

INTRODUCTION

Once, a pastor visited a family who had been absent from church for a long time. As he sat talking to the mother, he said, "There are some passages of the Bible that I'd like to read to you, would you bring me your Bible?" The mother turned to her little daughter and said with a syrupy voice dripping with spirituality, "Sweetheart, will you go fetch the book that mommy loves to read and bring it to the pastor?" Obediently, the little girl brought a copy of *TV Guide* to the pastor! How much of the Bible do you read? More importantly—how much of the Bible do you believe?

Let me repeat a familiar story to you. Once upon a time there lived a lovely little princess named Snow White. Her vain and wicked stepmother, the queen, feared that someday Snow White's beauty would surpass her own. So she dressed the little princess in rags and forced her to work as a scullery maid. Each day the vain queen consulted her magic mirror. "Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" And as long as the mirror answered, "You are the fairest one of all," Snow White was safe from the queen's cruel jealousy. Of course, as we all know, the day came when the magic mirror answered, "Snow White is the fairest one of all," and the rest of the story is the tale of how Snow White ate a poisoned apple and was revived by the kiss of her handsome prince—and they lived happily ever after. Fairytales like Snow White maintain their popularity because everyone loves a good story, especially those where the good guy or, in this case, the good gal, beats the odds. People love stories with a moral and a happy ending.

Perhaps the greatest story of all time with a moral—lots of them, in fact—and a happy ending is the story in the Bible. God creates the world. But the crown of that creation, men and women, choose to live their lives outside of His guidelines. As a result they find themselves in great danger of present and eternal calamity. So God, in the person of Jesus Christ, launches an all-out rescue attempt that includes a daring strategy of death, burial and resurrection on the part of the hero. The tale concludes as people all over the world accept the lifeline of salvation and begin to experience the quality of life that God intended from the beginning and they live in heaven, happily ever after.

It's a great story, like so many other stories of the ages. But that's where it gets a little tricky for many of us. We grownups know that we're not supposed to take fairy tales literally. You don't have to believe that there really was a wicked queen or a magic mirror to learn a lesson from Snow White. Maybe the Bible works the same way. Maybe it doesn't matter if everything it says really happened. Maybe the real value is in the lessons we learn. Sounds good. But there's just one little problem with that theory: The Bible itself claims to be more than a good story with a moral. In 2 Timothy 3:16, we read what the Bible says about itself. "All scripture is God breathed (our word is "inspired") The Bible claims that the stories in it really happened. The Old and New Testaments are filled with references to specific people, places, and events. So how do we know that this book we hold and read and study is *not* just a compilation of fairy tales with good morals? You see, what you believe about the Bible will determine what you believe about everything that is in the Bible.

This morning, we begin a verse-by-verse journey through the Gospel according to Luke. As I introduce this series today, I want us to look at the first four verses to answer the all-important

question: *Is the Bible really true?* If at the end of this message you do not believe that this book is anything more than a collection of myths and legends, then you really don't have any hope for the future, because this business about heaven could be just a myth. If however, you believe, as I do, that this Bible is the totally inspired Word of God—and is totally without error—then I expect to see you continue to base your entire life on what we find in its pages. And you can be certain that your hope of heaven is sure!

Look at the first four verses:

Luke 1:1-4 "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word [it should be capitalized like in John 1:1]. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of things you have been taught."

Luke was a physician (Colossians 4:14) and a gentile. He tends to want to look at events with more of a scientific slant than the other writers. Along with this gospel, he wrote the book of Acts. That means Luke was responsible for writing more material in the New Testament than any other individual, including Paul. He addresses this book to "Theophilus," which means "lover of God." Most scholars believe Theophilus was an influential man in the household of the Roman leader, Seneca. But it is really addressed to every one of us who "love God."

Notice Luke is striving for accuracy (eyewitness accounts) and organization (chronological story). It is obvious he spoke personally to Mary, the mother of Jesus; how else would we know that "Mary pondered all these things in her heart?" (Luke 2:19) He spoke with many other eyewitnesses of the life and teaching of Jesus. His goal in writing is so the reader may know the certainty of things they have been taught. That's a good place to start. Most of you in this room have been taught Christian truth since the time you were little. Are you certain it is true? Do you believe it just because your parents, your Sunday School teachers or your pastor told you? Today, let's consider

I. THE TRUTH OF THIS BOOK

Is this Book reliable? Can you base your life on it? Is it only a collection of stories with morals, like Aesop's fables? Now for a moment, I want you to be totally open minded about this issue. For some of you, who have grown up loving and believing the Bible, it's hard to do. But for the next few moments, I want you to imagine that you don't believe the Bible is the Word of God. Allow me to show you some real evidence that this Book is true, evidence that is beyond what your parents, Sunday School teachers, or pastors have told you about why you should believe the Bible. Remember, I never ask you to check your brain at the door when you come to church here.

