

KNOWING WITH CERTAINTY

Luke 1-6

INTRODUCTION: I hope with all my heart that you began reading through the New Testament with us this past week, and that you come this morning having read through the first six chapters of the Gospel of Luke.

If you are new, or for whatever reason, you didn't get started, you can still easily join us. We are only reading a chapter a day. If you want to have read what everybody else has read, just do two chapters a day starting tomorrow and you will be where the rest of us are, having read through Luke chapter 12.

I hope you read the prolog to Luke, that's

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

Did you notice there the reason we are beginning with Dr. Luke's gospel?

- Luke was not an apostle like Matthew and John.
- Before Luke began to write,

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he tells us that others had written about things Jesus had said or done.

- We are pretty sure he was not talking about John's gospel. There is good consensus that it was the last of the gospels written.
- Some think that Mark and maybe Matthew were written before Luke, but that is not at all certain.
- If they were written, they may have not been sufficiently circulated for Luke to have read them. Amazon.com was much slower in his time. Luke was a Gentile, and not living in Palestine.

So, why did Luke even write a gospel?

- **Certainly not for fame!**
 - **Luke never mentions his own name** in either the gospel or Acts, which is a sequel to the Gospel of Luke.
 - He only even refers to himself vaguely in the Book of Acts in passages where he uses the pronoun “we” to talk about Paul and his traveling companions of which Luke was one.
 - **But Luke never identifies himself.** Paul mentions him in some of his letters, and always favorably.
 - The only way that we know this humble Gentile who became a devoted follower of Christ is that **the people who received Luke’s gospel knew that he had written it.**
 - **So as they copied it by hand, they added a title, “The Gospel according to Luke.”**
 - **But unlike some of the other books of the New Testament, there was never any dispute about who wrote this gospel. Everybody agreed – Luke wrote it.**
 - But Luke wanted no name recognition or glory.

You might be asking, “OK, so Luke was a humble, devoted, follower of Christ. I’m sure there were many. **Why is this important?**”

I thought you would never ask!

It’s important for us to understand why Luke wrote.

- Knowing his purpose helps us read with understanding.
- And Luke tells us why he wrote.
- In fact he tells us why he put his historian hat on and interviewed eye witnesses to Jesus’s life and ministry, which for Luke meant difficult travel and tracking down a lot of people he didn’t know.
- And remember, when I say difficult travel, I don’t mean a twelve hour delay at an airport or the interstate suddenly becoming a parking lot.
 - I mean taking a journey on a cargo boat with no comfort or accommodations for passengers

- and walking what we would label very rough roads with a continuous threat of bandits and other hazards.

Writing this gospel was not a casual undertaking. Luke had not lived it. He had not seen it. He never met Jesus personally in the flesh. He had to research it all and then put it into an orderly, a systematic account.

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And by the way, here is the answer to the first question I raised. Do you know why in reading through the New Testament, we are starting with Luke instead of Matthew which is at the front of our New Testaments when we open our Bibles?

Here is the reason: Luke, under the guidance and leadership of the Spirit, undertook to give us an ordered account, a systematic account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In so doing, he gives us the most chronological account of all four of the gospels.

When we are learning about a person's life, most of us learn best by a chronological biography. While all the gospels follow a basic chronological outline, none of the others set this as a primary purpose and so they waver from chronology to accomplish other goals. Luke seldom does. So that is why we started here. It does not mean the Gospel of Luke is better or more important. It is just a great place to get a really good grip on the life lived by our Lord when He came to this world and entered human flesh. Do you get that?

Now, back to the really important question: **Why did Luke write this gospel?**

He tells us.

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Luke wrote it specifically for an aristocratic friend, that is what is meant by the title "most excellent," who had already been taught some things about the Lord, but **Luke wanted** him to have an orderly, systematic account, because he wanted **Theophilus to know with certainty about Christ.**

With certainty means "exact truth."

“Well, what about me?” you may ask. Didn’t Luke write this to me and others?

The honest answer is “maybe.” Because the name Theophilus in Greek means “friend of God,” some people think that Theophilus was not a personal friend in the flesh to Luke. They think that Luke is writing this to everyone who counts himself or herself as God’s friend and who wants to know more about His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that may be correct. I personally don’t think so. Luke is so precise and direct in everything else he writes, that if he were not writing to an individual, I don’t think he would frame the beginning of his gospel or the book of Acts in this way. I cannot prove that; it’s just what I think.

But whether Luke intended his gospel for a larger audience than just a personal friend, does not matter.

God did. The Holy Spirit who guided every step of Luke’s research and led him to think and pen every word that composes this precious book, intended it for each of us. He also with mighty hand and strong arm preserved this gospel in spite of the fact that it would have been first written on very fragile papyrus that was far less durable than our cheapest paper, easily damaged by intent or accident.

God kept it for us although tyrants did their wicked worst to destroy it and the rest of the Holy Scriptures. God preserved it, because He wants us to have it. And He **wants us** to have it for the same reason He put in the heart of Luke for his friend Theophilus, **to know with certainty the things about God’s own dear Son!**

What things? Well, there’s a long list, or I should say, a long narrative. Luke is the longest book in the New Testament. Put the Book of Acts with it, and humble physician, historian, Gentile, Luke wrote more than a quarter of the entire New Testament.

What did God want us to know with certainty through his writings?

I. THE BIRTH OF JESUS WAS THE FULFILLMENT OF MESSIAH’S ENTRANCE INTO THE WORLD.

There are more than a hundred prophecies of Christ’s first coming given in the Old Testament.

