

Luke 1:1–4

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- [0 : 00] Luke chapter 1 verses 1 through 4. This is the word of the Lord.
- Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Good morning to the people of God. We're glad that you are here this morning.
- First day of Advent. And we're blessed to be in God's presence and to be with you today. Let's pray. Bless the Lord, O my soul.
- And everything that is within me. Bless your holy name. Forget none of your benefits. You heal. You forgive.
- You satisfy us with good, good things. We bless and we honor your day. Your name this day. Amen. It seems like at HTC, quite regularly, at least since I've been here for the last seven Christmases.
- [1 : 29] We have found ourselves in the first few chapters of Luke with a degree of regularity. We find ourselves again there this year.
- But the difference this year is that our Advent series is merely a gateway into the book itself. We will be spending an extended time in the book of Luke.
- What a great place to be during this season that celebrates the arrival, the coming of the Son of God into the world. I want you to think of this.
- Think of the book of Luke as a gift. It's a gift. And it's, you might even say, the first gift that you may get during this season. And the tag on it is from Luke.
- You get to open it here on December 1. How's that for a Christmas, a start to Christmas? We get to peek into this wonderful, wonderful book.
- [2 : 35] It's unique in all of Scripture. We find information, particularly in this book, that we find nowhere else in the New Testament, nowhere else in Scripture.
- The prologue itself that we'll look at today and the narrative that follows makes the, we get into areas that other biblical writers, they don't tread here.
- Only Luke gives us the particulars that surround the arrival of our Lord Jesus Christ. Foretelling the births of John and of Jesus.
- And then recording their particular births in Scripture. Yet, what we have early in these particular chapters, they're but a foretaste, friends, to what follows in Luke.
- We get to unwrap this particular gift throughout the year. And my prayer is that as we see the wonders that are a part of the book of Luke, I would guess that our hearts would swell again and again as we take a look into this book in this particular season, as well as in the days ahead.
- [3 : 49] Looking at very sacred things from this great gospel. Luke's prologue that we look at today in verses 1 through 4, they are introductory in a two-fold sense.
- On the one hand, they introduce us to the book of Luke. But on the other hand, they introduce us to the two-volume work that Luke wrote, both Luke as well as the book of Acts.

This is, again, a four-verse gateway into the gospel. It is in the form of a formal literary preface, not uncommon for ancient literature.

It included the acknowledgement of works that had preceded him on the same subject. We see that in verses 1 and 2, as well as the writer's qualifications to write these things in verse 3, and to mention of one to whom the work is dedicated in verse 4.

I want to summarize the verses in a sentence or two, and then we'll begin to unpack them. Here's the summary sentence. Luke would say, I've carefully followed these things from the start, and I'm sharing them with you so you can be strengthened in your Christian faith, so you can be strengthened in what you believe.

[5 : 39] Look at verse 1. There we see information as it relates to things that have been accomplished. You see that there?

Look at it. Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been, there it is, accomplished, or another word to say that, is fulfilled among us.

So he begins, acknowledging the worthwhile contributions of others. The things that had been accomplished were so significant, so significant, so big, so huge, that many got in on compiling narratives.

These were both oral and written forms. As it related to this particular information, as it concerned Jesus, as it concerned the fulfillment of the things that had been promised the old in the person, in the work of Jesus.

Exactly who these many were, we're not told. What we do know is that from among the many, writings like Matthew and writings like Mark survived.

[6 : 49] Perhaps other works had not risen to the level of these particular gospel writers that are included in the canon. But based on the common material that we find in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it's reasonable to think that some of the sources were common sources that each of them used.

Mark likely being the first of them. Here the writer, presumed, beloved, acknowledged the work of others.

The historical significance of what had happened during that time was not to be underestimated. The significance of the life and the ministry, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ had not escaped those who lived in that particular day, that particular era.

These things were deemed to be so momentous. They were so noteworthy that many had undertaken to document these things. Again, orally, or in written form.

People were absolutely struck by the game-changing impact of Jesus. I mean, it was world-changing. And they felt that it was worthy of being recorded, shared, passed on in that particular day.

[8 : 15] There were those, and we see this in the gospels, that likely saw the parallels between the ministry of Jesus and ministry of the Old Testament prophets, of bygone errors, people like Elijah or Jeremiah.

