

Tell Me Again:

The Accomplishments of Christ & God's Concern for Our Certainty

Introduction

The 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.

Tell Me Again

A. Have you ever had a relationship with a person where you just needed to hear them tell you again that they love you and aren't going anywhere? You need reassurance of their love and commitment to you.

1. This could be the person who comes from a broken family—maybe adopted, terrified of being abandoned again. The little guy needs to hear again and again from his new parents: “Are you going to leave me too?” “No! We are with you for life, son!”
2. Or it might be the girl whose been abused in past relationships—men taking advantage of her, using her for her body and then kicking her like garbage to the curb when their done. When you finally meet that man who's going to love you well, isn't it hard...to believe him? “Tell me again, you actually love me? Not just my body, but who I am?”

B. It's a fallen, turbulent, and dangerous world. We need reassurance. We need to be told again. But not just from our parents or our spouses, but most especially from our God.

1. And here's the crazy thing about our God, YHWH, Jesus Christ: He has no problem telling us again. In fact, He delights to do it.

Is 57:15

For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

- a. The high, the lifted up, the eternal, the holy One, comes down, condescends, to comfort me?! What's He doing down here with me?!
 2. The whole story of the Bible is composed of this basic plotline: we left God but He's still coming after us, and even when He's found us, He doesn't stop coming: "I love you, and I'm not going anywhere"! Indeed every book in the Bible is essentially a riff on this same message, the gospel proclaimed to us from a different angle: God is coming, He's not going to give up, He is here, He loves us, He really loves us, and He will love us to the end!
- C. We who are familiar with Christianity have no idea how incredibly unique this is. You who are just coming in to the faith, having been tossed around by various false gods all your life, probably recognize this more—the wonder and refreshing stability of the Christian God's love.
1. In the ancient world, the nations surrounding Israel didn't have a God like this? The polytheistic systems made everything unstable, as gods compete with one another and vie for the upper hand—capricious and self-centered. They don't care about you. You make sacrifices to get on their good side, but you don't really know. You try to read the entrails of dead animals to figure out what their saying, but you just have to guess. Their gods made life intrinsically uncertain and unstable.

"Faithfulness is one of the most frequently affirmed attributes of YHWH because of His covenant relationship with Israel. In contrast, it is difficult to find any such affirmation for the gods of the ancient Near East. Words that convey loyalty are never used of the gods in that way. The gods have no agreements or promises to be faithful to and no obligations or commitments to fulfill" (Walton, 109).

- a. But we have a God who moves in the complete opposite direction! "One of the most frequently affirmed attributes...[faithfulness]!" He makes promises to us. He moves towards us to stabilize and reassure us...to tell us again! For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us...? (Deu 4:7a).
2. We see the same contrast when we look at Islam and its god, Allah. My apologetics professor shared with us something a Muslim once said to him. He'd been trying to evangelize this man, dealing with historical facts about the Koran and other apologetic matters, when the guy told him what he felt was Christianity's most compelling proof: "What you Christians have is this: you know that God loves you, and we don't. We say it, but we don't believe it like you do."
 - a. They don't have any assurance of Allah's love. And this is because they don't have Christ as the incarnation of God, God with us, so committed He comes to dwell with us, literally. They don't have the New Testament, where God tells us again and again, from every angle: "Here is how much I love you!"

Luke: A “Tell Me Again” Project

- A. Luke’s gospel is a “Tell Me Again” project. If last week we established that Jesus is the answer to our most pressing question—“Who can fix what’s wrong?!”—this morning we will see God’s unswerving commitment to lead us to that answer: I’ll tell you again, again, and again. The answer is Jesus! And I want you to know for sure!
- B. In the first 4 vv. he writes this formal prologue that we might be prone to skip right over to get to the good stuff. But don’t do that! Here in these 4 vv. we are given much regarding: (1) Luke’s focus in writing this gospel; (2) his method in writing it; but, most significant for us today, in v. 4 he gives us (3) his purpose in writing it:

⁴that you (Theophilus) may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

- 1. Many have already compiled narratives of the things that have been accomplished among us...but it seemed good to Luke (and God through Luke) to write another one, why? Certainty.
 - a. The word in the Greek has the notion of: assurance; stability; security; safety; protection from stumbling or falling. The only other place Luke uses this same word is in [Act 5:23](#), referring to one being locked securely in prison.
 - i. Luke wants Theophilus (and us) to be secure in accomplishments of Christ! To imprison us in His love—I can’t get out; I know for sure; He’s come for me! And so, he endeavors in his gospel, to tell us again!

