filled. May we come humble and teachable as blood-bought sinners, to have our eyes open to see wondrous things from Your Word today. Lord, would You anoint Pastor David to be the conduit You would use to transform my life, to transform each one of us once again by Your precious Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

David Sunday:

¹ Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. [Luke 1:1-4, ESV]

“Most excellent Theophilus”...that *is my* name. But such respect, such honor—I feel unworthy of it. You may know me as the man to whom two of your New Testament books are addressed, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. That's a full quarter of the New Testament—written for an individual like me. I'm here to tell you that if you are like me, this book was written for you too!

My name, Theophilus, means “lover of God” or “beloved of God.” I prefer the second meaning for I cannot argue with the fact that God loves me—not if He cares deeply enough to address a book like this to me!

But whether I am a true lover of God remains to be seen. You see, I've known about Jesus for quite some time. I've been catechized in the faith; I've received the basic instruction on Who Jesus is and what He accomplished. Luke is right. I have been taught these things. I've seen the growing movement of those who follow the Jesus Way and I cannot deny that many of those I know who follow Him, their lives have been changed.

But my faith... Sometimes I wonder if it exists at all. It has been weak at best. I've been wavering; I've been on the fence; I've been questioning the reality of it all. I've wondered if the gospel of Jesus is true. I've struggled with nagging doubts:

- Is Jesus the Messiah sent by God?
- Is He really the fulfillment of all God's plans, purposes and promises from the beginning of time?

- If He is, why do so many Jewish people reject Him?

I look at how the church is suffering these days, especially now that Gentiles are being included in it, and I wonder, “Do I really belong in a group like that?”

I look at the antagonism these Jesus-followers suffer and I wonder, “Is their hope in vain? Will the rest of God’s promises really come to pass? Is Jesus really the fulfillment of God’s plans and promises in history? Is He really the hope of the world’s future?”

I can identify with one of your own poets who said,

“A mosquito buzzes round my faith
—the mosquito of doubt.”

(Roger White, quoted in Phil Ryken’s Reformed Expository Commentary on Luke)

Doubt. Doubts...

“...and fears and sorrows rise,
And hide the promise from [my] eyes.”

(Jesus, Our Soul’s Delightful Choice by Isaac Watts)

I’m coming to you today because I know some of you are being pestered by that same mosquito. I know others of you will be pestered by that mosquito of doubt down the road. And you all know someone who is asking questions just like these:

- How can I know for sure that what I’ve been taught is the truth?
- Can I really be sure that Jesus Christ is Lord?
- Has He really come?
- Did He really heal?
- Does He set people free?
- Can His death really bring about the forgiveness of my sins?
- Did He really rise from the dead?
- Is He truly reigning now at the right hand of God?
- Will He truly come back soon?
- How can I know that I will go to heaven when I die?

If you are not sure about what you believe—if you wrestle with doubts or feel insecure in your faith or if you know someone who does—I can think of no better person for you to get to know than my friend Luke. No human being has done more to dispel my doubts than Luke. And since you will be spending a lot of time with him in the months to come, it is my privilege and pleasure to introduce Luke to you today.

There are five things I want to tell you about my friend, Luke. Five things that I hope will help you appreciate this wonderful book he has written for me—and for you.

1. Luke is not One of the Original Apostles

Unlike Matthew, Mark and John, Luke wasn't part of the first generation of Jesus-followers. Luke, like us, learned about Jesus through the eyewitness accounts and testimonies of others. Things were delivered to him about Jesus and that's how he learned.

Now Luke became a close associate of the apostles, especially Paul. As Paul's ministry grew more and more lonely, Luke remained one of Paul's most ardent and steady traveling companions. When Paul was in prison in Rome, he called Luke "*our dear friend*" (Colossians 4:14, NIV). At the end of his life, Paul wrote, "*only Luke is with me*" (2 Timothy 4:11, NIV).

That tells us a lot about what kind of man Luke was: a faithful friend, a loyal bondservant. He poured his whole life into the spread of the apostles' message and to that gospel he remained faithful unto death. Luke was not an apostle but he loved the apostles' message. He supported their ministry and dedicated his life to preserving that message for us.

