

Account, Analysis, Affirmation

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Date: 05 September 2021

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[0 : 00] please turn back with me to Luke chapter 1, verses 1 through 4. And as we study this passage, let's seek the Lord's help.

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern through Jesus Christ our Lord.

What kind of world do you live in? Do you live in a fantasy world of make-believe?

Horoscopes and healing crystals and ghosts? Or do you live in a materialistic world? Where nothing else except what you can see with your eyes and hear with your ears exists or matters.

If you live in the first of these worlds, the superstitious world, then fact is your greatest enemy. If you live in the second of these worlds, the materialistic world, then truth is your greatest enemy.

[1 : 14] But as Christians, we live in neither world, superstitious or materialistic, a world with a million gods or a world with none.

We live in a world of both fact and truth. A world governed by the one true and living God. A God who has made himself known through the coming of his one and only son, Jesus Christ.

A God in whom there is salvation for all men and women and is to be worshipped by all men and women. This is the world in which we live.

A world which is governed by God's wise and loving purposes. In other words, you do not abandon your senses when you believe in this God and follow him for yourself.

You reclaim them. Over the next few years, God willing, I want us to reclaim our senses as together we study the New Testament books of Luke and Acts.

[2 : 23] And I say over the next few years. So if you're a student here today and you just started Glasgow Uni, by the time you finish, we will still be in Luke and Acts. We're going to study them together not just because they were both written by the same man, a man called Luke, but because they formed two volumes of the same story.

The Gospel of Luke, the beginning of the mission of Jesus, the book of Acts, the continuation of the mission of Jesus. And through the study of these two books, my hair will be gray by the time we're finished, I want us to understand that this world in which we live is God's world.

A God whose mission is the redemption of all kinds of people through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ. And they're coming together as one church, a church that bears the name Christian.

And so today we begin our, in Luke chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, with our introduction to the book of Luke and Acts.

As we read these tightly packed verses, we're asking the question, what is the Gospel of Luke? To which we answer, it is first an affirmation, it is secondly an account, no, sorry, it is first an account, secondly, it is an analysis, and thirdly, it is an affirmation.

[3 : 54] It's an account, it's an analysis, and it's an affirmation. Let today be the first step in you beginning to live in this world of fact and truth.

A world where God's kingdom is growing exponentially, and the name of Jesus Christ is drawing all kinds of people to himself, yes, maybe even you.

So first of all then, the Gospel of Luke is an account. It's an account. In many ways, the first sentence of Luke's Gospel is somewhat of a damp squib compared to the first sentences of the other Gospels.

Matthew begins his Gospel with the majestic words, the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Mark begins his Gospel with the words, the beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.

John begins his Gospel with the famous words, we read these words together, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Compare these mysterious and majestic introductions with that of Luke, inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us.

[5 : 20] You see, the other Gospel writers begin on notes of extraordinary majesty. Luke begins with, well, the ordinary mundane, a narrative, a story, an account of things.

Luke may be many things, but first and foremost, he is a storyteller whose intention is to write an orderly account, as he says in verse 3.

He tells us that others have already compiled stories of Jesus. Probably a reference to Mark, whose Gospel was already in circulation by the time Luke wrote this Gospel.

But Luke's Gospel is his story of Jesus. His account of the things which have been accomplished by God through the coming, the living, the dying, and the rising of his Son, Jesus Christ.

But let me ask you, what's so wrong with Luke beginning the way he does? What's so wrong about it? You see, from the get-go, he's telling us, the things I'm going to tell you about aren't fantasy.

[6 : 33] They're not fiction. They are a historical narrative, a true story, a factual account. Now, of course, as we're going to discover as we go through Luke Acts, Luke has his own slant on the story, his own reasons for writing, as did Matthew and Mark and John.

But Luke is starting where we need him to start, with fact, with truth, not make-believe or materialism.

From the very beginning, he's reminding us that when we follow Christ, we are reclaiming our senses. We're not abandoning them. In 1965, the American film producer, George Stevens, released a film called The Greatest Story Ever Told.

Receiving five Academy Award nominations, The Greatest Story Ever Told was a retelling of the story of Jesus of Nazareth. Stephen could have stolen the title from the beginning of Luke's Gospel, The Greatest Story Ever Told.

The thing is, according to Luke, the story's bigger still. It is the story, as you will see in verse 1, of the things which have been accomplished among us, or more literally, fulfilled.

