

# THE REAL JESUS: WHO'S WHO

Week Two | April 15, 2018 | Meet Luke [Part 2]

## 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 and 1 Corinthians 15:14-18. 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

Both theological depth and historical accuracy are key to knowing the "real Jesus."

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

To know the "real Jesus," you have to know more than just basic facts about Him. You must know the significance of those facts and how they point to the person. Luke uses both historical accuracy and theological depth to help us genuinely encounter Jesus.

### MEDITATE

*"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).*

## 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:** *When you want to get to know someone, what do you do?*

**Q:** *How important are knowing facts about a person? In what ways is just knowing the facts not enough?*

If you have a Facebook account, have you ever wondered how Facebook selects your suggested friends? Even without friends in common, how did the person you dated in high school show up? How did the person you happened to run into yesterday make it on the list? You start to wonder how well Facebook knows you! It's actually a mystery how Facebook makes such spot-on suggestions and connects people who haven't been in contact for years. Most people think it has something to do with a user's broader friend network or contacts they have on their phone or other apps. Regardless, it's clear that the social media machines have access to a lot of facts about people, gathered not just from information users provide, but also from browsing patterns and friend circles. Though search engines may be able to "profile" you, they obviously don't know the real you.

It's possible to know a lot of correct facts about someone—to memorize their profile—but that doesn't mean you really know them. You can know their birthday, their favorite food, their educational history, hobbies, and even the books and music they like, but fail to be in a relationship with the person. That's because there is more to people than facts. At the same time, it's easy to question if someone really knows you if they don't know basic facts about you. Facts are important because they help shape who we are as people. But, on the other hand, people are more than a conglomeration of facts.

When people want to know the "real Jesus," sometimes they gravitate to one extreme or the other. Either they think they can know Jesus by knowing as many things about Him as possible, or they think they can somehow have an authentic relationship with Him without knowing anything factual about Him at all. In his account of Jesus' life and ministry, Luke shows that coming to know Jesus requires both knowing the facts and encountering the person. Jesus is both a historical man and the living, ever-present God. As hard as it is to wrap our minds around, the mystery of the God-man is at the heart of Christianity. Many religions have gods, and many have men, but only Christianity has a God-man. And Luke invites us to encounter Him.

**Q:** *If knowing the real Jesus includes, but is not limited to, knowing facts about Him, how can the gospel of Luke give us what documentaries on Jesus can't?*

**Q:** *When you have an evangelistic conversation with an unbeliever, what do you usually argue is the most compelling part of Christianity, historical proofs or a personal relationship? How does the concept of “verified faith” help you bring those two together?*

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Last week we began our introduction to the book of Luke by looking at who Luke was and how his experiences and gifts uniquely prepared him to write a text that would strengthen the faith of those who lack assurance. This week we will look at the way Luke reveals to us the “real Jesus.” Unlike documentaries on Jesus of Nazareth, which only give you a profile made of historical facts, the book of Luke combines historical accuracy with theological depth. History and theology together show us the significance of the facts and allow us to encounter Jesus not as a profile, but as a person.

### 1. OUR FACTS MUST BE TRUE

### 2. OUR FACTS MUST BE INTERPRETED BY THE TRUTH

## 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.*

## OUR FACTS MUST BE TRUE

### ▣ LUKE 1:1–4 & 1 CORINTHIANS 15:14–18

**Q:** *Do you know anyone who believes Christianity is a made-up religion created by people who embellished the life of the historical Jesus, making Him something He never actually claimed to be?*

**Q:** *According to 1 Corinthians 15:14-18, why are historical facts so important?*

The Christian faith is not simply a set of ideas or a moral path; it is historically rooted. There are actual events in history that make Christianity what it is. The Bible tells a story, a grand narrative in which a good God creates a world that perfectly reflects His glory. And in it He places His image bearers to worship Him and care for the world. But these image bearers decided they didn't want to be creatures whose knowledge and abilities were limited. Instead of being dependent on their Creator, they wanted to be the Creator. By directly disobeying God's commands, they sought to usurp the Creator God and place themselves on the throne of the universe instead. They committed high treason against the King. Such an act of rebellion deserves death.