2. Luke Loves People

One of the outstanding characteristics of his personality that shines through in his Gospel is that Luke loves people. His stands out among the four Gospels as the most Gentile in its focus—or I could say the most non-Jewish in its focus. So he's writing to most of us. He writes with a heart for the nations. He loves the outcasts of society. As you read through these pages, you'll notice...

- Only Luke tells us about the shepherds—that despicable trade, that lowly occupation—who found the Baby Jesus in the manger (2:7).
- Only in Luke do we read about the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14).
- Without Luke, we never would have heard the stories of the lost sheep (15:1-7), the lost coin (15:8-10) and the lost son—that most memorable of all stories, the parable of Prodigal Son (15:11-32).
- Luke alone tells us about the salvation of the thief on the cross (23:39-43).

Luke traces these events and reveals these people to us because he loves to proclaim, “...*the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost*” (19:10). That’s his key verse.

Luke loves to tell the story of Jesus, the Friend of sinners. He wants us to know that Jesus is a Savior Who brings “*good news of great joy that will be for all the people*” (2:10). He loves people and delights in mentioning individuals like myself and like these people:

- Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist (1:5-24)
- Mary and Martha (10:38-42)
- Mary Magdalene (8:2; 24:10-11)
- the widow of Nain (7:11-17)
- the other widow who gave all she had (21:1-4)
- Zacchaeus (19:1-10)
- the woman who anointed Jesus’ feet (7:36-50)

Luke loves to shine the spotlight on the dignity Jesus gave to the poor, to women, to slaves, to those who are suffering, to the outcasts of society. I agree with the person who said, Luke believes “there is no kind of person the gospel cannot reach, no boundary it cannot cross.” And though Luke clearly teaches that “not everyone *will* be saved...[surely he believes] anyone *can* be saved.” [From Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Luke*.]

That’s been my experience with Luke. He loves people and because he loves me. He wants me to know for sure that I am an heir of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. That’s why he has written this wonderful story—the Gospel—for me. Even when I’m not sure if I can be saved, I am sure that Luke is sure I can be saved if I will put my trust in Jesus!

And that’s why Luke is writing to you, too. His goal is to secure your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and having secured your faith, his goal is then to strengthen your faith and bring it to full assurance. Luke loves people!

3. Luke is a Student of History

He’s really a scholar in his own rite! Who else would begin a book with the word, “Inasmuch” and follow that with almost the longest sentence in the whole Greek New Testament. Luke is also the longest book in the New Testament. Other scholars have said that Luke’s first sentence is the most carefully and artistically crafted sentence in the entire New Testament. He carefully and artistically crafted this prologue—these first four sentences—because he’s establishing his methodology; because he wants you and me to be

confident that our salvation in Christ is grounded in historical facts; in events that really happened. As a historian, Luke loves the Old Testament Scriptures.

Look at verse one and notice the phrase, “the things that have been accomplished among us.” The word “accomplished” is a big word in the Greek language. It speaks of fulfillment; of the culmination of something that has been long anticipated; of the coming to fruition of a plan that has long been in the making. It tells us that everything Luke is about to write is the result of plans and purposes that have been in the heart of God from the beginning of time. It’s the fulfillment of promises that God has been making since humanity fell into sin in the Garden of Eden.

All these things have been fulfilled among us and Luke is saying they are for all people—Jews and Gentiles alike! Luke’s priority is to show these things are fulfilled in Jesus Christ:

- Luke records what Mary said after the angel visited her and told her the Holy Spirit would conceive Jesus in her womb. We read these words from Mary’s mouth, God *“has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever”* (1:54-55). There’s a fulfillment here of things God has spoken.
- Luke records Zechariah’s words of how the Lord God of Israel *“has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old”* (1:68-70).
- Simeon says, when he holds the baby Jesus in his hands, *“my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples”* (2:30-31).
- And in his genealogy in chapter three, Luke shows how Jesus’ line goes back generation to generation all the way to the first man, Adam, because in him the hopes and fears of all the years are finding their fulfillment.
- And that’s why in Luke 4, when Jesus opens up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads about the Anointed Servant of the Lord, and he says, *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* (4:21).¹

Luke loves the Old Testament Scriptures and he loves to demonstrate how all of God’s plans, purposes and promises are being fulfilled in Jesus. This truth—the fulfillment theme—is designed to bring depth, certainty and assurance to your faith and to mine.

