

Christ of Prophecy

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[0 : 0 0] Now we return together to chapter one of Luke. And even though it's going to take us quite a while to go through Luke, we can never really look at it in as much detail as it deserves.

And so there will be times when we'll maybe either read longer passages and just actually focus and preach on shorter bits of them, or we will leave out passages, but we will hope to keep through the theme of this book.

And what I want to do to begin with is introduce the author, because it's important, isn't it? Because we're not dealing with fable here, we're not dealing with make-believe, we're not dealing with fairy stories, we're dealing with real people in real life, so it's good for us to be introduced to the author of this gospel, who is, as is stated there in the heading, Luke, who is he?

Well, we know that he's a doctor. Okay, we can build up a small picture of him. We're not told very much about him, just as we're often not told very much about some of the characters in the Bible, but we know he's a doctor, a medical doctor, that's made clear from Colossians 4:14.

We also know that he was an evangelist, he was a believer who went and supported Paul on his missionary journey. Okay, so we've got a couple of facts there.

[1 : 2 8] He's also a second-generation believer, which means that he didn't see Jesus face-to-face. He didn't touch Jesus, he wasn't in the company of Jesus, but he knew people who knew Jesus.

So he was second-generation at that level, hadn't met with Jesus himself. He was possibly, at probably, should I say, although it's not definitively revealed, he was very probably a Greek, he wasn't a Jewish believer, he was a Gentile.

So he begins to come a little bit closer, maybe, to us, culturally, because he was a Greek person as opposed to a Jewish person, and he most probably was writing this to Gentile people as opposed to Jewish people.

Very often people who weren't Christians. And interestingly, he has two volumes to his book. Don't know if you recognize or remember that or know that.

And the middle point of the two volumes is the ascension of Jesus. Volume one is the Gospel of Luke finishes with the ascension. Volume two is the Acts of the Apostles.

[2 : 4 5] It starts with the ascension. So the ascension is the middle point. First of all, he wants to tell people about Jesus' life, and then he wants to tell about the early church on either side of the ascension.

So we have two volumes, and we have, and I don't know if you know this, maybe it'll come up in some biblical Trivial Pursuit quiz, I'm not sure, but it's also useful to know, not just from a Trivial point of view, but if you were asked who has written the most in the New Testament, what would you say? Would your hands go up for Paul?

I think most people would think it's Paul. Paul's written the most in the New Testament, all these epistles, all these pastoral letters, but it's Luke. Luke, who wasn't a Jew, Luke who was a Gentile, Luke who was writing to Gentiles, it writes the most of the New Testament.

God's revelation to us in the New Testament. It seems he's a bright, passionate, thoughtful man who has been transformed by Jesus Christ. His life has been changed radically. He's not thick, he's not dumb, he's not stupid, he's not superstitious, he's a medical professional, and his life has been turned upside down by Jesus, and he wants to share that.

And God has anointed him to share that, not just with his compatriots and people like Theophilus, to whom he writes, but also to the whole generations of humanity after him.

[4 : 11] So that's a little introduction about who he is. Now what is he doing? Well, if you look at the introduction, introductions are important. Stay with me here. Verses 1 and 4 are very important.

You might think they're just a kind of precursor to the Gospel. They're unimportant, but particularly in the light of what we were looking at on Wednesday evening, which was great. When we got into groups and we looked at some difficult, apologetic questions that people asked, you know, how can you trust the Bible? How do you know the Bible is true?

Well, we come back to bits like this to help us to understand these things. What's he doing? Well, he's presenting the facts of the Gospel. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seems good also for me to write an orderly account.

He's looking at all the accounts handed down by the eyewitnesses. So here's Dr. Luke. He is a medic. He is used to detail. He's used to study.

He's used to accuracy. He's used to diagnosis. He's used to finding answers. And here he gives, he is concerned to tell us that he is writing not a loose account of what Jesus has done, but something that is well researched, that goes back to eyewitnesses, that is based on fact, that is orderly, that is investigated.

