

Message #2

Luke 1:1-4

Not long ago I read an interesting statistic. 84 % of the world's population is religious. What that mathematically means is more than 8 out of 10 people identify themselves with some religion. The world's population is 7.6 billion people, which means almost 6.4 billion people are involved in the participation of some religion.

Now all religions talk about God, good and bad, kindness and love and forgiveness. Many of them use a few verses from the Bible and most of them mention something about Jesus. Each religion features some belief creed or code or constitution. Each one has their religious rituals and each one claims to be right. Many of these religions have a large number of followers and appear to be really making their mark on the world. It doesn't surprise us that religion is flourishing. Paul said Satan does his best work in religion (II Cor. 11:13-15).

What are we to do in a world like this? How do we combat all of this? How do we cope and stay solid and stable?

I am convinced that there is nothing that Satan loves more than when God's people lack precise, Biblical knowledge. Satan knows if he can keep God's people in ignorance, he can keep them weak. In fact, that was his first tactic to trip Eve. She was confused over what God said and he tricked her into believing a lie.

Stability, usability, strength and power come from a full and precise level of Biblical knowledge. The more you systematically study God's Word and know God's Word, the more powerful you become.

If ever there is an introduction to a book in the Bible that presents the importance of systematic precision in our understanding of the Scriptures, it is the opening verses of Luke. Luke was well aware of religion and religious notions and ideas. He knew the danger of ignorance when it came to a relationship with God. He specifically went to great lengths and trouble to see to it that people had accurate data about Jesus Christ.

At the time Luke wrote, there were many stories floating around about Jesus Christ. A man, who had been very special to Luke, Theophilus, was hearing these stories and he was obviously confused as to what he was supposed to believe. Theophilus was struggling and Luke wanted him stable in his faith, so he carefully researched and wrote this 24 chapter history letter, known as the Gospel of Luke. Now when Theophilus would have opened the scroll and started reading the opening verses, the thing that would have stood out to him was this:

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU KNOW EXACT TRUTH ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN TAUGHT ABOUT JESUS CHRIST, SO THIS GOSPEL OF LUKE HAS BEEN CAREFULLY AND SYSTEMATICALLY COMPILED BY CAREFUL RESEARCH AND INVESTIGATION TO PRODUCE THAT.

This is what separates truth from religion. **Religion is real interested in how you feel. Real faith is interested in precision in what you believe.** Unless one is seriously and systematically and precisely studying the Bible, there will be no stability. That is clearly seen in these verses.

Luke was a medical doctor. He was not interested in interesting stories or emotional hype or random sharing. He was not given to religious hyperbole. He was after truth and he was after facts. That is what he wanted Theophilus to know and that is what God wants us to know.

Luke is a book of the Bible that condemns sloppy scholarship and research. It is a book that promotes precision. The more precise we are in our understanding of God's Word, the more stable and mature we will be in our faith.

The sad tragedy of our day is that many people own Bibles but very few are interested in precision in understanding those books of the Bible. Ministers stand up in churches and preach their topics. Most of the time there is no precision with a text. The result of this is that it had produced a bunch of spiritual invalids who are frankly Biblically illiterate. Luke did not want that for Theophilus and God does not want that for us.

Now the first thing we may observe about **verse 1** is that it begins with the conjunction "inasmuch." This conjunction is very rare. In fact, it is only found here in the N.T.. **This is a causal conjunction, which introduces reasons why Luke was motivated to do all of this research.** In other words, this is what motivated Dr. Luke to research and write.

