

Luke 1:1-4

Sermon: **The Bible is not a fairy tale**

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1. Today we will break down the first four verses – the introduction to the Gospel of Luke – and try to answer the question: why does Luke write this Gospel?

1.1. We don't know much about Luke. He was probably a Gentile, a Greek, an educated man, and we know he was a physician¹.

He was a faithful friend and follower of the apostle Paul on most of his journeys. Luke stayed with Paul until the very end, while many others abandoned him².

Luke wrote two books in the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke and The Acts of the Apostles. It is assumed that he wrote his Gospel while the apostle Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea. The Gospel of Luke is based on the testimonies of people who personally experienced and saw Jesus and His teaching.

THREE KEY WORDS

2. Three things I want to highlight at the very beginning:

a) The word THEOPHILUS in verse 3 means: THOSE WHO LOVE GOD.

Most commentators say it refers to a single person, but I believe it refers to the plural—and later I will explain why I have taken that position.

b) The word CERTAINTY in verse 4—here I believe Luke wants to emphasize that the evidence, the facts, and the stories are reliable, and that a believer can firmly hold on to his faith on that foundation.

¹ (Colossians 4:14)

² (2 Timothy 4:9–11)

c) The word FULFILLED in verse 1—I believe Luke here speaks of a BODY OF KNOWLEDGE that was established by the apostles themselves and fully accepted in the communities as tradition.

LUKE'S INTENTION

2.1. When we read these verses on the surface, we might come to the conclusion that Luke doubts the body of knowledge and wants to personally come to his own answers. But I don't think that was Luke's goal. Luke wants to say that he has an incredibly rich source of information, based on the knowledge of MANY, and he wants to use it and confirm that it is true.

2.2. Luke certainly gained the respect of believers during his journeys, both as a physician and as a disciple of the apostle Paul. But since, unfortunately, even at that time false teachers were already entering the communities, Luke decided to do something about it. He chose to use his knowledge and give encouragement to the communities. In their doubts, he wanted to prove to them that the only true teaching is the one that comes from Jesus and the apostles.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

3. I want to point out that throughout history biblical teachers have come to the conclusion that the Gospels of Luke, Matthew, and Mark are similar to one another. Luke and Matthew most likely used Mark as one of their sources when writing their Gospels. Biblical teachers called them the Synoptic Gospels – they presented similar events in their writings.

3.1. What was the purpose of writing a Gospel? Why did Luke, Matthew, Mark, and John do it? As I mentioned earlier (§ 2.2.), they all recognized the problem that was appearing in the communities spreading throughout the Roman Empire. In their time the Good News was spreading orally, and if someone had doubts about something that was said, a letter would be sent to the apostles, and then they would either confirm or deny that doubt.

3.2. Already in the very beginnings of the church, young, clever, and charismatic teachers began to appear who claimed that they alone knew the true teaching of Jesus. The first generations of Christians rejected that, but their children were led astray. They probably said: *"What do you old people know, these are the real teachers!"* The proof that this truly happened is found in (1 John).

3.3. Luke realized that passing on the true teaching (the teaching of Jesus) through oral tradition would not work in the long run. What would happen when the apostles died? And that is why he wrote the Gospel—he wanted the generations that would come after him to know the true teaching of Jesus.

3.4. Did Luke know that we, 2000 years later, would be reading his Gospel? I don't believe so. I think Luke had in mind only a few generations after his own. Luke's purpose was to preserve the teaching of Jesus and the works he did, works that the apostles themselves witnessed, established, and confirmed.

SOURCES AND WITNESSES

4. The source of information was not always only the apostles. There were Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. There was also Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ. Luke's goal was to explain to the reader that even though some testimonies did not come directly from the apostles, they were still authentic and true. Why? Because they received, in the end, the seal—that is, the approval—of the apostles themselves, who examined all these stories to see whether they were in harmony with the teaching of Jesus. If the testimonies were false, they would reject them; if they were true, they would include them in their reports. In other words, only the apostles after Christ's death could have the authority to say what was truth and what was not.

