

LUKE AS PASTOR OF DOUBT: FAITH AND CERTAINTY IN LUKAN PERSPECTIVE

ADAM COPENHAVER¹

Christians have traditionally embraced certainty as an ideal goal of Christian faith, but in recent times, the precise opposite view has been increasingly argued, namely that doubt is the only realistic and authentic way to believe. This creates confusion for Christians who doubt—should they strive to overcome their doubt in pursuit of certainty, or should they reject certainty and learn to be content with their doubt? And this also raises questions for spiritual formation and for pastoral ministry—what does it mean to be formed spiritually as one who doubts, and how does a pastor shepherd doubters into that formation?

In this paper, we will explore doubt and certainty in light of the writings of Luke. We will see that Luke intends for his writings to in some way form certainty within his audience, and that Luke may thereby be seen as a pastor to those who doubt. The paper will develop in three sections. First, we will consider some of the voices speaking about doubt and certainty today. Second, we will explore Luke's understanding of certainty and how he expects his corpus of writings to produce that certainty. Third and finally, we will draw conclusions for spiritual formation and pastoral ministry today.

I. DOUBT, FAITH AND CERTAINTY IN THEOLOGICAL CONVERSATION

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the main character, Christian, inadvertently trespasses on the ground of Doubting Castle.² He is taken captive by Giant Despair, who is lord of Doubting Castle, and Christian suffers many torments during his captivity, though Hopeful remains faithfully by his side, so that he does not die, as have many captives before him. He escapes when, after a night of prayer, he realizes that he has always had the key in his chest pocket, near his heart, and that key is the promises of God. As his faith is renewed and his convictions restored, this key opens one gate after another, releasing him from captivity. Christian then erects

¹ Adam Copenhaver is the Senior Pastor of Mabton Grace Brethren Church in Mabton, Washington.

² John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come*, ed. Barry E. Horner (Lindenhurst, NY: Reformation Press, 1999; originally published 1678).

a monument warning future pilgrims about the danger of doubt, which is forbidden ground, for it leads to captivity, despair, and even destruction.³

Bunyan's view of doubt has been shared by many Christians throughout history. John Calvin, for example, defines faith as a "a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit."⁴ Doubt, however, works against the "firm and sure" nature of faith, for "nothing is more adverse to faith than conjecture, or any other feeling akin to doubt."⁵ For Calvin, though all believers experience the doubts that arise from the flesh, God equips believers for overcoming doubt by the Holy Spirit, who reveals to us the promise of God's favor toward us in Christ and seals those truths upon our hearts.⁶ Therefore, believers can have assurance in humility, for such assurance is the gift of God.⁷

More recently, Os Guinness has expressed the danger of doubt even more explicitly. He defines doubt in light of belief and unbelief as follows: "To believe is to be 'in one mind' about trusting someone or something as true; to disbelieve is to be 'in one mind' about rejecting them. To doubt is to waver between the two, to believe and disbelieve at once and so to be 'in

³ The monument reads (Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, 145):

*Out of the way we went, and then we found
What 'twas to tread upon forbidden ground;
And let them that come after have a care,
Lest heedlessness makes them, as we, to fare.
Lest they for trespassing his prisoners are,
Whose castle's Doubting, and whose name's Despair.*

⁴ Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.7. All citations of Calvin's *Institutes* are taken from John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁵ Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.38.

⁶ When a believer wrestles with unbelief, it has a limited power, for unbelief "reigns not in the hearts of believers, but only assails them from without; does not wound them mortally with its darts, but annoys them, or, at the utmost, gives them a wound which can be healed" (Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.21). Further, doubt reflects the imperfect nature of faith whereby the believer both "delights in recognizing the divine goodness" and is filled "with bitterness under a sense of his fallen state." The former inclines the believer toward confidence, while the latter elicits alarm and incertitude. "Hence those conflicts: the distrust cleaving to the remains of the flesh rising up to assail the faith existing in our hearts. But if in the believer's mind certainty is mingled with doubt, must we not always be carried back to the conclusion that faith consists not of a sure and clear, but only of an obscure and confused, understanding of the divine will in regard to us? By no means. Though we are distracted by various thoughts, it does not follow that we are immediately divested of faith. Though we are agitated and carried to and fro by distrust, we are not immediately plunged into the abyss; though we are shaken, we are not therefore driven from our place. The invariable issue of the contest is, that faith in the long-run surmounts the difficulties by which it was beset and seemed to be endangered" (Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.18).

⁷ In contrast, those who protest that believers are arrogant to claim "undoubted knowledge of the divine will" prove themselves to be arrogant, for they are exalting themselves over the Holy Spirit, denying the Holy Spirit's work of revealing God's favor and sealing believers' hearts, and thereby are insulting the Holy Spirit (Calvin, *Inst.* 3.2.39).

two minds.’”⁸ Guinness contends that doubt in and of itself is not unbelief, but if doubt is left unchecked and not overcome, it will lead to unbelief and disaster for the believer, and therefore doubt should not be treated as trivial.⁹ Tim Keller would add that the believer who acknowledges and wrestles with both their own doubts and the doubts expressed by others will ultimately “come to a position of strong faith, to respect and understand those who doubt.”¹⁰

However, in recent times, an alternative approach to doubt has emerged in which doubt poses less a threat than an opportunity to believers. For example, Rachel Held Evans describes her own spiritual journey in which she was a captive to certainty but she was rescued by doubt. Her faith “evolved” as she moved “from certainty, through doubt, to faith,” so that she has experienced a “surprising rebirth” into an evolved faith that “means being okay with being wrong, okay with not having all the answers, okay with never being finished.”¹¹ Her journey is, at least in part, a justifiable reaction to the attitude of some fundamentalists who are certain about every aspect of their faith and doctrine, even where such certainty is unwarranted. In the end, for Evans, certainty is the castle that held her captive and doubt is the key that opened the door and set her free.

Likewise Peter Enns argues that certainty is itself a sin, a false confidence that stems from pride rather than from faith.¹² Certainty reflects naiveté at best and deliberate inauthenticity at worst, since Scripture—in Enns’ view—presents us with diversity and mystery rather than with clarity

⁸ Os Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 29. Guinness also surveys the various Greek words used in the New Testament that could be translated with our English word *doubt*: first, *δίψυχος* refers to a person who is “chronically double-minded” (e.g. James 1:8); second, *διακρίνω* suggests a mind that is torn or separated, so that a person cannot make up their mind (e.g. James 1:6); third, *μετεωρίζομαι* indicates the restlessness or anxiety that comes with being “up in the air” because of our pride, and it can overlap with doubt (e.g. Luke 12:29); fourth, *διαλογισμός* refers to internal reasoning that gives rise to doubt (e.g. Luke 24:38); finally, *διστάζω* means to hesitate or to falter, perhaps because of reservations (e.g. Matt 28:17). He concludes that in all of these terms, the common theme is that the “condition of doubleness is the essence of doubt” (Guinness, *God in the Dark*, 24–25).

⁹ “Continued doubt loosens the believer’s hold on the resources and privileges of faith and can be the prelude to the disasters of unbelief. So doubt is never treated as trivial” (Guinness, *God in the Dark*, 29). Alister McGrath also adds a definition of skepticism, which is “the decision to doubt everything deliberately, as a matter of principle,” but doubt itself arises only from within a position of faith, where the one who believes struggles against their own human frailty and sinful nature (Alister E. McGrath, *Doubling: Growing Through the Uncertainties of Faith* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007], 13, 16–18).

¹⁰ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), xvii.

¹¹ Rachel Held Evans, *Faith Unraveled: How a Girl Who Knew All the Answers Learned to Ask Questions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 22–23.

¹² Here Enns moves beyond Daniel Taylor, for whom certainty is merely a myth. Peter Enns, *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More Than Our Correct Beliefs* (New York: HarperOne, 2017); Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1986).

and precision in what we ought to believe. Doubt, therefore, plays a crucial role in breaking down our unwarranted certainties that we construct to give us a false sense of security, and doubt sets us free into the darkness, where we can trust God himself, in all of his mystery, rather than trusting in our inadequate conceptions of God.¹³ Indeed, God may actually be closer to us in our doubt than in our certainty. Believers, therefore, ought to embrace doubt as it leads them out of certainty to trust but not back to certainty again.

If Enns and Evans were to create a Bunyan-like allegory, they might describe Christian trespassing at Certainty Castle and being taken captive by Giant Pride, but he escapes when, after a long night of asking questions, he realizes that the key of Doubt is in his pocket, and Doubt opens the gates and sets him free to continue his journey, but not before he erects a monument warning all future pilgrims against the danger of certainty.

These various authors exemplify two contrasting views of doubt and certainty. One presents doubt as captivity leading to destruction, while the other presents doubt as an escape leading to freedom; one seeks to overcome doubt as an enemy of faith while the other embraces doubt as a friend of faith.¹⁴ What, then, shall we say to the believer who experiences doubt? Shall they embrace their doubt or overcome it? And if the latter, how shall it be overcome? We now turn our attention to Luke and consider how he would speak to these issues.

II. LUKE ON DOUBT AND CERTAINTY

In the prologue to his gospel, Luke describes the purpose of his project in terms of certainty—he writes in order that his audience might have certainty regarding what they have already been taught (Luke 1:4). He addresses his writings to Theophilus (Luke 1:3), who may be a real person, perhaps even the patron sponsoring Luke's work, or he may represent Luke's ideal reader, a person whom Luke envisions will benefit from his writings.¹⁵

¹³ "Doubt tears down the castle walls we have built, with the false security and permanence they give, and forces us outside to walk a lonely, trying, yet cleansing road. In those times, it definitely feels like God is against us, far away, or absent altogether. But what if the darkness is actually a moment of God's presence that *seems* like absence, a gift of God to help us grow up out of our little ideas of God? Doubting God is painful and frightening because we think we are leaving behind, when in fact we are only leaving behind ideas about God that we are used to surrounding ourselves with—the small God, the God within our control, the God who moves in our circles, the God who agrees with us. Doubt strips away distraction so we can see more clearly the inadequacies of who we think God is and move us from the foolishness of thinking that *our* god is *the* God" (Enns, *The Sin of Certainty*, 158).

