

Gospel P1

Luke E1: An Intro to Reading the Gospels

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Luke E1: An Intro to Reading the Gospels

- Jon: This is Jon from The Bible Project. Tim and I have been preparing for a five-part miniseries that walk through the entire life of Jesus as told by Luke in his gospel. The first of these is on the birth of Jesus, which will release just in time for Christmas, and then the rest will come out 2017. Luke is one of four counts of the life of Jesus found in the Christian scriptures.
- Tim: There's four of them in the New Testament. That's odd. We're talking about one of the major world religions in the founding story of the key figure. It doesn't just have one story of his life, but four parallel versions.
- Jon: This first conversation about Luke is really about what the gospels are and what it looks like to trust them as a faithful representation of what happened in human history.
- Tim: Christianity is based on both claims that something took place in history around Jesus of Nazareth, but it's also a claim about the meaning of those events that clearly wasn't compelling to everybody who was there and saw Jesus. Because there were many people who thought he was full of it. There were different interpretations of Jesus, and what we have are the version of what happened according to his disciples.
- Jon: Doing history is difficult. Whenever you recount event, you aren't just saying, "What happened?" but you're also explaining why those events mattered.
- Tim: The meaning of events is actually never a self-evident thing. What the gospels are, are recounting of the story of Jesus in the light of the resurrection.
- Jon: So, can we trust the Gospel of Luke as history? Why are there some differences between Luke's account and other accounts? If you've ever wrestled with being able to trust the Gospels, we hope this dialogue will be great aid for you. Let's go.
- Tim: We're talking about Gospel of Luke. Here's an interesting fact. Luke, who as far as we can tell - we talked about this little bit more — he's not Jewish. He wasn't a part of the circle of the 12, but he was an early coworker of Paul's, super tied into the first generation of apostles.
- Jon: Do we know where he's from?
- Tim: No, no. He actually appears within the story of Acts at a certain point, and then there's a number of places where he starts using the pronoun "we" in some stories in Acts that's called the "we" passages.
- Jon: Yeah, because he was there.

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Tim: They are conspicuously passages where he appears close by in the story. Paul tells us he was a physician. So he was of the middle-upper class in Roman society. And based on a comment that Paul makes there at the end of Colossians, it seems like he's including Luke in a category of non-Jewish coworkers.

So here we have a Gentile, who's not a part of the 12 but a close, close companion who knows everybody - he travels around them. And to this, Luke, we do nearly one-third of the New Testament. Just by sheer like page numbers and amount of work, Luke and Acts are the longest books in the New Testament and they make up nearly a third of it in terms of pages.

Jon: Now, if we didn't have Luke, we would be okay because we have Mark and Matthew.

Tim: And John.

Jon: But if we have Acts, that would be a whole mystery that whole time period. There's a lot of good history in Acts.

Tim: Yeah, that's exactly right.

Jon: And it's due to a guy who is not Jewish. He knows a lot about Judaism and the story of the Bible.

Tim: Yeah, there's a lot of tradition about him in the later church. He's only mentioned three times by name in the New Testament, and then he's implied in the "we" passages of Acts. But there were lots of non-Jewish people who would grow up with families, who went to synagogues, attended synagogue. There were lots of Gentiles who were attracted to Jewish life and culture.

It's clear that Greek is his first language because his command of Greek is beautiful. Just beautiful, literary Greek, which means it's long, complex sentences. He is also clearly the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Septuagint, is near and dear to his heart, because not just when characters are quoting from the Greek scriptures, but he's also woven words and phrases from the Greek Old Testament just into the story, into the narration. So yeah, we have a Greek, maybe non-Jewish.

Jon: We don't know for sure.

Tim: We don't know for certain. It's just at the end of Colossians 4, Paul says, "Here's a bunch of those of the Jews who are my co-workers and then he separates them from another list of people who seem to be not Jewish coworker in the second list. But it could be there are some people in between. It's a little bit difficult.

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So what's significant is this is an author - and when you think about famous authors in the New Testament, Matthew is the first one, really big story of Jesus, John, Paul, but in terms of sheer volume, Luke takes the cake. It's awesome. I love it. Luke and Paul are the top writers of the New Testament.