[8 : 01] It's not just the bare story of the things Jesus said and the things Jesus did, fulfilled God's wise and loving plan for the world he created.

Throughout the Old Testament, God has said what he would do to save a people for himself. And now, in Luke Acts, as we're going to see by the time little Finley begins to shave, God does what he says he would through his son, Jesus Christ.

You see, this is a story, but it's a very special kind of story. It's a fulfillment story, where at every stage, we're going to see how God is working out his wise and loving plan for his world through Jesus Christ.

whether it be in the infancy narratives in Luke chapter 1 and 2 situated within small villages around the city of Jerusalem, or in the last couple of chapters of Acts, where the mighty apostle Paul is proclaiming the gospel in the streets of the capital city of Rome.

Luke is telling us all the way through, God is working out his plans. And it's not about great men in great cities. in great nations.

[9 : 29] It's about despised and hidden people in far off places, in nations with no names. But it's particularly about Jesus Christ himself, the Lord they worship, the master they follow, the saviour in whom they believe, and it's about the church to which they belong.

perhaps it's because we're so familiar with the story of Jesus that we don't appreciate it like we should or like we could. My intention is to tell you this story again and again and again.

To take you to a stable in Bethlehem and from there to the temple in Jerusalem. you're going to hear the stories Jesus told. Amazing stories of lost coins and prodigal sons.

You're going to hear of amazing miracles involving feeding 5,000 with next to nothing and raising dead people to new life. And you're going to see you're going to see the life of a man, Jesus Christ, who didn't never just do anything wrong, but everything he did was right, loving, and good.

You're going to learn of his love not just for Jewish people but also for Gentiles, people like us.

You're going to see Jesus crucified, rising again, ascending into heaven and sending his spirit.

[10 : 58] So Luke Acts is an account, it's a story of small beginnings in Bethlehem to big endings in Rome of the Jewish Messiah who was Lord of all therefore salvation is for all, not just for Jew but also for Gentile.

You're going to find out that universal history finds its fulfillment in one man, born according to promise, living according to righteousness, dying according to love, rising according to power, ascending according to glory, and reigning according to sovereignty through his Holy Spirit. This is the greatest story you will ever, ever hear. Not just the story of Luke Acts but the whole of God's universal purpose fulfilled in Christ Jesus.

I want to tell you a story of how much God loves you. Week on week building the case why you belong among his people.

And if there's one thing for which I'm going to pray all these years, it's that none of us will ever lose our wonder at the narrative of all the things God has fulfilled among us by Jesus and his spirit.

[12:17] It's an account first of all. Second, it's an analysis. It's an analysis.

Now tradition tells us that Luke was a doctor. We don't know what kind of doctor he was and furthermore we must be careful not to equate his doctoring with modern doctoring.

After all until fairly recently barbers served as dentists and sometimes even executioners served as medics.

What we do know is that Luke's story and Luke acts is not a fiction. It's the result of painstaking research over the course of many years on his part.

He wants us to know that following Christ is not a blind step into the darkness. Following Christ is a reasoned response to fact and truth.

[13:21] Now it's obvious from these first verses that Luke has used sources. Well every good author whether he's writing fiction or non-fiction researches his material beforehand and uses sources from which to write.

And in this respect Luke is no different. He follows closely verse 3 the sources investigating everything researching everything before he sets it down in writing and then when he writes it down he sets it all in order as any good student in university does.

He studiously reviews everything he's learned and then he formulates an order a sequence of words and works which most closely corresponds to what Jesus said and what Jesus did.

So for example it seems clear that he based his gospel upon compilations of those who went before him those who were eyewitnesses in verse 2 and ministers of the word.

Modern scholarship dates the gospel of Luke at around the mid 60s AD from about 63 to 67 AD the gospel of Mark was written a few years before the gospel of Luke and as you compare the two gospels you realize that there are many similarities so in his research and investigation Luke used the gospel of Mark same gospel we've got today as one of his sources.

[14:58] Mark was still alive when Luke was writing so it's possible that Luke communicated with Mark to act for clarification about certain points and about certain events.

Just to clarify Luke's not writing in a vacuum he's doing what any good historian does he is consulting primary sources namely the gospel of Mark.

But there's more in Colossians 4 verse 14 writing to the Colossians Paul says our dear friend Luke the doctor sends greetings.

Colossians 4 verse 14 throughout the latter portions of Acts written by Luke he often uses the word we we went here we did this we went there signifying that for some years he was Paul's traveling companion.

