

SUNDAY DECEMBER 9, 2018

COMPARING NOTES

Luke 1:1-4

SPEAKER: KEN DAVIS

1. I have some **very** important news for you this morning. Did you know...**did you know...**that the earth is actually **flat**—and that scientists, astronauts, explorers, pilots and all the world governments have conspired to keep us in the dark on this important fact?

-And I have **more!** Did you know that the **Holocaust** never actually happened? That 6 million Jews, Christians and dissidents were never killed in death camps? That all the film footage and eye-witness accounts have been faked by governments who wanted to help create the nation of Israel?

-Oh—and did you **also** know that Neal Armstrong never actually walked on the moon? The moon landing faked by the U.S. and filmed by Stanley Kubrick to deceive the USSR about our technological advancement!

-One more—and this will **really** shock you! On September 11, 2001, the US government—under the leadership of George W. Bush, **staged** the collapse of the twin towers to gain publicity for the Iraq war and the seizing of oil reserves.

-**Actually?** The world has been covering up the **real** truth for years on the landing of aliens, the imminent world take-over by the Illuminati, the fact that JFK's assassination was planned by Lyndon Johnson and the CIA! And did you know that the nation of Israel has implanted spy technology in animals? That Malaysia Flight 370 landed—introduced as Flight 17—and then shot down for political reasons?

-So. How many of you **believe me?** If not—**why not?** I'm a US citizen, a pastor, I'm educated—and I've **lived** through most of this stuff!

 - a. Here's what I believe. First I believe that **most** of you know I'm messing with you. **Second**—we live in an era of history that **loves** conspiracy theories. And we are more sceptical of **truth**—as we hear it than ever. What we are not sceptical **enough** about is the people who come up with conspiracy theories!
 - b. Now, **most** of this stuff **honestly doesn't matter in the whole scheme of things**. Here's what I'm seeing; There's this suspicion that people in leadership all lie to protect their power. Therefore, people are more prone to believing the conspiracy theories than they are Truth.
 - c. There's a fascinating case study of this. When Dan Brown published his novel, **The DaVinci Code**, in 2003, people actually **believed** the conspiracy theory he'd invented in a story classified as fiction. The plot in his novel was wrapped around a conspiracy theory that the Church was involved in a cover-up

regarding Jesus—that he had survived the cross, married Mary Magdalene and moved to France.

-Even though there's not a shred of evidence to support it—**people swallowed it hook, line and sinker, rod, reel and bass boat.** What Dan Brown's novel did was pry the lid off of a box filled with people vying for their 15 minutes of fame.

- d. We start a series today called **NOTEWORTHY**. At its core, it's about the story of Jesus—the **most noteworthy person to walk this planet.**

It's the story of Christmas—written by **eyewitnesses**—or people who **knew** the eyewitnesses. So. **Were they telling the truth?** Or...**or hiding** the truth? If they **weren't** telling the truth, how did Jesus split history and become—**BY FAR**—the most influential person who has **ever** walked here—and someone who is **still** impacting our world in profound ways? Is what we have in these accounts **true**—or better fiction than Dan Brown and Stephen King?

2. Let's start with some facts. The most detailed description of Jesus' birth come from Luke. Luke was a Gentile medical doctor who traveled with the Apostle Paul around 59-60 A.D. Acts, his next book, takes us up to the time when Paul was imprisoned in Rome—and then stops there; 60-63 A.D.

-Here's my point; Luke was a real person writing an account that is dated very close to the actual events. How many of you remember when Princess Diana was killed in an auto accident in Paris? If you read an account that described her surviving an accident in London and then marrying her lover—what would you think? You **remember** it—you **saw** the pics. Well, about the same amount of time had passed between Jesus' death—and when Luke wrote these accounts—give or take a few years.

-Scholars who study a **lot** of ancient documents tell us that Luke was a first-rate historian. He records an immense amount of detail about names, places, customs—things that can **all** be checked out. **He did his homework!** He puts it like this:

Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write an accurate account for you, most honourable Theophilus, so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NLT)

- a. Notice that he used two sources: First eyewitness accounts that had been circulating. Now, this was **not** legend; people didn't have iPads, notebooks or scraps of people; so their memories had been honed to accuracy—just like some of your thumbs on your iPhones!
These eyewitness accounts were **so well known** that if Luke or anyone else deviated even a tiny bit, they'd get called on it.