Jon: But Paul wrote more than Luke.

Tim: In sheer page numbers. I haven't done the count. I've only done the total count, which is that out of all the pages in the New Testament, Luke makes up 30%.

Jon: That's a high percentage.

Tim: It is. But Paul's got 13 letters to 7 church communities. John is googling "what percentage of the New Testament did Paul write."

Jon: Luke is 27%, Paul is 23% in terms of words.

Tim: Words, yeah. amount of words.

Jon: And then third is John, 20%.

Tim: Yeah, there you go.

Jon: So Luke wrote more of the New Testament than Paul.

Tim: I love it.

Jon: And it's the longest gospel in word count.

Tim: And it's the longest gospel in terms of the number of words. Not number of chapters, but number of words. The Gospels, there's four of them in the New Testament. That's odd. We're talking about one of the major world religions and the founding story of the key figure. It doesn't just have one story of his life, but four. That's odd just as effective history.

Jon: Why is it odd?

Tim: Well, not that there are multiple sources, historical sources attesting to the life of a founding religious figure, but all four of them, despite their variations and differences, sometimes really nerve-wracking ones, that they are all included within the scriptural canon of the Christian tradition.

Jon: So it's more odd that they were all selected, not necessarily odd that they were all written.

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Tim: Correct.

Jon: But if you're going to decide, well, which one is the authoritative one? you would probably just choose one and you wouldn't have to deal with any discrepancy.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. In fact, we know that the existence of four versions of the life of Jesus cause tension in the second, third, fourth generations of the Christian movement, because there are debates in the early church about different versions of different stories and what really happened. Did Jesus say what he said here in Luke, "Blessed are the poor," or did he say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" as it says in Matthew? It's a good question.

Jon: Or did he say both sometimes?

Tim: Or did he say both and he said different things on different occasions? There was an early Christian scholar named Tatian, who created a super gospel called "The Diatessaron," which literally means one through four. He cut and pasted all four of the Gospels to wove them together, took out the repeats — he usually picked different one on different occasions — and wove them all together into this one super gospel.

Jon: I feel like there was something like that that was more modern.

Tim: Yeah, they're usually called Lives of Christ or a Harmony of the Gospels, which create one mega gospel, which, for historical purposes, a valid investigation. But what's fascinating is that the first generation, second generation of Christians had no problems appealing to all four of them despite their differences in certain places.

It's as if the life of Jesus is so rich that no one version can fully capture who he was and is. It's not even stereo. What do you do when you're hearing something from four directions?

Jon: I don't know. I don't have four ears.

Tim: So, many modern readers will read one, will read Matthew, then they'll read Luke, and then they'll read John be like, "Oh, they're so different. What? Oh." And it's a scandal to them. But it seems like the earliest generations of the church saw it the opposite way - that actually this was an advantage to get these unique different angles on Jesus that complement each other because of the richness that you get from the different portrait.

Jon: But sometimes appear to contradict each other.

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Tim: Yeah. Sometimes different versions of the same story have divergent details. And that's just—

Jon: What did the early Christians think about that?

Tim: I think there was just a diversity of reactions. There's quite a number of them where you can just say, "They're just different interpretations of the same events just like different eyewitnesses of a car accident." But there are places where we can talk about this more.

Luke mentions that he consulted sources. He says it right at the beginning. Well, the consensus position is that we know one of these sources it's the testimony of Peter that embodied in the Gospel of Mark because he just picks up Mark verbatim in many places but adjust some of the details.

The climax of the Gospel of Mark, the Roman centurion, surely, this man was the Son of God. And Luke, the Roman centurion says, "Surely this was the innocent man, a righteous man." Usually, we readers go right for the historical question, what really happened? But there I think we can pretty easily discern what happened that Luke has adapted the wording of the source.

We'll get to this when we talk about it, but Luke has woven a highlight a theme in the trial and execution of Jesus where everybody can see that this man is innocent. Everybody. Pilate highlights Jesus' innocence three times in trial. Everybody thinks that he's done nothing wrong, but yet he still gets crucified.

