



T R I N I T Y
B I B L E C H U R C H
D A L L A S

The Sermon

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Luke 1:1-4

"The Greatest Story Ever Written"

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TRANSCRIPT

Well, it's good to be back in God's will for my life. I've been out of God's will traveling and preaching, and you're now stuck with me for a long time, okay, so I will be here for quite some time. And I am so looking forward to what we have in store for us because today we are starting a brand new series in the gospel of Luke, and this is going to occupy us for quite some time. And you're going to fall in love with Luke. You're going to want to name your sons Luke. You're going to want to name your daughters Luke. This is just such an extraordinary book, and today we're going to inaugurate our study in it.

So, I want to begin by reading the passage that we're going to be looking at today. So, if you would take your Bible and turn with me to Luke chapter 1, and we're going to look at the first four verses today. The title of this message is "The Greatest Story Ever Written. The Greatest Story Ever Written," and it's exactly what this is. I'm going to read the first four verses and I want you to follow along with me in your Bible.

As Dr. Luke writes, he begins in verse 1, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 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 may

know the exact truth about the things you have been taught." So, this is the reading of God's word. Let us go to Him now in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father in heaven, we are so grateful to have this treasure preserved for us – the gospel of Luke. And there is so much for us to learn. There is so much for us to apply and to live. And so we come with expectant hearts and eager souls and a hunger for the truth, to know Christ in a far deeper way. And so I pray that You would leave an indelible imprint upon our spiritual lives as we begin now this new series in the gospel of Luke. Father, we pray this in the name that is above every name, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. [End]

With these verses I have just read, we begin what will be a monumental study of the gospel of Luke, and this will be Luke's account of the greatest story ever written because it concerns the life, the death, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; and no other story could even come close to comparing to this. This rises above the story of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. This rises above the story of David and Solomon. This is the pinnacle. This is the mountain peak. This is the account of God come in human flesh to live among us and to die for us. It involves the greatest person who ever lived – the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It involves the greatest mission that anyone has ever undertaken. He has come to seek and to save that which is lost. It involves the greatest birth that has ever occurred, because it was the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, as in the womb of Mary the Holy Spirit sired the humanity of Christ, and He became the God-man. This involves the greatest life ever lived, the only perfect life that there's ever been – the life of Jesus Christ. This describes the greatest event that has ever happened on planet earth or will ever happen on planet earth. It concerns the crucifixion of Jesus Christ as He died in the place of guilty sinners to secure their salvation. It details the greatest victory that has ever been won – the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, as He conquered death. This involves the greatest charge that has ever been given in the Great Commission, that we are to go into all the world and preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Everything about

the gospel of Luke is the greatest. And so we need to know something by way of introduction about "Who is Luke?"

Who's Luke? Well, Luke was a physician in the first century. He was beloved by Paul the apostle and was a close friend and travel companion of the apostle Paul. In fact, Luke accompanied Paul on his second and third missionary journeys and he stood with Paul through thick and thin. He was with Paul in the mob scene in Jerusalem. He was with Paul in his two years of imprisonment in Caesarea. He was with Paul as he set sail to Rome to stand trial before Caesar, and he was with Paul as he went through the shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea. He was with Paul when Paul was in prison for two years in Rome. And he was with Paul to the very end of his life. When Paul was put into Roman imprisonment for his second imprisonment, Luke was down in the Mamertine Prison with Paul, and he was with Paul until Paul was martyred.

So, Luke lived at Ground Zero. I mean, Luke lived right in the midst of what God was doing here upon the earth because he was shoulder to shoulder with the apostle Paul. In fact, Luke will go on to write not only this book, but also the book of Acts. And when you put the two together, Luke wrote more than one-fourth of the New Testament. He was mightily used by God, and he is the only Gentile writer in the New Testament. This is a remarkable, remarkable man.

And so, as we look at these first four verses, still just by way of introduction, I want you to know that these first four verses are what we call the prologue. The prologue is an introduction. It's a brief introduction that, really, sets the stage for the rest of the book. These four verses that we're going to look at today are one sentence. It's one beautifully-written, long sentence. It's written in exemplary Greek writing and with vocabulary, and it reveals to us, really, how well-educated and how well-read Luke was.