¹⁴ Lesslie Newbigin articulates this dichotomy in terms of fundamentalism and liberalism as follows: "From the point of view of the fundamentalist, doubt is sin; from the point of view of the liberal, the capacity for doubt is a measure of intellectual integrity and honest" (Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 1)

¹⁵ Francis Watson is representative of scholars who see Theophilus as an ideal reader whom Luke hopes will find in his writings "the full, satisfying, and convincing account of the truth that has never been available before" (Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel: A*

Either way, Luke views himself as writing toward a specific kind of person in order to address a specific spiritual need. Theophilus represents a person who has already been instructed in the basic teachings about Jesus, but Luke perceives Theophilus to be experiencing some measure of uncertainty or doubt and Luke sets out to help Theophilus overcome his doubts and find certainty. At first glance, therefore, Luke seems to agree with Bunyan and Calvin that doubt ought to be overcome and certainty pursued. But we must carefully consider the nature of certainty in Luke and how Luke seeks to develop it.

Regarding the nature of this certainty, Luke uses the word *ἀσφάλεια*, which sometimes refers to being safe in the midst of a dangerous situation (e.g. 1 Thess 5:3; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.245) or the security that restricts the movement of a prisoner (e.g. Acts 5:23; *Mart. Pol.* 13.3), but in contexts such as Luke's, it refers to the stability of an idea, its truthfulness, or certainty (BDAG, 118). It is a "security against stumbling or falling" (LSJ, 266). We may define certainty as having confidence that what we know to be true is indeed true and reliable, and that no evidence or argument, whether presently known or unknown, is or will be able to discredit or refute what we know to be true. Doubt represents the absence of such confidence, when we have feelings of misgiving that what we hold to be true may in fact be false, and may be proven to us to be false, should sufficient arguments and evidence surface, so that we might one day be compelled to admit that what we now hold to be true is in fact false. Luke aims to move Theophilus from doubt to certainty.

But we must immediately note that in Luke 1:4, this certainty is the object of what we know rather than the quality with which we know. Luke wants Theophilus to "know the certainty," where certainty is the object of knowledge (*ἐπιγνώσ...τὴν ἀσφάλειαν*), not to "know with certainty," where certainty is the quality of knowing. Instead, this certainty more properly belongs to the instructions Theophilus has already received (*περὶ ὧν κατηχήθης λόγων*).¹⁶ In other words, Luke does not here indicate a desire for us to be certain of what we know (or think we know) about these teachings but to know that these teachings are in and of themselves certain, whether we know them to be certain or not. Or we might say that Luke does not call us to be certain of what we know but to know the certainty of what

Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016], 62). On the other hand, Martin Hengel suggests Theophilus was an alias for a high-ranking Roman aristocrat who was also a "friend of God" and may have been Luke's patron (Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collectoin and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. John Bowden [Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000], 102).

¹⁶ Our English translations sometimes obscure the precise nature of Luke's intention. The ESV's reading, "that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught" (cf. HCSB, NLT), locates certainty within Theophilus himself, while the NIV's reading, "so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught" (cf. KJV, NASB), locates certainty within the teachings. In this case, the NIV reading is preferred, since it correctly renders the accusative *τὴν ἀσφάλειαν* as the object of *ἐπιγνώσ*.

we know. Luke aims to demonstrate that the message about Christ stands securely upon its own merit.

To accomplish this goal, Luke compiles a narrative (διήγησις; Luke 1:1) of historical events that have taken place, namely the events involving Jesus. He acknowledges that other authors have already undertaken similar writings, and he may in fact be aware of the gospels written by Matthew and Mark, but Luke identifies his own gospel as an “orderly account” (καθεξῆς; Luke 1:3), perhaps indicating his intention to arrange his account logically or even chronologically (BDAG, 490).¹⁷ He seeks an orderly narrative, and rightly so, since “an orderly account will also be a credible account; a disordered narrative undermines its own credibility.”¹⁸ Luke considers himself to be equipped for writing such a definitive history, since he has carefully followed these events for some time, and has himself received firsthand information from eyewitnesses and perhaps even the apostles themselves. Indeed, Luke may himself be an eyewitness of some of the events in Acts when he speaks in the first person (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-8; 27:1–28:16). Luke aims to be a meticulous historian, since he sees these events as the central proofs of the certainty of the teachings about Christ.

As a historian, Luke has a particular view of history in which these events represent the fullness of time, or even the fulfillment (πληροφορέω; Luke 1:1) of God’s purposes and promises.¹⁹ Luke, therefore, cannot restrict himself to merely reciting a sequence of historical events, but he must also comment on the *significance* of these events as the activity of God acting within history. In this regard, Luke also plays the role of a theologian who presents the character and work of God at work in Jesus’ ministry.²⁰ Luke is “*both* historian *and* theologian,” and his theology is inseparable from his history.²¹

But Luke is more than historian and theologian; he is also pastor, if we understand a pastor as someone who seeks to guide Christians into maturity as they trust Christ more deeply and obey Christ more faithfully. Luke undertakes this historical and theological project with such a pastoral purpose, as he aims to strengthen the faith of Theophilus by demonstrating

¹⁷ Watson suggests Luke was certainly aware of Mark’s and probably aware of Matthew’s gospels, and yet he aims for his to be “the definitive version” (Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 62).

¹⁸ Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 71.

¹⁹ “The use of this verb suggests that Luke is thinking of events which were promised and performed by God: it conveys the idea of fulfillment. Thus the events recorded by Luke are seen as having a particular interpretation; they are not mere events, but form part of a series planned and carried into effect by God” (I. Howard Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970], 41).

²⁰ Thus, “his purpose was not to draw important lessons from history, as it was the case with other Greek historians, but to serve Christianity with a true report of *God acting in history*” (I. J. du Plessis, “Once More: The Purpose of Luke’s Prologue [Luke I.1-4],” *NovT* 16 [1974]: 271; cited by David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 57).

²¹ Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 18.

the certainty of these teachings in order to overcome his doubts.²² Our goal, then, is to consider how Luke envisions his history and theology to accomplish his pastoral aim, namely how the particular history he writes, with its particular theological distinctives, might engender the certainty he seeks for Theophilus. We might say that Luke's history informs his theology that serves his pastoral aims. We will therefore consider, first, Luke as a historian, second, Luke as a theologian, and finally, and most importantly, Luke as a pastor.

A. LUKE AS HISTORIAN

Luke's identity as a historian has been widely acknowledged and evaluated by scholars, whose work can be easily accessed. Our goal here is simply to sketch the broad contours of Luke's historical writings in his gospel and in Acts and to consider how his historical approach pertains to his pastoral aim. Generally speaking, Luke proves himself to be a careful and patient historian with a meticulous attention to detail, including establishing historical context by naming rulers and geographical locations, as well as naming characters and witnesses involved. In this way, Luke overloads his writings with falsifiable historical statements—statements that could be proven to be false if indeed they are false.

A statement is more probable not only based on the availability of data to support its truthfulness, if in fact it is true, but also on the likelihood of data being available to contradict its truthfulness, if in fact it is false.²³ Luke presents his sources from the outset—he relies upon the written narratives written by others as well as eyewitness testimony. Today's scholars recognize, in varying degrees, that Luke likely used in his gospel some combination of the writings of Matthew and Mark, and perhaps the hypothetical document called Q.²⁴ In both his Gospel and Acts, Luke uses the accounts of the apostles (the “ministers of the word; Luke 1:3), and the oral testimony of eyewitnesses, and, in the Book of Acts, his own experiences as an eyewitness

²² Because Theophilus has already received these teachings and presumably possesses some measure of faith, Luke is better described as a pastor rather than an evangelist, as Marshall suggests (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 18-19), or an apologist seeking to defend these teachings against their opponents, as Hengel indicates (Hengel, *The Four Gospels*, 101).

²³ Michael Licona identifies “three major components” for calculating the probability of a hypothesis, such as a historical claim, to be true: “the prior probability that the hypothesis is true, the likelihood that we would have the relevant extant evidence given the truth of the hypothesis and the likelihood of that evidence given the falsehood of the hypothesis” (Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010], 115.).

²⁴ Darrell Bock provides a summary of the parallel texts that Luke shares with Mark and Matthew, concluding that about 35% of Luke corresponds to Mark's gospel and an additional 21% of Luke corresponds to unique material in Matthew's gospel, though it is not clear whether Luke borrows from both these texts, or whether one or both of them borrows from Luke (Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50; Volume 1*; BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994], 10-11). For an extensive analysis of Luke's use of written sources, see Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 156–216.

companion of Paul's.²⁵ Luke has done his research, and he uses sources that he feels are reliable, and he expects that his readers can also consult those sources to verify his account.

In his gospel, Luke attends to historical details far more than Matthew, Mark, or John. For example, when he tells of Jesus being born in Bethlehem, he explains the historical background of how Jesus' parents came to be in Bethlehem at this time. It was because of a decree from Caesar Augustus, when Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2:1-2).²⁶ And when John the Baptist appears baptizing, Luke first establishes the historical context "with references to secular rulers both well known (Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod Agrippa) and obscure (Philip, Lysanias), to leading clerics (Annas, Caiaphas), and to territories that will feature in Luke's narrative (Judea, Galilee) and those that will not (Iturea, Trachonitis, Abilene). Several of these persons or locations were no doubt as obscure to Luke's first readers as they are to his present-day ones;" nevertheless, Luke mentions them in order that "a well-informed reader such as Theophilus will be reassured that the gospel events unfold within historical rather than mythological time."²⁷

In the Book of Acts, Luke continues to locate the story of the apostles squarely within particular historical contexts. They travel to real cities and engage with real people, both inside and outside the church. Luke tells of multiple experiences that would have left behind official civic and judicial records, such as the arrests of the apostles in Jerusalem and their appearance before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4-5), the execution of Stephen (Acts 7), the official documents authorizing Paul to persecute Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2), the Jerusalem church council's ruling (Acts 15), the earthquake that destroyed the Philippian jail (Acts 16:26), the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19), and Paul's multiple trials in Jerusalem and Caesarea, as well as the court documents regarding his appeal to Rome (Acts 21-28). Other events surely lived on in local lore, such as the attempt to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods at Lystra after they healed a crippled man (Acts

²⁵ Richard Bauckham argues that the "eyewitnesses" and the "ministers of the word" in Luke 1:2 are one group of people rather than two, for the eyewitnesses were also active in bearing witness to what they saw all the way up to the time of Luke's writing (Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Second Edition [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017], 30). In the second half of Acts (chapters 13-28), the occasional use of the first person "we" indicates Luke (or his source's) presence with Paul, but otherwise scholars are unable to agree upon the particular nature of Luke's other sources (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 67-68).

