Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Luke: Physician and Historian
Scripture: Luke 1:1-4
Code: 42-1

Today is a very special day. It's a day of beginning, really. We're going to begin our study of the gospel of Luke today. This is going to be a great adventure. I think the wonderful thing about going through the gospel of Luke is that Jesus Christ is the theme of this gospel and week after week after week for months, and yes, years, we will be going through this gospel following...following the life of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Luke is one of four New Testament gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...four narratives of the life of Jesus. They are monumental. They are inspired by the Spirit of God. They tell the great, great, story of salvation. But Luke's is unique. I like to call it a persuasive gospel, and you'll understand why as we work our way through the beginning of this wonderful work of Luke.

Years ago there was a motion picture titled "The Greatest Story Ever Told," and it was about Jesus. And it was interesting to me that even the world understood that this in fact is the greatest story ever told. The world, frankly, is full of stories. Some are compelling, moving, impactful, even capable of changing how we think and how we act. But there's really only one story that transcends time and space, that transcends the material world to effect people eternally, and that is the story that Luke writes. And it is indeed the greatest story ever told.

In a summary, or a synopsis, it is the story of God's plan to save sinners from eternal hell through the coming of His Son Jesus Christ to earth to die and rise again from the dead. Let me say that again. That's the summary of the best of all stories, the greatest story ever told. It is the story of God's plan to save sinners from eternal hell through the coming of His Son Jesus Christ to earth to die and rise again from the dead. The story is true. It is actual history. It is without equal in its impact and its power.

In fact, not all the simple and complex legends of ancient cultures, not all the mysteries of past civilizations, the fanciful, supernatural legends of the Greeks, the stories of deities, false gods and all kinds of tales of people that exist in the traditions of tribes and nations, the best of our own culture from Bierwolfe(??) through Shakespeare to modern writers, Aesop's insightful fables, not all of them combined can even begin to approach the truth and the power of the story of Jesus which is the only story that can, has and will change the eternal destiny of millions of people.

This story is called good news. The word "gospel" means good news. It is the best news that man has ever heard because it is the news of salvation from sin.

Now we're going to be looking at the third narrative of the life of Jesus. It's known to us as the gospel of Luke. And I would venture to say that if I asked you, you probably couldn't talk about Luke for two minutes. If I asked you to tell me all you know about Luke, you would probably say..."Well, he was a doctor, a physician." You'd be right. But there might not be another sentence because we don't know much about Luke. It is amazing to think about Luke, apart from the Apostle Paul, was the most influential force in writing the New Testament. In fact, the writings of Luke which come in two volumes...volume one is the gospel of Luke, volume two is the book of Acts...add up to 52 chapters. The gospel of Luke is the longest of all the gospel narratives and therefore it's the most thorough and complete.

So I say, next to Paul, Luke is the most powerful writing force in the New Testament, and yet he is basically unknown. I don't think in my life I've ever heard a sermon about Luke. His historical narrative spans over 60 years. It starts with the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner to Jesus, and it ends at the end of the book of Acts which is volume two of his writings, it ends with the gospel being preached at Rome which means the gospel has extended to the world. No other writer wrote so comprehensive a history of Jesus and His impact. No other writer goes all the way from the John the Baptist to the gospel having reached the capital of the Roman Empire. He is the most complete story teller of the saga of salvation in the New Testament, and he is mostly unknown to us.

In spite of this immense effort, in spite of this involvement in writing the story of salvation, Luke never once refers to himself so that in the 24 chapters of the gospel of Luke he never mentions his name...and in the 28 chapters of the book of Acts he never mentions his name. He is content to be humbly hidden behind his massive and marvelous two-volume inspired writings. And he lets the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the theme of his writing dominate. A very humble man...this very humble man who had no desire to put himself at all into his own writings has given us the most complete, thorough story of the gospel in the scriptures. What he wrote was accurate. What he wrote was inerrant. What he wrote was sufficient to fill up the full detail that God desired for us to have of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth.

This is real history accurately recorded. It is sound theology logically developed. Luke identifies what he writes in verse 4 of chapter 1 of exact truth...exact truth. It isn't fantasy, it isn't his own spiritual musings. It isn't some effort on his part to concoct a tale or to build a legend. What he is giving is history and theology that is exact.

Let's listen as Luke begins his gospel. "In as much as many have...and I'm reading from the NAS here...In as much as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among

us, just as those who from the beginning were eye witnesses and servants of the Word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." Stop right there.