Even now at the end of the story, the one who crucified him, Luke has adapted the acknowledgment as the Son of God to be an acknowledgment that he's innocent. So it's an example where Luke has adjusted the wording to fit into a theme that he is uniquely highlighting in his version.

Jon: He's making things up.

Tim: He's interpreting the data. Well, this gets us into a debate about, what does it mean for an ancient historian like Luke to write history? Do we impose standards of historical reporting on the Gospels that are foreign to the purpose and methods that Luke used as a historian?

Jon: Sure. Well, so I guess what we're saying is, when we think of writing someone's history journalistically or as a historian, we want to fact check. We want to make sure, is that what they actually said? Is that what actually happened? And we want that to be very accurate. You're saying that wasn't the intention or desire?

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- Tim: Well, I think the gospel authors are trying to faithfully portray the story of Jesus and its meaning at the same time. And to do that within their toolset, one of their available tools is to adjust wording so that it will reflect the meaning of what happened.
- Jon: So the meaning of the soldier observing Christ in Mark was that the soldier realized this was the Messiah.
- Tim: Or specifically the Son of God, Messiah, which fits into Mark's way of framing because he has an acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God in the first at the baptism, of the Transfiguration mountain in the middle of the book, and then the Romans.
- Jon: So he uses that character to reinforce his point there?
- Tim: Yeah.
- Jon: Luke uses the character to reinforce a point of his innocence, but that guy was or was not there and he did or did not say something.
- Tim: Correct. That's correct.
- Jon: What if I want to know what he actually said?
- Tim: And I think that's a valid question but that's a different question than asking, "What does the author of Luke intend for me right here to get about the story of Jesus?"
- Jon: How far does that extend so they could put words in people's mouths? Do they—
- Tim: They'll often summarize, they'll adapt wording. You can get these tools called the Synopsis of the Gospels, and they'll set parallel stories and teachings of Jesus right next to each other. And you can see they all have this characteristic of they're the same and they're different. The basic meaning is always the same but each gospel author has adapted or adjusted wording.
- Jon: But their meaning in Luke and Mark, to use the example of Centurion, were different. Their meaning was, "Here's a guy seeing that he's the son of God." And then the other one is, "Here's a guy just saying that he's innocent." I guess there is an underlying meaning of "here's an unexpected character realizing what you should have realized."
- Tim: That's right. "Here's who we thought he was, oh, my gosh, here's who he really was."

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Jon: And so, in a way in the story of Jesus, it sounds like a trope that's developed of this Centurion, and he's the character who gets you to see at the end of the story what you should have seen all along.

Tim: Yeah. That doesn't exclude there actually having been...as far as we can tell, they were only a few male disciples of Jesus and a whole lot of women disciples of Jesus who were there at the crucifixion.

So I think, based on what Luke says, all these stories come from eyewitness testimony that somebody heard and saw a Roman soldier having a powerful movement over there as he watches the crucifixion. And that, as they retold and recounted the story to the apostles, that became a significant detail that each of the gospel authors then puts into their account, but to highlight a different...

But all history writing is interpretive like this. There's no such thing as an objective report of the events because no literary representation of an event can represent every single detail of what happened, for all history writing is already an interpretation by the fact that it's been processed through your brain.

Jon: I guess what's interesting is now that we live in an age where things are recorded, that you could go back and say, "Well, what did that person actually say?"

Tim: Correct.

Jon: But I guess imagine living in a time where things weren't recorded. Really all you have is your memory. It's just been proven over and over that we think we can remember exactly what happened, but we're always interpreting in real time.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: And every time you remember something, you're actually kind of recreating it — recreating that memory...

[crosstalk 00:16:57]

Tim: This is a whole industry in New Testament studies. The cross-discipline of studying the history of the gospel traditions and stories in light of brain research and memory theory it's a whole...I've just a handful of books, but there's a stack of them that exist.

And it differs. There's a cultural difference. For you and I, whose brains are melted on mobile screens, for us to remember things is very different from a textually immersed culture whose identity is shaped by the memorization and recitation of texts and stories like Jewish culture.