When the Bible says you are "to love the Lord your God with all your mind" it means you should know *why* you believe what you believe. For the next few minutes, let me be the attorney

and you be an open-minded member of a jury. I want to give you three levels of irrefutable evidence to demonstrate the truth of the Bible. The reliability of the Bible is supported by:

1. Literary comparison

There is an entire field of literary science called "Literary Criticism." In it, scholars make a critical examination of an ancient document to determine its reliability. In determining the authenticity of any ancient document, there are several tests historians apply. The first is how many copies of the manuscript are still around and how similar are they to one another? The higher the number of manuscripts and the greater the similarity between them, the more likely the copies are true to the original writing. In the case of the New Testament, the writings of the first followers of Jesus, the vast number of ancient manuscripts is overwhelming evidence of its authenticity. In fact, there are more ancient copies of the New Testament than any other document in all of literature.

When you were in high school or college you may have read Homer's *Odyssey* or *The Iliad*. Maybe you studied Plato's writings in a philosophy class. There are seven manuscript copies of Plato's Tetralogies. There are 10 manuscripts Of Caesar's Gallic Wars. There are 643 manuscripts of Homer's *Iliad*. You say, "That's a lot." What about the New Testament?

There are over 24,000 manuscript portions of the New Testament that date back to the first few Centuries of Christianity.

What about the Old Testament? In the 1948 printing of his book, *Our Bible and Ancient Manuscripts*, the great scholar Sir Frederick Kenyon, wrote that he doubted scholars would ever find manuscript copies of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament that were older than the Masoretic Text. The Masoretic Text of the Old Testament was produced in A.D. 900 by a group of Hebrew scribes known as the "Masoretes."

When Kenyon wrote his book in 1947, it was the oldest ancient manuscript of the entire Old Testament. But at virtually the same time his book was rolling off the presses, thousands of miles away a young Arab boy was walking along the shore of the Dead Sea. For fun he picked up a stone and randomly threw it into one of the hundreds of caves in the cliffs that surround it. To his surprise, he heard something shatter. When he crawled in to investigate, he found a broken pottery jar and some old manuscripts, the first of the collection that came to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. Soon archeologists were excavating caves throughout the area. They were amazed to find fragments of every Old Testament book and several complete copies. Investigation revealed that they were produced at Qumran, a Jewish settlement, which existed between 125 B.C. and A.D. 68. Newly found manuscripts, the Dead Sea Scrolls version of the Old Testament, had to have been produced around 100 B.C., which is almost 1,000 years prior to the Masoretic text.

If errors and changes had crept into the Old Testament over time, it would surely be discovered when the Masoretic text was compared to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Guess what? The only variations over 1,000 years amounted to what could be categorized as minor spelling errors!

I can't even sign my name the same way twice! Yet Jewish scribes had been accurately transcribing the scripture for a millennium. That amazing consistency has led most scholars to conclude that the Old Testament text has been preserved from the time of the originals, and that the Bible we read today contains the authentic writings of Moses and David and the prophets.

Now, when we say that the Bible is totally without error, we mean the original writings. We don't possess any of the original writings of the 66th book of the Bible called "autographs." For instance, there are no original autographs of Luke's writings. We have faithful copies preserved of what he wrote. Before the time of the printing press or the Xerox machine, faithful scribes spent their entire lives copying the scriptures, applying the same rules of literary criticism to the Bible as to that of other ancient literature. There is at least a hundred times more evidence for the Bible than for any other ancient book. The second evidence that I'd like to introduce for the truth of the Bible is in the field of:

2. Archaeological discoveries

I love biblical archeology. When I was a freshman in college, I had dreams of being an archeologist, because I thought it would be exciting and glamorous like Indiana Jones. Then I spent some time digging at Beth Shan in Israel. It is slow tedious work. I spent three weeks digging in a box six feet square with nothing but a spoon and a toothbrush and that cured my desire to be an archeologist! But I am still amazed at the modern archaeological discoveries that continue to prove the truth of the Bible. Let me give you two examples.

