

The Beautiful Book

Luke 1:1-4

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Luke says in his Gospel, chapter 1, verses 1-4, “Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled...”—or “believed” in the King James translation—“...among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word...”—or the Greek word for “word” is “logos”—“...delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly...”—or “logical” or “thematic” as opposed to chronological—“...account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed.”

The Gospel according to Luke has been called “the loveliest book in the world.” Many view it as the best life of Christ ever written. It certainly has won my affection. My wife has said that this is her favorite Gospel. Anyone who knows the Gospel of Luke loves the beauty and majesty of this Gospel.

Why do we have the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John? The first three—Matthew, Mark and Luke—are known as synoptics. “Synoptics” means “to see together.” They pretty much see the life of Christ in the same way. But the third Gospel, Luke, is quite different from Matthew and Mark and certainly quite different from John. The Gospels give us different pictures of the same person: He is the King of the Jews, He is a Servant and He is the Messiah.

Matthew's Gospel says, concerning Jesus, “Behold, the King,” Matthew 21:5. It is the Gospel that sets Jesus forth as the King of the Jews. It has a Jewish flavor. There is a constant repeated refrain of “that which was spoken of has been fulfilled.” It shows us the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah.

And Mark's Gospel shows Jesus as the Servant. “Behold, the Servant.” This Gospel was written to Romans, and in the Roman culture, they magnified servanthood, obedience and diligence. So Jesus is presented as the Servant of the Lord.

Then John's Gospel basically says, “Behold, your God.” We love the Gospel of John where it says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” John 1:1. In his Gospel, John sets forth the deity of Jesus.

But Luke, which is the subject of our series, basically says, “Behold, the Man.” The Gospel of Luke is the Gospel of the man who was perfection incarnate. He was the only truly perfect man, the sinless human Son of God, Son of Man, the God-man, Jesus Christ. So the theme of Luke's Gospel is the humanity of Jesus Christ.

The author of this third Gospel is Luke, who was called by Paul, in Colossians 4:14, “the beloved physician.” And Luke has the unique distinction of being the only New Testament writer

who was a Gentile. So all the other New Testament writers were Jews. Luke was a traveling companion of Paul. He also wrote the book of Acts, which was written to the same Theophilus as was the Gospel of Luke. And the book of Acts was written after the book of Luke as one, continuous series.

In verse 3 of Luke, he addresses his book to Theophilus, who was called “most excellent.” And who is Theophilus? We don’t know. Where the Bible is silent, we’re silent. His name means “lover of God” or “one who loves God.” Some say that it is a general reference to all those who love God. But it seems best to view Theophilus as an individual. And the fact that he is called “most excellent,” is believed—and rightly so—that he was a high ranking, Roman official. That’s the only way that term is used in the New Testament. It would say, “Most excellent Felix” or “Most excellent Festus” or “Most excellent Agrippa.” And as we will see, he was a Gentile and a believer in Luke’s writing. So Luke wrote his Gospel to Theophilus so Theophilus could be certain about the things concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

When did Luke write his Gospel? It’s possible—and highly probable—that Luke wrote his Gospel during Paul’s two-year imprisonment in Caesarea, around AD 56 or 58. Mark probably had already written his Gospel, and during this time, Luke was with Paul. He stayed with Paul until Paul was martyred in Rome at the end of the book of Acts. So while he was with Paul in Caesarea, Luke probably traveled around Israel and interviewed eyewitnesses, as we see in this passage. Luke might have already studied Mark’s Gospel and gotten other accounts that were written and then compiled his own Gospel.

In 2 Timothy 4:11, at the end of Paul’s life while he was in prison in Rome, he said, “Only Luke is with me.” So Luke was near and dear to the Apostle Paul and stayed with him until Paul was martyred.

Luke is the longest of the Gospels. Fifty percent of its content is nowhere found in the other Gospels. In Luke we are given an invaluable gift. Someone said that “It is the most artistically constructed and most beautifully written Gospel. It is truly the beautiful book.”

