

Luke 1:1-4

"That you may be certain..."

December 31, 2023

1. Intro

- a. Content in his Gospel
 - i. Last week, we learned all about the shepherds out in the fields near Bethlehem, and how they heard the wonderful hymn of the angels on that first Christmas night
 1. The reason why we know about that story, is because of the Gospel of Luke
 - ii. Most of us are familiar with the story of Jesus as a young boy of 12 years old, getting left behind in Jerusalem by his distracted parents – a story that some of us might be able to relate to!
 1. The reason why we know about this story, is because of the Gospel of Luke
 - iii. We know about that “wee little man,” Zacchaeus, because of the Gospel of Luke
 1. As well as the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and the parable of the Prodigal Son
 - iv. Luke’s Gospel also tells us about the women who accompanied Jesus during his time of ministry, the sending out of 72 of his followers, and his interaction with two of his disciples after his resurrection on the road to Emmaus
 1. This is just scratching the surface of all the material that is unique to the Gospel of Luke
 - a. If we didn’t have Luke’s Gospel, think about all that we would not know!
- b. But who was this man named Luke?
 - i. In the Apostle Paul’s letter to his friend, Philemon, he mentions at the end of his letter four men whom he calls his “fellow workers” – co-laborers in the advancement of the Gospel
 1. Among these four whom Paul named... was Luke
 - ii. In his letter to the Colossian believers, Paul calls this same Luke “the beloved physician”
 1. This is a helpful description for us for two reasons
 - a. First, the fact that Paul calls Luke beloved tells us that he was a man who was both well-known and well-loved by the believers in Colossae
 - b. And second, we learn that Luke was a doctor
 - i. An occupation that had only been accepted in the Roman Empire a little over a hundred years before the time of Christ
 - ii. So Luke was already becoming known as the beloved physician
 - iii. And then in 2 Timothy, Paul writes that Luke is the only one of Paul’s many travelling companions that remained with him in his imprisonment in Rome
 1. Everyone else had either been sent to other assignments, or they had deserted Paul
 2. But Luke stayed with him
 - iv. Luke wasn’t an apostle
 1. And it doesn’t appear that he was one of Paul’s disciples, like Timothy and Titus were
 2. But it is clear that Paul thought very highly of Dr. Luke, and that Paul placed a high value on their relationship
 - a. And it is clear that God, in His sovereign plan of bringing together His Scriptures, had big plans for this beloved physician
- c. So what else do we know about this man named Luke?
 - i. Our first response to that question would likely be, “Well, he’s the guy who wrote the Gospel of Luke, right?”
 1. But did you know that Luke is never named in either the Gospel of Luke, or the book of Acts, which is also attributed to him?
 - a. So how do we know he is the author?
 - b. If someone were to call the validity of these two books into question, how would you answer them?
 - i. Thankfully, we have some help when it comes to these questions
 2. First, we know that the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are linked because of the mention of Theophilus at the beginning of both books

- a. In Luke 1:3, we read these words...
 - i. 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*
- b. And in Acts 1:1-2, we read...
 - i. ¹*In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.*
- c. So it's pretty clear from these verses that these books were both written by the same author, to the same man
 - i. In addition to this link, Bible scholars have also found much continuity in the language and structure of both books, which also helps us in tying these two books together
- 3. Second, once we know that these books are linked, we can then look for internal clues to help us identify the author
 - a. The most convincing of these clues is found in Acts, starting in chapter 16
 - i. Up to this chapter, all of the events in Acts were written from the third person point of view
 - 1. In other words, the narrative sounds like, "He did this," or "she did that," or "they went to that place"
 - ii. But, starting in Acts 16:10, the language shifts to the first person point of view, as all the events are now described as WE did this, or WE went there
 - 1. This shift tells us that at this point, the author has joined Paul in his travels
 - 2. From there, it is a relatively simple process of sorting through the people that were with Paul in the various "we" passages, and Luke quickly becomes the most likely candidate to be the author
- 4. And third, we look at what early church theologians and pastors had to say about it
 - a. From very early on in the writings of the church fathers, it was widely supported that Luke was the author of Luke and Acts, without question
 - i. Men such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, and many others, had no hesitation about writing about this Gospel as "the Gospel according to Luke"
 - b. So even though Luke's name is never mentioned in Luke or Acts, we can have certainty that he is indeed the author
 - i. Which makes this fact even more remarkable...
- ii. Luke... was a Gentile!
 - 1. In Colossians 4, as Paul is closing his letter, he writes of the men who were with him at this time
 - a. He writes of Aristarchus, and Mark, and a man named Jesus (that would be a great name to have during those days, wouldn't it?)
 - i. As he writes of these men, he calls them "men of the circumcision," meaning that they were Jews
 - 1. Paul says that they were the ONLY men of the circumcision with him
 - ii. But then he goes on to also name Epaphras, Demas, and the beloved physician, Luke
 - 1. All of whom were NOT men of the circumcision, but were Gentiles
 - b. Which would make Luke the only Gentile author in the entire New Testament!
 - i. This is a pretty incredible fact that I think we tend to take for granted
 - 1. As we talked about last week, it was the Jewish people who were the people of the Covenant
 - a. It was the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob who chose Israel out of all the other nations to be His people

