

Get to Grips with the Word

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[0 : 00] I want us to turn this evening to the chapter that we read, Gospel of Luke in chapter 1. I want to read once again from the beginning of the chapter.

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

That was one sentence, by the way. One sentence in our English Bibles, because it was one sentence as it was originally written.

And I hope I'll show you, I hope we'll have time later on for us to show you why it's important that that one sentence is preserved, because there's a lot of significance to that one opening sentence. I have many regrets in my life, many of them. One of them is that I didn't read more.

[1 : 35] I don't know why that was, probably too restless in my younger days, probably too easily distracted, I guess. I'm not alone in that. Lots of people in the world are too easily distracted, particularly in a modern world, where we've got so many things that we can do, so many things that will distract us.

But I'm really sorry that I didn't read more, because if I had read more, I would be more informed, I would know more, I would know far, far more. I'd have much better stories to use as illustrations, I would know far more about what I preach, I'd be far better at explaining things, because I reckon that those who read are far better teachers, because they can explain things far, far better.

Out of all the classics at my fingertips, the Roman Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, history of Scotland, the history of England, and I wish that I had read all of these things.

I wish I was far, far less ignorant than I am. It's only a few years ago that I really started reading properly. And the reason I'm saying that, that's not just a by the way.

God has chosen to speak to us through books, through the book, the Bible. God has chosen to write down his word to us. And so it's absolutely essential if you can, there are some people in the world who can't read, and they can't help it.

[2 : 57] But if you can, then we must make use of the gift that God has given to us, because this is the particular way that God has chosen to communicate with us. So if you want to find out what God's message is, you have to read.

You have to listen, but you also have to read. And I don't think I was alone in neglecting the whole area of reading. And I would like to encourage you, I really, really, if you really want to take the Bible series, you have to read it.

You have to read it for yourself. And not just the Bible, but books that explain the Bible. Because if I wasn't a Christian tonight, I think I would be really trying to seriously focus on this message of the gospel.

Try to get to grips with it, because I think it deserves, I really believe it deserves, your effort and your attention. And too much attention is given to all the wrong things, I think, in the modern world. Many, many people, they never get to grips with the most important message in all the world. But when we do come to books, we very often skip introductions. That's a very bad habit I have.

[4 : 08] I'm sure it's a habit that some of you have as well. You get onto the main story, chapter one, right away. Skip the introduction. Not interested. Not interested in anything that is to do with the background or anything like that.

Just get onto the main story. And we do that with the Bible. And the worst thing we could do is to start Luke chapter one by skipping the introduction. Because the introduction is immensely,

immensely important.

Luke is beginning his account of the life of Jesus with an immensely serious statement. Because he wants us to know that he has been serious about the research that he has done.

He wants us to know also what kind of person Luke is. Now, if you're going to take seriously everything that he says, you first of all have to trust the person who is writing the story.

Because if there's anything about him which is suspect or dodgy, you're not going to believe the story that he writes. And so he writes this one sentence, this very short section, but I believe that within that short section is enough to build up our confidence in what he's going to write.

[5 : 24] Now, it's one thing to have confidence in a writer when you're learning about some area of history or some scientific knowledge. That's one thing. But what Luke is writing about is the future of you and I beyond death.

This is the ultimate truth. Now, surely, surely you'd agree with me that when it comes to ultimate truth and the future of my soul, my life beyond death, whether it's heaven or hell, surely you would want at the very beginning to know that you could trust the person that is going to write the account. So it's not surprising to me that he writes this one sentence to introduce himself and to introduce what he's going to do and to introduce the seriousness and the solemnity with how he's going to write this.

It's almost as if he's saying, I know that some of the things you're going to read about are utterly bizarre. Some of the things I'm going to tell you are hard to believe.

They're impossible, almost impossible to believe. They defy human logic. They defy nature. They defy science. They defy what you would expect.

[6 : 39] They are the most marvelous things. And your natural reaction to a story like the one I'm going to tell you is to say, it's just nonsense. It's fairy tales. It's just complete myth.

So he says, the problem that I have is that I'm not going to tell you fairy tales. I am going to tell you as it has been told me by men and women perhaps who were there and who saw what happened. This is an account that I'm writing because I believe it and because it all happens. And I know how bizarre it was. He must have felt he was in a hiding to nothing. He must have felt that his credibility was at stake and his credibility was at stake.

And we have to remember that credibility would have been important to Luke. He was a doctor. And any doctor, everything depends on your credibility if you're a doctor because nobody's going to come and see you if you're incredible, if you're not to be trusted.

It's the same true today. If you have any reason to suspect, of course you're going to be worried because your life, your health, it's the same with Dr. Luke. But you see, I'm so glad he was a doctor because in the same way as you trust your life to a doctor and his diagnosis, it's a doctor that God used to write down the story of Jesus from start to finish because he was so meticulous and trustworthy.

