

Doubt your doubt

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[0:00] Now I want you to imagine this scenario happening. Before I explain it, it is very far fetched. So you're going to have to go with me. I want you to imagine, I've also used this illustration before, most of my illustrations are just repeated.

But I just want you to imagine, imagine that as we're sat here this morning, unbeknown to us, right outside in the road, right outside, there's an organised fight. It's Old Firm Day, it's Rangers Celtic, and for some reason, go with me, there's an organised hardcore hooligans have decided to meet just outside and just have a scrap.

It's all happening outside whilst we're having the service in here, we can't hear them, don't go with me details, it's okay, just go with me. Police turn up, half the village is out there watching it, trying to understand all the commotion. At last, while we're all inside, it's just as we're about to finish, it's all died down, everything's moved away, nothing to see here, and everybody's moved on.

And as we're standing here, the service finishes, and 500 people burst through the front door. This room doesn't hold 500, so we'd be a bit squashed, but as I say, go with me.

500 people burst through the door, and as I said, spare the details, but five people come in and they're all giving it about what they've just seen. All slightly different stories, all versions of the carry-on that they've just seen, because they're different people and they've arrived on the scene at different times and they've seen it all from different angles.

[1:40] But there's one common thread. All the accounts agree that it happened outside. Some of them even got caught up in it and they've maybe caught in the crossfire, they've got a war wound to show.

Imagine that happening. If you had 500 people, all stories agreeing, it would take a brave one of us to stand up after the last person as explained and shout, didn't happen. Not having it. No chance. No chance did that happen.

Why? Because we would have had 500 eyewitnesses of the same event. What we're going to unpack this morning is exactly what we read in the Gospels, is why we can have certainty in the Bible.

Because just like you trust eyewitnesses, we can have certainty for it, because the Bible, the Gospels, are written from eyewitness accounts. These four opening verses function kind of in Luke's Gospel. They function as, you know, if you ever read a book and there's a prologue, they function as a prologue to a two-part work. Luke's Gospel is kind of the first book.

But Luke also wrote the book of Acts, and there's a prologue, a little mini-prologue in that as well. And in the prologue, verses 1 to 4, Luke is telling us how he's gone about writing this Gospel, his good news account.

[3:14] Now, he didn't wait for 500 people to burst into the room to tell him. But he went around speaking to every person he could find that he saw, that he knew that saw, that met and spoke with Jesus of Nazareth.

Right from the time that Jesus was born as a baby, all the way through to when Jesus ascended to heaven. These opening verses, these four opening verses, they're there to give us confidence that when we read what happened, that all of it is grounded in eyewitness accounts.

It's real people who saw and reported the same things, yes, from different perspectives, from different angles, who saw Jesus at different times. But their accounts together give us a true account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Written not only to convey historical detail, but also to illustrate the significance and meaning of this man.

To make sense that Jesus isn't just a good story, but actually his story has eternal significance.

[4:32] You know, our culture paints a different picture, doesn't it, of the Bible? Well, the picture our culture paints is that, you know, the Bible is just historical trivia. It's just subjective folklore.

The problem is, is that when we hear people kind of talk about the Bible in that negative way, when we hear that, it sometimes, depending on what day it is and how we feel, it can undermine our confidence in it.

It can give us doubts and we're like, oh man, I've never heard, that's kind of a strong argument. And we can be tempted with doubt about the Bible. These four short verses bring relief from lingering doubt.

They bring relief from our culture's misguided understanding of the book that we hold here. And so that we can have certainty to the historical events of Jesus' earthly existence and to the life-altering meaning it has for ours.

And so, you know, really there's a great opportunity in the Word of God today is that, so that for every time a doubt creeps in, or maybe you might have a mountain of doubts, but wherever you are on kind of the doubt spectrum, actually the opportunity is that you can silence them.

[5:52] These four verses make us doubt the doubt and give us certainty. The principle then that we've got to kick off is that the Gospel accounts provide certainty that God's covenant promises are true and fulfilled in Jesus.

This is where we get it. The principle, it comes directly from the passage. Gospel gives us certainty that God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus.

Now, Luke is not just some random bloke. You know, he did, he's, Luke was, he was a doctor. He was a physician, a scientist.

