

So That You Will Know

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[0 : 0 0] So, I run a graduate program in Christian apologetics. If you don't know what apologetics is, that's not unusual. Sometimes we have large conferences devoted to apologetics, and half the crowd attending the conference really doesn't know what apologetics is.

So, let me give you a brief definition, and it's very simple. It's offering reasons for faith, offering reasons to put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what apologetics does.

It's not just for, you know, super intellectual people or people who just love to study philosophy and things. It's for everybody. It's something that we've actually been commanded to do in the Scriptures. In fact, the great apologetics verse is in 1 Peter 3.15, where Peter writes this, always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. Yet, do this with gentleness and respect. And that last part is very important. We want to be able to engage people and do our very best to accurately answer their questions, but always doing this with gentleness and respect. If we're not doing it with gentleness and respect, they might understand our answer, and it's even a good answer, but it's not going to have an impact on them. So, we're ambassadors of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we need to deliver these wonderful messages with gentleness, reverence, and respect. Well, running an apologetics program, I get a chance to go to a lot of churches, and some churches are a bit resistant to offering reasons for faith. That's a bit strange to me because I think the Scriptures are pretty clear that this is something we ought to be doing. And so, I've really poured over the Scriptures looking for good biblical justification for doing what I do. You know, it actually encourages me a great deal to know that what I'm doing is supported by the Bible. So, I've sat down in my comfortable Bible reading chair, and I've read through the entire Bible looking for the ways God loves to demonstrate the truth of His message.

He likes to demonstrate who He is, His great power, His great wisdom, and His great love for us. He likes to demonstrate it so that we walk around with knowledge. He likes us to have knowledge. Now, some people think, well, maybe that's not the way we're supposed to do this. Aren't we supposed to have faith, not knowledge? I've got to help you out with this one if you're confused by that. Knowledge is not the opposite of faith. In fact, let me read to you something that came from an editorial piece in a Los Angeles newspaper. It's from an engineering professor at the University of Southern California.

And he wrote this piece because he was annoyed that the government was helping support faith-based initiatives in the community. And so, he didn't like the concept of faith entering into the public sphere. But here's what this engineering professor, this unbelieving engineering professor, says faith is.

[3 : 0 7] He says, faith is unwarranted belief. Faith is belief without evidence or despite evidence to the contrary. Faith occurs when a person believes that something is true even though he suspects it's false.

It takes large doses of such faith to support the very existence of gambling casinos, psychic hotlines, astrology columns, mall Santas, and most organized religions.

Is that what faith is? Good heavens, no. The problem is very many people in the churches I've been to, Christians walk around with an idea of this as faith. And notice he thinks faith is really the opposite of the opposite of knowledge. It's believing things that you actually suspect aren't true.

But you're just going to close your eyes and you're going to leap into them. What he's describing here, I call blind leaping, not biblical faith. Biblical faith is very simply trusting Jesus. It's trusting God to save you. It's putting your faith or your trust in Him. And that trust can be built upon a wonderful, solid foundation of knowledge. In fact, that's the greatest way to come to faith is if the knowledge has compelled you in that direction. So I'm going to trust Jesus because, wow, this thing has to be true. God was very generous in giving us the evidence and good reasons to understand that His message is true, His Word and His identity. So if you read through the Scriptures, you find this constantly God demonstrating the truth of His identity and His Word. Now, I don't have time to give you a whole lot of these passages, but let me give you my favorite from the Old Testament.

I think you're going to like this one. You've probably been delighted to read this passage yourself. But it's Elijah, the prophet Elijah, squaring off against the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 16, 17, 18. It's quite a remarkable passage. I love the prophet Elijah, by the way, don't you? He's not a writing prophet like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. He's a doing prophet. You know, he just wanders around in the desert, you know, and I always picture him looking kind of scraggly. He's got hair going out here, and he's got a funny look on his face and a scraggly beard. He's got a sword. He's marching around in a sword and sandals. And can you imagine he would wander into town what the little children would do, you know, trying throwing rocks at him and hiding, and he'd snarl at them.

[6 : 00] He's quite a figure, you know, if you really think about him, somebody very unusual. Well, it turns out in 1 Kings, the land of Israel is being dominated by a foreign type of worship, a worship that is not pleasing to Yahweh at all. It's Baal worship. And there are busloads of prophets of Baal out there, and they're all supported by Ahab and Jezebel, the king and queen of the land. And Elijah is annoyed at this, so he wants to deal with it. And here's the way he dealt with it in 1 Kings. In fact, let me give the setup here in 1 Kings chapter 16, starting with verse 29.