The Outline

- A. I’m going to organize my thoughts this morning under 3 headings, all of which derive from the natural sense and order of our text: (1) Things Accomplished; (2) Things Delivered; (3) Things Certain.
 - 1. The things accomplished by Christ, are delivered to others in the word, all with the goal of assuring us of the validity of our faith and the stability of His love.

(1) Things Accomplished

- A. We spent all of last week on this, so we’ll move quicker here. But this is the natural place to start as we move towards certainty. It answers the question: Certain of what? To be sure, we see in v. 4 that Luke wants Theophilus to “[have certainty concerning the things \[he had\] been taught.](#)” But what were these things? Here we are clearly brought back up to the beginning of our text and find its referent in “[the things that have been accomplished among us](#)” (v. 1). Luke wants Theophilus to be certain of all that Jesus has accomplished in history for him.

- B. Remember from last week, we saw that Luke is jealous, from the very first verse of his gospel, to show Christ as the climactic fulfillment of God’s plan—bringing together in His person and work all the promises, prophecies, symbols, and shadows of the Old Testament. To put it more plainly: Christ’s death and resurrection inaugurate the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament anticipation!
 - 1. And in fulfilling the Old, He initiates the New. We took that word “**accomplished**” (or “fulfilled”) and traced its close synonym in the Greek through Luke’s gospel. What emerged was a vision of Christ as a New Creator, who through a New Exodus, is establishing a New Humanity. He is the answer to our burning question: “Who can make what’s wrong right?” He is the One in and through Whom God is making all things new.
- C. It is this that Luke wants Theophilus (and us) to be certain of. Christ is the answer. He really does love us. He really can put us and this world back together.

(2) Things Delivered

- A. But how do these accomplishments get to us? Where did Luke get them to give to Theophilus? In vv. 1-3 we see essentially 3 stages of delivery. The historical order of this delivery moves from v. 2a to v. 2b to vv. 1 and 3. And we watch as these things are delivered: (1) from Christ to eyewitnesses; (2) from these eyewitnesses to Luke and his contemporaries; and (3) from Luke, in particular, to Theophilus, and us.
 - 1. And, intriguingly, certainty and assurance stand forth as the driving goal of every stage in this delivery. Let’s take these stages one at a time.

(1) From Christ to Eyewitnesses (v. 2a)

²just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses...

- A. For these accomplishments of Christ to benefit anybody, they first had to be witnessed and understood. From the beginning of Christ’s ministry, he chooses out of His disciples twelve men and names them Apostles (Luk 6:13). These Apostles, we come to see, have a special function in the mission of our Lord. But in the first place, they are called to be eyewitnesses to His life, death, and resurrection.
 - 1. Consider what Peter writes: “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet 1:16). We weren’t following fanciful stories without any historical fact, we saw the historical fact! We saw the life, death, and resurrection—the accomplishments—of the Messiah!
- B. But, we know, and we saw last week, even though they heard and saw it all, they still didn’t get it. Though He had told them again and again that the Christ must suffer, die and then rise, as they watched the Messiah die, they thought: “It’s over...we thought He was the One, but we were wrong.”