[5 : 34] In a sense, he moves from being a doctor to being someone like an investigative journalist. He's looking in a detailed way at these facts. In some ways, it's almost legal the way he speaks here.

It's almost like he's presenting a legal case that is orderly and is full of accuracy, is carefully investigated, and he's presenting the facts of the Gospel, the truth of Jesus Christ, the truth of what Jesus is.

But he's also doing more than that. And this is important for us because he is recognizing that these facts provide deeper spiritual value than merely the presentation of facts, because he's presenting them to a person, to theophilus.

And he wants, theophilus might, as we've said before, they may know the certainty of the things that you've been taught. Again, we don't know much about theophilus. He may be an inquirer, he probably was.

He may be a young Christian, we don't know exactly, young believer. But he recognizes that if theophilus has the facts of the Gospel, and he knows about Jesus, then that will make him more secure in his faith, and he will believe more certainly, he will have a better foundation, and his life will be transformed.

[6 : 56] Because Luke has been with Paul and he has seen the lives of ordinary people like you and I being transformed all over the place, what by the presentation of the facts of the Gospel, as they are presented and as they reveal Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit of God.

So he recognizes that these facts God uses to change lives. I hope you recognize something of the importance of that for ourselves in our Christian lives and in our Christian testimony.

The facts of the Bible are the truth of the Bible. It's very important because some people kind of talk about today and the Bible contains truth and there's facts kind of swilling about, but if you look deeper you'll find some spiritual truth that might help you.

Maybe it's mystical, maybe it's hidden, maybe it's just a subliminal message. But here Luke is saying the facts of the Bible are the truth of the Bible.

It's not hidden, it's not kind of somewhere in there in the ether of what is presented. The facts of the Bible matter because they are the truth of the Bible.

[8 : 12] Because what happened happened. The history of the Bible, the accuracy of the Bible, it matters. It's not just a dry kind of academic discussion in the academy for people to discuss whether the Bible is true or genuine or not.

It's important for us because this is history, because the facts of the Bible reveal the truth of God to us. And so today we thank God and maybe you should take a moment to thank God for Dr. Luke and value the Bible and value the word and the truth of the word as it's given to us.

And why is that important? Why do the facts matter? In the same way that Luke recognizes, he wrote to Theophilus, that these facts change lives.

And maybe have we lost sight of that reality, that the facts of the Bible change lives. I wonder when we share the Gospel, when we tell people about our Christianity, is it purely subjective, I've done this, Jesus has changed me and all these kind of things, which are right and absolutely important.

And we have no confidence in the facts of the Bible themselves to change people's lives. We're actually worse than having no confidence. We're actually a bit embarrassed by the facts of the Bible. And I'm going to look at that again in a little while.

[9 : 31] A little bit embarrassed about the Jewishness of the Bible, the fact that it's so kind of distant from our 21st century experience, that people have said that the facts can't be trusted.

But Luke had great confidence that it was as he revealed Jesus, and as he laid out the facts that Theophilus would have a great foundation and would be changed.

And that is the power of the good news. And I do think we need to recognize the importance of the facts of the Bible for us. The truth of the Bible, the knowledge of the Bible.

Don't be a second-hand Christian in the level of not knowing the Bible and the truth and the facts of the Bible, because they will give you certainty in your faith. They will give you a deep foundation.

They will really build up your knowledge and your certainty, and your life will be transformed as you soak yourself in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 30] Okay, so that's what he seeks to do. Where does he start? And I can only do a quick overview of this, but he starts like a good doctor at the beginning.

I'm not quite sure why that makes him a good doctor at the beginning, but I suppose if he diagnosed you at the end, it wouldn't be very helpful. So he starts at the beginning, doesn't he? More so than any of the other of the Gospel writers.

He starts at the beginning. He doesn't even start at the birth of Jesus in telling the Gospel story. He starts at the prophecy of the birth of John before Jesus.

And we're going to have a brief overview. He starts with prophecy. He starts with the fact of the prophecy to Zechariah of John's birth.