As I looked at every single word in this passage in the original Greek language that Luke wrote it, one thing that impressed me is there are numerous words in these four verses that are used no place else in the New

Testament. It just shows what a commanding vocabulary that this physician had as he writes these opening verses. He wasn't a fisherman like John, and he wasn't a tax collector like Matthew. He's a very bright, well-taught, well-read physician. And this prologue, really, is so different from the other prologues – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy – a long genealogy of Christ to show that He is the fulfillment of the messianic promises that Christ is.

Mark: there is no genealogy, there is no birth account. Mark begins with Jesus at age 30, out in the wilderness, and John the Baptist is preaching, and it just starts abruptly because Mark is written to show that Jesus is a servant, and a servant does not need to show his credentials, he just needs to do the work. And so it starts so – just abruptly.

And then the gospel of John does have a prologue. It's 18 verses. It is profound. It is deeply theological. It begins, John 1, verse 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and it comes all the way down, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us; we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." I mean, it just drips with theology. But as Luke begins his gospel, he writes it in a totally different fashion. He actually begins here with a formal introduction that follows, really, much the pattern of other historical writings at this time.

And so with that by way of introduction, let's now begin walking through these first four verses, one sentence that constitutes the prologue, the introduction to the gospel according to Luke. And the first thing that I want you to note is in verse 1, "the previous writers." Luke begins by telling us that he's not the first person to write an account of the life of Christ, that there were others who have already taken on this assignment, and he writes in verse 1, "Inasmuch as many" – please note the word 'many' – have undertaken to compile an account."

There have been many who have already written an account of the life of Christ. Now, we do not have any of those accounts because they were not

inspired by God, and they were not what we call canonical books, meaning included in the 27 books of the New Testament. But they, nevertheless, were out there. I do not believe it's referring to Matthew or to Mark. For one reason, he mentioned Theophilus by name at the end of verse 3; surely he would have mentioned Matthew and Mark by name if that had been the intent. No, these were just other observers of the life of Christ, and what they observed was so astonishing and amazing that people just began to write it down so that they could remember it, so that they could go back and revisit it.

And so, he says, "Many" - again, not a few, a great number - "have undertaken" - that means set their hand to, and it indicates that they're writing this down - "to compile an account." Now, the word "account" means a narrative, a historical account, a series of events. And so, many were writing down this unfolding journey of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he says, "It was of the things accomplished among us." "Things" refers to the events of the life of Christ, and "they were accomplished among us." This word "accomplished" means to be brought to fulfillment, the fulfillment of the divine plan. And what Luke is alluding to here is that the life of Christ was all in fulfillment of the will of the Father.

We know, from before the foundation of the world, that every step that Jesus took was an accomplishment of the eternal purpose and plan of God the Father. And he said, "it was all accomplished in our midst, right before us." And so the fact that many writers have made an attempt to record the life of Christ, this testifies to the enormous impact and influence that Jesus made upon His generation in the land of Israel that many would try to recompile what they have heard and seen.

Now just to remind you, the land of Israel is basically the size of Dallas-Fort Worth. It's not a huge continent. It's a very narrow strip of land. And we can understand how one extraordinary life lived by the Lord Jesus Christ could virtually throw a blanket over the entire land with a significant influence.

And so I was thinking about this this morning. I woke up very early this morning to review my notes and I thought, "I'm just going to trace this out for a moment. Like, so how many people were following Christ?" which would give some indication of why so many people are writing this down.

And so, in Matthew 4:25, we read, "Large crowds" - crowds in the plural; many, many crowds - "followed Him from Galilee" - that's a whole region - "and Decapolis" - that's ten cities that are kind of closely clustered together - "and Jerusalem" - that's the Holy City - "and Judea" - that's another region - "and from beyond the Jordan." That's east of the Jordan. I mean that almost covers north, south, east, and west. People are just flooding out of their homes and they are following the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are hanging on His words, and they are wanting to know, "What will He say next?"

