

What do you know?

Luke 1:1-4

Has your world ever been turned upside down? When we think of something being turned upside down, we may not always consider it as a good thing. So hearing the phrase “upside down Kingdom,” which is the title of our series, may conjure up negative connotations.

But what if something looked upside down because we needed to look at it from a different perspective? Sometimes what looks upside down can simply be turned over or viewed from a different angle to see it rightly and with appreciation.

Before becoming a parent, for example, we have more liberty to sleep in, to go out with friends, and more flexibility in our schedule. But when you have a child, your entire world is turned upside down. You’re getting up in the middle of the night for feedings. You’re constantly tired. The baby demands your time and attention. But you don’t resent it because the baby has transformed you and given you new life, new purpose, new meaning. You gladly give up your prior liberties for the good of your child.

Likewise, when we are born again by faith in Christ, we are new creations in Christ. We’ve received the indwelling Holy Spirit of God and are transferred from the kingdom of darkness, to the Kingdom of His beloved Son.

As citizens of God’s kingdom, we’re given a new perspective on life. We no longer live according to our old sinful nature, we have a new nature, with new desires and a new value system that is rooted in the love of Christ. Our priorities are turned upside down. We no longer live for our own interests, but we look out for the interests of others (2 Corinthians 5:15).

This is the way of Jesus’ countercultural kingdom. It is upside-down and inside-out—a kingdom where the last will be first, where the meek inherit the earth, where we lose our lives to find it, “where weakness is power, power is weakness, and suffering leads to glory.”

Although we are not promised a life of ease as representatives of the kingdom of Jesus, but instead can expect opposition, we don't resent it. Rather, when we see things from a kingdom perspective, we can rejoice knowing that we are laying up treasures in heaven when we suffer for righteousness on earth.

Now while aspects of the upside-down kingdom are shown in all the four gospels, Luke, the longest of the four, painstakingly explores what Jesus said about His kingdom so that together we might better represent Him on earth. The historic and detailed narratives in Luke's gospel, like the circumstances surrounding Christ's birth, which are not recorded in the other gospels, provide a unique look into the inverted kingdom of God.

When you examine the material that is unique to Luke's gospel, you find a common thread, namely that Jesus brings about a complete reversal of worldly values. This view that in the kingdom of God everything we know is turned on its head is often called the "Great Reversal." This idea is a distinct feature of Luke's gospel.

The Jewish messiah did not arrive as His own people expected Him to. The King of kings arrived as a babe and was born of a lowly virgin and laid in a manger. He didn't overthrow Rome by force to establish His kingdom on earth. Rather, it was through His crucifixion on a Roman cross that Jesus conquered demonic powers and expanded His kingdom. In this upside-down kingdom, leaders are servants, some who are last will be first, and tax collectors and sinners dine together at the same table with the King.

What kind of "kingdom is this? This is an inverted kingdom—a kingdom that works in reverse to the kingdoms of this world. And as citizens of the Kingdom of God, we have the privilege and the power to represent the upside-down kingdom of heaven on earth.

Now, what causes us to count it a privilege and a joy to represent the upside-down Kingdom? We are joyfully willing to live according to the

inverted values of the kingdom because of the certainty and hope of the gospel.

So, what do you know? How certain are you of the hope of the gospel? To have greater certainty we need to see Jesus with greater clarity.

Main theme: Our certain hope as Christians is not based on wishful thinking but on the life of the incarnate Son of God.

In the message today, we are going to look at 3 main sources of the certainty that enables us to be dynamic representatives of the upside-downness of life under Christ's rule on earth.

1. Inspiration of the scriptures

Before Luke, the writer of this gospel, begins to unfold his historic and detailed account of the life of Christ, he starts with a brief prologue. According to Colossians 4:14, Luke was a physician and a beloved traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. In his introductory remarks, doctor Luke explains the background and purpose for undertaking the task of writing his account of the good news of Jesus: *"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,² just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, ³ it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus"* (Luke 1:1-3).

