

James Shepherd

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[0 : 00] Certainty is something that we all want. We want to be sure about the things that we put our faith or trust in. We want to make sure that they are right and true.

But the question we always ask ourselves along the path to certainty is, how do you know? How do you know this is true?

How do you know that is correct? We're not going to just put our faith and trust in anything. We want to make sure that the facts are correct. They will stand up to the test.

Our word is not simply enough here. If we want to be heard ourselves and accepted ourselves for what we believe, we must back it up with proof. We're not going to just believe anyone what they say, and so why should they always believe us what we say as well?

And lest we find ourselves made out to be fools for believing it isn't true, lest that we are embarrassed for how silly we were to hold to such convictions to state publicly, we want to make sure that we have certainty.

[1 : 03] We want to make sure that what we put our faith and trust in is for real and certain, so we don't become fools, so we don't end up being embarrassed. Kind of like this guy here on screen, Harold Camping.

Harold, a preacher and is also head of the ministry called Family Radio in the United States. Also a self-proclaimed prophet of God, he made a prediction in 2011, 21st of May, the world was going to end, and that Jesus was going to take his followers up from the world to heaven, and for the next five months there were going to be fire and brimstone and judgment upon the world up until October 21st where the world would end.

Now Harold convinced millions of people that he was correct. He convinced and made certain towards millions of people that Jesus was coming back on this date, May 21st, so be ready.

And because he had made people so certain that what he was saying was true, people sold everything they had. They gave up their jobs, they sold their houses, they sold their cars, and gave all their money to Harold to advertise the end of the world was coming, so be ready.

He made sure that they were certain the end was coming. I remember the day quite clearly in 2011, May 21st.

[2 : 33] I was working at Optus. I used to run an Optus store back in Castle Hill. I opened the store as I normally did that morning. I served a lot of customers, fixed a lot of phone problems, fixed a lot of billing issues, got yelled at as I do usually by a lot of customers for how wrong I am and for how much Optus is ripping him off.

I showed grace and love and return of always. Then I went home, put my feet up, put the TV on, and the world was still going. Jesus hadn't come back, like Harold had said.

He is coming back, by the way, just not on May 21. He hadn't come back. Harold was proven wrong. His certainty was misplaced.

He was made out to be a fool. And therefore, he suffered the consequences of that. Examples such as Harold's are the reason why we ask the question, how do you know?

How do you know? How can you be sure that what you believe and think is true and correct? How can you be certain? We want certainty before we just jump into anything and believe it and have faith in it.

[3 : 43] Christianity makes some pretty big claims, particularly about Jesus himself. Christianity makes some great promises that God loves you, that our sins can be forgiven, that one day all things will be renewed, that we won't have to suffer and have pain anymore, there'll be no more tears and no more crying, that we can have hope for not just in this life, but hope for eternal life to come, beyond death.

All these things sound quite incredible, but there is one crucial fact that all of this hangs upon, and that is whether or not Jesus rose from the dead.

That is, whether or not the tomb is empty. What we claim as Christians is bold. And many people, I'm sure, have asked you, or you've maybe asked yourself, how do you know this?

How can you be sure this is true? How do you know it's not actually made up? And if it is true, how can I know that God will actually love me? How can I know that it actually matters at all that Jesus rose from the dead?

The how do you know question is a really important one, because if it isn't true, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then what we are doing here is pointless.

[5 : 05] You come to the church tonight, it's just pointless. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.

Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.

If Christ has not been raised, then when we die, that's it. There is no more hope. That's the end. So, can we be certain that what we hear from the gospel, from Christianity, is true?

That there is hope beyond death? Can we be certain that Jesus rose from the dead, and that profoundly impacts us now? That God does love you?

That there is forgiveness for our sins? That there is hope beyond death? I think we can be. And this is why we are thankful for the biblical witness, particularly for Luke's gospel account here.

[6 : 18] Because Luke had set out to make certain the things that we have been taught, things like Christianity, things like what Jesus had done and accomplished. In chapter 1, verse 4, he says very clearly why he has written his gospel.