That is what we would call a prologue. Actually the story begins in verse 5, "In the days of Herod...etc." This is a prologue. It is important for Luke to write this prologue because this is the classic way of writing in the Greek world. Any philosopher, any theologian, any educator, any historian in the ancient world who was of high quality who wanted his volume to stand on the shelf with the classics would start his writing with such a prologue. Herodotus did it. Thucydides did it. Polybius did it. Even Josephus did it. And Luke does it.

These four verses, in fact, are one long unbroken sentence, one sentence, written in Greek originally and written in the polished style of Greek that is known as literary classical Greek. The rest of the gospel of Luke is written in the common Greek, but not the prologue. Luke did this, I think, because he wanted to establish the lofty literary character of this work. It is such a high quality of Greek, by the way, that it was obvious that Luke was highly educated. If it didn't tell us in the Bible that he was a physician, we would assume that he had had some kind of high level education because of his handling of the classical form of Greek.

By using this kind of Greek as he introduces his gospel, he is claiming a place for the gospel as a classic. He is claiming a place for the gospel as a serious work, as a true work of literary, historical worth to be given attention by the most sophisticated and highly educated Gentile or Greek reader. Luke is claiming a place for Christianity among the classics. He's claiming a place for Christianity on the stage of world history. And while much of the New Testament literature was written for the church and therefore the common people, Luke had in mind the world and he wanted to make sure that he included those who were at the very highest levels of education. As I said, other Greek writers used a very similar prologue. In fact, the format here is very, very common to ancient Greek classical writing.

In this prologue he talks about his...his sources, as any good historian would. He talks about other accounts that have been compiled. He talks about eye witnesses and servants of the Word who have handed them down. This is not something He has invented. He has...he has carefully investigated, verse 3 says, and researched everything carefully from the beginning. He is concerned about actual history. He is concerned about precision as he says in verse 4, "exact truth." And so, this prologue is very important in establishing Luke as a legitimate writer.

Now, as we approach the prologue, I have to confess again, as I did earlier to you, that Luke is never mentioned in this gospel and he's never mentioned in the prologue. But we're going to learn everything we can learn about him, even though he's not mentioned here. Now if you're saying, "Well

wait a minute, it says it's the gospel according to Luke right before verse 1," but that's not in the actual text of Scripture, that was placed there because of the conviction of the church that in fact he did write this, although nowhere in his gospel and nowhere in the book of Acts does he personally identify himself as the author.

Now that's an interesting dilemma for us. But it makes for fascinating history to dig into it. By the time we're done with these four verses, not today but today and next time, by the time we're done with these four verses you're going to meet Luke the physician, Luke the historian, Luke the theologian, and Luke the pastor. To me, this kind of adventure in trying to dig into the Scripture and find what isn't immediately apparent there is the real fun of Bible study, and I hope you will enjoy it as much as I do.

It nowhere mentions Luke's name and yet its clearly said it's the gospel according to Luke, how did they come to that conclusion? Let's begin, first of all, with looking at Luke the physician...Luke the physician.

Now the only thing that is a reference to the author in the first four verses is in verse 3. "It seemed fitting for me," that's all we have is "me." That leaves us with a rather open-ended question...who is me? Me...who is it?

Well the answer to that question takes us into two areas. First of all, it takes us into tradition, and then secondly it takes us into the text of Scripture. And by both of those I'm going to try to answer the question...who is me? Who is the author of Luke? We can take the word for the people who put it there that this is written by Luke, but much more instructive for us to come to that conclusion by being led through a process of understanding why they designated it as such.

According to early tradition the gospel, the third gospel, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, the third gospel has always been attributed to Luke...always called Luke, never called anything else, never was there a suggestion of any other author. And traditions are interesting, they really are. Traditions are very interesting. If you've done any archaeological work or you've traveled in the Middle East or in ancient places and even in more modern places, there are traditions that develop. And as you look at certain sites in the ancient world they say, "Well the tradition is that this was the place where Jesus did this...or...Tradition says this is the place where Abraham sacrificed Isaac...Tradition says this is the place where such and such happened...this is where Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel...This is the traditional site of this and that." When you tour the Holy Land or you tour ancient Turkey which, of course, was Asia Minor, the ministry of the Apostle Paul there, they will tell you all about traditional sites. We have traditional sites all over the world, not only in Christian religion but in many other places of history. This is the traditional place where So-and-so died in a battle, or whatever.