Now I want to give you four reasons why Luke is a beautiful book. Number one, it was written with the skill of a historian. Luke was a historian of first rate. He studied, gathered information, met with eyewitnesses, and he put together, in logical order, a marvelous book.

Now in verses 1-4, Luke opens his book with a preface. It is considered to be the best-style Greek in the New Testament. Greek scholars say that these first, four verses of Luke’s Gospel are the most classic, beautifully composed, artistically arranged Greek in all the New Testament. And the New Testament was written in what is called a “Koine Greek,” but not this first section. It was written in a higher, classical Greek that only the scholars used. So Luke was a highly educated, medical physician, and he was a historian of the first rate, as he wrote this preface. Charles Erdman called it “a perfect gem of Greek art.” It was written in the polished style of the Greek literary classics of Herodotus and Josephus.

Luke was saying that what he was writing was historically true. That is one of the themes in this preface. What he was writing was history and not philosophy. It is true so it must not be ignored.

There are four things in verses 1-4 that this historian, Luke, tells us. Luke was writing with the skill of a historian. First, Luke gives us the source of his information, in verses 1-2. These two verses tell us that Luke got the story of Jesus from eyewitnesses, which indicates that Luke was not an eyewitness. Rather he interviewed the eyewitnesses and compiled the information.

“Inasmuch as many...”—he doesn’t tell us who the “many” are—“...have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us...”—prophetically God keeps His promises—“...just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers...”—or “servants” or “underrowers”—“...of the word...”—or “logos,” the message of the Gospel that centers in the Person of Jesus Christ—“...delivered them to us....” In the NIV, these verses read, “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.”

So in verse 1, Luke said there were many who had compiled accounts that he drew from as the source. Those people are unknown to us. But it is believed—and rightfully so—that Luke already had Mark’s Gospel at this time, since it was the first one written, and he drew from that. And Luke was with Paul when Paul was in prison in Caesarea, so perhaps Luke journeyed to Israel from Caesarea to Nazareth or Bethlehem or wherever Mary was to interview her. Can you imagine interviewing Mary?!

That’s why Luke’s Gospel is the only one which includes the story of the angel’s annunciation to Mary, her Magnificat Song, and the story of Elizabeth and Zacharias in chapters 1-2. It’s so very marvelous, as we approach Advent at Christmas.

So Luke gives us the source of his information, which are eyewitnesses. From the word “eyewitnesses,” in verse 2, we get the English word “autopsy” from the Greek word. Since Luke is a physician, he uses a lot of medical terms. Luke was not an eyewitness, but he interviewed eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses were servants of the logos or of the Word. I like that.

Not only does Luke tell us his source, but number two, he tells us his subject, in verse 2. The subject is “the word.” The subject of Luke is the logos, the message of the Gospel embodied in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. When we study Luke, you are going to meet Jesus on every page. And spending a whole year plus going through this Gospel, you’ll see the beauty of Jesus like never before. “Behold, the Man.” He’s God and man in one person, fully God and fully man, the God-man, Jesus Christ. So Luke says that the subject of his Gospel is “the word”; it is that which is embodied in the truth of Jesus’ Person and work.

Christianity is Christ. It is trustworthy. It is historically true. It is based on history about a person, Jesus Christ, who actually came from heaven and was born of a virgin. And the only

place we read of the virgin birth is in Luke's Gospel. Jesus lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death on the Cross, rose from the dead and ascended back to heaven. That's just the first half of the story. The second half is that He's coming back again. So Luke's Gospel is historically true and is centered in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Other religions are just philosophy or a code of ethics or rules to follow. But Christianity is Christ. If you take Christ out of Christianity, you don't have Christian truth or Christian doctrine. So Luke names his subject as Christ. I like that old song, Tell Me the Story of Jesus.

