

*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us,<sup>2</sup> just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4)*

### **So that We May Know Jesus**

How do you know if something is true? In my last church, there was woman whose husband was not a member. His father was in his nineties and he went into the hospital for some procedure and after that, he went downhill and in a few months, he died. My member's husband sued the hospital because he was convinced that the hospital must have done something wrong. His wife believed that the man was in his nineties and it was just time for him to go. So who was right? How would you know? I don't know how it finally came out, but a judge or a jury or an insurance adjustor somewhere along the line, had to make a decision. But only God knows for sure what really happened. That dispute illustrates how hard it is to find the truth. Sometimes people tell me that they just know that God is telling them to do something, to go somewhere, to make some decision. What they really mean is that they feel that this would be a good thing. They "know in their heart" – they're convinced, but only because of the way they feel. Is that truth? What if I feel differently? Sometimes, people point to science as the source of truth. But that's not really what science does. It proposes models that seem to work. Some people lean on eye-witness testimony. But study after study has shown that eye-witnesses are not very reliable. People's memory plays tricks on them sometimes. How can we know what's true? In life, we have to muddle along as best we can. But when it comes to knowing Jesus our Savior, muddling along isn't good enough. God wants us to have the truth. So he stepped in and gave it to us. Of course, I'm talking about his word. God gave it to us **so that we may know Jesus.**

#### **I.**

God wants us to know and understand what he has done for us, so that we aren't plagued by doubt or tormented by the devil. **So that we may know Jesus, God provided a gospel writer.** In point of fact, he provided four of them. But today, we're focusing on Luke, because today is a minor festival. Just this past week, we had a test on this in confirmation class, so I'm sure that any of the seventh and eighth graders who are here this morning could jump up and tell you what that means. A minor festival is a holiday that celebrates a person or an event in the Bible. There are about thirty of them scattered throughout the year. Today, we focus on the man that God used to write the gospel of Luke.

The church calls him "St. Luke the Evangelist." What is an evangelist? Today, we often use the term to mean someone who is called to reach out to the lost. To a certain degree, the word was used that way in the Bible, too. St. Paul told Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" – in other words, to share the gospel. "Evangel" is the Greek word for gospel. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are called evangelists for a slightly different reason: God called them to record the gospel, that is, the life of Christ. God gives us four different views of the life of Jesus. A week or two ago in Bible class, someone compared it to replay cameras at a football game. Each camera gives a different view of the play. The referees look at all the camera angles to get the best possible understanding of what happened. God gave us four "camera angles" of Christ. By comparing the four with each other, we have a better understanding of our Savior's life and work.

Luke says, "**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.**" There were lots of accounts of Jesus' life circulating already. That really isn't surprising. Jesus was a celebrity. People couldn't help talking about his miracles, his preaching, his death and resurrection. It's also not surprising that some of those accounts were inaccurate. People hear a story and don't understand it all correctly, so when they retell it, they mess up the details. Then the next person makes it worse. Sometimes, people just want to have a good story or to sound impressive or authoritative and they just make things up. So there was a need for an accurate account. Luke says that he carefully investigated everything from the beginning. He may very well have talked to some of the "eyewitnesses" – men like Peter, James and John. He did all that work before he sat down to write.

But the true author of the book of Luke, just like the true author of Matthew and Mark and John and Paul's letters and the whole Old Testament, is the Holy Spirit. God chose Luke to write. God carefully formed his mind and his character and gave him the natural abilities he needed to do this work. God brought him to faith and gave him the spiritual gifts he needed to serve. But God still does that every day. Every pastor, every teacher and even every lay leader can say those things about their work of serving the Lord. But God did something special with Luke – just like he did with Matthew, Mark, John and Paul. He inspired him. He breathed into him the very words he was to write. So God created Luke to be the instrument he wanted. And then God gave him the exact words to write – putting them into the natural style of Luke, because that's how God wanted them to be. God gave us this “camera angle” of Jesus' life. And we can trust that every word Luke gave us is God's word. It is all true and trustworthy.

Many people in Luke's day were trying to tell the story of the things that had been fulfilled among them. But the farther people got from the truth of Jesus' life and work, the greater the possibility that they would lose the point. That is the case today. Even with all God tells us, the world is lost in confusion about Jesus. I once witnessed to a young man who, at first, was very interested. But he had ideas that are popular in our culture but which don't agree with God's Word. When I quoted St. Paul about those things, he said to me, “I don't want to hear what Paul says. I'm only interested in what Jesus says.” That allowed him to distort what Jesus says because he denied God's explanations of Jesus' life and works, given through Paul. Many, many scholars and pastors and people today simply don't believe that the Bible gives us an accurate account of Jesus' life and work. They don't believe it because they want their own version, a version that allows them to embrace lifestyles and beliefs that are simply contrary to what God teaches.

