



“Being Certain about the Son of Man”

Luke 1:1-4

November 12, 2017

This morning we begin our series in the book of Luke. The title of this morning’s message is *Being Certain About the Son of Man*.

I wonder if you have noticed that the holidays are pretty much upon us. If you are anything like me, two weeks from today you will go home from church and finish the turkey leftovers. In addition to that, Christmas music is already being played on the radio. The Hallmark Channel is already airing all those sappy Christmas movies, to the pumping fists of some of the sisters here.

In addition, once we get into December there will be certain channels on cable television that will start broadcasting their documentaries about the origins of Christianity, and who they understand to be the historical Jesus. They will air these documentaries on the basis of liberal theologians and Bible scholars.

They will not present Jesus as the Messianic King who came into the world proclaiming the Kingdom of God with the corresponding signs and miracles that factually and literally took place. They will not present Jesus as the One who literally and factually rose triumphantly from the grave on the third day.

Rather, cable television will present another version of Jesus. They will present Him as a First Century social revolutionary whose story was greatly embellished and exaggerated by later generations of His followers. That is what you can expect to see if you watch most of these documentaries that take place on various cable stations.

Many people, as well as Christians, will see these programs and certain questions may rise up in their hearts about the veracity and the historicity of the story of Jesus as we have received it in the pages of the New Testament.

Even going back to the Garden of Eden and into the beginning of the work of Jesus Christ in the First Century, the adversary has been casting doubt upon the Word of God. This has been happening all along. Even starting with those First Century Jews who said that the resurrection was phony, stories have been perpetuated that seek to discredit the message that we base our lives and our eternities upon.

Back in the First Century, there was man who shared a similar concern about these things. He was a Gentile man of great prominence. He is remembered as Theophilus. Put together, the Greek words that made up his name comes from *Theos* which means *God*, and *phileo* which means *beloved, brotherly, warmth*. Thus, his name means “the one who is favored by God; the one who is beloved by God or who loves God.”

Theophilus may have been his literal name. It may have been something of a nickname that was given to him because he had a favorable disposition toward the believers of the First Century. He was a man of standing and importance in the First Century Roman world, for he is remembered as the *most excellent Theophilus*. That is the little phrase that was used of people in high position.

Theophilus had a favorable inclination toward the Christian faith. The story of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, made its way into his ears, and it would appear that it made its way into his heart as well.

Evidently, this man Theophilus had some questions. He had some concerns. It would seem that he had given his life to the message about Jesus that was being proclaimed. So, Theophilus wanted to know where Jesus actually came from. He wanted to know what he actually did, and what he really said. He wanted the facts. He needed to know.

He had probably already heard how the Jewish authority figures were seeking to discredit what the early Apostles were preaching. So, this man wanted to have the facts. He wanted to know the real deal about all the stories he heard about Jesus. He wanted to know if He could base his life upon those things. That was Theophilus.

A contemporary of Theophilus was living in the First Century. His name was Lucas. We remember him as Luke. He was an early travel companion of the Apostle Paul. Luke is mentioned three times in the writings of the Apostle Paul. We learn by what was said of him that he was one of Paul's travel companion. We learn that he was a faithful friend who was with Paul to the very end as Luke is mentioned in II Timothy Chapter 4 when Paul was on trial at the end of his life.

We also interestingly read in Paul's letters that Luke was a physician by occupation as the greeting went forth to the Colossians. Colossians 4:14:

¹⁴Luke the beloved physician greets you....

What we find is that this man Luke had some of the same concerns as Theophilus. From all the writing that we have from Luke, we can see that this was a man who was educated. This man could do some research, and this man could do some writing. He was a very skilled man with a pen.

Not only was Luke a man of faith, but he was also a man of reason. Yes, faith and reason are very much compatible. They go together. Luke was man who wanted and needed to know that the story was straight, and that it was legitimate.

So, what we find by Luke's own testimony is that he went and gathered the facts in a pains-taking way from the eyewitnesses who were still living in his time, and who were able to confirm the stories that were being told. Luke spent many years of his life speaking to the ones who saw and heard Jesus. The things he learned brought certainty to his own heart. Then he did his great writing project, putting these stories about Jesus on

paper to give that same assurance to Theophilus, and any of those who would want the assurance of the historicity of the man Jesus Christ who performed miracles, who raised the dead, who was raised from the dead, who was the friend of sinners, who preached like nobody on earth had ever preached before or after Him, who proclaimed the Kingdom of God with authority, who was crucified on a Roman cross, and who rose on the third day.

