

Part 1: A Story that Takes Us Places

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We are starting a new series here today at Sovereign Hope in the Gospel of Luke. We will actually ride this into and through our advent season here, taking a quick break during January and February, and picking it up again after that. This sermon series will certainly be the longest sermon series I will have ever preached through here at Sovereign Hope and this is for a number of key reasons.

First, there is perhaps no New Testament writer more influential than the man who we will soon meet, a man by the name of Luke. Luke's account of the gospel is not only the most robust account of the four gospels in the New Testament, but it is actually the largest book in the New Testament. But more than that, Luke is also the writer of the book of Acts. For Luke the two were meant to go together as one complete picture, something which we will circle back to in a bit.

When we think of New Testament authors and theologians we often think of the illustrious apostle Paul and his many letters, or perhaps John the Beloved who wrote not only a gospel, but three letters and the book of Revelation. But the single largest contributor to the New Testament, and subsequently much of our biblical theology, is Luke. Together the books of Luke and Acts make up over 25% of the whole New Testament.

This is a book, this is a man, whose writing has been preserved by the Holy Spirit to act as a glacier which slowly and subtly shapes the landscape and thoughts we have on Jesus, on God's promise and plan, and the church as a whole.

But secondly, this book is a perfect follow up to the book of Proverbs. Of all the gospels, this book includes the most comprehensive teachings of Jesus on a whole number of topics from marriage, to finances, to justice, eternity, parenting, and work. So as we concluded a book whose wisdom pointed us to Jesus Christ, here we have in the book of Luke the wisdom of Jesus Christ. Just as we will see John the Baptist prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus. Proverbs has in a sense prepared us for the wisdom of Jesus which touches every aspect of our lives.

Yet most importantly we need to study the book of Luke, because we need to encounter the message of Luke. Contained in these pages is not merely history, not merely ethics, and masterful language, but contained in these pages are the events of Jesus Christ who is the savior of the world.

In light of this, we are going to examine Luke's prologue this morning and we are going to brace ourselves for what Luke is trying to accomplish. We live in a world where motives are often concealed, but Luke leads with his motive in writing. He wants us to have certainty regarding all Jesus Christ has accomplished in his sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection.

So what we are going to do this morning is look at three points by way of introduction. First we are going to examine **Luke's Gospel**, then we are going to see **Luke's Methods**, and finally we are going to be introduced to **Luke's Hope**.

So let me read for us our passage today and then we will dive in: **Luke 1:1-7**.

Before we begin, we need to first define our terms today. This is our first point: **Luke's Gospel**.

You perhaps noticed that the word "gospel" didn't show up in our text today. That is true. Yet this book is called, "The gospel of Luke."

So what is the gospel? What do we mean when we call books, "gospels" and how does that relate to other things which we call, the "gospel." One author surveyed his diverse neighborhood in his metropolitan city once and simply asked his neighbors what the gospel was. Many people responded saying the gospel was a style of music, the truth that Jesus loves you, hope, or living a good life.

Now some of those things are included in the gospel, but none of those things on their own is the gospel.

The word gospel simply comes from the Greek root "evangelion." This word simply means: "good news." It's a word that was often used in military context to describe the one who brings the word of victory or surrender.

When it comes to this good news, there are often three ways the church speaks of it, all of which make up of the whole ecosystem of the gospel.

The gospel, the good news, is often presented **summary statement**. We have a summary statement we use often at our church: The gospel is the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God.

I heard another pastor summarize the gospel in this helpful way as well: The gospel is that God is our maker, and that sin is our failure, and that Jesus is our Savior, and that faith is our answer and that new life is our pleasure.

It's a summary of wonderful good news when we say "Jesus saves sinners," or that "Christ died for you."

But in order for us to have certainty on this summary statement, we need to also know the truth behind it. That is to say at some point the summary statement of good news is based off a **theological statement**. When we talk about the gospel it includes good news for us between other humans, good news between us and our world, but ultimately it is a theological statement regarding the good news between "theos," God, and those who would believe it.

This past week we celebrated Veterans Day. Many men and women have given their lives for you. So why is the good news of Jesus' death distinct from their deaths? In fact in the book of Luke, Jesus shares a story of many people claiming to have heard the summary of Jesus' good news but rebukes them for not knowing the role Jesus played as the center of that good news. You might have heard Jesus saves, but do you know how Jesus saves? Do you know the theology which says in our dark nights, and in our moments of weakness, in the pain of sorrow that we are indeed lost sinners loved and redeemed by the King of Kings?

An example of a theological statement of the gospel comes from Paul in **1 Corinthians 15:1-5**.

Here Paul is reminding his people not simply that the good news happened, but how it happened: Jesus died for sinners as the long prophesied Savior, and rose again and now lives eternally. The mechanism

which makes all the good news good is that Jesus really took the weight of our sin, and died the death of our sin, and rose to give us new life if we simply come to him in faith.