John the Baptist, that is. That's where he starts. John, who is a priestly dad, Zechariah who is in the temple, the Jewish temple, who gets an angelic visit to tell him that his wife, who's unable to have children and who's by this stage fairly old, is going to have a child, is going to be miraculous at that level, and that John will be born and he will be the forerunner of the Messiah, the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

[11 : 52] He'll prepare the way for Jesus to come. Zechariah and Elizabeth's lives from that point were turned upside down by this prophetic message from Gabriel the angel.

That's where he starts. He then moves on to a very similar account this time, not to a priest but to a teenage girl, an unmarried teenage girl vowed to be married to Joseph.

And the angel Gabriel speaks to her. And he also prophesies that she will have a baby. And she will have a baby miraculously. This will be a virgin birth, clearly documented here by Dr. Luke.

And that he will be the Savior. He will be the Messiah. He will be the Son of God. And Mary's life too was turned upside down by this visit of God, by this visit of the angel who brought God's message.

So that's where he starts. He starts with prophecy and he starts with prophecy of two births that usher in the kingdom age, that usher in the coming of the Messiah.

[13 : 06] So what is happening here? And again, I hope you'll see that relevance not just for Luke as he brings the message to our people but to us in our lives.

What's he happening? Remember Luke is not a Jewish guy and in all probability he's not bringing this account, this Gospel account to Jewish guys, to Jewish people.

He's very probably going to give it to Gentile people. He hopes we'll maybe read it in the coffee tables in Rome or places like that. And so he brings, he's hoping to bring this Gospel and he grounds his account in two very strange areas.

If he's speaking to people who had no real maybe Bible knowledge and no Jewish connections, what does he do? He grounds the beginning of his factual, reasoned, orderly, clever, thought-provoking account in Old Testament history and in the supernatural.

That's what he does. That's how he begins his Gospel. Now if you think about it, that's quite strange, isn't it? He's speaking to people who don't know the Bible, he's speaking to people who aren't Jewish and he grounds the beginning of his story in Old Testament history and the supernatural.

[14 : 28] You know that the first bit there where he speaks about John the Baptist's birth is very kind of Jewish in the way it's presented. He's talking about prophecy, he's almost inferring that this is a first prophetic noise for 400 years, which the Jews would have recognised and known about.

It's set in the Jewish temple. John is going to grow up with a spirit and the passion of Elijah, the Old Testament prophet, and then he goes on to speak about Jesus who would be the Messiah, the people of God's Saviour.

So it's couched in a certain context, isn't it? In certain language, the Old Testament Jewish covenant people of God. That's the kind of language it's spoken about in.

And it's also grounded in the supernatural. And again, you know, this is Dr. Luke. This isn't a witch doctor, it's not a hocus pocus man.

This is a medical, intelligent person who immediately, having moved from speaking about an orderly account that is with eyewitnesses, carefully investigated, immediately starts speaking about angels and about miracle births and about the Holy Spirit living in people and about the Son of God and about prophecy.

[15 : 58] It seems strange, doesn't it? That this guy who's so concerned with giving an accurate and historical account immediately blows into such supernatural language.

Why does that matter? Why is it important here and why is it important for us? Well, there's lots more you could say about this chapter. But, you know, in terms of an overview, what I want to get across are these two things.

That the Gentile people he was writing to, and very often ourselves, and maybe the people that we witness to or share the Gospel with, have two very significant stumbling blocks to becoming Christians, to accepting the Christian faith.

One, people will say it's irrelevant, and two, they will say it's incredible. You can't believe it because it's full of ridiculous stories of God and angels and miracles.

Have you found that? Has that been sometimes what people have opposed? Is that what you find difficult yourself in believing or accepting the Gospel message? It's irrelevant or it is incredible?

[17 : 12] Well, that's why Luke begins in this way, because it's so important to blow apart these particular misconceptions.

It's irrelevant. The Gentile people, why do we want to know about the Old Testament, the history of God and Elijah and the temple and the Messiah?