It says that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught. This is the whole purpose of Luke's gospel, to give us certainty that what Jesus has done, what he has come to do, what he has accomplished, happened.

It's historical, and you can believe it, and therefore know, and have no doubt in your mind, that he rose from the dead, that your sins are paid for, that he loves you, and wants you to be in relationship with him, that there is hope beyond this life, beyond death, hope for eternity.

And the way Luke helps us to be certain, particularly in this chapter here, in chapter 24, is by telling us the story, the beautiful story, of how the disciples came to have certainty that Jesus was alive, that he'd rose from the dead.

He tells us this story, and invites us, as his reader, to journey with the disciples, on their path of discovery, as they begin to uncover the evidence themselves, that Jesus has risen, so we will also begin to uncover the evidence as well.

[7 : 45] It's an unfolding drama, and we take our place inside that drama, as Luke tells the story. So the first piece of evidence that Luke brings up, is the empty tomb.

In the opening scene, we have a bunch of women, who upon arriving at the tomb, discovered the tomb itself, was empty. And that would have been, pretty shocking. These are the women, who loved and followed Jesus.

They came to anoint his body, with spices and perfumes. They thought he was dead. They expected a dead body, when they rocked up, there was no body. The tombstone was rolled away, and this left them perplexed, and shocked.

And before they could even deal, with their shock, and their confusion, two, we're told, two dazzling men appeared. Men who looked like lightning, presumably angels.

And they said to the women, why do you seek the living, among the dead? It's a bit of a weird question to ask, I think. Because the women were clearly there, to seek the dead, among the dead.

[8 : 50] They expected a body, that was not alive. They had come to anoint, a body of perfume and spice, because the body was to decay. They did not expect, Jesus to be alive.

And the reason why the angel, says that question, why you seek the living, among the dead, is just to highlight, that contrast. They did not expect, a risen Lord Jesus.

They expected, Jesus to remain, in the tomb. They had lost all hope, and all certainty, that Jesus was God. But the angels themselves, they said something different, about him.

They said this, he is not here, he is risen. Listen, this, is immensely, exciting, and shocking, all at the same time.

They've been trying, to deal with the fact, they lost their Lord, and their Messiah, who was crucified, on the cross. And now, they've been told, that he's risen, from the dead. This has been confirmed, by angels.

[9 : 51] The tomb is emptying. Who knows, what to think of all of this, all of a sudden. And it's not until, the angels point back, to what Jesus, had taught, about his death, and resurrection, the women, begin to remember, what Jesus had said.

They say to the women, remember how he told you, while he was with you, in Galilee? The son of man, must be delivered, over to the hands of sinners, be crucified, and on the third day, be raised again.

Then, they remembered, his words. It's not until, they are reminded, of Jesus' own words, do they begin, to understand. So they rush back, to the disciples.

They tell them, the good news. They tell them, that the tomb was empty, that angels confirmed, to them, that Jesus was not there, that he had risen. But the disciples, they didn't believe.

They considered it, nonsense. As if they were, grasping for straws. Again, showing, there was no, expectation, that Jesus, was going to rise.

[10 : 57] There was no plan, to try and make it up. They were so downcast, they were so filled, of sorrow, that he had died. There was no expectation, of any hope, that he might, rise again.

However, Peter, Jesus' most beloved disciple, did not dismiss, the women's report, straight away. He checked it out, for himself. He went to the tomb. He saw, that it was empty.

He saw, Jesus' burial close. And he's left, wondering, what is going on? What is happening? There is great reason, to believe here, that something, incredible, has happened.

Jesus, at the very least, is no longer dead. The tomb is empty, and angels have confirmed this. But now, we have the same question, as disciples do. What is going on?

What is happening? Why is this happening? These disciples, who were so, filled with sorrow, and doubt, now, there's a glimmer of hope.

[12 : 02] They now have a glimmer, of hope. But there's still, some uncertainty. They haven't seen, Jesus yet. But this is the beginning. This is the beginning, of the story, of how the disciples, begin to see, that Jesus is, alive.

