

Written for Certainty

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Luke 1:1-4.

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. This week we begin our series through the Gospel According to Luke.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Imagine you live in the Roman Empire in the first Century. You are surrounded by people wearing togas. You are respected and probably work in government. When you sit down to eat a meal you don't eat a lot of meat- mostly fish. Most of the vegetables you eat are unrecognizable to 21st Century people because they haven't been cultivated from more wild varieties yet. You get around by horse and walking. All around you your friends go to pagan Temples and make offerings to statues. But you have become something very rare in your circle- a Christian. People around you think you have strange views about God, human sexuality, family, and the physical world. Someone told you about a Jew named Jesus and the message that He has come to save sinners like you. From death and Hell. Something happened inside you heard it. You want it to be true. If only there was a way to know and be certain about this truth. You don't want to be gullible. You don't want your life to be built on wish fulfillment. You want to have certainty. What are you going to do?

That is almost exactly the circumstance that led to the writing of Luke's gospel. A man named Theophilus has become a Christian. He has been taught the fundamentals of the Christian faith and believed them. But Theophilus wants to be certain. He wants to know he has good reason to believe what he has been taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he is handed something to help- the very first written copy of Luke's gospel- the longest New Testament book. He opens it and reads it.

Maybe that's you. Maybe you've never looked at Luke's gospel before today. We have all been or will be where Theophilus was. Our faith will need help. We will wonder if the gospel is true. We will want as much certainty of faith as is possible. How will you find it? By opening the philosophers? By watching the latest Tik-Tok

or Youtube video? Will you find certainty by just sticking your head in the sand and ignoring the world around you? No, the place to go is to God's Word. And here's why:

[Proposition] The written gospel brings certainty.

Theophilus held in his hands a written gospel. Luke. He had heard the gospel out loud, but he may not have had the opportunity to actually read a detailed and orderly gospel account before. So let's look at vv. 1-4 together and ask some investigative questions about this written gospel? Who wrote this gospel? To whom was this gospel written? How did we get this written gospel? And why was this gospel written? Who, to whom, how, and why?

[Main Point 1] Who wrote this gospel?

Answer: Luke. Look with me at v. 3, we'll come back to vv. 1-2

...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you...

Who is this "me" of v. 3? We don't find Luke's name in these pages. Yet history is essentially unanimous. The writer of Luke wrote also wrote Acts. Acts proves the author to be someone who travelled with the Apostle Paul. That gives us a list of influential names like Timothy, Silas, Barnabas, Titus, and more. Yet from the very beginning it has always been attributed to Luke. The author is someone very much like Luke. Someone who is familiar with both Gentile and Jewish customs. Someone who is very educated and has a superb grasp of Greek. Like Luke, the physician (Colossians 4:14). Based on the book of Acts, this leads us to believe that this book was written early- likely before 60AD, when many, many people who knew Jesus were still alive.

Who wrote this gospel? Answer: Luke. But Luke had help. When Jesus ascended to Heaven He sent the Holy Spirit as He promised. And Jesus sent Him to Luke. Luke's gospel is quoted as God-authored Scripture in 1 Timothy 5:18. Luke's gospel has always been treated as God's word. So when I say that Luke wrote this gospel, I am also saying that the Holy Spirit wrote it. Our God is so amazing that He used Luke and his background, his grasp of Greek, and his impressive research to write this gospel.

Who wrote this gospel? Luke under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Now let's turn to the next question:

[Main Point 2] To whom was this gospel written?

Answer: to Theophilus.

Let's read v. 3 again:

...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

I've touched on this in the introduction, but this gospel was written to a person named Theophilus. Theophilus means "God-lover," and was a common name in the first century. Though common in both Jewish and Gentile communities, my best guess is that Theophilus is a Gentile. And notice how he's called "most excellent." That is often used for influential people in government. So it is likely that Theophilus is an influential person who served in the Roman government. Which implies Christians can have meaningful roles in political government.

These first four verses are an obvious prologue. A prologue in Luke's time often meant that it was expected to be read by others. So in a real sense, if you are a modern-day Theophilus. A modern-day "lover of God" this gospel was also written for you.

[Illustration] While I'm very different, there's something I appreciate about a lot of New Age hippie-types. Maybe that's you. They are looking for a sign from God or the universe. Astrology. Crystals. Hallucinogenics. But those ways always end up being subjective and unclear. Wouldn't it be even better if God gave you a sign that was even easier to understand than your inclinations or feelings or hallucinations? What if God sent you a letter? He did it for Theophilus. If you are looking for a sign, wanting God to speak to you and tell you what to believe- this is it- He's written something to you.