[8 : 00] Now, I'm going to, we're going to just have a look at some of the ways, some of the words that are used in this, just this little short introduction and just to try and to focus our attention on them and I hope as we do so that we will be encouraged to trust this man, this Dr. Luke.

We don't know where he came from. We don't quite know whether he was Jewish or Gentile.

Nobody's quite sure. They reckon that he probably was a Gentile. One of the first Gentile believers, you remember, of course, Jesus was born into a Jewish community and the world in which he lived was largely a Jewish world but we remember also afterwards that by Acts chapter 10 the gospel had then spread to the Gentile world.

Remember, the Jews and the Gentiles hated each other. They didn't get on well at all. They lived together reluctantly and yet the gospel came to the Gentile world because God had ordered his disciples to go into all the world and to make disciples of Jews and Gentiles and we reckon that this Dr. Luke must have been one of the very first people who came to faith in Jesus.

We also don't know who he's writing to. He names him as Theophilus and we're not quite sure who this Theophilus is. He's a sort of mysterious character but he's obviously someone who Luke thinks very highly of and respects a lot and it's obviously a project that has been given to Luke by Theophilus because Luke wants this Maybe Theophilus was had just was on the point of becoming a Christian himself.

He had heard about Jesus of Nazareth and maybe he had met with Luke they had trusted each other and Luke had said to him I'm going to write down for you everything that I discover in my research about this man Jesus of Nazareth so that you will be informed.

[10 : 13] Let me tell you something tonight the most important task that you have in front of you when it comes to the gospel is to become informed.

I'm not asking you to believe or to trust something you know nothing about I would never ask you to do that but surely it is both reasonable and logical and sensible in the light of what you know about this tremendous character has there ever been a figure in history who has changed the course of human history like Jesus.

You might try and compare him with other great leaders and religious leaders all throughout the centuries but you will admit with me if you know anything at all that whatever great things you can say about other people famous people who walk the face of the earth no one comes anywhere close to the effect that Jesus had upon the world.

No one changed the world like this Jesus. Now listen all I'm saying is this is it not sensible for you to go and to become informed as to what the truth really is.

That's what Luke is doing that's just what he's doing he's saying to Theophilus look I just want to tell you the story just so that you'll know what happened I'm going to go and I'm going to make it my business to go to go around the streets of I don't know how many people he talked to but he tells us that he wrote his gospel by way of interviewing eyewitnesses witnesses not just one I reckon several some people reckon he took two years to interview all the people that he came across to write down their story this man is serious about what he is doing and I hope that as we're taking this obscure text a text you probably never heard anybody speaking about before I hope at the very least that your confidence is being built up and if you're not a Christian that you will at least go and read the story for yourself too many people are quite happy to write Jesus off and they'll tell you that there are contradictions in the

[12 : 31] Bible and they'll tell you how ridiculous the whole gospel is and it turns out they've never read the gospel for themselves now I don't understand a person like that I can't understand it particularly because if this message is true there's too much at stake to ignore it and by the time you find out it'll be too late one day you'll find out that it's true and then it'll be too late and all the time you've had opportunity even tonight to go away and to read the account for yourself and to come and to form an impression about it and one of the things I believe with all my heart is that God speaks through his word he may use an instrument like me from time to time but the real power lies in his own word that means that I can quite confidently say to you tonight go and read it and God will I truly believe that God will speak to you through his own word that's the challenge is that too much to ask surely surely that's not too much to ask any reasonable rational person

I know how many other things there are to do especially at this time of year when our lives are taken up with so many other but ask yourself how important are these things how important are they compared to my relationship with God and to my discovery of the truth of God in Jesus Christ to how I stand before God because if this message is true then a day will come when I will die and if I die outside of Christ I stand before Jesus his judgment seat the Bible calls it his judgment seat and I my sins will not be forgiven there's far too much at stake for me to ignore this all I'm asking you to do at this moment in time is to read the word and you know there's an enormous reluctance for people to do this partly because I think they rather suspect and they're rather afraid of what God might say to them in the Bible and the challenge of reading the Bible because the Bible speaks personally to each one of us that means that as you go through the gospel of Luke or the gospel of Matthew or the Bible you will you'll begin to feel awkward and you begin to feel uncomfortable because this is the living word of God where God probes and presses and starts opening doors and starts uncovering things in our lives things that we thought that we had covered up successfully a long time ago things that we thought we could hide from ourselves and from other people and we even were foolish enough to think that we could hide them from God but it's as we read God's word that these things are taken off God removes the covers and God probes and presses and shines his light into the darkness of our hearts and that's uncomfortable and it takes us out of our comfort zone and it shows us for what we really are that's what we need that's what you need you need to see yourself before you can see the saviour that's only when you see how ugly you are on the inside by reading God's word that you that you see how how much how desperately you need the Jesus that Luke is going to write about I challenge you this evening there's too much at stake for you to ignore this and there's a single person in here that cannot take up the challenge that I'm putting before you tonight there's not a single there's not a single person make a point of reading this gospel make a point of starting to read your Bible make a point of asking God show me

