

Why Should I Trust the Bible?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 November 2020

Preacher: Kevin Murphy

[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from Luke 1 starting at verse 1. Please follow along on the screen or in your bulletin. 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 down an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainly concerning the things you have been taught. Amen.

Great, thank you Christina. Nice and short reading. Well, good morning church. It is so good to see everybody. I know we've said it many times, but I was just thinking before the service, coming back together is like coming back for a Chinese New Year reunion meal.

And the difference between this and church online is like eating McDonald's on your own, right? It's a meal. It'll get you through the day. It's okay. You won't starve. But that compared to a reunion meal with your family when you've been away for a year is just vastly different.

And so it's so great to see everyone. It's wonderful to see you face to face. And I want to just come and give everyone a great big hug, but I know that's socially inappropriate. And so I'll refrain from that, but it's so wonderful to see us all face to face together.

I'm sure these guys will work on the sound. We are continuing our series called Why Christianity? I don't know if you've been journeying with us the last couple of weeks. We've been looking at some of the big questions that confront Christianity.

[1 : 45] Things like, isn't it arrogant or exclusive for Christians to say that what they believe is the one true faith? Or what about evil and suffering? Or what about science and faith?

How do these things come together? And this morning we're going to continue that. And we're going to ask the question, how do we make sense of the Bible? Or why should I trust the Bible? And it's a really important question because at the heart of Christianity is the person of Jesus Christ. And what the Bible says, who he was and what he accomplished in his life and in his death.

You see, Christianity is not really an ethical movement. It's not a bunch of wisdom to tell you just how to live your life, how to improve your life. At the heart of Christianity is the person of Jesus. And almost every world religion, you could remove the founder of the religion and the essence of the faith would still stand. You take Buddha away from Buddhism and his teachings still stand and Buddhism would still stand as a philosophy, as a worldview.

[2 : 46] You could take Muhammad out of Islam and Islam would still stand. But if you remove Jesus Christ, the person of Christ and who he is, who he claimed to be, and what his life accomplished, Christianity falls flat.

And so in many ways, the Christian faith hinges on what the Bible says, who Christ is, and what he accomplished in his life.

And therefore, the credibility and the reliability of the Bible is a really important thing for us to grapple with. And so this morning we're going to ask kind of two questions.

One, why should I trust the Bible? And secondly, how do I make sense of the Bible? In order to do that, I want us to think about it three ways. I want us to think about it historically.

I want us to think about it culturally or carefully. And thirdly, to think about it personally. Okay. So let's dive in. Historically. Let's think about the Bible historically.

[3 : 44] Now, these days, we often hear objections or questions or people saying, how do we know that what's written in our Bible today is the same thing that was written 2,000 years ago?

A lot has happened 2,000 years ago. It was originally written in Aramaic and Hebrew and Greek. It's been translated into Latin. It's been translated again. It's been copied many, many, many times over the 2,000 years.

And we don't have any original, original documents. We don't have the original parchment that Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote on. So how do we know that what's here is the same thing that was written all those years ago?

And secondly, the question is, how do we know that even if this is the same thing that was originally written, how do we know that church leaders didn't make stuff up and put it in here?

How do we know that the Jesus of faith, of Christianity, is the same as the Jesus of history? Maybe Jesus of history was just a good, wise, moral man, a good, wise teacher.

[4 : 44] But the church leaders embellished it or put a whole lot of myths and fables and legends in to prop up Jesus and make him something more than he claimed to be. So let's think about this.

I want to give, again, three historical things to think about as we think about this objection. The first one, we can trust the Bible because of the historical data. I want us to think, firstly, when we consider historical documents, such as the New Testament or any other historical documents, that's not a religious exercise.

That's an academic exercise. And scholars and academics, when looking at the reliability or credibility of a historical document, use a science called textual criticism.

And again, that's not something in religious departments. That's just historical departments. And textual criticism looks at the copies that we have of ancient historical documents and works out by asking a number of questions how reliable, how accurate are those earliest documents we have compared to the original document that it was based upon.