The early church fathers were acutely aware of Paul's relationship with Luke and how Paul's faith and teaching was instrumental in Luke's discipleship as John talked about Dawson Trotman and his friend Spencer.

[16:12] And so the church father Tertullian calls the gospel of Luke a digest of Paul's gospel a digest of Paul's gospel.

In other words one of the sources that Luke used to write this gospel was the apostle Paul. You don't find anything in the Pauline epistles of the New Testament which you do not find in seed form somewhere in the gospels but it goes further Luke's gospel is different from the others it is distinctively Pauline in its approach and its theology.

So there you have two eyewitnesses you have Mark and Paul eyewitnesses and ministers of the word and Luke uses both of them as sources to write his gospel. Mark and Paul were still both alive when Luke was writing and he was able to engage with them asking them for clarification about certain thorny issues.

You can almost imagine Luke and Mark and Paul sitting around a fire in the house discussing the question of what exactly Jesus meant when he spoke of a son running away from his father to a far off country.

Or maybe he said to Mark, Mark, Mark, remind me again, where was it that Jesus healed that man born blind whose name was Bartimaeus? The point is, Luke is using primary sources as any good historian does.

[17 : 45] You are not taking your senses by following and believing what he's written, you are reclaiming your senses. But there is one more source I believe Luke relied upon very heavily.

Now, Luke is unlike any of the other gospels in that Luke wrote in classical Greek, posh Greek, we might call it, as opposed to the Koine Greek which Matthew, Mark and John used when they were writing.

It's the difference between reading the English of Jane Austen and the English of the Daily Record. But there's something about the first few chapters of Luke's gospel.

Even though they are written in classical Greek which is incredibly difficult to translate, let me tell you, they read like a Jewish document. To use a technical term, they're Semitic in style.

They read like a Jewish document. They read like Old Testament narrative and prophecy. It's almost like Luke has used a Jewish source, a distinctively Jewish source in order to frame these first few chapters of his gospel.

[19 : 01] He's used someone who was steeped in the world of Judaism, Jewishness, the style, the prophecies of the Old Testament. Besides which in the next few months as we go through the first few chapters of Luke, these chapters precede his involvement in the Christian church and the involvement of Mark and Paul.

Furthermore, many of these details in the first few chapters, they're very personal to Jesus' family. The way Mary felt when the angel informed her of her pregnancy.

The words of Elizabeth and Zechariah when John the Baptist was born and how John the Baptist as a fetus leapt in his mother's womb.

Put these strains of information together. The Jewishness of these first few chapters of the gospel. The fact that they predate Paul and Mark. And the intimacy of the details about Jesus' birth.

Put it all together and we're left speculating that in fact the source used in writing these so-called Semitic chapters, Luke chapters 1-4, was Mary, the mother of our Lord, who at the time of writing was a very old lady belonging to the household of the apostle John in Ephesus.

[20 : 37] So what we're reading here in Luke 1-2 are the blessed virgin's recollection of all the events that took place surrounding her son Jesus Christ. This is Mary's take on beginnings.

Told of a Jewish style including details that only she could have known. There could be no more primary source than the mother of our Lord.

Again, you see, Luke isn't just telling a story, he's a great storyteller, but he's engaging in the analysis of the sources. he's telling us that what he's writing has been carefully researched, as Evan, our resident historian, carefully researched the history of our church when he wrote the Hope Street story.

It's not a book of Chinese whispers. It's not a legend. It's not a fabrication of the early church designed to elevate Jesus to sainthood. It's a historical investigation into the fulfillment of God's plan that Jesus should be Lord of all and that therefore salvation should belong to all.

There may be some of us who think that a Sunday morning in church is an escape from reason. You're sick of reason on a Monday through Friday and you see Christianity as a kind of form of escapism.

[21 : 57] There may be even genuine Christians among us who believe, who think that to believe in Christ is a blind step into the unknown. And Luke says to us, no, no, and no again.

Following Christ is a step into the known. There be no monsters here. Rather, the historical analysis of what really happened, I have derived them from primary sources.

In other words, brothers and sisters in Christ, your Christian faith is not an escape from reason. It is an engagement with reason.

no fairy tale this for any of us. This is fact and this is truth. It is an analysis.

And then finally, it is an affirmation, an affirmation. Now, both the book of Luke and Acts are written to a man whose name is Theophilus.

