

I want to thank you for praying for me. On September 2nd, after I finished preaching the 11:00, on my way home, it was hurting to swallow. I went in to the doctor, they swabbed me and said, "Listen, it's not strep. It should be alright, so we're going to just dope you up real good and go for it." And so they gave me a steroid shot, an antibiotic shot and put me on some antibiotics. And by 3:00 on Sunday afternoon, I felt normal. I mean, I just felt completely normal and woke up that next morning early, felt just strong as can be and got on the plane. And by the time I landed in Asia, I was running an unbelievably high fever and could barely function. And then, I just wouldn't get better. So for ten days, it just went downhill. I always want to stress, this was not something I caught in Asia, but it was a good old American grown disease and apparently one that doesn't respond well to antibiotics. In fact, it was like the antibiotics just made it really angry. And so, I want to thank you for your prayers because I could feel them and knew that you were. And so, there's some things I can say with confidence, that I don't think that what happened to me was some kind of an attack from the enemy. There were just too many people praying and too many people crying out, and I just think that the Lord wanted to knock me out. And that was okay. So about a day before we were scheduled to fly home, it was pretty evident that I was not going to be able to physically do that. And so, we went to a hospital there, which was awesome. Two things, and I'm not lying. We have pictures, documented pictures. At one point, a dog came into my room. I'm not lying. A dog came into my room, and I just looked at my sister and said, "I swear to God, if they try to leech me, I am out of here." And then another time, I came to and there was an Asian man in a tank top mixing plaster on the floor next to me. Maybe I hallucinated all of that, I don't know, but I swear those things happened and asked my sister to take pictures of it. So they wanted to do one or two things to me, and I was like, "I'm not letting you do that to me." And they just put me on a massive amount of steroids. Like even what I know, I was like, "I think normally you take four of those a day in the States, followed by three, followed by two, followed by one...twenty-two pills a day's making me a little nervous. Are you sure?" I mean, we're trying to do this through a translator, and I'm like, "Okay, that's twenty-two pills in the States. I know what this is in the States, and why does it come in a white baggie? Why isn't this in a pill thing? It's normally a little case like this that those come in." And so I took those pills and that got me well enough to travel. And I got home and faked my way through customs, you know, put some cologne on and, "No, I am carrying no diseases, thank you." I got here and went to the hospital as soon as I got home. And the only thing they could find out as they looked at x-rays and looked at my blood was that my body was battling some sort of infection. And so once again, they've hopped me up on antibiotics and an anti-inflammatory and the steroids. And I'm seven days into that regimen and getting stronger every day. I've got another seven. I've got to go in to give some blood tomorrow to look at my white count and I feel like I'm out of the woods, but I wanted to thank you for your prayers, because it really was, in my 33 years of life, by far the most difficult ten days that I've ever endured, where it just wouldn't go away. And there's some real beautiful things that happened in that moment; there really is. I don't know that I knew it then. And people have asked me, "What were you praying for and how were you praying?" And all I really remember was a lot of "Uggggghh" and there were two times where I asked Him to kill me. And that's all I really remember, but there's something really beautiful that happens when all that you count on is gone, and then not just gone for a day or two. Because it being gone for a day or two, I think we can be disciplined and strong and quote Scriptures to ourselves, but by day ten, all that for me, all my mental ability to press into Him had faded. And to find the Lord very, very, very, very sweet and really good in that moment was pleasing to my heart because for most of us, we never have to prove the things we say we believe. We just don't, we don't have to prove it. And we hope we'll be that person, but we just don't know. And so, I'm not trying to claim that I went through anything as horrific as other things that people have endured, but for me, it was a tough deal. So I'm so glad to be home and so glad to be here.