Their disobedience also ushered in a new reality that was not present before, sin and death. Both God's good creation and His image bearers became broken. But immediately after the fall, the Creator God made a promise. What sin and death have broken and corrupted, God Himself will redeem. He declared that He had a plan of redemption, and it centered on a Promised One who would defeat sin and death and restore the world and the image bearers to God's original design.

The Old Testament is all about waiting for this Promised One to come and trusting that God will be faithful to keep His Word. In the New Testament, the Promised One finally comes. The Son of God Himself takes on flesh and enters into history. His name is Jesus, and He will save the people from their sins. He is the God-man. Because He is fully God and fully human, He is the perfect mediator between fallen mankind and a perfectly holy God.

Central to God's plan of redemption is not only Jesus' coming, but His death and, most importantly, His resurrection. Jesus had to pay the penalty for our sins by dying in our place. If Jesus did not die in our place, then the payment for our sin is still on our shoulders. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we are still under the power of death. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "[If] Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." If Jesus was not crucified, buried in a tomb, and bodily raised from the dead, we are in trouble. Not only do we believe something that isn't true, but we are still dead in our sins. Eternity hangs in the balance of several particular historical events. The truthfulness of these events doesn't just impact the things we believe, they impact the state of our souls, our eternal destiny, and our relationship with our Creator.

In verse 15, Paul gives another reason the truthfulness of historical facts is important for Christianity. If Christ really didn't rise from the dead, then not only is our faith in vain, but "we are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise if it is true that the dead are not

raised.” If we claim God raised Jesus from the dead, it better be true. Otherwise, we are lying about God, saying He did something He did not do. We are fabricating a story or creating a conspiracy theory rather than speaking good news. For Christians, true facts are very important.

The historicity of Christianity is one of the many ways it is unique among all other religions. While there is enough external historical evidence for Christianity to produce hundreds of documentaries and archeological projects tied to its key claims, there is very little external historical evidence for the claims of other religions. For example, Islam makes the claim that Muhammad was miraculously transported to Jerusalem and then to heaven. For that reason, Muslims claim the Dome of the Rock as a holy site. But there is no historical evidence that Muhammad was ever in Jerusalem at all. Instead of requiring us to fabricate, ignore, or not look too closely at history, Christianity invites us to investigate it and see that our faith is rooted in events that actually happened.

That is why Luke is not afraid to give specific dates, names, and places in his account. His facts are verifiable by external evidence. As Thabiti Anyabwile says, “Time and again those who have examined Luke for historical accuracy have found the text completely reliable. It is as if God not only put his word on paper, he also carved it into stones. For our certainty, God left us a record inside and outside the Bible.” Christians need not fear that the facts of history could one day prove Christianity is one big hoax. Luke shows us that facts are our friends, not our enemies. History has proven time and again to be a voice of witness to the truthfulness of Christianity. Facts not only tell us what we believe is right, but they are proof God has indeed kept the promise He made right after the fall. He has provided a Savior to redeem everything sin has broken.

- ❓: *How does knowing Christianity is historically rooted increase your faith?*
- ❓: *How does Luke’s practice of carefully handling the facts inspire you as you read the Bible?*
- ❓: *Consider other religions and systems of belief. What kind of historical facts are they rooted in, and are those claims externally verifiable?*

# OUR FACTS MUST BE INTERPRETED BY THE TRUTH

## LUKE 1:1-4 & 1 CORINTHIANS 15:14-18

Q: *If you were given a list of facts about a person, how would you go about determining which facts are relevant and which are not?*

Q: *What do you use to help you make sense of the facts of your life [the situations you find yourself in, things that have happened to you, etc.]?*

Documentaries and historical studies may be able to give us facts about Jesus of Nazareth, but they cannot help us know the significance of His life, and they certainly cannot help us genuinely encounter *Him*. According to Luke, if we want to know the “real Jesus,” we must see the verifiable evidence about Him and understand the meaning of that evidence. We have to do more than create a list of factoids; we have to understand why His time on earth changed the course of history. If we don’t see the theological significance of the historicity of Jesus, we will see nothing more special about Him than any other great person. Unless we see how history fits into God’s plan of redemption, we will never be able to move from acquiring information about a man who lived two thousand years ago to worshipping Him as our personal Lord and Savior. It takes both history and theology for us to encounter the true Jesus.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. So what? Lots of babies are born in Bethlehem. Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph. So what? Mary and Joseph had other kids as well. Jesus had twelve disciples. So what? Lots of people have friends and mentors. Jesus miraculously healed specific people. So what? Plenty of people have made up legends and fairy tales. Jesus died on a cross on Golgotha. So what? Two other people died right beside Him that day.

