

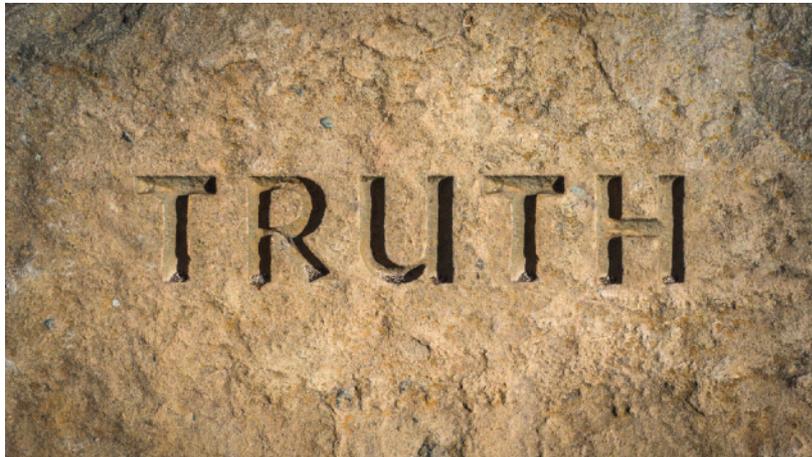
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# Luke Gospel Introduction

**Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 6 July**

Genesis 3:1-5 • Luke 1:1-4

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Let's pray to begin. Lord Jesus, as we open your word together, may it's truth impact and inspire us, Amen.

This morning, as we pick up our series on NT introductions, Luke gives evidence to support the truth and trustworthiness of what has been communicated about Jesus.

Why might Luke start in that way? Because truth is important. The truth of the gospel obviously. But truth in general is pretty foundational if we are to make sense of life.

I want to take it further, and suggest that when it comes to the truth of the gospel, to lose that truth, could well be feeding into one of the growing issues or problems of our day.

There are many voices telling us anxiety levels are pretty high, particularly among younger people. This anxiety level is also being given as one of contributors feeding into what is being called a mental health crisis.

Just this morning I saw this headline from 2022 NZ Herald article. "Anxiety Epidemic: shocking stats show young people at crisis point." In that article, Covid and isolation were listed as a couple of contributors to this problem.

Anxiety and mental health is obviously a very complicated issue, and there can be many reasons, physical, social, spiritual, environmental, for people to feel anxious and all that might follow from that anxiety.

I want to suggest though, that a part of what seems to be an exponential growth in poor mental health, could be tied to the loss of a big story that can us make sense of life. The big story I have in mind is the gospel story.

So I want to take the idea of truth and say, when it gets to the stage where truth is seen as fluid and relative, even a somewhat outdated idea, confidence can go **down**, and anxiety can go **up**.

Let me take a simple example. Say I'm invited to sit on a rickety looking chair with the assurance, "don't worry it's safe." If I doubt the truth of that statement, I will sit with a certain amount of anxiety.

Now say I was anxious about a whole bunch of stuff, most of which I had little or no control over. To make matters worse, say I didn't believe that anyone was in control. No one good at least.

Luke would not want me to face that kind of struggle. He begins by giving reason for faith. Yes, as a follower of Jesus I still worry about things. But my worry is tempered, or modified, or filtered through a gospel lens.

In Vs 4 Luke is giving the reason he is starting his gospel as he does. "so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed".

Truth and the trustworthiness of it is something of a theme for Luke it would seem. As he began Acts, he also emphasised the trustworthiness and truth of the gospel. He pointed to the evidence of the resurrection and invited folk to check this evidence out with the eye witnesses that were still around.

Whatever people may say in our truth denying or truth adverse culture, truth matters. It matters because truth builds trust. And trust or faith, in one who is both good, and in control, can certainly help with anxiety levels.

Let me say at this point. Having faith in Jesus, and holding to the truth of gospel as reliable and trustworthy does not inoculate one, or guarantee that a follower of Jesus will not struggle from mental anguish or anxiety.

It's a fact that many who have deep faith have experienced what has been called the dark night of the soul. In fact show me one with very deep faith and I would suspect that such faith has very often been shaped and matured on the anvil of struggle and loss.

It has even been suggested that the apostle Paul's thorn in the flesh was a struggle with depression. Whatever it was, God's grace was enough to help Paul through it. And just to take away the idea that faith alone can get us through the struggles we might face, I dare say if it was depression Paul was struggling with, and they had had antidepressants in Paul's day, they could have helped Paul as well.

Back to truth, it's link with being able to trust, and all that can flow from that. All well and good some might say. But the very idea that there is such a thing as truth is somewhat challenged by some.

Throw in

- Artificial intelligence.
- Digital manipulations.
- Deep fake technology.

And even the idea that "Seeing is believing" is a thing of the past. Inconvenient truth is also sometimes written of as "fake news".

All that taken into consideration, when making a decision, truth matters.