Luke needed to dig in and hear about what Jesus did from the people who saw it, so he investigated it. Based on his investigation, Luke wrote the book that we begin studying today. This morning I want us to see Luke's prologue. I want us to see his purpose in writing.

Luke wanted you and me to know that the story about Jesus' birth, ministry, and His death and resurrection is to be taken seriously as literal history that occurred in the First Century. Luke wanted us to know that the story of Jesus can be trusted.

Let's begin our series in this great book by seeing how Luke got this across to Theophilus, and the rest of us with the opening sentence of his book about the life of Jesus Christ. Luke Chapter 1 and Verses 1 through 4:

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Here we have the introduction of the Gospel of Luke, as well as the purpose of its writing. Its purpose is to provide people with certainty about the biblical narrative of Jesus the Son of man, the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel.

After this one long sentence, Luke went on to write the longest book in the New Testament. Matthew has 28 chapters and Luke has 24 chapters, but guess how many verses are in Chapter 1 of the book of Luke? There are 80 verses! So, Luke wrote 24 chapters and many of them are very, very long. Luke is the longest book as far as substance and content goes in the New Testament.

Luke is also the most prolific author of the New Testament because there is a companion that goes with the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of Luke is part one and part two is the book of Acts. In the first verses of the book of Acts, the author identifies Theophilus once again as somebody he wanted in particular to be encouraged by his writing. However, Luke knew there would be so many more reading his text, and he wanted us all to have the story straight.

The writings of Luke comprise the largest portion of writings of any New Testament authors. He wrote even more than his dear friend, Paul. Luke's statement of purpose was that we may have confidence and assurance and certainty about the story of Christ in

the book of Luke, then certainty about the origin of the church as it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

This morning we are going to begin our study of the Gospel of Luke. We are going to be here a while. I was reading through this and looking at some of the outlines of this book, and if the Lord so leads, this could be an 82-sermon series. Scholars call the units of thought in the Bible *periscopes*. These units contain 10-20 verses, and if I preached on one of these units each Sunday, it would take 82 sermons. I have a half a mind to go that direction! I will probably weave in some other series on other portions of Scripture along the way. I like to break up longer books into volumes. Whatever happens will be as the Spirit leads.

These things are written that we might just have great, great confidence that what we have received about Jesus is, in fact, the truth. We are going to get to know our brother Luke, and I think that we are going to appreciate him as we see what he passed on to us.

Not only did Luke want us to have certainty about the things that we have received about Jesus, he wanted us to have faith in Jesus. He wanted our hearts to believe and, therefore, be saved. Luke wanted us to know that God is real; that the Creator is holy; that we are, in fact, tainted with sin—you and me both, and Luke wanted us to know that Jesus is God's remedy for that sin. He wanted us to know that Jesus came to save us and wash our sins away.

There have been a lot of people who have had the facts about Jesus straight, but their hearts were still hard, and they did not believe. Look at the very First Century Israelites, those Pharisees, who knew that Jesus was risen from the grave, yet their hearts were hard. They made up fabricated stories that the apostles stole the body of Jesus. Look at Paul's interaction with Governor Festus, who was compelled and interested but knew there would be certain risks and sacrifices that would come by proclaiming Jesus as Savior and Lord. So, he drew back even though he knew that the story was straight.

My prayer is that by the Holy Spirit, hearts would be soft. My prayer is that not only would we have the story of Jesus straight in our minds, but the faith in our hearts would be true and robust. I pray that if there is anybody who has not put their faith in Jesus, that they would do so as we read about Him in this text.

For those of us who are in Christ and trusting in Him, I pray that our faith would grow, that our intimacy with Jesus would increase, that our knowledge of our Lord would get bigger and bigger to our joy, growth, and to our maturity in the faith.

Once again, this opening paragraph is all about letting us know that Jesus is the real deal. So, I want to look at three aspects of what we have just read. I want us to think about them and apply them and see if we can understand their significance for us. These things are written for our certainty in the faith. For your certainty, I want us to notice how this passage talks about:

1. The Historical Nature of the Christian Faith

Look again at what it says in Verses 1 and 2:

¹Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us

Those were literal things. Things were accomplished. Things happened. It is the even the language of fulfillment. Things anticipated in the Old Testament were accomplished among us, Luke said. Verse 2:

²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us

Luke was saying that the things that he wrote about in his book came from the testimony of eyewitnesses from men and women who saw and heard the things that are recorded in this book.