And the second piece, of evidence, that we have, from Luke's gospel, here in chapter 24, is the revelation, of the word. Now, Luke transports us, from the tomb site, to another event, that took place, later in that day.

We are told, that there are two men, on their way to a village, who are discussing, with each other, everything that had happened, from the death, to the, to what had happened, that morning.

We know this, because they say, they talk about, the women's report, to a particular stranger. They talk about, these things, that had happened, and they're not sure, what's going on. And then, we're told by Luke, there's a third character.

While they were walking, and talking, Jesus himself, decided to walk, alongside them. This is the first appearance, of the Lord, Jesus risen. This is the one, who has conquered death, who was shown, that he is king, and has accomplished, his work on the cross.

[13 : 15] Therefore, there is hope, for eternal life, hope, for forgiveness of sins, hope, for the disciples. And Luke just says, that he just, turned up, and walked alongside them, as if it was nothing.

But the thing was, it was, a non-event. Because we're told, in verse 16, these disciples, were kept, from recognising Jesus. So you must remember, Luke is presenting, the narrative here, in a way, they are experiencing it, not the way, that we might, expect to experience it.

And so the whole idea, is we're going to experience it, with the disciples. But right here, Luke's also informing us, about what really is going on. This is no stranger.

This is Jesus. And he is risen. And so we, as the reader, are in this privileged position, to know what exactly, is going on, so that we can see, the irony, and the disciples' despondency, as they are so, saddened, by what they think, has happened.

They say, to the stranger, in verse 21, after explaining, what's been happening, we had hope, that he was the one, who was going to, redeem Israel. For them, the crucifixion of Jesus, was the end.

[14 : 36] Any claim, that he was God, was now false. Any claim, that he was going to come, and save his people, was now false. Because a dead king, can't do anything. Any claim, that he was going to, save the world, was now false.

Because a dead God, can't do anything. The irony, is astounding here, for us, as the reader. Because we can see, Jesus is alive.

And in his resurrection, he has achieved, exactly what, God had planned, for him to achieve, on the cross. Jesus didn't, disarm the powers, of this world, by destroying, the enemy's weaponry. He didn't come in, as a conquering general, with an army, and kicked out, the Romans. In a physical, kind of sense. You see, Jesus disarms, the powers, of this world, by dying on the cross, and then rising, into new life again.

He showed that, he has power, over death, our worst, and final enemy. And through his death, we can have life. And then that death, was vindicated, proven powerful, by Jesus' own resurrection.

[15 : 53] And so, Jesus pushes back here, and rebukes, these two disciples, and says to them, how foolish you are, and how slow to believe, all the prophets have spoken.

Did not the Messiah, have to suffer these things, and then enter, his glory? And beginning with Moses, and all the prophets, he explained to them, what was said, in all the scriptures, concerning himself.

Notice how Jesus said, he calls them foolish. They believed only, what made logical sense, according to the world. That dead people, don't rise from the dead.

That someone who claims, to be God and dies, probably isn't God. That a dead God, can't really do much, in this world. But Jesus spends time, with these two, unpacking the entire scriptures, to show, that what might seem foolish, is actually the true wisdom, of God.

That although, in the world's eyes, death, can't accomplish, anything, the scripture testifies, that the death, of Jesus Christ, and along with resurrection, accomplishes, all along, what God had planned, throughout, the scriptures, throughout, what the Bible, has taught us.

[17 : 13] The whole point, of the biblical witness, was to point us, towards Jesus, his death, and resurrection, as the means, of how God, would save, his people, in the end.

Here, we see the work, of God, in Christ, being vindicated, by his eternal word. what has happened, what has happened, is of no surprise, to God, or to Jesus, but always part, of the plan, from the very beginning.

It's beginning, to dawn, on these two, disciples, what's been happening, and they urged, the stranger, to come back, to their house, to have dinner, with them.

And this is what takes place, it's very astounding. Verse 30, when he was at the table, with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared, from their sight.

