

MONDAY, 9/16

Read all of Luke.

Ok, I'm willing to bet the scripture reading threw you today. *All of Luke, are you serious?* I am, and let me explain.

When we begin a new series, I always challenge you to read the book we will be studying in its entirety in one sitting. I'm asking you to do the same with Luke's gospel.

I realize that reading a letter like Philippians is a much easier task. It's only 4 chapters, whereas Luke is 24 chapters long. It took me about two hours, so it is a lot to ask. Of course, you can always listen to it as well. I'm asking you to do so because I believe you will see things in Luke's gospel that you will otherwise miss. The books of the Bible were written as letters or narratives to be read together rather than broken up in small increments. I know it's a lot to ask to read all of Luke, but it's worth it. Trust me.

If you don't have time today, I get it. Try to carve out the time this week. As those in Christ, we know God's Word plays an essential role in transformation. It has the power to shape our minds as well as our hearts. We want to give the Word a place in our lives to bless and challenge us.

I hope you'll take me up on my challenge. I'm confident you will emerge even more excited for this series than you were before you read it.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, as we search the Word, open our minds, our eyes, and our hearts that we may encounter You in new and fresh ways. We want to know You. We seek to give You the platform to teach, bless, encourage, and challenge us. We are clay in Your hands. Amen."

TUESDAY, 9/17

Read Luke 1:1-2.

"*Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word.*"

This week we begin our new series on the Gospel of Luke. We will dig into the first four verses of Luke's introduction to his account of Jesus' story.

Luke is intentional about how he writes his prologue. It reads quite differently from Matthew and for good reason. Matthew was intended for a Jewish audience. Luke, on the other hand, was written to take Jesus' story to the Gentiles. As such, he writes a Greek-style introduction. The reasons and arguments he presents are to underscore the reliability and historicity of his account. Luke wants his audience to trust that he has used every possible means to make an accurate account of Jesus' story.

Luke introduces the gospel by telling the recipient Theophilus, whom we'll get to later this week, that "many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us". What is Luke talking about?

After Jesus' ascension, the apostles began to preach and tell Jesus' story. In the days of the early church, they relied heavily upon the testimony of the apostles. They didn't make a

concerted effort to record Jesus' teachings and stories in an orderly account. After all, they had the apostles who were with Him.

A few years later, after some of the apostles were martyred, it became evident that their stories of Jesus and His teachings needed to be recorded. The four gospels are the result of those efforts. Scholars believe there might be other reliable accounts out there that have either not been found or were lost to time.

It is encouraging to us to hear that so many made the effort to write down Jesus' story. The texts of most other religions have a single author. The fact that we have four reliable accounts that bear remarkable similarities regarding Jesus' identity, activity, and teachings should give us confidence in their reliability.

Praying Together:

"Lord, thank You for preserving Your story so that we can hear it and be changed by it. I trust the accounts of Your life and seek to be a student of Your teachings and way of life. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 9/18

Read Luke 1:1-2.

"Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things *that have been fulfilled among us*, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word."

You likely noticed that we read the same verse today as we did yesterday. We're delving into verses 1-4 this week, so we'll spend a few days on each verse. Please note the italicized portion of the verse, as that will be our focus for the day.

Luke chose to write down what he calls "the things that have been fulfilled among us". What has been fulfilled among them? In short, the hopes of the people for salvation. Since the fall of humankind, all creation has been suffering the effects of sin. All creation was intended to experience harmony under God's care and reign. Humankind was the crown of creation and created to be stewards alongside God for the care of creation.

When we sinned against God, all creation felt the sting. We see the pain and disharmony play out every day. We see instability in the created order. The effect of sin takes many forms in us. It looks like violence, injustice, hatred, unforgiveness, lust for power, manipulation; on and on the list goes. Humanity turned not only against God, but also against one another.

Ever since the fall, there has been a longing within humanity for restoration. We have a collective hope that the daily struggles we feel and the pain we see all around us won't always be our story.

The scriptures tell the story of the hopes of the people that God will someday right what we have made wrong. There are signs of hope throughout the Old Testament and promises that are made, but it isn't until we meet Jesus that we find One who had the power and authority to fulfill our highest hopes.

By dying our death, Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for our sin. He took the judgment we deserved upon Himself and chose to extend salvation to all who would come to Him, reversing the curse of the fall. By His resurrection, we can now enter into a new life through Him and with Him. The beauty of this life is available for us to enjoy here and now.

Jesus is the fulfillment of our hopes. He is the One who makes right the wrongs we committed. Luke is eager to tell us His story.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, You are the fulfillment of all our hopes. You have done everything to make us right with God and to usher us into a new kind of existence with You. Help us to live our new lives with You. Walk with us. Teach us. Heal us. Free us to serve with You in Your redemptive purposes in the world. Amen.”

THURSDAY, 9/19

Read Luke 1:1-2.

“Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, *just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word.*”

One question we have not considered yet is this: just who is Luke?

This is a difficult question to answer. We know Luke was a companion of Paul. He traveled with Paul on some of his journeys. It seems that Luke was not present with Jesus during His earthly life and ministry. Much of Luke is written from the perspective of an outsider. This changes with the book of Acts, which Luke wrote as well. In Acts, Luke writes as someone in the thick of the action of the early church. It is most likely that Luke was an early convert, perhaps at Pentecost, or he might have encountered the risen Jesus before He ascended to heaven.

