

Certain Truth - Luke 1:1-4

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word.

Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, Most Excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Now if you could turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter, which is on page 1222 in the Church Bibles, 2 Peter chapter 1, starting in verse 16.

So 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 16. We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

For he received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory, saying, This is my Son, whom I love.

[1 : 18] With him I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain. And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you. Thank you for your Son, the Lord Jesus. Thank you for your word. Thank you for your word. Which is a revelation of your Son, teaching us and making us known who you are.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit, who teaches us, opens up our minds, so that we can understand your word, not just intellectually, but in a way that it applies to our hearts, changing us, and making us more like you.

[3 : 00] So, Father, come amongst us by your Spirit, and help us, that we might know you more and more, and come to love you in a deeper way.

Thank you for your word. Bless these coming weeks as we look at Luke's Gospel together, that it would be an encouragement, that it would be an encouragement, helping us to understand the God who has come to seek us and save us, so that we in turn can seek others and bring the message of Christ to a needy world.

Help us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, have your Bibles open in Luke's Gospel.

I wonder, do you believe everything that you hear in the news? Did the Russians help Trump secure his political victory?

Is climate change the reason for all the flooding across our planet? Well, according to a recent poll on Clareburn Live, 54% of people in Ireland don't trust the news they hear, and a further 19% say they are unsure.

- [4 : 28] The news, they say, is, well, it's just stories that have been made up to distort, deceive, and promote a political or moral bias.
- It's all fake news. And with the influence of social media, it's very difficult for us to know what is fake news and what is true news.
- Well, Luke, who is the author of Luke's Gospel, has some news for us. Keep your finger in Luke's Gospel, Chapter 1, and flick on to Acts, Chapter 1.
- So you've got Luke, then John, and then Acts, Acts, Chapter 1. Keep your finger in Luke, and go to Acts, Chapter 1.
- You may know that Luke is the author of two books, the Gospel of Luke, and also the Book of Acts, sometimes referred to as a two-volumed work. They're together.
- [5 : 37] And this is what Luke, Acts, Chapter 1, Verse 1 says. In my former book, so there he's referring to Luke, my first book.
- In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. So Luke is all about what Jesus began to do and to teach.
- And Acts, if we were to read through that, is what Jesus continues to do and teach, ultimately through his church, by his Spirit.
- Back to Luke's Gospel, Chapter 1. So Luke is all about what Jesus began to do and to teach. But at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, Luke makes this extraordinary claim.
- Look what he says in Luke 1, Verse 4. He says he writes this, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.
- [6 : 50] Luke wants us to know, right at the very beginning of his work, of his writings, that the things that he is going to write about, the things that you may have been taught about Jesus, is not fake news, but it's true news.
- It is reliable. It is dependable. You can believe it and trust it. It is certain truth. These are not made-up stories, but historical facts about a living person called Jesus Christ, who claims to be nothing less than God who has come in human form, with absolute power, and supreme authority, to seek and to save what was lost, to change and transform lives, so that we might be in a relationship with him that is secure and safe for all eternity.
- Know the certainty of these things. Well, how do we know that all this is not made up? How do we know that what Luke begins to write is not just Luke promoting his own biased views and kind of forcing upon some guy called Jesus all these great things?
- You see, there are many people who think that the Gospel of Luke is fake news. One author, his name is Dr. Bart Ehrman, has written many books making this claim.
- His most recent book has this subtitle. It's quite long, so listen. This is the subtitle of the book. How the earliest Christians remembered, changed, and invented the stories of the Saviour.
- [8 : 53] And although he was once a firm Christian, he now makes this claim. He says that the New Testament and the Gospels in particular don't provide a trustworthy account of the historical Jesus.
- Instead, what we have are books that are forgeries, certain contradictions, have morally questionable teachings, and have been edited and changed through the centuries.
- Quite a claim. Now, you might run into Bart tomorrow when you're at work, and you might ask people in work or school, do you know him? They may never have heard of him.
- But you can be absolutely sure they've been influenced by his writings as it's filtered out through the media and through other publications. People say you simply can't trust the Gospels.