Now as near as I can assess, there were four main reasons Luke wrote Luke:

REASON #1 – Luke wrote because of the work many were attempting. **1:1**

When we read **verse 1**, it is clear that many historians were trying to piece together a narrative account of the life and work of Jesus Christ. In fact, the word "account" is another rare Greek word that refers to a narrative account. Many historians were trying to put together some narrative account of the life and work of Jesus Christ. As one writer said, many were trying to put together an "apologetic historiography" concerning Jesus Christ. **It is obvious that Luke was not satisfied with the work those others were doing.**

Apparently Luke saw weaknesses in their work and he decided to research and put together his own systematic work in written form. He was, in part, driven to do this because of the fact that he was not satisfied with what he was seeing. Good students of God's Word are never satisfied. They are always studying and researching because they want precision in knowledge and faith. Luke had been a close friend of Paul and Paul was exactly the same way—I Cor. 8:2; II Tim. 4:13.

One of the most beloved Michigan pastors was Dr. Howard Sugden of Lansing, Michigan, who went home to be with the Lord in 1993. When I was in school, I used to love to hear him preach. One time, Dr. Sugden said his wife said to him, "Howard, you have been in ministry and preaching the Bible for 50 years, why do you still go to your study and study 30 hours a week?"

Dr. Sugden said he looked at his wife and said, “because of how little I know. I am ashamed of how ignorant I am of the Bible.” He was always after precise knowledge.

Luke was not satisfied with what he was seeing, so he decided to tackle the project himself. The more precise and accurate we are in our understanding of God’s Word, the more we will know and grow. Growth does not occur by stories; it occurs through an accurate understanding of God’s Word.

REASON #2 – Luke wrote because of the instruction he had received. **1:2**

Back at this time there were primarily two ways instruction was communicated:

- 1) Instruction was communicated by verbal communication.
- 2) Instruction was communicated by written communication.

Both Luke and Theophilus had been exposed to both kinds of instruction.

Now this verse makes it clear that Luke himself was not an eyewitness to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, but he had been personally taught by those who were eyewitnesses. **There is a very important point to see from this verse: truth is established by credible witnesses.**

Luke had been taught by “eyewitnesses and servants of the word.” That word “servants” is interesting because it refers to one who has the responsibility to row a boat in order to keep it moving in the right direction.

Luke had been personally taught by these eyewitnesses and those servants who had been chosen by God to keep the truth moving forward. It was their responsibility to accurately proclaim the truth and that is what they did. But Luke had never seen Jesus Christ and therefore if he were to write on the life of Jesus Christ, he would need to learn from those who had seen Him and those who had been there.

Luke makes it clear that these faithful people handed the truth down to him and that is obviously what God used to change his life. It was precise knowledge of truth handed down to him that impacted him.

What we learn here is that **before Luke became a skilled teacher, he was first a serious student. Those who become powerful teachers for God are first dedicated students of God’s Word.**

There is a dangerous and arrogant mentality in Christianity that says, “I have my Bible and I have the Holy Spirit and that is all I need.” No, it is not. God has given gifts to the church and one of those gifts is that of a teacher and in order for one to grow to become strong in faith, one needs to be under accurate teaching from an accurate teacher.

To be an accurate skilled teacher requires that you learn from other accurate skilled teachers who know more than you do. Luke, who was a medical doctor, realized his need to learn truth and he submitted himself to those eyewitnesses who had been entrusted to communicate it.

REASON #3 – Luke wrote because of the research he had done. **1:3**

Luke is a real gentleman here. He does not say the other things written were lacking or bad, he simply says it seemed fitting or good for him to do this. What Luke will do differently is write a continual account concerning the life of Jesus Christ beginning with what was happening in Jerusalem and Rome.

When we get done examining this one verse, we must conclude that Luke truly believed that real spiritual stability comes from learning God's Word in a very systematic and organized way. True learning comes by carefully observing facts.

There are three facts brought out:

Fact #1 - Luke's research was carefully investigated. **1:3a**

Luke investigated everything carefully. He traveled to various places and he spoke to various people. He was very careful to ascertain truth. Luke gave careful thought and research to everything he analyzed. He talked to people and was very careful to do his homework accurately (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 119). He did this from the beginning.