And there's a whole lot of questions that they ask, but there's two main questions. The first one is, how many copies do we have? If you've got five copies or ten copies or fifteen copies, okay, that's okay.

[6 : 01] If you've got a hundred or five hundred or a thousand copies, well, then it's far more accurate to see where changes have taken place, where there have been edits, where the original has been corrupted or changed over time.

Okay? So the first question is, how many copies do we have? The second question, very important, is how big is the time gap between the copies that we have and the original that was written?

So if the time gap is a hundred years, that's a good thing. If the time gap is a thousand years or two thousand years, okay, then there's more space for changes to take place. And so you want to know, how many copies do we have?

And what are the earliest copies that we have? And from those two things, generally, you can work out what did the original document look like or say. Now, when you apply these criteria to the New Testament documents, almost all historians will tell us that the New Testament documents pass with flying colors any questions or tests of historical credibility, especially when you compare it to other historical documents.

So let me give you a couple of examples, right? We've all heard of this ancient Greek philosopher called Plato. Plato, one of the wisest philosophers in the ancient world, kind of the founder of Western thought.

[7 : 14] When you look at the historical evidence for Plato's teachings and his sayings, we have about 200, 210, actually, official documents that highlight what he said and what he taught.

And those documents range from somewhere around 950 to 1,500 years after his lifetime. Okay? So 200 documents, 1,000 to 1,500 years after his lifetime.

Or think of Alexander the Great. We've all heard of Alexander the Great, the Macedon king, who conquered kind of the Western world before the Roman Empire conquered the Greek Empire.

And Alexander the Great, one of the great military leaders of the ancient world. And again, almost everything we know about him comes from two sources, a man by the name of Plutarch and a man by the name of Arian.

And these were written about 450, 500 years after his death. Okay? And all historians will take that as credible documentation that we know about the life of Alexander the Great.

[8 : 12] And we could keep on going. There's hundreds of ancient historians that we could look at. Julius Caesar and his Gaelic Wars, 50 BC. He wrote this book called The Gaelic Wars. And we have about 250 copies of those.

And the surviving copies that we have are written about 1,000 to 1,500 years after the event. Okay? So lots of copying took place. And we've got 200 documents recording the original.

When it comes to the documentation of the New Testament, the New Testament stands head and shoulders above everything else. For the four Gospels, we've got five, almost 6,000 Greek documents of the Gospels alone.

And of the New Testament alone, we've got between 20,000 and 30,000 original early documents that are verifiable and accurate.

And those documents were written not 1,500, not 1,000 years, not even 500 years. Some of those earliest documents we have are from between 30 and 50 years of the events, of the documents in which they're written.

[9 : 16] So for instance, John's Gospel is written somewhere at the latest stage around 90 AD, 95 AD, the very latest. We've got documents of John's Gospel written from the year 130 AD.

That's 35 years after the original was written. You compare that to Plato, 1,000 years, 1,500 years. And not just 200 documents, 20,000 or 30,000 of the New Testament documents.

One historian put it like this. Simply put, if we reject the authenticity of the New Testament on textual historical grounds, we'd have to reject every ancient work of antiquity and declare null and void every piece of historical information from written sources prior to the beginning of the 2nd millennium AG.

In other words, anything from 1,000 AD onwards, we'd have to say, listen, we can't trust it. Who knows? It's all just guesswork. And that's not just Western thought. That's the same for Confucian, same for Confucius, same for Buddha.

All the major thoughts of the world. Nothing stands out to the historical credibility of the New Testament Gospels. Okay, so first one is the historical document. Secondly, think about the eyewitnesses.

[10 : 29] When we read the New Testament, one of the things that you encounter a lot is all sorts of random names of people and places. And we often skip over those names, right?

Now, confession time. How many of us have read Matthew 1 or Luke 3, all these names, and just turned over the page quickly, right? There are all these names, and we think, who put that in there? Who thought it was a good idea to put this in God's Holy Word, right? Those names don't make sense to us in the 21st century, but a lot of them make a lot of sense to the 1st century audience. And the reason is the Bible wasn't primarily written for a 21st century audience. It was written as a historical document, largely, for a 1st century audience. And those names are put there for a very specific reason.

