



"That You May Have Certainty" (Luke 1-2:20)

I. INTRO

- A. Sir Francis Newport led a British Society of Atheists. On his deathbed in terrible pain, he cried out in agony, "You need not tell me there is no God, [As his friends gathered around his bed], I know there is one and I am even now in His angry presence. You need not tell me there is no hell for my soul feels its fires already hot and I know that I am damned forever..." And he died...
- B. Contrast that with D.L. Moody, the great evangelist of the 19th century, in the last moments of his life he opened his eyes and said, "Earth recedes and heaven opens before me - it is beautiful, no valley is there, it's beautiful. This is my coronation that I have longed for." And with that, he closed his eyes and he died.
- C. Today each one of us is at varying levels of certainty regarding the implications of the Christian faith. We're all, probably, somewhere between Sir Francis Newport and D. L. Moody.
- D. There is a strong current of the believer's certainty that runs throughout the NT. Consider these verses:
1. "...All the riches of full assurance..." --Colossians 2:2
 2. "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean..." -- Hebrews 10:22
 3. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life." -- 1 John 5:13
- E. We also see this invitation (or admonition) to certainty in Luke's gospel. Please pull out the insert in you bulletin and turn to Luke 1. I will read the first four verses (the Prologue, or intro, or preface) and then pray for our time together this morning...
- F. *"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 1:1-4 [pray]

- G. Luke is the only Gospel writer who describes the events of Jesus' birth. He was also the only Gentile writer of the Bible, yet his two books constitute about one quarter of the NT. Luke was a medical doctor by training (Col 4:14) as well as an exacting historian whose narrative of the birth and ministry of Jesus was written to non-Hebrews and is focused on clarifying the historical roots of the Christian faith and demonstrating the sovereignty of God in history to the Gentiles.
- H. In these few verses of Luke's gospel (1:1-4) we see that he is writing to Theophilus and takes a direct and straightforward approach, even using legal language. One theologian writes: "This story excels by reason of its unaffected simplicity...it is by no means merely the product of poetical imagination or the forming of legends¹."
- I. Notice the word "certainty" in v. 4. The word that Luke uses is *asphaleia* and means "that you may know the security, the safety, the stability, the unshakable, solid, stable, immovable reality of the things you've been taught."
1. We live in a day when many Christians have been taught things, but those things do not become unshakable or immovable.
 2. One pastor has said, "They are known the way we know a cloud, not the way we know our neighborhood."
 3. For many church-goers viewpoints about God and the Bible float around in our mind and heart but can easily be blown away by our circumstances and replaced by another cloud.
 4. Luke is assuring Theophilus that it is possible to have a secure, safe, stable, and unshakable faith.
- J. So, who is Theophilus?
1. Luke wrote his gospel narrative and the book of Acts to him. Theophilus = "friend of God" or "(be-)loved by God." No one knows for sure who he was. There are (at least) three possibilities:
 - a. Some theologians think that his name is a generic designation that applies to all Christians. Other theologians think the context indicates that Luke is writing to a specific individual.
 - b. Theophilus could have been a Roman officer or high-ranking official in the Roman government.

¹ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series, Eerdmans Reprint 1975: 110.

- c. Theophilus could have been a wealthy and influential man in the city of Antioch.
 - 1) There are historical references to wealthy man named Theophilus in Antioch during the time of Luke.
 - 2) He could have been a wealthy benefactor who supported Paul and Luke on their missionary journeys, which would account for Luke's wanting to provide an orderly and detailed account of what had happened.
- 2. What Luke is saying to Theophilus is that Christianity is rooted in history and that God is sovereign – even over the secular pagan ruling authorities of the day. (If this is accurate then we must acknowledge that it is true for us today as well.)

II. BODY

A. In Luke's "orderly account" (v. 3) within the first two chapters, we have a complete description of the gospel. Luke wants to make clear the certainty of the most unshakable, solid, stable, immovable realities in the universe are:

- 1. The certainty of God
- 2. The certainty of Jesus
- 3. The certainty of salvation
- 4. The certainty of faith

B. We will look at them one at a time²...

1. The certainty of God.

- a. In Matthew's Gospel he uses the words "God" and "Lord" about 60 times, Luke uses the words a total of almost 200 times — about three times as often.
 - 1) "Zechariah was serving as priest before God" (1:8).
 - 2) Your son "will turn many to the Lord their God" (1:16).
 - 3) Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and said, "I stand in the presence of God" (1:19).
 - 4) "Gabriel was sent from God" to Mary (1:26), and says, "You have found favor with God" (1:30).

² This outline is adapted from John Piper.

