

02/05/12

Our Reliable Source

- would you agree with me this morning that it's important to base your decisions on a reliable source of information?...
 - in other words, if you have a deficient source of truth...whatever choice you make is at least going to be flawed, and maybe even disastrous...
 - we've all seen the unbelievable pictures of this cruise ship that wrecked off the shores of Italy...
 - what an incredible miscalculation...
 - 17 people lost their lives and 15 others are unaccounted for and presumed dead...
 - many other passengers were injured in various ways – 2 lawsuits seeking damages of \$560 million have already been filed on behalf of seven individuals with many more on the horizon...
 - then there's the loss of the vessel...which cost \$570 million to construct...
 - Carnival is now projecting a financial hit in the range of \$375-395 to their bottom line...and they just reduced their latest financial forecast for the entire year because of what's happened...
 - it is incredible that the wrong decision of one person could have such dramatic implications on so many others...

- well, how did all of this happen?...
 - the captain says that the rocks they hit were not located on any of the maps...
 - and amazingly, they weren't detected by the ship's multi-million dollar navigation system...
 - here's the exact testimony from Captain Schettino – the so-called “chicken of the sea”... **The area was safe, the water was deep enough,” he said. “We struck a stretch of rock that was not marked on the charts. As far as I am concerned, we were in perfectly navigable waters. We were moving with a tourist navigation system, and as you can see by the rip (in the ship) there was a lateral rock projection. On the nautical chart, it was marked just as water at 100-150 meters from the rocks and we were about 300 meters from the shore. We shouldn't have had this contact.”**
 - there it is – we shouldn't have had this contact...
 - well Mr. Captain – you did...you surely did...

- you can decide how much of the captain's story you even believe...but there's no question about this – it's important to have a source of truth that's reliable and trustworthy...and a lot can go wrong when you don't...

- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible this morning to Luke chapter 1...page 43 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
 - our church's theme this year is **Building Core Strength**
 - emphasized in verses like - **Psalm 138:3 - On the day I called, You answered me; You made me bold with strength in my soul...that's it—core strength...**

- we're emphasizing this theme in three specific areas this year...
 - 1. Shoring up foundational areas in our walk with Christ and our church ministries that comprise the basis of godliness and effective community service.**

2. Planning and praying for the construction of Faith West and the successful launch of a cluster of new ministries in West Lafayette.

3. Preparing for the next round of ministry dreaming as we embark on a new strategic planning process in 2013.

- this morning we're talking about **Basing Our Core Strength on a Reliable Source...**
 - we're just going to try to work our way through the first 4 verses this morning...
 - read Luke 1:1-4...

- in the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 reasons to base your core strength on the reliability of Scripture.**

I. Because of the Significant Number of Original Sources.

- let's just say...

A. A word about the author.

- there's really not a lot that we know about Luke...
- that's because he wasn't interested in talking about himself---he's interested in talking about Jesus...
- but as we survey Scripture – we pick up a few isolated details...

1. He was a physician.

- **Colossians 4:14 – Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.**

2. He was probably a Gentile.

- cf. **“in their own language” in Acts 1:19**
- also in this list of Paul's fellow workers in Colossians 4 – his Jewish companions are spelled out as such – and Luke is mentioned after that...
- cf. **Colossians 4:11 - ...these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.**

3. He was a traveling companion to the apostle Paul on some of his missionary journeys.

- we know that because of the “we” sections in the book of Acts...
- in other words, Luke—who was also the human author of the book of Acts, was personally present during many of those events about which he was writing...
- now, all of this is very relevant to the issue of reliability that we're talking about this morning...
- when you put the books of Luke and Acts together, both written by the same man...and incidentally, written to the same man – an individual named Theophilus...
- but those two books comprise over one-fourth of the entire NT...
- it's significant that a relatively unknown man was used by God to author, humanly speaking, this much of our New Testaments...
- the reason that matters is because if the author was an imposter – he would have claimed to be someone well known to give his words greater credibility...but he didn't need to do that because he was the real thing...
- that's why writings we have that date all the way back to the second century, like the Muratorian Canon, specifically name Luke as the writer of this book...
- the same is true many of the third century church fathers, people like Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Clement of Alexander all attributed the book to Luke...