2. It wasn't until Christ came that the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile was torn down, and in Christ, we Gentiles who were once far off, were now brought near
 - a. And, within forty to fifty years of Christ's death and resurrection, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a Gentile was given the high privilege of being one of the authors of the New Testament
 - b. And this wasn't a minor piece, tacked on just to give the Gentiles some recognition
- ii. When you look at the number of verses in the New Testament, Luke is responsible for an astounding 27.5% of the entire New Testament!
 1. Over a quarter of the New Testament of God's Holy Word, was written by a Gentile
 - a. This should be very encouraging to us!!
- iii. But this isn't just encouraging for us that Luke was a Gentile – it also brings in a different perspective in the way that Luke writes
 1. Luke focuses much more on Jesus' interaction with Gentiles than the other three Gospels in the New Testament
 2. The fact that was a "wild branch grafted into the people of God," to borrow Paul's language, also lent itself to Luke's unique emphasis on Jesus' interactions with women and the poor
 3. And Luke was also much more descriptive when it came to the geography and architecture and traditions surrounding Jerusalem, as he understood that non-Jews would probably need a little more background info on all these things
 - a. Isn't it amazing to think about the creativity of our God?
 - i. He didn't give us a flat, one-sided account written by one man, like Muhammed and the Quran, or Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon
 - ii. Instead He chose to have His Word written by a multitude of different authors, all with unique backgrounds and personalities
 1. But ALL with the same unifying passion to write for the glory of HIS name!
- d. I think we have a pretty good picture of who Luke was now, so the next question is, who was his audience? Who did he write these two books for?
 - i. As we noted earlier, the answer to this question is "most excellent Theophilus"
 1. In the intro to both Luke and Acts, Luke greets Theophilus as the intended recipient of both books
 - a. We don't know much at all about Theophilus, but we can make some inferences based on the context
 - i. In Luke 1:3, Luke calls Theophilus, "most excellent" Theophilus
 1. This was a title given to those in authority, so it's highly likely that Theophilus had some sort of position of power in the Roman Empire
 - ii. Again, as we learned a few moments ago, Luke gives extra attention to describing things that Jewish people would probably already know, so its very likely that Theophilus was also a Gentile
 - iii. Some have argued that Theophilus was a close friend of Luke's
 1. This is certainly possible, but it's also very possible that Theophilus was a patron of Luke
 - a. Meaning that he had hired Luke to go out gather research on the life of Christ, and the birth of his church
 - b. This would help explain the great length of these two books, as well as Luke's desire to get all the historical details as accurate as he could
 - c. If Theophilus was simply Luke's friend, then Luke was a REALLY good friend, wasn't he?!

- i. Travelling throughout the Empire, at great cost and danger to himself, interviewing countless numbers of people, compiling all sorts of notes and documents, all just for his friend?
- ii. That's not unlikely, but it makes a whole lot more sense if this is what Luke has been hired to do

2. History tells us that there was a very wealthy man in Antioch named Theophilus, during Luke's time

- a. Some have speculated that this Theophilus helped to finance not just Luke's research, but also many of Paul's missionary travels as well
 - i. This all makes for some interesting possibilities, but we simply do not have enough facts to come to a definite conclusion

ii. So, we know who Luke is

- 1. We know a little bit about who he wrote Luke and Acts to
- 2. But WHY did Luke write such lengthy and detailed accounts
 - a. For our answer to that question, we will FINALLY get to our passage for this morning, Luke 1:1-4

2. Luke 1:1-4

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

i. Why did Luke travel far and wide, interviewing and writing and compiling these orderly accounts?

