

THE REAL JESUS: WHO'S WHO

Week One | April 8, 2018 | Meet Luke (Part 1)

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Before your group meets next time, spend some time alone in God's Word reading through this week's text, Luke 1:1–4. Pray that God, through His Spirit, would bring to life the truth of this text and how it applies to your life.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God uniquely equips and positions us to leverage our gifts, experiences, and resources for the glory of Christ.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Luke wrote his gospel with particular attention to readers who struggle with doubt or skepticism about Jesus. Instead of disregarding their questions, his text honestly addresses them in a way that is credible, precise, and clear.

MEDITATE

"Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long" (Psalm 25:5).

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Q: *Have you ever wondered if the historical Jesus is the same Jesus portrayed in the gospels?*

Q: *What is the biggest question you have about Jesus's life?*

Every few years a new documentary is released on Jesus of Nazareth, exploring everything from newly unearthed artifacts to historical analysis on what the “real Jesus” was like. Beneath these enterprises is the suspicion that the Jesus we encounter in the Bible and the actual, historic Jesus may not be the same person. For example, National Geographic’s documentary on Jesus, entitled *Jesus Revealed*, opens with these lines:

“He is the son of Mary and Joseph, the founder of a prominent religion, and known to millions as the son of God. Jesus, the most famous man in the world. But two thousand years after his death many questions remain about his life. Where was he really born? Did he have a love life? Did he orchestrate his own crucifixion? Now, scientists are digging up new evidence, discovering details about how ancient people lived, and analyzing the Bible for clues. A startling new portrait is emerging of the man who changed the Western world. And it may not be what you think.”

Often, scientists and historians assume that modern tools and methodologies reveal who Jesus really was better than the text of the Bible could. However, many do not realize that the book of Luke is the most historically reliable account of the “real Jesus.” In fact, by modern historical and scientific standards of what makes an historical source reliable and trustworthy, the book of Luke passes with flying colors.

In this study, we will explore the book of Luke to encounter the “real Jesus.” We will examine His historical context, the life He lived, the people He knew, and the eyewitnesses to His ministry. We will see how Luke’s account has proven by modern scientific and historical standards to be the most reliable historical document on Jesus of Nazareth. But more than giving us interesting facts about Jesus and the world He lived in, Luke will also show us the significance of the historical information.

By studying Luke, we don’t just learn about a historic figure, we encounter the Son of God who really did enter into history and live at a particular point in time and space. He really did die a common criminal’s death, and He really was raised to life on the third day. Christianity is centered on the historic fact that there really is an empty tomb in the Middle East. We will see that history does not oppose our faith, but that our faith is historical. Christianity is all about encountering the “real Jesus” and being radically changed by that encounter.

Q: *What do you think would qualify someone to write an historically reliable document?*

Q: *Discuss the relationship between faith and history. Often we think the two go against each other. Why do you think that is? How do you think they are necessary for one another?*

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

As we begin the study, we will first meet the author of the gospel of Luke. We will see who Luke is, his qualifications for creating such an historically reliable document, and his purpose for writing.

1. LUKE'S RESUME

2. LUKE'S METHOD

3. LUKE'S PURPOSE

GOING DEEPER

+ *This next section will help show what God's Word says about this week's particular focus. Read through the Scripture passages and connect the text to this week's biblical truth.*

LUKE'S RESUME

▣ COLOSSIANS 4:14

Q: *What is Luke's profession according to Paul?*

Q: *How do you think this profession would have given him unique qualifications to write an historically reliable account of Jesus?*

Luke was a medical doctor, which means he was the only scientist among the gospel writers. His medical training and scientific skills gave him an eye for detail concerning circumstances and physical characteristics. In fact, unlike the other gospel writers, Luke uses specific medical terminology in his descriptions of Jesus' healings and even His crucifixion. His medical training also gave him a disposition for precision and accuracy. Much like Sherlock Holmes, Luke notices and finds specific physical clues important for his account. These qualities make him an excellent historian by modern standards. He sticks to the facts and includes context-specific details that are important for historical accuracy.