[Application] We should want to read this account. We should be people who love the Bible and go to it as much as we can. We should recognize that we have a treasure in our hands whenever we hold the Bible. We should recognize that our love for God will grow the more we are exposed to it. We should deal with doubts by dealing with the facts recorded here. Luke, under the guidance of the Holy

Spirit, wrote this for Theophilus and others. Let's honor them both by actually receiving it and reading it. Try reading through Luke over and over again on your own as we go through it as a church. If you take about five minutes to read a chapter a day you will read through this gospel over a dozen times in a year.

Notice how Luke was passing this gospel account down to others. Others did this for Theophilus. We have an obligation to pass down the truths of the gospel to the next generation. Those with gray hair, pass it down to those who are just earning their wrinkles. Parents pass it down to teenagers. Singles pass it down to your friends or up to your older coworkers. Discipleship groups, grow so that you can pass it down to the next groups you will lead. Children, teach your younger siblings. Use the written Word as your source. Read the Bible together. Read books that explain the Bible together. That will work toward a purpose- to bring certainty.

The written gospel bring certainty. We've answered the question of who wrote this gospel. We've answered the question of to whom was this gospel written. Luke wrote to Theophilus. Simultaneously, we've learned that the Holy Spirit was writing to us.

Now let's ask another challenging question:

[Main Point 3] How did we get this written gospel?

Answer: through careful investigation. Luke investigated things. Specifically we're told that he did a

[Subpoint 1] Careful investigation of written accounts

Read v. 1 with me

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,

Before Luke wrote his gospel account, people were writing details about the teachings and life of Jesus. Luke is writing as a complement to those other sources. With little doubt, Luke carefully investigated the written account by Mark but the word "many" tells us he had other written sources. This tells us that the Jesus Christ was so important that people wrote this stuff down at a time when that was a very costly thing to do. Luke included the very earliest written accounts

and this written gospel is, with the other three gospels- the earliest existent sources we have. The earliest sources we have now, and they are very early, are Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke.

How did we get this written gospel? Through careful investigation of written accounts. But also through

[Subpoint 2] Careful investigation of spoken accounts

Let's read vv. 1-2 with special attention on v. 2

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,

Notice in passing that Luke considers himself to be part of a community by ending v. 2 with "to us." This prioritizes the church- you are not just an individual. But let's especially notice that Luke interviewed people. He investigated spoken accounts. He spoke to people who were eyewitnesses of things from the beginning- which points to the events that even preceded the birth of Jesus. He sat down with eyewitnesses and listened to them. People actually saw the things in Luke's gospel happen. They were experts on events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. They gave their spoken accounts of what they saw Jesus do and what they heard Jesus say. He investigated them carefully.

[Illustration] Author Tom Nichols wrote a book called *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why it Matters*. In it, he is pointing out that, especially in America, people tend to be too proud to listen to experts. He does not say that it's wrong to sometimes challenge authorities and experts. But usually experts are right. He tells some interesting stories- about how one survey showed that the less people knew about Ukraine the more likely they were to say we should send troops to intervene there. He tells of someone on Twitter reaching out for help on information about Sarin gas. When the world's expert on sarin gas offered help, the original tweeter proceeded to lecture the expert for acting like a know-it-all. But this one stuck out to me:

A renowned astrophysicist was on Dartmouth University's campus giving a lecture on missile defense. A sophomore stood up and started arguing with the expert. After seeing that the astrophysicist wasn't going to change his mind the student

simple pronounced, “Well, your guess is as good as mine.” The scientist responded immediately, “No, no, no. My guesses are much, *much* better than yours.”

[Apologetic] Maybe you don't like to listen to experts. Maybe you have your own answer if you were to be asked who Jesus is and what He is like. About what God approves of and what he doesn't. And you don't like to be told differently. In the end those people always imagine a God who thinks exactly like they think. How dare you claim that He might be any different! When asked about Jesus, they would say to you or me or Luke the first century physician, “Well, your guess is as good as mine.” To which Luke answers in verses 1-4, “No, no, no. My guesses are much, *much* better than yours.” Because Luke's guesses aren't guesses at all. What he writes is what the Holy Spirit told him to write. What he writes is truth. What he writes is exactly in line with what accurate earlier written accounts contained. What he writes is exactly in line with the eyewitnesses who spoke the truth to him. He is doing this to help us. If you aren't a Christian you need to investigate, and your investigation, if it's really careful and honest, will trust the expert investigation and reporting of Luke's written gospel.

Students, don't just buy what some person claims loudly in the classroom about why you can't trust Jesus or the Bible. Adults, don't trust what Jordan Peterson or Joe Rogan or Anderson Cooper or Oprah or Jen Hatmaker say. Listen to Luke- an actual expert who investigated. God uses Luke's hard work to help you.

