

A FIRM FOUNDATION

Luke 1:1-4

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther was born in Tübingen Province of Germany in 1483. He entered an Augustinian order monastery when he was 22.

Two years later, as he was preparing for ordination as a priest, Luther became preoccupied with the question of his own salvation, asking himself as he reports, “**what must I do to be saved?**”

Luther became more and more distressed with the enormity of his sins and his inability to satisfy a righteous God. He had a friend named Johan von Staupitz who suggested he set aside his theological books and turned to the study of the Bible.

He was ordained as a priest, celebrated the Roman Catholic Mass, and served in the monastery → none of which provided peace to Luther’s inner conflict and personal sin.

Luther followed the monastic life in every detail including prayer, fasting, night watches, self-mortification, and confession. The other monks grew tired and impatient of Luther. He would drag his confessional times on for several hours at a time. He wrote later, “If ever a monk got to heaven by “monkery”, I would have gotten there.”

It was not one particular sin that disturbed Luther, but his condition as a sinner.

→ “What can I do to win a gracious God.”

→ “Oh, my sin! My sin! What shall I do with my sin?”

Luther began to learn that “true repentance consists not in self-imposed penances and punishments, but in a change of heart.” He continued to study the Bible, pondering day and night, “**the righteousness of God**” in **Rom 1:17**.

He was brought to the conviction that a sinner is justified by faith alone without works of law.

This true Gospel broke the fetters of legalistic slavery and filled Luther with joy and peace. Some 10 years later, on **October 31, 1517**, Martin Luther nailed his **95 Theses** of protest on the door of the **Castle Church of Wittenberg**.

Gary, Chris and the elders were asking me if I was going to do something special for the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation.

Beloved, on this **500 Year Anniversary of the Reformation**, we begin our exposition of *The Gospel According to Luke* this morning. I can't think of a better way to commemorate this event than what has been given to us with providential timing – the exposition of a Gospel from the Bible so that we might know the exact Truth.

→ READ Luke 1:1-4

It is common for historical Greek narratives to begin with a prologue. Narratives were very important in the ancient world. They didn't have social media and the internet. They didn't even have book covers and book reviews. In the Greco-Roman world, a "book" was a rolled-up scroll. They didn't have the option to "look inside" the book cover (either manually with a hard copy or with google books ☺).

They would unroll the scroll just a bit and read the first part.

Illustration – It is like the porch to a great castle, covered in ornate carving, suggesting the importance of what lies behind this vast entrance. → It brings readers from the world outside the text into the world of the text.

Proposition: 3 Foundational Truths of the Gospel:

- I. **Historical**
- II. **Reliable**

III. Personal

So That: When we read, we would have some of that the conviction and commitment wash into our heart and mind; that we would have the hope that is sure and the Word as the anchor of our souls. That we would know the exact truth of the Gospel.

1st Foundational Truth of the Gospel, ...

I. The Gospel is: Historical Luke 1:1-2

Point – The Life and Ministry of Jesus was a fulfillment of what had been promised from the beginning and had long been expected in the coming of the Seed of the woman who would crush the head of the evil one.

Proof – **“¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, ²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us,”**

Luke begins by citing his historical resources:

- A. **Writers**
- B. **Witnesses and Workers**

A. Historical Writers

There were **“many”** reporting the life and ministry of Jesus. Certainly, with oral testimony, but others had also written of His work:

- 1) **“undertaken to compile an account”**
- 2) and v. 3 – **“fitting for me as well”**

I studied Greek in seminary. I took elective Greek exegesis classes. I still have a small shoebox of Greek vocabulary cards. I have continued to study Greek through the years as part of my preaching ministry.

Full disclosure – I’m not 100% certain I can tell you the difference between beautiful Greek and terrible Greek ☺ All

the commentators, who presumably know more Greek than me, say the Gospel of Luke is written in beautiful Greek.

One thing I can tell you with absolute certainty: After studying these first four verses, after studying the first five words it is very clear that Luke has a tremendous vocabulary. I said to myself, "I didn't see that word in my vocabulary cards."

4 of the first 5 Greek words:

"Inasmuch" – only appearance of this word in Scripture

"undertaken" – 3 times in New Testament → Luke 1:1; Acts 9:29; 19:13

"compile" – single appearance of this word in the Bible

"account" – only appearance of this word in the Scriptures

You don't make a vocabulary card for a word that only appears once in the Bible. You don't make a vocab card for a word that appears once in Luke, twice in Acts, and nowhere else.