Luke was a scientist and a medical professional who did not see his faith standing in opposition to historical accuracy. Instead, he used his vocation as a way to live out his faith and strengthen the body of Christ. For example, Luke was the apostle Paul's personal physician. Paul had frequent need of medical care, because of both continuing infirmities and physical persecution. Luke served Paul and the Church by leveraging his profession for the gospel. Luke also employed the skills of his profession to help both seekers and Christians grow in faith by writing an account focused on the historical reliability of Jesus' life and ministry. Rather than ignoring historical inquiry or scientifically oriented questions, Luke takes them on, and he is the best man for the job. His education, experience, and training make him highly qualified for such an endeavor.

- ❏ *Consider your own vocation, experiences, and skills. How has God been faithful to use things you never expected to be particularly useful to allow you to uniquely build up the church and glorify Christ?*
- ❏ *How does Luke inspire you to be more intentional in leveraging your vocation, experiences, and skills for Christ?*
- ❏ *Now consider others in your group. Can you identify ways God has gifted them or particular experiences they have had that equip them to serve? If so, tell them! Often we struggle to see our own gifts or imagine how we can utilize what we have for the kingdom, and it is helpful to hear the encouragement from a brother or sister.*

LUKE'S METHOD

LUKE 1:1-3

Q: *What tools did Luke use to compile his account?*

Q: *What are the descriptive words Luke uses for the kind of account he desires to produce?*

Of all the gospel writers, Luke was the analytical one. His account is full of critical and logical analysis, much like investigative journalism. In the opening verses of the book, Luke says that there are many who have written accounts of Jesus' life and ministry. While these other accounts are profitable and truthful, he desires to create a narrative that bears certain characteristics.

To write this narrative, he lays out for his readers the methods and criteria he will use. First, while he himself was not an eyewitness of Jesus' life and ministry, he carefully interviewed eyewitnesses who saw everything from the beginning. This explains why Luke was able to include details that would have only been privately known by the eyewitnesses. For example, the gospel of Luke includes specific conversations between Mary and Martha. The only way Luke would have known these things is if he got his information directly from Mary and Martha. Luke also includes Mary's Magnificat, the song she sings when she is pregnant with Jesus, and specific details about Jesus as a young boy. The only way Luke would have known these things is if he spoke with Mary herself.

Luke also says that this work is not something he has quickly thrown together, but the product of a careful, slow process over a long period of time. He investigated, tested, interviewed, verified, confirmed, researched, and compiled until he was able to write an orderly, logical account. While not all of us are trained physicians with the skill and eye Luke had, his example should dispel the myth that being a Christian requires pitting your brain and your heart against each other. Christianity does not require us to check our brains at the door.

On the contrary, a Christ-centered life calls us to surrender every part of our being to Christ—our heart, our soul, our *mind*, and our strength. Instead of giving us implausible accounts or calling us to take blind leaps of faith, the Bible gives us an orderly account that shows us that our faith can be verified. Instead of saying facts aren't important, the gospel of Luke shows us that accuracy is important.

Q: *How can you tell a legend or a myth from a truthful, historical account?*

Q: *What about Luke's intentional approach to the truth of Christ most challenges you?*

Luke structures his account both chronologically and geographically. He begins before Jesus' birth through age twelve. He then discusses His public ministry, which included miracles, teaching about the kingdom of God, calling out the religious hypocrites, and training His disciples. Finally, Luke ends with Jesus' betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Geographically, Luke begins in Galilee, the area where Jesus was born and where His ministry began. Then, he shows how Jesus continues His ministry, slowly migrating to Jerusalem, where He would die on the cross. Luke gives many location markers, careful to situate the context of each event he writes about. By organizing the text chronologically and geographically, Luke roots Jesus in a specific point of time and space. The account of Jesus is not from a land far, far away at a time no one knows. Instead, He came to a particular location at a specific point in time. Jesus lived a real life just like you and me.