You remember Matthew chapter 16. Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, that I am? Some say this, some say that. Why were they saying that? Because God was at work in the person and the work of Jesus in ways that paralleled and other ways that exceeded what he had done in men of God of a previous era.

The word and works, his teaching and touching, what he did and what he said were legendary. And in that particular day, they were given and known as far as, say, this is something big.

This is something huge. And again, we feel the ricochet effect of those things even in our day. Peter, speaking of Jesus and his work in Acts chapter 10, verses 36 through 40, as a matter of fact, turn with 10 to that in your scriptures.

Let me get you engaged in this on this morning. He spoke of him in very significant, impactful kinds of ways.

[9 : 39] And this, in a sentence or two, sort of captures the ministry and the work of Jesus. Of course, Luke begins in Acts chapter 1.

He says, the former treatise, and he's speaking about the gospel of Luke, I've written of all that Jesus began both to do and teach until he was taken up from among them.

But here, Peter, speaking at Cornelius' house, notice what he says beginning in verse 36. As for the word that he, God, sent to Israel preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ, he is Lord of all, you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed.

And listen to this. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with him.

and we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. But God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people, but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

[11 : 10] Again, Peter, in a sentence or two, he captures the work of Jesus, both his words, his proclamation, as well as his deeds, and on to his death and his resurrection and appearances afterward.

The things that God accomplished as a fulfillment of that which was spoken in the Old Testament times, previous days, were absolutely huge.

They found fulfillment in the life and ministry of Jesus, his death and resurrection. God was at work in the ministry of Jesus, fulfilling, accomplishing his work, fulfilling his promises, inaugurating his kingdom.

Things promised, fulfilled. Jesus speaks about it. I mean, Luke captures that particular word and shows us in different places. One of those, Luke chapter 4, we won't turn to it, but he was in Nazareth, had been given the scroll of Isaiah, began to speak about the spirit of the Lord is upon me, and then he ends up saying, this day, this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears.

And then that great passage at the end of the book itself, where Jesus speaks to them, just prior to his ascension, these are my words I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be, there it is, fulfilled.

[12 : 42] Then he opened their minds to understand the scripture and said to them, thus it is written that the Christ should suffer on the third day, rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

And you are witnesses of these things. Things fulfilled. huge. Huge. Christ's coming. Christ's ministry in word and deed.

Christ's death and his resurrection. Life-changing kinds of things that were captured. The things accomplished among them in that day, but you and I feel the impact of that.

Hey, indeed, a corn of wheat or a grain of wheat has fallen into the ground. And it has risen. The seed has spread throughout the world.

And because they had captured the essence of these things, the substance of these things, the power of these things, you and I have embraced and received them even in our day.

- [13 : 54] Things accomplished, verse 1. Things delivered in verse 2. While what had been accomplished through Jesus comes into view in verse 1, those who were used of God to share truth about Jesus, they come into focus in verse 2.

Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us. Huh? They shared truth about Jesus.

They're referred to as eyewitnesses, those who had seen for themselves. And ministers are attendants of the word dedicated to spreading the message and the ministry of the master.

Huh? These were those who had seen Jesus, had been set under his teaching, and were eventually commissioned by him. And friends, they were not silent.

Huh? They obeyed Jesus' commission to make disciples of the nation. Huh? These were the ones who had handed down this information about Jesus through their preaching and through their ministry.

- [15 : 06] Now, likely, undoubtedly, the apostles were at the core group of these, but there were also other credible, first-hand witnesses who had experienced Jesus.

And they then shared their story about him. Huh? Again, we get a glimpse of their spirit-empowered preaching and ministry in the book of Acts.

They ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus. We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard. We're witnesses of these things, witnesses of his resurrection.

And they passed those things down. Huh? Things accomplished, things delivered, but things followed closely hand. You see that in verse 3?

It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account. Huh? The shift in verse 3 from the eyewitnesses and ministers who had engaged in the transmission of truth about Jesus to the me that's mentioned in verse 3.

- [16 : 11] So the question is, who is the me? Again, we've assumed that it's Luke. Huh? But, is there biblical warrant to think that Luke is actually the author of this book?

Huh? If you look for the author's name in the gospel, you won't find it. You do so futilely. If you look for the author's name in the book of Acts, you don't find it there.

