

**Certain**  
**Luke 1:1-4**  
**Part 1 of “Luke” series**

**INTRO - Shift from Exodus to Luke**

Recently, in the evangelical world, there has been given a lot of attention to some very influential Christians who have for one reason or another, walked away from the Christian faith.

For example, one author and former pastor recently announced on his Instagram that he had *“undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is ‘deconstruction,’ the biblical phrase is ‘falling away.’ By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian.”*

In another example a songwriter, for probably the largest worship band in the world, revealed, again on Instagram, *“Time for some real talk...I’m genuinely losing my faith, and it doesn’t bother me.”*

Naturally, these revelations of a deconstruction of faith has left many people, especially those who have looked up to them, saddened, confused, and even shaken in their own faith.

Probably, however, the issue of faith and doubt is much more personal for you. Maybe you recently heard a lecture by an atheist professor, or watched a youtube video on why Christianity is wrong and atheism is right, or there is some other nagging theological or philosophical question in your mind that you haven’t found an answer for. You might this morning confess I hold a Christian faith, but to be honest, it is a shaky faith.

Maybe you echo the sentiments of well-known atheist, Sam Harris, who said in 2007, *“I don’t want to pretend to be certain about anything I’m not certain about.”* You might be saying, *“I just don’t know if Jesus was who really said he was. I mean we are 2,000 years removed from when he lived. How can we know for sure of what he really taught and what really he did?”*

The Gospel of Luke is for you. Luke is for all of us...Luke, as we will see, was written for all of us to know Jesus better, and by knowing Jesus better, to have a strengthened faith in his life, teachings, and finished work for our salvation.

**Introduction to the book**

Author: Luke, details (not apostle, probably Gentile, doctor, companion of Paul's in ministry)

The Gospel: longest of the four we have in the NT

Paired with Acts, which is the result of Luke's purpose

## TEXT

### Luke 1:1-4

**1** 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*, **4** that *you may have certainty* concerning the things you have been taught.

Luke's purpose - to write a detailed, orderly account of Jesus so that Theophilus may have certainty

### v. 1-2

#### Luke 1:1-4

**1** 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,

Luke is not the first to write about Jesus. There were both written and oral traditions prior to this writing.

However, Luke's work is more detailed (longest gospel) and with the composition of Acts ties the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus to the church.

### v. 3-4 - The purpose and recipient of the gospel

#### Luke 1:3-4

**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*, **4** that *you may have certainty* concerning the things you have been taught.

4 characteristics of his work (Bock)

1. "followed all things closely" - investigate
2. The extent - "for some time past" or "since the beginning" - He is saying I tried to go back to the beginning, that is the birth of Christ, yet in reality much farther than that because he will also try to connect Jesus with the Old Testament.
3. "all things" or "everything"

4. “closely” or “carefully” - “eyewitnesses” (v. 2)- Luke is not citing Wikipedia, he wasn’t basing his belief on Facebook articles that showed up in his News Feed. Luke was diligent to do his homework, interviewing once again all of the first hand eyewitnesses of the events and teachings found in his gospel.

There is a reason why Luke is the longest of the four gospels, he is thorough:

**Only in Luke do we learn about:**

1. The birth of John the Baptist
2. The infancy of Jesus - when he was dedicated at the temple
3. The “Christmas carols” of Mary, Zechariah, Simeon, and the angels in heaven
4. The parables of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), the Prodigal Son (15:11-32), and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14)
5. What Jesus preached to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection
6. Only in Luke do we get a fuller picture of some of the women who followed Jesus, such as, Elizabeth, Mary, Anna, and Mary & Martha.