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Again, assuming that we haven't even read the prologue of Luke out loud, we have pretty clear evidence that in early Christianity there was a special place and role for people whose job it was to memorize the traditions and the stories and the sayings, and to go around as churches are being planted and teach those traditions...

[crosstalk 00:18:01]

Jon: So this oral memory is really important.

Tim: Crucial.

Jon: So, Jesus rises from the dead, mind-blowing. You see him. You're like, everything's turned upside down for you. You're just like, "This is crazy." I mean, you've seen some crazy things, but now the guy's back from the dead. And so, you're like, "Okay, this is on for real?" Like—

Tim: Holy cow. And not just you, but his earliest disciples. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, there are a few hundred people who have all had these experiences with...

[crosstalk 00:18:38]

Jon: And then there's this remarkable experience of receiving the Holy Spirit in this community and that really shapes them. And so, you're gathering together and you guys are going, "Okay, let's recount this. What happened?" And someone tells a story. "Oh, I was there during the crucifixion and I saw him being crucified and I actually saw the Roman centurion realizing that what he was killing was Son of God."

Tim: Yeah. "Do you remember Rufus, or whatever his name? Did you hear what he said?"

Jon: And so, the story would circulate, and then it would be told over and over. And because they took the oral tradition of storytelling so important, it would be important how you were telling that story and that you were true to that.

So wouldn't it be scandalous then if you're familiar with Mark's account, and then all of a sudden, you get to Luke and Luke changes his words? You'd be like, "Well, that's not how we told the story. That's not how I heard the story." Would they be comfortable with the fact that Luke made that change?

Tim: Yeah. There, I think we're imposing expectation on it to say what it means to face faithfully represent that event requires verbatim repetition of the precise wording always.

Jon: And that's not the case.

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Tim: And that it's just manifestly not the case because that's not what the Gospels tell us. What the Gospels consistently show is the core sameness among all the parallel versions of the stories and sayings but with variation. And usually, that variation is tied into a pattern or a theme that each different author is highlighting.

For a long time, people would search back behind the Gospel accounts to look for what's called the Verba ipsissima — the very words. That's a Latin phrase. Verba ipsissima — the very words of Jesus.

And after many, many decades of this digging through the Gospels to get to what's behind them, a lot of people have said, "We're doing the impossible because that's not what the gospels are trying to present to us. They're trying to present what's the vox ipsissima — the voice of Jesus. The meaning of what he said.

So, to be a faithful representation of what Jesus said and did doesn't mean it has to match precisely what I would have seen if I was there with a video camera. Now, that's a spin for modern readers, but it's a jump that you have to make. Otherwise, you're going to open up a synopsis of the Gospels and it's going to destroy your thing.

Jon: It's going to crush your spirit.

Tim: That's going to destroy your faith. Really. If your faith is built on a conviction—

Jon: Well, what else do we have if we don't have the facts of history?

Tim: We have the faithful eyewitness traditions.

Jon: When you say, faithful, what do you mean there?

Tim: The claim of these eyewitnesses is that they are recounting events that happened and they're faithfully passing on to us both accounts.

Jon: By faithful you don't mean accurate?

Tim: Well, it's all about what's your definition of accuracy. I don't want to impose on Luke a standard of accuracy that he didn't hold himself. If I want to have the right expectation of what Luke is doing, I want to meet him on his terms of what he wants me to expect.

Jon: And in his terms are?

Tim: Here. Let's just finally read the prologue. We've talked around it but here it is. Look at what he says. Opening words of Luke. "Many have undertaken to draw up an

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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. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too, decided to write an orderly account for you most excellent Theophilus, so that you might know the certainty or with confidence the things that you've been taught."

So he's writing to Theophilus. We have no idea who this is. Most likely the patron sponsor, he sponsored Luke study leave for two years to research and write.

Jon: He didn't have like 1000 micro patrons?

Tim: He had Theophilus. And notice what he says about Theophilus. "You have been taught all kinds of things about Jesus." So Theophilus is a convert and has gone to church and has heard all kinds of accounts and stories about Jesus. "So here's what I did. I wanted you to have confidence in what you've learned about the story and teachings of Jesus." So I did the research.