Now what makes a tradition valid or invalid generally is how old the tradition is. If the tradition is about the time the actual events happened, it is likely an accurate tradition. You'll travel the land of israel and somebody will say, "Well, this is the traditional place where Jesus fell down under the weight of His cross and the cross was therefore handed over to Simon of Cyrene." And you ask, "Well how do they know this is the stone in which...or this is the very place where Jesus fell?"

"Well it's a tradition."

"Well, when did that tradition develop?"

"Well it developed in the thirteenth century."

Probably not accurate. There was probably some way that the church could make some money out of that tradition at the time. Or some person could gain some spiritual favor or some spiritual accolades by having come to that great conclusion. the fact of the matter is if the tradition isn't nearly at the very time of the event, you probably shouldn't trust it as being absolutely accurate. But when you go back in the gospel of Luke, you go all the way back to the first century, all the way back to the second century which would just be one generation past the writing of the gospel of Luke and they're all saying Luke wrote it and they would know because they were there. There isn't any time passing here. Always this has been attributed to this man Luke. Even the heretic Marcion, M-a-r-c-i-o-n, in 135, this would be 70 years after this gospel was written, the heretic Marcion acknowledged Luke as the author of the third gospel. So did the early church unanimously. As I said, there was never any other suggestion. The oldest Greek manuscript of the gospel, a second-century manuscript, the oldest Greek manuscript in existence goes back to the second century titles this "The gospel according to Luke." Very, very likely accurate that early. There is a canon...when we say a canon we're talking about a compilation of the scriptures. The earliest compilation of New Testament scriptures where it was all brought together is called the Moorituriaan(?) Canon, it's 170 to 180 A.D. and it calls this third gospel the gospel according to Luke. And there are many other ancient sources that I won't take you in to that affirm that Luke is the author.

Very little reason to be suspicious of that from the traditional side. But let's look at the textual side, okay?

In this gospel we notice something interesting. It is addressed in verse 3 to a man named Theophilus. Verse 3 it says, "I'm going to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus." So this is addressed to Theophilus.

Look at Acts now. Turn over to the book of Acts chapter 1 verse 1. In Acts chapter 1 verse 1 it says, "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach and I

composed it all the way till the day He was ascended into heaven when He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen." Well, what is he saying? He's saying I wrote the third gospel...right?...to Theophilus. Again he says, "Theophilus, the first account I composed and it was all about what Jesus began to do and teach," and then the writer goes on to write the book of Acts. So the conclusion is this, whoever wrote Acts wrote the third gospel. Whoever wrote the first account to Theophilus refers to himself as having written that first account to Theophilus and then proceeds to write the book of Acts.

So this much we know. Whoever wrote Acts wrote Luke. Now we also know, going back to Luke chapter 1, that the writer was not an apostle. He was not one of the apostles because he refers to those in verse 2 "Who from the beginning were eye witnesses." And there was one characteristic of an apostle, what did an apostle have to be? An eye witness of what? Of the resurrection of Jesus. So he says there were those who from the beginning were eye witnesses and servants of the Word and have handed them down to us. So he does not write as an apostle. The apostles and other eye witnesses were his sources. In verse 1 he says, "Many have undertaken to compile an account, among them would be those who from the beginning were eye witnesses and servants of the Word and they've handed those accounts down to us." So he says, "I'm beholding to the accounts that have already been put together. And he says in verse 3, "I've investigated everything carefully from the beginning in those accounts." So he is not an apostle. And he was not an eye witness.

Now the fact that he is the author of Luke is established then if we can establish that he is the author of Acts. How can we establish that he is the author of Acts if it never mentions him there? Well, first of all, tradition affirms that he is the author of Acts as it does of the gospel of Luke. But there's something else that I think we can follow, a little path and you put your concentration in high gear here and follow this thought.

Throughout the book of Acts we come across the author identifying himself with what's going on. He's not even...he's not writing as a...as a historian looking back at something he didn't experience. He wasn't there during the life of Christ. He was not an apostle. He was not an eye witness to those events. But he is an eye witness to the things he's writing about in the book of Acts and the reason we know that is because starting in chapter 16 he starts to use the plural pronoun "we" and he's right involved in the ministry of the apostle Paul which, as you know, starts in Acts 14 and goes to the end of the chapter. And we keep reading "we did this and we went there and we were here and we did this and that," and the "we" sections have become very famous because the author is saying I was there, I went where Paul went, I went where Mark and Aristarchus and these others who were with Paul went...we were doing this and we were doing that. The "we" sections start in chapter 16 and run all the way to the end of the book. He's there all the way from Paul's second journey to the very end of the book of Acts where Paul is a prisoner in Rome in his first Roman imprisonment.