- 1. So that Theophilus could have CERTAINTY concerning the things he had been taught
 - a. This word that Luke used for "certainty" literally means "not tottering"
 - i. Luke wanted Theophilus to have a STRONG foundation
 - 1. He wanted Theophilus to have a faith in Christ that was not tossed about by the winds of false doctrine
 - 2. He wanted Theophilus to have a faith in Christ that was not shaken when persecution came
 - 3. He wanted Theophilus to have a faith in Christ that would be rooted and grounded in LOVE for Christ

b. In the midst of a pagan empire, where Christians were very quickly being portrayed as enemies of Caesar, Luke didn't want Theophilus to totter in his faith

b. I think it is safe to say that we are in need of the same encouragement in our day today, aren't we?

3. False Doctrine

a. False doctrines abound in the church today, don't they?

i. We see churches all around us that are exploding in numbers, who preach the false message that Jesus is just a means to an end

- 1. If you believe in Jesus, he will make you wealthy and powerful and successful
- 2. You'll have favor out in the world, you'll prosper in everything you do, and anything your heart desires can be yours
- 3. Just believe in Jesus, and he'll make all your dreams come true

ii. We also see churches all around us teaching the false message that if you just claim something in the name of Jesus, and with enough faith, it will happen

- 1. If your faith is strong enough, you can claim your healing from cancer, and it will be yours!
- 2. If your faith is strong enough, you can claim that promotion at work, and it will be yours!
- 3. If your faith is strong enough, you can claim salvation for all your loved ones, and it WILL happen!

iii. We also see churches all around attributing all sorts of nonsense to the Holy Spirit

1. People writhing and convulsing uncontrollably on the ground, because they're "full of the Spirit"
2. People running through the auditorium, laughing and screaming hysterically, because they're "full of the Spirit"
3. People speaking unintelligible gibberish that no one can understand or interpret, because they're "full of the Spirit"
- iv. And sadly, we also see churches all around us giving in to the pressures of our culture, casting aside the clear commands of the Scriptures
 1. We see this in the church's ambiguity over the issue of abortion
 2. We see this in the church's acceptance of homosexuality and transgenderism
 3. We see this in the church's apathy toward sin and holiness
- b. False doctrines abound, INSIDE the church today, don't they?
 - i. But this isn't anything new, is it?
 1. As we read at the beginning of the service in Colossians 2, this was one of the reasons why Paul was writing to the Christians in Colossae
 - a. He wanted them to have wisdom and knowledge in Christ, SO THAT no one would delude them with plausible arguments that might pull them away from Christ
 - b. Paul REJOICED to see that their church was in good order, and that their faith in Jesus was FIRM
 - i. He had great joy in knowing that they were CERTAIN about the things they had been taught
 - ii. Or, think about Paul's warning to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-4, when he said...
 1. *¹I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*
 - a. Paul's warning is clear:
 - i. If we do not stand firmly upon the Word of God, then we will inevitably turn to our own passions, and wander off into all sorts of false teachings
 - ii. If we are not CERTAIN about the things we have been taught, we will totter in our faith
 1. For false teachers preaching false doctrine ABOUND in our world today
 - iii. Even Jesus himself had plenty to say about these things, as we see in Matthew 7:24-27
 1. *²⁴"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."*
 - a. The wise man hears all the words of Jesus, and does them
 - i. His foundation is CERTAIN, for his foundation is built upon the rock of Jesus Christ
 - ii. Any other foundation will not be able to bear the winds of false doctrine that beat upon us from every side
 2. So we study the Gospel of Luke so that we will be certain about the things we have been taught, that our house may stand strong in the face of false doctrine
 4. We also study the Gospel of Luke so that we will be certain about the things we have been taught, in order to endure the persecution that is promised
 - a. Think back to what we talked about regarding Theophilus