In Matthew 5:1, we read, "When Jesus saw the crowds," - plural - "He went up on a mountain." In verse 2, "He opened His mouth and began to teach them." And then Matthew 8:1, "When Jesus came down from the mountain," - listen to this - "large crowds followed Him." It's not just that they were standing there listening to Him; when He took a step, they took a step. When He moved out to the next city, they moved out to the next city, and they're just trailing in behind Jesus wanting to hear the next lesson to see the next miracle: "What will He do next?"

In Matthew 9:33, "The crowds" - plural - "were amazed." And the word "amazed" means astonished, out of their mind. They don't even have a category for this, and were saying, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." There's no point of comparison to what He is doing, what He is saying.

In Matthew 12:23, "All the crowds were amazed." It's not just a few pockets of them were amazed, all the crowds, its says, were amazed. And in Matthew 13:2, "And large crowds gathered to Him." I mean, He was almost just like honey, and all the bees are just coming from everywhere and they're just surrounding the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Matthew 14:14, "When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd." Do you know why He saw a large crowd? Because He left from the other side of the Sea of Galilee, He sailed across, and the people ran around and they're waiting for Him when He gets off of the boat. And it says, "He saw a large crowd." Do you want to know how many? Five thousand men. When you add women and children, it would be a crowd of about twenty thousand people. They're all waiting for Him, and that's when He feeds the five thousand men, but also the women and children as well. Wherever He went the popularity just escalated.

Matthew 15:30, "And large crowds" - mega crowds - "came to Him."
Matthew 20:29, "And as they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him." And in Matthew 21:9, "The crowds were going ahead of Him, and others were following Him." Now just picture this. There's so many people following Jesus that the people who are wanting to get close, they can't draw close, so they have to run on ahead down the road and just be there waiting for when Jesus comes. And the huge crowd that's following Him, He's literally surrounded by people - people coming behind, people waiting on Him in the front. People are just pouring out of villages and towns to hear Him, and they said, "Never has a man spoken like this before."

In fact, once they sent some temple officials to go arrest Him, they come to arrest Him, they listen to Him, they go back emptyhanded. And they said, "Where is He?" and they said, "Never has a man spoken like this before." So, the immense affect that Jesus was having: Matthew 22:33, "The crowds were astonished at His teaching." Luke 14:25, "Now large crowds" - crowds means throngs of multitudes - "were going along with Him."

So, why do I read all these cross-references? If this many people, thousands and thousands, are following Christ, okay, I can understand that many were writing this down. He is the most electric figure in the form of a bondservant to ever come to the land of Israel, and people are hanging on His every word, and they are walking the dusty roads to follow Him to be connected with whatever it is He's going to say and whatever it is He's

going to do. So Luke acknowledges that there were many who have already written this down. We do not have what those writings are, but the fact remains: He was such a dominant public figure in His itinerant preaching ministry that there are already many men writing this down. He lived the greatest life that anyone could ever possibly live.

So this leads now, second, to "the personal witnesses." In verse 2, Luke now shifts from the writers who are writing this down to the eyewitnesses who are passing along verbally what they have seen and heard. And so as we come to verse 2, we read, continuation of the same sentence, "just as they were handed down to us by those who were from the beginning eyewitnesses and servants of the word."

So as it begins, "just as," Luke is saying that they now, with their verbal testimony and what we would call oral tradition, that's being passed down as well. And you can imagine this, because as they're following Christ, these eyewitnesses cannot keep this to themselves, even if they're not writing it down. He's the talk of the town. He's the talk of the region. He's the talk of the nation. "Everybody is talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. How could you not be talking about the Lord Jesus Christ?" They'd never seen anything like this. They've never heard anything like this.

And so, "just as they" - referring to these testimonies - "were handed down" - means delivered down - "to us" - to Luke - let me just put this footnote. Luke was not an eyewitness, and Luke was not in the crowd. So he is dependent upon his own personal research with all of these different writings, as well as he's dependent upon interviewing the eyewitnesses to write his account.

And so, "they were handed down to us by those" - "those" refer to the eyewitnesses - "who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word." Now, "the beginning" here refers to the beginning of Christ's public ministry. It refers to when He was baptized in the river Jordan and inaugurated His three years of public ministry. Previous to that, for 30 years Jesus had lived in obscurity. Jesus had lived outside of the spotlight.