²⁶ Some scholars question whether Luke is accurate in this particular historical detail, since Josephus (*Ant.* 18.1.1) indicates Quirinius was only governor of Syria for a brief period of time in 6-7 CE, about ten years after Jesus was born. Various explanations have emerged in an attempt to reconcile this discrepancy, but the lack of additional evidence prohibit a definitive conclusion (see the discussion, for example, in Garland, *Luke*, 117-18). Thus, Joel Green's following conclusion, which he bases on such apparent historical problems in Luke and Luke's subjection of historical detail to his interpretation of Jesus' significance, is profoundly overstated: "This means, too, that we must reject any attempts to locate in Luke an historical basis for faith" (Joel Green, *The Theology of the Gospel of Luke* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 146).

²⁷ Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 69-70.

14:8-18), and the humiliation of the seven sons of Sceva leading to the burning of an immense value of magical books in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-20). The external evidence needed to corroborate Luke's record of these events would have been available to the diligent First-century reader.

In addition, Luke incorporates eyewitnesses into his narrative and provides the information Theophilus would need to track down and consult with these eyewitnesses. Some of these eyewitnesses are named explicitly in his gospel, including Zechariah, Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary (Luke 1), as well as Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:22-38), the twelve apostles (Luke 6:14-16), Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38), Jairus (Luke 8:41), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2), Simon of Cyrene (Luke 23:26), Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50), Mary Magdalene (Luke 24:10), Mary the mother of James (Luke 24:10), and Cleopas (Luke 24:18).²⁸ Many of the events Luke records regarding these named individuals were publicly witnessed, so that even if the named eyewitness is deceased, others could likely still attest to the veracity of Luke's record.²⁹

Further, Luke includes stories in his gospel of events witnessed by large crowds in small, rural communities, and of events in particular places where witnesses could be found with minimal effort. In a small village such as Nazareth, surely some synagogue members there remember the day they nearly threw Jesus off a cliff (Luke 4:61-30). How hard would it be to find the widow in Nain whose son Jesus raised from the dead, or her son, or other townspeople who witnessed this event (Luke 7:11-17)? One trip to the temple in Jerusalem, and a reader of Luke could surely find multiple witnesses who recount various events there, including the boy Jesus amazing the teachers (Luke 2:41-51), the cleansing of the temple (Luke 19:45-46), and the crucifixion.

²⁸ Luke has a stronger inclination to name persons in his gospel than do the other gospel writers. He includes forty-four named persons, as compared with thirty-three in Mark and Matthew, and twenty in John (Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 56-66). Further, Bauckham compares the use of particular names in the gospels to how popular those names were in other Palestinian Jewish sources from the time period of Jesus. He concludes "that the relative frequency of the various personal names in the Gospels corresponds well to the relative frequency in the full database of three thousand individual instances of names in the Palestinian Jewish sources of the period" (Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 84). If Luke was fabricating the names of eyewitnesses, he would have been very unlikely to be so accurate in distributing the names so closely according to popularity, since Luke wrote a generation later and was not himself Palestinian. Bauckham's research argues heavily for the authenticity of these named eyewitnesses.

²⁹ For this reason, G. A. Kennedy's suggestion that Luke "identifies no sources" and simply "sought to recreate in his own mind" what various characters such as Elizabeth *would* have said does not itself have any basis in the text (G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984], 107-8). Though Greek historians may have taken such liberties of *prosopoeia*, this kind of approach would have been self-defeating for Luke's aims. Luke actually labors to include historical details such as the precise date and location of these events because he understands them to be historical events that could be verified by witnesses. We would hardly expect such detailed reporting from Luke if indeed he is trying to cover-up his fabrications.

In the Book of Acts, Luke immediately reminds his readers of the eyewitnesses of Jesus by listing the eleven remaining apostles by name (Acts 1:13) along with Mary, mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). The apostles determine to replace Judas with a person who was present throughout the entirety of Jesus' ministry, and at least two qualified candidates emerge, Matthias, who is selected, and Joseph, who is also called both Barsabbas and Justus (Acts 1:23).³⁰ The rest of the 120 people present apparently witnessed portions of Jesus' earthly ministry but not his entire career (Acts 1:15). To this list we might also add the apostle Paul, to whom the resurrected Jesus appeared on the Damascus road, so that he could become an eyewitness, albeit one "untimely born" (Acts 9:1-19; 1 Cor 15:8). These eyewitnesses provide the foundational testimony about Jesus throughout Acts, and others also bear witness to Jesus on the basis of their testimony.³¹

As Luke advances his historical narrative throughout Acts, he continues naming the various people involved, including both believers and unbelievers, as well as obscure and public figures. These people serve as eyewitnesses of the events that took place concerning eyewitnesses of Jesus.³² Luke specifically names no fewer than 68 people who played some role in various events recorded in Acts.³³ Some of these individuals played a major role and even traveled with Paul, sharing in multiple events, while others

³⁰ Matthias and Joseph would thereby qualify as eyewitnesses "from the beginning" upon whom Luke relies for his information (Luke 1:2).

³¹ "What matters for Luke is the function of the apostles as witnesses to Christ and the saving events. It is arguable that only the apostles actually function as witnesses in the strict sense of the term, and that the task of other and later believers is to repeat the apostolic witness rather than to be witnesses themselves" (I. Howard Marshall, *A Concise New Testament Theology* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008], 64).

³² Bauckham defines eyewitnesses as "firsthand observers of events," so that we may identify the apostles and company as firsthand observers of the events surrounding Jesus' life on earth as recorded in the gospel of Luke, but these additional named people in Acts are firsthand observers of the historical events following Jesus' ascension (Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 117).

³³ My initial list of named persons in Acts includes Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, of the priestly family (4:6); Joseph called Barnabas (4:36); Gamaliel, a Pharisee on the Jewish council (5:34); Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, all in Jerusalem (6:5); Philip and Simon the magician in Samaria (8); Ananias in Damascus (9:10-19); Aeneas in Lydda (9:33); Tabitha, called Dorcas, and Simon the tanner, both in Joppa (9:36-43); Cornelius in Caesarea (10); Barnabas (11:22-26, etc.); Mary, the mother of John, and Rhoda (12:12-13); John, called Mark (12:25, etc.); Simon, called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manean, all in Antioch (13:1); Elymas and Sergius Paulus in Cyprus (13:4-12); Judas, called Barsabbas, and Silas, sent from Jerusalem (15:22); Timothy (16:1, etc.); Lydia in Philippi (16:14); Jason in Thessalonica (17:5-9); Dionysius the Areopagite and Damaris in Athens (17:34); Aquila and Priscilla (18:2), Titius Justus and Crispus (18:7-8), and Gallio and Sosthenes (18:12-17), all in Corinth; Apollos of Alexandria (18:24), Erastus (19:22), Demetrius the silversmith, Gaius, Aristarchus, and Alexander, all in Ephesus (19:23-34); additional companions of Paul, including Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, Gaius of Derbe, and Tychicus and Trophimus of the Asians (20:4); Eutychus in Troas (20:9); Philip the evangelist at Caesarea (21:8); Mnason of Cyprus (21:16); Trophimus the Ephesian (21:29); Ananias the high priest (23:2) and Tertullus his spokesman (24:1); Felix the Roman governor in Caesarea and his

played a more obscure role in their own towns. In addition, he provides detailed descriptions of other individuals that might allow a reader to identify them, such as the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27), the priest of Zeus in Lystra (Acts 14:13), the town clerk in Ephesus (Acts 19:35), and the tribune in Jerusalem (Acts 21:38). He also refers to large groups of people that could be found in various cities, including the church community in many cities, the elders of various churches (e.g. the elders in Ephesus; Acts 20), the Jewish council, synagogues in various cities, and the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17). And we have not yet even mentioned the countless witnesses of Pentecost who came from and went back home to virtually every corner of the Mediterranean World (Acts 2:9-10)!

What shall we make of Luke's painstaking attention to historical detail? On the one hand, Luke may simply be lost in a historian's obsession with recording endless details that only distract from his larger agenda. But more likely, these details are essential to Luke's agenda of writing an orderly and definitive account that will corroborate the certainty of these historical events.³⁴ Luke leaves a trail of breadcrumbs for the skeptical reader to follow, a trail that leads to and through a treasure trove of evidence, from one eyewitness to another, through countless towns and cities spread around the Mediterranean Sea, from peasant shepherds to high priests and Roman authorities, and into the official records of the temple and of Jewish and Roman courts. Luke's history touches upon nearly every people group in every geographical region. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that a First-century reader would have been *unable* to find a source close at hand to verify or falsify some portion of Luke's narrative. Only a historian certain of the accuracy of his or her account would include such extensive falsifiable details. Luke presents to us a falsifiable narrative with full confidence that it cannot and will not be falsified.

In ancient historiography, it would have been unfeasible for Luke to provide further substantiating evidence. In our modern world, we might be dissatisfied with Luke's sources and skeptical of bias, since we favor the

wife Drusilla (24); Festus (25:1-12); King Agrippa and Bernice (25-26); Julius, the centurion of the Augustan Cohort (27:1); and Publius, the chief man of the island of Malta (28:7).

³⁴ Nevertheless, some scholars have challenged the accuracy of Luke's history on various grounds, such as supposed errors in geography, misstatements about political rulers, incongruency between Luke's narratives of Paul's life and Paul's own autobiographical statements in his letters, and the various speeches in Acts, which may or may not be recorded verbatim. However, Marshall demonstrates how these various challenges can be taken seriously and yet also explained in various ways without special pleading, so that on the whole "Luke's treatment of background details is basically reliable," as is his travelogue of Paul's journeys and his basic recollection of the essence of speeches (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 72; cf. 53-76). Regarding the speeches, we ought to remember that it would be entirely unreasonable to expect Luke to incorporate verbatim manuscripts of speeches, since an apostle such as Paul could speak for hours on end—remember poor Eutyclus! Yet Luke himself acknowledges that the apostles preached "many other words" than are recorded (Acts 2:40). He is under no illusion about the summary nature of his recorded speeches, and yet he seeks a faithful summary that could be affirmed by the original listeners as a faithful recollection of all that was said.

objective and concrete evidence of photographs, videos, and CSI-style forensic data (e.g. DNA, fingerprints, and the like) that provide absolute proof. However, the absence of such concrete evidence in ancient historiography does not make ancient historiography any less reliable. As Licona argues, *absolute* certainty may not be realistic for the historian, who may nevertheless have *adequate* certainty based on “carefully examined inferences” and deliberate attempts to be unbiased and to follow proper methodology.³⁵ As a historian, Luke provides adequate certainty to the fullest extent possible.³⁶

B. LUKE AS THEOLOGIAN

We turn now from the nature of Luke’s historical work to his work as a theologian, and we may summarize the theological theme of Luke’s writings as the work of God through Jesus Christ to bring about the salvation of all who believe.³⁷ This statement incorporates several minor theological themes including the divine determination of God, the saving work of Christ, and how salvation truly does reach to all people, even the Gentiles, through the power of the Holy Spirit and by the proclamation and prayers of the apostles and the early church. We will consider briefly each of these themes and then we will see how they all converge in the resurrection, which is the center of both Luke’s theology and history, and which is the key to his pastoral aim with regard to doubt.

³⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 69. Likewise, Marshall says the conclusions of the historian “are not like those of a mathematician who can proceed with perfect certainty from a set of premises to a conclusion. *All* historical reconstructions have an inherent element of uncertainty about them” (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 24). Leslie Newbigin goes even further in his criticism of our modern Enlightenment ideals whereby we assume that certainty is an attainable and necessary goal that can only be reached in an objective, impersonal, and even mathematical way. But when we define certainty in this way, then we are inherently limiting the kind of questions that can be answered with certainty, namely questions that can be answered in a mathematical way. Therefore, historians are *a priori* judged incapable of providing certainty, as also are theologians, since such impersonal methodologies can never speak to the deeper questions of purpose, where we might introduce the personal God of Christian faith (Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 95).

³⁶ As a personal anecdote, my wife once served on a jury for a murder trial in which there was no absolute evidence in the form of surveillance videos, DNA, or smoking guns. The prosecution spent five weeks carefully piecing together the testimony of more than 50 eyewitnesses, none of whom had witnessed the actual murder, but each of whom had witnessed some small event related to the murder. The prosecutor built an entire narrative from this testimony and asked the jury to render a guilty verdict. The jury had not been allowed to discuss the trial with one another over these weeks, yet when they finally entered into deliberations, they had a unanimous guilty verdict within minutes. They had each become individually convinced by the overwhelming evidence from the testimonies of these witnesses. The jurors would probably not say that they were *absolutely* certain, as they might have been had they witnessed the murder themselves, but they were *adequately* certain, given the kinds of evidence actually available to them, that no other conclusion was possible. If the combined testimony of witnesses can still today have the compelling power to send a man to life in prison, how much more compelling would such testimony be in Luke’s world, where videos and forensic analysis did not even exist!

³⁷ Similarly, Marshall says, “The central theme in the writings of Luke is that Jesus offers salvation to men” (Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 116).



the
**COMMON
GOOD**

with **IAN SIMKINS** *and* **BRIAN FROM**

WEEKDAYS FROM 4 TO 6PM CT



**LISTEN ON-LINE AND
DOWNLOAD PODCASTS AT
1160HOPE.COM**

In Luke's writings, God is the primary actor who superintends all other events so that those events are properly described in Luke 1:1 as the activities "which have been fulfilled" among us (*περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων*), implying both a past promise that needed to be fulfilled and a divine agent who has accomplished this fulfillment, namely God himself. Though Luke does not specifically cite Old Testament prophets with the frequency of Matthew, he does see the story of Jesus as the continuation of the story of Israel. Jesus begins his ministry with an announcement of himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2 (Luke 4:17-21) and he ends his ministry in the gospel of Luke with a lengthy demonstration of how his death and resurrection fulfill what was foretold in Moses and the prophets, and even in all of Scripture (Luke 24:27). Richard Hays aptly observes, "[Of] all the Evangelists, Luke is the most intentional, and the most skillful, in narrating the story of Jesus in a way that joins it seamlessly to Israel's story."³⁸

Therefore, in Acts the apostles cannot tell the story of Jesus apart from the story of Israel. Peter lectures his way through the prophecy of Joel before telling of Jesus' resurrection in light of King David (Psalm 2:14-36). Steven begins with Abraham and plods through the patriarchs, Moses and the exodus, Sinai, the wilderness wanderings, and kings David and Solomon, before finally making the briefest comment about Jesus being crucified and proclaiming his vision of the resurrected Jesus (Acts 7). Philip teaches the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus from Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:26-40), and the apostle Paul routinely argues from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah (e.g. Acts 17:2-3). The working presupposition of the apostles and also of Luke is that the Old Testament constituted a promise that has now been fulfilled in Christ, so that the narrative of the fulfillment is really the continuation of the narrative of the promise.

The promise and the fulfillment are conjoined together by the all-embracing work of God which superintends all events past, present, and future. Luke repeatedly frames historical events within language of divine sovereignty, as if God is the director of the drama of history. Luke uses the Greek term *δεῖ*, indicating necessity, 40 times in his writings to show how God has predetermined what must come to pass.³⁹ For example, Jesus must preach the good news (Luke 4:43), must stay at Zacchaeus' house (Luke 19:5), and repeatedly says that he must be killed and raised on the third day (Luke 9:22; 22:37; 24:7, 26). In Acts, Peter acknowledges God as the primary actor in the saving work of Jesus, since God attested Jesus by signs and wonders, God foreknew and planned Jesus' crucifixion, and God has raised him from the dead, so that God has now made him to be Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-24, 32, 36). And if God superintended Jesus'

³⁸ Further, "the story of Jesus constitutes the fulfillment of the story of Israel" (Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016], 191-92).

³⁹ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 286. Joel Green (*Theology of the Gospel of Luke*, 29) observes that Luke also expressed divine intentionality with additional terms such as *βουλή* ("purpose"), *βούλομαι* ("to want"), *θέλημα* ("will"), *θέλω* ("to will"), *ὀρίζω* ("to determine"), *πληρῶω* ("to fulfill"), and *προφήτης* ("prophet").

own suffering, then the apostles are justified to see their own suffering as part of the plan of the sovereign God (e.g. Acts 4:23-31). Behind every event in Luke's narrative lies the invisible, superintending hand of God.

At the center of the "definite plan" (Acts 2:23) of God we find the salvation that was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ.⁴⁰ It is fitting that Luke should use the resurrection to bridge the gap between his Gospel and Acts, so that Acts begins where the Gospel ends. In his preface to Acts, he describes the Gospel of Luke as containing all that Jesus began to do until he was taken up into heaven, after he had proven himself to be raised from the dead (Acts 1:1-3), and then Luke tells again of the resurrected Jesus ascending into heaven (Acts 1:6-11). The Gospel of Luke in many ways serves as a prologue to the main act in Jerusalem where Jesus will die and be raised. Jesus "sets his face" toward Jerusalem relatively early in Luke's narrative (Luke 9:51), and Luke then devotes a substantial amount of text to Jesus' slowly-developing journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:44) and the events surrounding his death and resurrection (Luke 19:45-24:53).⁴¹ Luke's Gospel moves steadily inward upon Jerusalem, narrowing its focus more and more clearly upon Jesus, until only Jesus remains, upon his cross and then raised from the dead.

Acts, on the other hand, moves steadily outward from Jerusalem, expanding its vision until it encompasses the entire Mediterranean World. Acts is a kind of epilogue to the resurrection, looking back to the resurrection and unfolding its implications into the present world. The apostles now operate out of a clear conviction that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and, if Acts 1:1 refers to what Jesus *began* to do on earth, then the apostles naturally anticipate what Jesus will *continue* to do from heaven. They have been promised the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5) and the return of Jesus (Acts 1:11), of which the Holy Spirit comes first. When Peter addresses the crowd in Jerusalem at Pentecost, he attributes the phenomenon of the Holy Spirit and the miracle of tongues to Jesus himself, whom God raised from the dead, and who now is ascended and sitting at God's right hand, and *he* (Jesus) has poured out the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33). From this point forward, the central theme in all of the apostles' preaching is

⁴⁰ If Jesus' death and resurrection stand at the center of his work, and if his work stands at the center of history, as Burridge suggests in the following statement, then we may say that Jesus' death and resurrection stand at the center of all of history: "Recent studies of Luke have shown that Jesus stands in 'the Middle of Time', the pivot around whom all history centres, the time of fulfillment. Before Jesus, there is the past, the time of prophecy in the Jewish scriptures; after Jesus, there is the future, the period of the church which Luke will describe in the book of Acts. The gospel is carefully structured historically, from the deliberate Old Testament feel of the opening chapters, through to the disciples in Jerusalem at the end beginning the church, and on into the second volume, the Acts of the Apostles. Luke has a flow of events" (Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* [London: SPCK, 1994], 107).

⁴¹ Perhaps as much as 49% of Luke's extensive coverage of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in 9:51-19:44 is unique to Luke (Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 23).

the death and resurrection of Jesus, which they unflinchingly proclaim as a certain historical fact (e.g. Acts 5:30-31; 7:52-53; 10:39-43).⁴²

The apostles issue this proclamation with urgency because of the overwhelming good news that, through Jesus' death and resurrection, God has now accomplished salvation for *all* who believe. The universal scope of this salvation permeates Luke's writings and propels the apostles outward in Acts, for the gospel truly calls out to all people, not only to Israelites, but also to Gentiles, and in Luke's gospel, especially to the marginalized and outsiders. When Jesus first stands in Nazareth and announces that God will accomplish his promised salvation through Jesus, he is initially well-received, but only until he suggests that God's salvation will move beyond the Nazarene synagogue—even bypassing the Nazarene synagogue—to reach foreign widows and lepers (Luke 4:17-27). In Luke's Gospel, the ministry of Jesus focuses especially on the poor, the lame, Gentiles, women, and other "lost" people, whom he came to seek and to save (Luke 19:10).⁴³ To them, Jesus brings salvation in the form of healing, forgiveness of sins, and inclusion in his ministry and kingdom.⁴⁴

In the Book of Acts, the outward impulse takes on epic proportions. Jesus himself sets the agenda in Acts 1:8 by sending out the apostles as witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to the ends of the earth. Peter first bears witness in Jerusalem, and he ends his bold proclamation with an invitation to salvation, now a spiritual salvation in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, received by faith, repentance, and baptism (Acts 2:38-39). The message moves outward through the scattering of the

⁴² In Acts, the apostle's apparent lack of interest in Jesus' earthly life is rather surprising given that Luke has written an entire gospel of the miracles Jesus performed and the parables he taught, not to mention the fantastic story of Jesus' birth! The apostles do still mention Jesus' deeds on earth, but only in summary form and only in passing, and in an apparent rush to get to his death and resurrection (e.g. Acts 2:22; 10:37-39). This gives further evidence to the centrality of the death and resurrection in Luke's writings and to the secondary role of all else as prologue and epilogue.

⁴³ Much of Luke's unique material focuses on God's attention to the poor and his aversion to the rich, including the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), the focus on shepherds in Bethlehem (2:8-20), the parables of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37), the rich fool (12:13-21), the seats of honor (14:7-14), the great banquet (14:15-24), the lost sheep (15:4-7), the prodigal son (15:11-31), and the nagging widow (18:1-8), as well as the stories of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31) and the tax collector (18:9-14).