"Tell me the story of Jesus,

Write on my heart every word;

Tell me the story most precious,

Sweetest that ever was heard."

I love the story of Jesus; we're going to learn it in the Gospel of Luke.

Number three, Luke reveals his method, in verse 3. I like this. He said, "It seemed good to me." In verses 3-4, the story of Jesus went from Luke to Theophilus. So in verses 1-2, we read that the story of Jesus came from the eyewitnesses to Luke, and in verses 3-4, Luke sent the story of Jesus to Theophilus. Luke says, "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first..."—or "the very beginning"—"...to write to you an orderly..."—or "thematic"—"...account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." So Luke's method was that it seem good to him to gather this information, because he was very well informed, he had done his own investigations and had put it all together for Theophilus.

There is a thought here I want to convey by way of importance and application. We, as Christians, believe—at least we should believe—in the inspiration of Scripture. The Bible says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit." "Inspiration" means "God breathed out." The way to define inspiration is God superintended the human authors, so that the very words they wrote were the very words of God. I believe in verbal plenary inspiration, which means that every word of Scripture was given by inspiration or was breathed out by God. I also believe in the inerrancy of Scripture; that the Bible was written without error. And I believe in the authority of Scripture.

Now how do we reconcile that with what Luke said? He said in this text, "It seemed good to me, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first." He's actually saying, "I thought it was a great idea, since I had all this information and all this knowledge, to write this Gospel." The answer is that God superintended the human authors. They weren't robots; He didn't take away their own will. So Luke had a lovely idea to write a book, and God used that as He breathed on Luke to write what it says in this supernatural Gospel.

it is written by men, but it is inspired by God. And because it is written by men, we read the Bible with our minds like we would read any other book. But because it's inspired by the Holy Spirit, it's written like no other book. We get on our knees, we pray and we ask for illumination when we read it. And we ask the Holy Spirit to bring transformation, because it's a supernatural book, which has two natures. Jesus is the Living Word; He's divine and human. So the Bible, as the written Word, is both divine and human.

The Bible was written by men, who had their ideas that they wrote down, and they did their research. So you ask, "If the Bible is given by inspiration, why did Luke have to study?" Because God used the human authors through their own personalities, their own research, their own information, but He superintended them. This is what the Bible teaches. So you see both the human side of the Bible, and you see the divine side. God inspired Luke to write this book, but he thought about the idea, and "it seemed good to me," and he did his own investigation. He had "perfect understanding of all things from the very first."

2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." And in 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter says, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." So we have a book written by men but given by the inspiration of God.

So Luke reveals his method, in verse 3, and number four, he reveals his purpose, in verse 4. Luke wanted Theophilus to "know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." I believe Theophilus was a Christian, he had some preliminary teaching and instruction, but Luke wanted to put him in "catechism" or teach him to make him certain of things. So Luke wrote his Gospel for that purpose.

God wants us to be certain of what we believe. We want to be certain about the divine inspiration of Scripture. If you don't believe the Bible is given by inspiration of God, you're going to have trouble, you're going to struggle. If you don't really believe that Jesus came from heaven, was born of a virgin, then you don't have a sinless Savior. If you don't believe Jesus died on the Cross for your sins, then you don't have atonement for your sins. If you don't believe Jesus rose from the dead, you have no hope of immortality or eternal life.

So this Gospel, written for Theophilus and for us, was written to bring us certainty. There are a lot of people, Christians included, who aren't certain about the inerrancy of Scripture, the authority of Scripture, the certainty of Christ, the historicity of the stories we read in the Bible.

As we study Luke, I want you to know that I believe with all my heart that these are true stories; they actually happened. There really was a Zacharias and Elizabeth. There really was an Anna. There really was a virgin named Mary, who had a child conceived by the Holy Spirit. There really was a man named Jesus, who healed the sick, raised the dead, cleansed the lepers, died on the Cross, rose from the dead—it's historically true.

it gives us a certainty so we can live our Christian life. It's historically true. Someone said, "The Gospel is good news, not good views." I like that.