1. The ministry of assurance and certainty (of telling them yet again) begins at this stage in delivery, with Christ to His Apostles. He wants them to know for sure. This is His essential concern in [Luk 24](#):
 - a. When He appears to those 2 disciples (not Apostles) on the road to Emmaus. What's He trying to show them? ["Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"](#) (v. 26). ["I am the promised Christ! I have fulfilled the entire Old Testament anticipation!"](#) And he stayed with these 2 until ["their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And \[then\] He vanished from their sight"](#) (v. 31).
 - b. And then what happens? These 2 go find the 11 Apostles, and what do the Apostles say: ["The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon \(Peter\)!"](#) (v. 34). The risen Lord appeared to the 2 disciples, but it seems He appeared first of all to Peter ([1 Cor 15:5](#)). Why? Peter would have been the most dejected, the most depressed, because he had denied his Lord, even invoking a curse upon himself: ["I do not know the man"](#) ([Mat 26:74](#)). Jesus needs a private conversation with him. He pursues him first. ["My accomplishments, on that cross, in this resurrection...for you, Peter!"](#)
 - c. So you have Peter sharing his resurrection story, and then the 2 from the road to Emmaus sharing their resurrection story; certainty is just being stirred up among them—this really happened! And then, as if this weren't enough: ["As they were talking about these things, Jesus Himself stood among them!"](#) (v. 36). And He says to them: ["Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see!"](#) (vv. 38-39a). In other words: I want you to know for sure, I died for the sins of the world, and I've risen to redeem!" Then ["He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures"](#) (v. 45) and they get it!

(2) From Ministers to Luke (v. 2b)

- A. That's stage 1 of Things Delivered. But, Christ pursued and assured these ["eyewitnesses"](#), not so that they could merely sit and stagnate in His love, but so that they would go as ["ministers of the word"](#) (the gospel): ["...just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us..."](#) (v. 2). Here the camera pans out and we see that Christ has more in mind. He's not only wanting to deliver the things accomplished to them with certainty, He's wanting them to deliver this to others!
 1. Interestingly, this is precisely where He goes in [Luk 24](#). After assuring them personally, He says this: ["Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things"](#) (vv. 46-48). In other words, what you have seen, go and tell!

- B. There is this beautiful text at the beginning of **1 John**, that shows how this played out in the Apostles from this point. The Apostle John writes this:

1 John 1:1–4

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—

²the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—

³that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

⁴And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1. Note the similarities in language, process and goal between this and our text in **Luk 1**. The eyewitnesses of the accomplishments of Christ, were brought into glorious fellowship with the Father and Son. But that is not enough. They are made ministers of the word, delivering the things accomplished to the next generation, with the goal of bringing them into the same fellowship, and into the joy of knowing God’s love for them—these accomplishments are for me! The circle gets bigger here!

- C. But who did the Apostles deliver these things to? Luke and his contemporaries. Luke was in this second generation, it would seem; not an eyewitness himself, but one to whom the Apostles ministered and delivered the word of Christ’s accomplishments.

(3) From Luke to Theophilus (& Us) (vv. 1, 3)

- A. That’s stage 2, and it just keeps multiplying out from here. What did Luke and his contemporaries do with this? These accomplishments, because of their profound and even cosmic significance, become the subject of endless narration and reflection. We see what He’s done, and we can’t stop talking, writing, sharing about it!
1. We see Luke’s contemporaries in v. 1: “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us...”
 2. And then we see Luke in v. 3. Although many had already compiled narratives, Luke couldn’t help himself: “...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...”
 - a. We are given window here into the incredible effort Luke put into this “Tell Me Again” project.
 - i. He had “followed all things closely...” He collected sources both oral and written; He spoke with the eyewitnesses themselves—Apostles (Paul) and others (Mary, etc.). He wanted to get the historical facts straight.

- ii. And he did this “...for some time past...” He’d been at this investigation for a long time.
 - iii. And he put what he found in writing, but this wasn’t haphazard, it was an “orderly account.” He ordered the material carefully, logically.
- b. And, again, he does all of this with concern for Theophilus’ certainty, assurance: “...that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (v. 4).

(3) Things Certain

How Do We Get It?

