

Main Idea: There are two subjects that every person needs to know about: Christ, and the Church. Or are these two subjects really one subject? Luke helps us answer this question in his two God-inspired books, and we’re beginning a journey through his second book this morning.

- I. Everyone needs to know the truth about Christ. That’s why Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke.
 - A. Luke explained his investigation (1:1-2).
 1. It involved human resources.
 2. It involved divine inspiration.
 - B. Luke explained his instruction (1:3).
 1. It’s thorough.
 2. It’s accurate.
 3. It’s orderly.
 - C. Luke explained his intention (1:4).
 1. God’s Word doesn’t offer us speculation.
 2. God’s Word offers us certainty.
- II. Everyone needs to know the truth about the Church. That’s why Luke wrote the Book of Acts.
 - A. We have a history.
 1. The Church began in Jerusalem (Acts 1).
 2. The Church spread to Rome and beyond (Acts 28).
 - B. We have a mission.
 1. We need to know Christ.
 2. We need to make Christ known to others.
 - C. We have a certain hope.
 1. The Church is not the work of man.
 2. The Church is the work of God.

The Necessary Response: We need to make two commitments...

1. We need to take Christ seriously.
2. We need to take the Church seriously.

There are two subjects that every person needs to know about if they want to experience life as God intended. The first is *Christ*. The second is the *Church* of Jesus Christ. Then again, are these two subjects really two subjects, or one subject?

I think the Spirit of God answered this question for us by directing a man named Luke to write two God-breathed books, the first his Gospel, the second his record of the Acts of the apostles. In his first book Luke tells us what Jesus did, or as he says in Acts 1:1, “what Jesus began to do.” In his second book he tells us what Jesus is doing in the present age as He works by the ministry of His Spirit through His church.

I’ve entitled this message, “*Christ and the Church: Two Subjects or One?*” Let’s read the opening verses of Acts.

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:1-5

Suppose you had a friend who asked you, “What can you tell me about Jesus? I’ve heard a lot about Him. Some say He was a great person. Some say they live life for Him. Others hate Him. Who was He really? I want to know about Jesus.”

How would you respond? Has anyone here ever seen Jesus? Did anyone here have the privilege of watching Jesus heal a leper, or raise a corpse from the tomb, or hear Him proclaim divine truth on the hillsides of Galilee?

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this text, see the Acts series preached at WBC in 2001.

The truth is, of course, none of us have ever seen Jesus, for two thousand years ago, from a hill outside the city of Jerusalem, He vanished from human eyes, and ascended to His Father's right hand in heaven.

So what will you tell your friend? Actually, a very similar situation faced a man named Luke many years ago. Luke was a follower of Christ, although he himself had never personally seen the Master. And he had a friend who had questions about Jesus, and he was burdened for him.

So he wrote two books, about two subjects, which indeed are one and the same subject.

This morning we're going to begin a journey through the book of Acts. Why? Because we need to know the truth about these two subjects which are indeed one. And because we too have friends who need to know.

I urge you to invite them and join the journey with us.

I. Everyone needs to know the truth about Christ.

Luke was a "second generation" Christian, for didn't come to know Christ until after He had returned to heaven. By birth, Luke was a Gentile, not a Jew. He had a Greek name (lit. "Loukios"). By occupation, Luke was a physician (Col 4:14). But then Christ saved him, and by divine commission Luke became a ministry associate of Paul.²

Luke had a friend by the name of Theophilus. Out of his love for this friend, Luke wrote two books for him. These are "must read" books for anyone who wants to know what life's all about.

Luke wrote his two-volume set probably somewhere between the years AD 59-63. And he identifies the first recipient at the beginning of both books, a friend named Theophilus. In Luke 1:3, Luke refers to him as "most excellent Theophilus." The phrase could be translated, "Your Excellency Theophilus."

Who was Theophilus? Some feel that earlier in his life Luke had been a slave, and his patron was this man, Theophilus, who became his lifelong friend when he graciously granted Luke his freedom.

We can't prove this, but we do know Luke cared deeply for this man and wanted him to know the truth about the two most important subjects of all, which are really one.

Christ. And the Church.

To begin our series in Acts, let's first go back and look at the beginning of Luke's Gospel. Luke's gospel record is significant. It's distinct. Unlike the other gospel writers who were all Jews, Luke was a Gentile. Matthew, Mark, and John had all seen and heard Jesus. But Luke had not. The others saw life through Hebrew glasses, but Luke was a Greek thinking man.