He says he went back to eyewitnesses and then also to servants of the word. This is technical phrase. We're talking about professional memorizers and scribes of the Jesus tradition. We have parallels of this, which is a great, really important study of this done in that whole New Testament field of oral tradition.

Gerd Theissen did a cross comparison between the memorization of stories and sayings of the rabbi's in Jewish tradition, like rabbinic tradition, and the way that what we see in the New Testament parallel. Of course, these are all Jewish people.

So, servants were talking about people whose job it is in the community to memorize and then go and pass it on. But they are servants of the word. The point is, you memorize this material and then you travel about and commit the word to new people.

Jon: This was a profession?

Tim: Well, it assumes a group of people who were not themselves the eyewitnesses but who are servants.

Jon: But would they do this? This would be their career or hobby?

Tim: This would be their ministry. Certainly Paul. Paul was one of these. Was he an eyewitness to the Jesus and Galilee? No. But what's fascinating is in 1 Corinthians 11, when he wants to recount the story of what happened at the Last Supper, he says, "I

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pass on to you what I received." And it's nearly verbatim what you have of the Last Supper in the Gospel accounts. Like nearly verbatim.

Jon: So that's a guy who's traveling around and saying, "Here are stories that you need to know about Jesus?"

Tim: So, Luke has consulted as many eyewitnesses as he can, and then also the first wave of these people who have memorized huge amounts of scriptures.

Jon: So Luke, he seems very analytical, right?

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: Then he's got some sort of strategy here. As he talks with the eyewitnesses and servants, he must have noticed their discrepancies of "Oh, you said that the Centurion said this and this eyewitness said this, and this servant now is saying that, and there are some differences."

Tim: Or another occasion did the...not centurion. There was a really significant Roman who wanted Jesus to heal his servant. So did the Roman himself come to Jesus as in Mark, or did the Roman leader send messengers to Jesus on his behalf? And does the difference really matter? But there's a difference in the parallel versions of the story.

Jon: Luke must have been aware of these differences and his conclusion is, "You can have confidence in the things you were taught. I'm going to write an account of all this and you can be confident that what actually happened actually is accurate."

Tim: He says, "I put this all together for you so that you might know the certainty or literally might have confidence about the things that you've been taught, so you can know that this is faithful, it's true, it happened." But the first line is saying, "Listen, I know I'm not the only person who's written up an account of Jesus." He says, "There's a number of accounts of Jesus circling around." It's not like he's trying to create one to oust all the others, or he doesn't indicate any negative view. He says, "I wanted to get to the bottom of things for myself."

I remember personally being really bothered and scandalized by these differences for a long, long time. But then the more that I read and reflected on them and marked up my synopsis on the parallel version some more...there's a New Testament scholar named James Dunn, who wrote an excellent huge thick volume called "The Oral Gospel Tradition." And that's his phrase the same and different. Because the differences are almost never...there's some that are whoppers, but they're almost never like compromise the meaning of the story.

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But what they show us is that the Jesus tradition, it was the what he calls the living tradition. It was a tradition meant to be preached and passed on to living communities. And they didn't feel free to just invent wholesale stories that never happened, at least in that first generation. Though, there's a lot of debate that's obviously a point of contention. But what we do see when there are parallel stories is faithfulness to the basic meaning of a story, but variation in wording.

Jon: Faithfulness to meaning.

Tim: Faithfulness to the basic outline. Again, we can test this because there are many stories that have two or sometimes you have a story that Matthew has, Mark has, and Luke has. And so, you can cross compare and see how they differ from each other. And almost never is the story completely like a different story. It's almost always a variation in wording but the same basic message.

Jon: And they are okay with that?

Tim: Nobody seems to have had a problem with this. And also, it's important to the process of memorization wouldn't have only started after the resurrection. Jesus is a rabbi, traveling itinerant teacher who speaks and teaches in very memorable one-liners and parables and stories.

Jon: So that they could be passed on.

Tim: He's an oral teacher. So the memorization process among Jesus's disciples would have started immediately from his first announcement. This is a whole field of New Testament studies with centuries of history to the conversation. But it's fascinating.

I'm obsessed with this whole field because it really interesting and it's so amazing that we have four counts of Jesus. But it forces you to reshape your paradigm of what the Bible is around just the historical fact of these four accounts.