That's the gospel. There is only one gospel. There is only one good news and it is who Jesus is and what he did to call sinners to faith and repentance.

But, there are four books we call gospels? What are these? This is the final category of the gospel and that is ***the story of good news***. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are not four different pieces of good news, they are four different accounts in which the story of Jesus is shown to be good news.

If the statements are the headlines, these gospel accounts are the full articles that show the wonderful ways in which this good news is really good news.

But these stories cannot simply be heard. They must be responded to. The goal of Luke's account is that you would actually be taken up in this story.

What's really interesting is that the noun form of "evangelion" is never used in the book of Luke. But the verbal form of it is used more here than in any of the other gospels. Which means Luke doesn't simply want us to hear the theological answer of the gospel, he wants to pull us into the whole process of it. Luke wants us to see the gospel proclaimed in the story and he wants it to carry us somewhere.

This is news that takes us places.

In January of 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation which declared all slaves to be free. The event happened! They were free. But the problem was that most slaves weren't given the opportunity to hear what really happened. Especially in Texas which was the most geographically isolated region in the south.

It wasn't until two years later in 1865 that General Gordon Granger reached Galveston, Texas and declared to those who hadn't yet heard General Order Number 3: "The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with the proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free."

Consider the parallels this passage has with the message Jesus himself proclaims in **Luke 4:16-19**.

Now when those slaves heard General Order Number 3, what do you think they did with that news? Did they simply acknowledge its truthfulness? No. They lived their life in light of it.

How much more does this good news of the gospel call us to think and live differently? Here in the message of Jesus Christ is good news for all who are in bondage to sin, all who are enslaved to their passions, all who feel oppressed, neglected or empty. This message is not simply a story, it is a declaration of freedom to all who would hear it and believe it.

Luke wants to take us somewhere.

But how? This is where we look at **Luke's Methods**.

Read with me once more **Luke 1:1-4**.

So here we get a glimpse into a handful of things. We see who Luke is, what he is writing and two whom he is writing.

Luke does not appear to be an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. But what he is, is a historian. More than that we know that Luke followed the Apostle Paul for much of his ministry journeys. Multiple times in the book of Acts we encounter what are called the "we passages" where Luke includes himself in the missionary journeys and events of the early church.

Paul spoke of Luke and his primary occupation: **Colossians 4:14**.

So what we see here is that Luke who was a doctor, at some point set aside his office and followed Paul on the trail of gospel expansion. Here don't we see more proof that the gospel take us places? Luke was a physician, which like now, was a position of esteem. But this gospel which Jesus proclaims not only calls lowly fishermen to leave their nets, it calls even the elite to lay aside their practice and follow him.

We don't know if Luke stopped practicing medicine, but what we do know is that however he practiced it in the later portions of his life, he practiced it for the glory and expansion of the Kingdom of God.

As Luke followed Paul, he met other apostles, other eyewitnesses, and read these other accounts of the gospel he mentions in verse one. And in light of all of this what does he do? He sets to write an orderly account.

He did this by "following these events closely for some time past." Meaning he investigated these things. He cross checked his references. He did the work of a historian.

We are reading true events. True events which include miraculous things.

C.S. Lewis described something called chronological snobbery. That's the tendency we have to think ourselves to be smarter and more sophisticated than those who came before us.

There are all kinds of historians who wrote at the same time as Luke who are still accepted as credible and accurate contributors to history. But none of them have undergone such intense scrutiny as Luke the historian has.

We seem to adopt this fairy tale mindset that people were stupid back then. "Of course they believed in God and miracles, they didn't have the science we do now!"

But Luke here is a doctor and he did doctor things. He investigated. He checked his sources, and he assembled his accounts. I've included verses 5-7 in our introduction today only to prove the truthfulness of Luke's account. If his goal was to create a false account, it's a dangerous move to tie your story to names and dates that can easily be verified. But Luke did that. He spoke of a real period of time, "In the days of Herod," of real people who could be verified by their birthright, Zechariah and Elizabeth, and of real problems and burdens like childlessness.

Famously, one atheistic professor at both Cambridge and Oxford, by the name of William Ramsay, set out to disprove the Bible, or as he called it "the book of fables." For 25 years he studied and participated in archeological work in Asian and the Middle East, seeking to find the accounts of the Biblical authors to

be false. But remarkably every spade uncovered the truthfulness of the Biblical authors account and Ramsay himself became a Christian.

Luke, and the other gospel writers, go to show us that faith is not something we choose to believe regardless of what is true. Faith, biblical saving faith is something we believe because it is true and we can know it. How can we know it? Because Luke told his friend Theophilus about it, and God through the power of the Holy Spirit has preserved this account for us today.