He was in the shadows, in the corners. And then in the river Jordan, as He was baptized by John the Baptist in order to identify Himself with sinners that He has come to save and to fulfill all righteousness, this now is the beginning of His public ministry.

And think about all that Jesus accomplished; it was in only three years, such a short period of time. And what has been passed down, at the end of verse 2, says, "it came from eyewitnesses and servants of the word." That really refers to one group. There's one definite article in front of eyewitnesses that really describes both the eyewitnesses and the servants. So everyone who was an eyewitness is now a servant of the word. "The word" here refers not to the word of God, the written word of God, because the New Testament has not yet been written basically. James has been written. But what it's referring to, "word" here, is the gospel message, the gospel proclamation. And these who were eyewitnesses now are faithful to pass on what they heard Jesus teach in His teaching and preaching ministry. They were eyewitnesses. I mean, they saw it for themselves with their own eyeballs. They heard it with their own ears. This is a first source footnote.

I write biographies of great Christian men, the Reformers, Puritans, those in the Great Awakening, the pre-Reformers, all the way to Spurgeon and Lloyd-Jones, and I understand that when you do research, you have to go back to first source information. I can't quote someone who said something from someone, who said something from someone, who said something from someone. Too much is lost in the transition. I've got to search, I've got to dig. Sometimes I have to call libraries in England, have them go back – or in Europe and go back in the back rooms and scan old documents; and something's written in Middle English, and have it translated into Modern English, so that I can quote exactly what this man said, so that there's no mistake about the content and the accuracy and the precision of what I am writing down.

That's what Luke is saying: "I can't go on hearsay. I can't go on a second-hand source of information. There is too much room for mistake or error. I've got to talk to the people who were standing there that day, who heard it with their own ears and who saw it the miracle with their own eyes." And

then he will also consult what these other men have written. And plus the Holy Spirit of God is resting upon him and guiding him and directing him to thread the needle to record exactly what took place, where it happened, and what was said. And so these eyewitnesses that he mentions in verse 2 really set a good example for us, because this says all who were eyewitnesses were also therefore servants of the word, which means what they learned, they could not keep it to themselves, they could not hoard it, they could not be a spiritual cul-de-sac. What comes into them must go through them to the lives of others and to pass on what they have learned.

And this is an example for you me, because as we go through the gospel of Luke in these upcoming weeks and months, yes, even years, we're all responsible for what we're learning. And it's not intended just for us, it's intended for family members. It's intended for neighbors. It's intended for work associates. It's intended for people with whom we have a seemingly random encounter with that we can pass on the truth to them. So that's what's happening here. So they are an example for us. And I hope all that, of which you will be an eyewitness in a sense as we look into pages of scripture, that you too will be a servant of the word.

Now, this leads us to verse 3, and I want you to note "the project undertaken," because Luke now starts his personal account of the life of Christ or describing how he brought it about, and it will be based upon his own research, from what others have written, from what others have seen and heard and passed on to him, and he will bring it together with structure and order.

So, let's look at verse 3: "It seemed fitting for me as well." "Seemed fitting" means it seemed good. This seemed to be the right thing to do. "This seems to be a worthy task for me to undertake, to invest my time and my abilities, to pour myself into writing the gospel of Luke." So he says, "It seemed fitting for me as well," and when he says "as well" he's acknowledging that he is joining league with these others who have already attempted to write the life of Christ.

So, he's not undermining what they have done, he's not undercutting them, it's just what Luke will do will be far superior. He will fill in the gaps, and he will put the events into the right sequence and into the right order, and he will place the right emphasis on the truth and the doctrine where it needs to be. He will, really, weave together a tapestry of truth that will be beautiful and done with absolute precision and accuracy.

So, he says, "It seemed fitting for me as well," - just like these other writers have attempted - "having investigated, having investigated everything." He did such careful research reading, studying, interviewing, listening, thinking, writing, rearranging, lining up, that he used this intellect that God gave to him, being directed by the Spirit of God, to look into everything. The word "everything" means this will be a comprehensive account of the life of Christ.