Let me read excerpts from an article that appeared in the Kansas City Star just last December:

"From the Northern Hills of Israel to the desert of Yemen, a string of recent archaeological discoveries have provided the first hard evidence for several biblical figures and events, many of which had been widely dismissed as myths and moral tales. Individually, the discoveries are important. Together they are shaking the field of biblical archaeology and buttressing words believers have taken on faith. The most important of the new discoveries is evidence for the existence of King David. The Bible says the child David slew the Philistine giant Goliath and went on to found Jerusalem. David's story is an exciting tale of murder, adultery, deceit and extraordinary faith and courage. The story is so fantastic, some historians said that he was just a character of Jewish legend – he didn't really exist. Why? Because for centuries, there was no archeological evidence for his existence.

In 1993 Israeli archaeologists digging in the Golan Heights unearthed a piece of stone from an ancient monument. Inscribed upon it, in ancient Aramaic, were the words "King of Israel" and "House of David." The story so shook some scholars that they insisted the find was phony or the inscription incorrectly translated. A year later, however, archaeologists found more fragments of the [monument] with additional inscriptions referring to the ancient king. Today the new scholarly consensus is that David was real. Not because the Bible says so, says Ronny Reich of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, but because "archaeology has found it."

We read in all four gospel accounts that there was a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate who delivered Jesus over to the Jews to be crucified. But there is no written record (other than the Bible) of this character, so some have questioned the truth of the Bible for this reason.

For centuries, historians questioned the existence of Pontius Pilate until a stone tablet with his name on it was unearthed at Caesarea in 1961.

Today, you can visit the ruins of Caesarea and read with your own eyes that Pilate really existed. Not because the Bible says it, but archeology confirms it. Those are just two of hundreds of examples of how modern archeology supports the Bible. Is the Bible true? Literary criticism says it's more reliable than any other text. Archeology seconds the motion. Here's my third area of evidence. The reliability of the Bible is supported by:

3. Fulfilled prophecies

Dr. Peter Stoner has written a good book about the Bible called *Science Speaks*. He points out that there are at least 300 Old Testament scriptures that have already been fulfilled in the New Testament. When we were studying the prophecy of Daniel a few weeks ago, we studied many prophecies that have been fulfilled. But let's narrow it down a little further to just the prophecies about Jesus. There are 33 Old Testament prophecies about Jesus that were clearly fulfilled in His life. Have you ever thought of the odds of that just happening in a random fashion?

Dr. Peter Stoner calculates that the random of possibility of any one person fulfilling just 8 prophecies is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.

That's a 1 with 17 zeros. I'm not even sure how to pronounce that number—it's something like a thousand trillion! Dr. Stoner points out a better way to calculate those odds. In order to comprehend this, imagine taking one thousand trillion silver dollars and laying them on the face of the state of Texas. They will cover the entire state two feet deep. Then mark one of the silver dollars and somehow stir the whole pile thoroughly, all over the state. Put on a blindfold, travel as far as you wish, and on the first try, pick up the marked silver dollar. The chance of that happening is the same as the chance of eight messianic prophecies coming true in any one man. And remember, there are at least 33 prophecies that were fulfilled exactly by Jesus. Here are a few: (1) Isaiah 7:14 predicted He would be born of a virgin; (2) Micah 5:2 predicted He would be born in Bethlehem; (3) Isaiah 9:1 predicted that His main ministry area would be Galilee; (4) Psalm 41:9 predicted that He would be betrayed by a friend; (5) Isaiah 53:7 predicted that He would be silent before His accusers; (6) Psalm 22:16 predicted that His hands and feet would be pierced; (7) Psalm 22:18 predicted that they would cast lots for His clothing; (8) Isaiah 53:9 predicted that He would be buried in the tomb of a rich man.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury I pose the question to you again. Is this book merely a book of fairy tales with a moral lesson? You must decide. But I believe it is a supernatural book—it is the infallible, perfect, authoritative Word of God, unlike any other book that will ever be written. I agree with the ancient Christian leader St. Augustine who said, "When the Bible speaks, God speaks."