One of the reasons is because many of them were still alive and were eyewitnesses of the things that were being written in the documents. So let me give you an example. In Mark's Gospel, chapter 15, Jesus is going to the cross.

[11 : 27] And Mark writes this in his Gospel. He says, verse 20, Now we read that and think, Mark could have just said, and they compelled a passerby to carry the cross.

But Mark's very specific. He writes the name of this guy, Simon, from Cyrene, and his two children. He's the father of Rufus and Alexander. Why put that detail in there? Well, when you consider the fact that Mark's Gospel is written somewhere around 20 to 25 years, 15 even, some historians will say, after the event took place, in all likelihood, Rufus and Alexander are still alive and are possibly part of the Christian community.

They are known to the audience. In other words, what Mark is doing is he's saying, there are eyewitnesses that are still alive. And you can go and test what I'm saying. Go and ask him if what I'm saying is true.

There are eyewitnesses that could either falsify or verify what the writers are saying in the New Testament. And all the New Testament writers do this. Paul, in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, he writes and he says, the Gospel which was handed down from others to me, that Jesus died, that he rose again on the third day, he appeared to 12, then he appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters at one time, and then he writes this, most of whom are still alive.

Why does he say that? What he's saying is, I want you to go and verify what I'm saying. I want you to go check it out. I want you to go and do the research. Go and ask those people if what I'm writing in my epistle is true.

[13 : 20] The reason the New Testament writers put all these details in is because they want us to go and check. They want us to verify the facts. First, Justin here works for the DOJ, right?

The prosecutor. And as any prosecutor or attorney will tell you, if you want to lie or if you want to make up a story, make sure there are very few witnesses around that can contradict you, right? I'm assuming that's good knowledge, right? Or think about, we've all watched TV shows, and someone gets arrested, and what do the arresting officers all say?

You have the right to remain silent, anything you say can and will be held against you in a court of law. And a good attorney will tell you, if you ever get arrested, here's some free advice, okay? Next time you get arrested, don't say anything.

I hope you're not going to get arrested anytime soon. But don't say anything. Why? Because anything you say can and will be held against you. In other words, if you're going to make up something, if you want to try, if you're in trouble, the more details you give, the more that can be held against you.

[14:25] Minimize the details that you give. The New Testament writers do the opposite. They're trying to get as many eyewitnesses as well as possible, and they're trying to give as much detail as possible.

Why? Because they want just to go and verify what they have to say. And so, today we come, and this is going to be very brief, but we're going to look at Luke chapter 1. And it's in your bulletin. And look at it with me. Look what Luke writes here. Now, by the way, Luke was not a disciple of Jesus. He was a medical doctor and a historian.

And so Luke wasn't an uneducated fisherman like some of the disciples. He was a doctor who was used to examining the evidence and coming up with a diagnosis. And Luke, it seems like, he writes this letter to this man called Theophilus.

And it seems like Theophilus was a high-ranking Roman official because he calls him most excellent Theophilus. And the only other times in the Bible that that phrase is used is when addressing a Roman magistrate.

[15:23] And so, it seems like Theophilus is a high-ranking Roman official. And it seems like Theophilus has heard about Jesus and he wants to verify that what he's heard is true. And so, he commissions this doctor historian called Ruth, not Ruth, Luke, to go and verify the data.

And so, look at how Luke begins the beginning of his epistle. He says, Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile the narrative of the things that have been accomplished amongst us, now he's probably talking about Mark's gospel there, that was written previously.

Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, and they've delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things that you have been taught.

See what Luke's doing there. He's saying, I've gone and I've done the research. I've gone and interviewed the eyewitnesses. And I've decided to write this orderly account, not just based on the other narratives that are out there, gospel of Mark, etc.

I've done my own research. I've asked the eyewitnesses, and I'm writing this account that you may have certainty, Theophilus, about the gospel that you've heard about the person of Jesus.