⁴⁴ Walters provides a helpful definition of salvation that connects the salvation Jesus brings through his ministry in Luke's gospel with the salvation the apostles proclaim in the Book of Acts. "(Salvation) means the action or result of deliverance or preservation from danger or disease, implying safety, health and prosperity. The movement in Scripture is from the more physical aspects towards moral and spiritual deliverance. Thus, the earlier parts of the Old Testament lay stress on ways of escape for God's individual servants from the hands of their enemies, the emancipation of His people from bondage and their establishment in a land of plenty; the later parts lay greater emphasis upon the moral and religious conditions and qualities of blessedness and extend its amenities beyond the nation's confines. The New Testament indicates clearly man's thralldom to sin, its danger and potency, and the deliverance from it to be found exclusively in Christ" (G. Walters, "Salvation," ed. J.D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* [London: Intervarsity, 1962], 1126; cited by Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 94).

church (Acts 8:1) and the preaching of Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). The Gentile mission is fully born through the call of the apostle Paul, who is chosen by Jesus himself to carry Jesus name not only before Israel, but also before Gentiles and kings (Acts 9:16). Peter then has a vision in which he realizes that Jesus is “Lord of everyone” (Acts 10:36) and he therefore proclaims the resurrection of Jesus to Cornelius, a Gentile, and concludes, “Everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” Most of the rest of Acts details Paul’s missionary journeys as he ventures farther and farther towards the ends of the earth, and Acts concludes with a reminder that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles (Acts 12:28).

Luke portrays this mission in such a way that it would not have been accomplished apart from the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of the church. Before his ascension, Jesus charges the apostles to be his witnesses, but he instructs them to first wait in Jerusalem for the power they will receive by the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).⁴⁵ When the Spirit arrives at Pentecost, this power is immediately displayed in the miraculous ability of the apostles to be understood in foreign languages (Acts 2:1-13), and this same Spirit is promised as a gift for all who believe (Acts 2:38).⁴⁶ The Spirit continues to fill people in Acts and to empower their speech in mission (e.g. Acts 4:8, 31; 6:3; 9:17; 13:9; 11:24). Philip is directed by the Spirit to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26, 39), the Spirit is the driving force behind the Cornelius episode and the gospel going to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11), and the Spirit directs Paul in his journeys (e.g. Acts 13:2-4; 16:6-7).

It is because of their acute sense that the power for this mission comes from beyond themselves that the apostles and early church turned to prayer when they faced situations in which they were powerless. The apostles devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14; 6:4) as did also the first converts (Acts 2:42). They prayed before they made important decisions (Acts 1:24) and when they faced persecution (Acts 4:23-31). It was through prayer that they received the Holy Spirit and were empowered to witness (Acts 8:15; cf. 4:31). It is as Peter and Cornelius pray that the Spirit sends Peter to Cornelius (Acts 10:9, 30), and Peter is miraculously released from prison even as the church is gathered together and praying (Acts 12:12). The church sends out Paul and Barnabas with prayer (Acts 13:3) and elders are commissioned with prayer (Acts 14:23; 20:36). Paul and Silas pray when they are in prison (Acts 16:25). Their message about Christ went forth

⁴⁵ Bock notes the presence of the Holy Spirit also in the Gospel of Luke (e.g. Luke 1:35; 4:14), but there are four times as many references to the Spirit in Acts as there are in Luke’s Gospel, and the Spirit is especially connected to power in both (e.g. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts: God’s Promised Program, Realized for All Nations* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 219, 225).

⁴⁶ It is precisely because receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit was the normative Christian experience “that the apparent absence of the Spirit is treated as a situation that must be remedied” (I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004], 177).

not though their own power, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by their continual devotion to prayer.

Luke's writings, therefore, present a theology of salvation, in which God has worked through Jesus Christ to bring about salvation to all mankind, and this salvation goes forth through the witness of his people empowered by the Holy Spirit. As Luke's writings end, he has expanded his history *outward* to include all peoples and he has brought his history *forward* into the present moment, so that Theophilus and all of his readers are swept up into the narrative.⁴⁷ God's salvation is for all (including *me*) and God continues to save people through his gospel by the power of the Spirit (even *now*). In this way, the history meets the present, so that the story of Jesus is not mere historical abstraction about the past but it is relevant and personal for *me* in the present. Luke's theology, therefore, connects his historical work to his pastoral agenda, as he aims to guide his readers to personally share in the same experience of those Christians in Acts, so that we hear the same message, call upon the name of the same Jesus, and receive the same Holy Spirit, and we thereby come to share in the same certainty in our faith.

C. LUKE AS PASTOR

What, then, shall we say about Luke's pastoral goal of strengthening Theophilus' faith? We can surely find numerous themes scattered throughout his history and theology that prove beneficial for strengthening the faith of believers in the face of various doubts.⁴⁸ But when we step back and absorb all of these themes together, we find that the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts, for Luke's history and his theology ultimately work together to accomplish his superseding pastoral intention. We might say that his various themes are like beams of steel, each with its own individual strength suitable for bracing our faith in sundry ways, but Luke's ultimate goal is pastoral, as he aims for these beams to work together to form a trestle capable of bearing the full weight of our doubts and giving us certainty.

To see how Luke accomplishes this larger pastoral goal, we must turn to what is perhaps the most important story in all of his writings, the story of

⁴⁷ Because Luke does not tell the outcome of Paul's trial in Rome, it is possible that Luke wrote Acts while Paul was still in prison in Rome (ca. 62 CE). If so, then Luke literally brings his history up to his present moment when he writes. But even if Acts was written at a later date, a few years difference does not substantially affect the point that Luke has brought the gospel to the present time and place of Theophilus. On the dating of Acts, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 298–300.

⁴⁸ For example, if we doubt whether God exists, or whether he works in our world, Luke's narrative reminds us that God has worked in our world through Christ and he does work by his Spirit. If we doubt whether God loves us, Luke reminds us of God's love demonstrated in the saving work in Christ. If we doubt whether God's salvation is truly for *me*, Luke reminds us that God's salvation reaches all people, including outsiders like myself. Thus, Luke's individual themes offer various strands of assurance for us in our faith.

the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on the day of Jesus' resurrection.⁴⁹ Luke identifies one of these two disciples as Cleopas, and Cleopas serves not only as an eyewitness of the resurrection, but his journey from doubt to certainty provides Luke's roadmap for Theophilus and his readers who might doubt. As the story begins, Cleopas and his friend walk slowly, discussing the baffling events of the day and ruminating on their own sadness. They are believers in the sense that they belonged to the community of disciples (being "one of them" in Luke 24:13), they recognized Jesus as a prophet approved by God (Luke 24:19), and they had hoped in Jesus that he would redeem Israel (Luke 24:21; cf. 1:68; 2:38). But now they despair, for Jesus was crucified and their hope has died with him, and they are also confused, for they have heard reports from reliable sources that Jesus' body is missing from the grave (Luke 24:20-24).

Notice carefully how Jesus addresses these disciples in Luke 24:25: "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe!" It seems their slowness to believe is more akin to the double-mindedness of doubt than to unbelief itself, for they remain disciples throughout the story even as they entertain confusion and uncertainty. In other words, Luke intends for Theophilus to identify with Cleopas at this point in the story, for they both share misgivings and doubts about what they have believed. In response to Cleopas' doubts, Jesus lectures extensively about himself, explaining from "all the Scriptures," including Moses and the Prophets, the theological necessity of Jesus' own sufferings and his subsequent glory as the fulfillment of all God's promises (Luke 24:26-27).⁵⁰ Essentially Jesus sets forth the full narrative of theological history with himself at the center, not entirely unlike the theological history Luke himself presents in his gospel. Interestingly, however, Luke does not tell us how Cleopas responded in this moment. The historical and theological lecture from Jesus, in and of itself, yields no apparent change of heart in Cleopas. Yet, this lecture plays a crucial and instrumental role in the transformative moment to come.

That evening, as they have dinner, Jesus the stranger plays the role of the host—taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing bread in accordance with his custom. In this moment, Cleopas' and his friend's eyes "were opened" and they recognized the resurrected Jesus. The passive form of their eyes *being opened* (*διηνοιχθησαν*) suggests it is a work of God and not something contrived by Cleopas or his friend. We might even call it a miracle, something only God can do, and yet this opening of the eyes happens only *after* Jesus has provided the historical and theological explanation, and only *when* Jesus breaks the bread, a seemingly mundane task of table

⁴⁹ "Luke 24 is a small masterpiece, designed as the closing scene for a large scale work of art" (N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003], 647).

⁵⁰ For those of us who long to know what Jesus said in this lecture, Luke would perhaps point us to the first twenty-three chapters of his Gospel, where he has provided a history and theology of Jesus connected to the Old Testament, and then Luke might send us to the Book of Acts, where the apostles frequently tell the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. Indeed, Luke may see his entire writing project as his own version of Jesus' lecture to Cleopas.

fellowship.⁵¹ Thus, their eyes could not be opened apart from the work of God, nor could they be opened apart from the historical and theological narrative about Jesus and his work within the community of disciples.

When his eyes are opened, Cleopas recognizes that Jesus has truly been raised from the dead. Luke uses the word ἐπιγινώσκω here (Luke 24:31) to say they “fully know” Jesus in this moment, even as Luke intends for Theophilus to “fully know” (ἐπιγινώσκω) the certainty of what he has been taught (Luke 1:4).⁵² For Cleopas, “knowing” Jesus in this way moves him from doubt to certainty, from “slow to believe” to confidently proclaiming the resurrection. He and his friend rush back to Jerusalem eager to report that “the Lord has risen indeed” and to tell the story of what happened on the road to the other disciples (Luke 24:34-35), who also initially disbelieve until Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures and the reality of his resurrection (Luke 24:36-49). Cleopas sets the example, and the other disciples follow. When Cleopas “fully knows” Jesus and the truth of his resurrection, he arrives at the certainty Luke aims to establish for Theophilus and his readers. Thus, Luke opens and closes his gospel with two kinds of knowing that are one and the same, knowing the certainty of these teachings (Luke 1:4) and knowing the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:31).

Belief in the resurrection clears away the confusion and the doubt and brings certainty. The resurrection is not merely the missing piece in the puzzle of these events; the resurrection is the puzzle box lid with its image that reveals how all the pieces fit together.⁵³ Suddenly Cleopas goes from having a jumbled up pile of random pieces of historical events and theological teachings that leave him confused and uncertain that any of it could be true, to now having the big resurrection picture that makes sense of it all. Now, when Cleopas realizes that Jesus has been raised from the dead, Cleopas realizes the certainty of all that God has done. Of course, it was certain all along, but now Cleopas *knows* that it is certain—now he himself has certainty.