Let me pray for us and we'll get started. "Father, I thank You just for home and I thank You for the truth of Scriptures and I thank You for the beauty of who You are. And I ask You to speak to us in a real deep way this morning and I ask You to challenge us and push us. And I ask You to challenge us in the real deep parts of our heart. But I also ask You to push us in our mind. And I'm just going to ask for Your help in all of that. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

Now, I'm going to start this morning what will probably be the longest series I've done here to date. We're going to start the gospel of Luke. It is by far the longest gospel. And he's going to tell us right out of the gate who wrote it, who he's writing it to, how he wrote it and why he wrote it. And that's what I'm going to cover this morning with just one little rant, and then we're going to be gone. We're going to be out. And so while you're turning to Luke 1, let me tell you about Luke. We know who Luke is. Like there are some times in the Scriptures that we're not sure who wrote the book. If you look at the book of Hebrews, there's a lot of debate over who wrote it, and we're not really sure. But we know who Luke is. We know who Luke is because he's mentioned over and over and over again in Scripture. I say that; he's mentioned four times in Scripture. And almost every time he's mentioned, we find something out about him. Like we know from the book of Colossians, in chapter 4, that he's a physician. He's a physician by trade. So he's not a pastor and he's not necessarily a teacher and he's not an apostle and he's not an evangelist. He is a physician. It's what he does. So we know he's a physician, we know he travels with the apostle Paul. He travels all over the place with the apostle Paul because on numerous occasions, Paul lists out who's with him and always calls Luke his "fellow worker." Luke who also wrote the book of Acts—this is a two-part letter to this guy Theophilus—Luke first, followed by the book of Acts. So if you read the book of Acts, anytime you see the author of the book say "and then we..." referencing Paul, he's saying, "we, Paul and I, Luke, left there and went to the next place." So throughout Paul's missionary journey, Luke is with Paul. We also know that Luke, although he started out a skeptic, has a dynamic, fearless faith. And we know this because in 2 Timothy 4, the apostle Paul is lamenting the fact that as persecution began against the church, specifically him, as he began to be beaten and imprisoned, everyone left him. They left him and went and hid in Ephesus, they went and headed down in Cyprus. They left, everyone except Luke. Luke didn't go. And so, as persecution started blowing up against Paul and against the Church, everyone scattered that was with Paul except Luke. So Luke went from skeptic to believing so passionately in what was being taught in this person and work of Jesus, that even as things turned violent and even as men were beginning to be killed for this, he didn't go anywhere. So we know that his faith grew into something pretty dynamic. And then, the last thing we know is the apostle Paul, who wrote 75% of the New Testament, loved him. He loved him. Almost every time he references Luke, he calls him, "beloved Luke."

So that's what we know about him. And so, now let's get into this and see who he wrote it to. Verse 1, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus..." Now, there is some debate over who Theophilus is. Theophilus, that name in the Greek, basically means, "One who's loved by God." And so, what some people think is that this is written to a group of people because it says, "most excellent Theophilus," that those loved by God, that this is written to a group of people. I don't believe that at all, and I'll tell you why. The title, "most excellent," is used by Luke in three other places, namely in the book of Acts, and every time it's used, it's used in conjunction with a high ranking Roman official. So any time you see Luke use the phrase, "most excellent," he's referencing someone in the Roman government, usually somebody who is not a believer, some sort of pagan who's in the Roman government. So I think that this is some sort of high ranking Roman official who has gotten intrigued by Christianity, is beginning to study it; he's got some kind of professional relationship with this doctor Luke and begins to ask Luke questions. And it seems good on Luke's behalf to compile for him all the information that he's wanting to know in the books of Luke and Acts and to send him these books. And we'll find out why he sends it to him.