In the 38th year of Asa, king of Judah, Ahab, son of Omri, became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel 22 years. Ahab, son of Omri, did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. How would you like people to be writing that in the Bible about you? Oh, goodness, that's not a great epitaph. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nabat, but he also married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbal, king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him. My goodness. So, Elijah understands this, and he wants to confront this.

And it says in chapter 18, verse 17, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. This was going to be quite a meeting. When he saw Elijah, he said, is that you, you troubler of Israel? And Elijah writes or says, I have not made trouble for Israel, but you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. Now, summon the people from all over Israel to meet me and bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table.

So, Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, how long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him, but if Baal is God, follow him. Well, this is quite a setup. So, Elijah proposes this little contest between him, the one outstanding prophet of God in the land, and then 400 plus prophets of Baal and Asherah.

So, that's quite a contest. One man against busloads of false prophets. So, he proposes that they climb up onto Mount Carmel and they build two altars, right? And what they're going to do is they're going to put a slab of meat on top of these altars, and they are going to pray to their respective deities, and they're going to see who sends down fire from heaven to consume the offering.

[9 : 19] So, the prophets of Baal get to go first. They build a lovely altar over here. They put a fine slab of meat on there. The sun is low in the sky. It's in the early morning, and they get to go first.

And so, they begin to chant and dance. You know, I have no idea how they did this, but just imagine. And they're calling out to Baal to send down fire to consume the offering. And there's 400 of them, so they can take turns, and everybody can be very vigorous in their activity. And they're moving along quite well. The sun is getting higher in the sky, but nothing's happening. There's no sparks.

There's no smoke. There's nothing. There's birds flying over, and there's flies gathering on the meat, you know. It's not going particularly well. So, they ramp it up. They start moving faster.

They chant more. Elijah is over here taunting them. He's saying things like, hey, guys, shout louder. Your God probably can't hear you. He actually says this, you know, hey, guys, he might be on the toilet. Keep working at it, you know. So, they're working at it, and it's not going well. Nothing's happening. And so, their time was getting close to the end, and so they pulled out, says the text, swords and spears and began to cut themselves, hoping that a little bit of blood on the skin would attract Baal's attention.

So, they're staggering around. They're bleeding. They're falling and fainting. There's probably a pile of prophets here, but their time is up, and now it's Elijah's turn. Elijah builds a lovely altar over here, puts this nice slab of meat on top of it, and he has people dig a trench around the altar, and he has people bring in buckets of water to pour over the offering, and it's running down into the trench. I was teaching this to some small children one time, fourth graders, and I asked them, so why do you think Elijah had to pour water over the offering? And one small kid raised his hand right away. He had a good answer. I called him, and he said, to make gravy.

[11 : 30] So, yeah. I'm sure he could have got the answer out of these guys down here. So, it's Elijah's turn. The prophets of Baal failed miserably. He's got his altar built. He's got the water poured, and he says a little prayer, and I always picture him kind of winking at God.

And down comes fire from heaven, takes up the offering, laps up the water in the trench, probably takes up a couple of prophets of Baal for good measure. It's a definitive demonstration that Yahweh's God and Baal is not. Definitive demonstration. And the text says that all of Israel was there watching this. Probably not every person in Israel, but leaders from all the tribes. And they witnessed this. Now, think about it. What do you think they did once this little contest was over? Do you think they walked away going, huh? You know, religion's a tricky thing. You know, who can know? It's all so mysterious, and it's about all that's going on inside of you, and who can really know what's going on?

No, that's not what they did at all. They said, oh my goodness, Yahweh's God, Baal is not, and Yahweh seems a little mad. And so they ran for the caves. They ran for to hide in the clefts of rocks and so on. No, no. It was a definitive demonstration. Yahweh's God and Baal is not. God loves to demonstrate the truth of His identity and the truth of His Word. There are so many examples in the Old Testament of this. It's a bit difficult to choose others. But when you begin to roll right into the New Testament, this almost gets too much. I remember as a young man reading the New Testament for the first time.

I became a Christian when I was a 17-year-old, a senior in high school. And I'm reading through the New Testament thinking, these followers of Jesus are kind of obsessed with Jesus and His resurrection. And I was reading passages like this. Get this, 2 Peter 1.16. 2 Peter 1.16. Peter writes, for we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. John takes it several steps further in 1 John 1.1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched, this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

It's like they're saying, no, don't you make this mistake for a second. This really happened. It was not some figment of our imagination. It was not some mystical dream or spiritual vision. He was here.

