

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 204, 10-18-2020 † Festival of St. Luke

“Lord God, you have appointed me as pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

LUKE 1

¹Many have undertaken to compile an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ²an account like those handed down to us by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word from the beginning. ³For this reason, it seemed good to me also, since I followed everything closely from the beginning, to write an orderly account to you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴so that you may know the certainty of the things you were taught.



Where was St. Luke when Jesus was teaching, preaching, dying, and rising? Answer: We don't know. But we do know what Luke was up to afterwards. He was following up. He was finding out. He was with the apostle Paul. He was learning of a universal Savior known as Jesus. He was writing down.

We may be unsettled when we learn the Bible was written almost 2000 years ago. We may worry and wring our hands about whether it's 100% right. But not today. Today we read the internal evidence of God's Word made sure on paper and in our hearts. With 52 chapters in two books of the Bible, a quarter of the New Testament, we know ...

The Lord Uses The Doctor

1. To show an interest in Jesus

In the only gospel with a formal introduction, Luke reassures us it's true. Jesus died and he died for you. The original Greek in these first four verses is much harder and more elevated than anything else in the four gospels. It is as

sophisticated than anything in the New Testament. I had to double-check every other word.

Add to that how tightly Luke attaches his events next to history. He writes with precision, for example, in chapter 2: *¹In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ²(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³And everyone went to his own town to register. ⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.*

And chapter 3: *¹In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Tracoinitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene—²during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.*

Some people say Luke's second book, the book of Acts, would be the greatest historical insight to the Roman world in the 1st century ... if you just remove all the miracles. But of course, Luke, as an educated doctor believed them. He believed that ten lepers could be cured of their disease, that blind people could now see, that the crippled could leave Jesus walking, that Jesus could conquer pain, and that Jesus could even defeat death.

He even believed the greatest miracle: Jesus died and it was "*for all the people.*" Jesus was "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to [God's] people Israel.*" "*All mankind would see God's salvation*" not just because Jesus brought salvation, but because of what God did through Luke. And he used Luke's occupation to do it.

There was once a (news story 6-7 years ago about a) 911 operator who took thousands of calls—and hung up on them. That's right. Someone called in about vehicles racing on the highway, and she hung up. Someone else called about an armed robbery, and she hung up twice, saying, "Ain't nobody got time for this. Get real." In that armed robbery, a father of four, the store manager, was shot and killed. The professionals were available, but she would not share them. Who knows how many tragedies resulted from this horrible 911 operator?

Doctor Luke refused to let that happen. He refused to let Jesus' professional care be lost in the pages of history. He refused to let our questions to God for more understanding fall on deaf ears. Luke wanted to share the work of Jesus not just with the Jews and not just with the powerful and not just with the educated, but with the lowly, the suffering, and the sinful.

2. To give certainty to Theophilus

In both of his books, St. Luke writes to an individual. We read it at the end of verse three, a person named Theophilus in both Luke and Acts, calling him "most excellent." This was a title for people of high official station. Theophilus may have been an Italian citizen, since Luke takes less detail in describing insignificant Italian villages than the villages of other lands. But sometimes you wonder if Theophilus was a particular person. This may have meant anyone reading the book of Luke, since it means "friend of God" or "one who loves God." (*Phile* means "love" and *theo* means "for God," so ... "one who loves God.") But that's you and I. We love God. And anyone who loves God doesn't want to guess at what God has done for us out of his love. Do you see how God wanted you to know of his love through the abilities of Dr. Luke?

Would you want an engineer to write your Bible? A fisherman? An IRS contractor? A missionary? A priest? A mother? How about all of them in one volume, recorded by a physician? That's what we have in the book of Luke, as Paul casually mentioned in Colossians 4:14. As a physician, or doctor, Luke was highly interested in the healings of Jesus. Where Matthew and Mark and John might use words as simple as slice and dice, Luke would use words like "incision," "surgery," and "autopsy." In fact, the Greek word behind our word autopsy means eyewitnesses. Literally, it means your "own eyes." Luke was gathering reports of the very same people who saw Jesus' ministry, his preaching and teaching, his death, and his rising to life again.

That's right, all the eyewitnesses in one. St. Luke was telling narratives that many had already told. He was doing nothing new. But he was perhaps more careful, more accurate, than anyone about the material he was using. And he was stitching all those narratives together in one organized book. Luke was double-, triple-, and quadruple-checking. Everyone, from the time Luke wrote down his gospel, can go and double-check what happened.

Possibly the priest Zechariah wrote about his experiences leading up to John the Baptizer's birth. Probably Paul stumbled upon a great deal of information and sources to share with Luke. Maybe Mary was willing to tell St. Luke many of the things she treasured up in her heart as she cradled baby Jesus. Luke, as a doctor, would take a keen interest in the very birth of our Savior.

So how is your health? Are you assailed on all sides by the world, who tell you that you are uneducated if you are Christian? Are you told that you believe in fairytales? Do your friends shame you at work and at play? If so, you fit right in with all believers in Jesus of all time. David writes in Psalm 6, *⁶I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. ⁷My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.* If your enemies in the world and the devil seem to weaken your eyes of faith, then it may help to know that Dr. Luke wrote this for you. Someone who studied in the school of Thucydides or Galen and recorded God's word precisely and carefully tells you, "These aren't fairytales. People who had nothing to gain saw them happen and described them completely. Jesus knows what your body needs and Jesus is the doctor of your soul." Take a moment to marvel at the healings of Jesus in Luke, at the parables of the lost that only he records. Marvel at the rich man and poor Lazarus and at the angels' song at the birth of Jesus.

Eventually, Luke himself needed a doctor. Tradition tells us he lived into his old age, but his body would wear out and he would eventually need a Greater Physician. He would need the Doctor for his soul, the one who could promise him something much greater than sky miles. He would get the Great Physician, Jesus himself, who had taken away Luke's sins, who proved that he could take away death itself, even as Luke looked to Jesus with eyes of faith. And, thanks to the words of Luke, his Doctor is also our Doctor.

Where were we during Jesus' ministry, death, and life again? Thanks to Luke, it really doesn't matter where we *were*. What really matters is where we are now by faith—and where we will be when Jesus returns. We will be able to stand with Luke. Amen.