You and I live in this culture. We are influenced by it in a thousand different ways. Our children are hardwired into the attitudes our culture embraces. Again and again, I hear members of our church saying things that just are not scriptural because they are repeating what everybody else says, what everybody else believes – sometimes without even thinking about what it all means.

Why do we fall into that? Because we're sinners. The old man, the sinful nature inside us, doesn't want to know the truth. He doesn't want to hear another sermon about Jesus. He doesn't care about true doctrine. He doesn't believe that he needs a Savior. He believes that he's a good person and God owes him eternal life. That old man would much rather buy into what's popular in our society, he would much rather get along with and be appreciated by the world around us, than take a stand on what God says. That old man lives even in the heart of the most committed believer. He deserves God's punishment in hell. That old man is resilient and we could never conquer him on our own.

But we aren't on our own. Jesus lived the life of perfect faith that we can never live. Jesus died and he paid for all the times that unbeliever rebelled against God and refused to listen and didn't care about what God says. His blood washed all our sin away. Jesus rose and declared that we are now holy in God's sight. Through the simple message of what Jesus did, the Holy Spirit entered our hearts and gave us faith. At the very moment that he planted faith inside us, he created a new man, a believer inside us. That believer loves to hear about Jesus. That believer loves to live for Jesus. That believer thirsts for the gospel message. Every time we hear that message, God reaches into our hearts again and strengthens that believer to fight against the unbeliever and so by the power of God, we overcome. By the power of God, we dedicate our lives to hearing and serving him. Where is that power of God? In the gospel – the very message that Luke recorded for us. The more we study it, the clearer God makes the truth to us and the stronger he makes us to live for him. God wants us to know Jesus, so he gave us that life-changing power.

## II.

So God carefully prepared a man to give us this account. That man is an example for us in our work of knowing and sharing the gospel. **So that we may know Jesus, God provided a model of witnessing.** Every time we share the gospel with each other, we're building the whole church up. The day may come when someone that you helped to know Jesus or to grow in their faith helps you live your faith. The whole church benefits when we proclaim Jesus.

Who was Luke? Most people know that he was a doctor. He was probably a gentile. An ancient church tradition says that he came from Antioch, which was a great center of mission work. People were first called Christians in Antioch. Luke apparently became one there. He became a missionary. He joined Paul several times in his mission journeys. He may have used his medical training at times while he was working, but his

primary focus was the good news about Jesus. In fact, Luke's gospel was probably the first reliable account of Jesus' life that many of the churches Paul founded had. Think about how that must have happened. Paul and his missionary team came to your town and told you about Jesus. The Holy Spirit gave you faith. You were baptized. Paul did some instruction on the life and preaching of Jesus. He taught you about communion. Then persecution started and he had to leave. But your church remained. And you wanted to know more about Jesus. You wanted to hear the whole story. Different versions were circulating. You may have heard or read parts of them. But they were incomplete and unsatisfying. So God gave you Luke, who wrote it down clearly and concisely. He explained the Jewish stuff you didn't understand. He told you about Jesus' words and works and life and death and resurrection. And you rejoiced to know your Savior better.

Luke was a man who just wanted people to know Jesus. He was a humble man – he never mentioned his own name in either Luke or Acts. He focused on Christ. He just told the story and let the Holy Spirit work. He understood that there's more to mission work than just bringing in the lost. They have to be educated. They have to grow. They want to know more.

Luke is a model for us gentiles. We need focus on Jesus and what he did. We need to tell the story. That's how we help our children grow in faith. That's how we help each other grow in faith. It's not about how gifted we are. It's about Christ. It's about the power of God in the gospel. Hearing the story of Jesus changes us. It makes believers out of unbelievers. And it strengthens and motivates us believers to serve God and his people. You know, we know almost nothing about Luke. We know nothing about his family, his education, or even when he became a believer. The whole model that God gives us through him comes down to telling the story about Jesus. And through him God gave us a book that we can rely on to do that. The more you know Luke's gospel, the more you know your Savior.

A couple of weeks ago, I was teaching Bible class. We were studying another gospel, Matthew. I asked a question and then I gave a wrong answer to it. It caused something of a stir among those who were there. I had to go back and search the scriptures and make sure I knew what the truth was so that I can teach it correctly. Thankfully, I knew how to find the truth even when I had said something that was untrue. The truth doesn't come from your pastors. The truth doesn't come from what our society wants to believe. The truth doesn't come from majority opinion or from what we feel is right or from the experts. The truth comes from God. He has revealed it in his word. He wants you to know it, so he breathed the very words into the minds and hearts of the men he called to write the Bible. You can know that truth. You can trust it. You are saved through it. Amen.