- Is this house I'm buying actually built well?
- Will this new car actually prove safer and more economical than my current one?
- Does my partner really love me?
- Can I really believe in the goodness and control of the God who says I am loved and I can trust him.
- Or to take it to the ordinary things of life. Will this concentrated dish washing liquid prove to be a good buy?

The promotional material can say or promise anything. What's the truth? Does the product match what's claimed on the label? V4. "So that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

Let's look a little at Luke because it adds to the credibility of what he says. First, Luke was a historian. He didn't just take things at face value. He carefully checked, investigated gathered and cross referenced information before he made statements. Second, Luke was a doctor.

- Drs are trained to ask questions.

- Drs are trained to look at symptoms and evidence and come up with a diagnosis.
- For a doctor to get it wrong might mean the difference between life and death.

The gospel will argue that knowing the truth, when that truth is Jesus, is a matter of life and death. Not just now, but for eternity.

**Vs1-3** SINCE many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything, carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus

The point? At the time, Luke wrote this gospel. It had been tested and evaluated.

We could ask the question, why was Lk so keen to assure Theophilus and the other readers that what was spoken of Jesus and the gospel are factual, credible, reliable, trustworthy, true

Firstly, because it's not just today we have conspiracy theories. There were conspiracy theories and fake news around in Luke's day just as in ours.

You may remember in the run up to the 2016 American presidential election. One of the conspiracy theories circulating, was that Hilary Clinton and secret cabal of global leaders, were supposedly doing away with children and drinking their blood. This was all meant to be happening in the basement of a pizza shop. Well meaning folk were picketing the place and then found the Pizza shop in question didn't even have a basement.

There is a saying that may well apply to our age. When it gets to the point you believe in nothing you are prone to believe in anything.

Nothing new under the sun. Did you know that in the first century church, 2000 years ago, Christian's were falsely charged with eating flesh and drinking blood. How and Why? To discredit and undermine Christianity, by over literalising the Lords supper and taking Jesus words out of context. The face book rumour mill equivalent of the day was posting that Christian's were cannibals.

Secondly, and more importantly, as a Historian, a Dr, and a follower of Jesus, the one who said "I am the Truth" truth mattered to Luke.

Here's a fact. Undermine truth, or the idea that there is such a thing as truth, and ultimately you undermine the gospel.

Way back in Genesis, in the creation story, things were going well. Until that is the tempter casts a doubt on God's integrity and motivation by asking a simple question. "Did God really say you can't eat the fruit of any tree in the garden?"

The short answer was no. Because that wasn't what God said. God said you may eat of all the trees except one. Trouble was the trap was set.

It wasn't long before the tempter was twisting the facts in the hope that we disregard God. Worse, we would put ourselves in the place of God. "You will not surely die" the tempter said. You will be like God knowing good and evil.

We haven't time to unpack all that was behind that twisting of the truth. But at its core, the enemy wanted us to doubt God's goodness and love for us.

It was a twisting of truth that had as its sole intent the aim of undermining our trust of God.

Truth matters.

Does God love us and want the best for us?

- I believe yes is the true and trustworthy answer.

Is God in control?

- Again, I believe yes is the true and trustworthy answer.

Do those beliefs effect how I see and cope with life.

- Again yes, of course.

In the film *Amazing Grace* John Newton, the reformed slave trader, now a follower of Jesus, and a minister of the gospel, is old, blind, his memory is fading and he is nearing the end.

As William Wilberforce, that one who spent decades trying to end the slave trade meets with John, the writer of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, John Newton is writing all he can remember of the slave trade in the hope it will be useful as Wilberforce fight to have that inhumane trade abolished.

There is a scene in the movie that cuts me to the heart. Newton's sight is gone. His memory is fading. He says this: "though my memory is fading, I remember two things very well. I am a great sinner, and Christ is a great saviour." Jesus said. "you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

I believe that it is the truth that God, the creator of the universe, loves me and he loves you. Not because we are loveable or good. Well you might be, but I'm not. God does not love me, us, because we deserve it.

God loves us despite us. God loves us because of who he is, not because of who we are. "We know that God is love in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us". Know and believe this. If we could do nothing for God, we would still be loved.

"I too, decided, after investigating everything, carefully, from the very first, to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed."

Now given the trustworthiness of the truth handed down to us, as I finish, I ask a really important question "how then should we live? While we might complicate the answer and give a huge list of do's and don'ts, let me suggest we could answer that question in two words. How then are we to live? Like Jesus.

As Jesus followers we are called to be like him. The good news, the truth of the gospel is we can because he will help.

In an anxiety ridden world, I would argue largely because the truth of God has been pushed out of the picture, we need the truth, gospel truth for our mental and spiritual well being.

If we live like Jesus, that will go a long way in convincing people that this gospel stuff is indeed and in reality true. And such will prove to be good medicine to much that ails us.

Let us pray. May the truth of your word, written and living, shape our attitudes and our actions that the world might believe in the one true God.

Amen.