They're forgeries, contradictions. They've been changed and edited to suit the author's particular political or moral bias. So, the question is, is Luke's Gospel fake news or true news?

[10 : 08] Can we trust it? Well, let's see what Luke has to say. First, Luke wants us to know that what he has written is an orderly account.

Look at chapter 1, verse 1. Many have undertaken to draw up an account or write up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us.

End of verse 3. So, he says, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

In other words, this is not a random collection of sayings and stories, but a carefully compiled historical account about the person of Jesus.

It's an account of the Gospel. We know that from the New Testament we have four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Sometimes Matthew, Mark and Luke are put together known as the Synoptic Gospels.

[11 : 13] Now, their material is all quite similar. They're the same almost in style. John's Gospel is different. He seems to have other material.

And they're like, together, they're like biographies of the life of Jesus. Now, the fact that we have four Gospels doesn't mean we have four different versions of the Gospel. And we have to try and figure out which is the right one.

Now, there's only one Gospel story. There's only one account. But yet, we have different presentations of that same story. Each one has their particular emphasis.

So, Mark, for example, has no account of the birth of Jesus. It's the shortest. It's like he jumps straight in, right into the action. He wants to get it all out as quick as possible.

Whereas, Luke takes his time. He goes into great detail about the birth of Jesus, listing historical events so that we can know it's true.

[12 : 14] Matthew, if you were to read through that, is equally long, but seems to be written for those who are from a more religious background, while Luke's account is more suited to those who are from a non-religious background.

And many claim that Theophilus was one who was from a non-religious background. John is more theological, whereas Luke is more straightforward and simple.

They've all got their own particular emphasis, they've all chosen their particular material, and each one reflects each author's particular presentation.

But we must be clear and understand there is only one Gospel. And like all the other Gospel authors, Luke has set about writing an orderly account about the person of Jesus.

But more specifically, this orderly account that Luke has put together is not something new. It has actually been planned from eternity past.

[13 : 23] So again, look at verse 1. He says, many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us.

So the coming of Jesus isn't an accident or a surprise, but something that has been fulfilled. It's been planned by God and purposed by God in eternity past and has now been fulfilled.

have a look at what Jesus says about himself, which comes at the very end of Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 24. Right at the very end of Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 24, verse 44.

So Jesus is speaking to his disciples. It's after his death.

It's after his resurrection from the grave. And he's explaining to his disciples who have been completely confused by what has happened. And Jesus seeks to remind them what has happened.

- [14 : 37] Verse 44, he said to them, this is what I told you while I was still with you. Everything, that is everything about the life of Jesus, everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses.

The law of Moses is the first five books of the Old Testament, the prophets and the Psalms which is referring to the rest of the Old Testament. He says everything that has happened, my coming, my birth, my death, my resurrection was all written about in the past and it is now being fulfilled.

Verse 45, then he opened their minds so that they could understand the scriptures and he told them, this is what is written. Read through the Old Testament scriptures and you will see that Christ will suffer and he did, he died and he will rise from the dead on the third day and he did and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem.

Back to chapter 1. So Luke's orderly account is not just his ideas and his experience, rather he wants us to know that this is the account of Jesus that was planned and promised by God in eternity past and has now been fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ.

So Jesus is not just some invention, it is not just a religious bias, he is the focus and fulfillment of all history.

- [16 : 26] So, Luke wants us to know that it is an orderly account. Second, Luke wants us to know that this orderly account is the result of careful investigation.

Look at verse 3. Therefore, he said, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seems good also for me to write an orderly account.

If you were to read through Colossians, one of Paul's letters, you'd discover that we read there that Luke was a medical doctor. But he was also very skilled as a historian.