We read this, and we understand that the Christian faith is established upon real events that involved actual people that occurred in literal places. These stories have been passed on to us by eyewitnesses. Luke wanted us to know that it is legit! It happened. This is a voice speaking to you from the First Century about the things Jesus said and did.

This opening paragraph of Luke is so important for all us who are in Christ. It has a special place in my own heart. It was in my later college years that my yearning for the Scripture became robust. In my early twenties, and after a season of being something of a prodigal who was messing around in the far country, I heard some good Bible teaching on Luke, and the Word of God glowed inside of me telling me that Jesus is awesome! I wanted to know Him better and better and better.

That was in the early to mid-90s, and at that time there was a group of men and women who called themselves The Jesus Seminar. They were active during that time. They would identify themselves as *men and women of the cloth*. They took it upon themselves to help everybody understand which writings about Jesus in the New Testament were authentic and trustworthy, and which were not.

They even came up with a color-coding scheme. This was focused primarily on the teachings of Jesus. Whatever was highlighted in a certain color, that could be understood as what Jesus the Revolutionary actually said. Then there was another color highlighted that meant that maybe what He said was true. Then there was a very large highlighted portion that meant He had not said these things.

I was growing in the faith, and I was reading the Scriptures and the Gospels, then I came up against this and wondered what was going on. So, I began to dig into some teaching about the historical nature of the faith, and I grabbed hold of what is written in this opening paragraph of the Gospel of Luke.

I read how in history men outside of the New Testament, outside of the Bible, wrote of their knowledge of this book. Justin Martyr in the Second Century talked about one of the travel companions of Paul who would compile the deluxe edition of the sayings of Jesus. This was in the generation of Christ and His followers.

Then there was Irenaeus who was another person who wrote outside the New Testament. He spoke of his knowledge of the Gospel of Luke, and that just goes to show that this book did not get created centuries later by some people who wanted to manipulate the masses. What is written here was in existence in the very generation of the time of Christ. There is evidence to show that it was there. We also read this passage and see how Luke clearly stated that he had spoken to the eyewitnesses.

Luke himself was not one of the twelve. He was like a second-generation believer so to speak, but he was with the disciples. He was with the people who knew Jesus. So, he was able to talk to them while they were still living. Luke said that what he was writing was based on eyewitness accounts.

Likewise, it says in the introduction to I John, that we saw Him with our own eyes. We touched Him with our hands. We heard His voice. This we proclaim to you about the Word of Life that has appeared. You can also read how in II Peter Chapter 1, Peter said *we did not follow cleverly invented myths when we told you about the power and the coming of our Lord and Savior. We saw His glory on the mountainside*, speaking of the Transfiguration.

We have these First Century sources speaking to us about the things that they saw. I read through all this, I took it in, and my heart rejoiced. I said in my heart, *what is this rubbish of the Jesus Seminar, and who needs them?* Who needs them when we have these voices speaking to us. Who needs to hear from these people thousands of years later, thousands of miles separated, when we have voices from the First Century speaking to us about the authenticity of what they saw and heard and what they passed on?

We read what Luke said here, and what we find is that he intended to write history. If we read what he said, we will see that this was a skilled man in research. He had the ability to write history. Here he asserted to you and me that he was writing history. It is real. Be certain. These are facts.

Brothers and sisters, what gracious facts that the Messiah came on a mission of mercy to seek and save that which was lost. To come and die on the cross, and to show His power over eternity by being raised on the third day. Take these things seriously. Take and receive them more than just facts of history, but also as the grace of God for sinners like you and me. Jesus is the one and only way that we can be saved and brought into the glory of eternal life and new life in Christ.

For your certainty in the faith, Luke speaks of the historical nature of Christianity. It is made up of a narrative of things that have been accomplished, speaking of that First Century generation, and things that have been accomplished among us.