We got Luke's written gospel through his careful investigation and he wrote it to Theophilus. Now that always important question:

[Main Point 4] Why was this gospel written?

Answer: to bring certainty. Let's read vv. 3-4 together

...it seemed good to me also, having followed 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 that you have been taught.

God loves you so much that he wants to help you when you are struggling to believe. He made sure that this gospel was written down so that you can pick it up off the shelf or pull it up on your phone, so that you would know about the Lord Jesus Christ, and not just know about Him, but actually know him as a person. He

cares for you and wants to help you. Notice that Theophilus had already been taught. That word “taught” is where we get the word for catechesis or catechism- so parents, again, we should be teaching our children these truths and pointing them to this written gospel so that they have certainty.

[Application] We must be a church of the Word that is teaching the word. Churches that are only about programs or social justice or homeschooling or a political agenda are not churches at all. We must be a church that teaches. We must be a church that teaches the Word. That’s why written Scripture is in the songs we sing. In the prayers we pray. In the books we read in discipleship. In the sermons we preach on Sunday morning and discuss in home groups. To have any certainty at all we must teach and believe what has been taught.

The main point of these verses and this sermon is this: “The written gospel bring certainty.” We answer the question, “Who wrote this?” with Luke. We answer the question “To whom was this gospel written?” with Theophilus. We answer the question “How did we get this written gospel?” with through careful investigation. And we answer the question, “Why was this gospel written?” with to have certainty. But here’s a question I didn’t forecast at the beginning:

[Main Point 5] What is this written gospel about?

Answer: Jesus. In the pages of this gospel we are going to encounter the most amazing person who has ever lived. We are going to come face-to-face with the most amazing truth. We are going to meet Jesus who fulfilled exactly what was promised beforehand and fully accomplished the work of our Savior- as v. 1 tells us. There is no work left for us to do to achieve our salvation!

We are going to read the most detailed account of Jesus’ birth and childhood found anywhere. We are going to encounter a powerful teacher who goes toe-to-toe with the Devil in the desert and wins. Jesus is going to challenge how we use our money, love our neighbors, and care for the people around us. We are going to hear the very Words of God come out in the Words of Jesus of Nazareth. And He is going to demand our obedience. We are going to read about someone who displays Himself as the divine Son and yet humbles Himself to those around Him. We are going to see a Savior who is happy to be interrupted by society’s outcasts and pleased to help them. We are going to listen to him teach us how to learn from ravens not to worry, how tiny mustard seed of faith results in supernatural

power, how Heaven rejoices when the lost are found. We are going to spend a tremendous amount of time, as all the gospel accounts do, examining the final week of Jesus life leading up to His death. And we are going to see a Savior who is so good that He is willing to shamefully suffer and die surrounded by thieves and criminals. All because He loves His people so much that he will have his blood shed for them. We are going to see what God is like when we read about the cross of Jesus Christ. We will hear details about how he defeated death and the eyewitnesses who saw Him. Who spoke with Him. And who watched Him supernaturally and literally ascend through the sky to the Father's right hand.

What is this gospel written about? The most wonderful truths imaginable all wrapped up in the most holy, righteous, and loving person who will ever walk the face of the earth. And we'll hear that I am made right with God, not by trusting in my righteousness of tithing or saying prayers but of looking at the evil in my heart and asking God to have mercy on me, a sinner.

[Illustration] American Founding Father John Adams had an excellent relationship with his wife Abigail. Due to his role as a representative in congress and as a foreign ambassador to Europe the two were apart a lot. And they wrote a lot of letters back and forth sharing their love for one another and the things that were important to them. The Broadway musical *1776* has a song that summarized a real interchange where they share their affections and tell what's the most pressing need was. Abigail was requesting John to bring home some clothing pins. England wouldn't sell them to Americans. John was requesting that Abigail set to work making salt peter, a key ingredient for gunpowder. They were at war after all. The end of the song, is something of an argument about what the other most needs to know. Pins. Salt Peter. Pins. Salt Peter. (Shouting now) Pins! Salt Peter! Pins! Salt Peter!

[Conclusion] This written gospel is not silent black words on white pages. It shouts our need to us. This gospel was something of a letter from Luke to Theophilus. From God to us. It shouts the most important need we'll ever have. It's the most important thing ever written. This written gospel is about Jesus and what He has done to save you and me and build a new people and kingdom. And you can benefit by stop focusing on yourself and put your full focus on Jesus. By giving up on your own goodness or knowledge and trusting in the work of Christ to forgive.

By recognizing that Jesus is the one who is worth abandoning all your sin and baggage uniting yourself to in faith. If you've never done that, do it today for the first time. Or do it again for the ten thousandth time. And this gospel was written so that as you walk with this wonderful Jesus, you have certainty that it's all true. Every last word.