But here's one of my favorite parts. Here's why I love Luke. Look at how he put the letter together. Look at how he puts the gospel together. Starting in verse 1 again. "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us..." Here's what he just said: "There are already books about this." "...just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us..." Not only are there written accounts, but there's still eyewitnesses. This book was written in around 60 A.D., we believe. Jesus was killed in around 33-36 A.D. So there are still eyewitnesses to the person, work and teachings of Jesus. Now listen to this: "...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely..." All things: the things written, the things spoken, the things taught and the eyewitnesses. And look at how long he did it: "...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past..." Here's what we get from Luke. Luke is not the blind faith guy. He's not the blind faith guy, but rather he seems to be naturally the skeptic that wants to read everything and then not only read it, he wants to hunt down who wrote it, ask him how it happened again and then compare it to what he wrote to see if the guy's a liar. I love him. Not only do I get that from this, but there's also in the book of Acts, Paul's teaching to a group of men called the Bereans and they don't believe Paul. So every time Paul says anything, they take what he says and then they go rip it apart and try to study it and look in the Old Testament and try to deny it. And then the more they try to study the teachings of Paul to deny it, the more they started becoming believers, and Luke loved them for it. Luke loved them because they were doubters. They were skeptics, and Luke was like, "You're my type of people. Let's get something to drink. Let's talk." So Luke starts out a skeptic, but it's very evident that he had read some very early church writings. Here's what I mean. 60% of the book of Mark is quoted verbatim in Luke. It is very evident that Luke had the gospel of Mark as one of his sources. But Luke says Mark wasn't enough for him. He's basically reading Mark and going, "Floated up into heaven, give me a break. Who saw it? Are they still in Jerusalem? Alright, get my horse." And then he goes to Jerusalem and he's like, "Um, so I heard that on this mountain Jesus floated up to the west." And they're like, "No no no, it was on this mountain to the east." "Dang it! Alright, I was trying to get you. I was trying to corner you there. You came through. So I heard that on the sea next to Cyprus, Jesus swam on top of the water. Is that true?" They're like, "No, it was Galilee and He walked." "Dang it!" So, you've got a skeptic who has compiled, who has researched, who has interviewed eyewitnesses, and somewhere in the middle of all of that his heart has been enlightened, he has become an impassioned follower of the person and teachings of Jesus. And the reason I can without doubt tell you he's an impassioned follower is because when people start getting killed for believing this and you don't run, you're pretty impassioned.

Now, this is how he wrote the book, this is who wrote the book and this is who he wrote the book to, but it's why he wrote the book that is intriguing, powerful and in the end, going to be too difficult for some of us. Let's look at what he does. Picking it up in verse 3. "...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught." Now, Theophilus is a 1st century pagan Roman government official who Luke has built a relationship with and now is writing a book to say—now follow me here because think how un-politically correct this is—is writing him a letter to say, "What you believe religiously is wrong. I want to tell you what's right so that you may be certain of it." So this book has the potential to be powerful in our lives because if Jesus is who He says He is, then by studying His teachings and becoming familiar with who He is, we have this unbelievable opportunity to make sense of our existence, we have this unbelievable opportunity to make sense of life, to answer the haunting questions that, if we'd turn off the TV and sit in silence for a second or two, would run us down: why there's suffering, why the world's dark, why it doesn't seem to make sense, why with every step forward that humanity makes, it makes four backwards. And I know some don't believe we're there, but you know we can cure almost any disease in the world but we're not doing it. Why? I think it has something to do with Mr. Benjamin. I think it has something to do with money. So the Third World's dying of the flu? Do you know how many infants die in Africa from diarrhea? Millions a year. Diarrhea. So why can't we treat that? Why can't we take care of that? Well, I'll tell you why. Because it's not profitable. So what's going on with humanity? It's broken. Everybody knows it's broken. I won't even speak religiously to some regard. Watch Oprah; she knows it's broken. Go to the bookstore;

the bookstore will tell you it's broken. Watch any television show; they know it's broken. Everybody knows the world's broken. So how do we get some answers? I mean answers that honestly make sense? Not answers like, "Well, we need education. We need personal enterprise. We need civil government." I'm just asking you to study a little bit of history. Those things haven't fixed anything. They've got us a lot more channels on television, though, you know what I'm saying? They got us Halo 3, but... So it's got this opportunity to be powerful because it can make some sense out of our existence, but it's going to be difficult for some of us. And I'll tell you why: the writer and the teachings of Jesus are going to repeatedly make absolute truth claims. And I know "absolute truth" is redundant, but it's redundant for effect. It's going to make absolute truth claims over and over and over and over again.