Luke as historian...quotes from Piper and Ramsay

*“Wherever modern scholarship has been able to check up on the accuracy of Luke’s work the judgment has been unanimous: he is one of the finest and ablest historians in the ancient world.”*<sup>1</sup> (German historian Otto Piper, 1945)

*“Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy; he is possessed of the true historic sense; he seizes the important and critical events and shows their true nature at great length, while he touches lightly or omits entirely much that was valueless for his purposes. In short, this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”*<sup>2</sup> (Scottish historian, atheist converted to Christianity, William Ramsay, 1915)

**Theophilus**

-“most excellent” - a description of someone with rank, possibly in the Roman military.  
-skeptical? New believer? Doubting believer?

So, Luke is writing to strengthen the faith of Theophilus, and ultimately God gives us this work in His Word to strengthen our faith as well.

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<sup>1</sup> Otto Piper, quoted in *Luke* (Reformed Expository Commentary), 6. Originally from “The Purpose of Luke,” *Union Seminary Review* 67.1 (Nov. 1945), 16.

<sup>2</sup> William Ramsay, quoted in *Luke* (Reformed Expository Commentary), 6. Originally from Ramsay’s *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, 1915, p. 222.

## **APPLICATIONS - 1 Caution and 4 Encouragements**

**A word of caution** - There is a difference between ***acknowledging*** your doubt/skepticism and ***celebrating*** your doubt/skepticism.

I think this needs to be said and explained, because of the trend recently in these “de-conversion” or “deconstructionist” stories.

**Acknowledging your doubts** is actually a healthy thing. It is an act of honesty and humility.

### **[Vaccine Illustration]**

We, like all families this time of year, are getting ready for the beginning of school. We are, of course, new to the city, so we had to take our daughters last week to make sure their vaccinations records are up to New York State standards. We all know what vaccinations are *designed* to do, they are meant to train our bodies to fight some terrible diseases.

Similarly, acknowledging doubts can do the same to strengthen our faith. Tim Keller wrote, *“A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person’s faith can collapse almost overnight if she has failed over the years to listen patiently to her own doubts, which should only be discarded after long reflection.”*<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledging doubts is a good, healthy thing to do. It should cause you to seek answers or better answers for your questions, leading you to a deeper and more personal faith.

However, that is not the same as ***celebrating doubts and skepticism***. For some, especially recently, who are wrestling with their faith and beginning to embrace positions that are unorthodox to biblical Christianity, seem to celebrate their doubts. As if having a shaky faith is virtuous or even a mark of spiritual maturity over those other people whose faith seems unmovable.

However, understand that celebrating doubt as something virtuous is absolutely foreign to the Bible.

In fact, Jesus frequently rebuked the disciples for having little faith.

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, xvii.

Later in Luke, Jesus prays for Peter before revealing that he would deny knowing Jesus

**Luke 22:31-32**

**31** “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, **32** but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

Many other examples in Scripture urging us to have strong faith...

John says that our faith is evidence of “overcoming”

**1 John 5:4-5**

**4** For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **5** Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Paul, in praying for the believers in Colossae and Laodicea, prays for “full assurance”

**Col. 2:1-3**

**1** For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, **2** that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, **3** in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The author of Hebrews says we should be eager to have assurance in our faith

**Heb. 6:11-12**

**11** And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, **12** so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Again, a weak, shaky, and flimsy faith is not a mark of spiritual maturity - doubt, like a flat-out rejection of Christ, is a result of our fallen nature not of a sanctified nature.

And, ultimately, a continuous posture of doubt does not serve you well.

Dave Tomlinson, a somewhat influential spiritual leader in the UK who helps and promotes a kind of “deconstructionist” journey in faith, admitted himself in a

recent interview, *“It might look cool to be a wandering spiritual nomad forever, but I don’t think that gets you anywhere.”*<sup>4</sup>

Maybe you need to pray the same prayers as the father who brought his demon possessed son to Jesus...

**Mark 9:24b**

“I believe; help my unbelief!”

or...