⁵¹ This breaking of the bread probably did not refer to the eucharist itself but rather to the table fellowship that Jesus regularly enjoyed with his disciples and that was likely familiar to Cleopas (Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996], 357). In other words, Jesus was made known to them in the familiar way in which Jesus had worked among them. Perhaps we could say that still today, Jesus is revealed to us in the familiar and mundane ways in which he works in his community of his disciples, the church, through the means of grace, namely in worship, prayer, the reading and preaching of the word, and the Lord’s Table. But at the same time, Luke does not set forth a recipe for replicating this experience, since the opening of their eyes is ultimately the result of God’s sovereign work and not of human contriving, and we cannot today replicate the physical presence of Jesus in our table fellowship.

⁵² Garland defines ἐπιγινώσκω as “recognize in full” (Garland, *Luke*, 56).

⁵³ If our faith depends upon the resurrection being true, then we would do well to carefully consider the historical reliability of the resurrection. Michael Licona has provided a superb historiographical analysis of the historicity of the resurrection, and he concludes that “the historian is warranted in regarding Jesus’ resurrection as an event that occurred in the past,” for so long as we do not *a priori* rule against the possibility of God performing a miracle in our world, then the resurrection of Jesus is “the best historical explanation of the relevant historical bedrock” (Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 610).

In this story, Cleopas undergoes a conversion of plausibility structures.⁵⁴ A plausibility structure refers to our deepest presuppositions by which we determine what may or may not be true and through which we come to interpret everything else (and is in this way similar to what is sometimes called a worldview).⁵⁵ We do not know much about Cleopas himself beyond that he was a disciple of Jesus longing for the redemption of Israel, but we can also deduce that he held a particular view of death in which death marks the absolute and irrevocable end of Jesus and of his ministry. His plausibility structure, in other words, had no place for the resurrection of Jesus, so he is unable to see Jesus' death as anything but a tragic termination. He is unable to assimilate and embrace the reports of an empty tomb, even when they come from otherwise reliable sources. Therefore, Cleopas remains confused and uncertain, even though he has all the proper information at his disposal, and even after receiving a thorough lecture from Jesus about the historical and theological necessity of his sufferings and glory. So long as his plausibility structure does not allow for the resurrection of Jesus, Cleopas remains uncertain about it all.

When his eyes are opened, Cleopas receives an entirely new plausibility structure centered upon the resurrection of Jesus. He does not merely fit Jesus' resurrection into his old worldview but Jesus' resurrection becomes the worldview by which he understands everything else, and with this transformation, Cleopas' angst is immediately replaced with peace, and his doubts give way to certainty. The resurrection interprets and confirms the entire historical and theological narrative about Jesus. If God has really raised Jesus from the dead, then Jesus must truly be the fulfillment of God's promises (Luke 1:1), a fulfillment that has taken place within the historical period of the First-century, and a fulfillment that has accomplished salvation

⁵⁴ Hays describes Cleopas' transformation as follows: "The ironic gap between Cleopas' presumption of superior knowledge and his actual ignorance of Jesus' identity prepares the reader...to interpret the dialogue that follows as a hermeneutical corrective to the preresurrectional understanding of Jesus that the Emmaus pilgrims articulate" (Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014], 55). Hays correctly suggests that Cleopas undergoes a "hermeneutical correction" but Hays underestimates Cleopas' error when he calls it only an "ironic gap" in his knowledge, for in fact Cleopas suffers from an entirely inadequate way of knowing.

⁵⁵ Peter Berger defines a plausibility structure in terms of the "social-structural prerequisites of any religious...reality-maintaining process." Within particular socially-constructed worlds, particular religious ideations become legitimate, and therefore these worlds serve as the "bases," or the "plausibility structures," for certain "religiously legitimated worlds" (Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969], 45). In other words, Berger uses "plausibility structures" to refer to the sociocultural contexts within which certain meanings make sense, and therefore Berger would argue that our deepest presuppositions are ultimately socially-derived. If Berger is correct, then Cleopas has derived his former plausibility structure from within his sociocultural context as a first century resident of Palestine, and the resurrection of Jesus conflicts not only with his personal presuppositions but with the social world from which they are derived. In the rest of this paper, we will use "plausibility structures" to refer primarily to an individual's intellectual presuppositions and framework for making sense of the world, though not to the exclusion of the social environment from which such presuppositions have been derived.

for all who believe. Through the resurrection, we can see that the entire narrative about Jesus is true and certain.

When we turn the page to the Book of Acts, we find that all of the apostles have walked the path Cleopas walked. Over the course of forty-days, Jesus appears to them and proves himself to be alive, so that they also become convinced of his resurrection. When Peter stands at Pentecost in Acts 2 and proclaims the resurrection, we can see how the resurrection has become the plausibility structure through which he now understands all of history and theology. In his speech, he points to three Old Testament passages and shows how they have been fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus has been raised from the dead in fulfillment of Psalm 16:8-11, and he has now ascended into the heavens to sit at God's right hand in fulfillment of Psalm 110:1. Therefore, Jesus is the one now pouring out the Holy Spirit in fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32. Peter pointedly attributes the Pentecost phenomena to Jesus himself, living and seated in the heavens. How could he make such a claim when Jesus was so publicly crucified just two months earlier in the very same city, and when Peter himself had at that time fled in fear?

The truth of Jesus' resurrection has led him to an entirely new way of understanding all that has taken place. The resurrection of Jesus has become the lens through which he reinterprets the Old Testament—it is the fulfillment by which the promises now make sense. Because of the resurrection, Peter can say with confidence that God superintended Jesus' death (Acts 2:23), and because of the resurrection, Peter can proclaim Jesus to be greater even than David, who is rotting in a grave, because Jesus has ascended into heaven. Therefore, Peter can make a bold and sweeping application, that all Israel must now "certainly know" (*ἀσφαλῶς...γινωσκέτω*) that God has made Jesus to be both Lord and Christ. In Luke 1:4, Luke calls Theophilus to know the "certainty" (using the noun *ἀσφάλεια*) that inherently belongs to the teachings he has received, but in Acts 2:36, Peter calls his audience to know these same teachings about Christ "certainly" (using the adverb *ἀσφαλῶς*, left-dislocated in the sentence for emphasis), where certainty now becomes the quality with which they know rather than the quality of that which they know.⁵⁶

This shift from certainty as a noun to certainty as an adverb marks an important transition in Luke's writings, and it is the culmination of the change in plausibility structure evidenced by Cleopas. Luke moves from certainty that belongs to the teachings about Jesus (Luke 1:4) to the certainty of faith itself (Acts 2:36), from certainty as an external and objective quality of these teachings to certainty as the internal and personal quality of our own conviction regarding these teachings. But the two forms of certainty are necessarily interrelated, for believing with certainty is only justified where the object of faith is itself certain. In other words, only if that which we believe is intrinsically certain are we justified in believing

⁵⁶ Further, certainty (*ἀσφάλεια*) is the final word in Luke 1:4 and certainly (*ἀσφαλῶς*) is the initial word of Acts 2:36, suggesting perhaps that Acts 2:36 picks up where Luke 1:4 left off.

those teachings with certainty. Only if Jesus certainly has been raised can and should we be certain that he is Lord and Christ.

Therefore, when Peter stands at Pentecost and calls all of Israel to certainly know that Jesus is Lord and Christ, Peter's strong language does not arise from arrogant bravado or ignorant blustering but rather from his certain confidence that Jesus has been raised from the dead.⁵⁷ And the resurrection in turn provides the plausibility structure that makes sense of all of his other claims, for only if Jesus has been raised could Peter logically and sensibly claim that Jesus has ascended to God's right hand, that Jesus is pouring out the Holy Spirit, and that salvation is now found in Jesus' name. Even Peter's interpretations of the Old Testament are only plausible from within the plausibility structure of the resurrection. How could Psalms 16 and 110 speak of Jesus' resurrection and ascension, respectively, and Joel 2 speak of present salvation in Jesus' name, unless Jesus indeed was raised from the dead?⁵⁸ Peter now understands Scripture in a new way, in which Jesus' resurrection stands in continuity with the Scriptures and the narrative leading all the way back to Abraham (cf. Acts 3:13-15), but only when those Scriptures are interpreted in light of the resurrection. Thus, if the resurrection of Jesus did not happen, then Peter's entire speech is rubbish. It only makes sense and becomes believable if we first embrace the truth of the resurrection, even as Peter himself has done.

And the same can be said for the entire Book of Acts, where all of the acts of the apostles arise from the underlying assumption that Jesus has been raised. Peter heals a lame beggar "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 3:6). Then Peter rebukes the crowd for being astonished by this, since Jesus has been raised and now has the same power to heal from heaven as he did when he was on earth (Acts 3:11-16). Stephen sees Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56). The dramatic conversion of Saul from being the chief persecutor of Christians to being the chief apostle to the Gentiles only happens by the appearance of the living Jesus, a story which Paul retells multiple times in Acts (Acts 9:1-18; 22:3-21; 26:12-23). Repeatedly in Acts the apostles proclaim that Jesus has been raised and is now "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36), and they call people to reject all other gods and to believe in

⁵⁷ "If what matters about religious beliefs is not the factual truth of what they affirm but the sincerity with which they are held; if religious belief is a matter of personal inward experience rather than an account of what is objectively the case, then there are certainly no grounds for thinking that Christians have any right—much less any duty—to seek the conversion of these neighbors to Christian faith. To try to do so is arrogance" (Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989], 25).

⁵⁸ We could perhaps say that the resurrection has become for Peter the framework through which he now interprets the Old Testament. Therefore, rather than the Old Testament being the plausibility structure through which he understands the history of Jesus, the history of Jesus, and especially the resurrection, provides the plausibility structure through which he understands the Old Testament. Resurrection and the Old Testament are mutually informing, and both are essential, but the resurrection undergirds the rest.