[16:43] Okay, so consider the historical data. Consider the eyewitnesses. Thirdly, very quickly, consider the embarrassing passages. Many people say, the Jesus of history is different to the Jesus of the Bible, right?

They don't correlate, because the church leaders put a whole lot of legend and myth and interesting stuff in there about miracles, to make Jesus to be something different than what he was, right? And the reason why church leaders would do this is to bolster their own reputation, to bolster their own movement, and to lend credibility to their claim, their religion that they're starting.

But there's too much stuff in the New Testament that is just too embarrassing if you're trying to start a new religion. There's too much stuff in there that if you're trying to convince people to get on board, if you're making up the story, you'd rather leave it out.

But there's hundreds of cases, but just consider a couple of them. The one is, Jesus is on the cross. Think about it. Jesus is on the cross. Now, firstly, no Jew believed that the Messiah was going to die on the cross.

But anyway, Jesus ends up on the cross. But while he's there, he cries out, he says, Father, why have you forsaken me? If you're trying to make up a Savior that's going to save the world, you probably wouldn't put that kind of information in there.

[18 : 02] Or consider just before the cross, Jesus is in Gethsemane. And he's sweating, his sweat is turned to blood, and he cries, he prays his prayer, and he says, God, if there's any way to take the cross from me, let it be.

Why is Jesus, why do you include this stuff in your religion about Jesus trying to get out of the cross? It doesn't make sense, unless, unless it really happened.

Or consider the way that all four of the Gospels recount that the very first eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection were women. Now, that's not a big deal in our day and age.

That's perfectly acceptable. But in the first century, that was ridiculous. Women's testimony was not admissible in a court of law because of their low social status. In fact, there's one ancient critic of Christianity who said this.

He said, Christianity cannot be true because their testimony is based on hysterical females. That's how he wrote it. It's like, it can't be true. It's the women, it's the hysterical females that were the first witnesses.

[19 : 05] Any historian knows if you try to bolster your claim that Christianity is true, the last thing you want to do is make the first witnesses to the resurrection women. And yet, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all do that.

Why? The only credible reason is because that's exactly what happened. And again, if you consider the life of the disciples, the disciples, these are the guys that were meant to be the founders of Christianity, the religion, and yet, when you read the Bible, they are clumsy, they are idiotic, they say dumb things, they deny Jesus, they run away, they abandon Him, they're fearful, they're cowards, they are doubting.

Why would you make the very people that are writing the books look that way unless, unless that's what actually happened? where am I? Okay, so, remember what Luke says in his opening paragraph.

He says, It seemed good to me, O Theophilus, having followed all things closely for some time, to write an orderly account that you may have certainty concerning the things that you've heard about the person of Jesus.

Okay, friends, here's the point. There's too much historical data, there's too many eyewitnesses, there's too much perplexing information in the New Testament for it simply to be made up, for it to be changed or edited.

[20 : 26] The Bible that we have in our hands, you can trust it, it's reliable, it's credible. It is what the disciples wrote, it is what the early church wrote, and it is reflect accurately the person of Jesus.

Okay, you can trust it historically. Second thing, culturally. Let's think about it culturally, or I put it on the slide carefully. Now, one of the questions that we often arise when we think about the Bible is, okay, let's just assume that it is historically accurate and credible.

Okay, that what's in the Bible is what the apostles wrote, and it is true. Many people will say, okay, but it's still so offensive. I mean, there's just so much stuff in there that is socially repressive, it's offensive, it bothers me, the Bible's sexist, the Bible says all sorts of stuff about slavery.

How can I even take it seriously, even if it is true? It's just archaic and out of date. There's many issues that we could look at, right? We could look at genocide, we could look at, does God hate gay people, gender, and all these kinds of things.

There's lots of issues we could talk through. But Tim Keller, Dr. Tim Keller, has really helped me think through this, and he's given us a framework to think through it. And this is what he says, he says that rather than looking at each issue, let's think about the culture and the context in which it's written.

[21 : 52] And there's two handles that I want us to think about when we think about the Bible this way. The first one is this, is to consider the possibility that maybe what you think it teaches, at first God, is not what it actually teaches.

I remember about a year ago I was having lunch with a young man, 16, 17 years old, and he was just throwing a whole lot of questions at me about the Bible and faith and science and how can you believe it.

And after about half an hour I said, hey but just a quick question, have you actually read the New Testament? Have you gone to the source material? He said, no, no, no, but I read a blog and the blog told me that the Bible says this, right?

There's many things that we hear, the Bible says this, the Bible says this, and as you actually examine it and carefully think about it, you realize that's maybe not what the Bible is saying at all. Let me give you one example. When you read the Old Testament, especially the first five books of the Old Testament, one of the things that stands out to you is many of the leaders of the Old Testament, the way that they treat women, right?

[22 : 58] You read and you think, that's just terrible. Many of them have got multiple wives, they've got concubines on top of that. They seem to just treat women as objects that they can trade and buy and sell.

And on top of this, many are the leaders, people like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and David and multiple wives and the treatment of women. And you think, how on earth can God condone that? How can God encourage that? How can that be in any inspired sacred book? Many years ago, in the 1980s, a Jewish scholar by the name of Robert Alter, a professor at Berkeley University, wrote a book called The Art of Biblical Narrative.

And what Robert Alter says in there is that when you read, he says, in the ancient custom, there were two institutions that were kind of universally accepted. The institution of polygamy, which means that men can have as many wives as they want and therefore men have all the power. Wives just get reduced to an object. The men have all the power. But the second one is the

institution of primogeniture. And primogeniture essentially says the firstborn son gets everything.

[24 : 06] He gets all the honor, all the wealth, all the money, all the blessing, and the others, well, best of luck to them. And what Robert Alter says is that when you read the Old Testament, one of the things you quickly see is that in every case of polygamy, it always ends in a train wreck.

It always ends in a train wreck. It wrecks the people physically, socially, psychology, their family, emotionally, and worst of all, spiritually.

And the great example of this, of course, is King David. King David is the greatest king in the Old Testament, but his treatment of women is not great. He's got a couple of wives, and one day he sees this lady bathing, and he says, I want to.

And he treats her just as an object to satisfy his own sexual desires. And so he pulls her to the palace, he arranges for her husband to get killed, he sleeps with her, and then he marries her.

Right? But as you read the Old Testament, one thing you see is that from that moment on, David's personal life, his family, his kingdom, his reign, and in fact, the entire nation of Israel goes absolutely downhill and never recovers.

[25 : 19] And what Robert Alter tells us is that God is never condoning this. He's challenging it. He's saying, can't you see that I've designed for man and woman to be united, kept for one another, and when you mess with that order, it never, ever works out well.

It always lends in heartache and pain and destruction. It's always a wreck. Secondly, think of primogeniture. When you read the Old Testament, who does God always choose?

He always chooses the one that nobody else chooses. He chooses Abel, not Cain. He chooses Jacob, not Esau. He chooses Isaac, not Ishmael. And even though Leah is the older sister of Rachel, Rachel's the beautiful one that everyone loves and gets invited to the parties and all that.

And God chooses Leah, the one that's despised and rejected, to be the great, great, great grandmother of King David and ultimately of the Messiah. And so Robert Alter is saying that when you read this, at first you think, that's disgusting.

How can that be in the Bible? How can God condone that? And he's saying, God's not condoning it. He's subverting it, not supporting it. Okay, so consider the fact that the Bible might not be teaching what we first think it teaches.

[26 : 31] The second thing is this. Consider the influence of your own personal, cultural bias.

Experts tell us that almost none of us can read something like the Bible or other ancient scriptures without our own cultural bias influencing the way that we read it.

We all come to it from a worldview, a lens that influences the way that we see it and what we think is right and wrong. Which means we all have unexamined assumptions that our cultural norms are correct and everyone else's are less than correct.

Right? And yet, there are parts of the world where other cultures find our cultural norms just very troubling. Let me put it lightly.

Okay? Does that make sense? So we all have our cultural norms. We think, this is just normal. This is the way the whole world operates. Everybody thinks like me. Until you go to another part of the

world and you realize, oh, wait, not everybody thinks like me.

Okay? We're a very international church. I'm sure we've all experienced that. In my own story, I don't think I understood what the Bible really meant about honoring your family or about the beauty of community until I moved to Hong Kong.

[27 : 42] Because Western culture is just far more individualistic. We don't honor our family, we don't honor our parents, and we're not as community-orientated as we are here in Asia. Right? And I consider myself an Asian.

So those Westerners are very different from us Asians. Right? I'm kind of saying the tongue-in-cheek. One of the things that's interesting is Christianity in the last 500 years, and maybe you could argue even earlier than that, has largely been influenced by white Caucasian Western theology.

Right? But that's changing. In the last 50 years or so, the majority of Christianity is shifting from white Caucasian Western theology to Africa and Asia are going to be the biggest Christian continents in years to come.

Which is good news for us, right? Africa and Asia are going to be the most Christian continents in the next 150, 200 years. Now one of the amazing things about the Bible is that it has the ability to both confront and challenge as well as affirm and encourage every culture.

No matter what your culture is, there's going to be parts of your culture that the Bible affirms and says that's good, and there's going to be parts of your culture that the Bible challenges. Because all of our cultures have part of it that align up with God's heart and part of it that are distinct from God's heart.

[29 : 08] And so the question is if you're going to take the Bible seriously, if you're going to take it to heart, no matter what culture or country you come from, there's going to be parts of the Bible that you think that doesn't make sense to me.

Why would God allow that? And there's going to be other parts that you think yeah, that makes complete sense to me. Tim Keller gives a great example. He says, most Western countries think that the Bible's teaching on sexual ethic is just repressive, it's archaic, it's out of date, and it should just be dismissed.

And yet most Western Christians love the Bible's teaching on forgiveness and mercy and turning the other cheek, right? But if you go to the Middle East, those two things swap around.

Many people in the Middle East will think actually the Bible's teaching on sexual ethics is pretty good, if not a little liberal, maybe you could tighten it up a little bit. And yet the Bible's teaching on forgiveness and mercy is just considered as weak and just offensive.

Why would you do that? That's just less people getting away with things unnecessarily. You see, there's parts of all of our culture that we like, or parts of all of our culture that affirms what the Bible says, but the Bible also challenge every part of us.

[30 : 19] And what that means is that if you're going to make sense of the Bible, if you really understand it for what it's saying, you can't read it imperialistically. You can't read it from the worldview that says, my culture is right and everything that disagrees with my culture must be wrong.

You've got to come up the Bible and say, God, where are you affirming my culture, but where are you challenging it? Where am I right and where am I wrong? And here's the other thing. If you serve a God that never challenges you, never confronts you, never challenges your culture, chances are you're worshipping a made-up God of our imagination, a God who we've made in our own image. But here's the problem. That God will never save you. That God will never deliver you. That God will never comfort you in the midst of the storms of life. That God will never be an anchor for your soul when your fear arises and when the storms come.

A God that is made in our image will never be there to minister and to comfort us. You must consider the Bible culturally. Okay, thirdly and finally, how are we doing?

Are we all right? Okay, thank you, Emily. Let's consider the Bible personally. Personally. At the end of Luke's gospel, very famously, Jesus dies, he rises from the dead and he's walking along this road between Jerusalem and the town called Emmaus and he comes across two disciples and the disciples don't recognize him.

[31 : 43] They're not one of the twelve originally, they're a bigger group of disciples. One's called Cleopas, we don't know the other name and Jesus comes up and says, hey, what are you talking about? And they say, Jesus of Nazareth, the man that we had hoped would save Israel, but he died

on the cross.

And Jesus kind of plays dumb and he asks them a few more questions and they say, who are you? Where have you been? Don't you know who Jesus was? And they're so disappointed, they say, we really hoped that he would deliver Israel, but he died.

And Jesus says to them, O slow of heart, do you not see that the Christ had to suffer and die for the sins of the world? And then Luke says that Jesus, starting with Moses and all the prophets explained to them all the scriptures concerning himself.

In other words, Jesus goes through the whole Old Testament and he shows them how the Old Testament points to the Christ, Moses. Don't you see how Moses is writing, but he's actually telling you about the Christ. Isaiah is writing, but he's actually telling you about the Christ.

Jeremiah is writing, but he's actually telling you about the Christ. David. And he goes through the whole Old Testament and shows them that actually the whole Bible is all about the Christ, the one that had to come and die on the cross.

[32 : 58] They go to the village, they have a meal, and at the end of the meal, Jesus leaves them. And as Jesus leaves them, suddenly they realize who it is that they've been speaking to. And they turn to one another and they say this, Did not our hearts burn within us when he opened up to us the scriptures?

Did not our hearts burn within us? And Greek scholars will tell us that what that word burns within us, what it means is an uncontrollable longing to speak to God or to pray.

In other words, they're saying, when Jesus opened up the scriptures, didn't you also feel your heart come alive in this desire to know God and to encounter him personally?

And what Luke is telling us here is that Jesus was showing them the scriptures, but he wasn't just showing them that they are intellectually stimulating. He wasn't just showing them that they are spiritually enlightening and rewarding.

He was showing them that they are personally inviting. That when you read the scriptures, it's not just, okay, that's interesting. It's an invitation by the living God to know him and to encounter him and to encounter his incredible love.

[34 : 14] Now, what does that mean? Edwin Clowney, Professor Edwin Clowney, writes this, and he says, there's two ways that you can read the Bible. You can either read it as if it's all about you or you can read it as if it's all about Christ.

So when we read the Bible as if it's all about us, we read it as if it's telling us what does God want me to do? How does God want me to behave? What do I need to do in order to save myself and get the blessings of God?

Or, you can read the Bible Christocentrically, which means it's all about Christ. And when we do that, we see that Christ is at the center. It's all about him and what he's done to rescue us, to save us, and to bring us into relationship with God.

Either you read it where you're at the center and it's a self-help guide to save yourself, or where Christ is at the center and it's the story of what God has done to bring us into relationship with him by Jesus dying on the cross that we can know him and love him.

In fact, look at verse 21. The disciples say this. He says, we had hoped that Jesus would rescue Israel, but he died on the cross. You see what they're doing there?

[35 : 22] They're doing the exact thing we spoke about in point two. They're reading it from their own cultural perspective. They've read the Bible, but they haven't understood it. And Jesus comes and shows them, you know what it says, but you don't know what it's saying.

And what it's saying is that I am the Messiah and I've come to die on the cross to rescue you, to save you. Friends, when we read the Bible Christocentrically, we discover that the Scriptures are not only reliable, not only relevant, but they are personally inviting.

Jesus says to us here, don't you see all the Scriptures from Moses all the way through the Old Testament is all about the Christ. In other words, what he's saying, the whole Bible from beginning to end is God's great plan to bring those that are far from God and don't know him back into relationship, to be included in the family, to know him and experience him and to encounter him.

Chris earlier in the call to worship spoke about how God's Word is encouraging. Well, that's because Jesus is encouraging. God's Word is hopeful. Well, that's because Jesus is hopeful.

God's Word is enlightening. That's because Jesus is enlightening because the whole Scriptures are all about Jesus. If we read the Bible, if it's all about us, what we'll do is we'll reduce the Scriptures to

a rule book, a manual, a documentation to tell us how to live.

[36 : 46] Friends, the problem with a rule book, with a manual, with the documentation how to live is that, as we all know, a rule book doesn't warm the heart. A rule book is never going to elicit worship and adoration.

A manual about how to make your own way to heaven is never going to be there to rescue you, to comfort you, to save you, or deliver you. Throughout the New Testament, we're coming to land now.

Throughout the New Testament, consider this. Who does Jesus reserve His strongest criticism and most stinging rebukes for? It's not for sinners and it's not for those that have failed.

Jesus always reserves His strongest rebuke and criticism for the religious leaders, those who have spent their lives poring over the Scriptures, studying it, trying to understand it.