the truth of the Bible show me yourself show me this yourself and that way I leave it to God to show himself to you but you must answer to God as he does so and you must listen to him surely surely if you don't listen to God who are you going to listen to and so so this is why I this is why this this sentence is so immensely important it's important also because through even from the point of view that the way it's written demonstrates the care and the style of this very immensely clever man I have no I don't believe as a person who's I don't think particularly clever I don't think cleverness has anything to be ashamed of some people are clever some people are brilliant some people are geniuses some people don't have it everyone's different but you know when it comes to writing an accurate account of what Jesus did I want someone who's clever I have to have someone who's clever it's absolutely essential that this man must be a geek and I don't use that word disparagingly I don't I don't believe I think that's a terrible word for people to use insultingly because what I mean by this is the word that young people use for someone who's studious and someone who takes seriously their studies and someone who does their homework really to the best of their ability someone who is immensely serious about life that's what they call a geek you know when it comes to whether this gospel is true or not

[18:24] I want the writer to be a geek I want him to be someone who is absolutely serious about what he's doing it has to be if it's someone who's dodgy or sloppy or lazy he's not going to tell it as it happened but if it's someone who's meticulous you know how I know who's meticulous you know how I know who good this guy is because his first sentence any person with any knowledge this person means business you know why because he was able to write this magnificent sentence now if you knew the greek language which the new testament was written in you would know that this one long great sentence it takes a lot cleverness to write a big long sentence by the way and he's able to write it in they tell me that it's one of the finest sentences in the Bible why is that important because instantly I know what kind of man this is and I know how reliable he is and I know that if he can write a sentence like this then the whole of the book

I want to read it because I know that what he's going to tell me is the truth and when it comes to my soul I need somebody to tell me the truth I need somebody when he tells me that he's gone round eyewitnesses and he's done his research and he's not missed a word he's interviewed people and he said right what date was that when Jesus turned the well Luke doesn't record for example the temptation or the calling of the first disciples or the sayings of Jesus the sermons that Jesus preached on top of the mountain when he raised the widow's son when he healed the centurion servant when he healed when he raised the daughter of Jairus when he walked on the water when he was transfigured all of these things Luke went around all those people who were personally there at the time and he sat with them and he said now you tell me exactly what happened what did you see what did

Jesus say did he really say that and his work is absolutely meticulous so that means I can come to the gospel of Luke and I know for sure that this is what happened see this kind of pushes us into a corner doesn't it because maybe there's somebody here tonight you've been relying for years on your skepticism and you're too quickly you say nah but when you come to realize that this man wasn't a nutter at all this man was an immensely clever able intelligent educated man who is writing about the most incredible things then it enforces the fact that

Jesus and all that he said and he did on this earth were true if they're true there can be no other explanation but that he was the son of God if they're true then his death was a purpose if they're true then he rose from the dead if they're true then when he said I am the way and the truth and the life he meant it and he was the way and the truth and the life and that means I can tonight entrust my life and my soul and my faith in Jesus Christ that's the implication see how important this sentence is massively important you might ask well I thought when you said the Bible was the word of God that God would have whispered what he wanted

Luke to write in his ear you see a lot of people have this idea that because we believe the word of God that then God somehow spoke the word spoke what he wanted each individual person to write now I'm not saying that perhaps there were there were times when that did happen yes I believe that there were times when that did happen particularly in the Old Testament but that's not what I believe happened with Luke at all what you have in the gospel of Luke is an eyewitness account a researched document that has the support of people who were there and who saw everything that Jesus did who followed Jesus who witnessed all the miracles and the teachings and they remembered them but it's still the word of God because God led Luke in his providence to write all

of these things down and this became one of the four gospels you put the four gospels together and you get a whole account a combined eyewitness account of how

[23 : 59] Jesus was born how he began his ministry how he was tempted his miracles his teachings his death and his resurrection and I can be absolutely confident in giving my faith and resting my faith in Jesus Christ as I hear God's word so tonight there's the challenge don't dismiss the gospel as some kind of myth some kind of half-hearted half-baked fairy story Luke tells us in these four verses this one sentence this is enough to give us the confidence not just in the writer but in the person that Jesus was and in the God whose word it is whose powerful word it is and whose word is able to reach into our hearts and transform us and to shine his truth in our lives so that our lives are changed our sins are forgiven as we come on the strength of this great word to believe in this great savior let's pray together our gracious and ever blessed

God we give thanks for your word and for how marvelously your word was put together by your providence as you moved men and women to act in accordance with your spirit we give thanks Lord for all the events that make up the entirety of your word we pray Lord to read it for ourselves to study it to take it seriously and to go away even this evening and to make it our own to make a point of getting to grips with this word we pray that we will do it confidently knowing that these are the words of everlasting life in Jesus name Amen