It can't be found. Huh? But, there's something that we do know. The book, the name of Luke appears three times in scripture. Colossians 4.14, Philemon verse 24, and 2 Timothy 4.11.

And from these particular verses, there's certain things that we learn about Luke. According to Colossians 4.14, he was a physician who was also a fellow worker of Paul as we see in Philemon verse 24.

This is the one he did not forsake Paul when Paul was in prison. We see that in 2 Timothy 4.11. The writer of Luke, we also know also that he was the writer of the book of Acts.

- [17 : 30] Based on what we know as in the we sections in the book of Acts, he was a travel companion with Paul. As a matter of fact, turn with me to Acts chapter 16. And this is one of several what are known as we sections in the book.

And from this, we deduce that this particular person, again, we, the writer, was a companion of Paul on various ones of his travels.

Acts chapter 16. And let's look at look at verse 10. And again, this is the first time that this we appears and again, the writer as a companion of Paul.

And when Paul had seen the vision immediately, we sought to go into Macedonia concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Reading on, so setting sail from Troy as we made a direct voyage to Samothrace and the following day to Napolis and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony, we remained in this city some days.

Here was a travel companion of Paul, one who cared for him while he was in prison. Luke is the most likely of Paul's companions that would have been doing the recording that we see in Acts, in this passage and in others.

[19 : 09] We also notice that the writer of Luke had excellent command of Hellenistic Greek. Again, we see that fine Greek that's even in the prologue of the book that we look at today.

this could also accord with one who was a medical doctor. The vocabulary of Luke that we see in various places in this book includes medical terms and sensitivities that are not found in the other Gospels.

As far back as mid-second century, there's been attestation to Luke's authorship of the third Gospel. And he is the likely writer of it.

Well, on the one hand, we know that the writer's credibility was not on the basis of what he saw. But on the other hand, it was according to his words back in Luke chapter 1, he had followed all things closely and he had followed all things closely for some time past.

The things that had been accomplished and delivered had been a matter of investigative interest to Luke. He was a student of these things.

[20 : 27] And he says, in essence, he says, I am a credible witness. I've done my homework. I have followed these things closely. And so, another voice enters into the mix.

Think of the Holy Spirit as a divine conductor and he brings Luke into the mix. Luke, I think of the voice.

He is not a corrective voice to those whose voices were being heard in the Gospels, particularly Matthew and Mark. But his was a complementary voice, one that was very much in harmony with the Gospel sounds that had already gone out.

As we look at Luke, the notes in Luke are very, very crisp. And sometimes as you look with him as it relates to the other Gospels, the Gospels are in unison.

At other times, we hear Luke and Luke has many solo parts as you look at the Gospels as a whole. But one thing that we find, there is always unity in these particular voices.

[21 : 40] And then as John later is brought in, what you have is the Gospel in four-part harmony. And we get to hear the Gospel as it relates to and as it comes from these particular voices.

According to Luke's claim, what he wrote was orderly. This doesn't mean that it was in chronological order, though there's a reasonable in that regard.

But it's logical. It's factual. It is arranged in ways that fit the author's purpose. That's what he gives us.

Note that he wrote with a person, one person in mind, at least according to what we see here. He comes into view in the second part of verse three.

And his name was Theophilus. Theophilus was a common name in that particular day. One that means a lover of God.

[22 : 43] So, while the name of the writer does not appear in the gospel, the one that he wrote to here, as well as in the sequel in Acts, the name of Theophilus appears.

The words most excellent that precede his name indicates that he was likely a person of high social rank. He was not at the bottom of social order of that day.

Some have postulated that rather than Theophilus being a person, he may represent a community of those who love God. But it's more likely that he was indeed an individual.

Perhaps he was Luke's patron who financed or otherwise supported the work that he was putting together as well as ultimately the dissemination thereof. Again, a significant person.

But notice in verse four the purpose that we come to. What was Luke's purpose in writing? It's very clear, isn't it? It appears that Theophilus, the recipient, had been taught about Christian truth, about Jesus, and he became a believer in Jesus.

[23 : 50] Thus Luke wrote to reinforce the teaching that he had to complement, to strengthen what he had received, what he had already been taught. Do you want to be further catechized as it relates to the things of Christ?

In what God has accomplished in and through Jesus? Do you want accurate, well investigated information? Do you want assurance that what you believe is real?