And doctors, especially, you know, in the Greco-Roman world, it's where actually you can trace back the history of medicine, modern medicine, began with the Greeks, can trace its medicine's historical heritage.

One thing that you could say about a Greek doctor was that they were thorough. They went about collecting evidence with precision and accuracy. You look how Luke writes, we write, he has investigated.

[7:01] It's like a GP analyzes all the evidence and symptoms that a patient presents before making a diagnosis. Luke has done this, he's investigated, he's spoken carefully with everyone he could, who had met, who had heard, who had saw Jesus.

But there's something a little bit different. Luke has done far more than gather just hearsay. His investigations have been careful. He has collected eyewitness evidence.

And then he's taken it all away to study. But it's from that careful research that what he writes, it's not just a loose compilation of stories, but we read it as an orderly account.

What does that mean? Ordered in part, chronologically, we know that it'd be, you know, he starts the birth at the beginning, kind of the resurrection or ascension at the end. But above all, it's arranged in an order to explain the significance of who Jesus is and why he came.

That what Jesus fulfilled needs to be front and centre. Perhaps you can picture Luke, you know, his eyewitness evidence in the one hand and the Old Testament in the other.

[8:19] Ordering his account, piecing it together to show the significance of this man's life. A huge clue that this is how he went about it, we read in verse 1.

Just look with me, he says, he's undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have, here we have it, that have been fulfilled amongst us. What that means is that the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fulfilment of what the Old Testament was all about.

It's the fulfilment of what the Old Testament people of God were waiting and hoping for for hundreds of years. It's what the Old Testament was pointing forwards to from the very beginning that Jesus Christ fulfils every single promise that God has ever made.

Jesus, where Adam failed in the garden, Jesus resisted temptation. Whereas Israel failed in the promised land, Jesus resisted.

Jesus is the better Moses who leads his people not out of Egyptian slavery, but slavery to sin. He's the better David. He's the descendant of David, the king who sits on his throne forever.

[9:42] He's the Passover lamb who dies in the place of his people to set them free. He's the better priest who offers himself and he fulfils the law completely with perfect obedience.

Jesus never puts a foot wrong and never sins. Everything in the Old Testament is pointing forwards to Jesus. They are just the shadow, but Jesus is the real deal.

You know that when you see a shadow on the floor, you can tell if you see a shadow, most of the time what it's a shadow of. But if you just saw the shadow and you weren't looking at what it was a shadow of, it would be vague, it's not clear.

You have to look up from the shadow to see what the shadow is of. It's there that you see it with clarity. Everything in the Old Testament is a shadow, but Jesus is the real deal.

You look up at Jesus and everything that you read makes it crystal clear that it's all pointing forward to Jesus Christ. When we read the Gospels, when we read everything that he's done, it's like it's all come into focus.

[11:02] He's writing to Theophilus. Theophilus, now you can know the certainty of the things you've been taught ever since you were a little boy. He can know that everything he's taught, the promises of God, are true and yes in him.

And we can know that too. That is the point as we read it, that we can have confidence that this man is fulfilling every promise and it is certain in him that what we read actually happened.

If all that evidence is so clear, if it's so clear, you do wonder, well, why did, you know, it's just, if it's there and it's so obvious, why did Luke go to all this effort?

You'd think no one would doubt ever again, right? If it's, but that's not the reality, is it? It is that we all go through doubts, which brings us to our problem.

Problem is that we remain uncertain with doubt and insecurity. The problem we have, it's implied, isn't it, that we struggle. Theophilus, he writes it so that Paul, Theophilus can be certain, which suggests that there's been a bit of doubt in his mind.

[12:16] Doubt happens to everyone. There are countless opinions on what the Bible is and how we read it. What we actually think, that question is one of the most important we'll ever ask.

What is the Bible? And it's actually, is it God's word? Is it written by a divine author to you so that when we read it, God is actually speaking to you?

Do we believe that? Is it reliable or not? And skepticism, doubt is on a spectrum. It ranges from the outright denial of the whole Bible, it's just kind of fantasy, to perhaps more, you know, people have honest questions about specifics.

The specifics, you know, when the rate goes into kind of the cultural hot potato subjects, when it challenges lifestyle. So doubt, skepticism, it's on a spectrum, it has lots of motives.