Now, there's no way that anyone could write down everything that Jesus said or did, because at the end of John's gospel in John chapter 21, John acknowledged that "if everything that Jesus said and did was written down, all the books the world could not contain it." So Luke is going to have to be selective, and he will have to be strategic in what he writes down. He will have to go for the mountain peaks. And as Luke does this, he is putting his arms around the entire life account of Christ.

Now, it would be easier for you and me to put our arms around the Pacific Ocean than for us to put our arms around the entire life of Christ. I mean, it's the greatest story that's ever been lived, ever been told, ever been written. But he says, "I've investigated everything carefully." The word "carefully" means with diligence and with precision," and he says, "from the beginning." And here, "the beginning" refers to the beginning of Christ's life.

And so, this involves the entirety of Christ's life, we could say, from the womb to the tomb, the entirety. This includes what he's looked into: Christ's birth, His circumcision, His boyhood, which John doesn't even address basically; and Matthew, in only a passing way; and Mark doesn't even cover

the birth of Christ at all. So Luke is giving us invaluable information about the birth of Christ, the boyhood of Christ, His baptism, His temptation in the wilderness, His public ministry, His teaching, His preaching, His evangelizing, His death, His resurrection, His post-resurrection appearances, His ascension. Dr. Luke, of all four gospels, really is the most comprehensive in this sense. And that's why in Luke 1 and 2 there is such an emphasis on the birth of Christ, because he's presenting Christ as the perfect man, the Son of Man. And so he is taking it all in.

Now, John is the most theological; but Luke, the most comprehensive. So he then says in the middle of verse 3, he's investigated all this carefully, and from the beginning, he says, "to write it out for you." You see, when it's written, it's now preserved, and it's now precise. If it was only verbal and passed down, then by the time it would come to Theophilus, there have been so many runners in this relay race that the story is going to be unintentionally – there's going to be some balls dropped, and there's going to be some misstatements along the way. That's just the way it is with verbal.

But with writing, now it becomes very precise. Now, once it's written down, it can be read, it can be reread, it can be studied, it can be analyzed, it can be parsed, it can be defined, it can be compared, it can be revisited. Once it is written down, it's now preserved for the ages, and it is now ready to be carefully, carefully studied. And so that's what Luke is doing, "to write it out for you." Now, who is the "you"? Well, the "you" is at the end of verse 3. That's Theophilus. And we're going to talk about Theophilus here shortly.

But, "to write it out for you" – now watch this – "in consecutive order." That's very important. In a coherent, sequential, logical arrangement of the material, with everything in chronological order, everything in theological order, everything in a linear fashion, this is the mark of, really, a very effective writer and speaker. There are many men – not many – there are some men that I will go hear preach at a conference and they are known theologians, but they do not speak in a linear manner. They are circular, and you don't know whether they're coming or going. And it's hard to take notes, and it's hard to follow them, because they're chasing rabbits and

they're going in every direction. But with a linear speaker, he is so easy to follow and so easy to understand, because his message goes from one to two to three to four to five. It goes from A to B to C to D. That's why he's so easy for you to track with him.

And that's what Luke is saying here: "I am writing this out for you in consecutive order, so that you can follow the bouncing ball, so that you can follow the unfolding progression of the life of Christ"; otherwise, it would be almost like an omelet, just a bunch of information put into something, but it's not divided out, it's not in sequence, it's not in order. So as we go through the gospel of Luke, this is going to be so easy for us to track with him, because with his brilliant mind he has given careful thought to the unfolding sequence of the life of Christ.

So, Luke is highly qualified to write this account. He is a diligent researcher. He is a careful historian. In fact, many liberals have tried to attack the Bible by showing what they thought were historical errors in the Bible and say the Bible has errors. You know who they can't get around? Luke. He is a brilliant historian. And to this day 2,000 years later they still can't find any holes to punch into his accounts in the gospel of Luke and in the book of Acts, because he nailed it. He nailed it perfectly. And every archeological discovery is just one more affirmation Luke was right from the very beginning.