And let me tell you why I think this is going to be difficult for us. The majority of Americans believe in God. I mean, the numbers are astounding. Like 98% of all Americans believe in God. So it's funny to me. Atheism gets all this airplay, but there's like fourteen of them in the country. They get all the Time articles and get all the play on CNN, but it's a very small club. 98% of Americans believe that there is some sort of God, but at the same time, the majority of Americans believe that no one religion can know the fullness of spiritual truth and that those who claim they do know the fullness of spiritual truth, are arrogant and intolerant. A common parable to prove the point—it's the parable of the elephant and the blind men. The story goes like this. A group of blind men were asked to describe an elephant. And the first one grabbed the trunk and said, "An elephant's like a snake. Yeah, it's just like a snake with two holes on the end. It's really weird." And the other one was feeling the leg going, "No, it's nothing like a snake." He's feeling the leg. "What are you, blind? Does that guy not have any hands? It's like a tree trunk. An elephant's like a tree trunk." And the other one on the other side's like, "What is wrong with these people?" He's feeling the side of the elephant. He's like, "An elephant's like a wall." The last guy's at the end; he's just holding the tail. He's like, "No, it's kind of hairy and humid." That could be my medicine talking; I apologize. This is the parable. Now, here's the point. The point of the parable is to show how each of the religions, although somewhat correct, is in the end wrong and that anyone who would steadfastly say, "An elephant is like a snake and I don't care what anybody else says and I don't care what anybody else thinks. It's like a snake," that that guy is arrogant, foolish and causes violence against humanity. Isn't that right? That's absolutely right. Now surprise, I have some problems with this. I have problems on two fronts, and I won't even use the one that you think. I have problems with it because I'm a believer in Christ. But if you're a skeptic, you don't care. So I won't even address that part of it. I also have problems with this idea because it's intellectually inconsistent and it uses smoke and mirrors to pretend it's more tolerant than the rest of us when in reality it's no more tolerant. Let me explain. The only way the parable of the elephant and the blind men makes any sense is if the narrator of the story sees the whole elephant. Here's what I'm saying. The moment you claim that ultimate reality is unknowable, you have just claimed the knowledge that you say can't be known. The second you say ultimate reality is unknowable and that ultimate truth is unknowable, you've just claimed what you say can't be claimed. This is intellectually inconsistent. I'm not speaking religiously. I'm speaking intellectually, philosophically—this thing has an unbelievable amount of holes. On top of that, I'll tell you this. The belief system that no one can know God in such a way as to invalidate what someone else believes about God is in itself religious, is in itself a religion that has it's own affirmations, denials and absolute truths. That's what I'm saying; this thing is comical on a philosophical level. It's just sexy, but it's funny. Here would be their affirmations: that God is ultimately unknowable, that no one can know the full truth about God. The only way you could possibly know that would be to know how the universe is wired, why it's wired that way, which is the same thing they're claiming can't be known. Now listen to these statements. "All religions are the same. All religions are following a path to God. It doesn't matter what you believe; it's how you live." Does any of that sound familiar? Now follow me here. These are religious statements. They are dogmas, doctrines. Those are doctrinal statements about God. So they are claiming by saying there is no truth and then coming back and saying, "No one can know God in His fullness. All religions lead to God. It doesn't matter what you believe but how you live," those are absolute religious statements. So here's the irony of ironies. And by the way, I don't like preaching on this. I like talking about this over coffee or a big frothy cola. Because I think it works better relationally than in this setting, but because he said, "certainty," I thought we had to address it. The relativist and me, we're claiming

the same thing at different points of emphasis. Here's what's happening. I, Matt Chandler, fundamental in doctrine, orthodox in doctrine, conservative in theology, pastor Matt Chandler, and the relativist, we're claiming the same thing: an understanding of ultimate reality, only he's calling me arrogant and himself enlightened. That's what's happening. I'm arrogant and I'm intolerant because I say I know ultimate reality. And because I don't really know ultimate reality, he knows ultimate reality, I'm arrogant for claiming I know ultimate reality because he really knows ultimate reality. That's what's happening. And for all the talk of Christians trying to convert the world, the missionary force around this idea is massive compared to what we send out. This is the very air Americans breathe. Now, I wrote this last little sentence here. "In the end, relativism zealously fights to make sure no one believes in any absolutes while using their own absolutes to establish this idea."