So whoever the author of Acts is he was Paul's traveling companion from chapter 16, his second journey when he had a vision from God to go to Macedonia and preach the gospel. He's there from that time all the way up to the end of the book of Acts. He's there when Paul was a prisoner in his first imprisonment in Rome, and follow this, later on, Paul years after that had a second imprisonment in Rome referred to in 2 Timothy and there he was beheaded and martyred. And at that point 2 Timothy chapter 4 at the very end of Paul's life during his second imprisonment after the first one, the first one's at the end of Acts, a later imprisonment referred to and indicated in 2 Timothy, Luke is also there. So really Luke was with Paul from the time of his second missionary journey, the time when he was at Philippi and Troas, the time recorded in Acts 16, to the end of his life...to the end of his life. Long-term companion of Paul who was even there in Paul's final imprisonment and martyrdom.

So in much of what is recorded in the book of Acts, certainly the dominant part of the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, he was a witness to a lot of it. While not an eye witness to the gospel account, he was an eye witness to much of what he is recording in the book of Acts.

Now, you say, "Well okay, we agree, he's a companion of Paul and he was with Paul, but Paul had a lot of companions. How do we know that out of all those companions Luke is the writer?" Well let's follow it a little bit further. There's a list of Paul's companions given throughout the book of Acts. They are Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphras, Barnabas, Sopater, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus and Trophimus. And all those names will be on the quiz. Okay, those are the names, those are the names of all the people who ministered alongside Paul. But listen to this, all of those names are given in the book of Acts by the author, all but three. So any that he mentions and identifies would not qualify...right?...they won't qualify. So any of those that the writer of Acts mentions would be other than himself. So all of those names are mentioned with the exception of three. Demas, Demas is not mentioned in Acts but he couldn't have written the gospel of Luke because remember what he did? He forsook the apostle Paul having loved the present world and abandoned the faith. Epaphras and Titus are the only two not mentioned in the book of Acts out of that whole list that would possibly qualify. But neither Epaphras nor Titus fit the pattern of having been with Paul from the Macedonian vision in Acts 16 all the way to the end of his life. There's only one who fits that and it's Luke...and it's Luke.

So when you sift through, sort out all of Paul's companions, Luke is left as the only one who really does fit. The early church knew Luke wrote it and the story in Acts support it. And if Luke wrote Acts then he also wrote Luke because in Acts he says, "The first account I composed to you, Theophilus," that has to refer to Luke. So he wrote the third gospel and he wrote the book of Acts.

Matthew and John then were apostles. The gospel of Matthew, the gospel of John written by apostles. Luke and Mark were not apostles but they were companions of the apostles. Luke was Paul's companion and Mark was Peter's companion. And all four of those accounts God inspired to give us the fullest and richest understanding of the glory of the life of Jesus Christ.

Now all that brings us down then to Luke the physician. What do we know about him? Well, first of all, look at Colossians chapter 3, let's just take him for who he was. We don't know anything about what he did. All those years traveling with Paul never tells us what he did, doesn't tell us whether he preached a sermon or taught a class or arranged travel arrangements, I don't know what we...we would just have to speculate on that because there's nothing there. But in Colossians 4 and verse 14 this is the only...this is the only real personal characteristic that we know about. It just says this, "Luke the beloved physician sends you his greetings." So all we know about him in terms of his own life is that he was a physician...he was a physician, not just a physician but a beloved physician.

If you go back to verse 11, we'll take it a little further cause we're going to dig into his medical background, at least as far as we can. Back in to verse 11 of Colossians 4 it mentions in the middle of the verse "those who are from the circumcision...those who are from the circumcision." Paul had some companions who were Jewish. He names them, verse 10, Aristarchus, Mark, a man in verse 11 named Jesus Justus, but he says there, "These are the only fellow workers for the Kingdom of God who are from the circumcision." That is they were the only Jewish ones, so we therefore conclude that the rest are...what?...are Gentiles. And he names them, verse 12 is Epaphras who would have been a Gentile, and verse 14, Luke the beloved physician. He set apart from those that were Jewish of the circumcision as a Gentile. So we know this, he was a physician, he was a Gentile physician.