Most of us have a lot in common with Luke. Like Luke, we are Gentiles. Like Luke, we believe in a Messiah we have never seen. And like Luke, we too have friends who have never seen the Messiah, yet desperately need to know the truth about Him.

I want you to know right up front where Luke is taking us. He wants us to know the truth about Christ, and His church, and not just for knowledge sake, but so we'll embrace Christ and what He's doing today to make Himself known through His church.

In Luke 1:1-4, Dr. Luke explains three things about his gospel.

² In fact, in Philemon 24 Paul called Luke "my fellow worker." At the end of Paul's life, writing from a Roman prison the apostle told Timothy, "Only Luke is with me (2 Tim 4:11)."

A. Luke explained his investigation (1:1-2). “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 were from the first eyewitnesses and servants of the word.”

Luke was living thirty years after Christ had left the earth, sixty years after the God-man was born to peasant parents in the village of Bethlehem. The news of Jesus Christ had spread world-wide through the efforts of His followers.

Luke acknowledged to his friend Theophilus that "many" in his day had undertaken a similar project. What kind of project? “To draw up an account,” he says. “To set forth in order a declaration,” as the KJV puts it.

What kind of account? Luke says, an account of the things that had been “fulfilled among us.”

It was only natural. The message of Jesus was revolutionizing the Roman world.

But things passed on solely by word of mouth can soon be twisted. So it was in the first century. Some people began to misrepresent Jesus by spreading false ideas.

So certain individuals, in fact, *many*, says Luke, began to write down biographical sketches of Jesus. Four of these were God-inspired accounts, written by Matthew, Mark, John (who wrote last), and Luke.

Luke himself, according to his own admission, set out on an investigation. He delved into the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

What sources did he use? He mentions that he utilized two types in his investigation.

1. *It involved human resources.* Notice verse 2 again. Where did Luke get the details for his biographical sketch of Jesus’ life? “They were handed down to us by those who were from the first eyewitnesses and servants of the word.”

Since Luke never saw Jesus, he couldn’t depend upon personal experience. So he interviewed people. He talked with people. He took notes from people.

He says they were "eyewitnesses." It’s the Greek word *autoptai*, from which we get our word "autopsy." What’s an autopsy? It’s involves a personal, first-hand investigation. Autopsy means seeing for yourself. Today this medical term is used to describe post-mortem examinations. Here Dr. Luke uses the word to show us that he interviewed people who had first-hand confrontations with Jesus. Don’t miss this. In writing this gospel, Luke obtained first-hand stories.

Luke uses a second term to describe the people he interviewed. He calls them “servants [ministers] of the word.” This also is a medical word, one that literally means "under-rower". In Luke's day the term was used of the doctors who helped the chief physician in a case. We call them interns today. Luke says he actually interviewed the "under-rowers," the "interns" of the "word".

Unfortunately, in our English Bibles the word "word" in verse 2 begins with a small case letter. The Greek word is *logos*. It's the same term used in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the *Word*." Who was John describing there? In verse 14 John elaborates, "And the Word became flesh." The Word, then, was Jesus.

Luke says he interviewed the "interns" of the "Word", that is, the interns of Jesus. Just who were these interns? They were the apostles for sure, and perhaps others that served Jesus. So Luke tracked down the people that had lived with Jesus for three years, the ones who had watched Him everywhere He went, and hung on every word He spoke.

Know this, my friend. Your Bible is historical and accurate. You can trust it.

Undoubtedly, Luke's gospel was the fruit of countless months of research. He collected writings. He talked to anyone who had first-hand stories to tell him. It seems possible that he interviewed Jesus' mother, Mary, since he has so much to say about our Lord's birth.³

So Luke's investigation involved human resources. But if that was all, then Luke's account would be no more than a literary masterpiece. A second element is vital.

2. *It involved divine inspiration.* 2 Timothy 3:16 indicates, "All Scripture is God-breathed [i.e. given by the inspiration of God]." Peter elaborated in 2 Peter 1:20-21, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

It's possible that Luke himself attests to this divine leading by use of the phrase "from the beginning" ["from the very first" in the KJV] in verse 3. This important word is translated differently elsewhere, such as in John 3:31, "He that cometh *from above* is above all." It appears in James 1:17, "Every good and perfect gift is *from above*." And in James 3:17 in a reference to "wisdom *from above*."