Jon: I'm trying to get that reshaped paradigm and I'm struggling.

Tim: A parallel of my own life that I've discovered, Jessica and I just celebrated 15 years of being married. When we meet somebody new, we go over to dinner to someone's house, and they ask, "How did you guys meet? Tell us a story of how you guys met." So we've been telling that story. It's not like we go like, "Oh, yeah. Well, man, that was 15 years ago, I don't..."

Jon: You got the story locked down.

Tim: We've been telling the same story over and over and over again for 15 years. And here's what has happened. We've condensed it, we've assigned part unofficially, but

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she does the part of the story of in the library, and I do the part of the story of horses on the beach.

And so, we have these fix things. And are there moments where totally we've condensed two events into one? Yes, of course, we have. Is it a faithful representation of what happened? Yes, I lived our story. But we've condensed it adapted it over the course of the retelling also to reflect what we now can see the significance and meaning of those events in our life stories.

And so, I think we have to envision something similar where Jesus had a deep impact all of these individuals. They're not going to forget the day that he healed my eyes or the day that he calls Zacchaeus into his home. These events will mark these individuals for the rest of their lives. And they're not waiting 10 years before they go tell them to somebody else. But as they retell them, the stories get adapted, and we have to reckon with that. That's part of how the Gospels came into existence. And Luke wants his readers to have to have confidence.

Christianity is based on both claims that something took place in history around Jesus of Nazareth, but it's also a claim about the meaning of those events that clearly wasn't compelling to everybody who was there and saw Jesus. Because there were many people who thought he was full of it, and there were people who killed him and hated him. So there were different interpretations of Jesus. And what we have are the version of what happened according to His disciples.

Jon: I think what a modern reader would wish to have is an unbiased empirical account of everything that actually was said and done so that you could come to your own conclusion. But what we have instead is the crafting of these happenings in such a way that it's designed to explain to you not exactly what happened, but more importantly the significance of why it happened.

Tim: I wouldn't put a "but" in there. It's "and." So, tell you what happened and to show you what it means in the retelling. I think in the Gospel authors minds, they want you to read these stories and say, "Oh, yeah, Jesus did and said this."

Jon: What if I was sitting down with Luke and Mark together and we're all recounting the centurion, right? And Luke says, "Oh, yeah, the centurion just saw that Jesus was innocent. That's what he said." And then Mark goes, "Yeah, the centurion, what he said was 'this was a son of God.'" And then I turn to him and I say, "Well, what did he say?" What would the answer be?

Tim: Well, that one's a little easier because I think I'm fairly confident about the order of the sources there. I think Luke had Mark in front of him as one of his sources.

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Jon: So Luke would have been like, "Well, yeah, yeah, yeah."

Tim: Luke would say, "Yeah, I changed the wording."

Jon: He'd say, "Yeah, Mark had it right, but from my point of the story, I was trying to show not just that he saw that he was the Son of God — we already have that account — but he also realized he was innocent. So I put those words in his mouth."

Tim: I think that's how the conversation would go.

Jon: And then you wouldn't lose confidence in Luke's gospel that he just threw words in someone's mouth?

Tim: No. Well, confidence of what?

Jon: Confidence in faithfulness? We used the word faithfulness.

Tim: Yeah, faithfulness.

Jon: So, is Luke being faithful to what actually happened, and why it mattered if he's able to change what happened?

Tim: By faithfulness, a faithful representation of what happened and the meaning of what happened, I'm trying to let my version of faithfulness be redefined by what the gospel authors actually did, not what I think they ought to have done according to whatever our modern standard might be. I don't know any other way to reconcile myself to this. And then also reconcile my vision of what the Bible is as a divine and human product also has to be reconciled with this.

It seems like the first generation of Christians didn't have a problem in doing this. It's our problem where we have the ability because we have something to compare it to. We have their way of doing history compared to just like my mobile camera documenting everything.

Jon: But our bias is always better.

Tim: Yeah, totally.

