

## The Prelude to the Gospel of Luke

Are you familiar with these opening lines from five classic literary works?

“Call me Ishmael.”<sup>1</sup>

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”<sup>2</sup>

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”<sup>3</sup>

“He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish.”<sup>4</sup>

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.”<sup>5</sup>

Recently, I have begun to re-read many of the classics I was required to read for my high school English classes. I must admit it is much more enjoyable now than it was then, during my mid-to-late teens. Further, I must admit that some of the literary works like *The Ilead*, *Beowulf*, and *Great Expectations* demanded some additional help to understand their challenging poetry or underlying plot themes. So, I turned to what many students did - I purchased a small yellow and black booklet to help get a better understanding of what I was reading. Yes, you guessed it, I purchased a copy of Cliffs Notes for every book in question.

Now, I am not advocating purchasing Cliffs Notes for the Gospel of Luke - I am not even sure they are available or how helpful they would be, but I am suggesting you **take a few minutes to read and ponder the first four verses of his account of Jesus' life to identify the purpose and motivation for its writing**. Similar to the memorable opening lines or paragraphs in classics, the first few verses of Luke's gospel are familiar, captivating, and revealing.

In the case of the beloved physician and travel companion of Paul, Luke didn't launch into his Jesus-account haphazardly or casually. On the contrary. Being a fellow worker of the Apostle Paul (Philemon 24), Luke accompanied the missionary and church planter on several of his travels and surely gleaned much from his

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<sup>1</sup> *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville, 1851

<sup>2</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austin, 1813

<sup>3</sup> *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens, 1859

<sup>4</sup> *The Old Man and the Sea*, Ernest Hemingway, 1952

<sup>5</sup> *The Hobbit*, J.R.R. Tolkien, 1932

efforts and passion for the Gospel. In turn, these shared experiences surely influenced his account of Jesus' life and ministry. Through carefully recorded eyewitness reports, Luke wrote an orderly account so his readers might “know the certainty of the things [they] had been taught” (Lk:1:4) and furthermore, have their faith make a difference in the world and for the one to come.

Finally, **Luke 19:10 provides us with the central theme of the Lukan account, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”** It is a gospel account that shows Jesus came for sinners - specifically, humans who are broken, troubled, wayward, weak, and helpless. To use Luke’s word, “lost”. Again, Jesus says, “I did not come to call the [self-proclaimed] righteous [who see no need to repent], but sinners to repentance [to change their old way of thinking, to turn from sin and to seek God and His righteousness]” (Luke 5:32, Amplified).

Jesus, makes all the difference! He becomes one of us, the Son of Man. He comes (Lk 1-4), He seeks (Lk 4-23), and He saves (Lk 23-24). Luke proclaims that Jesus invites sinners to His table and His invitation is for everybody. It is for you, for me, and for all those lost and longing. Have you accepted the invitation? Will you bring someone with you? That is the challenge that Luke lays before us.

***Luke 1:1-4 (ESV) - “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.**”***