Jesus alone. All of the stories and speeches in Acts are only plausible from within the plausibility structure of the resurrection of Jesus.⁵⁹

At the same time, the resurrection of Jesus is incompatible with any plausibility structure but its own, and therefore the resurrection can be found at the center of the conflicts the apostles and Christians face in Acts.⁶⁰ The first direct persecution occurs when the temple leadership and the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection (Luke 20:27-40), become “greatly annoyed” because the apostles are “proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 2:2).⁶¹ The apostles are released and continue “giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 2:33). They are again arrested, and when Peter proclaims the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, the council is enraged and wants to kill him (Acts 5:17-32). Stephen is arrested because of the message he proclaims about the ongoing and future work of Jesus (Acts 6:14). The council hears out his long speech, until the moment when he describes his vision of the resurrected Jesus being alive in heaven. At that point their rage boils over, and they pick up stones to stone him (Luke 7:56-58). The Areopagus in Athens listens to Paul’s ideas with an apparent open mind until Paul mentions the resurrection of Jesus, which then causes some members of the

⁵⁹ In 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, Paul will argue that if Christ has not been raised, the entire Christian faith is vain, as is also Paul’s ministry and teaching. Christian faith and living all collapse into folly if the resurrection does not stand at its foundation, but with the resurrection as the foundation, everything else becomes plausible. The resurrection is the key to the Christian plausibility structure; it undergirds all the rest.

⁶⁰ Newbigin says, “The affirmation that the One by whom and through whom and for whom all creation exists is to be identified with a man who was crucified and rose bodily from the dead cannot possibly be accommodated within any plausibility structure except one of which it is the cornerstone. In any other place in the structure it can only be a stone of stumbling” (Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 93).

⁶¹ First century Jews held a wide range of views regarding the idea of resurrection, with some rejecting it outright (e.g. Sadducees) while others affirmed a future general resurrection for believers (e.g. Pharisees), depending upon how they interpreted texts that imply resurrection in some sense, such as Job 33:15-30; Psalm 16:8-11; 104:29; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 12:2-3; and Hosea 6:1-2. Therefore, the idea of resurrection in and of itself was not necessarily incompatible with some strands of Jewish belief, but the notion that one particular person, Jesus, was raised as a firstfruit preceding the general resurrection, and the claim that this establishes his identity as Messiah and Son of God, was certainly incompatible with all first century Jewish plausibility structures (Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 200-206). Further, Wright describes seven ways in which Christianity modifies resurrection as understood within second temple Judaism: (1) Christians universally held to resurrection, unlike Jews, who had a variety of views; (2) resurrection is central to Christianity while it is peripheral in Judaism; (3) Christians believed the resurrection body to be a transformed physical body, while Jews disagreed on this point; (4) Christians split the resurrection into two events, with Jesus rising from the dead ahead of the rest; (5) Christians are called to a “collaborative eschatology” in which they presently work in anticipation of the final resurrection; (6) in Judaism, resurrection refers metaphorically to return from exile and the renewal of ethnic Israel, while Christians use resurrection to refer metaphorically to baptism, ethics, and the renewal of humans in general; (7) nobody in Judaism imagined the Messiah rising from the dead, but this is central to Christians (N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* [New York: HarperOne, 2008], 41-48).

Areopagus to mock Paul while others believe in Jesus (Acts 17:31-32).⁶² When he appears before the Jewish council, Paul proclaims that he is on trial on account of the resurrection, and the council erupts in dissension (Acts 23:8). Paul later tells of Jesus appearing to him on the Damascus Road and of his message that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. King Agrippa responds, “Paul, you are out of your mind” (Acts 26:24).

The resurrection of Jesus, therefore, poses a direct threat to any plausibility structure other than its own. It is not simply one more truth to assimilate within a prevailing plausibility structure, but it is the one truth that demolishes all other plausibility structures. To accept the truth of the resurrection, therefore, requires that we adopt the plausibility structure that comes with it.⁶³ And this brings us full circle to Cleopas, whose eyes are opened and fully knows the resurrected Jesus. With that knowledge, he receives the plausibility structure of the resurrection, through which all the teachings about Jesus are confirmed as true. Cleopas becomes an eager, bold, and confident witness to the resurrection. So long as he lingers in his old plausibility structure—in which Jesus has not been raised—Cleopas remains mired in confusion, uncertainty, and doubt. With the realization that Jesus has been raised, Cleopas embraces a new plausibility structure in which all of the history and theology of Scripture makes sense and its truth is confirmed. Cleopas has confidence and certainty as he embraces the mission of proclaiming that Jesus has been risen indeed.

For Luke as pastor, therefore, the process of moving from doubt to certainty goes as follows: First, the historical and theological teachings about Jesus, including the entire narrative of Scripture, are intrinsically certain, whether we believe them to be or not; second, we recognize that the historical and theological teachings about Jesus are indeed intrinsically certain, even as those teachings are expounded to us; third, we thereby know with certainty that Jesus is Lord and Christ, by virtue of God having raised him from the dead; fourth and finally, the resurrection of Jesus

⁶² C. Kavin Rowe observes that at this point in the speech, Paul also moves from a “universalizing scope” to the “radical particularity” of God’s work through the particular man, Jesus, who died and was raised. In this way, Rowe says, “Luke’s move in 17:30-31 thus entails a total determination of general cosmology by a radically particularized eschatology. Whether one’s interpretive structure was Platonist, Aristotelian, Epicurean, Stoic, or something else (e.g. everyday paganism), to accept Luke’s construal of the importance of Jesus’ resurrection for the world would mean the destruction of one’s theory(ies) – tacit or acknowledged – of the origin and (non-)end of the cosmos. It is therefore hardly surprising that some sneered (χλευάζω) at Paul after hearing of the resurrection (v.32)” (C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 39).

⁶³ Again, in Berger’s summation of plausibility structures as ultimately being socially-derived (Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 45), this means that the resurrection must also locate itself within a sociocultural world within which the resurrection is legitimate. Because no such world existed before the resurrection, the resurrection must create such a sociocultural world, which we now know as the church. This creates a circle in which the resurrection establishes the new social world within which the resurrection functions as the cornerstone of the plausibility structure. In other words, the resurrection founds the church and the church legitimates the resurrection.

becomes the plausibility structure by which we understand everything else, including Scripture, God, our world, and our mission in the world.⁶⁴ Luke accomplishes his work as a pastor by means of his work as a historian and theologian, so that through his historical and theological narrative about Jesus, culminating in the resurrection, Luke shepherds Theophilus and his readers from doubt to certainty. Therefore, Luke recognizes certainty to be a reasonable, attainable, and necessary goal that Christians achieve when they embrace the resurrection of Jesus as their plausibility structure.

III. DOUBT AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN PASTORAL MINISTRY

For Luke, therefore, every doubt is ultimately a resurrection doubt arising from an ignorance that runs much deeper than we might initially suppose. When we encounter doubt, we often assume that our plausibility structure is sound but our faith is uncertain, as if we are owed another convincing proof or a persuasive argument that would be sufficient to make our faith plausible within our prevailing structure of plausibility. Luke presses much deeper with a comprehensive project that goes beyond trying to supplement our knowledge. Instead, he gives us an entirely new way of knowing. When we know his historical and theological narrative about Christ, and when the resurrection of Christ becomes the center of our knowing, then we find our way out of doubt and into the certainty of faith.

In our world today, most Christians who express doubt do so from within a plausibility structure that has been generally shaped by the Enlightenment. In the Enlightenment's plausibility structure, certainty is only plausible when it is derived from rational and impersonal argumentation, scientific proofs, and mathematical computations. Therefore, any form of knowledge that cannot be proven by such criteria can never be known with certainty, including such categories as faith, history, and philosophy. The Enlightenment, therefore, *a priori* imprisons faith within insurmountable doubt, for Christianity makes claims that cannot be known with certainty, namely that a personal God has worked within history and calls people to faith. So long as we, as pastors, attempt to resolve Christian doubt within an Enlightenment plausibility structure, we will inevitably fall short and frustrate those Christians who experience doubt, for we will never be able to offer them the kind of certainty demanded by the Enlightenment. Thus, we must resign ourselves to living in a state of perpetual doubt, so long as we hold to this Enlightenment plausibility structure.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ We might note a hermeneutical spiral here in which we only understand Jesus' resurrection in light of the Scriptures, but we only understand the Scriptures in light of Jesus' resurrection. In other words, Cleopas needed *both* Jesus' exposition of the Scriptures *and* the opening of his eyes to the resurrection.

⁶⁵ In this sense, Enns, Evans, and Taylor are right to conclude that doubt is inevitable in the Christian faith and certainty is a myth, for no one can ever be as certain about categories of faith as they can be about categories of mathematics and science, so long as certainty is being measured by Enlightenment categories (Enns, *The Sin of Certainty*; Evans, *Faith Unraveled*; Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty*).

If, as pastors, we wish to follow Luke's example, then we must seek to address doubt among our own congregants in a thorough, comprehensive, plausibility-structure-changing way. Why, Luke might wonder, would we allow the Enlightenment's assumptions to hold a position of truth greater than our Christian faith itself, so that our faith must demonstrate its plausibility on the Enlightenment's terms? Instead, Luke calls us to a radically new agenda, so that we no longer search for proof of certainty according to an Enlightenment plausibility structure, but instead we invite people into a new plausibility structure centered upon a personal God who works within history through Christ, with the resurrection as the foundational truth through which we evaluate and interpret all other truths. The resurrection demolishes the Enlightenment's plausibility structure by shifting from impersonal abstraction to the personal God, from reason alone to theology and revelation.⁶⁶ If within this new plausibility structure, the certainty of faith becomes plausible, then we make a grave pastoral error if we counsel our people to embrace their doubt within their old plausibility structure rather than inviting them into a plausibility structure where doubt gives way to certainty.⁶⁷

Like Luke, we shepherd people toward certainty first by doing the work of a historian. Luke grounds his pastoral work in the historical narrative of what God really did do in Christ in the first century. Because Luke sees history as central to our faith and to certainty, he becomes a meticulous

⁶⁶ The resurrection does to the Enlightenment what it does to all other plausibility structures, and therefore it works no differently today than it did in the first century when it confronted Sadducees, the Areopagus, and so forth. Thus, Newbigin says, "It is no secret, indeed it has been affirmed from the beginning, that the gospel gives rise to a new plausibility structure, a radically different vision of things from those that shape all human cultures apart from the gospel. The Church, therefore, as the bearer of the gospel, inhabits a plausibility structure which is at variance with, and which calls in question, those that govern all human cultures without exception. The tension which this challenge creates has been present throughout the history of Western civilization" (Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 9).