Jon: They had their way of doing medicine and we have our way of doing medicine. They had their way of traveling by foot and horse, we have our way of travel. And so, there is kind of this bias of like everything's been advancing. And so, is the way that we do history—

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Tim: The way we do history is naturally better, or it's naturally more free of bias. And that's a highly questionable assumption.

Jon: Sure.

Tim: Because the moment any historical event is filtered through a human brain and recounted in a literary work, it's already undergone multiple stages of interpretation. Retelling you what I had for breakfast this morning would be an interpretation. I couldn't possibly recreate for you what actually happened - all you have is my testimony. And that's what the gospels are — their testimony.

Jon: And for me, it seems like confronted with this, the only thing I know to do is to say, "Well, did Jesus rise from the dead? Did that happen?" That's the most significant thing.

Whether or not the centurion said one thing or the other, or if Jesus said, "poor in spirit or just poor," or did he do the miracle before he went to Jerusalem or after, or whatever details are, like, "Okay, I guess I don't have to care."

But you're going to give me confidence if you say, "Hey, look, I've talked to all the eyewitnesses and here are the differences, here's where I'm going with this one. I think this is what actually happened." That account will give me confidence. This account where he's just like, "I'm going to change what he said," that doesn't give me confidence.

Tim: Yeah, interesting. But again, I think that should trigger in us, oh, well, does the fact that he would adapt the wording, what's standard am I holding him to call that? I don't know, manipulation of the sort.

Jon: So if I'm—

Tim: No, no. What I'm forcing you to undergo in 30 minutes is what has taken me years to sort out and come to terms with. So it's fine. It's also a significant to notice he doesn't talk about having a vision or a trance.

Jon: Sure. He's like, "I'm investigating."

Tim: He's like, "I'm a historian doing investigation," and to fit this into a view of what Christians called the inspiration of Scriptures, is to say, "Oh, the Holy Spirit was at work in Luke's hard work." And in the years, this is incredibly intentionally crafted document of third of the New Testament called the book of Luke-Acts. We also have to factor that into our view of what the Bible is how it came into existence because he says how he made the book.

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Jon: So we have to go into this book aware that Luke is taking some license at times and what people say?

Tim: Yeah, he's both a preserver of the Jesus tradition and he is a creative author in his own right. Because that's what he says. "I've carefully investigated and then I have written in order to count."

So he's brought a design and order to it that's visible in ways that differ from Mark and Matthew. So he's brought an order to it to emphasize things about the story of Jesus that are unique to his account. There you go. That's what the gospels are.

Jon: I guess I'm sort of now interested in what is it that I would want other than this.

Tim: Well, it's clear what Tatian wanted.

Jon: Tatian?

Tim: He is the guy who created the Super Gospel. He was much happier with just having one big one. What I suppose would you want is a video camera. But would a video camera expose to you the story through the lens of the resurrection?

Just like when my wife and I retell the stories of our first meeting and conversations, we're doing so in the light of where we know things went. I always joke with her about her motives for approaching me for our first conversation. That kind of thing. But if you were just sitting at the desk next to Jessica and I having our first conversation, what would your interpretation be of the meaning of this event?

So, if I saw Jesus do this remarkable healing or say this parable, what is the meaning of that? Well, am I Pharisee or am I poor Galilean farmer or am I, you know...? The meaning of events is actually never a self-evident thing. And you're right, what the gospels are, are recounting of the story of Jesus in the light of the resurrection.

Jon: They want to tell you why this was...

[crosstalk 00:40:08]

Tim: Yeah, they want to show you that the risen Jesus who we know and met and who you can experience by the Spirit is the Jesus who said and did these things in Galilee and Jerusalem and led up to his death. And that he is the Messiah, Son of God who is bringing God's kingdom here.

Jon: We've spent enough time on this. I don't feel any full resolution but let Luke tell us what he wants to tell us about Jesus of Nazareth, and see why he thought it was so important that he could twist someone's words.

Luke E1: An Intro to Reading the Gospels

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Up next on the podcast will be the second in this series of discussions on the Gospel of Luke. We'll talk about chapters 1-19, and we'll be talking about how Luke expertly uses the Hebrew Scriptures to tie Jesus' story into the entire Jewish narrative. Thanks for being a part of this with us.