So he's a careful historian. He gives attention to details, to dates, to places, to people. He's a skilled wordsmith with an impressive command of language. He is a sound theologian. Think about being with Paul for two years in a prison and two years in a house and a long time on a ship. He's personally disciplined by the apostle Paul, arguably the greatest Christian who's ever lived. He has a wealth of truth. And he is a polished author who uses eloquent Greek and a very beautiful literary style as he writes. And so as Luke will write the gospel of Luke, he is writing in a literary form that we call a Gospel – capital G. When I say a Gospel, I'm not referring to the gospel message per se, I'm referring to the form that the gospel of Luke, the gospel of Mark, the gospel of Matthew, the gospel of John undertake.

So, what is a Gospel – capital G? Well, it's much like a biography, but it's not a biography. It's like a biography in that it is the story of the life of Christ, but it's much more than just a biography. It has the elements of a theology book because it contains the teachings of Christ, but it is not a theology. The best comparison that we can come up with is that it's like a portrait that reveals one man's attempt to paint a picture of the life, the death, the burial, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, there's different ways to paint someone's picture. I was just in the Philadelphia Museum of Art two weeks ago and spent hours in there just mesmerized by the genius of these artists. And the painting styles differ from one century to the next, to the next. And I love the Dutch masters and Rembrandt and Van Dyck and the way they can paint with the dark black backdrop, and then the face, and there's light on one side of the face. And that was really a reflection of the Reformation, that after darkness, light. And there's no sun, there's no window, there's just light spontaneously appearing out of thin air and shining on one side of the person's face. That's all a reflection of how they chose to paint someone right after the Reformation.

And then there's the French impressionists, and it's totally different style. It's not a detailed precision, it's a different brushstroke. And then I love the masters of the 18th and 19th century who have painted during the Federal period, and then the early American years. I don't need to take us through every room in the museum, but you could take the same person that you're painting a picture of and paint him in so many different ways.

And that's what's taking place with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Four paintings of the same person, the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew paints to show Jesus is the King of Israel. It's directed to a Jewish audience. And so He is painted with very Jewish colors and all of the Old Testament references. Mark has a whole different paintbrush and has a whole different set of colors with which he paints, and he paints Jesus not as the King, but as the Servant, the Servant of Jehovah. And the most important word in the gospel of Mark is the word "immediately," because that's how a servant works. He does his task immediately. He doesn't have to be told a second time to do

what His Father would tell Him to do. And Mark has written to the Romans, and the Roman's value is, "Can you do the job? Can you do the work?" They're project people.

Then we come to Luke. Luke has a whole different palette of colors, and he has a whole different set of paintbrushes, and he's not writing to the Romans or the Jews, he's writing to the Greeks. And the Greeks are philosophers, and the Greeks have this ideal of the perfect man. And so Luke paints for his audience that Jesus Christ is as the Son of Man, He is the perfect man, He is the perfect second Adam. And so he will come at it from that angle.

Then the gospel of John is yet a fourth different painting of the Master Himself, and what John does, he gets in the elevator, goes up to the penthouse, and he just paints Christ for the whole world, no matter who you are. And he paints Christ as the Son of God, eternal God in human flesh.

So, each of the four gospels have their unique portrait of Christ and their unique picture of Christ. And so a gospel really becomes a collage of multiple types of literature within one portrait. And with the gospel of Luke, there are narratives, which are stories. There are hymns. There are more hymns in the gospel of Luke than anyplace else. There is a genealogy. There are discourses, which are sermons. There are Old Testament quotations. There are historical markers. There are prophecies. There are Beatitudes. There are benedictions. There are conversion stories. There are heroic stories. There are tragedies. He is a genius at work, as this collage of images is all being pulled together to portray for us the glories of the Son of Man.

And so the result of Luke's effort, it's astonishing. More than 40 percent of the gospel of Luke is not found in the other three gospels, 40 percent. Seventeen parables in Luke's gospel are not found in the other three gospels. Seven miracles in Luke are not found in the other gospels. And Luke - and you've got to love this - Luke has an unusual interest in the

outcasts of society. He's a physician. He cares for people. He cares for everyday people like you and me.

And so when we read the gospel of Luke, the spotlight is on Zacchaeus the tax collector. He's public enemy number one, he's the outcast. The spotlight is on the thief on the cross. Matthew, Mark, and John don't talk about the thief on the cross, but that captures Luke's attention. The prodigal son, that's in Luke. The repentant publican, that's in Luke. The good Samaritan, that's in Luke. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews.