Q: *Can you think of someone who struggles to believe that Jesus the man is actually the Son of God? Can you think of someone who struggles to believe that the Son of God actually entered into a specific point in time and space? Which truth amazes you the most?*

Q: *How do you believe you can honor God with your mind? How can you do this in your daily life with the gifts and opportunities He has given you?*

LUKE'S PURPOSE

LUKE 1:4

Q: *What does Luke say is his goal?*

Q: *How does providing an orderly account give assurance that what we believe is true?*

In a world of skepticism and doubt, particularly about matters of faith, everyone wants to know, without a doubt, that what they believe is right. The modern era teaches us that true knowledge is the opposite of faith, because knowledge is objective and verifiable while faith is subjective and unprovable. Therefore, certainty and faith become pitted against each other. Many people say they have faith, but they simply mean something that makes them feel good regardless of whether it's true or not. Other people refuse to have faith because they believe it is, by definition, irrational and unreal.

Luke refutes this view of faith and knowledge as mutually exclusive. Instead, he promotes the concept of verifiable faith. In verse 4, he says his purpose for writing is to provide assurance for the things we have been taught. He does not want us to naively accept whatever someone tells us and call that faith. On the other hand, he also does not want us to reject what we have been taught. He wants to help us verify what we have been taught. He wants to show us we can test what we are told and invites us to join him on a journey to meet the “real Jesus.”

Luke has a heart for the skeptics, the doubters, and the Christians who are struggling in their faith. For some people, faith seems to come easily. For others, it doesn't. Instead of running away from our doubt, Luke encourages us to bring it to the text. Instead of running away from doubters, Luke teaches us how to lovingly engage them by taking their questions seriously. He doesn't want us to believe something without being assured of it, and he provides his narrative to help us become more firmly rooted in our faith. As Thabiti Anyabwile says, “The only things worth believing are true things. Religions can be very beautiful and contain a lot of good. But if they are false, then they are futile. A person's faith is only as good as the object they rest their faith on. We can be confident in what we believe only if what we believe is true.” Luke invites us to investigate the truthfulness of Christianity and to get to know the *real* Jesus.

Q: *Do you think we can we have full assurance of the truth of Christianity or is faith, by definition, something that you believe without any kind of rational support?*

- Q: *How does a lack of assurance of our faith affect us?*
- Q: *What is the difference between assurance and arrogance? Is it possible to have assurance of the truthfulness of Christianity without falling into pride or self-righteousness? If so, how?*

NEXT STEPS

+ *Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.*

- Q: *Luke was perfectly positioned and equipped to appeal to skeptics and doubters who needed assurances of the truthfulness of Christianity. What particular audience has God positioned and equipped you to minister to?*
- Q: *Can you think of someone who struggles with assurance when it comes to the claims of Christianity? How has Luke inspired you to walk alongside them?*
- Q: *Can you think of a time when you experienced a lack of assurance giving way to assurance? How did it change you?*
- Q: *While it is virtuous to verify things before blindly believing them, discuss how a committed posture of skepticism and doubt is ultimately rooted in pride. What is the best way to overcome that pride?*

PRAY

+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

- God, thank You that You care about our questions. You know we are made of dust and we are fallible. Yet instead of telling us to blindly believe things we don't understand, You graciously reveal truth to us.
- Father, forgive me of pride that either feeds my skepticism or makes me feel better than others because I have all the right answers.
- Holy Spirit, show me how I can most glorify Christ in my life through the gifts, experiences, and resources You have given me. Help me remember that nothing is wasted, and give me creativity as I consider how I can best serve the church and glorify Christ.
- Jesus, thank You for Your Word. Thank You that we can bring our brains, our hearts, and our deepest questions to it, and that we will never be disappointed when we do.

**All exegetical content and commentary resourcing for this lesson was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes, the Christ Centered Exposition (Luke), and The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament.*