- A. So now as we look at Things Certain, we come to the all important question: How do we get it? Where does certainty come from?
1. We might be prone to think, if we’ve been reading Luke carefully here, that certainty comes from having all the facts. In other words, Luke is dealing with eyewitnesses, following things closely, writing orderly, to get us the facts, and when we get the facts, we get certainty. But such line of thinking would make Luke a mere rationalist. If you get the right facts into my brain, I will have certainty.
 - a. Clearly this is not Luke’s assumption. He goes out of his way in Luke-Acts to show us: the facts were given and nobody got it...that is, until, the Spirit of the risen Christ accompanied the ministering of the word and opened peoples’ hearts to get it.
 - i. We might think of Lydia here. Paul was sharing the gospel with her, and Luke records this: “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Act 16:14).
 2. It is the ministering of the word and the awakening activity of “the Lord” (the Spirit of God) that together are required for the certainty Luke is after.
 - a. The facts matter. Historical referentiality is critical. If Christ wasn’t raised from the dead, bodily, historically, what does Paul say? Our faith is in vain! This is a joke if it’s not true. So our certainty starts with historical referentiality, ordered accounts, tight arguments, human reason. But it doesn’t end there. Factuality is necessary but it is not decisive.
 - b. The word of the cross is foolishness to natural man. You can give me all the facts you want, but I will twist them to serve myself. We need the Word—we need Things Accomplished to be Things Delivered—but O how we also need the Spirit to open our hearts, that they might become for us Things Certain!

- B. As on the first day of the original creation, when the Word of God went forth and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the deep, so too today, as the word of God goes forth, I'm praying that the Spirit of God is hovering over the depths of your heart and bringing life, new creation!

Why Do We Need It?

- A. Why do we need this certainty? Why would Luke want so badly for Theophilus to have it?
1. Theophilus was most likely a Gentile. Now he's a part of this historically Jewish movement. "What am I doing here? I don't belong. Were Christ's accomplishments for me?" Here's where Luke's focus on the universality of salvation comes into play. As the words of this gospel are put before him, he sees it: "Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [Christ's] name to all nations..." (24:47)—I'm in that! And the Spirit of God lights up that Word for him and he knows: "All of this is for me!"
 - a. And we're like Theophilus in many ways right? "Do I really belong here? I'm too great of a sinner. I'm so much more messed up than the average "church-person." What am I doing here?!" And then the words of this gospel are put before you and you read Jesus' response to the Scribes and Pharisees as they're grumbling at him for hanging out with tax collectors and sinners: "And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Luk 5:31). There's room in the accomplishments of Christ for you, for me!
 2. Theophilus was most likely a wealthy aristocrat of some sort. We know this because of Luke's address "most excellent Theophilus" (used elsewhere in Acts for the social elite in the Roman empire). And, even more, there is also a good possibility that Luke is dedicating this work to Theophilus because he's funding the project, the patron behind it. Here's where Luke's focus on the reversal of the kingdom comes into play. As the words of this gospel are put before him and he reads that parable about the rich fool who stored up all his stuff in barns only to die with nothing before God. The Spirit of God lights up that Word and he knows: "This world is not my home!"
 - a. Don't we need this here in San Jose?! We need to be certain that heaven is for real, or when the devil offers us the kingdom of this world, we won't be able to withstand him!

Conclusion

Do We Have It?

- A. Do we have it? We need it; God wants us to have it; but do we have it?
1. If certainty comes from the Word of God and His Spirit, let me ask this: Are we in His Word? Like Luke, are we doing our part, carefully ordering our day, mobilizing our

efforts to get ourselves in position for God's Spirit to minister to us? This could involve listening to sermons on your commute, or the Bible on tape while you exercise, or worship music while you make dinner, memorizing Scripture, etc.. Are we strategizing, thinking carefully about this. Are we building God an altar on which His fire can fall; building Him a temple which His glory can fill!

Do They Have It?

- A. We've watched as the heart of Christ became the heart of the Apostles became the heart of Luke, they've been amazed by Christ's love and want others to know it as well. So is this our heart? Do we long to see more people, certain of Christ's accomplishments for them? Assurance has this momentum to it. It's not just for our couches while we do our devotions in the morning. It's for the streets! They need to hear about this love! Others in this church need to hear about this love! I want to be a church that delights to tell our own resurrection stories! He's come, He's shown me His love, He's told me again. Now I want to tell you!