He was a Gentile physician. There are four other indications of that. His name is Lucas which is a Greek word indicating his Greek origin, his Gentile origin. He writing language and style, as I told you, is distinctively Greek and it is that of a Greek with a high level of education, it is a vocabulary similar to classic Greek writers. Furthermore in writing his gospel Luke does something very interesting, we'll see it as we go through it. He avoids common semitic or Hebraic expressions and substitutes for them expressions out of the Septuagint which is a Greek translation. So he's much more at home with Greek than he is with Hebrew. And even when there is a Hebrew or semitic expression, Matthew, Mark and John would use the Hebraic version where Luke would use the Greek version of that same expression.

Also, he makes a major point out of showing how God's salvation and reaches Gentiles...both in the book of Luke and the book of Acts. He reveals his concern for his people, the Gentile people. So we conclude then that he was a Gentile, he was therefore a Gentile physician trained in some Gentile environment. We don't know where he came from although there are some traditions back to Eusebius and Jerome, early church fathers, that he came from Antioch...Antioch and Syria, Antioch in the north and Syria. And Antioch was a great center of civilization in ancient times where you remember the first church outside Jerusalem was planted in Antioch. And it may have been that when that church was planted there he heard the gospel in that church. And it was that church eventually pastored by Paul who was sent from that church on his first missionary journey. So if it is

true that he came from Antioch, he might have received his medical training in the culture, the Roman/Greek culture, the Hellenistic culture of Antioch.

The beloved aspect just indicates to us that he was an endearing man, that he was a man who had charmed, as it were, the heart of the apostle Paul and come to be to him a beloved man. Obviously if he left his practice to be a missionary and travel all those years with the apostle Paul, we can assume that he continued to be Paul's personal private physician. And for the oft ill and oft injured Paul, that was some luxury. And to have a man who was not only a physician but beloved was a double blessing. And isn't it interesting that as often as Luke must have ministered to Paul, he never ever mentions that he did that? Again you see the heart of this man is a heart of humility. So he was a beloved physician. And we can surmise that he may have come from training in Antioch, he may even have heard the gospel and been converted to Christ in that place. He became the beloved physician of the apostle Paul.

Though he left his medical practice, when you study the gospel of Luke you see Luke's interest in those matters that are physical, those healings that Jesus did. Those miracles that Jesus did in the physical real he views them uniquely. In fact, just one illustration and I won't get in to too many of these, just one I'll give you. There was a woman who came to Jesus with a disease and it says, one of the other gospel writers says, "She had suffered many things at the hands of many physicians." Luke leaves that line out. So that will give you the idea that he viewed things maybe a little uniquely. But he gives high profile to Jesus' healing ministry and how he viewed that. And as I said, he must have been a marvelous help to the apostle Paul.

Now if you're expecting to go through Luke and find all kinds of sort of secretive medical lingo like we have to deal with today, you're not going to find it. Today medical terminology is usually formatted in some way related to Latin or Greek and it's different than our normal common language. You go to the doctor and the doctor says, "Here's what's wrong with you, you have...in my case it was blood clots in your lungs...but the real name for that is pulmonary emboli." Well that's a kind of a contemporary phenomenon. In ancient times there was not a unique technical vocabulary for those who practiced medicine and so Luke will refer to things the way the other gospel writers will refer to them. In that day if you went to the doctor and you said, "Doctor, I have a pain in my elbow," he would say to you, "Yes, you have elbow pain." It was just the way it was. So I don't want you to think it's going to get technical when we get in to the gospel of Luke.

Now Luke is mentioned there in Colossians. That is...that's the first time he is mentioned in our little look at this. Go to Philemon, the little book, Philemon. This is the second time he's mentioned and there's only three. He's only named three times and the most that is ever said about him you just read. In Philemon, Philemon is a...was a man who had a slave who had run away and Paul wrote him a little letter to take him back because he had become a Christian and he wanted the man to embrace him as a brother and not a returning slave. But in the letter that he writes, at the end of the

letter, he just says this, verse 23 he mentions Epaphras, he always had these guys with him, Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. That's all we know. That's it. He was a fellow worker.

Now when Paul wrote that letter, Philemon, and when he wrote Colossians where he calls Luke the beloved physician and says he's not of the circumcision, when Paul wrote both Colossians and Philemon, he was a prisoner in Rome. He was in that first imprisonment in Rome which sort of ends the book of Acts. He was there in Rome writing these letters. This was on his third missionary journey and Luke was with him. He had been with him since the second missionary journey and he would be with him all the way to the end of his life with a six-year hiatus, and I'll mention that in a moment. But all we learn from it here, the text here, is that he was a fellow worker, he was just one of the guys who worked alongside Paul in Paul's ministry.