- b. But Luke **also** interviewed the eyewitnesses. The information surrounding Jesus' birth is **so** personal—only Mary—or maybe one of her other children, like James or Jude--would've known it. Given that fact that girls, like Mary, were married by the time they were 13 or 14, Mary could've been personally interviewed by Luke.

In talking about the shepherd's account of the angel's visit, listen to how Luke puts it:

...But Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. (Luke 2:19 NLT)

-I think Luke interviewed Mary! That's why he can say to the recipient, Theophilus, "I've carefully researched this so that you can know that what you've heard is **true!**"

3. Now, here's why I'm dealing with this. The 21st century has become a breeding ground for re-writing history.

That **matters** because the people doing the re-writing are **not** accurate in what they say—and are misleading gullible people. Let me give you a few examples of this so you know what I'm talking about.

*The first category of information could be stated like this: **Scholars are uncovering a radically different Jesus in ancient documents just as credible as the four Gospels.** The other ancient documents referred to here have been around and known to scholars for a long time, such as the **Gospel of Thomas**, the **Gospel of Mary Magdalene**, and, most recently, the **Gospel of Judas**.

-First, these sources of information are **very** different from the accounts in the Bible. Want to know why they aren't **in** the Bible? It's not because of any cover-up. It's because they were all written 100 to 200 years **after** the others—and they were known forgeries—intended to support a philosophy called **Gnosticism**.

-These later accounts don't even begin to **compare** to the Gospels—which were written either by the eyewitnesses—or people who were close to them—and authorized by them to write. They **walked and talked** with Jesus—watched him die—and saw him after He was risen. Period!

4. Another theory says that the **Church tampered with the early texts and they can't be trusted.** We talked about this a number of weeks ago, so let me just cover it briefly. Bart Ehrman, author of **Misquoting Jesus** is the one who re-ignited this debate. In this book he says that that our current New Testament has about 400,000 discrepancies in it. These discrepancies are, for the most part, differences in spelling—multiplied by how many times they were copied.

-As I said weeks ago, the ancient texts we have for the Bible are **way** more numerous—and of better quality—than any other documents from ancient history. These slight differences don't change a single doctrine.

5. Another objection—coming primarily from Islam and Judaism—is that ***Jesus was an impostor who failed to fulfill the Messianic prophecies***. I find this ***very*** hard to believe when Jesus fulfilled prophecy so precisely in terms of when he came, where he was born, and all the details surrounding his suffering and death. If you read Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, they are like first hand descriptions of a crucifixion—when crucifixion hadn't even been invented as a means of execution.

-The major issue—particularly for Jewish scholars, is the fact that Jesus didn't rule the nations or bring peace to the world. And Jesus said he would do that at His second coming.

6. The final I objection I want to speak to says that ***Christianity's beliefs were all copied from pagan religions***. Does the name Tom Harpur mean anything to you?

He lived in Richmond Hill until his death in 2017 and was the religion editor for the Toronto Star for years. His book, **The Pagan Christ** was the best-selling religious book in Canada in 2004.

-Here's the gist of what Harpur—wrote about Jesus; basically, that Jesus never existed—and that he was only an ***allegory***. The stories of his virgin birth—then his death and resurrection were a bunch of pagan myths stapled together.

-According to him—and other authors, the story of Jesus was plagiarized from the cults of Horus, Mithras, Dionysus and others to form what some call the ***Christ-Myth***. Jesus was simply created by the Church--the ***greatest story ever SOLD***. If you've seen films like ***Zeitgeist*** (Peter Joseph), or ***Religulous*** (Bill Maher) they're pretty much all ditto-ing each other.

- a. The first thing you need to know is that this isn't something new; this speculation started in the 18th century—and all this stuff was laid to rest back then because there was no substance to it. .

-Second, none of these claims are taken seriously by ***any*** scholars...***ANY*** scholars of antiquity, whether or not they believe in the truth of the Bible.