[14 : 30] We saw Him. We heard Him. We touched Him. This is what we're proclaiming. They wanted to make sure nobody got it wrong on that count. There was knowledge involved in this. It was not some mystical apparition. Now, Jesus Himself was big on demonstrating the truth of His teaching.

In fact, really the whole center point of Christianity is about a demonstration. When Jesus was wandering around the Holy Land during His ministry, He was often confronted by Jewish teachers of the law. And on several occasions, they confronted Him and said, hey, show us a sign, right? Show us a sign. Give us some evidence that you are who you say you are. We need something going. We need a sign. And Jesus would respond, I'm paraphrasing a little bit here, but He'd say, I'm not going to show a sign to a bunch of rascals. Except for one. Tear down this temple and I will raise it up again on the third day. And John tells us he was talking about the temple of His body.

The resurrection of Jesus was going to be the great sign, right? And it really is the center point of Christian demonstration. It's something that sets Christianity apart from the other great world religious traditions in rather dramatic fashion. And it also makes Christianity testable. The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 says that if Jesus did not come back from the dead, our faith is worthless.

It's empty. It's of no account. That is a crazy statement. You don't find that kind of statement in other world religious literature. I consider that passage in 1 Corinthians 15 by the Apostle Paul to be one of the strangest passages in all of religious literature. It makes Christianity testable. And Jesus was interested in people having knowledge. And His resurrection from the dead in front of eyewitnesses was going to be the great sign that He truly was the Messiah, the very Son of God, and had conquered death for all of us.

Now, Jesus showed His love for demonstration in another way as well. Mark chapter 2. Thank you so much for reading the passage this morning. I'm glad you were able to hear it from the text because I think I'm going to give a bit of a dramatic reading. I'm not going to display it in terms of interpretive dance. I won't go quite that far, and I didn't bring my leotard, so that's not going to work anyway. But I love this passage. Actually, I love the gospel of Mark in general. If any of you have ever studied the ancient Greek language, you know, Koine Greek, you get to appreciate the gospel of Mark because it's got this very simple cadence. It's obviously written by a person who was not super good at the Greek language. But so it has, you know, it's almost like it's written by a 10-year-old or something, the way it plods along. But it also has this texture of authenticity that's quite remarkable.

[17 : 48] In fact, just a little sideline here on the gospel of Mark. I've been part of a team exploring some ancient manuscripts that have been found. There's been some new manuscripts found, and I don't know if you know about these yet, but they've been found in a very unusual place. Ancient Egyptians around the time of Jesus and the apostles, they loved to have funeral masks when they died. Now, we're not talking about great kings and queens who had gold masks and all that. Even people who had just modest incomes would like a burial mask. It was an Egyptian burial tradition. So if you were an everyday Egyptian and you wanted a funeral mask and you couldn't afford a gold variety, what you would do is you would have somebody make you a paper mache mask. They'd take papyrus fragments that they found in local garbage cans, basically, and they would use some glue and patch them together and make a mask.

Well, it turns out the papyrus fragments that they were using to make these masks contains all kinds of interesting things like letters to kings, pieces of the writings of Homer, the great Greek poet, people's laundry lists and grocery lists, and on occasion, a piece of the Bible, for goodness sakes.

So once this was discovered, we were collecting these masks and dissolving them in a solution that wouldn't harm the manuscripts. And they'd float apart, and we'd take the scraps, and we'd read them, and we'd found several passages of Scripture. And these date to the earliest fragments ever found of these books. And we found a fragment of the Gospel of Mark that almost certainly dates back into the first century, probably just a decade or two after the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have never had a fragment that went that early. The earliest fragment we have had before this is the John Ryland's papyrus, which dates at about 125 AD. It's a fragment of the Gospel of John found in the Egyptian desert. This predates it by 30 or 40 years. It's a fragment of the Gospel of Mark. So this dashes the objection to Scripture that it was written very late, many generations after the events that they speak of.

And hence, they could have been doctored or tampered with. No, no. We've got fragments now pushing right back on to the time of these events. So these announcements will be coming, so keep an eye out for them. So back to the Gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 2. In Mark chapter 2, it's a big deal. Jesus is coming to Capernaum. Jesus is coming to Capernaum. Capernaum's a sleepy fishing village on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Nothing happens in Capernaum. It's a dead zone. I mean, you fish, you cook fish, you sell fish, and you just live your life. It's a bit boring. So when there is a fellow like Jesus of Nazareth coming to town, this isn't a ticket, right? This is something you want to make sure you attend.