- one commentator on the gospel of Luke, Robert Stein, said it like this...

Such unanimity in the tradition is impressive...In general such uncontested and ancient tradition should be accepted unless there is good reason to the contrary. This is especially so when it names a minor figure in the early church and a non-apostle as the author of over one-fourth of the entire New Testament (Luke, The New American Commentary, Nashville:Broadman and Holman, 1992, p. 21).

- Luke could be the poster child for reliability...
- by the way – here’s another one from the lack of reliability department ...
 - did you hear what happened at Belfrey Presbyterian Church in Grand Forks, Michigan
 - Pastor Nevin Smith recently had to tell his church family (and I quote) – “I’m saddened to announce that the woman you’ve seen here is not my wife...
 - His real wife, Trudy...met a woman at Kohl’s who looked just like her...
 - so Trudy asked the woman what she did on Sunday morning, and she said---nothing in particular...
 - so Trudy (who apparently didn’t like going to church – that is, her own husband’s church) said – how would you like a job...
 - for the next two years...she went to church, greeted people, hugged her “husband”, took copious notes during sermons, the whole thing...
 - for over two years...Trudy, the real pastor’s wife, paid her, over \$10,000 to impersonate her...
 - she said she knew their kids names, anniversaries, birthdays...
 - what brought them down was one Sunday the pastor was talking about an old hymn they used to sing together early in the ministry...and so on a whim, he calls his wife up to the platform for an impromptu opportunity to sing it with him during the sermon...
 - and obviously, she didn’t know the words...
 - by the way – they later interviewed the real Trudy and asked her about what she had done – her words were – it was worth every penny...
- that’s almost as bad as having an incorrect navigational chart when you’re the captain of a cruise ship...
- and all I’ve got to say about that one guys is – look at her carefully this afternoon before you smooch her...just sayin...
- but thank the Lord for people who are the real thing huh, like our man Luke...
- now, before we get too much further into this, we need to also say...

B. A word about the Author.

- and you might say – PV, you repeated your point...
- no, this one has a capital “A”...
- it’s important to understand the way God used human beings to function as the human authors, so to speak, or His Word...
- **2 Peter 1:16-21 - For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty....So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

- Paul explained it like this...

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

- here's a great summary of what we're talking about from theologian Ron Rhoads -

Biblical inspiration may be defined as God's superintending of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities (and even their writing styles), they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs. Inspiration means that the Holy Spirit of God superintended the human writers in the production of Scripture so that what they wrote was precisely what God wanted written.

- that's a formula for reliability...now, what else can we see from this text?...

C. Luke readily acknowledges the existence of other sources.

- Luke 1:1-2 - Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us...

- and Luke is not saying that in a disparaging way at all...

- he's glad for these original source documents and he's learned much from studying them...

- one of the first lessons I learned about research in college was the importance of going back to the original sources...don't just rely on what someone else said about a person's view or experience or writing – go back and investigate what they said themselves...

- that's why I've often recommended this book *The Question of God* by Armand Nicholli...

- Nicholli is a professor at Harvard Medical school and he wrote a theoretical debate between C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud...on the supposition that C.S. Lewis was one of the most influential thinkers in the 20th century writing from a Christian perspective while Freud was one of the most influential thinkers in the same time period writing from an atheistic perspective...

- and while we have no evidence that the two ever met....

- what Nicholli did was juxtapose what Lewis said in his original writings with what Freud said on the same subjects...

- what's great about that approach is – you're not reading what other people said about Lewis, or about Freud – you're reading what they said in their own words...in the original source documents...

- that's what Luke did – it is likely that he had either read Matthew's gospel and Mark's gospel, or even had access to copies...

- and not only that...Luke knew Mark, and traveled with him...

- Philemon 23-24 - Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.

- we also know that Paul was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea...

- Acts 24:27 - But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

- Luke very easily during that time could have interviewed Matthew, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, the other apostles, the 500 people who saw Christ resurrected, etc...

- for all of those eyewitness – the events and sayings of the life of Christ would have been incredibly vivid...