Being skeptical means, you know, those who, when it can range to the outright denial. The problem with skepticism, in the wrong way, is that it means actually that you don't have to engage with when the Bible confronts your life, if you think it's just make-believe.

[13:37] The doubt, there can be genuine questions and we encourage that and you should have genuine questions, but sometimes the doubt can just be a front. It can be a smoke screen.

Something you can stand behind rather than having actually the sinful desires confronted. It kind of filters out the hard truths. You know, if it's just, if you decide what it is, then you don't have to deal with the things that are difficult.

You filter them out. If that is you, and it may well be, it is worth asking and perhaps being honest with the questions you have. Is it that you have genuine, honest questions?

If you do, that's brilliant. But is it that you just don't really want to follow Jesus? Be honest with yourself. So there's the skeptics, the doubts can come because of skepticism.

But doubts can also come when we go through a rough time. We perhaps don't doubt the Bible, but we doubt God's character. How can God be good when all this is going on in my life?

[14:51] We doubt his goodness. For the skeptic who can sometimes hide behind doubt, lifestyle is protected.

If I can explain this away as irrelevant, I continue living how I want. You know, maybe they think in intellect, the intellect can be the God.

I'm not as primitive as those Christians who believe in, you know, a man with a grey beard in the sky. Lifestyle and intellect sit on the throne of the heart.

The skeptic looks at the word of God and decides that it submits to him and not the other way around. For the hurting believer, doubting the character of God, you know, it exposes and this is hard for us to grapple with.

It can expose very subtly and very quietly that what's going on in our lives that it became, that can be, the circumstances can be the place of security.

[15:56] We've got, we've all had this when things are good in life, when circumstances are smooth, when you're getting a full night's sleep at home, work is, you know, peace is good at work, when there's a spring in your step and we've all done this where we can tie God's goodness to those experiences.

I'm not saying suffering isn't hard, it is and you're not on your own with this. I, for one, have been in that boat and questioned God, why is he allowing things like that to happen to my life? Doesn't he care? God is big enough to handle those questions and I'm not minimising struggle at all but wanting us, wanting myself to understand our hearts when kind of that inevitably happens. The reason is because the illusion of control is broken and we can want someone to blame and sometimes it can be easier to blame God.

We can't fix our own cynicism, we can't get rid of our own doubts left to ourselves, there is no hope and we do doubt God in the face of tragedy and difficulty.

[17:09] We do doubt his goodness and love. We do want to live out our own desires if sometimes they're not good for us, we become sceptical but in those moments we need to know that there is one who bore our doubts in his own body.

The love of God, his true character, is on display in Christ Jesus that shows his goodness never fails. That's where we get to the gospel.

Jesus' fulfillment of the Bible is what secures our certainty. You see, the wonderful thing is what it means is that redemption, being set free, mine and yours, is an accomplished historical fact. It has a date, it has a time and it has a year. Jesus didn't die so that our salvation could potentially happen or that it could be just considered in the abstract.

His death is a moment in time that secures your salvation in full. It doesn't rest on our emotional state but on the historical sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which people saw, which they witnessed and recorded.

[18:28] It is a certain historical event. And so right now we can, with 100% certainty, say that these accounts are 100% reliable and they are the means by which we can know what Jesus has done for us.

The life, death and resurrection of this man is the good news that God will supply the grace we need in the face of our doubts and false security.

It is because of the cross that we can say Jesus is the better Adam who resisted temptation, the better Moses who led the people out of slavery and the better David who sat on the eternal throne. All those things, what he has done, have eternal significance for us. His death is the place where he's crowned as king. He died to take away the smokescreen.

The lies that perhaps we've believed, heard from others or told ourselves. He's taken that. He's not just the way, the truth and the life but he is your way.

[19:39] He is your truth and your life. And that truth of who he is and the truth of who you are have been revealed. Those lies are buried with him. He has taken the punishment for them.

He leads us out of slavery to deception and he gives his complete obedience to the law to you, his perfect record record so that you're seen as somebody who has not sinned in the eyes of the living God.