Whether Luke had this in mind in his choice of this word or not, we know this to be true. The fruit of his investigation was directed *from above*. That is, his scientific work was under the guidance of heaven. The Holy Spirit led him as he interviewed, as he collected sources, and then as he wrote. And the product before us, the gospel he wrote, is not merely the work of his hand. It is indeed the inspired product of God Himself.

So what did Luke do with his findings? He told Theophilus in verse 3, "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."

B. Luke explained his instruction (1:3). What kind of document did Luke write to his friend? We discover here three features about Luke's gospel.

1. *It's thorough.* Luke says he "investigated" everything from the beginning. Luke did his homework, and it was thorough. He probed "everything" in the life of his Lord. He traced Jesus' life back to his very birth, and even before.

It's significant to note where Luke began in his gospel. He devoted extensive material to the events surrounding Jesus' birth (1:5-2:52). Why was Luke so thorough in recording the details of our Lord's birth? Because of this. If you misunderstand Jesus' birth, you'll misunderstand who He is, and what He came to do.

2. *It's accurate.* Luke didn't say he merely investigated, but "carefully" investigated. The King James' translators used the phrase, "having had *perfect* understanding."

The word carries the idea of "exactness." Undoubtedly Luke checked and rechecked his findings. And of course the Holy Spirit superintended so that the finished product was perfect. Totally accurate.

Ponder this. You can read the gospel of Luke and see Jesus exactly as He was. There is no misrepresentation. It's totally reliable.

3. *It's orderly.* Luke says it seemed good to him to write an "orderly" account of Jesus' life. Is he saying that his gospel follows a chronological order? It does that. But Luke seems to be saying that he has arranged the various episodes and events from Jesus'

³ Observation by G. Campbell Morgan

life with a purpose in mind. He wants Theophilus to see the parts in relation to the whole.

This is a problem for many today. They celebrate the birth of Christ, yet fail to see His relevance the rest of the year. And they may agree that Jesus did miracles, but they don't know why. And they've heard that He died on a cross, but they don't grasp what that has to do with them.

What do they need? They need Luke's *orderly* account. They need to grasp not just the parts, but the whole. It's not enough merely to know some things *about* Jesus. We need to know Jesus Himself.

My friend, the Bible makes it clear there's nothing more important than knowing Jesus and knowing Him well. That's why Luke wrote this first book for his friend, with instruction that is thorough, accurate, and orderly. Then in verse 4...

C. Luke explained his intention (1:4). "So that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

Luke did not give us his gospel to entertain us. He had a specific purpose in mind when he wrote this for Theophilus (and us).

What was his intention? To give us something. What? One word—*certainty*. "So that you may know the *certainty* of the things you have been taught."

Don't miss that. What did Luke want his friend to find? *Certainty*. That involves intellectual conviction, but more than that. It has to do with security.

It's not clear whether Theophilus was a believer. Undoubtedly, he had heard about Jesus. But apparently he had doubts. Maybe he couldn't buy the part he heard about Jesus being born of a virgin. Or maybe he had questions about Jesus' resurrection. Maybe it all sounded far-fetched to him.

This much we know. Luke was burdened for his friend. He wanted Theophilus to come to know personally the security that comes to a person who gets to know and trust the historical Jesus.

Apparently Theophilus lacked such security. How do we know? Notice at the end of verse 4 that Luke says his friend needed certainty, "of the things you have been *taught*." The word "taught" [in the KJV, "instructed"] means "instructed by word of mouth." We actually get the word "catechism" from the Greek term Luke used. Apparently, Theophilus had learned of Jesus only through word of mouth. He didn't possess any written document to tell him of Jesus.

Luke wrote so that his friend might have a certain and secure record of Jesus Christ. He didn't want his comrade to flounder any longer. He wanted him to *know*. He wanted him to come face to face with the risen Christ.

Ponder the implications, dear friends...

1. *God's Word doesn't offer us speculation.* Rather...
2. *God's Word offers us certainty.*

Are you certain today about the truth of Christ? Do you know Him personally? Is He the Savior and Lord of your life?

If not, why not? Are you struggling with the notion that God became a man in order to save you? Does that not make sense to you?

Luke would say, "Look at the record! I've investigated the facts. I've interviewed the eyewitnesses. The gospel is true. You can believe it. And you can find security in your life if you will place the confidence of your hope in Jesus Christ!"

You might be thinking, “I’d believe in Jesus, but I can’t see Him. I can’t feel Him.” And Luke would say, “Read the record I’ve given you about Jesus, my friend. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.”