Not only does Luke love to read the Old Testament Scriptures, Luke the historian also loves to listen to the testimony of others. We see this in the first four verses. In my day there was an abundance of eyewitness testimony about Jesus. Many people in the first century knew Jesus personally. His words and acts and deeds are indelibly written on the

¹ This sequence of Scripture texts was suggested by a sermon by Pastor John Kimbell of Clifton Baptist Church.

tablets of their hearts. Many of these have written down records of what Jesus said and did; people who walked with Him, heard Him preach, saw Him heal, watched Him love this broken world all the way to the point of His death on the hill of Golgotha.

I can tell you this about Luke, he has followed these things closely. What he says in verse three is not an exaggeration.

Luke's work is thorough:

- Luke has **read** everything there is to be read about Jesus.
- He has **investigated** everything he could get his hands on.
- He has ***“followed all things closely”*** that could possibly be relevant to his theme.
- And he has done so ***“for some time past...”***—this has been the obsession of this his life.
- He has **traced** the source of Jesus' ministry all the way back to his conception and birth.

His work is accurate:

- He has **interviewed** the eyewitnesses.
- He has **traveled** through Palestine and Jerusalem, observing the sites of Jesus' ministry while gathering this data.
- He has **listened** to the apostles deliver the message throughout the world.
- He has done this in the presence of a host of **eyewitnesses** who could easily refute his testimony if there were any inaccuracies in it.
- Thus he has **checked** and **rechecked** himself, making sure that everything he writes will serve to bolster our confidence that his testimony is true. He wants me to know for certain that the truth of the gospel is grounded in the facts of history.

His work is orderly:

- Logically and artistically, in this beautiful Gospel, Luke is weaving together the story of salvation history as it unfolds in the life, teaching and works of Jesus Christ and he connects every part of his story to the gospel message.
- In chapters one through three, he shows Jesus is the promised Savior Who **came** into the world.
- In chapters four through 21, Luke shows how Jesus is the One Who **seeks** those who are lost.
- In chapters 22-24, Luke brings it all to its culmination, showing us how Jesus **saves** those who are lost through His death and resurrection.²

So Luke, this historian, writes with thoroughness, accuracy, logic and artistic order. With all the rigor of an investigative reporter and all the love of a faithful friend, Luke has gathered the sacred narrative into this precious volume that I hold in my hands—dedicated to me—so that I may know the certainty of what I have been taught! So you and I can know for sure that what we've heard about Jesus is true.

² This basic outline is summarized from Phil Ryken's commentary.

Luke has taken great pains to prepare this rich feast. He has carefully planned it. He has made sure every ingredient of it will be most nutritious to our faith. And he has attractively served it to bring pleasure and joy to our heart. As David Wilcox has well said, “We owe it (this Gospel) more than a nibble.” Let us feast upon the work of Luke, the historian.

4. Luke is Confident

I also want you to know that Luke is confident—unlike me. Doubts and fears and sorrows rise and hide the promise from my eyes. But for Luke, that darkness has been chased away and banished by the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I am a doubting believer. I am a weak and wounded sinner, just like you.

“Mosquitos buzz around my faith.” Demons of doubt come knocking at my door. Some of my doubts are intellectual, some are experiential. Like you, I have faced disappointment, suffering, loneliness and emptiness in this world. I have struggled to believe that this *“good news of great joy that is for all the people”* (2:10) could actually be for me. But I hold in my hands a gift—a gift from God, for me and for you—and Luke is confident that the Word he is delivering to us in this book has the power to dispel our doubts and make us sure of Who Jesus is; to know for certain the things we have been taught.

I love what Luke says to me in verse four. He says that he wrote *“an orderly account”* for me, *“most excellent Theophilus, that [I] may have certainty concerning the things [I] have been taught.”* Luke is telling me here that I can know God personally and deeply. Not just know things about Him but truly know Him in a personal and close way—like Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden. I can know God and I can know Him for sure. Beyond a shadow of doubt.

The word Luke uses for “certainty” is a strong word. In Greek it is *“asphaleian”*—the word from which you get your English word “asphalt.” What Luke is telling me here is that there is something solid, firm and smooth that I can build my life on; that I can plant my feet on and it will hold me up. I can travel the course of my life and never be misled by what is written in this book. It’s solid; it’s firm. The word also has the idea of infallibility. Luke is making a claim here that what he writes in this book is infallible. It will not err. It will never lead me astray. It will also prove to be true, no matter how much you put it to

the test. The word contained in this book is true, like silver refined in a furnace, purified seven times (Psalm 12:6). It will never err. It's an infallible word.