It's all to do with that little nation, something to do with us in Rome, the great world conquerors, something to do with me in Scotland. Why does the Gospel have to be couched in Jewish terms?

It's irrelevant. How often have we had that argument that the Bible is just a dull history of a small and relevant Middle Eastern nation that have done nothing but caused trouble for centuries?

Jesus has just, I think in someone last week spoke about the RME course for Edward and the Lothians in summarizing the Gospel, or summarizing Jesus Christ, it said that he was a Palestinian moral teacher who died for his beliefs.

[18 : 19] And that was the extent of the whole summary of Christianity at that level. And the cross means nothing. The cross is irrelevant. What is the cross of Jesus Christ?

What is someone dying on a cross 2,000 years ago in Palestine? Got anything to do with me and sophisticated Edinburgh in 21st century? It's irrelevant. The Gospel is irrelevant to my needs, to my struggles, to my difficulties, to my problems.

It's irrelevant. We have to remember, because Luke recognized this and we recognize it, that the Jewishness of the Bible, the Old Testament background to the New Testament story, is not a sideshow.

But it is intrinsic to our understanding. Why? Because God chose to break into our world as a first century Palestinian Jew.

That's why it matters, because it's history, because it's true, because he became flesh. He didn't become flesh in Scotland. He didn't become flesh in USA or in Africa.

[19 : 29] He became flesh in Palestine. And whether we like it or not, that is what Luke is reminding us of, because he is an orderly, high witness, well researched account of the life of Jesus. He actually came. He actually lived.

It's tremendously important, because he didn't just pop into the world. He didn't just go, hey, Presto, I'll choose Israel. He came with all the backing of God's plan and God's providence and God's preparation through an Old Testament covenant people that had been promised a Messiah, not just for themselves, but for you and for me. In 21st century sophisticated Edinburgh.

This is the outworking of God's plan, His long awaited purpose. God breaking into history, to real history, in its context.

So this Bible, it does speak about local history. It does speak about a small nation. We should love it all the more, because it speaks about a small nation, because we're a small nation.

But anyway, that's by the by. But it transcends, of course, that history, doesn't it? Because it's the message of God breaking into real humanity as the Savior.

[20 : 52] He is part of history, but he transcends that history. Please remember that we don't believe in a Santa Claus figure. We don't believe in some ethereal being that is not really real, but Jesus becomes flesh.

And immediately it brings him into our domain and into our life, because in so doing becomes our Savior, our substitute, our Redeemer, our Messiah.

So it's irrelevant that I hope you don't feel the Bible and the knowledge of the Bible and the knowledge of the Old Testament and the measurements for the temple and the pictures about the sacrifice.

And all these things that you look at, what is pretty irrelevant to me, is all given by God, bringing us to understand Jesus more clearly when He appears.

The Egyptian slavery, the freedom from that, the Passover, the prophecies, the judgments of God, the dealings of God with His people. People say, did you test me?

[21 : 58] It's fine. It can be bothered with the Old Testament. Recognize that Jesus coming is well grounded in this Old Testament truth. And the more we know that, and the more we know Jesus, the stronger our foundations will be.

So it's irrelevant, it's still a cry, isn't it? But also many people will say, you're a Christian. I simply can't believe that. It's absolutely incredible. You're telling me, you're a student in the university, you're an intelligent person, and you actually believe that Jesus walked in water.

You believe that He raised the dead. You believe that He's in your heart. Come on. Let's move beyond that. It's incredible the Christian faith.

Science today, reason, it's undermined all these things. It's explained them all the way. We know all the reasons behind what were so-called miracles. Just because at the Bible times, they didn't understand these things.

They didn't know how to explain them so. They just said it was a miracle. And they made you feel stupid. They made you feel, you know, that you're thick, that you're abandoning reason.

[23 : 08] You say, I can't believe the gospel. It's too incredible. Matulus. The virgin birth. Angels. Come on, it's nice to sing at Christmas time.

But I don't believe, and you can't believe these things. It's for weak people. It's for people who need some kind of extra strength in helping their lives.