He took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and began to give it to them. What does that sound like, to you? It's just something, we just did.

[18 : 29] Communion. Or in other words, here, the Passover meal. The Passover meal, was celebrated each year, by the Jewish people, in remembrance, of how God, saved us, from being enslaved, to the Egyptians.

Jesus then celebrated, with his disciples, just before his death, in order to redefine it, to show that he was now, going to save his people, through his sacrifice, on the cross, as his body, was being broken, and his blood, being poured out.

That we might be saved, from our sins, just, as that, Israel had been saved, all those years, ago.

And so when Jesus, breaks the bread, and gives it to them, they finally see, this is Jesus.

This is the one, who broke his body for me. This is the one, who went to the cross, died, that I might, be free from my sin, and now he's risen, that I can have life.

And as soon as, their eyes are opened, he's gone, disappears. But finally, they see. And finally, they have brought up to us, the reader, who we've known all along, who is Jesus.

[19 : 52] Now they see as well, that Jesus' death, and resurrection, is not some, event that's out of place. It is the culmination, of what God has always planned, in his word.

It can be testified, and grounded, in the word of God. And it's been expressed now, in the visible word as well, the communion meal, the Passover meal, which we celebrate, just earlier on.

Christ has completed, the work of salvation, through his death, and resurrection. And the word of God, vindicates it. And he himself, is the one, to explain it.

But there are still questions. Is this, truly a resurrection? Or is Jesus a ghost, or an apparition, a spirit? I mean, he can just disappear like that.

He can conceal himself. There are a lot of things, that we don't understand right now, about this resurrection. Which is why, Luke continues on, in his story, unfolding the narrative, of the disciples, discovering the resurrection.

[20 : 57] The third piece of evidence, we have here, is Jesus himself, in the flesh. The two men, had gone back, to the disciples, to explain what had happened, along the road. And before they could, even finish speaking, to the disciples, bam, there is Jesus, in the middle of the room, with them, saying, peace, be with you.

Not like, on the road to Emmaus, he comes suddenly, and he stutle, everyone, and everyone, and everyone can see, who it is. It is Jesus. He is risen.

Jesus, in all his glory, and splendor, who has come, to bring peace, on earth, appears before the disciples, to confirm, that he is alive, that what he did, on the cross, was effective for us, that his resurrection, now, confirms, that power, and that work.

But the disciples, they're afraid. They're not really sure, to think here. Jesus points, to his body, look at my hands, and look at my feet, pointing out the fact, that he probably had, nails driven through, both.

And the scars, were to remain. But they still, are not sure. They still, are excited. They're like, wow, he's back, he's alive, but we're just not sure, about the nature of this.

[22 : 11] And so they get Jesus, or Jesus asks actually, for a broiled fish, to eat. And he's showing, that as he eats the fish, he is human, he is embodied, that he can eat, and digest food.

He's not some ghost, he's not some spirit apparition, he is human. He is fully God, and fully man. But again, like the previous examples, it's not until Jesus, actually opens, the disciples' minds, to the scriptures, concerning himself, concerning the resurrection, do they actually, understand what's going on.

It says, it says in verse 44, this is what I told you, while I was still alive with you. Everything must be fulfilled, that is written about me, in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.

Then he opened their minds, so they could understand, the scriptures. They had everything now, that they needed to know. They had the end to him. The revelation, the revelation, of God's word. Jesus' death and resurrection, as the means of saving them, from their sin, and how the word of God, vindicates that. And now they had Jesus himself, in the flesh, before them, fully God, and fully man, resurrected.

[23 : 31] Luke's aim, to make us certain, is complete. There can be, no question. Having taken our place, in the disciples' journey, understanding, we can see, as they see now, that Jesus is alive, and he reigns, and this is certain.

Some of you, might want to be wondering still, but how do you know? How can you be sure, that Luke's not making this up? How can you be sure, how can you know for certain, that someone has not, edited the documents, along the way, in the path of history?

