

Luke 1:1-4

Ian MacKellen is a famous actor known for playing Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit and Magneto in the X-Men movies. He's also a well-known atheist, and he has a famous quote, "I've often thought the Bible should have a disclaimer on the front that says, 'This is fiction.'" I've run into this idea many times, and I'm sure you have too. I've worked with children in Bible camps who say, "Well, my Dad said this is just a bunch of cool stories, it's not actually real." People will say, "Pastor, you don't think all of that stuff really happened, do you?" "Those are just legends, or stories that God put in there to teach us a lesson, it doesn't matter if it's true or just a legend. You don't really believe that, do you?"

Do you? Are the narratives of Scripture just legends, fictional fables meant to teach us higher truths about God? Are they mostly true with some miraculous detail put in there by people who didn't know better? Regardless of what you think, we can all say that one of the most important questions to consider when talking about whether what the Bible claims is true or not is this: What did the authors say? If you would have asked Moses, David, Isaiah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, or Peter, what would they have said about what they were writing down? That would be rather helpful, because if they intended their readers to take their writings as fiction, they would have said so! Well today, we are going to look into what Luke says about his Gospel and the book of Acts, and what he's trying to get across to his original audience, a man named Theophilus. And the point of these first few verses is:

"You can trust me, Theophilus."

1. Scripture is divine.
2. Scripture is historical.
3. Scripture is enough.

Some of the critics of the Bible will sometimes say that it was written by primitive, uneducated, unsophisticated farmers and fishermen, but that simply isn't true. Altogether, the Bible has at least 40 different human authors who have contributed either entire books, chapters, Psalms, prophecies, and so on. Some were farmers or fishermen, but some were kings, soldiers, poets, scholars, priests, professional prophets, and Luke himself was a medical doctor. Assuming that Paul didn't write the book of Hebrews, the most voluminous author of the New Testament is Luke, who is also the only non-Jew to write any of the New Testament. And here we have Luke's preface to his Gospel, which he is addressing to someone named Theophilus. We have no idea who that is. Literally, Theophilus means "friend of God," so some commentators believe that this is addressed to all Christians who might read it, but because he refers to Theophilus as, "most excellent," he was likely a wealthy, powerful aristocrat or a government official who was a convert to Christianity, and Luke was writing this Gospel so that he could have a full account of the life and work and words of Christ.

And that's the first part: **Luke is claiming that what he is writing is divine.** Luke is not simply giving him the teachings of a wise philosopher, but the words and actions of a man who claimed to be God himself. Therefore, if what Luke is saying is true, and what he is recording is the Word of the Lord himself, then it must be embraced and believed. And look at what Luke says, "*The things that have been fulfilled.*" That's a fascinating word- because Luke isn't just saying that these things simply happened, but that they were fulfilled, that someone else earlier in time had predicted them, and that they happened. What's he saying? He's saying that everything Christ did that Luke was about to write down was already predicted by the prophets of the Old Testament- Christ's birth, his life, his miracles, his ministry, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, all of it was predicted and prophesied in the Old Testament. He's making the assertion that those who claim to believe in the Old Testament must also believe what Luke is about to write, and those who believe what Luke is about to write, must also accept the Old Testament. That's not a stretch- consider Jesus' words in Luke 24-

26 Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself... 44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

In the first verse alone, Luke is overtly saying, or at least assuming and implying, that his book is God's Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It's divine, and so is the entire Old Testament, and really so are the other Gospels as well, because they record the words and deeds of Christ himself, and therefore, all the epistle writings as well, because Luke records Jesus promising the disciples and Paul that they would receive the Holy Spirit and have the authority to instruct and teach his Church in his name with his authority. So here's my first major application point: **The Bible's not a buffet.** You can't pick and choose what you like and don't like. According to David in Psalm 19, Paul in 2 Timothy 3, Luke 1, and Jesus in Luke 24, all of Scripture is God's Word, breathed by the Holy Spirit, and it must be submitted to. All of us will at some point, be deeply challenged by the Bible, and perhaps even offended. That's a good thing. If we are truly sinful creatures, then we should expect the Words of a Holy God to offend or challenge us at some point. For some of us, it's Christ's teaching about forgiveness. For others, generosity, or self denial. For others, it's kindness toward those who are different, or standing up courageously for the truth. Let the Bible offend you, because only then can it form you, change you, and refine you into God wants you to be.