There's no movie theaters or video games or concert halls in Capernaum. If a guy like Jesus is coming to town, you get there, you get there early, and you attempt to get a front row seat because this is going to be the best thing that happened in town in a very long time. Jesus is coming to Capernaum. So then the text says that he was set up in a home teaching. It was very likely Peter's home. Peter had a home there, and it's likely Jesus had set up in his home to give this little talk. I always imagine Jesus giving a nice talk on the kingdom of God.

[21 : 53] But interestingly, the focus of the text is not on what Jesus was talking about, but all these strange occurrences taking place around him. Now, people wanted to get there, so many got there early and filled the home. In fact, the text says it was filled to overflowing. People were packed out, maybe 10 deep outside, craning their necks, hoping to hear what's going on inside the home. Then the story takes a quick shift. So it moves away from this message of Jesus in this home to four guys, four men. I love these guys.

How about you, there's guys like this all over this room too. These are guys who are gonna go hear Jesus, and they said, wait a minute, let's go get the paralytic, right? The guy who can't use his legs.

So these men are filled with compassion, and they want to go get their friend who can't use his legs, which is a terrible sentence in those days when you really have to use your body to make a living. This man was probably dependent on people giving him things and helping him out in every way.

So they had compassion. They run down to get him. They put him on a mat, and they trot him down to where Jesus is teaching. And they stop, and they look, and they go, oh, they can't get near the place.

It's jammed. Here's why I like these guys. They were not daunted by this. They found a way to get this poor man up on the roof of the dwelling, right? They found a way to get the paralytic up on the roof.

[23 : 23] Now, I don't know how they did that. The text doesn't say, but I'm imagining maybe two throwers and two catchers, you know, or maybe a special rope and pulley system, you know, but they get this guy up on the roof, and they start to dig through. They're pulling up tiles, and they're starting to dig around, you know, and could you imagine the scene inside as people are watching the ceiling shaking, and there's dust falling, and a leaf. And suddenly, a little beam of light breaks through, and the light is hitting the dust in the air, and it looks very spiritual and ethereal, and all the people who got there earlier were going, I'm so glad I got here, you know. So, and I'm sure Jesus was standing there going, what in the world is going on here? The hole gets bigger, and a head pops through.

A guy looks around, the head disappears, and the hole gets even bigger. Light is pouring in, there's dust everywhere. As if this is not strange enough, moments later, the ceiling of this little dwelling begins to give birth. They have this poor man probably wrapped in his mat with some ropes, and they're stuffing him through the hole they've made in the roof.

They're pushing and pop. This man goes through, and he's got a hold of a rope. His arms are plenty good. He's got the rope, and he's spinning around, and he plops on the floor, you know, cross-legged, and dust puffs up, and now there's light pouring in. There's dust everywhere. There's four heads poking through the big hole at the top now, and as the dust begins to settle, you can see everybody leaning forward at Jesus standing there, thinking, what in the world is the rabbi gonna say about this?

And so, Jesus sees this scene. This man is sitting in front of him. The dust is settling. There's light pouring into the room. Still plenty of dust in the air. And Jesus says this, son, your sins are forgiven.

Some of you have the same look on your face, I think, that they may have had. You're kind of like... Now, okay, here's the funny thing when I read this text. Why didn't the crowd leap to their feet and go, what a happy day? You know, this man's sins have been forgiven. This is a great day. You know, why didn't they do that? Well, if this man's sins have had really been forgiven, that is an invisible spiritual act, right? And you can't see it happen, so you kind of have to trust the guy who's saying it. There's...some of you are probably medical doctors and nurses and so on here, medical professionals of various sorts. I think you would agree with me that there's no LED light in a person's temple that starts flashing when their sins have been forgiven, right? There's...you can't go to the doctor and say, doc, you got to check this...the sin state I have. And he takes some instrument and he plunges it into you and pulls it out and goes, nope, you're good. You know, there's nothing like that, right? It's not a physical event. It's a spiritual event. And so, you have to trust the person who's talking about it. And I think Jesus knew that, right? So he says, son, your sins are forgiven. And of course, the text says that there were some Jewish teachers of the law in the room going, hey, wait a minute, who can forgive sins but God alone? And I'm sure Mark throws that in there to, you know, just give everybody the clue. That's exactly right. That's the question people should have been asking. But most of the people, I think, were just going, can he do that? Is that all right? And their partner at the event would say something like, you know, well, let's...whatever we do, let's hang in there. The word on the street is that he can make lunch. So we'll just wait for this. So, son, your sins are forgiven. There it is. And Jesus leaves it hanging in the air. In fact, just to give you the same kind of example, say the door opens in the back of the room here. And in walks a man with a long white robe, right? And a beard. Maybe he's got a big hat and he's got a staff and sandals. And maybe he has some little disciples following him or something. And he walks in. He comes down here and walks right up to the stage and pushes me aside.