And then after explaining that just like others, including eyewitnesses of the life of Christ, had taken on the task of compiling a narrative of what Jesus accomplished, Luke explains his aim for doing so in verse 4: *"that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."*

Do you know what most often causes us great worry and anxiety in life?: Uncertainty about what the future may hold. Whether it be a test result after a medical exam or how a project that we are working on is

going to turn out, not knowing the outcome, can bring great stress to our lives. But although there are things in life that we can never be certain about, there is an absolute certainty that we can have that will bring hope and peace in uncertain times.

The purpose for Luke's gospel was to give a man named Theophilus certainty concerning the things he was being taught. Exactly who Theophilus was we don't know for sure. What we do know is that his name means *lover of God* or *friend of God*. Because of the meaning of his name, some have surmised that Luke used the name as a kind of a code word that represented all followers of Jesus to whom the gospel was addressed.

Others suggest that because Luke addressed him as *most excellent Theophilus*, which is a title given to someone of honor or rank, that he could have been a Roman Official. But whether Theophilus was a high ranking official or just a code name for all Christians, it's clear that Luke's aim in writing was to give believers certainty about the person and work of Christ.

Do you know that many today have the mistaken idea that Christian faith is something that you believe without evidence or concrete certainty? In other words, faith for some is a leap into the dark. But as D.L. Moody once said, "faith is not a leap into the dark, it's a step into the light." That is to say, our faith is based in certainty and that certainty has a reliable source.

It is true that our faith in the certainty of Christ can lead us to take steps into the unknown, but the reason we take those steps is because we are certain that God is faithful and trustworthy.

Now how can we as Christians be so certain about our faith? We can be certain because of at least 3 main sources beginning with the **inspiration of the scriptures**. Again, as Luke begins his letter, he explains, "*Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,*" Luke 1:1

At the time that Luke wrote his gospel, which some scholars agree was around 60AD, others in the first century had written on the life of Christ and what he accomplished. As such, it appears that Luke relied much on the gospel of Mark which is believed by some scholars to be the first of the 4 gospel that was written. Scholars suggest this because much of the content in Mark is also found in the gospel of Luke and Matthew.

But in addition to drawing from works like the gospel of Mark and Matthew, Luke had access to eyewitnesses of the life of Christ from which he could also draw from and write his highly detailed and historic gospel account. Keep in mind that concerning these eyewitnesses, which included apostolic eyewitnesses to what Jesus accomplished, Luke explained that they served as both his motivation and source for writing his gospel.

Just think of it, Luke very likely interviewed Mary and learned firsthand from her about the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, which he wrote about in Luke chapters 1 and 2. And because of the reliability of these eyewitnesses and having closely been associated with those who had seen the risen Lord, Luke was able to write an orderly account of the life of Jesus that could give certainty to His followers then and now.

It's important to note also that in verse 1, Luke mentions that what he and others wrote based on eyewitness testimony was about, quote: *"things that have been accomplished among us."*

The word "accomplished" here can also be translated fulfilled. And the point is that what Luke wrote about was not just what Jesus accomplished during his earthly ministry. Rather the orderly account that Luke gives concerning what Jesus accomplished is also a fulfillment of prophecy given in the Old Testament scriptures.

In addition to many other prophecies, the prophet Isaiah, for example, prophesied of the virgin birth of Jesus some 800 years before it was accomplished (Isaiah 7:14). And because of Luke's access to eyewitnesses and diligence in carefully recording the details of the

birth and life of Jesus, for more than 2000 years now hundreds of millions of people have come to believe with certainty the claims of Christianity.

Concerning the key reason why Christians can be certain about their faith, one commentator explains: “One simple way of understanding the Bible’s organization is to think of the Old Testament as ‘promises made’ and the New Testament as ‘promises kept.’ The Old Testament looks forward to God keeping promises that he made to men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and King David. The New Testament books, like Luke’s Gospel, record for us how God kept or fulfilled those promises.

Now, if Christianity is ‘certain,’ than we should expect the New Testament to be more than current events. These are not things that ‘just happened.’ These are foreseen and fore promised events that have now come to pass. One of the major themes of Luke’s Gospel is his emphasis on the plan of God and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.”
Thabiti Anyabwile

So we can have certainty about the Christian faith because the origin of our faith is the Holy Spirit inspired and miraculous nature of the Holy Scriptures, which prove themselves to be the word of God. But in addition to the miraculous nature of the bible, like the prophecies made and prophecies fulfilled, the certainty of our faith can also be verified by historical evidence outside the bible.