- and the point of all of this is – you have to decide what the source of your core strength is going to be...
- and I realize that some people might say – well, I'm just going to remain neutral...there is no such thing...
- philosophically, we're talking about "epistemology" – your source of truth...how you go about knowing what you think you know...
- Cornelius Van Til was right when he spoke about the modern principle...that all facts are interpreted facts...and that there is no such thing as epistemological neutrality...
 - so you have a navigational map...do you have a reliable one...
 - and if you're married, you have a spouse...the only question is – are you going home with the right one...
- that's why it's wise for followers of Jesus Christ to order their lives on the truth of Scripture recorded for us in places like the gospel of Luke...
- that's why this church is always going to about systematically teaching God's Word...
 - **1 Timothy 3:15 - but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**
 - last Sunday was a different kind of schedule for me – we had our service pastors speaking and I gave a little presentation in the middle...and then in several services I was traveling around the campus at different times than I normally do...it was wonderful to look into different classrooms and watch the Word of God being taught to people of all different ages...because we're convinced about the reliability of the source...
- here's a second reason that flows out of this text...

II. Because People like Luke were Meticulous in their Research

A. Eyewitness accounts

- did you see that key phrase in verse 2?...
- **Luke 1:2 - just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses...**
- that's takes us back to what Peter said – we're not following cleverly devised fables here...
- we meticulously researched the testimony of eyewitness accounts...
 - **1 Corinthians 15:3-8 - For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.**
 - and you can picture Dr. Luke carefully interviewing these eyewitnesses because he wants to be sure he gets it right for his friend...
 - there's another detail here that's very important...

B. Of servants of the word...

- **Luke 1:2 - just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,**
- the reason that's important is to remind us that the people that Luke is interviewing derive no benefit from lying...

- they are paying a significant price, and increasingly so, for being followers of Christ...yet they are willing to do so because they aren't serving themselves, they're serving the Word...

C. He investigated everything carefully from the beginning and wrote it out in consecutive order.

- **Luke 1:3 - it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus;**
- Luke wanted his friend to know that this was a reliable source of truth...

D. This is why God's Word is powerful enough to change you.

- **John 17:17 - Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.**
- **Psalm 19:7 - The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.**
- **Hebrews 4:12 - For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.**
- believing this impacts our entire mode of ministry...
- we're convinced that God's Word is powerful enough to help people like you and me change...
- so unless there's some proven medical issue involved...we're going to operate on the assumption that Scripture is a reliable source of truth to guide us into a personal relationship with God...and then into progressively becoming the kind of people God wants us to be each and every day...
- that's why over 1700 dear servants of God are descending on Lafayette starting next Sunday evening...
 - they want to hear about how to take the practical truth from Scripture and make it available to people in their communities and their churches who are hurting...
 - we call it biblical counseling, or biblical discipleship...but it is based on the belief that the book we hold in our hands is reliable...it's God's Word to man...it can be trusted...
- I want to thank all of the men and women who are planning to serve for the BCTC...
 - you might think that what you are doing is not that important in the larger scheme of things...but we cannot overestimate the value and importance of how you serve in whatever task God has called you to...
 - because if what we're saying is true – that Scripture is a reliable guide and powerful enough to help us change...then ultimately the proof is in the pudding...
 - here's the way Paul said it to Titus...**Titus 2:10 - ...showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.**

E. This is also why we sometimes have to stand for it.

- **Jude 3 - Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.**

III. Because God Wants Us to have the Exact Truth

- don't you love the way Luke explained his purpose to his friend in verse 4?...
- **Luke 1:4 - so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.**

- isn't that what you need when it comes to the principles necessary to navigate life effectively...
 - you don't want a map that doesn't identify the rocks...
 - you don't want a navigational system that cost you a lot and helps you a little...
 - and you sure don't want to be going home with the wrong with...(worth every penny)...

- Can I ask you this morning, have you chosen a reliable source when it comes to the issue of establishing a relationship with God?...
- later Luke will quote Jesus who said...
 - **Luke 24:44 - Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."**
 - that's a reliable Savior – have you put your trust in Him?...

- Christian friend – is there evidence that you believe God's Word is a reliable guide for yourself and your family?...

- isn't this also what Faith West is all about?

- haven't we also seen that God blesses those who want to live and proclaim His Word?...
 - **John 13:17 - If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.**