When you look at the “cold facts” about Jesus’ life, it’s hard to see how He single-handedly altered the course of history. “What is the big deal about Jesus of Nazareth?” the documentaries ask.

We see the big deal about Jesus when historical facts collide with theological truth. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph, a direct fulfillment of dozens of prophecies made and recorded centuries before it happened. Jesus did have twelve disciples, which would have reminded the people of the twelve tribes of Israel, showing that, through Christ, God would fulfill His promise to redeem. The disciples were each used to spread the good news of the gospel to all the nations so that the whole earth might see the glory of God and so representatives of every tribe, tongue, and nation will worship around the throne of God. Jesus did heal many people as a sign that He was the one to reverse the curse of sin and death.

His coming is the inauguration of the kingdom, where God will restore the whole earth to the way it was before sin entered into it. Jesus did die on a cross between two criminals on Golgotha. But His death was significant because it was the ultimate sacrifice for sin. Because He was the only spotless lamb, His death atoned for all the sin that had ever been committed or will be committed. God poured out His anger against sin on Jesus, and He took our punishment. His death was no ordinary death, it had supernatural significance.

Finally, the historical fact of utmost significance is His resurrection. Tim Keller says, “If Jesus rose from the dead, then you have to accept all that he said; if he didn’t rise from the dead, then why worry about any of what he said?” If Jesus rose from the dead, then He must be God, and He must have defeated our greatest enemy once and for all. It is undeniable that the resurrection is laden with theological significance. That’s why everyone knows that if Jesus rose from the dead, then He truly is God and everything He says is true. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then He is not God and nothing He says is true. The resurrection cannot be just another impersonal “factoid” about Jesus, it has undeniable spiritual significance.

In the “real Jesus,” theology and history meet. To really know Him means to see the facts of His life through the lens of theological truth. When we do, Jesus comes to life for us. We begin to see Him as more than a man who lived two thousand years ago, but as our Redeemer.

- 🕒: *Think about other facts of Jesus’ life. What kind of theological significance do they have? How do those facts become more meaningful when you consider them in light of God’s plan of redemption?*
- 🕒: *How do you think eyewitness accounts provide a perfect blend of history and theology?*
- 🕒: *How does knowledge of information become personal faith?*

## 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: *How does Luke's example inspire the way you talk about Jesus with others?*
- Q: *How does Luke's example change or enrich your understanding of the importance of both facts and theology?*
- Q: *Discuss how you should interpret the "facts" of your life theologically. How would this help you honor God better and see Christ more clearly in your everyday life?*
- Q: *We all need to encounter "the real Jesus" each day. Discuss how you can do that this week.*

## PRAY

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

- Father, thank You for fulfilling Your promise to reverse the curse and bring redemption to what sin and death have broken. Fill my heart with joy anew for the glorious work You have done.
- Holy Spirit, as I read the Word this week, I pray You will reveal more of Christ to me. Allow me to encounter Him in a fresh way and know Him more deeply.
- Jesus, thank You for dying a real death on a real cross for me and really paying the penalty of my sins. Thank You that You rose again and that I am now no longer a slave of sin and death, but a child of God.

## COMMENTARY

**1 CORINTHIANS 15:12–24** In the context of verses 14–18, Paul is discussing the assurance believers can have that they will rise from the dead as well and spend eternity with God because Christ rose from the dead. They can trust



God has the power to raise the dead and that Christ's resurrection secures His promise that He will do so for us. Our future hope and comfort in the present is secured in the historical fact of Christ's death and resurrection.

**1 CORINTHIANS 15:12** At the time, some Corinthians denied that Jesus rose from the dead, though they thought His followers would be raised from the dead and have eternal life. This would be the modern equivalent of those who don't really believe Jesus was bodily raised from the dead, but think people who follow Him are good people who will go to heaven. Paul says there is an inextricable connection between Jesus' bodily resurrection and the promise of our bodily resurrection. One cannot exist without the other.

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