The one leper who came back and thanked Christ for healing him, that's in Luke. And on top of that, Luke has unusual interest in portraying women and portraying women in the best light. In the gospel of Luke we read about Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist. We read more about Mary the mother of Jesus. We read about Mary and Martha. We read about the women who financially underwrote the ministry of Jesus Christ.

You ever wonder how did they eat and how did they travel? There were some godly women who sacrificially gave – you can read about it in Luke 8:1-3 – and supported Jesus and the disciples. Well that's in Luke's gospel, because it fits the storyline. It fits into the portrait that Luke is painting. And so those who were on the outside are brought into the inside in Luke's gospel. And we would expect that, he's a physician. He cares for all kinds of people. Matthew is having to deal with the religious elite – the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees. Luke looks beyond them to real people who have real needs.

So, we're in for a treat of a lifetime, we really are. And I guess one more thing to tell you at this point is Luke and the book of Acts are really like Volume One and Volume Two. Same author, and it's just the continuation of the same story. Luke begins with the birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus. It ends with the ascension of Christ to heaven. Acts starts with not the birth of John and Jesus, but the birth of the church, and it extends all the way to Paul's first imprisonment in Rome. When you put the two together it covers almost seven decades of one continuous flow of thought.

And so he provides us, really, with the greatest historical account of the life of Christ and the continuing of the early church when you put these two together.

Okay, are you still with me? Okay, you've got to hang. You've got to hang tight with me here.

All right. So, number four, we've got to look at the end of verse 3. Number four, "the person addressed." At the end of verse 3 is something very interesting. He says at the end of verse 3, "most excellent Theophilus." Wow. Now what's this about?

Well, let's start with the title: "most excellent." That means most noble. It's a title of honor. It was used to address high-ranking officials in the Roman government. Luke will use this very same designation "most excellent" to refer to two governors in the book of Acts. He will use it to identify Felix in Acts 23 and Festus, Acts 24 and 26. And it really is a title that is reserved for Roman dignitaries, Roman political officials of a high standing, of an advanced status. And so, whoever Theophilus is, he is a Roman dignitary, a high-ranking official, and I'm going to suggest that he may even be serving in Caesar's household.

Now, Theophilus means friend of God. We have no personal information on him, all we know about him is that he is most excellent. He may have been even a patron of Luke to help underwrite all of his investigation and study. We don't know, but that's a possibility. And so as a man of considerable influence, Luke writes to him. Knowing how strategic Theophilus is, that to reach Theophilus with more gospel truth because of his high position, he may be able to disseminate this message far and wide. Because all roads lead to Rome, all roads lead from Rome as well. If you reach Rome, you reach the Empire.

And so, here's what's happened by way of background. Luke goes with Paul to Rome. He goes through the shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea. He

comes to Rome. Paul is in house arrest. Luke is in house arrest because Paul is in house arrest. They are rotating the Praetorian Guard through this house and they are chained to the apostle Paul for shifts, and they are rotating the Praetorian Guard. These are the elite of the elite of the elite guards. They're like the Navy Seals, and they are in Caesar's household, in his palace, and they are serving Caesar.

Paul could never into Caesar's house to preach the gospel, but he can lead all of these individual soldiers to Christ, and they can carry the gospel into Caesar's house. And it may well be that as they carry the gospel – which we know is true – into Caesar's house, it just may be that Theophilus is a high-ranking figure serving in the court of Caesar, and these Praetorian Guard are sharing the gospel with Theophilus and leading him to faith in Christ. And he now is saved, and he now is converted, and he has now an elementary understanding of the gospel, and he is on fire for the Lord, and he needs more truth about Jesus Christ. It just may well be that the reason Luke wrote this initially was to get the message into the inner circle of Caesar's household so that Theophilus can spread the message far and wide.

What a strategic use of Theophilus. I mean, only God could have set the scene for this and worked out the providence of all of this. It just reminds us of how far ahead God is of each one of our lives, and He's always positioning us to be able to spread the gospel further and wider in ways that we never knew in the past.