The third and the only other time he is mentioned in Scripture is in 2 Timothy 4...2 Timothy 4 and this is at the end of Paul's life. This is the last thing Paul ever wrote. He was about to be martyred for the cause of Christ. He was executed in Rome. And this is wonderful, verse 11 of chapter 4, "Only Luke is with me." Boy, that's sad. Down in verse 16 he said everybody deserted him, everybody. Why? Nero had cranked up the persecution to a high level and Christians were paying with their lives. And frankly, many believers had fled from Rome. And, you know, they might have had a reasonable motive to do that, to carry on the preaching of the gospel. It's not that they were all just cowards. But Luke didn't go. Everybody left. And there was a lot of desertion. Demas left him because he loved the present world, verse 10 says. And you do get the idea that some of the rest left in desertion from verse 16, but he says, "May it not be counted against them." But not Luke...loyal, faithful, brave, long-term friend, fellow worker, companion to Paul, been with Paul over years and years and years, been with Paul over hundreds and probably thousands of miles of walking. He was with Paul at Troas in Philippi on that second journey. And Paul, you'll remember, I don't know if you think back to this, but Paul left him at the end of the second journey, he left him at Philippi for six years to be with that new church. He left him there to help that new church in Macedonia. And then joined him six years later on his third missionary journey and then he was with him to the end of his life. He was with Paul when Paul returned after his third journey to Jerusalem, remember. He went to Jerusalem and he was arrested. Luke was there. That's part of the "we" passages. He was with him when he was then transported by the Romans to Caesarea which was on the coast which was the Roman garrison right on the Mediterranean just west of...just right where Tel Aviv is now, a little north of Tel Aviv. Paul was a prisoner there for two years in Caesarea and Luke was there too. Luke was there, never left him.

Finally Paul appealed to Rome because he wanted to get his case settled. He couldn't just keep him in jail, there had to be a trial and he was a Roman citizen, he had a right to a Roman trial. So they put him on a boat and they shipped him to Rome. You remember the story in Acts 27? Well Luke was on the boat too. Remember the terrible storm, and the shipwreck in Acts 27? Luke was there.

And when he finally got to Rome, Luke was there and Luke was ultimately there when he became a final prisoner in Rome and when he was just about to be martyred here in 2 Timothy, Luke is still with me, he says...still with me.

Quite a remarkable man, this Luke. And we didn't know much about him when we got here this morning, but all of a sudden he sort of comes alive, doesn't he? This beloved physician, Luke the physician, that's all we know. Those are the only three places he's mentioned. That's all we know specifically and directly, but there's so much more about him. He was a physician. He was a Gentile, perhaps from Antioch in Syria. He was a medical practitioner. He was a companion of Paul. He was a missionary with a kind, loyal, brave, sympathetic heart.

But secondly, and I'm just going to introduce this, I want you to look at Luke the historian. We don't know all about the features of that part of his life. We don't know much about Luke the physician. We know a lot about Luke the historian because of the two volumes of history that he wrote. He was an exceptional historian with a brilliant mind...careful, thoughtful. Verse 1 of this gospel that we now know he wrote, it says, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us..."

What's he doing here? He's saying, "Look, folks, I'm speaking to you as a historian. I'm writing as a historian." He uses, as I told you, that high-level classical literary Greek to establish the fact that this belongs on the library shelf with the classics. I am writing a true and legitimate history. And he starts by identifying his sources. This is sort of like putting your footnotes in general at the beginning rather than at the bottom of the page or at the end. The events of Jesus' life, he said, have become the subject for many writers. Many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us.

At the very outset he alerts the reader to the fact that he is aware of others who have provided records of the story of Jesus. He is aware that there are many others who have written about Jesus. He doesn't say who the many were, but he does say he investigated everything, in verse 3, carefully from the beginning. Every resource he could find he investigated. All those early documents, by the way, have been long ago lost. We don't even have the original autographs of the gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, or any other original manuscript of a biblical book, we only have copies. And those other documents that were floating around have long since disappeared. So we don't know what the sources were. But there were the apostles and no doubt many of them had written down accounts of various aspects of the life and ministry of Jesus. Many of them had taken record of memoirs, things that they had remembered. There were many followers of Jesus, disciples of Jesus. There were the women who followed Jesus. There were the 120 in the Upper Room. There was Barsabas and Matthias, you remember, who sort of vied for the slot that Judas left vacant by committing suicide. They were considered eye witnesses of the resurrection and they must have had things they knew about Jesus.

