

“An Orderly Account”

Luke 1:1-4

The name Lee Strobel is perhaps one that is familiar to most of us. If you are unaware of who he is, he is a writer and former legal editor for the Chicago Tribune. He is widely known for his book, “The Case for Christ,” which he published several years ago that chronicled his own story of how and why he turned from atheism to become a Christian. As a younger man, he didn’t believe in God or the resurrection. He thought Christianity was merely a crutch for people who couldn’t face the realities of life on their own. Strobel passionately tried to disprove the claims of Jesus Christ after his own wife announced that she had become a Christian. For nearly two years, the award journalist cross examined various scholars. He tried to pick apart the Bible verse by verse. And at the end of his quest, he reached a verdict that surprised him. He wrote:

“I was ambushed by the amount and quality of the evidence that Jesus is the unique Son of God.”

All of us know something about the power of a story. This is especially true for those who communicate for a living. There is something about a story that has power to draw a person’s attention, even to change a person’s ideas and deeply held beliefs. The world has known stories from every culture from every period of time. Human history itself is a story.

Of all the stories ever told, none surpasses the story of the life of Jesus. It is the greatest story ever told, the story of how God became Man in order to rescue those made in His image.

The Bible, though it is comprised of 66 books, is really one overarching story that points us to Jesus Christ.

While it is true that we find out who we are and where we are headed from Scripture, and while there may be some helpful truths to apply, the main storyline is all about Christ. The prophets who wrote in the Old Testament spoke of Jesus, as did the apostles.

Warren Wiersbe - *“When He wrote the Bible, God didn’t give us a ponderous theology book divided into sections labeled, God, Creation, Man, Sin, and so forth. Instead, He gave us a story, a narrative that begins in eternity past and ends in eternity future.”*

The story of Scripture is a true story! It is the story of God’s redemptive plan to rescue and redeem sinful humanity through the work of His Son. It is a love story, the story of a Father’s love for His Son, and a story of a Savior’s love for the fallen members of Adam’s race. Scripture presents God as a refuge and rock of salvation for all who are oppressed. He is a Savior for Sinners, and nowhere is this more vividly on display than in the Gospel of Luke.

Each of the four gospels, though they are unified in their purpose, are unique in their presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus. ***Matthew*** is written with the Jewish perspective in mind and shows how Jesus is the legitimate heir to the throne of David. He is the King of the Jews, the long awaited Messiah. ***Mark*** is the gospel of action and shows how Jesus is the Suffering Servant. ***John*** is majestic in scope and presents Jesus as the Word made flesh. ***Luke*** shows us how Jesus is the perfect Man, God with us, the Savior who came to identify with those in need of rescue. He is One who mingles with people, One who spends time with tax collectors and undesirables, and One who shoulders the burden of the weak and weary.

The world we live in is filled with people who desperately need a loving touch, an encouraging word, a divine rescue. That's why Luke's message is so important because he shows us how Jesus is ***A Savior for Sinners***.

The key verse to unlocking the riches of Luke's gospel is found in the nineteenth chapter, which says:

Luke 19:10—“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

And throughout the 24 chapters of the book, that is exactly what Jesus is doing. As you read the book, pay careful attention to how Luke seems especially concerned that you and I understand that Jesus is a Savior for the whole world, both Jews and Gentiles alike. In a detailed way, Luke highlights the dignity of those who were often overlooked and looked down upon by the rest of society.

Luke shows how Jesus ministered to:

- Sinners; some of the most memorable characters were also some of the most disreputable (Zacchaeus, etc.)
- Gentiles; from the earliest verses in the opening chapters we read that Jesus' birth is good news for the entire earth and He will be a light for the Gentiles; he points out the healing of a centurion's servant in chapter 7
- Women; Luke's portrait of the role of women involved in the ministry of Jesus is extraordinary; they are His faithful friends when even His disciples had abandoned Him
- Children; Luke shows how Jesus loved little children who were sick and oppressed

Luke shows how even though Jesus ministered to crowds, at the same time He always took time for individuals.