This explains why Luke was so diligent in searching out the details of Jesus' story. He interviewed those who were eyewitnesses to Jesus' ministry and teachings. These eyewitnesses likely consisted of the apostles and the dozens of other disciples who followed Jesus around Galilee, as well as those who saw Him after His resurrection. Like a well-trained lawyer or journalist, he pursued the facts to better understand exactly who Jesus really was.

John adds a similar introduction to his letter 1 John. In 1 John 1:3, he writes, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may also have fellowship with us.” John is saying, “I saw Jesus. I heard Him preach and teach. You can trust what I tell you.” It's important we hear Luke and John here. We have every reason to have confidence in what they tell us about Jesus.

Praying Together:

“Father, how grateful we are for the testimonies of those who saw Jesus and sat with Jesus. We are thankful that His teachings and life have been preserved for us to study and learn so that we too may know Him. Amen.”

FRIDAY, 9/20

Read Luke 1:3.

“*With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.*”

Luke tells us that he has “carefully investigated” Jesus' story before putting pen to paper. Let's look at what Luke means when he says, “carefully investigated”.

The word "investigate" means to "follow up on a thing that you have in mind to attain knowledge of it". It also means to "examine thoroughly". This word was often used of lawyers seeking to understand the events surrounding a case. It could also be used of seekers wanting to investigate truth.

It tells us that Luke was drawn to the person of Jesus and became infatuated with the idea of fully understanding His story. He felt the call to capture all of His story, especially the parts that had not been told as clearly. This makes sense given Luke gives us far more detail about Jesus' birth and childhood than any other gospel writer. Luke also goes on to write Acts because he felt Jesus' story was incomplete if his readers didn't also tell how Jesus' mission was passed on to the church, Jesus' body.

The word "carefully" speaks to precision and accuracy. It also carries the idea of diligence on the part of the one researching. Luke wants us to know that his research was done with the utmost integrity. This is Jesus' story.

It's important we hear what Luke is saying. We have every reason to have confidence in what he tells us about Jesus. To further corroborate Luke's claims, we have the gospels of Matthew and Mark, which affirm Luke's order of events, main activities, and teachings of Jesus. These three gospels are called the Synoptic Gospels, meaning "a common way of seeing". They all tell the same story in the same manner with the same material.

So, what about John, you may ask? Well, John is John. John writes from the perspective of helping us see who Jesus is rather than simply recording an accurate account of His life. John has a message for us rather than a play-by-play of Jesus' life. That is why his order is sometimes different than the other gospel writers, even though many of the events and teachings are similar.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, fill my heart with a desire to know You through the gift of this gospel. Help me take it to heart and allow it to inform my thoughts and beliefs. Let it change my heart and influence my life in the ways You intend it to. Amen."

SATURDAY, 9/21

Read Luke 1:3.

"With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, *I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.*"

So, for whom did Luke write this gospel?

The answer, given in his introduction, is to someone named Theophilus. The name "Theophilus" was a popular one among the Greeks. It means "friend of God," which leads us to an interesting question: was Theophilus a real person or a general term used for all of those who are "friends of God"?

I'm not sure we're able to come up with a definitive answer to that question. Most scholars believe Theophilus was a real person. He was likely someone of influence that had the means, both financial and personal, to get Luke's account before a wider audience. Some scholars believe that Theophilus was tied to Caesar's house that is referenced at the end of the letter to the Philippian church that we just read last week.

While the book is addressed to Theophilus, Luke lets us know that it is intended to touch the lives of any and everyone who reads it. The wonderful sentiment behind this is that Luke was writing to you and me. He wants us to know the Jesus that grabbed hold of his heart.

We have an incredible opportunity before us to be blessed by the life and teachings of Jesus. This is Luke's hope for you and me--for Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith, for us to trust Him and follow Him.

Let us make this our prayer as we prepare to launch into this gospel together.

Praying Together:

"Holy Spirit, I realize the opportunity we have before us to read this gospel story. As we do, may You fill us with a greater desire to know Christ. May we feel the excitement that comes from knowing Him more deeply. May this Word come alive to us that we may be inspired to follow Him and serve Him more faithfully. Amen."

SUNDAY, 9/22

Read Luke 1:3-4. "With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so *that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.*"

Here it is. In verse 4, Luke tells us the motivation for all the hard work of investigating and recording Jesus' story. He wants us to "know the certainty of the things you have been taught". What a wonderful hope for his readers.

The word "certainty" carries the idea of stability. Used in this context, it means "an undoubted truth". I wonder if you would describe your confidence in the recorded story of Jesus' life as a truth that you do not doubt. Do you have that kind of confidence in the gospels?

It is important to Luke that you do. Why is this so important to Luke? It's important to him because he knows that you will essentially be staking your life on it. The call of Christ is to deny ourselves, meaning we give Jesus first place in our lives. Our lives are no longer about only our wants and wishes. We have invited Jesus to be the Lord of our lives. If one is to make this decision, they had better be confident in knowing just whom they are inviting to take such a supreme place in their life.

To believe in and follow Jesus, we place all of our hope in Him. We throw all of our confidence in the fact that He is whom He claimed to be and that He did the things the gospels tell us He did. If we cannot put our confidence in Him in this way, our faith will be a constant battle. There is a freedom that comes from trusting the testimonies about Jesus and Jesus Himself.

May you know such freedom and be set free to find the joy of knowing Jesus.

Praying Together:

"Jesus, I place my confidence in You. I trust the stories and teachings that have been given to me. I will seek to follow You and Your ways. Continue to teach me and lead me. Amen."