God wants us to know that without question, Jesus is the fulfillment of those prophecies.

- The miracle birth of John the Baptist
- The angels sent in preparation
 - To Zacharias
 - To Mary

- To the shepherds
- The virgin birth of Christ
- The place of Jesus' birth and all it took to get Him there
- The testimony of Simeon and Anna
- Twelve year old Jesus confounding the rabbis and declaring that He was doing His Father's business
- Jesus comes to John to be baptized, and the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus in bodily form like a dove, and the Father calling out in an audible voice from heaven, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

Secondly, God wants us to know with certainty

II. JESUS KNEW HE WAS MESSIAH AND CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED IT.

This is important to know because liberals will often suggest that Jesus did not believe that He Himself was God or Savior. They accuse the church of making these claims up about Him. They say that the gospels are fantasies of the church misusing the life of an itinerant preacher named Jesus of Nazareth who upset both the political and religious structures of the day but who would have been aghast at people calling Him the Son of God.

Liberals today who spout such trash are not original. They would be wise to look at some of their predecessors. The story is well documented and recounted in numerous places of

"Sir William Ramsay, an atheist and the son of atheists, tried to disprove the Bible. He was a wealthy person who had graduated from the prestigious University of Oxford. Like Albright, Ramsay studied under the famous liberal German historical school in the mid-nineteenth century. Esteemed for its scholarship, this school also taught that the New Testament was not a historical document. ...

With this premise, **Ramsay devoted his whole life to archaeology and determined that he would disprove the Bible.**

He set out for the Holy Land and decided to disprove the book of Acts. **After 25 or more years** (he had released book after book during this time), **he was incredibly impressed by the accuracy of Luke in his writings finally declaring that 'Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy' . . . 'this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians' . . . 'Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect of its trustworthiness.'**

Sir William Ramsay became a Christian, and the transformation of his life is evident in his testimony of the repeated discoveries he made of the accuracy of the Bible, but particularly the accuracy of the writings of Luke.

In my early days as a pastor, while God had shortly before that time delivered me from liberalism and my doubting and even disbelief of certain parts of the Bible, I still found myself wanting, maybe even needing, to have my faith reinforced by solid evidence of the reality of the complete trustworthiness of Scripture.

I found the writings of Sir William Ramsay of great help, and I commend them to you. He wrote in the 1800s, and they are not easy reading; but their testimony is impacting. And especially if you are as I was, in need of the nurturing of evidence that either convinces or reinforces the understanding of the truthfulness of the Bible, get one or more of his books. Four of them are on Amazon, three of those available on Kindle edition. I just bought one of them which I had not read entitled *Was Christ Born At Bethlehem? A Study on the Credibility of St. Luke*

<http://christiantrumpetsounding.com/Archaeology/Archaeology%20Bklt/Archaeology%20Verifies%20Bible%20Ch2.htm>

JESUS KNEW HE WAS MESSIAH AND CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED IT.

We got to see many things He did in the early part of His ministry as we read from chapter four to six of Luke's gospel.

- **Jesus fasted (ate nothing!) for forty days and was tempted that whole time by the devil. Jesus escaped every temptation and remained without sin!**
- **In the synagogue of His home town, Jesus read one of Isaiah's prophecies of Messiah, and then He said, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**
- **He miraculously passed through a crowd determined to kill Him because He claimed to be Messiah.**
- **He cast out demons.**
- **He healed the sick.**
- **He cleansed a leper.**
- **He made a paralytic walk and forgave his sins.**

And those things are only the beginning of what we will see Jesus do as we read through the rest of the Gospel of Luke.

Only the Messiah, only God's promised Savior, only the Son of God could do what Jesus did.

And, God wants us to know with certainty

III. JESUS SHOWED HIMSELF TO BE GOD BY DEMONSTRATING HOW DIFFERENT HIS WAY IS FROM OUR WAY AND HIS THOUGHTS FROM OUR THOUGHTS.

Folks, I've been a Christian since I was a child. I like to think that I have grown a lot in the Lord across the years, but some of these words of Jesus convict me that I have not really come so far at all.

Luke 6:27–29 27 “But I say to you who hear:

- Love your enemies,
- do good to those who hate you,
- 28 bless those who curse you, and
- pray for those who spitefully use you.
- 29 To him who strikes you on the *one* cheek, offer the other also.
- And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold *your* tunic either.

I don't know many that I would call enemies or people that I think hate me, but I know some. And I don't know any way to exegete my way out of what Jesus says here. It means exactly what it sounds like it means.

I have a lot of growing to do, because I struggle to love people who curse me and use me, to even want to bless them, to pray for them, and not only not get even but to bless them with more than I think they took from me!

These words greatly tax me and stretch every fiber of my being, but I tell you I try. I try. Because Jesus said something else that takes these words and makes them even more important.

Luke 6:46–49 46 “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?

47 Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.

49 But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.”

Wow! I want my life to be built on the foundation on the rock, and it is.

- Jesus is the rock.
- He is the chief cornerstone.
- I have trusted Him, I do trust Him as my Lord and Savior.

So when I find myself still struggling to completely do His words

- I ask Him to **forgive** me for failing.
- I ask Him to **strengthen me with His strength and His life.**
- I ask Him to **empower** me to take the next step of obedience to what He has told me.
- I try to take that step **quickly**, before I let something distract me into disobedience.

All of that in just six chapters, in my Bible, just 7 pages. When have you read a book that had that much in the first seven pages?