[23 : 02] The name itself is a Greek word. It means lover of God. So, rather than it being the man's real name, it could just be a figurative speech, a nickname. I guess it could even represent perhaps even more than one person, all lumped together with the name Theophilus.

We're given the purpose of the book in verse four. So that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. So that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

New Testament scholars suggest that the gospel of Mark was written to people who previously had known little or nothing about Jesus.

But from what we read in verse four here, it's not so with Luke. Theophilus, whoever he was, already knew a fair bit about Jesus, about his words, about his works.

He had already been taught. And so Luke's purpose is to reinforce the factuality and truthfulness of these things. So what does Mark as a book for Christian novices?

[24 : 12] Luke serves a different purpose. It serves to assure Theophilus and all those like him that all those things which Jesus said and did really did happen.

That's the word affirmation, assurance. assurance. In our culture, assurance means one thing. We tend to talk of assurance in the Christian church in terms of knowing whether I have faith in Christ or not.

It's a subjective, person-centered assurance. But in the culture and tradition of Luke, the word assurance or affirmation means something different. It means knowing the truth about the life of Christ together with its meaning.

it's an objective, fact, truth, history-centered assurance. And the purpose of Luke's gospel therefore is to give that objective assurance to people like Theophilus that they're not being sold a lemon by believing in Jesus.

That the facts of truth and history are on their side. But as you read through the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, something else becomes clear, you will know that a large part of Acts is given over to the story of how the message of the gospel was proclaimed to the Gentiles.

[25 : 40] And through the power of the Spirit of God, the Gentiles began to believe and became members of the Christian church. So a church which had previously been made up of purely Jewish believers, believers, now had to come to terms with being made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

Okay, you say, for us that's no big deal. Consider that for hundreds, no, thousands of years, the Jews had considered the Gentiles to be an inferior race.

A race not worthy of God's grace or favor. But now, according to the gospel promises of God and the fulfillment of God's purpose for the world, Jesus is Lord of all and therefore salvation is for all, both Jew and Gentile.

And so much of the story of the book of Acts, as we're going to find out, is about how Gentile and Jewish Christians learned to live in unity with each other. This is a huge burden for Luke.

Influenced as he was by Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, how Jews and Gentiles can live together as one in one church.

[27 : 05] His name, Theophilus, is a Greek name. It's not a Hebrew name like Matthew or Jesus.

Theophilus was probably a Gentile Christian. Modern scholars speculate that the reason Luke wrote this letter is because Theophilus, a Gentile Christian, is finding it very hard to live in unity with Jewish Christians.

They're making him and other Gentile Christians in the church feel as if they don't really belong. that's a Jewish church. It's not for you Gentiles. After all, Jesus is Jewish.

And the Old Testament is Jewish. And all the apostles are Jewish. So it's quite natural that these Jewish Christians, either intentionally or unintentionally, were making Gentile Christians feel like second-class citizens in the early church.

So the ultimate reason that Luke wrote both this gospel and the book of Acts is to assure Gentile Christians that Jesus is as much their Lord as he is Lord of the Jewish Christian.

[28 : 25] In other words, Theophilus, you belong just as much in this church as anyone else. you belong.

Luke wrote these things to Theophilus to urge him to stick in with the church. However hard that might be, keep going, keeping one with his Jewish Christian brothers and sisters, even though they make it difficult for you.

Luke, he wrote these things to show Theophilus and the Gentile Christians that just as Jesus is Lord of all, so salvation belongs to all, that they belong to the church and the church belongs to them.

And so as we go through our studies in Luke Acts, we're going to examine how every single passage and every single story, and they do, affirms the place of Gentile within the Christian church.

And when you think of Gentiles, don't think of a group away out there somewhere. Think of yourself. Not just because we're all ethnic Gentiles here, but because if there's a place for anybody in the kingdom of God, if there's a place for anybody, listen to this, if there's a place for anybody in the kingdom of God, there's a place for you also.

[29 : 52] This is where you belong. you belong among the disciples of Jesus, whoever you are and of whatever ethnicity and background. You belong on the side of fact and truth, the very things under attack in our society through its dedication to fantasy materialism.

The entirety of your history has brought you to this point, this Sunday morning, where you're seated in this building, listening to the story of Jesus from the mouth of this strange man.

How will you respond? How will you respond? Belonging and believing. Believe in Jesus Christ. Belong to you. Last once you know yesterday. What is what is about you?