It means that you can say like Jesus is the one who resisted sin, we can say, we can resist sin ourselves. It gives freedom because salvation is not dependent on whether you have doubt or not. It's not the size or strength of your faith but the size and strength of your saviour. It's what your faith is in that counts.

Your doubt's not too big an obstacle. He's actually able to use your doubt and through all the wrestling and questioning and use that as the means to bring you through so that even when we do wrestle and we will, our relationship with God is unconditionally secure.

[20:58] Faith like a mustard seed is all you need. Have you ever seen a mustard seed? It is the smallest seed. If I had one on my finger right now you couldn't see it.

If I blew it off it's gone. It's the smallest of seeds. That is the size of faith you need. It is not the size and strength of your faith but the size and strength of your saviour what your faith is in.

And so we can respond. We get to silence the doubts with the historical certainty of what Jesus accomplished for us. The opportunity from these four verses I said at the beginning was that every time doubt or a mountain of doubt is if it's still there today we get to silence them.

You can consider doubt the doubt. Now that doesn't mean you can't have honest questions and like I say you'd encourage that. But it might just change why you're asking them when we realise the purpose behind Luke's gospel.

Why did he go to all this painstaking work of collating evidence and then arranging it so that it explained everything that Jesus has done? Well here we have it. The reason he did it was verse four.

[22:15] so that you may know the certainty of the things you've been taught. The word to know here is not just kind of a knowledge of cold intellectual facts you know you can like know things you get taught at school like you know scientific facts or maths equations.

This is not what this word know means. It's the way you might know history like 1066. but the word know here is the way you know a person. It's the way you know someone that you have a relationship with.

There are people you know from a distance celebrities but you don't know them like you know their family or your family. The invitation here to Theophilus and to us is to have a personal relational confidence with the man that Luke will write about.

But more than that. It's that as we see how he fulfills the Old Testament as we see how every promise is yes in him as we see how everything points to him that these are more than just words on a page but they are the words to us from God himself.

You see there are two authors to this gospel. Luke's the one writing. it's written in his linguistic style and his personality but it's the living God who is guiding his pen. There is the divine author who sits behind Luke communicating with everyone who will give it a chance and dare to read it.

[23:55] you know you can't actually read this or hear it read and actually leave the same. This is not a neutral book.

Either your heart will be softened to its message or you will be hardened to it. there is no neutral response. The offer from the living God inviting us is to take his word to heart.

Doubt our doubts. Rest in his grace and let his word soften your heart. As we come in for landing I want us to feel the weight of what we hold here.

I want us to feel the weight of how powerful and beautiful and wonderful this book is. Eyewitness accounts are the staple of our justice system. When people tell us what they witness we believe what they say and the more people were there the greater the credibility.

exactly what investigators do when they assess what went on. If that brawl really did outside happen no one would question 500 witnesses we would believe them.

[25:12] 500 people in one time saw Jesus after he was raised from the dead. This account is given to us by the living God to give us rock solid confidence and certainty that Jesus is who he said he was and that he did what we read.

He really did die for you. He really did die for you and he really did rise from the dead so that you could have life in his name. It has a date.

It has a time. There is a year. There is a place. He died for all our unbelief and exchange. He gave us faith to believe the word of God but that even more through his word he could have a personal relationship with you so that your standing doesn't rest on the strength of your grip on him but on the certainty of his grip on you.

If you have genuine honest questions keep asking them but don't let them become a smoke screen because underneath you don't want to change. And if you're struggling, if you're exhausted and feel like your faith is hanging on by just a thread, bring your weary mustard seedy faith to your saviour. Remember this is all you need for him to move mountains. Today in view of his grace we get to doubt our doubts and know with certainty that Jesus' death and resurrection is the solid historical fact of our redemption.

[26:43] Let me pray. Lord Jesus we love being able to have a relationship with you.

I praise you and I thank you that you speak to us and that we can speak to you. I praise you that the faith that you give us is a gift.

Lord you know the things that we go through, you know the doubts that we have, sometimes doubts about whether we believe what we believe is true and other times doubts about your character and that's hard at times, especially when we're going through stuff, difficulties and we all do and there's not a single person in this room that hasn't had doubt.

[28:01] And the historical fact of the event of your death and resurrection that means that we are free. That means that we have an eternal future secured.

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