Luke wrote this not for his own sake, but for the sake of what appears to be an educated Greek convert named Theophilus. His name means, "lover of God."

But why did Luke write this to Theophilus if Theophilus already knew the gospel?

Look at **Luke 1:4**.

Here we see our final point this morning: **Luke's Hope**.

Luke wrote so that Theophilus might have certainty regarding the things that were accomplished. What's lost in our English translation is that the "word" or "logos" that was ministered by the eyewitnesses back in verse two is the same word translated "things" in verse four.

Luke wrote so that we might have certainty regarding the word which we have been taught. That word was a word of the things accomplished back in verse one.

Luke is reminding us again that we might have hope that this "word" is not just a "word." But it is a word which accomplishes something. He wants us to know that what we are about to read is not a fairy tale, or a dead doctrine, it is something which does something.

Jesus accomplished things. The events of the gospel which we come to believe, accomplish something in us. This story which was shaping the landscape in Luke's day was shaping the world because it was accomplishing something drastic, real and transformative in the life of everyday people.

In 1931, Aldous Huxley penned a pessimistic and fictional look into the future in his book, "A Brave New World." While the book was science fiction, Huxley wrote out of the anxieties of his own age. World War I had ended just over a decade prior to the book. The stock market had crashed in 1929, the Great Depression was raging in the States and similar economic struggles surged in Britain. It would only be two short years before a young idealist named Adolf Hitler would become Chancellor of Germany.

The world was at an anxious and uncertain time.

So too sat Theophilus. Most scholars date the writing of the gospel of Luke in the early 60's AD. During this time most social weight and security came from either two places: ethnic identity or political strength.

But here Christianity was growing up in the midst of a growingly diverse church, with a dead king, and a growingly hostile culture.

Tension arose as the Christian's claimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promise to his people, and yet those Jews refused to accept these Gentile converts. As the Roman Empire oppressed Jerusalem, the King who was supposed to free them died, but then rose, but even after he rose he apparently ascended leaving his people to seemingly fend for themselves.

Persecution of this growingly diverse group of believers was increasing and would reach its first major conflict under Nero in 64 AD.

Here Luke wrote to a man who wrestled to find acceptance in the church as a Gentile, wrestled to find peace politically as he followed Jesus, and saw persecution mounting against his fellow Christians.

We might find ourselves in the midst of a similar sort of anxiety today.

Politically, culturally, religiously, the globe is changing. Christian practices which were at one point lauded are now being opposed. The days of comfortable Christianity is seemingly waning.

More than that, many other "Christian Churches" are claiming to serve the same Jesus without any of the baggage. There are churches who seek to flatten Jesus into a specific political party, or social identity. In order to find peace in power or among people, they mold Jesus into their own understanding, clinging to what they love, muting what they don't.

For those who submit themselves to Jesus, we often find ourselves opposed on both sides. We might wonder to ourselves, "Does this accomplish anything?" What's next?

But Luke writes of the events of Jesus to bring us peace in an age of uncertainty.

We might not know what comes next in our culture. But Luke writes to us so that we might see that the promise of God to bring salvation is not a dead promise. He writes so that while we look out and see kingdoms rising and falling we might take heart that the Kingdom of God is drawing closer and closer. We might not be able to look into our world and know what tomorrow looks like, but what Luke shows us in his books is that we can take confidence that we know exactly what the gospel will do.

The gospel is proof that God keeps his promises to real people, in real periods, even in the face of real problems. And Jesus is calling us to that good news: **Luke 4:43**.

To place our trust in this Jesus is to place our trust in the only thing of certainty in this world. This is so important because what we see time and time again in this book is that Jesus crushes the status quo.

Jesus loves those who seem unlovely. Jesus discomforts the comfortable. Jesus reaches the unreachable. Jesus speaks to the unspeakable, rebukes the wealthy, humbles the arrogant, and defeats the powerful.

Jesus, his message and his salvation, challenges us. But for those who have eyes to see, and hearts to believe, this Jesus really does save sinners. This Jesus gives us certainty, and this book is meant to bolster those who feel lost, lonely and weak.

There is a wonderful progression when we take the books of Luke and Acts together. There is the geographic movement which makes up the outline of Luke and that movement goes from the rural

places of Galilee and moves to the cultural center of Jerusalem. But there in Jerusalem it is not the Jewish King Herod, or the Roman official of Pontius Pilate who is of greatest influence, but the man who claimed to be King, but who was crucified as a criminal.

Then as Acts picks up, this message of a crucified and risen king moves geographically from Jerusalem to the world.

This movement of God's promise, this salvation and hope of God's people is what Luke wants to invite you into. The only way you can join is not simply to hear, but to participate by hearing the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God, and to believe that message in faith.