[28 : 08] He looks like Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings movies. You know, Gandalf the White. And he pushes me aside and he says, lo. Because that's what religious guys say for some reason.

Or maybe he says, behold. Or maybe he really, you know, does a great number on it and says, lo and behold. And he stands up here and he's a very impressive figure. And this is a very unusual circumstance. They have a man dressed all in white with a big hat and a staff coming up, pushing me aside and saying this. And he says to you, my children, your sins.

They are forgiven. Now, why aren't you leaping to your feet, you know, and going, what a happy day. This is great. Our sins have been forgiven. You know, Gandalf has told us so, you know. Well, this is a very strange circumstance, but you get the point. It sounds interesting and somewhat attractive to have your sins forgiven.

But you don't know if Gandalf can really do it, right? Even if he's proclaiming it, you don't know what's really going on. Because if it's true, it's an invisible spiritual act. It's exactly where Jesus was. Son, your sins are forgiven. But he did not want people left in a state of unknowing.

And this is the big crescendo of this particular biblical story. Jesus says this. He says, so that you will know, so that you will know, so that you will know that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins. Pick up your mat and go home. This guy gets to his feet, maybe for the first time in his life. He scoops up his mat and he starts to walk out of the room. And people are backing up, making a way for this guy as he walks out. And the gospel of Mark uses the strongest language in, uh, use the strongest words in that language. They were astonished. They had never seen anything like this. And guess what? Everybody in that room had excellent reason to believe that God could indeed forgive sins. Because Jesus demonstrated it through a miracle right there in front of people's eyes. The man they knew for years not to be able to use his leg was suddenly on them walking out of the room with his mat. They'd never seen anything like it. There was excellent reason to believe that Jesus could indeed forgive sins. I think there's excellent reason to believe that Jesus has come back from the dead. I think it's one of the best attested facts of the ancient world. I've studied this for years. And I think God was incredibly generous giving us the evidence that Jesus truly was alive at point A, dead at point B, and alive again at point C. We can know that. And I use the word know intentionally. We can know that to be true.

[31 : 03] And not just in some spiritual way. We can know it that way if we'd like. But also the facts of history testify to that. And I wish I could give you a case for the resurrection of Jesus right now, but don't have time for that this morning. Maybe another time. But the evidence is compelling and actually quite overwhelming in terms of the testimony you get from ancient history. It's remarkable. Jesus came back from the dead. And you can know it to be true from the facts of history, as well as from the Holy Spirit testifying in your heart. God wants us to know. He wants us to know that our sins can be forgiven.

And he wants us to know that we can have eternal life by trusting in him. Now, some of you may be hearing this for the first time. This is the real deal. You can know this to be true. And I encourage you to study it out. Think through it carefully. Read the text of Scripture and read some very smart people who helped to interpret that text. And what you will find is Jesus is indeed the Son of God, the unique Savior of humankind, who not only can forgive sins, but after he was killed by a Roman execution team on a cross, he came back from the dead on the third day. And you can know these things to be true. And by putting your trust in him, saying, all right, I'm pretty sure I'm not going to be able to save myself. Jesus, I'm going to trust you. You do that this morning. You will enter into a whole new existence. You will be a child of God. You will be born again. And you will inherit eternal life. This is something we can jump up and shout praises about. Join me in a word of prayer.

Our Heavenly Father, our great King, what a joy it is to serve you. What a joy it is to know that you didn't leave us stranded in our own time without a witness, a witness that you are who you say you are and that your word is true. Lord, if there's any among us today who are wondering if they should commit to you, I just pray that your Holy Spirit would move in their hearts, that they would understand that they've been alienated or separated from you and that you can bring them back, that you can forgive their sins, you can make their lives right, right now, right at this moment, and that you could give them eternal life, give them a new birth and a new outlook on life starting today.

In Jesus' name, amen. Thank you all so much.