

Jesus - The Evidence

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[0 : 00] Our reading this morning is taken from 1 Corinthians chapter 15, and it's on 1157 on the Church Bibles. That's page 1157.

We'll start with verse 1. Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

For I deliver to you, as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles.

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

[1 : 29] But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed. Well, good morning. Thanks, Suta, very much for reading.

Do keep that open. We're going to be spending most of our, well, all of our time there. I have to say, it's such a privilege to be able to bring these verses to you. These have been some of the most foundational for me, as I was trying to work out whether or not following Jesus was worth it, so I'm thrilled to be able to bring them to us today.

Why don't I lead us in prayer as we start? Dear Lord, we thank you that our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not on sand, but on the firm and sure foundation of your acts in history.

Please, Father, as believers, give us great confidence in the risen Lord Jesus this morning, and please shine forth brightly from your word. Amen. Now, many of you will know that I love frequenting coffee shops and talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 48] I find it's quite easy to do that, actually, when you just have a Bible open in front of you constantly, and people think it's strange, and you end up getting into kind of weird and wonderful conversations. And I was having one of those conversations last week with a friend of mine who works there, and we were talking about the Lord Jesus Christ, and I was trying to explain to her what the gospel message was, and she turned to me and she said, well, that's all very well for you, but I wish, I just wish I could have your faith.

I just wish I could have your faith. And I'll confess, I'm sure the Christians in the room will have heard that kind of term many, many times. I found it deeply frustrating. I thought, you just think I'm naive and stupid.

But then, as the kind of conversation went on, I realized that's not what she meant at all, so I was humbled. What she actually meant was, I really do wish I could have your faith, but I just can't take that much of a blind leap.

I can't take that much of a blind leap. In other words, what I realized is what she thought was that all Christians just somehow have this kind of amazing capacity for faith and lack of evidence that the normal person just doesn't have.

But that is not the Christian claim at all. Christians are not embarrassed by evidence. In fact, as I hope we're going to see this morning, I think there is more evidence for the Christian faith than any other worldview.

[4 : 12] And in fact, when I turned to my friend and I realized that what she meant was she couldn't cope with the idea of a leap of faith, well, I asked her, what do you think happens when you die?

And she thought for a moment and she said that, well, I just have a feeling that there's a better place that we go to. I would like there to be a better place that we go to. And I was struck by that comment because I think at its core, that is far more blind a position than any Christian who's thought about the Bible would hold.

I have a feeling. I have a feeling. Well, this morning, I hope we're going to be able to see and answer the question, whose faith is more blind? Whose faith is more blind?

Now, Paul gives us a very simple structure this morning. He gives us a claim and then he gives us evidence. So I'm just simply going to take us through the verses and we're going to see Paul's claim and then we're going to see what his evidence is.

Now, these 11 verses or so, they were written in about AD 60. Jesus was crucified in AD 33. So we're talking within one generation of the death and resurrection of Jesus, these verses.

[5 : 24] And it is a very straightforward, clear claim. Jesus died, really died, and Jesus rose from the dead. Really rose from the dead.

Have a look with me at verse 3 and 4 of chapter 15. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

I hope you can already see that this is slightly more concrete than, my friends, I have a feeling.

Now, that doesn't make it true, but it's at least worth noting, isn't it, that the Christian's claim is very, very specific.

One event, Jesus really died and really rose. That's the central claim of Christianity. And we heard a little bit, didn't we, from Rachel, which was wonderful, about how that's impacted her life.

That is the central claim. So if you're not religious here today, that is the thing on which the whole Christian faith either stands or falls upon. Did he die and did he rise?

[6 : 37] But again, it presents a problem, as I realise, because as I was trying to explain this to my non-Christian friend, I realised that she thought I meant allegory. Now, Jordan Peterson, who is someone that many of us will be familiar with, has shot to fame, weirdly in some ways, for his lectures on the Bible.

And he gave a very famous speech recently, where he said that Jesus Christ crucified is the metaphor for how to live your best life. Jesus Christ crucified is the metaphor for how to live your best life.

In other words, you need to bear your cross, just like Jesus did, and then you can live the best life imaginable. Now, I appreciate that he's engaging with the Bible, but what I would like to say to Mr. Peterson is that that is not how the Bible presents the cross.

It's not an allegory. It's not fable. It's not some big metaphor of how you can, I don't know, retire early, live young, and have a great life. No, it is an event in history.

Now, many of you know that I'm soon to become a father, which I'm both equal parts excited about and terrified about. And I've been thinking a lot about how do I raise a child.

[7 : 53] Some of you might still say that I am still a child, so you might be questioning how is that possible. And I've been thinking about, okay, gosh, so I've got to teach them not to steal, not to hit their parents, not to lie.

And I was thinking over what were some of the ways in which I was taught these fundamental truths. Now, for those of us who aren't English in the room, you're about to see a very strange insight into English parenting. But I grew up with the story of the boy who cried wolf.