You know, there are other so-called Holy writings, like the Koran and the book of Mormon that claim divine inspiration. But unlike the Old and New Testaments, the claims of these books cannot be verified by historical evidence, but in fact, historical and archeological evidence have proven their claims to be false.

The Holy scriptures, on the other hand, like the gospel of Luke, can be verified by historical, geographical and archeological evidence outside the bible. Remember, that Luke doesn’t just claim to have been given his data in a vision or dream that cannot be verified. Luke received his

detailed data from eyewitnesses of the birth, life, and resurrection of Jesus.

As one commentator elaborates: “The things we claim as Christians were not done in secret. They were done in space and time and leave a historical footprint.” As we will see in later messages, “Luke gives us specific historical dates and figures as he recounts the life of Jesus (Luke 1:5; 2:1-2). He gives us specific names of actual people and places. He gives us specific time references (Luke 3:1-2). This means we are not left dependent on the Bible’s claims to have certainty. We can look outside the Bible to test what is inside the bible. Archaeology and history both confirm the accuracy of Luke’s account. In fact, whenever archaeology makes a discovery, it tends to confirm the accuracy of the biblical text. And time and time 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 stone. For our certainty, God left us a record inside and outside the bible.” Thabiti Anyabwile

Now, as amazing as the bible is, which is the key source of our Christian faith, it is who the bible is centered on that is the ultimate source of the certainty of our faith, namely the virgin born, crucified, and risen Son of God.

This bring us to our second point:

2. Invincibility of the Savior

Again, in Luke 1:4, doctor Luke gives the main reason why he painstakingly undertook to write an orderly account of the things that are a fulfillment of bible prophecy. He explains to Theophilus: “*that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.*” Luke 1:1-4

What are the specific things that Theophilus was already learning that Luke, through his gospel, wanted him to be certain about? All you need to do is read the first two chapters to know that the heart of the gospel of Luke centers on the person, work, and teachings of King

Jesus. In fact, all the scriptures, Old Testament and New Testament, ultimately point to and find their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, in the opening lines of the book of Acts, which is a companion book to the gospel of Luke, doctor Luke writes: *“In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.”* Acts 1:1-3

Notice that Luke explains in the opening line of his second book, the book of Acts, that in his first book, the gospel of Luke, he dealt with the life and teachings of Jesus, culminating in His death, and resurrection. The certainty that Luke wanted Theophilus to gain was not centered on the ethical and moral teachings found in the gospel of Luke, but in the divine life of Jesus, whose miraculous works, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, witnessed by hundreds, was living proof that He was indeed the prophesied messiah and King.

Beloved, the certainty of our Christian faith is not based on wishful thinking or the wild imaginations of men, but in historical revelation. One commentator explained: “Luke records details about the real life and ministry of Jesus as well as insights into the beginning of the early church. This is supremely important. While the world wouldn’t need a historic Buddha to have Buddhism, it must have a historical Christ to have genuine Christianity. And we do! Further, if Jesus is dead, then Christianity is dead. But he’s alive! Historical facts like these serve as wonderful faith builders for Christians and as important apologetic arguments that are useful as we commend the faith to present-day Theophiluses.” Thabiti Anyabwile

Chuck Colson, who served as special counsel to President Richard Nixon, went to Federal Prison, along with others in the administration, for his part in the Watergate scandal, which led to Nixon’s resignation. After coming to faith in Christ in 1973, Chuck Colson became an influential Christian leader and author. Regarding the certainty of the

historic Christian faith, he wrote: “I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Everyone was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. They would not have endured that if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world-and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible.”

Some men have died because they believed a lie. But no man will knowingly and willingly die for a lie. The apostles of Jesus, who He presented Himself alive to, along with other disciples, suffered gladly for the cause of Christ because of their certain faith in the risen Savior.

Now their certainty about who Jesus was did not guarantee them a life of ease. The false prosperity preachers today claim that if you have enough faith you will be given health and wealth in this life. That's a big lie that is not taught anywhere in the bible. The certainty of our faith in Christ does not guarantee a life of ease.