Luke begins his Gospel with this one long sentence in literary classic Greek. The rest is in Koine Greek, masterfully done.

The written resources could include Mark's Gospel. **Matthew** was written first, then **Mark**. Luke could have had access to both, but there is greater similarity between **Mark** and **Luke**.

B. Historical Witnesses and Workers

Point – Both written and even more oral testimonies.

"²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us,"

One group – these witness and workers he is talking about

- literally – "the from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants"

"eyewitnesses" – ἀπόπτης (another *word we see only once*)

- from which we get our English word “autopsy”
- from two words αὐτό + ὀπτης (self + eye)
- a personal first hand investigation,
→ investigating and seeing for yourself

Includes **Paul**, other apostles, and other men and women of the Word.
For example → **Acts 21:8** – “And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of **Philip the evangelist**, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.”
Possibly **Barnabus** as well.

“**servants of the word**” – only appearance of this phrase in the New Testament

- literally means “under-rowers of the word”
- men who knew and lived the word they preached

Acts 8:4 – “Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word.”

Acts 10:36 – “The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ”

Illustration – When a police officer takes a statement from you, he is interested in what you know firsthand. He will reject things you report secondhand as being ‘hearsay.’

→ He will want what was seen and heard by you.

Witnesses:

- **2 Pet 1:16** – “we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”
- **1 John 1:1-3**

Application – Luke likely interviewed people.

Luke uses these oral and written resources to write the greatest history ever written

2nd Foundational Truth of the Gospel, ...

II. The Gospel is: **Reliable**

Luke 1:3a

Point – Luke takes great pains and great measures to communicate this Gospel he is reporting is **reliable and trustworthy!**

The Gentile Christians receiving the Epistles will know with certainty the Word taught to them is absolutely true.

Proof – “**³it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order,**”

“**^{3a}it seemed fitting for me as well**” – This is the only time in his Gospel that Luke uses the 1st person (grammatically) in his opening prologue → “**us ... us ... me**”

Luke doesn't criticize the past efforts.

He lauds them. He commends them here → There is a **continuity** that he wants you and I to understand.

Point – **Luke** is not content with the evidence that **Theophilus** already has from those who have taught him. He undertakes a heavy task: he writes a two-volume, 52 chapter book!

Proof – “**carefully**” – last word in original Greek → emphasis!

- This word is only used in the New Testament by Luke
Same word translated in the following:

Acts 11:4 – “But Peter began *speaking* and *proceeded* to explain to them in orderly sequence,”

Acts 18:23 – “And having spent some time *there*, he departed and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”

For example, when Luke writes about geographical locations, He is very precise.

“**from the beginning**” – original Greek word is translated as “from the top”

- **Matthew** uses the same word to describe the veil being ripped apart, from top to bottom.
- **John** uses the same word 3:3 – “you must be born again (or from above)”

Proof – “^{3b}**to write it out for you in consecutive order,**”

Given the time he lived in, **Luke** was logically consecutive, not necessarily chronologically consecutive.

However, because Gentile Luke is writing to Gentile Theophilus with Gentile salvation in mind, he is more chronological than, for example, **Matthew** (as is **Mark**).

MacArthur – “*A good theologian is someone who is analytical, who is systematic, who is logical.*”

<p>Luke is careful and his writing is comprehensive. There is credibility in the present and there is continuity with the past.</p>

There is a flow in his narrative.

It is cogent, cohesive, continuous and it is comprehensive.

Illustration – Ezra 7:10 – “Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice *it*, and to teach *His* statutes and ordinances in Israel.”

Illustration – when recording the resurrection of Jesus and how the apostles believe in the risen Christ, Luke writes in **Acts 1:3** – “To these He also presented Himself alive, after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over *a period of* forty days, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

Luke praises the Bereans in **Acts 17:11** – “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, *to see* whether these things were so.”

Luke's Gospel is the result of scientific investigation, and is artistically presented.

Application – Luke is eager to encourage the opposite of a blind leap of faith. The Holy Spirit does not replace persuasive words. He empowers them

Illustration – One of the most beautiful hymns ever written is “**Jesus, Firm Foundation**”:

*How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said—
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

*“Fear not, I am with thee, oh, be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.*

*“When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
For I will be with thee thy trouble to bless,
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.*

*“When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply;
The flame shall not harm thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*

*“The soul that on Jesus doth lean for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.”*

Application – Do you believe this? Why?
Because of the Word of God!

3rd Foundational Truth of the Gospel, ...

III. The Gospel is: **Personal**

Luke 1:3b-4

Point – Unique to Luke, he writes first to a personal individual.

Proof – “^{3b}**most excellent Theophilus;**”

“**Theophilus**” – Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1 – from *theos* and *phileo*. His name literally means ‘Lover of God’ or ‘Friend of God’.

This also connects **Luke’s Gospel prologue** to his prologue in volume 2 → **Acts 1:1** – “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen.”

“**most excellent**” – high honor – Luke records that Paul used this form of addressing nobility – **Felix** the Governor of Judea from A.D. 52-58 in **Acts 23** and **24** and then used to address **Festus**, the Governor of Judea from A.D. 59-62 in **Acts 26**.

Point – Beloved, Luke has **conviction** and **commitment**.
He wants to impress this upon Theophilus.
I want to impress this on you!

Luke writes what happened, why it happened, and what it means.

Proof – “⁴**so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.**”

ina – introduces the purpose statement

“**know**” – from Greek word ἐπιγινώσκω – literally translated as ‘experiential knowledge’

Job 42:5 – “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You;”

→ Experiential knowledge!

“**exact truth**” – ἀσφάλεια – literally means being secured from falling – *firmness, safety, security*

Illustration – this word was used extensively in business and security/protection – for rules of contracts and statutes - for security and protection in business

Deut 12:10 – “He gives you rest from all your enemies around *you* so that you live in security”

Prov 8:14 – “Counsel is mine and sound wisdom”

Isa 34:15 – “The tree snake shall make its nest and lay *eggs* there, and it will hatch and gather *them* under its protection.”

1 Thess 5:3 – “Peace and safety!”

“**taught**” – κατηχέω – from which we get the English word “catechism” which literally means ‘instruction by word of mouth’

Luke is communicating that the oral testimony or witness is sufficient to bring salvation, but there is blessing, protection and safety in the written Word that you and I have and that he sent to Theophilus.

→ Importance of written instruction!

Application – Beloved, if you would like to know my heart and prayers for you, they are captured well here

→ “**so that you might know the exact truth**”

The Gospel is personal! What about you friend?

Illustration – **Theophilus** never saw, touched, or heard Jesus. Nor did Luke. Nor have we. We have not seen the risen Christ. We have not seen any of His miracles. We did not hear the teaching directly from His mouth.

We have the written record, the more sure foundation of our faith. The exact truth that is trustworthy and reliable.

Application – The Gospel According to Luke is:

- 1) full of teaching to tell us what we are to believe.
- 2) full of ethics to tell us how we should live.
- 3) full of comfort to tell us why we should rejoice
- 4) full of prophecy to tell us what we are to expect.

Heb 6:19 – “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil”

I mentioned in our introduction and summary last week that Luke has wide views and broad sympathies for Gentiles, the poor, children, tax collectors, the sick, the handicapped, and especially **women**.

➔ The word “**salvation**” is not used by **Matthew** or **Mark**. **John** uses it once. **Luke** uses it 6 times. 😊

God takes the labor of love that **Luke** renders to this one man, **Theophilus**, and spreads it across the globe in thousands of languages. Millions of people have come to salvation through this Gospel that Luke wrote to Theophilus.

CONCLUSION

Illustration– The story is told of a world-famous violinist who earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but generously gave most of it away. One time, on one of his journeys, the great virtuoso discovered an exquisite violin he wasn’t able to buy, lacking the finances to meet the significant price.

He went to work to raise enough money to meet the asking price and returned to the seller hoping to purchase the beautiful instrument. To his great dismay it had been sold to a collector.

The virtuoso made his way to the new owner’s home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized

possession and he was not interested in selling it. The violinist was greatly disappointed and about to leave when an idea struck him.

He went to the collector and asked,
“May I play the instrument once, before it is consigned to silence?”
The collector granted his wish.

As the great virtuoso began to play the beautiful instrument, heart-rending music filled the room and the collector’s emotions were deeply stirred.

“I have no right to keep this beautiful song to myself,” he said.
“The violin is yours. Take it into the world, and let the people hear.”

Application – Beloved, in the same way, you have been given the most wonderful instrument in the world, the **Bible**, with the most beautiful song in the world, the **Gospel**.

Don’t hide it under a bushel.
Go.
Take it into the world.
And let the people hear.

A fire was lit in Wittenburg, Germany, 500 years ago.
Let’s light a fire here in Gilbert, AZ in 2017.