So, that's the person addressed. But as he addresses this to Theophilus, I want you to know your name's written in this as well, and it is addressed to you, my friend. And this is your book, this is your gospel, and we are to receive it as such.

Now finally, in verse 4, "the purpose announced." Luke now reveals why he addresses this to Theophilus. And in verse 4 he says, "so that," – that introduces a purpose, for the purpose of – "so that you" – Theophilus – "may know." Now I need to stop right there. This word "know" is an intensified compound word that means more than know. It means to deeply

know. It means to really know with better understanding and sharper discernment and deeper knowledge.

"I've written this down for you, Theophilus, so that you may know the exact truth, the precise truth, with accuracy and precision, because this is so important. You cannot afford to be vague about this, Theophilus. You can't be fuzzy about this, there's too much at stake. You've got to know the exact truth about the greatest story that has ever been told, every been lived, ever been written. You've got to know about Jesus Christ. There's nothing more important in the world for you to know than to know about Jesus Christ." And so that's why he writes this, so that this man of prominent standing, who would have strategic influence, can advance the gospel with clarity even further.

And he concludes. He says, "the exact truth about the things you have been taught." He already knows the truth. I think he's already come to faith in Jesus Christ by the way this is stated, and that he needs to go to the next level of spiritual maturity. And the only way you can get to the next level of spiritual maturity is to know more truth and to put the truth into your heart and into your life. You cannot grow spiritually without knowing the truth. Now, you can know the truth and it just stay in your head. But to grow, for your heart and for your life to grow spiritually, you must know and incorporate more of the truth. John 17:17, "Sanctify them by Your word; Your word is truth." We cannot grow spiritually apart from the truth.

So, this is Luke's beginning to the greatest story that's ever been written. You'll never hear a story that will supersede this story that we're about to learn and relearn.

I was converted to Christ when I was 17 years old, and I had lived a moral life. I was what you would call a straight arrow. I had never gotten into trouble. I played too many sports to have any energy left to get in trouble. But I was saved in the summer of my 17th year, and it brought about a dramatic change. It electrified my life. It turned me on. I couldn't get enough of it.

And I remember going to a Christian bookstore. I'd never even been in a Christian bookstore, but there was just this innate hunger to want to know more. And I saw a poster on the wall and it said at the top, "One Solitary Life," and I stood there and read it. And I didn't have much money, I'm 17 years old. My grandmother, my mother, and my aunt, though, were always giving me money. And so I bought that poster and I brought it home. And the wall in my bedroom - I loved my bedroom - it was just plastered with pictures of footballs games and baseball games, pennants of teams. That was my whole life. I took that poster and put it right over my bed, "One Solitary Life," and it was really representative of what God was doing in my life at that time, that now sports was decreasing and Christ was increasing.

And this is what that poster said: " He was born in an obscure village, a child of a peasant. He grew up in still another village where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty. Then for three years, He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never lived in a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.

"He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away; one of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies, and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While He was dying, His executioners gambled for His garments, the only property He had on earth. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

"Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race. I am well within the mark when I say that all the all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man on earth as much as this one solitary life."

I want to know this one solitary life deeper, better, closer. I want to follow this one solitary life. I want you to follow Christ. And in order for us to do that, we need to know Christ. We to know what He said, we need to know where He went, we need to know what He did, if we're going to follow Him. And so as we begin this study of the gospel of Luke, I invite you to join with me, as we go through this book and as we are on the heels of Christ, and draw as close to Him as we can possibly draw to Him, that we might become like Christ, and that we might be used by Christ here upon the earth. This is a golden opportunity for your spiritual life. This is a golden opportunity for my spiritual life. And I may never have an opportunity quite like this again, you may never have an opportunity quite like this again, for us to march through this book and be on the journey of the Lord Jesus Christ from His virgin birth to His ascension, back to the right hand of the Majesty on high. Let us pray.

[Prayer] Father in heaven, we are excited to begin now this journey. And I pray that it will greatly affect our lives, and that we will be transformed into the very image of Christ Himself. I pray that we would begin to think more like Christ, that we would begin to speak more like Christ, that we would begin to act and react more like Christ. May we serve more like Christ. So leave an indelible imprint upon us though the study of Luke. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.