The phrase "from the beginning" is an adverb, which is different from the one in **verse 2**. This adverb means that Luke was doing fresh research from the first moment he began and his research was from above (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 43).

Luke was doing very careful research and that is what is needed if people are to grow and become strong and stable. The more precise we are in our study and knowledge of God's Word, the more stable we will be in our faith.

I think there is an important message here for ministers. You need to do fresh research and not rely on old things. Some ministers just coast along and never tackle any new books of the Bible or any major doctrine. They just rest on the laurels of the past. You won't grow that way. Growth requires fresh research and that is the kind Luke did from the moment he started this project.

Fact #2 - Luke's research was carefully written. **1:3b**

Luke researched and he wrote. He wrote everything down. It is hard work to research, it is hard work to think and it is hard work to write. The ability to carefully write requires the ability to precisely think.

When you put things into writing, it can be analyzed and carefully checked and cross checked. That is what Luke did with this gospel.

In Homiletics we made students write out their entire exposition, including introduction, illustrations, applications and conclusion. Sometimes a student would say, “I know what I want to say, but I just can’t seem to write it on paper.” We would respond and say, “If you cannot write it on paper, you really don’t know what you want to say.”

Fact #3 - Luke’s research was carefully organized. **1:3c**

Luke put out his work in “consecutive order.” What that means is that he researched the data pertaining to the life and work of Jesus Christ and he organized it in a chronological, successive, systematic way.

I am convinced that Satan loves the verse and chapter numbers because people can skip around and never have to systematically study anything. That is what Satan wants. Most people bounce around and never go through any book of the Bible and they don’t grow.

This approach of Luke clearly corresponds to what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 28:9-10 that says God teaches knowledge to those who carefully study His Word “order on order, line on line” and it is done a little at a time.

It also corresponds to what Paul wrote in I Tim. 4:13 in which Paul challenged Timothy to give careful attention to reading of Scripture and to teaching. Luke is a great example of one who applied this.

REASON #4 – Luke wrote so Theophilus could know truth. **1:3d-4**

The odd thing is we don’t even know who Theophilus is. All we know is he must have been someone very special in Luke’s life because Luke researched and wrote him Luke and Acts. The words “most excellent” indicate that Theophilus was someone who held some very important public office, for this term was often used of some person of important rank (i.e. Felix, procurator of Judea (Acts 23:26); Festus, the replacement of Felix (Acts 26:25). So the conclusion we draw is that Theophilus was a high-ranking Roman official who was probably a believer. Many have speculated that Theophilus provided the funds necessary for Luke to travel, to research and to write. He certainly was no “ordinary man”; he wanted to know truth.

Now carefully observe from **verse 4** why Luke wrote him—so that he might know the exact truth about the things he had been taught. That verb “know” speaks of writing so someone can have a full level of knowledge. The interesting thing about the word “taught” is that it is the Greek word (κατηχεω) from which we get our English word catechism. The reason for knowing the facts about Jesus Christ is so that we may know exact truth about Jesus Christ.

Theophilus was someone who needed some systematic reassurance that things pertaining to Jesus Christ were all true. This is what most people do not understand; it is a very careful, systematic study of the books of the Bible that bring stability and reassurance to the faith of a believer.

Trent Butler, in his commentary on Luke, said, “Today, we are the Theophilus for whom the Gospel is written” (*Luke*, p. 18).

Luke was not motivated for money or fame or because he could go on some scholarly lecture circuit. He simply wanted people to know the accurate truth. Luke knew that “the greatest enemy of spiritual growth is ignorance.”

There are 6.4 billion religious people in this world and very few of them are after a serious systematic understanding of God’s Word. Very few really want the facts, but without facts, there is no truth.

This is the reason for facts: to know truth. The whole goal of knowing facts is to know truth. Of all the facts to know, the most critical of all are facts about Jesus Christ. You never want to be confused about Him because He is the only one who can save us.