So Luke, the beloved physician, is writing to us to confirm the accuracy and the certainty of the biblical record. Now, let's look a little closer at the Gospel according to Luke, because his theme is the theme of the Bible. Our second topic today is

II. THE THEME OF THIS BOOK

When I speak of "this book" I am referring to the entire Bible as well as the book of Luke's account of the life and teaching of Jesus. The key verse to the Gospel, which forms a brief outline of the book, is found in 19:10 This is a very well-known passage spoken by our Lord, in which he said of himself, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." That sums up the Gospel according to Luke and it is a pretty good thematic verse for the entire Bible, because:

1. The Bible's main person is Jesus

In Luke He is most often referred to as the "Son of Man." Each Gospel account presents a different angle on the character of Jesus. In Matthew, Jesus is the King, the Messiah, who fulfilled the Old Testament; this was written primarily to a Jewish audience. In Mark, Jesus is seen as the great Miracle Worker and Mark is writing so the Romans will be impressed with the power and authority of Jesus. John presents Jesus as the Son of God: The Word became flesh and his approach is to all people. Luke focuses more on the wonderful humanity of Jesus: He is seen as the "Son of Man" and we have many more parables in Luke than in any other gospel account. We have 51 total parables of Jesus recorded, of those, 35 are found in Luke, and 19 are *only* in Luke. You cannot escape the fact that Jesus is the central figure in all of history. Even when an atheist looked at the calendar this morning he unconsciously bore witness to the person of Jesus. Whatever he may believe about Him, Jesus split history into two parts. Everything that has ever happened on this planet falls into a category of before Christ or after Christ.

Phillip Shaff writes about Jesus:

"Without money and arms, this Jesus of Nazareth conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed and Napoleon; without science and learning, he shed more light on things human and divine than all the philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of the orator. Without writing a single line, he set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times. Born in a manger, and crucified as a malefactor, he now controls the destinies of the civilized world, and rules a spiritual empire which embraces one third of the inhabitants of the globe."

(Philip Schaff, *The Person of Christ*, p. 33ff)

H.G. Wells, a historian who does not even call himself a Christian, admits that Jesus is the most influential man of history. He writes: "The historian's test of an individual's greatness is, 'what did he leave to grow? Did he start men thinking along fresh lines with a vigor that persisted after him?' By this test, Jesus stands first."

Jesus, Himself, claimed that the entire Bible was about Him. On the first Easter afternoon, as he was walking on the road to Emmaus with two discouraged disciples who didn't know that He was the risen Christ, we read these words in Luke 24:25 –27: He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning him.

But Luke 19:10, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost," also shows us that:

2. The Bible's main purpose is salvation

In those three verbs, we have a simple division of the gospel of Luke: (1) Came (2) Seek and (3) Save.

First, Jesus:

(a) Came to us

We read in chapters 1 through 3 exactly *how* Jesus came to us. Over the next few weeks we will carefully study the details surrounding the wondrous birth of Jesus to the virgin named Mary. Isn't it a shame that the only time we usually study the birth of Jesus is around Christmas time when we have so many other things on our minds? We are going to have Christmas in July and take time to learn the glorious truth of *how* the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. By the way, one of the reasons I'm excited about preaching through Luke is because the topic of every single message will be about Jesus. When I preached through Romans and Daniel, I always tried to take a text and go straight to Jesus but in Luke, we start with Jesus in every passage. Now, the first chapter in God's salvation is that Jesus came to us. That means that we were unable to go to God, because He is holy, holy, holy and we are sinners, sinners, sinners.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, they could walk and talk with God in the cool of the evening. They were free to approach God because they were sinless. But when they became sinners, they messed it up for all of us and since that time, each person has experienced an alienation from God. John Milton, in his wonder allegorical epic called it *Paradise Lost*. Jesus came to reverse that mistake in what we could call Paradise Restored. In other words, what we could not do—approach God—He did for us when He sent Jesus into this world. If there is one verse you know from the Bible, it must be John 3:16. Say it out loud with me, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This first thing God did was to give His precious Son to come to us. Jesus was always co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, but He laid aside this glory and came to us. Not only that, but Jesus:

(b) Came seeking us

How did He do that? He not only came to us, He became like us so that He could relate to us. The story of Jesus seeking us is found in Luke chapters 4-19. You see, in the Old Testament, it was hard to relate to God because He is such a terrifying, awesome, mighty God. The Old Testament taught that if any man saw God, he would die. It would have been like looking into a light so bright that you would have been blinded. Even Moses couldn't look at God on Mount Sinai—he could only glance the afterglow of God's glory—and it gave Him a holy sunburn!