He provides, you read through Luke, he provides accounts of people who were ruling and people who were in charge at certain times and certain months. And he was also, it appears, an investigative journalist.

And he has, it seems, two main sources for his material as he carefully investigates everything from the beginning.

- [17 : 34] First, there's what's called the oral tradition. Luke wasn't the first person to start writing an account of Jesus. Again, look at verse 1.

He says, many, there were many people who have undertaken to draw up an account of these things. So circulating very soon after the life of Jesus were these written accounts of Jesus.

There were many accounts. And the earliest that we know of is the Gospel of Mark, which was written about 40 years after the life of Jesus.

Luke was written about 20 years later, but Mark 40 years after. This is one of the accounts of the many accounts that were written. But we have to ask the question, where did these accounts come from?

Where did they get their information to start writing about Jesus? Well, look at verse 2. These accounts came just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

- [18 : 49] Handed down is a technical term, and it's what scholars call the oral tradition. That is, the life and teaching of Jesus was being passed on verbally to other people.

If we want information today about someone or something, we would go to a research library or we'd go to the internet. Well, in the first century, they didn't have these kinds of resources.

They weren't available. Instead, information and history was preserved as it was passed on orally. Well, you say, that's all well and good, but how do we know that what people passed on orally and what Peter said to Mary and what Mary said to John and what John said, how do we know that it didn't get distorted as it got passed along?

It sounds a bit like Chinese whispers to me. How do we know it's true? Well, the second of these sources were the eyewitnesses accounts.

So again, look at verse 2. They were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

[20 : 11] So what Luke has access to was handed down, was passed on orally by those who were eyewitnesses, those who were servants of the word.

These eyewitnesses and servants of the word were the first apostles, the disciples. Those were the people who were with Jesus. They heard him speak. They ate with him.

They saw his deeds. They experienced his resurrection and we'll get to meet some of these characters as we go through Luke. But these eyewitnesses not only handed these things down orally, but they themselves began to write down and arrange material about the life of Jesus.

Let me give you two examples of these servants of the word who began to write down their eyewitness accounts. We read from one earlier.

Have a look at 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 16. Somebody got the page for me there. 2 Peter chapter 1 1, 2, 2, 2.

[21 : 23] 2 Peter chapter 1. So Peter, the writer of this letter, was a disciple and look what he says. 2 Peter 1 verse 16.

We did not, underline, we did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. And speaking of the, when they saw Jesus transfigured, verse 18, he said, we ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.

Flick over a page, maybe two pages, to 1 John. here's another account of somebody who's writing a letter but wants us to know that what he's writing is true.

Speaking of Jesus, he says, that which was from the beginning, that's Jesus, he says, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.

[22 : 48] This is a living person, it's not made up. This we proclaim concerning the word of life. The life appeared, we have seen it and testified to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

Go back to Luke chapter 1. So you see, Luke goes back to the earliest sources. These letters were written within 15 to 25 years of Jesus' resurrection.

So Luke is going back to the earliest sources, those eyewitness servants of the word accounts. A scholar, one of the good guys, Richard Boichum, wrote a book called Jesus and the Eyewitnesses, and he says this about the writing of the Gospels.

Many of the eyewitnesses to Jesus, life, death, and resurrection were still in wide active circulation during these years, able to function as trusted, authoritative sources and guardians of the tradition, a commonly revered practice and presence in oral societies.

So you see, Luke not only consulted with what people wrote and what people had said, but he was able to check it all out with the eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

- [24 : 25] So, he wants us to know that this, what he's written, is an orderly account. This orderly account has come after careful and thorough investigation, and he does all this so that we can be absolutely certain about the truth of Jesus Christ.

Let me read verses 3 and 4, Luke chapter 1. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus.

so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. So, first, we can know the certainty of Luke.

This is true news, not fake news. And this little phrase that we have here in verse 4, that you may know the certainty, has the meaning of security and stability.