Charles Swindoll — *“Without diminishing the Lord’s divine identity, Luke presents Jesus as the embodiment of God’s concern for helpless humanity. Thanks to Luke, we know the good Samaritan (10:25-37), the woman healed of her eighteen-year infirmity (13:10-17), the healing of a man with dropsy (14:1-6), the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin (15:1-10), the prodigal son (15:11-32), the greedy rich man and godly Lazarus (16:19-31), the healing of the ten lepers (17:11-19), Zaccheus (19:1-10), the penitent thief on the cross (23:39-43), and the faith of disillusioned believers on the road to Emmaus (24:13-35). He presumes his readers know only too well the rarities of living in a sin-sick world, so he presents the Son of God as the Great Physician.”*

Just as each of the four gospels present us with a unique emphasis, they also begin with a unique introduction. Matthew begins with a genealogy that traces the lineage of Jesus from Abraham through David, emphasizing His place as heir to Abraham’s promise and David’s throne. Mark begins with the ministry of John the Baptist. John begins His gospel with a rich theology of Jesus as the incarnate Word who was with God in the beginning and who is God.

Luke begins his gospel differently—not with a genealogy, not with narrative, not with a theological statement. He begins much in the same way that an author would begin a story. In the opening verses, Luke gives what we would call a ‘preface’ to his gospel. A preface is a statement of introduction in which an author states his thesis. It is a brief word of explanation concerning the information to follow.

In this preface, Luke says that he has written to provide us with an orderly account so that we as readers would have confidence in what we've been taught.

1. COMPILATION of a narrative (1:1-2)

“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...”

First things first, who was Luke? His name isn't mentioned in any of the four gospels, including this one that bears his name. To be honest, there is not that much information in the New Testament about him. But from what we do know, we're able to piece together a picture of a humble scholar.

Not only was he a scholar, but he was also a physician and a historian. Most of what we know about Luke comes from the book of Acts, which served as the follow up volume to his gospel. As the author of both the Gospel of Luke as well as the Book of Acts, he is responsible for writing more than 25% of the New Testament.

Luke wasn't a Jew; he was a Gentile by birth. He was a travel companion of the apostle Paul, and more than likely was one of Paul's converts in Troas.

According to the first of three 'we' passages in Acts, it would seem that this is where Luke first encountered Paul during his second missionary journey. Acts 16 says that Paul and Silas settled in the seaport town of Troas to consider their next move. During their stay, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia urging him to come help. So the team set out from Troas to Philippi, and Luke was included in their number.

While traveling with Paul, Luke no doubt encountered pockets of believers who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, each possessing their own body of oral tradition. As an educated man and scholar that he was, Luke could see a potential danger looming on the horizon. As that first generation of eyewitnesses began to pass from the scene, it left fewer firsthand accounts of Christ's life and ministry. Without an authoritative record backed up by eyewitness testimony, the fledgling church would be left with nothing more than fables that had taken the place of the authentic story.

The church needed a unified and comprehensive story of Christ's life. They needed a thoroughly researched and verified account that would equip them to separate fact from fiction. In other words, they needed an orderly account.

“Orderly Account” — *accurate; in logical sequence*

And an orderly account is exactly what the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write.

Some Bible scholars have pointed out that Luke's literary style compares to classical Greek historians. He had a keen ability to gather research, arrange data, and prepare a readable history. As far as literary concerns go, what he writes here in the first four verses of chapter 1 is perhaps the best grammatically structured paragraph in the whole New Testament. In fact, it is one long sentence in classical Greek, while the rest of what he writes is in the 'koine' or street Greek. Koine Greek was the everyday common language used by the common man.

Notice how he says that many had undertaken the task of compiling a narrative, or putting the whole story together. Many had written in an informal way the 'things that have been accomplished among us.'

“Accomplished” — *word that means complete fulfillment*

The gospel is the story of what Christ has accomplished through His finished work. All of the world’s religions can be reduced to two categories: 1) the religion of human achievement, 2) the religion of divine accomplishment. Christianity alone is in the second category!