2. But how do we know? How do we know that this Gospel that Luke is writing is truly what Jesus said and did and that it's accurate? **Because it's history.** The Greek word that Luke uses for "eyewitnesses," *Autoptai*, is actually the word that the word autopsy comes from. It emphasizes the "own eyes" idea. The people Luke is interviewing, plural by the way, saw Jesus with their own eyes and heard him with their own ears, touched him with their own hands, and in Mary's case, physically gave birth to him. Those were Luke's sources. Think about how vulnerable he's being. If anything he writes isn't absolutely correct, then people would have called him out on it! And the fact that Matthew writes a Gospel as well, and so does Mark, who was the personal attendant of Peter, and John, and they agree with Luke- that means that

Luke's Gospel is legit- especially when you consider what he says next- he that carefully investigated all the sources and and made an orderly account of the information that he got. Do you know what that means? **These aren't legends.** This isn't historical fiction. These aren't embellished versions of what happened- according to Luke, what he wrote is legitimate history. And again, he's not an uneducated, superstitious, primitive simpleton. He's a doctor. He's a scientist. And as carefully as he would investigate a body that is sick, do his research, and make a conclusion, he investigated all of the sources- the disciples, the women that accompanied them, Mary the mother of Jesus, and everyone else carefully in order to write this Gospel.

Do you know what's interesting about that? Immediately after Luke says this, he talks about the angel Gabriel speaking to Zechariah the Priest, saying that he and his elderly wife are going to miraculously give birth to a son. Then, in chapter 2, Luke says that at the same time that Caesar August issued a census at the time that Quirenius was governing Syria, that a baby boy was miraculously conceived and born and angels filled the sky to praise his name. Do you notice what's going on here? Luke is writing a careful, serious history, and it includes miraculous things that most modern secular people would say, "no, that's not real, he must have embellished the real story." **That's not possible.** Either Luke is right, and his historical record is history and these miraculous things really happened, or it's all a myth, and you shouldn't waste your time reading it. What you can't say however, is that the Bible has some good things to teach us, but it's mostly legendary. It's obvious that Luke dedicated himself to making a comprehensive historical account of Christ's life and work. Why?

3. **For your faith.** So you can be absolutely sure of what you have been taught. Whether or not Luke only meant for this writing to be read by Theophilus or for all Christians of all time, it's meant to create, strengthen, and affirm the Christian's faith in Christ. Consider how truly radical and beautiful that really is. God in his profound wisdom could have chosen any kind of way to make himself known to human beings. He could have made himself known through visions and dreams, or through lofty ideas or profound wisdom. **But God puts all of his power, all of his wisdom, all the details of his saving work in a book.** He puts the power of his salvation in the words written by broken human beings so they could be understood, embraced, and believed, and loved by broken human beings. God could have an angel show up in your room and tell you about him. But he does it through a book, and through these words in this book, he creates and sustains his mightiest miracle: your faith.

God the Holy Spirit attaches himself to this Word, and he himself makes you wise for Salvation. Remember, the Bible is not a bunch of rules or wisdom, it is news- literally, that's what "Gospel" means- Good news. Christ has come into the world, lived the perfect life that you should have lived, died the death you should have died, risen from the grave, and now will come back for you to take you home. That's what Luke's history is about, and he wants you to know it, be sure of it, and never forget just how deeply, how passionately, and how unconditionally God has loved you. That is how the Holy Spirit creates faith, and because of that, the Bible is sufficient. Everything you need to know about God is in this book.

And that is what Luther and his companions rediscovered during the Reformation. During Luther's time, Christianity at large had all but forgotten the Bible. The main question being asked by Christians wasn't, "what does God say in his Word," but "What does the Pope say? What do my priests say? What do the experts say?" And whether the Church said it out loud or not, they were essentially putting their own words above God's, adding their own rules to it, subtracting the parts they didn't specifically have use for, and holding Christians hostage to their rules. If they didn't obey, give to, and support the Church, they'd burn forever. And Luther's reformation put God's Word, the Bible, back into the hands of the people, and when they read about the God who saves people through the sacrifice of his son, a God who loves without their works, people were changed, and they were freed from religious bondage and said, "We listen to God's voice, not the Church's, not the Pope's," and the world was forever changed. And when Luther was asked, "how did you do that, this is how he responded."

"What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone ... How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name? ... I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything."

Luther understood. It's God's promise, God's work, and the Cross, and the writings in which they are revealed that can change the human heart and set the sinner free. And that was why God inspired Luke to write: so Christians would never have to wonder. That's what the Word is for. It's holy, inerrant, powerful, and for you.

Amen