Not only do we see here in this prologue the historical nature of Christianity, but, in addition to that, we see:

2. The Careful Research of the Author

Luke was telling us that he was one diligent student of these things. Like I mentioned, Luke was not one of the twelve disciples, so he was not journeying with Jesus during those three years of His ministry. But Luke came into relationship with those who did. He would have had a lot of access to the Apostle Paul, who was approached by the resurrected Jesus on the Damascus Road.

In addition to that, while in Jerusalem Luke would have spent time with John. He would have spent time with Peter. While in the Holy Land, you can see in his statement of purpose that Luke wanted to investigate these things. Looking at the extended version of the Christmas Story, I think it is very clear that Luke spent some time with Mary to hear about the things she treasured in her heart as she pondered who her Son was. He was the King who had been born.

This is where I am speculating a little bit, but based on what Luke said about digging deep into these things and tracking them—I wonder if Luke went and found Zacchaeus; little wee Zacchaeus, who climbed up in the tree. He was right there in the area. I think Luke talked with some of the people who were touched by His grace and love and miraculous power.

This passage is getting across to us the careful research of the author. Look at it especially in Verses 3 and 4. Going back a little, Luke said in Verse 1 that some had already sought to compile a narrative. By then the Gospel of Mark had been written. Maybe the Gospel of Matthew had been written. I go back and forth about what was written first, Matthew or Luke.

In addition to that, it would seem that based on this text, there were some who saw and heard Jesus. They did their best to get whatever scrap of papyrus they could find and jot it down. We don't have those now, but we have the fruit of them here in the Gospel of Luke, because Luke said in Verses 1 and 2:

¹...many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, ²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,

Now look at Luke's own careful research of these things in Verses 3 and 4:

³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke was saying to Theophilus, *I know that you don't have the opportunity to go to talk to all the eyewitnesses like I have had, but you can have certainty based on the research and the work that I have put in.* By extension, so can I and so can you. Luke would say the same thing to you. You can be certain. He would assure you of these things. We see that Luke was a man who took research seriously.

Back when we were in Pennsylvania, I had the privilege of staying a few nights at my Aunt Judy's house. I am fond of dad's little sister, and my Aunt Judy for so many reasons. One of the things that I really like about her is that she is kind of like the guardian of Saltzmann family heritage. There is so much history back there in the Oil City, Pennsylvania area.

I come from a family of beer brewers— The Saltzmann Brother's Beer Brewery. Dad has crates and I have a bottle with that emblem. You can go into antique stores back there and see Saltzmann Brother's Beer Brewery items. If you go back east and see a bottle like that, it is us!

Aunt Judy has some of our heirlooms in her house. She even has some of the photo albums and journals that were written by our family members over the past couple of centuries. That is so cool! Aunt Judy opened her computer to Ancestry.com, and there was a detailed family tree that blew my mind. I asked her to email that to me! It went back so many years, and is so amazing!

Dad and I were driving through the countryside, went down Miller Farm Road, and drove by this old country church that was out in the middle of farmland. The little tiny building had long since been abandoned. Dad told me that one of my ancestors had preached in that church. When we told Aunt Judy we went by the church, she pulled out a beautifully framed photograph of it.

You get the sense of Aunt Judy by these things. She is kind of the guardian of Saltzmann history. Luke, by the Spirit, was just like that. Look at what he said again in Verse 3:

³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past...

Among others like John, Peter, Mark, and Paul, Luke was one of the guardians of history. He was a researcher who followed these things with a detailed eye, wanting to make sure that we had the correct story about our precious Messiah. I love that man! What a gift. Luke tracked people down. He travelled, and got stories straight. He compiled it all for us in his book.

We see some things about Luke's character. Once again in Verse 3 it says

³it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past

He followed all things closely. That is the language of investigation. It kind of reminds me of a detective following the evidence to the origin in order to get the story straight. That is what Luke did.

But we see more about Luke's character in what is written here. We see that he was a thorough man. He was a high achiever. Do you see it there in Verse 3?

³...having followed all things closely for some time past

Luke wanted to get under every stone, and hear all that he could hear about Jesus, the Lord. We see that he was very thorough, and that is why in the Gospel of Luke, you have such a long book. There was so much, and he kept writing even when his hand was tired and hurting.

Luke included stories that are not found in the other three Gospels. There is some overlap. They were all a band of brothers, so some of the stories are the same. However, Luke has some things that are unique to Luke because he was so thorough. In the months ahead of us, we are going to get into the Christmas Story, and the shepherds, and the manger. Luke is the only one who gave us that information, because he probably went and talked to Mary about it.