- i. In the early 300's, when Constantine legalized Christianity, it became popular and beneficial to become a Christian
 - 1. But in the three hundred years prior to that, to confess Jesus as Lord meant that you were putting your status, your reputation, your very life... at risk
 - a. So for Theophilus, he might lose his position of authority
 - b. His wealth could be taken from him
 - c. He might even face imprisonment, or even death
 - i. So Luke wanted him to be CERTAIN about everything he had been taught
 - ii. He wanted Theophilus to TRULY count the cost of following Jesus
 - 1. Maybe this is why Luke was the only Gospel writer to include Jesus' teachings on the cost of discipleship, when he wrote in chapter 14,
 - a. *"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."*
 - d. We must all count the cost of following Jesus
 - i. We must be CERTAIN about the things we have been taught, for we must endure to the end
 - ii. Paul again is helpful in reminding us of these things in 2 Timothy, this time in chapter 3, verses 12-15...
 - 1. *¹²Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*
 - a. ALL who desire to live a godly life in Christ WILL be persecuted
 - i. Evil people are going to get worse
 - ii. False teachers will abound
 - 1. But YOU, Christian, continue in what you have learned and have FIRMLY believed
 - a. In the midst of the promised persecution, be CERTAIN about the things you have been taught
- iii. In Luke chapter 8, Jesus gives us the parable of the sower, which teaches us about those who will be bear fruit in the Kingdom
 - 1. In this parable, Jesus speaks of the sower throwing his seeds on the ground, and some of these seeds fell on the rocks
 - a. As these seeds sprouted and began to grow, they soon withered in the heat of the sun
 - b. Jesus goes on to explain the meaning of this withering seed, and he tells his disciples in verse 13,
 - i. *¹³And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word of God, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away.*
 - 1. We see this played out all around us, don't we?
 - 2. Someone comes to church, and they hear a message that stirs their heart, and they receive it with great joy
 - a. But then, when trouble comes, when their faith is tested, they fall away
 - b. For they have no root
 - ii. We saw a real life illustration of this a few months ago, didn't we
 - 1. When the strong storms blew through our area back in June, you could see entire trees that were toppled over, roots and all

- a. For even though their limbs seemed strong and healthy on the outside, their roots did not go deep enough to weather the storms
 - 2. My friends, we must be CERTAIN of the things we have been taught, so that our roots will go DEEP into the soil of the Word of God
 - a. All who seek to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted
 - b. So we will study the Gospel of Luke so that we can be certain about the things we have been taught, that our roots may be strong when persecution comes
 - c. We will study the Gospel of Luke so our houses will stand firm against the winds of false doctrine
- 5. But the most important reason why we will study the Gospel of Luke is that when our faith is CERTAIN and sure about the things we have been taught, our love for Jesus will abound
 - a. Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 1, as we see Paul's heart and prayer for the believers in Ephesus
 - i. Starting in verse 16...
 - 1. *¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*
 - ii. Paul was not content with just getting people to pray a prayer or make a decision for Jesus
 - 1. He wasn't interested in traveling all around the Roman Empire, making converts, and then posting on social media about how many people were saved through his ministry each year
 - a. Paul's heart was to make DISCIPLES
 - i. Teaching them to observe all that Jesus had commanded
 - ii. And to this end, he was in constant prayer for the churches throughout the land
 - 1. He prayed that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom
 - 2. He prayed that God would give them revelation in their knowledge of Him
 - 3. He prayed that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened
 - 4. In other words, he prayed that God would give them certainty about all the things they had been taught!
 - b. And why did he pray this prayer with such zeal and passion?
 - i. Because he wanted them to know and understand the hope to which they were called!
 - ii. He wanted them to know the riches of the glorious inheritance that awaited them!
 - iii. He wanted them to know immeasurable greatness of God's power, and the working of His great might and the power and authority He has given to His Son!
 - c. My friends, when we become more and more certain about the things we have been taught, and we begin to know and understand all that Christ has done and all that he is, our love for him HAS TO abound!!
 - 2. This was Paul's prayer for the believers in Philippi, as he wrote to them in Philippians 1:9-11,
 - a. *⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

- i. The idea of an ignorant Christian, who simply wants to “love God and love people” is an utterly foreign idea to the Apostle Paul
 1. An ignorant Christian doesn’t know HOW to love God or love people
 2. An ignorant Christian doesn’t place any value on knowledge or discernment
 3. An ignorant Christian cannot approve what is excellent, and therefore will not be pure and blameless on the day of Christ
 4. An ignorant Christian will not bear fruit
- iii. Which is why we must be CERTAIN about the things we have been taught
 1. Luke understood our need for this kind of certainty
 - a. That is why he carefully and diligently put together two incredible books full of the stories and teachings of Christ and his church
 - b. He wanted Theophilus to have certainty about the things he had been taught
 - i. That is my prayer for us as well
 - ii. As we embark on this journey, I pray that the Lord will give us certainty in our faith
 1. Yes, so we can stand strong against the winds of false doctrine
 2. Yes, so we can endure the persecution that is to come
 3. But ultimately, we want to be certain in our faith, so that our love for Christ may abound more and more
 - a. That we will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God!