There may have been many, myriads of things that had been written about Jesus and, of course, Matthew and Mark were both most likely written before Luke's gospel. They were likely among the many sources that Luke had carefully, carefully investigated. So perhaps...and because he knew Mark, I mean...Mark also was a close companion of Paul. Mark traveled with Paul. Luke traveled with Paul. Mark and Luke must have discussed many times the issues in the life of Jesus. And, of course, Mark knew Matthew because Matthew was a part of the early church as an apostle, and the early church it says met in Mark's home. So Matthew and Mark knew each other, and Mark and Luke knew each other. And Matthew and Luke likely met and got acquainted in the two years that...that Paul was imprisoned at Caesarea when Luke would have had easy access to go to Jerusalem and there, no doubt, would have met Matthew. And they perhaps shared their accounts and shared their experiences with the life of Jesus. And he was exposed to many sources.

This is very important so that people realize, the reader realizes this is not a fanciful thing. But he is basing this on other written narratives, as well oral stories and accounts that have been passed down to his time. But Luke was personally acquainted with apostles, personally acquainted with firsthand eye witnesses of the events of Christ's life. One writer suggests that he must have known Mary cause, after all, when those two years when he was in Caesarea there right near Jerusalem, he must have interacted with the church in Jerusalem and he would certainly have met this wonderful Mary, the mother of Jesus, and could well have heard the birth of Jesus story from her. Then as I said, there were the apostles and the disciples and the 120 and the women and Matthias and Barsabas later, and many others who could have known things about Jesus. There must have been a lot of folks whom Jesus had healed, right? Or who had been there at some of the moments of His teaching and His miracles. And so there were all kinds of accounts, it doesn't say just exactly what they were but there were many and they had undertaken to compile an account of the things. Those are technical terms. "Have undertaken" is a frequent used Greek word for a literary writing and "to compile an account" is a frequently used phrase for historical works. Lots of histories of Jesus were sort of happening. They weren't, of course, all inspired by God, but there were various things being written. Two of them were inspired by the Holy Spirit by the time Luke wrote...the gospel of Matthew and the gospel of Mark.

Now it's important to say at this juncture that Luke is not critical of these other attempts. He's not saying where there's a lot of phoney baloney floating around about Jesus, I'm going to write the straight stuff. This is not...this is not pejorative here, this is not some polemic against the others. Not at all. The reason he brings this up, the reason he talks about his sources is twofold.

One, to show he's a credible historian, to show that he is not inventing something, to show that this is history he is writing, this is actual fact and he has gone back to carefully thought-out accounts and various memoirs and things that have been written by people who were eye witnesses and this is a very careful thing on his part. He has talked to the eye witnesses and the servants of the Word who

have handed this down to him. He wants to establish himself as the writer of a credible history based upon credible sources.

Secondly, this is very important, he is showing that he's not writing outside the tradition. He is not writing outside the tradition. He is not writing another gospel that tells some kind of a strange story. Boy, there were some of those that appeared, really strange things were being written about Jesus even in ancient times, very strange things...heretical things, apocryphal things. He is not doing that. He is within the tradition. He is saying...I'm taking all this material that's already been done and I am putting myself inside that truth already written and revealed about Jesus. He's setting himself squarely in that tradition and harmony with other historians who carefully and thoughtfully wrote narratives of the life of Jesus. He's not using the bizarre and outlandish things, he's using those things that can be verified by eye witnesses. So he associates his work closely with the apostles and with the others. Takes his place within the gospel tradition already made known. And he would line himself up with Matthew and he would line himself up with Mark whom, no doubt, he personally knew.

Now that is not to say that he was not inspired by God. He was inspired by God to write and God guarded everything he wrote so that it was exactly what God wanted said and it was said without error. Matthew was there and his experience is there in his gospel, but superintended by God's Holy Spirit so that it came out actually accurate and inerrant. John was there and even though John wrote much later, John wrote his own experience but he wrote it under the superintending care of the Holy Spirit so that it was exactly what God wanted said and nothing more, nothing less and without error. Mark wasn't there but Mark was a close companion to Peter and, believe me, Peter was there. And Peter was Mark's eye witness source. That doesn't mean that Mark's gospel is strictly the memoirs of Peter, it was all that Peter could tell Mark and all that the Holy Spirit could tell Mark totally superintended by the Spirit of God to write the account fully. There are things in the gospel of Matthew that Matthew didn't experience and they were given to him by revelation through the Holy Spirit. Same is true of Mark and Luke and John. Their experiences were controlled by the Spirit of God and what they didn't know was revealed to them so that the combination of their experience and their research and their study and whatever from them went into it was under totally control of the Holy Spirit and elicited and inerrant testimony.