I want to move to say this though, because if you're a skeptic, I'm glad you're here. I really am. Luke would love that you're here. If this is you, this relativism, if this is where you feel comfortable, Luke would be like, "Let's get a drink." He would love that you're here. But let me make a few statements here at the end because I think there's a pervasive arrogance when this topic comes up among Evangelicals. So let me say a couple of things. Christians are no better than non-Christians. In fact, the believer in Christ who's actually been converted and understands the Scriptures doesn't see himself as morally fit for God at all. In fact, he sees himself as so desperately broken that unless God sends Jesus to become the wrath-absorbing sacrifice for our lives, we have no chance at ever being restored. And here's the thing I love about the Church, and what I mean by "love" is mean, "openly mock," is Christians continually show they don't understand the gospel by pretending we're more moral and more devoted than everyone else. Don't we? "We're more moral. It's why we've got to picket stuff. We're more devoted." Now, despite all the empirical data to the contrary, it's what we like to preach on, it's what we love to talk about, it's what we put on our t-shirts, it's us, man. "We're more devoted than the rest, and we're more moral." That's not the gospel. In fact, it's the enemy of the gospel. The gospel is not we're more moral or we're more devoted. The gospel is, "Jesus saves." Saves us from what? Us, our inability to be as devoted as we need to be, our inability to be as moral as He's commanded us to be. Like that whole God says, "Be holy as I am holy"—does anybody else have some difficulty getting there? Anybody else? Is it just me that struggles with that one? Alright, so that's what makes the teachings of Jesus so unbelievably intriguing. Because if religion has a bumper sticker...and I'm no bumper sticker fan. My favorite Christian one to this point though is, "The Bread of Life never gets stale." I was like, "I have to follow him home and destroy him. I have to. For the good of the kingdom of God, let me, honey." I need to quit saying stuff like that, because I know someone in here has that bumper sticker, so they'll be scraping that off their bumper before they leave the parking lot. Nobody drives well enough to have a bumper sticker that has Jesus' name on it. It's true. You should go the opposite. "I don't believe in Christ," and then you can drive like a madman. Anyway, in the end, if religion had a motto, it would say this: "I obey, therefore I'm accepted." That's it. That's religion. Whatever belief system you want to get into, that's it, but that is not the teachings of Jesus. Religion says, "Morality and religious observance are means of salvation," but that is not the message of Jesus. Religion says, "We've got it right and everyone else be damned," and Jesus says, "You love the Muslim, you serve the Muslim, if necessary, you die for him. You love the Jew, you serve the Jew and if necessary, you die for them. You love the Hindu, you give up your food for the Hindu, you open your home to the Hindu, you sacrifice your own life for the Hindu." Jesus says, "Love your enemies. Don't just love your friends. How easy is it to love your friends? Even killers do that." I mean, this is a crazy man here. The stuff He teaches, it is not religious in nature in any way historically as religion has been defined. The teachings of Jesus go contrary—now not necessarily what Evangelicals teach and do, but the teachings of Jesus. They're very, very different.

So this is Luke. Luke goes, "Let me introduce you to Jesus. Because I know you've been doing this religious thing. I know you've been going to the temple. I know you've been making sacrifices to this god and to this god. You've been going to the rain god and going, 'Please let it rain.' You've been going to the fertility god going, 'Please let my girl get pregnant.' You've been going over here to the summer god and asking him not to burn up the crops. You've been going over here

to this god and you've been crying out." And he's going here, "You're off. You're off here. Let me tell you about Jesus. Let me tell you about His teachings because this is different. It's intrinsically different at every level. It's not outside-in, it's inside-out. So I'm going to put together a thorough work for you from things I've read, from eyewitness who were there and saw it and thirty years later were still telling the same exact story in the exact same way. I've tested it, I've researched it, I've picked it apart and I'll eventually let my life be taken from me for it." So this is the book of Luke. It should be fun... for about a year and a half.

Let's pray. "Father, we love You. I think we want to love You more than we do. I think on a whole, we want to be more captivated by You than we are, we want to be more consumed by You than we are, we want to be more in love with You than we are. We just need Your help. And I thank You for the gospel and I thank You for the teachings of Jesus and I thank You for Your goodness and Your grace that rescues us where we are, that it wasn't religious observance that brings about salvation, but while we were yet sinners, You died for us. So help us with these things, because a lot of what Jesus is going to say is very different from the culture we're in and people tend to get offended by them. And so, I pray that You would make us gracious. And I thank You for the skeptics that are in here. I thank You for those that don't believe in You. I thank You that they're here. I pray that they'd always feel welcomed here and comfortable here. I pray that You'd speak to them. I pray that they'd eventually have a story like Luke, that they were skeptical so they just dug into it. I pray that those who are in here who are skeptics would look at the way they believe with the same scrutiny thrown on us. So I thank You for faith, and I thank You for how You stir the soul, but I also praise You for the mind. So help us, help us as we seek You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen.