

Just a coincidence? - CONFIRMATION

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. How are you? Good? Feeling comfy? That's good. We're going to look at this passage together from John's Gospel.

It's kind of a strange little passage though, don't you think? I mean, if I was Steven Spielberg, if I'd been writing the movie of what's just happened, then I'm not sure I would have put this bit in. You see, Jesus has told his disciples that he would be betrayed, and he was. He's told them he'd be arrested, and he was. He's told them he'd be killed, and he was.

He also told them he'd be raised from the dead, and he was. And so in terms of the story, it's all sort of come to this great climax, the crescendo, was that Jesus, crucified on the cross, buried in a grave, is now alive again, and he has appeared.

And he's appeared to the disciples, those who are following him. He's appeared. He's alive again. And then John, at the end of chapter 20, says, These things have been written so that you can know, so that you can believe that Jesus is the Christ.

[1 : 12] He's the one that was promised. He's the Messiah. And by believing in him, you can have eternal life. And at that point, if I was Steven Spielberg, it would be, and the curtain would come down, and the credits would roll, and we go, wow, that was awesome.

But we've got chapter 21. It's done. It's like he keeps going. In fact, the first word, did you see? After these things. Afterwards. After these things. You think, but the climax has happened.

So what now? What's in this bit here? I think we need to concentrate a little bit this morning together to see what God is saying.

For as Steve has rightly said, we should not harden our hearts if we hear God speak. And so God is going to speak through his word to us.

Let's open our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our hearts so that we might hear from him. So I'm going to pray, and we'll listen to what he has to say, shall we? Dear Father, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that it's been preserved in a way that we can have such easy access to it.

[2 : 25] I pray this morning as I speak, I'll be clear and careful with what you've given us so that we might hear you speak. I do pray, as we already have, that we would not harden our hearts, but that we would receive your word.

Amen. Amen. Well, I don't know why you're here this morning. Well, I guess you're here for church, right? But I don't know what's brought you. I don't know whether someone invited you or whether you come regularly because you're part of the family.

I don't know whether you're here because of the confirmation. I know that the people sitting in the front row always sit in the front row like this, right? Yeah, no, no. It's not a coincidence.

In fact, I'm not sure that anyone is here by coincidence. You know what a coincidence is, don't you? A coincidence is a remarkable alignment of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection, which is a dictionary definition.

I mean, it's basically saying it's when things line up without any kind of apparent reason for them lining up. Maybe you didn't know the confirmation was on today.

[3 : 39] So you might say, oh, what a coincidence. Maybe you didn't know I was speaking today. That would be a coincidence, wouldn't it? You just turned up. Although, I do have a friend here this morning, David. He knew I was going to be speaking.

David's from Adelaide. Welcome, David. It's not a coincidence. I don't believe in coincidences. See, I believe that God is behind everything.

So it's not an accident that you're here. It's not an accident that we're looking at John 21. It's not an accident that we have the opportunity to be here together. I don't think it's an accident. Now, I don't, at the same time, think it's terrible to say there are coincidences.

Because so long as what you're saying is, wow, I didn't realise those things were going on. But God has a very, very clear plan. And he wants you to know him.

And I think he uses events, even like this morning, so that you might get to know him better. Here's the question that I have for you right now, though. Are you prepared to be open to God and to get to know him better?

[4 : 51] Or do you just sort of come and tick the box and say hello to your friends and go home? Well, why would you need to get to know him better? And I, look, I wrote this sermon during this week, preparing for today.

I had no idea that what was going to happen in Westfield at Bondi yesterday. I had no idea that Iran was going to launch into Israel. But both of those things, and no doubt other things that are going on in your life, should convince us that actually we need to be in touch with God.

We need to understand that he is the sovereign one who is in control of everything. There are no accidents. There are no coincidences. God is sovereign over everything.

And we need to realise and understand some important things. And that, as I consider this passage, is exactly what John 21 is doing.

John, who was the disciple Jesus loved. John, who was known in the early church as the theologian. It was John who, other writers in the Bible describe what God was like.

[6 : 05] But it was John who said, this is what God is. God is spirit and truth. God is light. God is love. John was the great theologian of the early church.

And he has deliberately, not coincidentally, not accidentally, he has deliberately given us chapter 21, so that we can understand about the sovereignty of God.

Of who's in charge. Of who we need to come to and learn from. So, if you've got a Bible, open it up. If it's on your phone or your tablet or your other device, whatever you have, please open up.

John 21. And you'll find seven disciples back on the boats, once again working with their hands, working in a very humble role. They were fishermen. In the ancient world, fishermen were not wealthy.

Fishermen were actually just sort of the second level up from poverty. We do know from archaeological work that about nine out of ten people lived in abject poverty around Galilee.

[7 : 07] Nine out of ten. Ninety percent of the people lived what we call a subsistence life. In other words, they had food for today. And it wasn't a Krispy Kreme donut, let me tell you.

They had a very, very poor diet. Well, Krispy Kreme's not a great diet either, just quietly. But they had an incredibly poor diet. And we know that because of the way that their bodies, when they were buried, were affected by their diet, their bone structure, their bone density.

It's amazing what archaeologists have discovered. But we know that fishermen were probably second to the poorest. The richest people were landowners.

Most of them didn't live in Galilee. They owned the land. But they lived somewhere nice like Tiberias or Sepphorus or even in Jerusalem. And they had people managing their properties for them.

And then the next level down were the fishermen. And then the lowest of the low were people called tectones. Tectones were people who worked with stone. That's where we get, that's the Greek word.

[8 : 13] The English word would be tectonic. You know, tectonic plates when they have an earthquake. Tectones were the poorest of the poor. And you know what the English word for tectone is? Carpenter.

Jesus was a tectone. The poorest of the poor. Well, you knew that, didn't you? You remember Christmas? Where was he laid?

In a manger. They were the poorest of the poor. He grew up in the poorest group in society. These fishermen were not much better.

And here they are. They are back on their boats. We know that Peter and John had no silver and gold. They told a beggar as much in Jerusalem. But they are incredibly poor.

And they've lived for the last three years on the generosity of others. They've been following Jesus for three years. As he taught, as he did miracles, as he did all kinds of signs and wonders.

[9 : 13] They've followed him. And for three years, people have taken care of them. Their generosity meant that the disciples could eat. We know that Lazarus and his sisters, for example, hosted them in their home and looked after them.

We know that through many of the gospel accounts, they stayed with people who fed them and looked after them and gave them money. But now, their rabbi, their teacher, has gone. And I guess they're figuring, if the rabbi is gone, our money is gone. We'd better go back to work. You'd think that, wouldn't you? You would think, if he's gone, how are we going to live? I don't know. We'll go back to what we know. We go back to fishing. And I'm convinced that they were completely confused by what had happened. And when you are confused, what do you do? You do what you know best. If you're confused, you go to what you know. Because that at least is secure and safe. They're confused. Because their leader, who had taught them so many things that were mind-blowing, who'd shown them so many things that were astounding.

[10:23] People who were healed of disease. People who were blind, who could see. People who were raised from the dead. They saw him do all that. They saw him walk on water.

And now he's gone. That's kind of confusing. Not only gone, they saw him killed and buried. And then they saw him raised. But where is he now? They're confused. So they go back to what they know best. They go back to fishing. But did you pick up the coincidence that John is making really clear here? Because, again, I don't believe in coincidences. But look at the coincidence. Where are they? Sea of Galilee. Sea of Tiberias. It's actually a massive big lake in Israel. But listen to Mark chapter 1. I wonder if Peter, James and John, who are mentioned in John 21, who are in their boat again fishing, who are again on the Sea of Galilee, I wonder if they picked up the coincidence here.

[11:54] I wonder if it came home with peculiar power. That they're back in the place, the very place where Jesus called them. I wouldn't be surprised if it did.

Listen to Luke's account of what happened. This is from Luke chapter 5. When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon Peter, to put out into the deep water, let down the nets for a catch. This is three years ago from this moment. So Simon answered, Master, we've worked hard all night. We haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I'll let down the nets. When they'd done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full, they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they'd taken.

[12:54] And so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Do you get this? These same people on the same waterway, in the same boats, doing the same job.

Jesus called them three years before and said, come and follow me. And I will make you gather people, no longer gathering fish. I will make you fishers of men. So come and follow me. And where are they? They're back on the Sea of Galilee, fishing for fish. And not only back on the Sea of Galilee, but when Jesus said, cast your net over, they have a miraculous catch.

The first time, so big, that their nets began to break and the boats began to sink. This time, the catch is so big, they can't even get it into the boat. Do you think that they might have just gone, hang on, we've been here before. This has happened before. Hang on, is this just a coincidence? Do you think?

[14:03] Or do you think Jesus is actually saying, do you remember when I called you? Do you remember why I called you? Do you remember what I did? Do you remember when I told you to bring in the fish?

Do it again. Do you remember? Do you see who I am? But there's another thing. How could they miss that coincidence? But then there's another thing. When they pull in this massive catch of fish, they're reminded of his incredible power. And they're reminded of the way they followed. But for Peter, there's an incredible reminder that's coming. You see, when Peter sees Jesus, he jumps out of the boat, goes in, onto the beach, and Jesus is there cooking fish. Did you notice that, by the way? He doesn't need their catch of fish. He's already got fish. Did you notice also that he's got bread, fish, and bread.

[15:13] Did you notice that? Do you think that's a coincidence? That here by Galilee, he's about to feed them with fish and bread. Gee, I wonder if that's happened before.

In John chapter 6, there is a moment by the Sea of Galilee when crowds are following Jesus. And Jesus turns to the disciples and he says to Philip, let's feed them.

Let me read to you from John chapter 6. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming, he turned to Philip and he said, where will we buy bread for these people to eat? He asked this only to test him for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, it would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite. Another of his disciples, Andrew, the same names keep popping up, Simon Peter's brother spoke up, he's a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how will they go so far among so many?

And Jesus answered, have the people sit down, there's plenty of grass in that place, they sat down, about 5,000 men were there. Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted.

[16:33] He did the same with the fish. Do you get it? Fish and bread. He's done this before by the Sea of Galilee.

It's no coincidence what's on the menu for breakfast that day because he wants them to remember because he wants them to remember that he is the one who miraculously fed thousands of people. He is the one who's in control of everything. He is the one who is the sovereign who can even defeat death. He is the one. Have you forgotten that? Why have you gone fishing again?

And when that miracle happened, do you remember that story with the feeding of the 5,000? Do you remember how many baskets were left over? There were 12 baskets of fish and bread left over after Jesus had fed everyone.

And I reckon it's like the show bag for each of the disciples. There's 12 of them. There you go. One each. Take that home and just remember. Fish and bread. I'll look after you. I will care for you. I'm in charge.

[17:34] I am sovereign of everything. God is in control. I think they've forgotten. They've gone fishing again because they're so confused. But just after Jesus fed them and gave them their show bags, he said this, Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.

Do you hear that? Seek after Jesus. Turn to Christ. Follow him. That's what Jesus is telling.

That's what the word is telling us. That's what the message here is. How could you not follow him? How could you ever deny him? And then, well, here's another thing.

Did you notice when Peter got to the beach and the fire was burning, did you notice it wasn't just Jesus was using the barbecue or he had the web around or there was a fire on the beach?

Did you notice what it said? There is a coal fire burning. That word coal fire is only used twice in the whole Bible. Here, and a couple of chapters earlier, here in Galilee in 21 and in 18 in Jerusalem in a courtyard.

[18:56] And in that courtyard where the coal fire was burning, Peter saw Jesus arrested. And when Peter was asked, Don't you know him?

Aren't you one of his followers? Three times Peter said, I don't know him. I've never met him. I have no idea who the guy is. Three times Peter denied knowing Jesus before a coal fire.

Now, why do you think that's been mentioned? Because it's not a coincidence. It's because coal fires smell different. Have you ever smelled a coal fire? And smells have this capacity to make us remember things.

For us to associate with things. You know, the smell of a new car. How nice is that? Or the smell of aviation fuel.

Well, that's not something you should go sniffing. I wouldn't recommend that. But when you smell aviation fuel, you sort of, I know you start thinking, maybe I could go to Adelaide again. Or maybe I could go up to the Gold Coast or Noosa or somewhere.

[19:57] Or maybe we could go and visit our kids in Sweden. Ah, that smell of kerosene. Yeah, lovely. Actually, smells can do all kinds of things. Whenever I smell jasmine, you know jasmine?

Beautiful flower, beautiful scent. Makes me feel terrible every time I smell it. Because when Belinda, my now wife, was young and we were courting, she used to braid jasmine in her hair.

And we would go out. Belinda's mum would let us use her Tirana. Oh, that Tirana. Great car. I don't think I ever put petrol in that car. Ever. Hundreds of miles we drove.

I never paid for one drop of petrol. I feel so guilty when I smell jasmine. All the times I just thrashed that car. It was terrible. I confess.

The smells bring back memories. And the memory that Peter would have had on that morning on the beach was of when he denied it and knowing Jesus. It's a coincidence that Jesus is there at Galilee calling them again.

[21 : 02] Do you think it's a coincidence that they had a miraculous catch of fish? Do you think it's a coincidence that there's a coal fire burning? No. John is saying, no, no. There is no coincidence here. Jesus is reminding them because the world will cave in on them, confuse them, and make them doubt that Jesus really is the sovereign who's in control.

There will be things that will happen to them, not long from this moment, that will make them wonder if Jesus really is the king who is to be worshipped.

There will be things that will happen. And what Jesus is doing here is saying, there is no coincidence. I am in charge. I am in control. I am the sovereign.

I am the one you are to follow. So come, follow me, and obey me. Let people know about me. Seek me.

And when the events of a Westfield happen, and when there are wars and rumours of wars taking place, brothers and sisters, don't forget, Jesus is sovereign.

[22 : 14] He is in charge. When your family isn't having the happy relationships that you think that you should have, remember that Jesus is sovereign.

When you're at work or at school, when you're doing whatever you do this week and you feel like, I'm just on a wheel, like a mouse making it spin, remember that Jesus is sovereign.

It's no coincidence he has placed you where you are in your workplace or your school. It's no coincidence that you're in the family you are in. It's no coincidence that we live in a place called Sydney and there are people now rattled by the events of yesterday and we know the truth about Jesus, his sovereignty, his power, his majesty, his victory over death, the hope that we have.

And I wonder if this week you might have opportunity to share that hope.