As he traveled, Luke would have had the distinct privilege and skill of interviewing those who from the beginning were what he called ‘eyewitnesses’ and ‘ministers of the Word.’

“Eyewitnesses” — *same word we get ‘autopsy’ from; only time this word is used in the NT*

Luke compiled his narrative by interviewing the people who knew Jesus the best. He spent time with people who saw Him eat, who heard Him teach, and who saw Him work miracles. He sat down with those who were the firsthand eyewitnesses to the crucifixion and resurrection.

All of us know the value of eyewitness testimony. The evidence that supports the gospel is staggering.

Sir Edward Clarke — *“As a lawyer I have made a prolonged study of the evidences...For me, the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the high court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling...evidence for the resurrection is of this class, and as a lawyer I accept it unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts they were able to substantiate.”*

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul’s repeated use of the phrase “He was seen” illustrates this truth. Just how was He seen and by whom was He seen? Paul says:

- He was seen by His close friends
- He was seen by His disciples
- He was seen by His immediate family
- He was seen by His enemy

When Paul stood before King Agrippa, he appealed to the logic of eyewitness testimony.

Acts 26:26—“For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.”

The apostles and early church claimed to have seen Jesus after His resurrection. Can we trust their testimony?

Charles Hodge—“*As the resurrection of Christ is an historical fact, it is to be proved by historical evidence. The apostle therefore appeals to the testimony of competent witnesses...*”

Diligent student and scholar that he was, Luke sat down with eyewitnesses and compiled his record. His story isn't based on unsubstantiated claims, but upon eyewitness testimony.

2. COLLECTION of the facts (1:3)

“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...”

As a careful historian, Luke meticulously interviewed those who were firsthand eyewitnesses. He had followed their story for quite some time, having

determined that he would serve the church by providing an orderly account.
Notice that he addresses his book to someone known as...

“Theophilus” —*lover of God; could be symbolic or proper name of some Roman official; not uncommon for writers to have a financier*

It was only when he had gathered the facts that he sat down and began to write.

Charles Swindoll—*A good historian does not merely assemble facts and then string them together. A good historian tells us a story, usually for a specific purpose. He or she must choose which information to include and what data to leave out. Then the historian must organize and arrange the facts to paint an accurate, compelling, memorable, and useful picture of what occurred.”*

By his own admission, Luke essentially has been an investigative journalist on a mission to provide a clear and accurate report of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Are you familiar with the term ‘investigative journalism?’

Investigative journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of interest, such as serious crimes, political corruption, or corporate abuses. An investigative journalist may spend months or years researching and preparing a report.

As a researcher, how did Luke go about collecting the facts to compile his narrative? Look at what he says in verse 3:

“...having followed all things closely for some time past,”

In Greek, it literally reads, “having followed for some time past all things closely.” (Method, Depth, Subject, Quality)

The method of his study

“Having Followed” — *closely following the progress of certain events with keen interest; careful investigation*

Luke is simply saying that all of the work that he will go on to present in his narrative is the fruit of investigation. He is not writing on mere speculation. It is not an opinion piece. No, he is a careful and meticulous investigator.

The depth of his study

“For Some Time Past” — *literally means from the beginning; from on high or from above*

He extensively researched the events surrounding the life and ministry of Jesus, going all the way back to the beginning. Luke provides us with the most detailed account of Christ’s birth.

Luke records intimate details of what both Elizabeth and Mary were feeling when finding out that they were to give birth to important children. During the apostle Paul’s two year imprisonment in Caesarea, Luke could very well have interviewed those in the Jerusalem church who knew Jesus such as immediate family members, including the apostles as well as Mary herself. They would no doubt have vividly remembered everything that Jesus said and did.

The subject of his study

“All Things” — *means he looked at everything*

He is telling us what he carefully investigated. He looked at everything. He examined all the events, even going all the way back to the events surrounding Jesus’ birth, His ministry and miracles, and His death and resurrection. And given his associations in the church, he was well qualified to make such inquiries.