⁶⁷ This is not to say that doubt cannot be a helpful heuristic tool in breaking down our unwarranted certainties and false conceptions about God, as suggested, for example, by Enns (*The Sin of Certainty*, 158). Indeed, Luke may very well agree with Enns that Theophilus' doubts have been *good* insofar as they have created the opportunity for Theophilus to examine more thoroughly what he believes. However, Luke would certainly disagree with Enns' final rejection of the possibility that Theophilus could ever find warranted certainty in his faith. Perhaps this is why Enns does not interact with Luke but instead builds his case almost entirely on Old Testament texts where believers experience dissonance in their faith, especially within poetic and wisdom literature. His focus on Ecclesiastes, Job, and certain Psalms establishes his own kind of canon-within-a-canon, which in turn prejudices his judgment, since these texts represent the height of angst between God and his people. By focusing on the irrational experience of Job, the occasional imprecations of the psalmist, and the morbidly-obsessed musings of Qoheleth, how could Enns reach anything but a dystopian view of certainty? But when we bring Luke into the conversation, we can agree with Enns that doubt is a common experience for believers and that doubt can guide us out of unwarranted certainty, but Luke takes us one step further and suggests that a careful examination of theological history and the resurrection of Jesus will lead us into a new plausibility structure where certainty is warranted. This final step is not optional for Luke; it is the very heart of his pastoral purpose for writing in the first place.

historian and a patient history-teller, and we must do the same. And second, we must also do the work of a theologian, telling this history in a distinctively theological way, as the work of God within history, so that Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises and the one whom God raised from the dead and exalted as Lord. We must be historical theologians or theological historians, telling the tale of how God has raised Jesus from the dead and established him as Lord over all, so that all people are now called to repentance and faith. This is what Luke does for Theophilus in Luke-Acts, it is what Jesus does for Cleopas on the Emmaus Road, and it is what the apostles do repeatedly for numerous Christians in the Book of Acts. In Luke's writings, eyes are only opened and people only come to certainly know Jesus as Lord when the certain historical narrative about God's work in Jesus, culminating in his resurrection, is faithfully and thoroughly presented.

In practical terms, this means that we must work intentionally to incorporate history and theology into virtually every aspect of our pastoral ministries.⁶⁸ We dare not become so focused on the therapeutic benefits of faith, or the practical applications for Christian living, that we only lightly engage the historical and theological foundation of our faith. If we withhold from our congregations this historical narrative centered in Christ and his resurrection, then we are inadvertently withholding from them the very plausibility structure by which they would certainly know for themselves that Jesus is Lord. Instead, we must take on the role of a history teacher within our preaching, so that we demonstrate how our faith is rooted in real historical events which God has undertaken in Christ. We ought to utilize maps and teach geography, introduce major and minor characters, explain cultural intricacies, and, perhaps more than anything else, tell the stories about Jesus and the apostles recorded in Luke and Acts. We need to develop a culture of historical investigation within our churches so that our congregants themselves become historians and theologians well-versed in what God has done in Christ.⁶⁹

The same can be said for the more personal aspects of our ministry when we engage personal questions and doubts of the people under our care. Luke guides us in how we might steer our conversations with doubting believers toward those things that facilitate confidence and certainty. Doubters often ask abstract questions. How do I know God is real? How do I know the Bible is true? How do I know God loves me? Luke encourages us to address such abstract questions with lessons in theological history, namely

⁶⁸ This is not to reduce the work of a pastor to merely being the work of a historian or a theologian, but we must recognize the extraordinary value of history and theology as pastoral tools, especially in contexts of doubt.

⁶⁹ We could perhaps further propose that if we follow the example of Luke, we will utilize biblical theology as much—or perhaps even more—than systematic theology in our ministries. This is not to minimize the importance of systematic thinking, but it is to say that we can teach many systematic concepts (e.g. atonement, justification, Christology, etc.) within the context of the historical narrative of Scripture. In other words, we teach theology within history rather than theology divorced from history.

by telling again the story of Jesus. At first glance, this may seem like we are avoiding the issue by not giving a simple and straightforward answer, but in reality, we are answering the question in the only way Scripture knows how, by inviting this doubting Christian into the new plausibility structure. In other words, when a Christian expresses doubt to us, perhaps saying, "I'm wondering whether God really exists," we might answer, "In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah" (Luke 1:5), and we might then walk them through the theological history of Christ and especially his resurrection, whether in ongoing personal discipleship or through the teaching ministry of our church. This plots a much longer path toward certainty than simplistic answers and platitudes, but as the length of Luke-Acts indicates, there are few shortcuts available to us if we really want to establish the certainty of this theological narrative and of Jesus resurrection, that they might come to certainly know Jesus as Lord.⁷⁰

We ought to consider how we can absorb the historical and theological narrative of Jesus into our liturgies as well. Athanasius has said, "Christ, risen from the dead, makes the whole of human life a festival without end."⁷¹ Surely this should, at a minimum, be true of our worship, when we gather as a church on the first day of the week in commemoration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.⁷² His resurrection should be a recurring theme in our gatherings. We could recite creeds and other corporate readings that retell the work of Christ as the center of history and theology, such as the Apostles' Creed, which professes about Jesus our Lord that he was miraculously conceived, suffered, died, and was buried, then he rose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, sits at God's right hand, and will one day return.⁷³ Likewise, we could incorporate these same themes into our

⁷⁰ This is especially true for that person who has intellectual doubts about the historical reliability of Luke's narrative, or the historical reliability of the resurrection itself. Several recent scholars are demonstrating that truly engaging with Luke's sources and evaluating the historical veracity of his account can be a multi-year process resulting in a very thick book (e.g. Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 1-615; Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 1-641; Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 1-738)! We might consider making such works available to some congregants, or we might at least make a point of summarizing these works when appropriate in our teaching ministries.

⁷¹ Athanasius, PG 28, 1061b, cited by Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 192.

⁷² Wright laments that "many churches simply throw away Easter year by year," noting that we identify with Jesus' suffering for forty days of Lent but then have only one day of Easter celebration! He suggests we should recover the art of writing more Easter hymns and celebrating Easter more diligently throughout the liturgical calendar, and that we should incorporate Easter celebration "in creative new ways," including art, literature, poetry, music, dance, etc. (Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 255-57). Further, Wright's lengthy reflections on how the resurrection, once we embrace it, ought to then guide how we undertake our occupations in this world and our mission as a church (including such themes as justice, beauty, and evangelism) merit careful consideration (Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 189-290).

⁷³ We perhaps should issue a note of caution that the goal is not to become narrowly focused upon the narrative of Christ's work to the exclusion of the rest of Scripture's teaching about God the Father and God the Spirit. The Apostles' Creed appropriately begins by presenting God as the Creator, and it ends by reflecting on the Spirit's work and the church

singing, if we are careful to select those songs that speak specifically about the work of God in Christ rather than generically speaking of abstractions such as God's love.⁷⁴ When we incorporate these themes into our liturgy, we lead our congregations in rehearsing the very narrative that moves us toward certainty.

When we set forth the narrative about Christ in these and other ways, we invite people to embrace the resurrection of Jesus Christ as their own plausibility structure. This requires a certain amount of work from them as well. Luke does not anticipate that Theophilus will be a passive doubter simply waiting for certainty to find him; instead, Luke calls Theophilus to take an active role in pursuing those things that will lead to certainty, namely reading and carefully considering Luke's writings, evaluating the reliability of what Luke has said, and weighing the certainty of these teachings.

Here we find the closest parallel to what many regard as the disciplines of spiritual formation—through which the Holy Spirit works to transform our hearts—namely prayer, solitude, meditation upon Scripture, and so forth.⁷⁵ Even as Theophilus must exercise a certain amount of personal discipline in how he engages Luke's writings, if he is going to be moved from doubt to certainty, so also we must help our people take an active role in the midst of their doubts by guiding them into those disciplines through which they will be confronted with these teachings about Christ and his resurrection, that they might develop certainty in their faith. They must learn to diligently read and study their Bibles, to pray, and to gather together with God's people for mutual instruction, edification, and worship.

as the communion of saints, and these are essential to the broader narrative of God's work. But more than half (perhaps two-thirds?) of the creed focuses upon Jesus himself as the center of God's work and thereby the center of the church's proclamation of faith.

⁷⁴ For example, we might incorporate J. Wilbur Chapman's *One Day*, where the five verses tell the story of Jesus, including his pre-existence, incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and second coming, and the chorus resounds: "Living He loved me! dying, He saved me! Buried, He carried my sins far away! Rising, He justified freely forever! One day He's coming—O glorious day!" Every time our congregations sing such a song, they rehearse the narrative of Jesus and the plausibility structure of his resurrection that will move them toward certainty. On the other hand, we might caution against filling our liturgy with songs that speak only abstractly of such themes as the love of God without mention of any narrative beyond our present and personal experience. For example, the chorus of Passion's *Never Gonna Let Me Go* says, "His love breaking through my heart of stone, love breathing to awake my bones, love reaching out to save my soul, love never gonna let me go, love calling me as I am, love making me new again, love lifting me when I can't, love never gonna let me go." How much more certain will our faith be if it is grounded in the concrete historical narrative of *One Day* rather than in the abstract personal narrative of *Never Gonna Let Me Go*?

⁷⁵ Spiritual formation often speaks much more broadly to the "process of transformation" of our hearts and will "in such a way that its natural expression comes to be the deeds of Christ done in the power of Christ" (Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What It Is, and How It Is Done," accessed July 18, 2018, <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual/spiritual-formation-what-it-is-and-how-it-is-done>). Here we are focused more narrowly on the transformation of doubt to certainty, but some (or even all) of the disciplines associated with spiritual formation apply here as well.

These are the disciplines by which they can take hold of this resurrection plausibility structure and find certainty.

Finally, in the midst of all of these practical pastoral suggestions, we must recognize our limitation, that we ourselves are ultimately not capable of opening people's eyes or forcing them to recognize Jesus as the risen and exalted Lord. It was only through the direct intervention of God himself that Cleopas' eyes were opened—though it is within the context of our faithful attentiveness to our historical and theological work that God does his work of opening eyes. Thus, like the apostle in the Book of Acts, we must devote ourselves not only to the work of history and theology, but also to prayer, as we pray with and for those who doubt, that God might open their eyes and bring them to certain knowledge of the resurrected Jesus.

V. CONCLUSION

We may conclude unequivocally that Luke intends for believers to overcome their doubt and to find the certainty that is only plausible from within a resurrection plausibility structure. For Luke, then, doubt is indeed a castle that takes believers captive, but doubt is ruled by the insufficient plausibility structures that restrict our ability to comprehend all that God has done in Christ. We must escape this castle and find certainty, and toward this end, we have our trusty companion, the historical and theological narrative of all that God has done in Christ, and this narrative points us to the resurrection as the key that opens the gates and sets us free from our doubts. The resurrection becomes our new plausibility structure, and by it we have confidence, security, and even certainty in our knowing Jesus as Lord.