Number two, the Gospel of Luke is a beautiful book, because it was written with the care of a physician. Luke had the skill of a historian and the care of a physician. Luke was a medical doctor, so he used medical terms, especially when he described miracles of healing in his Gospel. Luke also shows his love and care, as a physician, for people. He delighted in mentioning individuals that no other Gospel mentions.

In Luke 1-2, all the content is found only in Luke. Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, is found only in Luke. Simeon and Anna; Zacchaeus, the tax collector who was saved; and others were found only in Luke. It is a Gospel that loves to mention individuals.

Luke also elaborates on the role of women. He mentions women in his Gospel 43 times, more than any other Gospel. If you combine Matthew and Mark, women there are mentioned 49 times. Luke has the birth of Jesus, told from Mary's perspective. The genealogy of Jesus, mentioned in Luke, runs through the line of Mary and not through Joseph. And Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, is mentioned. We have the background of John's birth. He mentions Anna in the Temple. We see that the healing of Peter's mother-in-law by Jesus is recorded only in Luke. So Luke cared about healing and the role of women in his Gospel.

He also had the forgiveness of the sinful woman, who washed Jesus' feet with her tears. Luke also records the raising of the widow's son of Nain. He mentions Mary and Martha and their relationship. Who doesn't love the story of Mary and Martha having Jesus over for dinner and Martha being frustrated because Mary wasn't helping her with the preparation of the food. Luke also speaks about the woman who had the two mites, the widow's mites. He also makes record of the women around the Cross. And he records the Resurrection of Christ and its relationship to the women seeing Christ and witnessing about His Resurrection.

Luke is also the Gospel to the poor. As a physician, Luke cared about poor people. Jesus is recorded as being born in a stable. It's only by Luke's Gospel that we know Jesus was born in a stable. Jesus preached to the poor, He warned about the riches of wicked men. Jesus also tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus, only found in Luke's Gospel.

Jesus' compassion for the poor, the needy and the sick is a pattern for us; we should have great compassion like the great physician portrayed in Luke's Gospel.

Number three, the reason Luke is a beautiful book is because it is written with the songs of a musician. Luke's Gospel is the singing Gospel. It has the song of Elizabeth, in Luke 1:39-45; it has Mary's song, the Magnificat, in Luke 1:46-55; it has the Benedictus, Zacharias' song at the birth of John the Baptist, in Luke 1:68-79; it has the angels' song at the birth of Jesus, in Luke 2:14—"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"; it has Simeon's song of praise, the noctomedus, when he saw the Messiah, in Luke 2:28-32; and at the end of his Gospel, in Luke 24:52-53, he said that the believers "worshipped Him, and returned to

Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God.”

The word “rejoice” is found more in Luke than in any other book of the New Testament. Jesus sets your heart to singing. So if you read Luke, you’ll have certainty and you’ll have a joyful heart. Jesus sets your heart to singing.

So Luke has the skill of a historian, the care of a physician—he’s compassionate—and the songs of a musician—you’ll sing.

And number four, Luke is a beautiful book because it was written with the insight of a theologian. The number one theological thought in our text is that we see the Gospel of Luke as a Gospel of prayer. Luke emphasizes the prayer life of Jesus, because he speaks of Christ the man and emphasizes His humanity. Jesus prayed at his baptism, after He healed the sick, before He selected the 12 apostles and at His Transfiguration, in Luke 9:29. The other Gospels record the Transfiguration, but only Luke records that when Jesus was transfigured, He was praying at that moment. And three times when Jesus was at Gethsemane, He prayed. Jesus prayed on the Cross twice, which only Luke records. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” Jesus also prayed, “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit,” in Luke 23:46. And Jesus taught His disciples to pray, in the model prayer in Luke 11:2-4. Anyone who studies the subject of prayer finds himself in Luke’s Gospel, because so much about prayer is mentioned there.

And Luke is also the Gospel of parables. He taught them the parables about prayer, in Luke 18. Of all the 22 parables in Luke, 17 are found nowhere else in the Gospels. A select list of the parables includes the two debtors, the good Samaritan, the friend at midnight asking for bread, the rich fool and his barns, the great supper and the excuses for not attending, the builder who did not finish, the lost coin, the prodigal son, the publican and the Pharisee, the widow and the judge, the servants and the pounds and other parables.

Luke is also the Gospel of the Holy Spirit. More so than any other Gospel, Luke makes reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. Mary was overshadowed by the Spirit when she conceived, Luke 1:35. Elizabeth, in Luke 1:41, and Zacharias, in Luke 1:67, were filled with the Holy Spirit. Simeon was also filled with the Holy Spirit when he prophesied, Luke 2:27. And John the Baptist was providentially prepared for his task as the Messianic forerunner by being filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother’s womb.

Think about that! Imagine your baby in the womb is filled with the Holy Spirit and starts leaping for joy, Luke 1:44. It’s the first Pentecostal action recorded in Scripture. Also Luke mentions more babies, more births and it is the only Gospel that records the boyhood of Jesus Christ.

What a beautiful book it is. Luke actually speaks so much about the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon Him at His baptism. The Spirit led Christ into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The Spirit empowered Jesus in His preaching and healing ministries. After His Resurrection, Jesus predicted the apostles would carry out the Great Commission in the

power of the Holy Spirit. And Luke's second book of Acts is a vivid chronicle of accomplishing this task. They were filled with the Spirit and went everywhere preaching.

Luke is also the Gospel of universal salvation. The offer of salvation is for all and is more prominent in Luke than in any other Gospel. In Luke 2:10-11, when Jesus Christ was born, the angel said, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." That's the universal Gospel. "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

And only in Luke do we have the story of Zacchaeus. He was the wee, little man who climbed up in a Sycamore tree. When I get to heaven I'm going to say, "Thank you, Luke, for putting that in the Bible! It's so cool!" I like that story. Luke records that story of Jesus, who came "to seek and to save that which was lost," Luke 19:10.

Only in Luke do you have the parable of the publican and the Pharisee. Jesus spoke it to those who trusted in themselves, because they thought they were righteous and despised others. And only in Luke do you have the story of the penitent thief on the Cross. If Luke hadn't written his Gospel, we would not know that story.

In Luke, the dying thief, in the last moments of his life, turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom," Luke 23:42. That's what we call "a deathbed conversion." And Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise," verse 43. The Bible also says, "To be absent from the body [is] to be present with the Lord," 2 Corinthians 5:8.

My older sister has just died, and when we met with her on Friday, she said, "I just want to go see Jesus." And I looked at my sister, Deborah, and said, "Debbie, you know you're going to heaven; right?"

She said, "Yes."

And I asked her, "You trusted Jesus as your Savior?"

And she said, "Yes." And two days later, she was looking at the face of Jesus Christ. We know she is with the Lord. How marvelous that is! The Bible says, "In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore," Psalm 16:11.

So it's the certainty that we have life beyond the grave, that we have hope beyond the grave. And it's the certainty that Jesus would give that atonement even in the last few moments of life, as He did for the thief on the cross.

And only in Luke do we have the story of the prodigal son and the loving father. Thank you, Doctor Luke, for this story. What a marvelous truth that story brings!

In Luke 19:10 is a statement of Jesus, which is a summary of the Gospel of Luke. "The Son of

Man...”—the theme of Luke, Jesus Christ and His humanity—“...has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” That’s the Gospel of Luke.

Luke, the historian, will make us certain of the truth of Jesus Christ. Luke, the physician, will help us understand the love and compassion of Jesus Christ. Luke, the musician, will set our hearts to singing and rejoicing in Jesus Christ. And Luke, the theologian, will point you to salvation, found only in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.