4.1. Luke wants to confirm, set forth, and prove the true apostolic teaching, and he was able to do this because the apostles were still alive. If we think about it, it is ironic that the church—and others—later took it upon themselves to formally and publicly decide which events and teachings were true and which were not. Luke here is not dealing with Christian (church) politics; this is about people who witnessed, saw, and were present at these events. These were ordinary people, like you and me, and that spontaneous process of interwoven stories corrected itself on the basis of the apostles who were still alive. The apostolic body of knowledge—that is, their tradition—was established long before church tradition came into existence. That means everything that needed to be said was written while the apostles were still alive. And why am I telling you this? Because anything said or written later that does not align with the apostolic and Jesus' teaching, we have the right to reject. In other words, the church as a public institution arose long after the death of the apostles, while the true teaching was founded on the testimonies of ordinary people, not on the authority of church leadership.

CERTAINTY AND RELIABILITY

5. Let's move on. When Luke speaks about the certainty and reliability of events in verse 4, what is he really trying to convey to the reader? The truth is, Luke fears and sees that doubt and confusion are growing within the communities, just as I mentioned earlier: *"Did Jesus really walk on water? Did He really turn water into wine? Did He really rise from the dead?"*

5.1. And what I am about to say is a tragic truth: humanity has always had the tendency to distort apostolic tradition. Either by adding events that are false, or by completely missing the meaning of the events themselves, the works, and the teachings of Jesus Christ—for all sorts

of reasons—and in the end this leads to a wrong understanding of the Gospel, of Jesus, and ultimately, of God.

5.2. As I already pointed out above, Luke is deeply concerned and wants what he writes to be an encouragement to the believer. In other words, he wants the Christian to have firm foundations and evidence upon which he or she will be able to persevere in faith.

THEOPHILUS – ONE PERSON OR MANY?

6. The word Theophilus, as I mentioned earlier, many biblical scholars claim refers to one person of high standing. Theophilus was a common name at that time. Those same scholars assume that he financed Luke's travels, which was also common in those days. They say he was a person who had recently been BORN FROM ABOVE. And Luke addresses him as most excellent, which proves that he was a man of importance. All of this, I must say, is very likely true.

6.1. But I personally believe that Luke here is addressing those who love God.

The reason comes from a question I asked myself: why would Luke put in so much effort to write and carefully investigate the testimonies just for one man? Wouldn't it have been more effective to simply go to Theophilus and teach him directly, just as Paul did day and night in the synagogues?

6.2. If what I am saying is true, then what Luke is doing here is incredibly profound and noble. Luke understands that the one who comes to believe in the Gospel is someone who will one day be a citizen of God's Kingdom, and that is why he addresses us Christians with the word MOST EXCELLENT. Luke wants to remind us that we are people of dignity, nobility, righteousness, truth, and humility. We are the ones who bear the image of God in this world.

6.3. And this is why God Himself calls us THE CHOSEN. Out of the sea of humanity, we are the ones who will receive that title, while sadly the majority move toward their destruction. For us, His children—the "most excellent"—this brings great joy on one hand, but also sorrow for those who do not want the teaching of Jesus to be the central aspect of their lives.

6.4. So, if I am right, Luke is addressing people who want to know God, who believe His promises, people who above all long for a fulfilled life, a quality life, a life without sorrow and evil. He is addressing people who know that such a life can never be fully attained here, and because of that realization, they long to become citizens of God's Kingdom. A Kingdom where God promises to give them all that they truly long for—above all, to become perfectly good human beings, just like His Son, Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS FAITH?

7. Before I finish this sermon, I would like to try to explain what faith actually is.

Faith can be looked at in two ways:

- a) ideological intelligence,
- b) intelligence based on facts, evidence, and reason.

Facts are events that someone claims actually happened. For example: Jesus walked on water, Jesus healed the sick, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, and so on.