Unrealistic, unscientific, hocus-pocus. That is the temptation for us to rationalise the gospel beyond and above, or away from the miraculous.

But can I say today, because Luke says it here, Luke starts this orderly, historical, well-researched, eyewitness account. Immediately he starts them with miracles and angels and virgin birth.

And things, he doesn't have any embarrassment about whatsoever. He doesn't even feel the need to explain them. He just gives it as fact. Because the important reality is no supernatural, no gospel.

[24 : 18] It's as simple as that. If we think that we believe in Jesus Christ in the gospel, but we disbelieve in the supernatural, we are not Christians.

It can't be that two are mutually exclusive. No supernatural, no gospel. Dr. Luke is unashamed of that. And we need to be as well, because what Dr. Luke is reminding us of, and which we need reminded us of again in another way, is that it is God's world breaking into ours.

There is miracle involved in Jesus Christ becoming flesh. The virgin birth, the break in conception, the uniqueness of God coming into the world.

The God who comes in and is announced by his angelic beings. Another world breaking into ours. There is God, there is God of science, there is God of reason.

There is God who made these things. Breaks into our world and the gospel is God becoming flesh and breaking into your life and into mine.

[25 : 29] She was wonderful about these stories. It's about God breaking into Zikariah's life and Elizabeth's life. Their name, ordinary people, Mary's life, Joseph's life.

God breaking in in most powerful ways into their lives and coming to do what science and reason can never do, which is give us a new heart and give us forgiveness and peace with God and transform us miraculously by His touch.

You see how important that is that God coming into your life and into mine is a miraculous reality. It is a supernatural reality. And if we lose the sense of supernatural, we lose the sense of God altogether.

Because it's supernatural that God comes and dwells in us and changes our hearts. And you might sit here today feeling absolutely trapped by your circumstances, by your darkness, by the heart that you have, by the fact that you just leap back into the same mistakes again and again, that breaks your heart and you know breaks the heart of others.

And if you don't have a supernatural Christ, you don't have anything. Because it's Christ who must come in and transform and change your hearts.

[26 : 48] He works beyond and in a different realm from science and nature. Neither science or nature or reason contradict or oppose Jesus. In any way at all. I embrace science and reason, even though I'm neither a scientist nor particularly reasonable, if you know me.

But embrace these things. Because God is sovereign over them and nothing in them, in true science or true reason, contradicts with one iota of the supernatural recognition of who Jesus is and what He came to do.

So, we have these two major objections, is it where, that Luke recognized and he sets his, if we can say it this way, he sets his cards on the table right away. And he says, my account of Jesus is going to be based in the historical reality of the Old Testament.

And it's going to be full of the supernatural. It's neither irrelevant nor is it incredible. These are the facts. And these are the facts that remain for us.

History, context, miracle. He knows that these things will give the awfulest and all who read it, a certainty in their faith and a transformed life.

[27 : 58] He knows that. And so today, what do you think of the Gospel of Jesus? And I really look forward to going through Luke's Gospel. Do you think he's irrelevant?

And the Gospel's irrelevant? And you wish it was clothed in 21st century CD, DVD, funky language and terminology and he didn't have to deal with all that Old Testament stuff.

Is it irrelevant? Is it irrelevant to your life and your needs? Is it incredible? Or not too rational, too intelligent, too balanced to believe in the miraculous and the supernatural?

Well, you must overcome these misconceptions or you will never become a Christian. You will never become a Christian if you lose sight of the fact that Jesus burst into history into a real situation, in a real space-time environment.

And if you don't see the need for God to transform your heart. And I hope you'll join us in this journey. And you'll invite others to come along in this journey, going through Luke.

[29 : 13] And if you want to ask more questions that you maybe think are coming along with the CD, can I give the last plug for the CD just now? It starts on Tuesday. No idea how many are coming. We'd like to know if there are any more who can come.

If you've got any invitations filled in, give them back to me today. If not, try and let me know. And there's a pile of invitations out there and I'm really mad at myself because they're all dated.