Okay, the boy who cried wolf. Some of us will be familiar with the story. Some of us won't. For those of us who aren't, the boy who cried wolf is a fable, a fable to help us not lie.

It's a fable to help us not lie. But I want you to imagine I'm sitting my little child down in front of me. I don't know, Timmy. That's not what we're actually going to go for, but let's say, Timmy. And Timmy's just lied to me.

And I'm thinking, oh, I've got to educate Timmy about the danger of lying. How am I going to do this? And I think, boy who cried wolf. Now, I want you to imagine whether or not the boy who cried wolf is either a fable or is a true story and how that might affect my young little boy, Timmy.

[8 : 59] Whether or not it's a fable or a true story and what that might say about my parenting based on that. So if it's a fable, the boy who cries wolf goes something like this. There's a boy. He's a shepherd. He's looking after a sheep.

He gets very bored. Very, very bored. So he shouts, wolf. There's a wolf. And then the whole village runs up to help the boy because they think, we don't want the boy to get eaten. And they discover there is no wolf.

So they go away annoyed. And then the boy, he's the same week. He's at it again. And he's like, I'm bored. These sheep, they just follow each other in circles. It's very dull. Wolf. And then the whole village comes up.

There's no wolf. He's annoyed. They're annoyed. They go back. The third time, it's always in threes, you see. Three little pigs. Anyway. And this time, though, there really is a wolf.

Okay. So the boy's looking after the sheep. He sees the wolf running towards him, salivating maybe. Not entirely sure. And he shouts, wolf. And no one comes. And the boy gets eaten.

[9 : 56] Horrifically. And all the sheep. Torn apart. And little Timmy is sitting there listening to this story. Okay. Now, if it's a fable, hopefully that's less traumatizing for little Timmy.

Okay. This is just a story. The boy doesn't actually get eaten. If you lie, you're not going to be killed. Now, if it's true, well, I've probably just traumatized my child and probably failed 101 in parenting. In other words, this silly example is to illustrate to us that it matters if a story is true or if a story is a fable. Which of those is the resurrection account?

Well, it's true. It's history. So that's the claim. Jesus really died and really rose. Now, point number two, the evidence. Now, of course, you're probably sitting here thinking, Benji, that's great that you've got a claim.

Well done. But that has absolutely no bearing whatsoever on whether or not it's true. And you're right. And Paul gives us three sets of evidence in these verses to persuade us that it's true.

[10 : 57] First of all, the Old Testament scriptures. Have a look with me again at verse three and four. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

Now, scriptures is just a word for the Old Testament. Now, what does that actually mean? Well, I want to tell you about my friend Dave. Okay? So I'm telling you about Dave. If I say friend, I've never actually met Dave.

Okay? Never met Dave. In fact, I'm never going to meet Dave. All right? But he is my friend. I know Dave very, very well. Really well. So well, in fact, that I can tell you when he's going to be born. He's going to be born in 2722 AD, specifically, which is 700 years from now. I can tell you where he's going to be born. Slough. He's going to be born in Slough.

If you've never been to Slough, don't. I can tell you exactly how he's going to die, which is a bit morbid. I don't know if someone said to you, would you like to know how you're going to die?

[12 : 01] I would say no. But I'm going to write down how Dave's going to die, because I know. And I also know why Dave's going to die. He's going to be hit by the number three bus stepping off the platform, stepping off the pavement in Slough.

And it's going to be, I don't know, some great fable. Why not? I know why and how Dave is going to die. And I'm going to write it down now for you. Okay? And I'm going to give it to you. And so that you can then pass this on, so that in 700 years' time, when Dave is hit by the number three bus in Slough, you'll know that I was right.

Now, on a scale of one to ten, you don't have to shout this out. I don't really do Q&A; right in the sermon. But I want to just think, on a scale of one to ten, how much do you believe that that is true? That I can write down what's going to happen to poor Dave being hit by the number three bus in Slough in 700 years' time?

I hope the answer is zero. Zero being, I don't believe you, by the way, Benji. Sorry to define my axes or whatever. But that is exactly what we have in the Old Testament.

We have predictions of when Jesus is going to be born, where he's going to be born, who he will be descended from, how he will die, and why he will die.

[13 : 11] Do ask me about it in the question time. It is extraordinary. It is persuasive. It is evidence. Old Testament scriptures. B, witnesses.

Now, we have a lot of witnesses here. So, just verse 5, he appeared to Cephas, which is Peter. Then to the 12, which is the apostles. Verse 6, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time.

7, then he appeared to James. Then he appeared to the apostles. Verse 8, last of all, he appeared to Paul, me. Now, it's interesting, the three people that Jesus references in these verses.

I want to choose three. He references James, who is his brother. He references Cephas, Peter, who is his best mate. And then he references Paul, who is his worst enemy.

Now, are there any brothers or sisters in the room? There are. Okay. Brilliant. Are there any best friends in the room? A bit cringe, isn't it? Pointing at your best friend. And, oh, okay, we're getting some shaking of the heads.