Darrell Bock—*“We should not think of Luke as a student locked up in a library, especially since written material was so rare in the ancient world. Here was an inquiring student who took in whatever he could, oral or written.”*

The quality of study

“Closely”—*word means carefully*

Luke was no slouchy student! He left no stone unturned. He wrote his gospel record so that his readers could have an accurate narrative of the life, ministry, and message of Jesus Christ. He carefully researched his material by interviewing eyewitnesses. And most important of all is that he did this under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Above and beyond all his research was the inspiration of God’s Spirit who provided the supernatural dynamic to what Luke writes.

And so he says, “I carefully investigated these matters closely from their beginning.” What Luke says here as he begins his gospel account reminds us that we can have complete confidence in the testimony of Scripture.

He even says that this is the purpose and goal of his gospel. Notice what he writes in verse 4.

3. CERTAINTY of the truth (1:4)

“that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

The NAS translates it, “so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.”

Luke wrote his gospel so that ‘Theophilus’ and all who are like him can have certainty of the truth. The word speaks of a confident assurance.

“That You May Have Certainty” — *to discern something clearly and distinctly as true and valid; recognize reliability*

Luke is saying, “I have provided you with a precise and accurate account of Christ’s life so that you can be certain.”

In fact, that word ‘certain’ appears last in the original language for the sake of emphasis. Luke knew all too well that an accurate telling of the story of Jesus would produce certain faith in those who listened to its truth.

Without an accurate and reliable record of what Jesus said and did, we would have no basis for what we believe. Any faith that separates itself from authoritative truth will shift with the prevailing winds of popular opinion. Eventually it will collapse like a house of cards when it gets battered by the storms of adversity.

Are you a confident follower of Jesus? There are a lot of things in life that we are unsure about. There is plenty of uncertainty in life, isn’t there? For instance:

- I’m not sure that I will always have a clean bill of health
- I’m not sure that I won’t have a financial reversal
- I’m not sure that the ground beneath me won’t shake

I’m sure that I will die one day, but I’m not sure when that day will be. There are a lot of things in life that we are unsure about, but let me tell you something—the truth of God’s Word is not one of them! Luke wrote his gospel so we can be assured of the truth.

Application:

- Be confident in what you read!

The gospel isn't some untested theory, some random idea. The Word of God is tested, tried, and true. Luke should encourage you to be a confident student of Scripture.

2 Peter 1:19—“We have also a more sure word of prophecy, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place...”

Romans 15:4—“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

- Be certain of what you believe!

It is important that Christians live with assurance of what they believe. Luke says that you and I can have certainty of the things we have been taught.

1 Corinthians 15:58—“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

- Be clear in what you proclaim!

We must be confident in what we read and certain of what we believe so that we can be clear in what we preach to others. A Christian who isn't confident in his or her faith won't be very fruitful in passing along that faith to others.

Luke shows us how people like you and me, people who have fumbled the ball, who have messed up lives, can have hope and confidence in a Savior like Jesus Christ. Luke portrays Jesus as the Perfect Son of Man, the Bread of Life laid in a manger, the Great Physician who heals the sick, the One and only Sacrifice for sinners. He describes the Man, Ministry, and Message in vivid detail. As we journey with Jesus in Luke's gospel, we'll crisscross the Judean countryside with

Him. We'll meet up close and personal those He came to save and find out that they're just like us.

Chuck Swindoll — *“You’ll climb to the summit of Jerusalem to face down the enemies of grace. You’ll endure the leather straps during His scourging and suffer the puncture of the nails at His crucifixion. You’ll feel the weight of the sagging body as He slumps on the cross. You’ll gasp your last breaths with Him. You’ll walk with His followers into despair during the three days after His death and experience their confusion during the pandemonium of that first Easter. And you’ll stand alongside them in worship as He ascends to heaven to sit by the Father.”*

No, Luke’s story isn't the fictional tale of some dead hero. It is His Story, the true story of an ever living and ever reigning Savior for Sinners who is still in the business of changing lives today. Amen!