-Third, the parallels they say exist between Jesus and other ancient myths are stretched ***way*** beyond recognition. Now, you can check this out for yourself, if you want. There's a book by Lee Strobel called, **The Case for the Real Jesus**—and another by a great Canadian scholar, Dr. Craig A. Evans called, **Fabricating Jesus. Read them!**

This is the clincher; the Mithras cult—which Jesus life and death are often compared to, were developed ***200 years after*** Jesus! So any parallels are likely borrowed from Christianity.

-When you do any systematic research on the parallels you find that the people who believe and write this stuff just keep repeating each others mistakes and never examine the original sources. In his book **Fabricating Jesus**. Dr Evans

addresses something called **parallelomania**; this is where authors *perceive* similarities between events or people—and then manufacture parallels without *any* attention to cultural context or historical awareness.

-Let me give you a modern example. Have you ever looked at some of the similarities between the lives and deaths of Abraham Lincoln and JFK?

*Both were concerned about civil rights

*Both were elected to congress in '46; 1846 and 1946

*Lincoln was elected President in 1860; Kennedy in 1960

*Both were killed on a Friday before a major holiday

*Both were shot in the presence of their wives and another couple

*Of the couples, the men were wounded, the wives weren't

*Both were shot from behind in the head

*Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theater in Box 7; Kennedy was shot in car 7 of the Dallas motorcade

*Both were pronounced dead at a location with the initials PH (Peterson House, Parkland Hospital)

*The successors of both were named Johnson

*Andrew Johnson was born in 1808, L.B.J. in 1908

*Both assassins were privates in the military

*John Wilkes Booth was born in 1839, Lee Harvey Oswald in 1939

*Booth fled from a theatre to a library, Oswald fled from a library to a theatre

*Both assassins were taken into custody by a police officer named Baker

*Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theatre; Kennedy was shot in a Ford car—that model of the Ford was a Lincoln! **That's crazy!**

- b. Now, here's the question I want to ask about all these parallels: **What does this mean?** Does it mean that Kennedy never existed—or that his death was a myth? No! It's an interesting parallel—*that's it?* The *real* question is: **Did Jesus ever really exist or not?**

-If Jesus *wasn't* an historical person, then that means **10 first century historians** who wrote about Jesus of Nazareth by name somehow got history

wrong—when there was no **point** to inventing someone who didn't exist. For example, Tacitus, a Roman Senator and historian—had an anti-Christian bias; he wrote:

Nero fastened the guilt...on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilatus.” (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15,44)

Why would an official Roman historian record something like that if Jesus never existed?

- c. H.G. Wells puts it like this: **"I am a historian, I am not a believer, but I must confess as a historian that the penniless preacher from Galilee is irrevocably at the center of history. Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all of history!"**

So **why are there still doubts?** It's because the people who write fantastic claims like this get noticed—and it's because this stuff **sells** to **gullible people** who **want** to believe it!

7. Let's talk about Jesus; let's compare the notes on **Who He was** and **what He's done** with all this other stuff floating around. If I was giving this message right after Jesus' death, there wouldn't be much to write. It looked as if the small mark he'd made on the tiny nation of Israel would fade into the rear view mirror as the story of another failed Messiah. The irony is that it was **after** his disappearance that his influence grew exponentially.

-See, the influence of most people starts to disappear after their death. Caesar Augustus, who was the Roman Emperor at Jesus' birth, was a **huge** deal in world politics of that day. Now? He's mainly remembered because his name was included in Jesus' story.

-Consider this; Jesus was better known 100 years after his death than He was during his life. And then after 500 **more** years—his reputation was known all through the Roman Empire. After 1000 years, his legacy laid the foundation for most of Europe.

-And now, after 2000 years, he has more followers in more places than ever. Think of **how many people** around the world will celebrate Christmas---and how many more will at least know about it?

-It was simply Jesus' life and teaching that drew people to follow Him—and his vision of life **still** haunts and challenges humanity. As H.G. Wells said, Jesus is **history's** most familiar figure. If you survey history, what you find is that his impact on everything that matters is immense. This, friends, was **no accident!**

-Sometimes great people have tried to change the calendar to reflect their greatness. Roman emperors tried it—and it didn't work. After another failed attempt in the 1920s,

the leader of the League of the Militant Godless, said, “Christianity is like a nail; the harder you strike it, the deeper it goes!”