They'll be useless after Tuesday in a sense. Well, there'll be another seven weeks. They'll be useless after eight weeks unless I take piles and piles of tip-ex and change the dates to next year.

So there are 2008 Christian explored invitations out there. Use them. Hand them out and pray about who might take them. What do you think?

And as Christians, we have this great foundational picture of listening to God and remembering that He speaks through facts and history, through the context of the Bible.

[30 : 17] The doctrine of the Bible matters and it's revealed in the truth and the historical reality of the Bible. And the more you're serious about the Bible, the more you imbibe the Bible and take it on and read it and know it and understand it, then you will be like the awfulest.

More certain of the things you've been taught. You'll be more secure in your faith. You'll not be blown about all over the place. That's one of the reasons I've added questions at the end of the small kind of summary of what we're looking at.

Just to, you know, ground us a little bit more to encourage us to think a little bit more about the truth of the Bible. Facts matter, but also your faith is supernatural.

You have been touched by God as a Christian and that is supernatural. You've been saved by grace. God has broken into your life in the same way He broken into Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph's lives here.

And you need Him. That's the reality. If your Christianity is just about you and your understanding philosophically or intellectually, then you never need God, but He must break into your life and He must be with you in your life.

[31 : 30] It's not just about you and me. It's about God in us strengthening and helping us. And as it was with Zechariah and Elizabeth and Mary and Joseph, when He does come into our lives, He turns them upside down.

These guys' lives were never the same. It was a complete revolution. Maybe you're sitting here today and afraid of that. Afraid that if you give your life to God and God comes into your life and you accept the facts and the truth of the Bible for yourself, that your world will be turned upside down.

That's exactly right. That's exactly what will happen. It's scary, undoubtedly. It's hard, clearly. It's counter-cultural, undoubtedly.

But it's life. And it's life to the full. And it's life that takes you into eternity with Jesus Christ. It's brilliant. You know?

So letting God break into your life is all these things. But it's life and it's healing. And this account, apart from anything else, also gives a great focus on healing.

[32 : 43] I think that's obviously significant because He was a doctor and you like that aspect of the ministry of Jesus. He sees it as healing. Let Jesus into your life through acknowledging and taking the facts and having Christ as your only Savior.

And your life will be turned upside down supernaturally and miraculously. And that will be an ongoing process for every one of us, from the oldest to the youngest. It remains that, a life that we are challenged by looking God.

And I want to say a little bit about that tonight to the young people and also in the evening service when we look at the life of Hezekiah and the miracle that he was given. A difficult account in many ways, but a lot of important principles that we can take from it.

So may God speak to us through His Word, that we not consider Him to be irrelevant or incredible. So it may we put our trust in the Savior, in the facts of the Savior who came, who lived, who died, who was raised again, who ascended, who is at the right hand of God and who will one day return again to judge the world.

May we do so. Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God, we ask and pray that Your Word would challenge us, would move us, would transform us. That You would give us confidence in it.

[34 : 09] That You would help us even in the darkest of our situations to look at them with the perspective of a God who longs to redeem and to comfort and to strengthen and to help and to show Himself as being the Savior.

And we know that that causes us difficulties because we know that sometimes, unlike Elizabeth, the childless couple don't get a child, and we know that sometimes, unlike Hezekiah, the sick person doesn't get healed, we recognize that.

We recognize that you're not a kind of lucky charm for us to give us everything we want and there's desire or look for.

We know the difficulties, we understand the fights, we sweat and we struggle and we try, we're full of trial. But we also know when God breaks into our lives that He knows and that He loves and that His purposes are even beyond what we can understand.

And that ultimately He has defeated these sins and these effects of sin in our lives and He will bring us life and healing and hope eternally.

[35 : 29] May we not be simplistic or stupid or careless or trite in our faith or our expression of it. But may we wrestle with you and with your word and know the relevance and know the incredible nature of what God will and can and does do for Jesus' sake. Amen.