[14:09] I'm pointing. That's awkward. Any best friends? There's no friends in this room. This is shocking. Okay. No. Thanks, Chris. Yeah, we got that. So, we got some best friends. What about worst enemies?

Any, yeah, okay, hands straight up. Brilliant. Now, I want you to think, whoever those people were, whether it's your brother or your best friend or your enemy, what would it take? What would they have to do for you to worship them as God?

Okay. Maybe you're looking at your brother now thinking, what would they have to do for you to worship them as God? How about your best friend? Now, my sister, okay, I have a sister, she wears Crocs as a fashion statement.

So, now, I think she's great. I think she's intelligent. Sometimes. Her screen time says she spends three and a half hours a day on TikTok. Question marks.

I certainly don't think she's God. I certainly aren't about to bow down and start worshipping her.

What would it take for you to worship your brother or your best friend or your enemy?

[15:09] Well, here, that's exactly what we see. James, Jesus' brother. Peter, Jesus' best friend. And Paul, Jesus' worst enemy, Jesus Christ, is God.

And what is it that persuaded them? They saw him risen from the dead. Evidence number two, witnesses. But there's one detail I don't want us to miss.

Verse six. Then he appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive. In other words, this is written so close to the events that many of the witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection on the cross, they're still alive.

In other words, go and ask them. The Christian is not ashamed of their central claim. They're not worried that they're going to get fined out. Look, here's X.

Go and ask them. He or she saw them. We're not ashamed. Witnesses. Finally, Paul's witness. The final bit of evidence. And we'll go through this relatively quickly.

[16:11] Now, Paul, as you see in verse nine, says, I persecuted the church of God. I persecuted the church of God. Paul, before he became a Christian, was a murderer of Christians.

He would gather Christians around. He would gather them in, sorry. And he would have them stoned to death. Acts six or seven, I forget. Account Stephen being stoned to death on Paul's commands.

Paul, though, goes from being a murderer of Christians to being murdered for being a Christian.

Paul goes from murdering Christians to going to being murdered for being a Christian.

And what brought on that change? Well, as he says, I met the Lord Jesus Christ. He met the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse eight, he appeared also to me.

Now, there's much more evidence I could touch on. I could talk about external historians like Tacitus or Josephus who aren't Christians. Do ask me about that in the quiet time. I could talk about manuscript evidence.

[17:11] I could talk about archaeological evidence. I could talk about the early church fathers. I could go on and on and on. I don't have time. Do ask me about it in the question time. But here we have three key witness claims.

We have the Old Testament scriptures. My friend Dave and Slough, number three bus. We have the witnesses still alive. Go and ask them. And we have the testimony of Paul murdering Christians to being murdered for being a Christian.

Now, to come towards application, the first thing I want, the first people I want to address, because I often feel like this, the Christians in the room, when they come to a guest event, and they're probably thinking, oh, I'm going to hear the same thing.

I've been hurting since Sunday school. I'm going to hear, you know, Jesus is king. He died for my sins. And what I think this has, my great prayer as I was preparing this for us as a church family here, is that we would have confidence and that we would be comforted.

Christians, you have a firm foundation to your faith. I don't know if you realize that. You are not evidence neutral. It's not like you need to be ashamed. And I know the temptation to be ashamed will be there.

[18 : 20] That friends in school might be like, really? You believe in that Jesus rising from the dead? That people at work might think, come on, let's just not talk about this kind of thing at work. But you have evidence.

Your faith is not blind. You can be comforted. But to conclude, to those of us here who wouldn't call themselves a follower of Jesus, thank you so much for coming.

I really appreciate you listening. But I want us to return to that conversation I was having with my friend in the cafe. I want us to return to what she said when I said, when you die, what do you think is going to happen?

And she says, well, I have a feeling. I have a feeling that there's something better. And I just want us to think, what if we look at the two columns of evidence, okay?

We have my friend on one side and we have the Christian on the other. My friend has a feeling. My friend has a feeling. If you want to put your confidence in a feeling, okay.

[19 : 18] What does the Christian have? Well, just to name three, Old Testament predictions, numerous witnesses, murderer to murdered for Christ.

And when we die, which all of us will, and we don't want to talk about that, which foundation of those two columns do you want to be standing on when you die? Do you want to be standing on a feeling?

Or do you want to be standing on something that actually has evidence? No, my friends, as Christians, we are not blind. We do not make blind jumps. We are not skeptical of evidence as a construct.

We like evidence. In fact, we have lots of it. Now, there are ways in which we can explore this more. And please, I would encourage you, whether it's going to be Christianity Explored, which is a course we run, or come and ask me, and I will happily open the Bible with any of you.

It will be my joy. Or turning to the Christian friend who brought you, please do. There is evidence. In fact, evidence of abundance. Why don't I lead us in prayer?

[20 : 24] Father, thank you that Jesus really, in history, died and rose again. Thank you that we know, because he did that, we can have confidence that he will bring us to new life, too.

Amen. Amen.