Why does Jesus do it? Because though they know what the Bible says intellectually, they've missed what it's all about. And Jesus, in John's Gospel, in chapter 5, He comes and He says to religious leaders, He says this, You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life, but you refuse to come to Me.

[37 : 58] See what He's saying? He's saying the Bible is not just there for us to study intellectually. The Bible is not just spiritually enlightening. The Scriptures are there as a personal invitation to know and encounter the living God, to have our lives turned around by Him.

Friends, don't read the Bible as if it's a book of instruction. Don't read it as if it's some magical book to give you insight or wisdom to how to improve your life, how to give you wisdom or some advice to secure favor with God.

Read it to encounter Jesus, the living God, to discover Him for who He is, why He came, why He died on the cross, but most importantly, come to God's Word as an invitation to encounter Jesus.

Now, very quickly, what does that mean practically? How do you actually do that? If you're a Christian here this morning, I want to ask you two questions. Are you getting into God's Word? Are you getting into God's Word? Are you reading it? And secondly, are you reading it to meet Jesus? Now, you say, how do I do that? Well, you've got to read it worshipfully.

[39 : 05] You've got to read God's Word and as you do that, don't just say, oh, that's interesting, I didn't know that before. You've got to ask, how am I reading leading me to worship God? How's it causing me to adore Him? You've got to read it confessionally.

You've got to see that what the Word says, how's it challenging your own heart and your own life? You read something in the Bible about being generous and you confess and repent. Say, God, actually, that's not true of my life.

Help me to be more generous than you. You read something in the Bible about community and you realize I'm individualistic and self-orientated. Say, God, I confess, I repent, I'm sorry for my individualism.

I want to be more like you. You read something in the Bible about God, I don't need Jesus. And you say, God, actually, I'm so sorry. I'm more concerned about pleasing people, people liking me than telling them the truth.

I'm so sorry, God, forgive me. You've got to read the Bible worshiply, you've got to read the Bible confessionally. Thirdly, you've got to read the Bible joyfully. You've got to let the Bible lead you to the place of taking joy and delight in who God is, finding your identity and your security in Him.

[40 : 09] What happens if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian? You're not a follower of Jesus? Can you get into the Bible? I want to encourage you this week, come to the Bible and read it.

And as you do that, pray this very simple prayer. So Jesus, I'm not sure if I believe in you. I'm not sure if you're real. But if you are real, won't you reveal yourself to me in the Scriptures?

If you are who you say you are, won't you show me from your Word? Come and chat to me afterwards, come and ask questions when you're standing here. I'd love to show you where to start in the Bible, how to get in this week.

But this week, whether you're a Christian or not a Christian, get into God's Word and go and meet Jesus, encounter Him personally. Friends, let's not make the mistake that so many have made.

You can trust the Bible historically. According to any metric you use, it stands up, it's credible and reliable. Come to the Bible and read it. Not as you want to impose your culture upon it, but as God is what He's saying.

[41 : 09] And there you'll discover the truth of who God is. But thirdly, and most importantly, come to the Bible personally. Don't just come to learn some academic information. Come to meet the person of Jesus, the one who died on the cross, the one whose arms are stretched out wide, the one who invites you, the one who's come to save and to rescue, the one who's come to bring you to His family.

Come and meet Jesus personally in His Word this week. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, thank You so much for Your Word.

God, that Your Word is living and active. It's alive and real. It's not just a historical book, though it is historically reliable. It's not just an interesting book, though culturally it is full of interesting things.

God, Your Word is alive and real. God, I pray for us as a church that we'll be a church that loves Your Word and is rooted in Your Word and anchored in Your Word. But God, not arrogantly, not proudly, not thinking that we know better than others.

God, we want to come to Your Word humbly. We want to come on our knees. We want to come and encounter You, the living God there. Jesus, come and open the eyes of our hearts to not just see and understand the Scriptures, but to see You there.

[42 : 25] We pray these things in Your great and gracious name. Amen. Amen. Amen.