Well, that Jesus is the real deal? Want to show up your faith? Huh? Well, receive Luke's Christmas gift, huh? Receive what we have here. Begin to look into this particular book.

Luke's gospel has the qualities, friends, of a good gift. So, as you think about a gift, and what are the things that you're going to as you do your shopping?

You may have been out on whatever they call that Friday is, this Black Friday pass or whatever, but what do you look for in a good gift? Luke's gift that he gives to us is a thoughtful gift.

[24 : 58] It's helpful, it's durable, and for you and me, it's affordable. not only that, it's a gift that keeps on giving. This is the kind of gift, friends, if you receive it, you don't have to return this gift.

It meets people right at the point of their need. It's a gift with great utility. It's useful. Here we have something for the soul that will serve us for both time and eternity.

Not only that, it's a magnificent gift. literally speaking, someone has said, it's the most beautiful book that was ever written. It's a gospel gift in that it concerns all that Jesus began both to do and teach, to include his death, his burial, and his resurrection.

Friends, this gift is a gift for growth. It can be catalytic for one to grow in gospel truth and gospel living.

The gospel here that you've received can here be reinforced. You can be encouraged in it. But listen to this. The gospel of Luke is a gift that can be re-gifted.

[26 : 15] It should be shared with others. At some point, I would hope that as we go through this particular book, that you might identify a Theophilus of sort yourself.

It may be in a one-to-one kind of reading situation. But as we get ourselves into this book, what might be the practical and even missional import for our going through this particular book in this particular year?

It's a gift, friends, that can be re-gifted. Bible study and community group evangelistic studies. know anybody like Theophilus that may need some kind of reassurance or strengthening in their faith?

Or perhaps one who might even need to come to faith. It's good for helping friends of God grow. And I would pray that this would not simply be an exercise of the head, but one of the heart and the soul.

And that God would use you and me as we walk through this book this particular year to perhaps do what Luke did as it relates to his patron and his friend.

[27 : 35] Friends, what we have here is good for accurate information about Jesus. It's good for growth steps for those in Jesus. Luke's gift is a gift that's good for the soul.

What am I saying this morning? Simply this. What God accomplished through Jesus is good for the security of the soul. And thus, we're poised to listen to Luke.

We're poised to listen so we can grow. We're poised to listen so we can mature. We're poised to listen so that you and I can be assured in our faith.

The gift of the gospel is pictured in the Lord's table. Think about it. Jesus' body for us, his blood for us.

We've got what God has done in and through the person and the work of Jesus sort of pictured in a ceremony.

[28 : 44] The word was made flesh in order, the incarnation, in order that he might come and die and give us life for you and me.

The words of Luke that we find in Luke chapter 22, and I'm going to use these for our words of institution on this morning, they parallel the words of Paul that we often use as we come to the Lord's table.

table and we'll find those in Luke chapter 22. As a matter of fact, why don't you turn there with me even as we prepare for the Lord's table. Luke 22 beginning in verse 14.

And as the header says, this is for the institution of the Lord's table, of the Lord's supper. Passover. And when the hour came, he, that's Jesus, reclined at table and the apostles with him.

And he said to them, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

[29 : 58] And he took a cup. And when he had given thanks, he says, take this and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you, from now on, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

And he took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body, which is given for you. Do this.

in remembrance of me. And likewise, the cup after he had eaten, saying, this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant of my blood.

The institution of the Lord's Supper. And here we are today. Two thousand plus years beyond that particular time.

We're impacted by the things that were accomplished in that day through the person and work of Jesus. And if you're a part of his body, if you're among his people, if you have embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior, this table is for you.

[31 : 14] My prayers that you would come, that you would be strengthened, that you would be nourished in a spiritual way. And perhaps even may this set the tone for what's ahead of us over the next four weeks or so, even as we have entered into this Advent period.

Let me pray. Dave is coming. He's going to assist me as you prepare your own hearts. Again, it's for, the table is for God's people. If you have not trusted Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Savior, we would ask that you would refrain from partaking of this meal on this morning.

Heavenly Father, we give thanks to you. We bless and we honor you. We thank you for Jesus, his coming into this world and giving himself for us.

You spared not your own son, but delivered him up for us all. And we acknowledge him through our partaking of this meal that represents him and his work on this morning.

We bless and we honor your name. Amen. Welcome to the table.