*How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?*

What’s the best thing you can do for a friend? Do what Luke did. Introduce your friend to Christ. And if he knows Christ, help him to grow in Christ.

I know many of you are doing just that. With your neighbors, and people at school, and family members. Keep doing it! We need to tell people the truth about Christ.

But there’s a second vital subject, although often neglected, that we need to discuss with our friends. Like Luke did with Theophilus. It’s what volume two is all about.

II. Everyone needs to know the truth about the Church.

In volume one, Luke told his friend the truth about *Christ*. But he didn’t stop there. He moved to a second subject, *the Church*, which is really the same subject.

Notice Luke’s introductory remarks in Acts 1:1-2, “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”

Luke refers to his “former book.” What book is that? His gospel account. What was the subject matter of the first book? He reminds Theophilus that his first volume was about the life of Jesus up until the day He returned to heaven.

Yes, Theophilus needed to know about that critical first subject. He needed to know the truth about *Christ*, as does every person, for Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”

But that’s not all he needed. Which is why the Spirit directed Luke to write a second volume, the one we call “Acts,” and shared about the wonderful subject of the *Church*.

There’s an unfortunate break in the order of the New Testament books that prevents us from seeing the connection between Luke’s two volumes. Did you realize that Luke devoted nearly as much ink to the second subject as he did to the first?⁴

We’re facing something today that was unheard of in the early days of Christianity. Many people know the truth about *Christ*—and may even know Christ—but have no meaningful relationship with His *Church*.

For various reasons. Some have bought the American notion of rugged individualism: “I don’t need anybody else. It’s just me and God.”

Others have been burned by bad church experiences. And so they’ve chucked the church.

And still others, even those who sit in church from week to week, fail to see the importance of the church. Church is sort of like the *Rotary Club*. “If you’ve got some extra time, fine. But you don’t really need it. A good idea maybe, but not a necessity.”

To which Luke would say, “Hold on. We do need the church.”

⁴ In the Greek text, in Luke’s Gospel there are 19,482 words; in Acts there are 18,450 words; In case you’re interested, the book in the Bible with the most words is Jeremiah, with 33,002, then Genesis (32,046), Psalms (30,147), and Ezekiel (29,918). The book with the least number is 3 John (219); see <https://overviewbible.com/word-counts-books-of-bible/>

In fact, we need the *church* just as much as we need *Christ*. Don't misunderstand me. We are saved by placing our faith in *Christ*, not by joining a church. Yet *Christ* and His church go together. Yes, we need to know what *Christ* did when He came to earth, and that's what Luke's Gospel shows us (Acts 1:1 "In my former book I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach..."). But we also need to know what *Christ* is doing presently, and that's what Luke's second book shows us.

Right now *Christ* is making Himself known in and through His church. The church *is* His Body. To know Him fully we must know and experience Him in the church. The two subjects go hand in hand.

I'm convinced we need the book of Acts, just like Theophilus did. Acts is a goldmine, and in it Luke gives us three treasures.

A. We have a history. The book of Acts tells us what happened during the first thirty years of the Church's existence. As we scan the book we discover that...

1. *The Church began in Jerusalem (Acts 1)*. It began with the small band of Jesus' followers having a prayer meeting in an upper room. But then, as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit came and transformed this timid group into a bold army. The transformation was so drastic that within one generation...

2. *The Church spread to Rome and beyond (Acts 28)*. The book ends in chapter 28 with the apostle Paul under house arrest in the capital city of the Roman Empire. It's quite possible that Luke wrote this work while his mentor, Paul, was awaiting trial in Rome. My Study Bible makes the point, "If his case came to court, what better court brief could Paul have had than a life of Jesus [the gospel of Luke], a history of the beginnings of the church (including the activity of Paul) and an early collection of Paul's letters?"⁵

Brothers and sisters, God wants us to know why we are here. That's why He gave us Acts. When we become a Christian, we join ranks with countless others who've gone before us. We are part of something that has a history.

B. We have a mission. Luke introduces the theme of the book in Acts 1:8. He quotes the final words of Jesus, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Why are we here? Jesus tells us.

1. *We need to know Him*. And then...

2. *We need to make Him known to others*. That's the mission of the Church.

And in the book of Acts Luke makes it clear that such was the *passion* of the Church.

Church is not what they did on Sunday. Church is who they were 24-7. Next to *Christ* Himself, there was nothing more important in their lives than the Church.