And so, Luke writes, basing his writings off the research he has done, humanly speaking, with these others who have compiled accounts. Look back at verse 1 for just a minute and ask yourself the question...why did Luke feel like he needed to add another gospel? I mean, after all, there is a lot of repetition. Sixty percent of the material in Mark is in Luke. Well why does Luke have to write? Because he's finding fault? No, certainly not finding fault with inspired writings. I'll tell you why he wrote, just one simple reason, because he was prompted by God to write. Does that make sense? It was God who prompted him to write and God wanted him to write one great narrative from the start...the birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner to Christ, all the way to the gospel having reached Rome through Paul. Such a comprehensive history had never been written in one inspired, precise,

reliable, logical, persuasive account in two volumes and that's why God wanted him to write it. And by the way, Luke's is the longest gospel, the largest gospel, therefore it's the more thorough gospel.

One last thought and we'll leave the rest till next time. Verse 1 says, and this, I think, is interesting. These people had undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us. It could have said "the things concerning Jesus." They're writing the life of Christ but he doesn't. This is so important. He goes to the goal of everything and he says the story is not a story about Jesus as if that's the end of the story. It's a story about what God accomplished among us through Him. That's the issue. Luke emphasizes the issue of divine accomplishment. Luke's story is about what God accomplishes in the lives of sinners through Jesus Christ, that's what it's about.

The verb "accomplish" has an intensive flavor, it's an intensive compound Greek word. It indicates the complete fulfillment of something and in this case, the plan of God. These other people were writing not just about the life of Jesus, they were writing about what God had accomplished in human history through Jesus. They chronicled how God accomplished salvation among people. Literally, to put it simply, they were writing salvation history. They were writing salvation history. And that, my friend, is the heart of the gospel...the gospels, all four of them, are salvation history. And the book of Acts is salvation history, isn't it? As the church begins, three thousand people are saved and thousands more are added and pretty soon there are twenty thousand. And the gospel leaps beyond Jerusalem and it goes into Judea and then it finds its way into Samaria and it finds its way into the uttermost part of the earth. It's salvation history. So he doesn't say they're compiling an account about Jesus, rather they're compiling an account of the things accomplished among us, "us" being believers. This looks at the end or the goal, the mission of all the events recorded. It is the story of God saving sinners. That's why it's the greatest story ever told. It's not just a story to bring your emotions out because of the sad things that happened to Jesus, it's not just Jesus Christ superstar, a poor, nice guy a little bit misguided. It's not just Jesus the ethical teacher. It's not just Jesus who set us an example of humility and selflessness. It is a history of salvation, that's what it is. It's redemptive history. And that's what Luke wrote, he wrote redemptive history.

That's Luke the historian. But that's only the start of Luke the historian. For the rest, you've got to come back next week and then we'll also see Luke the theologian and finally Luke the pastor. And you'll know him by the time we get done next Sunday. Join me in prayer.

Father, what a joy it is to come to grips with the wonderful richness of Scripture unfolding to us, this remarkable chosen vessel that You used to write a third of the New Testament, a man who, for the most part, is unknown to us and known so intimately to You. How enriching and wonderful it is to come to know him, this beloved physician, this fellow worker of Paul, this loyal, brave, long-term friend who was there when everybody else was gone. This is the heart of the physician, this tenderness, this loyalty, this care for his friend and certainly his one and only patient. And then we see Luke the historian, this remarkable, carefully, thoughtful researcher investigating everything

available, talking to those who were there, eye witnesses, disciples and preachers of the Word who could help him to understand the fullness of the greatest story ever told. Father, we thank You that You use people like Luke and like Paul and like Peter and like Mark and John and all those names, Aristarchus and Gaius and just people to accomplish Your glorious ends in the world. What an honor...what an honor for Luke and even as honored as he was he certainly remained humble. Thank You, Lord, for showing us a man who was so useful to You and may we be so as we demonstrate faithfulness to Your truth. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).