Luke is not ashamed to claim that this book is a word, not just from man, but from the living God. That's what Luke claims. He's confident of this fact. This is something solid, something firm, something you can stand on, something you can build your life and stake your eternal future on.

I know there are many in your world today who will tell you that you cannot know anything for certain. I know there are skeptics who don't believe any history can be known unless it's been independently verified by them. But that's really a recipe for intellectual suicide. If you can only know what you independently verify, you will in the end know nothing for certain. All true knowledge of history is based on witnesses, on testimony. The question is which witnesses can you trust? Who will tell you the truth about what has been accomplished? Any knowledge is ultimately dependent on trusting the sources of that knowledge and believing that source is credible and trustworthy.

Luke wrote these words to me—and to you—to persuade us that he is a trustworthy witness. He has placed in our hands the key to assurance and confidence in the midst of this confusing and uncertain world. The key to assurance is not looking at myself. If I look within myself at how strong my faith is or if I look at any experiences I've had, I will find that my faith is on sinking sand. The key to assurance is looking outside myself to the One Whom Luke puts so gloriously on display in this Gospel. Look to Jesus—the Jesus of history—the Jesus Who is alive today—the Jesus Who reveals Himself to us in this book—the Jesus Who has come to seek and save me from being lost forever. “Look to Jesus” Luke is saying. Study Him. Get to know Him and you will be sure that He is *“the Son of Man Who came to seek and save the lost”* (19:10). You will be sure He is the Savior sent from God to deliver you from your sins. You will be sure He is the true God and eternal life.

Too many people reject what they've never even seriously considered—don't make that mistake with Jesus! God has given us a treasure in this book. He has given us a Gospel and may we not reject what we've never even seriously read. May we read and reread and learn and expose ourselves to the One Who is revealed in these pages. If we do, Luke says we will be sure of what we've been taught. Let's take this treasure in our hands and heart. As we do so, may we discover,

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!

What more can He say than to you He hath said,
You, who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

(How Firm a Foundation by John Keith, 1787)

Luke is confident that if you will read this book with faith, you will find it to be a firm foundation for your faith.

5. Luke is a Doctor

There's one more thing I want to tell you about Luke this morning. He's not an apostle but he loves the work of the apostles and supports it. He's a lover of people; he's a student of history; he's a confident believer who wrote a most thorough, accurate, orderly, investigative report of Jesus so you and I can know for certain that Jesus is Who He said He is. But one more thing that makes Luke a very compelling witness to me is that Luke is a physician—a trained doctor. And in this book, Dr. Luke has given us wholesome medicine that can heal our doubting, diseased souls.

Will you take the doctor's prescription and faithfully consume it? Will you trust that what he has written here has the power to make you sure of Who Jesus is?

Let me tell you the story of another man like us—a Theophilus of your own day—who lived just a few decades earlier than you. His name was E.V. Rieu and he was a brilliant man. He was a Greek classicist who was notable for translating Homer's *Odyssey*. He did such a terrific job on that work that the editors of the Penguin Classics series asked him to translate The Four Gospels. Rieu was an agnostic at the time—someone who believed that it was not possible to know anything for sure about God. He didn't believe you could have certain knowledge about God. He didn't believe that Luke's purpose could be met in his own life.

When his son heard about his father's acceptance of the job to translate the four Gospels, he said, "It will be interesting to see what father makes of the four Gospels but it will be even more interesting to see what the Gospels make of father."

His son didn't have to wait long. Within a year, as E.V. Rieu was translating these precious words, that lifelong agnostic responded to the call of the Lord Jesus Christ. He became sure—he became certain—that Jesus is Lord and he became a committed Christian.

That seems to me to be the key question for each of us as we look at this treasure over the months to come. Not “What will you make of this Gospel?” but “What will this Gospel make of you?”

May we ask the Lord—through His holy Gospel and by the working of His Holy Spirit—to make us men and women who are sure of what we believe; who are certain of the One in Whom we trust in this age of frantic uncertainty and lack of assurance.

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