**Luke 17:5**

5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

## 4 Encouragements

**1. We can trust the Bible..**Luke is just one example of trustworthiness. There are many questions that can be asked of the trustworthiness of Scriptures regarding the original manuscripts, copying, and variations in the text. There are brilliant men and women who handle these questions and are invaluable resources for learning about the trustworthiness of Scripture...just one brief conclusion by Daniel Wallace, New Testament scholar...

*“The wealth of material that is available for determining the wording of the original New Testament is staggering: over 5,700 Greek New Testament MSS, as many as 20,000 versional MSS [translations from Greek to other early languages], and more than 1 million quotations by patristic writers. In comparison with the average ancient Greek author, the New Testament copies are well over a thousand times more plentiful.”*<sup>5</sup>

**2. Therefore, we can be certain of the life and work of Christ...**eyewitnesses

**3. Therefore, we can be certain of our salvation...** Luke is careful to say that he is reporting what was “accomplished among us”...the veracity of the gospel message/ Christianity is not based on our subjective feelings, it is not based on societal acceptance, it is based on historical facts.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.premierchristianity.com/Past-Issues/2019/April-2019/Deconstructing-faith-Meet-the-evangelicals-who-are-questioning-everything>.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Wallace, “Writing, Copying, and Transmitting the New Testament Text” in *How the Bible Came to Be*, Kindle Loc. 547.

It is not primarily about a moral code or religious piety, it is about the finished work of Christ to redeem sinful man back to God. And because it is based on the real, finished work of Christ we can have confidence that we are born again.

**2 Tim. 2:11-13**

**11** The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

**12** if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;

**13** if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.

Even when we falter in our faith, even when a pebble of doubt makes us feel faithless rather than faithful, we can look to the only truly faithful One. Only Jesus lived the perfect sinless, faithful life before the Father. And in the Gospel, Jesus' righteousness, including His faithfulness, is credited to you and me.

Be encouraged Christian, though you might have moments of doubt, God holds you tightly. It was God who saved you and it God who keeps you. Rest in his gracious sovereign care for your soul.

**4. The local church community is indispensable in helping one another grow in our faith.** (“us” language)

We need each other to encourage each other's faith, to help answer questions we might have, to find strength as we stand in a society that is anything but sure of the truth of the Gospel. The church is where we open the Word together to see the apostles' teachings. So please, lean into the church community not away from it. Your spiritual health depends on it.

Is there a Theophilus in your life?

-doesn't believe but is searching?

-maybe a new Christian and has a ton of questions?

-professes belief but holds a shaky faith - I referenced a prominent song writer earlier who said he was “losing his faith.” In his confession on Instagram he listed some of the big questions he is wrestling with regarding God, the Bible, Church, and life. And then he wrote, “No one talks about it.” The problem is that the questions he posed are talked about frequently. And they have been wrestled with for centuries throughout church history by brilliant scientists and theologians. What he needs is for someone to come alongside him and say I acknowledge those are great questions, but you are not the first person to think of this. Let me help you find the answers you are looking for, and in the meantime, look to Christ who poured out his love for you on the cross, even though you doubt.

## VERSES

Luke 1:1-4

Luke 22:31-32

1 John 5:4-5

Col. 2:1-3

Heb 6:11-12

Mark 9:24

Luke 17:5

2 Timothy 2:11-13

1 Corinthians 11:23-28

## SUMMARY POINTS

A Caution - Acknowledging doubt is not the same as celebrating doubt.

### Encouragements

1. We can trust the Bible.
2. Therefore, we can be certain of the life and teachings of Jesus.
3. Therefore, we can be certain of our salvation.
4. The local church is indispensable in helping us grow in our faith.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you react when you hear of people leaving the faith?
2. What kind of doubts or questions have you wrestled with in your faith journey?
3. How have you dealt with them?
4. How would you describe the difference between acknowledging doubt and celebrating doubt?
5. Why is celebrating doubt sometimes seen as a virtue in our culture today?
6. What is the relationship between faith and certainty?
7. How can we best encourage one another to full assurance of faith?