How do you know, still, even if it is true, that God, loves me? That's a very good question. We don't want to be like, the Harold Campions of the world, to put our faith, in something, that in the end, just proves us wrong.

To believe something, and to be made a fool, because, it was wrong. Now there's a long answer, to that question, but for the sake of time, I'll just say a few things. Most historians, will tell you, the Bible, particularly the New Testament, is the most, it was the best preserved document, we have, in antiquity.

We have so many manuscripts, and I can't stress that, we have so many manuscripts, of the Gospels, and of the New Testament letters, that date so closely, to their autographs, that's just overwhelming, the data is overwhelming, for us, in regards to, how much, of the sources, that are there.

[25 : 03] One, non-Christian, historian says this, about the Gospel story, about the Easter story. If the defeated, and depressed group, of disciples, overnight, could change, into a victorious, movement of faith, based only on, auto-suggestion, or self-deception, without a fundamental, faith experience, then this would be, a much greater miracle, than the resurrection itself.

In a purely, logical analysis, the resurrection of Jesus, is the lesser, of two evils. For all those, who seek, a rational explanation, of the worldwide, consequences, of that Easter faith.

Another guy, non-Christian historian, as well, says this, I do not regard, the deliberate fraud, as a worthwhile, explanation. Many of the people, in these lists, of witnesses, were to spend, the rest of

their lives, proclaiming, that they had seen, the risen Lord.

And several of them, would die for their cause. That Jesus' followers, and later Paul, had resurrection experiences, is, in my judgment, a fact.

What the reality was, that gave rise, to the experiences, I do not know. Isn't that incredible? That we can have, before us, a non-Christian historian, say, what we have here, in the gospels, is true.

[26 : 32] So true, that I do believe, that they witness, or experience, a resurrection, of some sort. I just don't know, exactly what that looked like. The historicity, of the gospel message, the Easter story, is valid.

Luke's account here, is valid. The question though, is do you accept it? Do you accept, what Luke labored, to make certain?

Do you believe, that Jesus, rose from the dead, and that profoundly, impacts you? What will you do? How will you respond? The disciples, themselves, respond, by worshipping, God.

As we told in, verses 52 and 53, they knew, finally, who Jesus was, that he had risen, from the dead, and the only proper response, was to worship, him.

But let's look, how they worshipped. Verse 52, says this, Then they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem, with great joy. And they stayed, continually, at the temple, praising God.

[27 : 45] Their worship, was not, out of duty, or out of fear. They were worshipping God, with joy. So much joy, they could not contain it.

They continued, to worship, in the temple, because Jesus, was king, and saviour, and he was risen. They now had hope. They had hope, for their future, as followers, of Jesus, who was alive, which meant, they could live, well now, in the present, with joy, and with hope.

And here's why. The resurrection, gives us certainty, that Jesus' death, paid for our sin, showing that God, does love you, and wants you, in relationship, with him.

The resurrection, gives us certainty, that death, is not the end, that death, has been swallowed up, in victory, through the resurrection. And so we can look forward, to eternal life.

We have hope, beyond this world, we're not consumed, by this world, or overcome, by this world, by the pain, and the suffering, we experience here. We can look forward, to when God, is going to make, all things new, where there's no more tears, and no more pain.

[28 : 58] And such a wonderful promise, in the resurrection, bids, only one response, and that, is worship.

We can have hope, in this life. We can have hope, now, for eternity. And it's based, in the risen, Lord Jesus. It's a hope, that anchors us, in this life, through the ups, and downs.

A hope, that enables us, to live well, in the midst, of pain, and suffering. A hope, that we get to look forward, to one day, seeing God, face to face, and to be with him, for eternity.

Because of this hope, we can say, with Paul, in Romans 8, for I am convinced, that neither death, nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present, nor the future, nor any power, neither height, nor depth, nor anything else, in all creation, will be able, to separate us, from the love of God, that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Who is alive, who loves you, who has made, a way for you, to be saved. So how will you, respond? Will you join, in on the worship, of your Lord, and Savior.

[30 : 21] Amen.