Nothing. I'm not exaggerating. Look through the book of Acts and what do you find? You find the followers of *Christ* banding together in their effort to proclaim *Christ* to the world.

They started in Jerusalem and Judea (chapters 1-7). Then they took the good news to Samaria (chapter 8). Then to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (chapters 9-12). And finally to Asia Minor and Europe, all the way to Rome (chapters 13-28).

In just one generation, they proclaimed the gospel to the world as they knew it. Did it cost them? Indeed. When we read the book we see Christians selling their properties to

⁵ NIV Study Bible, p. 1644.

fund the mission of the Church. We see Stephen and James and others laying down their lives. We see Paul and others being beaten and locked away in prisons.

What kept the followers of Jesus going? Luke tells us, a third treasure...

C. We have a certain hope. During Jesus' earthly ministry He said, "I will build My Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt 16:18)." He meant what He said. And if Acts makes anything clear, it's this. He truly meant what He said!

In fact, when Jesus told His followers, "You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth," He was giving them a *promise* as much as a responsibility. You *will* be My witnesses.

And they were. Read Acts and you see them going to Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, and beyond.

Was it easy? No. Wherever the Church went, it met stiff opposition. The persecution was often fierce, the antagonism great. But the promise of the Savior held true.

You *will* be My witnesses. And they were.

When Luke penned his second book he told the story, not of what Jesus did (that was his first book), but what He *began* to do and now is still doing. In chapter one He tells His followers to wait in Jerusalem until the promised One comes. In chapter two He sends His Spirit and forms the church and begins His work of rescuing sinners.

It's His work. It's His presence. So when we hear Him confront the tormentor of the church in Acts 9:4, He says, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

The church is His Body. What happens to His body is happening to Him.

In Acts Luke provides a living color demonstration of two certainties regarding the Church.

1. *The Church is not the work of man.* Rather...
2. *The Church is the work of God.* And because it is, no man, not even the mighty emperor of Rome himself, can stop it.

Will there be setbacks? Yes, and they will be painful, and many. But through it all, His church will advance. *He* will advance from city to city, nation to nation, until He has finished His mission of rescuing helpless, hell-bound rebels from every nation, language, and tribe.

Indeed, Luke ends the book highlighting the certain hope of the Church. Ironically, Paul is under house arrest in Rome, yet Luke says, "*Boldly and without hindrance* he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31)."

Even prison cannot thwart the work Christ is doing through His Church.

Brothers and sisters, we have a history, a mission, and a certain hope. Luke wants us to know that. That's why he wrote this book for his friend.

Let the implications sink in. If you are a Christian, you need the church. And you are needed in the church. I don't think we can overstate the importance of the church.

This understanding prompted Martin Luther to say, "Apart from the church, salvation is impossible." It's not that the church provides salvation. Only Christ can save a sinner. But once He does, Christ instructs that saved sinner to identify with and function as a member of His Body, the Church.

Calvin wrote, "So highly does the Lord esteem the communion of His church that He considers everyone a traitor and apostate from religion who perversely withdraws himself

from any Christian society which preserves the true ministry of the word and sacraments.”⁶

So two subjects? Or one? According to Luke, they go together. And the best thing we can do for those we care about is what Luke did with Theophilus. Help them come to grips with the truth about Christ and His Church.

The Necessary Response: We need to make two commitments...

1. *We need to take Christ seriously.* That’s the message of Luke’s first book. Jesus Christ came to save sinners. He lived a perfect life because we haven’t, and can’t, and a holy God requires perfection. He went to the cross, died in the place of sinners, and then conquered death by rising again on the third day. Now God will forgive us, and give us the merit of His Son’s perfect life, if we will repent and call upon Him in simple, child-like faith.

Have you received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? If so, have you obeyed His command to make your faith public by being baptized? And are you now seeking to live your life for His honor and pleasure and purpose?

We need to take Christ seriously. Furthermore...

2. *We need to take the Church seriously.* That’s the message of Luke’s second book. If we know Christ, it’s our privilege and responsibility to be an active, contributing member of His church. To place ourselves in it, so we can learn and grow. To serve through it, knowing that the parts of the body can do more together than on their own.

Friends, if you have questions about Christ and His church, I’d love to talk with you. What a joy it is to know Christ and be part of what He is doing in the world today.

⁶ Charles W. Colson, *The Body*, 1992, Word Publishing, p. 70.