One writer and speaker, John Piper, has pointed out that that same word or phrase is only used in two other places in the New Testament.

- [25 : 47] And in both cases, it refers to security, something that is locked up, something that is absolutely secure and unchangeable. So, Luke is saying that his message, this message about Jesus, the things that you have been heard, the things that you have been taught, is absolutely secure.

It is reliable and dependable. It is unshakable and immovable. This is true news, not fake news. It is something that is rock solid, foundational.

You can build your life upon it. You can entrust your life to the very words that are spoken in Luke's gospel. people will tell you that all this stuff about Jesus is not true, that we're all wasting our time reading these gospel accounts.

You can't believe the Bible. It's made up, it's a forgery, it's full of contradictions. But Luke has done all the hard work for us so that we can be absolutely certain that what we read about Jesus is certain rock solid, unshakable, immovable truth.

But second, this certain truth is extremely personal. We're not just to stand back and admire this and say, what a wonderful piece of writing.

- [27 : 27] How clever Luke must have been to have done all this investigation and checking out with eyewitnesses and putting together his material. What a wonderful author he is.

What a great piece of writing. No, this is personal. We're to act on it and believe it.

Look at verse 3 again. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

It's a wonderful name, isn't it? He's written to this person, a guy named Theophilus. It's personal. We don't know much about him other than the fact that he must have been somebody of high position and influence because nobody gets to be called most excellent for nothing.

He's a mover and shaker in his world, a wealthy man. And Luke is saying to Theophilus, this gospel that I am writing for you is not only true, but it's for you, it's personal.

- [28 : 46] We're not just to admire it as a wonderful piece of writing, we're to act on it and believe it. And it's as if we are to read this as Luke speaking to us, what I am writing is for you, Johnny.

And you insert your own name, this is personal to you, it's truth for my life and for your life. Let me show you briefly four ways this touches on us personally and how we can build our life upon this truth.

First, when you are struggling to make sense of life and the foundations on which you build your life are shaken to the core and people are telling you that all this is all made up and what you believe is a nonsense and you can't trust it, I guarantee you need to know that the God who has existed from all time and who sent his son, the God, man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the God who loves you, who came down to seek you and save you through his incarnation and to bring you into an eternal relationship that is safe and secure, it is true.

And you need to know that when you go into your workplace tomorrow or go into school tomorrow and people completely undermine it, you need to be sure what you believe and why you believe it.

Second, when you are weighed down with past failure and you're broken by present shame and you're conscious of sinful behaviours, you need to know that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, he was dying for your sin, when Luke writes about Jesus crying out, Father forgive, he was taking the judgement for you and he was providing forgiveness for you so that you could be set free from your guilt.

[31 : 08] You need to know that when you are weighed down with your past failures that this gospel of freedom is absolutely certain.

Third, when you are walking through suffering and when you are facing the dark reality of death itself and the grave only awaits, you need to know that the resurrection of Jesus Christ, defeating death and destroying the grave and when Luke records his account that Christ rose from the grave and appeared bodily to his disciples, you need to know that he destroyed the grave and was securing salvation for you and this is a rock solid dependable truth for your life when you are suffering and facing certain death.

death. And fourth, as we look out into our broken world, we see power hungry leaders, threatening nations, devastating floods, terrorists blowing up at will.

We need to know that when Luke tells us that the risen Lord Jesus ascended to be at the Father's right hand, is now ruling with all power, with all authority, and is one day going to come back again and make all things new and put this broken world back together again, is an unshakable and immovable reality for your life.

The incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension that Luke will tell us all about, is true.

[33 : 17] And he says, I have written this gospel that you and that you and that you and that I may know the certainty of the things that we have been taught.

This, this gospel is the foundation for our life. This is what we rest in and this is what we believe.

Do you trust your life with the words of Luke about the person of Jesus Christ? Christ? I hope you do.

Let's pray. Let's pray.