- Now? Every time you look at a calendar, the date on your iPhone—or the expiry date on your credit card—it reminds you of how **distant** you are from Jesus’ birth—and how his influence continues!

- Sometimes great people try to preserve their heritage by having others named after them. Jesus never did—and yet His name is and those of his followers are everywhere. John, James, Matthew, Thomas—Peter, Paul and Mary are all common. The names Caesar and Herod? They’re mostly used for dogs, casinos, salads and pizza parlours—not people.

*No one knows what Jesus looked like—and yet Jesus and his followers are the most frequent subjects for art in the world.

*He has been portrayed in movies by dozens of famous actors—and the number of songs, written about Him? In the hundreds of thousands—including all the Christmas songs on your Christmas station, 98.1 FM.

*As John Ortberg says in his book, **Who Was This Man?**,

“In Jesus’ name, desperate people pray, grateful people worship and angry people swear. From christenings to weddings to sickrooms to funerals, it is in Jesus’ name that people are hatched, matched, patched and dispatched! From the Dark Ages to postmodernity, he is the man who won’t go away.” (Ortberg, *Who Is This Man?* p. 14)

- a. One of the most significant treasures they found on **The Curse of Oak Island** was a cross. One historian speculated, “If it were possible with some super-magnet to pull up out of history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of his name, how much would be left?”
- b. Jesus transformed the way children were thought of. See, in the Roman Empire, children who were deformed or of a “non-preferred” gender, were exposed. That is—**left to die**. Know who rescued them? Followers of the One who said, **Let the little children come to me**. It was **Christians** who started the orphanages!
- c. Jesus never married, but the dignity He gave woman as equals led to a community so friendly to women that they joined it by the thousands. Women led at least half of the churches mentioned in the NT—and it was women who stayed at the cross—and were first to see Him resurrected. An early Roman politician was scandalized by the fact that if he became a Christian, the leader of his church might be a slave girl!
- d. Jesus never wrote a book, and yet his call to **love God with all your mind** led to a community with such a deep respect for learning that it, over time, established guilds and libraries of learning. It was out of this that Cambridge, Oxford, Yale and Harvard were established.

-In England, Robert Raikes, a follower of Jesus was deeply concerned about children in the workforce—and founded something called **Sunday School**—where children could get an education and get out of poverty. If you're a public school teacher, this is how it started.

- e. Jesus never led an army. He was born on the wrong side of the law—and died on the wrong side of the law—publicly executed by the Roman government. And yet his movement led to the end of emperor worship, and eventually gave way to the law being equal for all, with language like:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they have been endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...

- f. The Roman empire could a splendid culture—but it was incredibly cruel—especially to those declared inferior. The slaves, the diseased, and people with disabilities. When the plagues moved through Roman cities, the citizens threw their sick into the streets to die. It was followers of Jesus who believed that the suffering of every single human matters; that people who could help them **ought** to do to it!

And today, around the world, if you see a hospital—or a **red cross**—or someone out on the front lines helping people in poverty, saving the lives of children—and stopping slavery and sex trafficking—you can **bet** that someone who belonged to Jesus started it.

- g. If you've ever done any study on the subject of humility, you'll find that before Jesus, people **despised** it. And **since** Him, it has become one of the premium virtues worldwide.

The cross, before Jesus, was a sign of hopelessness and shame. Since Him? A symbol of hope and humility.

- h. You can't even escape Jesus when you die! The practice of burial in graveyards—came from followers of Jesus. The word **cemetery** means 'sleeping place'—based on the Christian hope of resurrection. On every tombstone there are two dates with a dash in the middle—all of based on the distance from Jesus' lifetime. **The most common sign over a grave is still a cross!**
- i. Jesus is, in many ways, mysterious. Not because of what we **don't** know about Him—but because of what we **do** know about Him. Especially what He said about Himself: "If you've seen me—you've seen the Father;" or "Before Abraham was, **I AM!**"—or that He would "come on the clouds of heaven to judge the world."