7.1. Let us first look at point a):

a) An ideologically oriented person will only accept the facts that fit their belief, and if they do not fit, that same person will reject them—even if those facts are backed by evidence and reason. Such a person has this attitude: *“I believe what I believe, and nothing you say or present to me can convince me otherwise!”*

7.2. For example, think of a person who supports a certain football club. He is ideologically devoted to his team. Even if that club lost fairly to their opponent that day, this person will do everything he can to defend his conviction: *“The referees were biased, the match was fixed...”* On the other hand, the statistics and the evidence show that it is perfectly reasonable to conclude that his team simply played worse that day. Yet he will not admit it, because his ideological convictions do not allow him to. Such a person is not open to dialogue; such a person is not interested in what is logical or reasonable, even when it is supported by evidence.

7.3. Now let us move on to point b):

b) This speaks of a person whose intelligence is oriented around facts and evidence. Such a person is open to dialogue, to re-examining their views, and even to changing their opinion—but only if the opposing position is backed by solid evidence that sounds reasonable and logical. For example, if someone came to us today with scientific proof that the bones of Jesus had been found, such a person would have no choice but to accept that the Bible, and what it stands for, is false.

FAITH AND REASON

8. Unfortunately, from the very beginning Christians have elevated the word faith above logic and reason.

Luke’s perspective is that if faith is not grounded in evidence and reason, then that faith is foolishness. Luke believes that faith must be supported by evidence, and by events that are reasonably connected into a story that holds together.

8.1. The question arises: is there a difference between faith and reason? Yes. Through reason we can come to the conclusion that Christianity is true, but that still does not mean we have entered into faith. Faith does not come only through rational obligation, but through a personal commitment—a decision to completely surrender ourselves to the teaching and truth of Jesus. Faith is more than reason, but it is built upon facts, evidence, and truth.

COULD IT ALL BE MADE UP?

9. Let's go further—Is it logically possible that someone made all this up about Jesus?

Yes, logically it is possible. My reason tells me that I do not have 100% certainty.

Everything that has happened in the past or will happen in the future is abstract to us, because we cannot see it. What we see is what feels real to us.

9.1. Take death as an example. We know that it is universally established as reality.

But do we actually believe in it? I don't think so. When I think about myself, I know that I never looked at death as a reality until I faced my own illness. I never experienced death as a reality until I saw so much of it around me in the hospital. What young person thinks about death? For them, it is abstract—but that does not mean it does not exist.

In the same way, we can look at Jesus. There are thousands of pieces of evidence that He existed, and that what the Bible says about Him makes complete sense and is reasonable to believe. The very course of history proves that He was the great turning point when humanity chose to go in a different direction from the one it had been on—toward something better, of course. But until we confront the fact that this is a universally established reality, to us it remains abstract.

CRITICS AND THE BIBLE

10. One Bible teacher gave an excellent example of how critics want us to look at the Bible and the teaching of Jesus. Imagine an alien who comes to earth, and a handful of people see him—but the alien says nothing. Those same people decide to become followers of this alien and begin inventing stories, putting words into his mouth as if he had said them. They then start telling those stories to others so that they too might become followers of the alien.

10.1. Is that possible? Yes. Are there crazy people in this world who would do something like that? Yes, they exist—I've personally met quite a few in my life. But here's the question: why would anyone make something like that up? You see, when you read the Bible, you realize that most believers (the apostles and their disciples) were killed for their convictions. So who would be so insane as to invent such things, only to be killed because of them?

10.2. Critics want to present the Bible as a book that begins with the words: "*Once upon a time...*". They want to present it as a fairy tale. In other words, many critics have rejected the Bible—not on the basis of evidence, but on the basis of dogmatic beliefs.

10.3. That being said, the Bible can be proven historically and archaeologically. The God of the Bible did not perform miracles somewhere in secret where no one could see them, but before crowds of people. And those very people testified to it—and in the end, they gave their lives for those convictions. This is why today Luke wants to encourage us to stand firmly in our faith. When I think about it, the problem has never been with the evidence. The problem lies in the human heart that stubbornly refuses to accept that there is a God who has the right to be God

in our lives. Of course, that statement needs to be unpacked properly, and if you are intrigued by my interpretation, I will gradually develop that theme in the following sermons.