The Bible says "all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Jesus." (Colossians 1:19) God wanted to be able to sit down and talk with mankind, and the only way He could do it was to send His Son who would put on human flesh and walk with us and talk with us. That's why in Luke we see the tender, human side of Jesus. We are going to be blessed as we study what Jesus said and what Jesus did in seeking us. The final chapter of salvation is found in the last verb in Luke 19:10: Jesus:

(c) Came to save us

That's what we read about in Chapters 20-24. Jesus goes to Jerusalem and voluntarily allows Himself to be betrayed, arrested, tortured and crucified. Luke goes into marvelous detail about the crucifixion and tells us things that perhaps only a physician would understand. But then, the story doesn't end with the death and burial of Jesus.

Cindy and the girls and I have just returned from a wonderful trip to London and Paris. While there, we visited many art galleries such as the National Gallery in London, the Orsay Museum, and the Louvre in Paris. It's amazing how many pictures of the death of Jesus were the subject of those early painters. I'm sure I saw no less than 100 paintings that depicted Jesus on the cross and I saw at least 50 that pictured Mary, the mother of Jesus, holding Him in her arms after the crucifixion; but I saw very few pictures of the resurrection. There were a few, but not many.

Don't misunderstand what I'm saying, because the death of Jesus on the cross was the single most important event in human history—but without the resurrection, His death was for nothing. The reason He died was to bear our sins, He was buried to take away our sins, but as the Bible says in Romans 4:25 "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." That's exactly why I don't believe in wearing or kissing a crucifix. Because Jesus is no longer on the cross: He is alive for evermore. As we say every Easter: He is risen! He is risen, indeed!!

So, that's the gospel story in its most condensed form. "The Son of Man (Jesus) came to seek and to save that which was lost." Where are we in that verse? Look at the last word: LOST. That's us. Without Jesus a person is lost. If you are here today and you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Bible says you are LOST. I've known people who have lost a fortune; that's sad. I've known people who have lost their health; how tragic. I've known people who have lost their minds; so agonizing. But, my friend, worse than losing your fortune, your health, or your mind is having a lost soul. Jesus once made this amazing observation: "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul?" (Mark 8:36) You see if you are lost, Jesus is your *only* hope. The Bible says in Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." What is salvation? As

I say so often, religion is not the same thing as salvation. Salvation is having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Do you have a relationship with Him?

CONCLUSION

I believe the older I get, the more I realize that relationships are the bottom line of life. Several years ago, Allen Peterson was on a Boeing 747 as it took off from Brazil in the middle of the night to return him to his home in the U.S. As the jet was climbing, there was a lurch and then a loud noise and the aircraft started to sink. A frantic announcement came over the speaker announcing that they had a serious emergency—they had lost three engines due to fuel contamination and the fourth could stop at any moment. They were instructed to prepare for a crash. Let me read to you what Allen Petersen felt during those last few minutes:

“When the steward barked ‘prepare for impact’ all I could do was pray. Everybody started praying. I found myself praying in a way that was as natural to me as breathing. As I buried my head in my lap and pulled my knees up, as I was convinced it was over I said, ‘Oh, God, thank you. Thank you for the incredible privilege of knowing you. Life has been wonderful.’ And as the plane was going down my last thought, my last cry was, ‘Oh, God, I love you. I love my wife! I love my children!’ Miraculously, our plane was able to make an emergency landing back at the airport. I walked back into the terminal a shaken man. As I reflected on my near-death experience I asked myself: ‘What did I do? What did I say? What were my last thoughts? Why did I think that?’ I wondered, ‘What was the bottom line?’ In that moment, I discovered the bottom line of my life is: relationships. My relationship with God and my relationship with my family are more valuable than life itself.” (J. Allen Petersen, *Family Building*, p. 104)

If you were facing death today, could you honestly say you are certain that you have a personal relationship with God? You can enter into that relationship with Him today, by trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

OUTLINE

I. THE TRUTH OF THIS BOOK

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1. Literary comparison

There are over 24,000 manuscript portions of the New Testament that date back to the first few centuries of Christianity.

2. Archaeological discoveries

For centuries, historians questioned the existence of Pontius Pilate until a stone tablet with his name on it was unearthed at Caesarea in 1961.

3. Fulfilled prophecies

Dr. Peter Stone calculates that the random possibility of any one person fulfilling just 8 prophecies is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.

II. THE THEME OF THIS BOOK

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." *Luke 19:10*

The Bible's main:

1. Person is Jesus—"Son of Man"

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. *Luke 24:25-27*

2. Purpose is salvation—Jesus:

- a. Came to us
- b. Came seeking us
- c. Came to save us

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." *Acts 4:12*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes