

Luke 1:1-4
(Deuteronomy 6:20-25; Romans 15:18-21)
“A Narrative of God’s Faithfulness”

Introduction

The gospel according to Luke is actually book one of a two-volume narrative including the Acts of the Apostles. Luke is presumed to be the only Gentile author of Scripture, and is the only gospel writer who observes what was in his day the conventional introduction that identified a document as a piece of serious historical writing. In the opening verses, Luke addresses his patron, a man whom he refers to as “most excellent Theophilus” (a name that means “lover of God”), and explains the care with which he, Luke, has researched other accounts of Jesus’ life and ministry, consulted with eyewitnesses, and produced a document worthy of trust.

We know that Luke was a friend and associate of the apostle Paul, who refers to him in three of his letters, once as his “dear friend, the doctor.” Imprisoned near the end of his life, deserted by nearly everyone who had once labored with him, Paul was comforted by Dr. Luke, who remained faithfully at his side. No other New Testament author has produced such a sweeping history of the life of Christ and of the early church. It is fitting that on this first Sunday in Advent, at the start of a new church year, we prepare for our celebration of the Messiah’s birth by listening again to this magisterial telling of the story that divides human history in two, and that alone can give it eternal meaning.

But before we enter the story that Luke sets out to tell, it is important, I think, that we pause and recognize what Luke is doing, and its relationship to what God has invited each one of us to do. Each of us is called to live in a way that reflects the glory of God. For this grand purpose we were created, and as that singular part of God’s vast creation made in his own image and likeness, we are called to offer up to God the narrative of our own lives as a unique chapter in the story of salvation.

Of course Luke is doing something unique here, in concert with the other three gospel writers. God breathed his word through them to us, and their words became the Scriptures, utterly unique in their power to bring new life and in their authority to command the obedience of faith. However, Luke added to his gospel the book of Acts, and that book is a story begun by the early church but still being written in your life and mine, a book unfinished until the end of history.

In other words, we should take our own lives and our own stories as seriously as God takes them. How differently we should live these brief days given to us if we realized that we are leaving a record in the presence of heaven and earth: either a record that serves as an example to others, or one that serves as a warning. Note how Luke approached his narrative, as an example of how faithfully and with what awe and wonder we should approach the narrative of our own lives.

Body

- 1. The gospel is not theological speculation about God or ethical teaching about how humans should relate to each other, nor is it an account of religious feelings and affections; rather it is an account of things done by God in human history, in the lives of people like you and me.**

The gospel is different from all other religions in precisely this sense. Thus, the gospel never calls us to a blind leap of faith. For example, in our Old Testament lesson, an Israelite father was to explain why Israel was different from the nations by telling the story of God's historical salvation of his people, Israel.

- 2. Because the gospel is an account of what God has done in human history, there are always eyewitnesses to these things.**

This explains the ongoing, crucial importance of both Bible study and Christian community. We study, not speculative theories, but eyewitness accounts of God making promises and then fulfilling them, whether in delivering from trouble those who entrust themselves to his care, or in delivering over to the consequences of their sin those who refuse to place their hope and trust in him.

- 3. When we witness what God has done, we become servants of the Word, called to tell others what we have seen and heard.**

We are therefore responsible for following closely and carefully God's works, so that (like Dr Luke) we may give an orderly account of these things to those who ask. We should increasingly understand this as the heart of our life's vocation, whatever we may do for a living.

- 4. The result is a proper confidence in the gospel of Christ.**

The more we study God's Word within the context of Christian community, the more we grow in a proper confidence in the gospel, and the more we are able to help others toward such confidence that God has acted through Christ, and is still at work through his church.

Conclusion

In Luke, we find an immensely gifted person, a beloved physician, an extraordinary researcher and writer, who realized that the greatest gift that he could give his age was a careful, faithful narrative, the true story of God's grace in Jesus Christ, told in Luke's own wonderfully unique voice. And so too, the greatest gift that you and I can give our families, our neighbors and all those with whom we come in contact, is a faithful narrative of Christ's continuing work of salvation in us, the true story of a God who forgives rebellious sinners and makes all things new for those who heed his voice and turn to him for grace that is always greater than all our sin.

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