Rather, our certainty will bring hope and perseverance to our lives in uncertain times. Furthermore, the certainty that God wants us to have that will enable us to live as dynamic representatives of the upside-down kingdom, is not just knowledge about the historic revelations of Christ, but a experiential certainty in the faithfulness and trustworthiness of Christ.

The apostles of Jesus then and followers of Jesus throughout the centuries have been willing to risk it all for Christ because of the certainty that to risk it all for Jesus is the end of all risk. And they possess this certainly not only because of the inspired scriptures and historical facts that attest to the reality of His resurrection, but because Jesus lives in the heart of all who receive Him by faith as Savior and Lord.

This brings us to our final point.

3. Indwelling of the Spirit

In addition to the inspiration of the scripture and the invincibility of the Savior, the certainty of our faith is set on fire by the indwelling of the Spirit. When Luke writes to Theophilus that his aim in compiling an orderly account of all that Jesus accomplish was, and I quote: *“that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught”* (Luke 1:4), we can be certain that he wasn’t relying solely on his writing skills and fact-finding expertise.

Do you know that Luke wrote more about prayer and the Holy Spirit than any other of the writers of the 66 books of the bible? In chapter one alone of Luke’s gospel there are seven references to the work of the Holy Spirit in the unfolding of God’s redemptive plans.

A careful reading of the gospel of Luke demonstrates that the key turning points in Luke’s two-volume historical narrative are initiated by the Spirit, particularly Jesus’ birth (Luke 1:35), baptism (Luke 3:21-22), temptation (Luke 4:1-2), and the start of his earthy ministry (Luke 4:18). Moreover, the birth of the early church in Acts (Acts 2:4) and the start of gospel ministry among the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48) are also marked by the experience of the Spirit.

Futhermore, the internal evidence and external impact of the gospel of Luke and Acts leaves no doubt that Luke was carried along by the Spirit in the revelations that he received and in the writing of Luke and Acts.

Luke and Acts also show that the greatest mark of dependence upon the Spirit’s power is prayer.

Beloved, Luke was certain about his Christian faith not only because of the witness of the Old Testament scriptures that were fulfilled in Christ and the eyewitness testimony of those who saw Jesus alive after his crucifixion. Luke was certain of His faith because of the inner witness of the Spirit who resides in all believers.

Moreover, Luke knew that the Spirit of God, who worked through His special servants to write the scriptures, uses the scriptures and prayer

to bring certainty in our hearts concerning the person and work of Jesus.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Luke records in chapter 24 that two disciples on the road to Emmaus, which was a town near Jerusalem, were sorrowfully discussing the events surrounding the death of Christ and reports of His empty tomb. While they were discussing these things, Jesus drew near to them but they didn't recognize him at first. And as they walked along the way, Luke recorded in verse 27: *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”* And after Jesus departed from them, Luke records in verse 32: *“They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”*

Beloved, through prayer and the Holy Spirit, Jesus is still opening the scriptures to all who desire to know Him and make Him known. Our hearts will be set on fire with certainty, assurance, and hope, not just when we read the scripture, but when we read them prayerfully and meditatively to encounter Jesus, to behold His glory and to be transformed by Him to live for His kingdom.

What do you know? Sadly, we often know more about trivial things than about what matters most. What's more, we tend to be preoccupied with the uncertainties of life rather than what we can be certain of. That tendency needs to be turned upside down.

There aren't a lot of things in this life that we can be certain about. But the more we know Jesus, and focus on the certainty of His love, faithfulness and trustworthiness, the more we will be able to deal with the uncertainties of life with hope and peace in our hearts.

Conclusion

Beloved, when we see the world in light of the glory and hope of the upside-down Kingdom of Christ, we will not be ashamed of the gospel and its countercultural values. Rather, when we are certain of the implications of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we will gladly

live contrary to the world's values and be "different" so that we can make an eternal difference for Christ on earth.

Sometimes our feelings will betray us. When they do, we must hold on to what is true about Jesus and look to what He makes known to us through His inspired scriptures, invincible life, and indwelling Spirit. And what we can know with certainty, will restore our hope and peace, and make us unstoppable witnesses for Christ and His kingdom to the glory of His name.