There are parables that are only in the Gospel of Luke. Aren't you glad that we are going to get to study the Parable of the Good Samaritan? How about the Parable of the Prodigal Son? We are going to get to read through these things. Luke is the one who dug those things up, based on the people in the First Century who he talked to. There are so many details that Luke included that we look forward to reading.

In addition to that, we see that Luke was a careful man.

³...having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus

Luke wanted what he wrote to be clear. Generally, the Gospel of Luke goes in chronological order, but sometimes Luke also was willing to rearrange things topically, like putting certain parables together. He was aiming for an organized account that we can have confidence in.

Not only was Luke a thorough and careful man, he was also a very thoughtful man. I like how he said this in Verse 3. *It seemed good to me also. I have done all this research and know that others will have questions and concerns similar to mine. It seemed good to me. I better write all of it down, and make sure I don't just write things down I gathered from myself.*

Luke put in some serious effort. He did not have a typewriter. Sometimes my hand hurts even typing sermon manuscripts. For my sermon prep I first read through the text of Scripture. Then I have a legal pad handy, and I write out the things that come to my heart. Ideas are impressed deeper in my heart as I write them down.

After three or four pages on a note pad, my hand hurts. Luke wrote a very long book, being very thoughtful and careful. He was concerned and caring. He wanted the truth of Jesus to be passed on, and I am sure it was driven by a very powerful sense of God's calling upon his life.

In all this, we gain certainty of the faith seeing the careful research that the Holy Spirit inspired in the author. There is one last aspect of this that I want us to see. We can have confidence and certainty in the faith we have in Jesus based on:

3. The Significance of the Recipient: Gentile Inclusion

I have already talked about Theophilus a little bit. He is referred to *as most excellent Theophilus*. We don't know that much about him except for what is written here in Luke and in Acts.

However, it is evident that Theophilus was a Gentile man of means. He had a Gentile name, not a Jewish one. Luke used the language of *most excellent* three other times in his writings in Acts, and each time it was in reference to a high governing official. So, this was a phrase that was used of people of means and influence. Here in the Gospel of Luke, we have the story of the life of Christ written by a Gentile scholar for a Gentile politician, most likely Theophilus was that.

In that, we see that Jesus was pursuing the nations with His grace. Like Paul said in that text Martin Luther took so seriously— I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for all who believe, first for the Jew then also for the Gentile. Here we see some Gentile scholarly discussion among the Gentile nations.

We are reminded that Jesus came into the world to redeem and to forgive and to transform people from all nations, from the high and the low of society, from all kinds of strata of life.

When we were driving through Oklahoma I got kind of perturbed. Highway 40 turns into a giant toll road there. Every time you get off Highway 40, you have to pay another highway fee of one or two dollars to get back on. Every time we visited a rest stop or ate, we had to pay another toll. If you want to save money going through Oklahoma, you better not get off the highway very often.

I was grumbling about the situation. It really got me when we started approaching the border of Oklahoma, ready to depart the state. In addition to all the other toll stops, there was one final grand exit where you had to pay another toll fee. I could not believe

it, so I was muttering. Then my dad said, “Now, now, Jeff, remember, Jesus loves the tax collectors too.”

I cracked up and was encouraged, so I told that young toll booth lady, “I want you to know, that Jesus loves the tax collectors.” She said she thought Jesus loved everybody. I looked up on her white board, and I am pretty sure I identified Scripture— Let us love one another. I thought that was cool, and wondered if she were a sister.

Jesus loves the tax collectors. He ate dinner with people that were entrapped and willfully committing sin. He ate dinner with people who were stuck in self-righteous sin, or who were arrogant and looked down on others. He spent time with people that they might know the power of His Kingdom.

As we embark on this journey, the author of it wants you to know that it is real. Just take that in and receive it. It’s the truth! These are the facts. He rose on the third day, and He rose on the third day for real, after paying the price that no one else could pay for our sin.

I encourage you to believe in Jesus, because God wrote that introduction through Luke to let you know these are the facts. Be confident. Be encouraged. Brothers and sisters, be bold knowing that it is the real deal.

I think this series would rightly be called *Have Certainty*, because that is what Luke said in Verse 4:

⁴that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

Let’s pray.