Your thought is, "Who does He think He **is?**" People who listened to him teach said, "We've never heard **anyone** talk like this!" And he **still** puzzles people by

how his life and teaching impacted history—after only 3 years of public ministry. How many people in the world have never heard of a **Good Samaritan** or a **prodigal son**?

-Most people have heard the phrases: **Let him who is without sin cast the first stone**, or, **Do for others as you would want them to do for you**, or **judge not so that you will not be judged**.

-And Jesus has a way of breaking out of the prisons people put him in. When people claimed his authority for slavery, a man named William Wilberforce rises up and abolishes it in **Jesus' name**. Jonathan Blanchard sees in Jesus the call for freedom. He inspires Leo Tolstoy, who inspires Mahatma Ghandi, who then inspires Martin Luther King, Jr., who inspires Desmond Tutu to develop the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

-Just look at the number of groups **for** Jesus; Jews for Jesus, Muslims for Jesus, Ex-Masons for Jesus, Road Riders for Jesus, Cowboys for Jesus, Wrestlers for Jesus, Clowns for Jesus, Puppets for Jesus—and even **Atheists for Jesus**.

- j. “Ralph Waldo Emerson said once that the name of Jesus was ‘not so much written as ploughed into the history of the world.’”

-Why? How did this all happen? “Maybe ...it was just dumb luck! Maybe Jesus was a kind, simple, innocent soul with a good mom and a knack for catchy sayings. You know, who showed up at the right place at the right time. **Jesus Gump**. Maybe his place in history is a remarkable accident. **But maybe it isn't!** (Ortberg, p. 20)

8. I don't think—given the history of the world as we know it—there's **any** question that Jesus was **THE MOST NOTEWORTHY** person in all of history. Virtually everything we see and know about has been impacted by his life, his teaching—and the **hundreds of thousands** who have died with His name on their lips.

-In fact, every single person who was one of His disciples paid with their lives—or their freedom—for never once deviating from their eyewitness accounts. There are a **lot** of cool, interesting theories about Jesus. Have you noticed that they all make Jesus less than **He** was—just human like everyone else—**or** make us more than **we** are; Jesus was god? Well, **so am I!**

-Here's the question I have; when you compare notes, do **any of these other theories fit how Jesus changed history—and how people are still transformed by the power of His Name?** I don't think they do.

-So, here's what I want to encourage you to **continue** to do. **Compare notes**. Look at the other theories out there if you want to. See what you think. Watch **Zeitgeist** and **Religulous** and visit **Reddit**. Look through the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene—and ask, “Does this even **sound** believable?”

-Read Tom Harpur's book and see if Jesus' immense impact on the world even makes sense—if he never actually existed. But then you also need to read the narratives of Jesus.

—and read some authors like Craig Evans and N.T. Wright and Lee Strobel and Timothy Keller—who've **wrestled** with all these issues and come to the conclusion that Jesus is ***Who He claimed to be!***

9. Last Sunday, as many of you know, Charles Mully from the ***Mully Children's Family*** visited here The ***Mully*** movie tells his story; how he was abandoned in Kenya at the age of 6—and begged on the streets for most of his growing up years. Mully walked into a church one day—and gave his life to Jesus. What God did for him is nothing short of amazing. From a job as a servant, he worked his way up to being a very wealthy man—and the owner of a transportation conglomerate.

-In 1989, God spoke to him about the needs of others orphans—and called him to help them. Mully sold everything—and began bringing abandoned children in his home—along with his 8 children. His story of taking a piece of desert—and turning it into a thriving farm and home for almost 3000 orphans reduce me to tears.

- God's guidance, God's kindness, God's supernatural intervention came time after time, from healing people to showing Mully where to dig for water.

As I helped him onto the stage here, my first thought is, "We are truly in the presence of ***greatness. What a hero!*** And then I realized, ***Only Jesus has the power to do that!*** Charles and Esther Mully have raised over 21,000 abandoned children!

-That kind of stuff, friends, doesn't come from a ***Christ-Myth*** who never really existed, or a miserable failure of a prophet, or from a conspiracy theory. If you want to tap into ***that*** kind of power and goodness—you need ***Jesus!*** I'd encourage you to ***try coming to Him!***