- 5) *"The Lord God will give your son the throne of his father David"* (1:32).
 - 6) *"The holy child will be called the Son of God"* (1:35).
 - 7) *"Nothing will be impossible with God"* (1:37).
 - 8) And then Mary sings, *"My spirit rejoices in God"* (1:47).
 - 9) And when John is born, and Zechariah's mouth is opened he worships: *"Blessed be the Lord God"* (1:68).
 - 10) And when Jesus is born *"a multitude of the heavenly host praises God"* (2:13) singing *"Glory to God in the highest"* (2:14).
- b. What's the point? That God is real. God is active. God is sovereign over Rome and Caesar Augustus.
 - c. God sent His angel. God struck Zechariah mute. God made the elderly and barren Elizabeth and the virgin Mary conceive. With God nothing is impossible (1:37).
 - d. Luke wants Theophilus to know the security, the safety, the stability, the unshakable, solid, stable, immovable certainty of the doctrine of God as the central reality in the universe, in history, and in the gospel.

2. **The certainty of Jesus.**

- a. And second, Luke wants Theophilus to know the secure, solid, unshakable certainty of Jesus. Let's take a look at Luke 1:31–35...
- b. *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God." --Luke 1:31-35*
- c. Two things:
 - 1) V. 33 -- A King has been born who will reign forever. His kingdom will be seen through the eyes of faith. I love the lyrics from the U2 song Walk On: "You're packing a suitcase for a place none of us

has been, a place that has to be believed to be seen." --Walk On, U2

- 2) This King is the one and only Son of God by virtue of his two natures, one **divine** from the Holy Spirit and the other **human** from Mary.
- 3) God solved the problem of sin by providing a sinless Savior. Jesus is fully divine as well as fully human in nature. This is the Doctrine of the Incarnation that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, yet one person, forever.

3. The certainty of salvation.

- a. And third, Luke wants Theophilus, to know the unshakable certainty that this Jesus will save his people from their sins by dying in their place.
 - 1) Zechariah said, God *"has raised up a horn³ of salvation for us"* -- Luke 1:69
 - 2) Zechariah, filled with the Holy Spirit in a prophetic proclamation (1:67) said of his son John, *"You will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins"* --Luke 1:77
 - 3) At His birth, the angels said, *"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior"* --Luke 2:11
- b. Luke is telling Theophilus, this God-man Jesus, is his Savior and He will die for his sins and forgive them. Here is what Luke writes in 9:22: *"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* --Luke 9:22.
- c. This is God's plan and Jesus' mission.

4. The certainty of faith.

- a. Luke is saying to Theophilus there is a way for him to obtain this salvation and a way for him to miss this salvation.
- b. Luke, as an exacting historian, has shown us the work of God in history; now it's time to surrender to the work of God in the soul.

³ The horn is not a musical instrument but the horn of an ox and is a sign of strength and a means of victory (see Ps 92:9-10; Micah 4:13).

- c. God has brought salvation into history. And now God brings the human soul into salvation.
- d. Just because Jesus came into the world, does not mean that we will come into Him.

III. CONCLUSION

A. I would like to conclude our time by comparing Zechariah's response to the good news and Mary's response.

1. Zechariah – In 1:5-20 we see his encounter with Gabriel.
 - a. Notice v. 18: *"And Zechariah said to the angel, 'How shall I know this?'"* --Luke 1:18
 - b. Gabriel is a little indignant at this point and strikes Zechariah mute because he did not believe him (v. 20).
2. Mary's response, as you probably know, is different. We see her encounter with Gabriel in Luke 1:26-38.
 - a. Mary had a question too (1:34): *"How will this be, since I am a virgin?"* - -Luke 1:34
 - b. Mary did not say, "How shall I know this?" She actually asked a good and sincere question -- and the angel answered her question and told her how it would be.
 - c. And then in v. 38 Mary said, *"Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."* --Luke 1:38
3. I hate to point out the obvious but Zechariah is a learned and long-time priest serving in the temple and Mary is a teenager in podunk Nazareth.
4. We see this plainly in v. 45 when Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, and is greeted by her cousin Elizabeth, who, filled with the Holy Spirit says: *"Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord."* --Luke 1:45
5. And then Mary breaks out into her proclamation of praise (or, song) and adoration called The Magnificat, Latin for: *"My soul magnifies"* (1:46-56)

B. What Luke is saying to Theophilus, and to us, is that salvation has come into the world and there is a way to have it and a way to miss it.

1. Zechariah was a deeply religious man but he almost missed it through pride and a bit of arrogance.

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2. Mary was humble, aware of her human frailty, and yet not afraid to ask questions.
- C. This good news rooted in history addresses the most serious problem that you and I have as human beings, and that problem is that:
1. God is holy and He is just, and I'm not. And at the end of my life, I'm going to stand before a just and holy God, and I will be judged.
 2. And I will be judged either on the basis of my own righteousness, or the righteousness of Jesus Christ.
 3. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus lived a life of perfect righteousness, a life of perfect obedience to God – and not for His own well-being but for His people.
 4. He has done for me what I couldn't possibly do for myself.
 5. The way we've been saying it around here is that God is both perfectly just AND perfectly merciful. And part of us wonders how can that be? And then we see that God's justice and mercy intersect at the cross...
- D. *"When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."* --Galatians 4:4-5