

Is Christianity True?

Building a Christian Mind

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Well, I invite you to turn to 1 Corinthians 15 for our text this morning, which I will explain the choice of that text as we go along, but I want to open with the reading of 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 as we come to God's word again here this morning. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.

1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

For the balance of this calendar year, we have been in a series that we've titled "Building a Christian Mind," and our most recent messages have been on the doctrine of divine providence, following the divine decree, creation, and providence, and I just wanna say a word about that because I'm going to pivot away from providence and move on to the next section today of that broader series. A full treatment of the doctrine of providence has to address the problem of evil. How is it that a sovereign God and a loving God is ruling over the universe and yet evil and sin exists in it? Why is there evil in a world that a holy God and a loving God created and sustains? Where does that evil come from? It's one of the most difficult questions in all of Christian theology. God is not the author of sin, he does not force men to sin, indeed he commands men not to sin, and he is altogether holy. How do we put these things together? Well, I addressed those issues in two messages from September, 2019. The titles are "God Over Evil," and secondly, "Providence, the Will, and the Way." That's September, 2019. And I point you to those recorded messages in lieu of repeating them during this series and I want to explain why I'm doing that. In large part, I'm making a concession to my upcoming calendar because after next Sunday I'm going to be away until October 8th, and I think it's best to advance

this "Building a Christian Mind" series with the three slots that we have between now and then rather than going into a matter that I've covered sufficiently at another time.

And so with all of that administrative housekeeping stuff out of the way, I want to come to today's message which I've titled, "Is Christianity True?" Is Christianity true, and this is a continuation of the broader series on "Building a Christian Mind." And if you haven't been with us, what I'm about to say will be a helpful little introduction. If you have been with us, hopefully it will be a good review for you, what I'm about to say because, beloved, let me approach it, let me enter into it this way. Yesterday, Nancy and I were with two of our girls, and we had opportunity to visit a family cemetery that's about two hours from here. It's a place that's very precious to my heart. And to get to that cemetery and winding around another cemetery in the area, there is this little river that I thought was a big deal when I was growing up called the Muscatatuck River and it just makes for a very scenic location to visit and remember and to honor the memory of our loved ones that have gone on before us. But one of the things about the Muscatatuck River is that people kind of use it as a dumping ground and so every year there will be community-wide efforts to go in and cleanse it and remove all that's been dumped out so it can be a pure and, you know, a more attractive river, I guess, and I think part of the water supply in the area is driven by that. But a river running through daily is polluted, and it needs to be cleansed in order to have its maximum beauty and maximum effectiveness. That's a little bit of a metaphor, beloved, if you will, for the difficulty that each one of you have in having a mind in a fallen world and especially a world like what we live in today. So much sewage is being dumped into your mind, so many things that you help contribute to with your choices and sinful inclinations, and what is meant to be a mind that is pure and clean and used to the glory of God instead is polluted and on the verge of being unusable.

Scripture tells us exactly how to address that problem. It says, "Do not be conformed to this world," in Romans 12, "but be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Part of what we've been doing this calendar year, and I realize it's been a long series and the truth is it hasn't been long enough, part of what we're doing is we're trying to clean the river of your mind out, taking away the worldly sewage that has taken root there and replace it with a pure source of truth, a pure source of thinking. Scripture says as a man thinks, so he is, and the way that we think is a reflection of who we are, and all of the issues of life flow from the way that we think about truth, about Christ, about Scripture. And so in my judgment, there has not been a more important series that I have done in the course of my entire ministry than this one and where did we start and how does all of this work? How do you have a Christian mind? Well, beloved, you have to start with the broadest, most basic fundamentals of human thought and then put those into place systematically over time so that you're working from the great broad principles down to that which is more specific and so we started and answered the question how to know God exists. There is no excuse for anyone being an atheist, and Scripture makes this clear. Scripture says the fool has said in his heart that there is no God. Scripture shows us the many ways that God has manifested himself and revealed himself so that all men everywhere in every circumstance in every age are on notice that a great, powerful Creator God exists and they will one day give an account to him. We see that God has

revealed himself in creation and in the Canon of Scripture, in the conscience that pervades mankind, in the person of Christ, and in the conversion of individual sinners. Every one of you in this room, those of you that were watching on the live stream, had a testimony of the existence of God and the reality of God in the two wonderful testimonies that we heard in the baptism waters at the beginning of the service. God exists and what you need to do if you're going to have a pure mind is to start there and to realize that there are certain presuppositions which are absolute and by which everything else is measured and from which all of your other thought flows. There is a God, he rules over his universe and he is there and he has made himself known.

That's the starting point of Christian thought and there is no reason for any of you not to be able to just rehearse those things in your mind and be able to repeat them to others quite easily. Creation. The Canon of Scripture. Conscience. Christ. Conversion. In all of those ways, Scripture says, God has made himself known and we looked at each one of those issues individually months ago. Beyond that, we considered the topic how to know the Bible is true. What is the authority for truth and why do we open this single collection of 66 books and no more, 66 and no more, why do we open it and teach it and how do we know that this book is true and every other claim to revelation is false? Well, we know that based on the highest testimony that there is in the universe. If you think of Old and New Testaments, there's two testaments in the Bible, the Old Testament, 39 books. The New Testament with 27 books. In the same way, two words, two names, two titles assure us of the trustworthy nature of Scripture, and those two words are Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ affirms the authority and the accuracy of the Old Testament to us in his ministry and he predetermined, pre-authenticated through his apostles the writing of the New Testament that would come, so that we receive the authority of Scripture, we receive the testimony of the word of God in the written word of God based on the highest authority that there is. Jesus Christ is the Ruler of the universe and there is no one above him and he says the Bible is true and trustworthy and he manifested that in his teaching in so many different ways. We spent several messages covering that.

And so there is a God, generally speaking, and he has specifically revealed himself in his word. Now all of a sudden, our thought is being corralled into the right direction. We're being delivered from thoughts about that there is no truth, that there is no absolute authority. We're delivered from confusion about alternative and competing claims to revelation. We know it on the word of Christ himself that the Bible, as we have it, is true and that, all of a sudden, we have some clarity. We have, as it were, the word of God whistling for us to come and beckoning us to come over and to follow it and to read and study it and know what it says. In like manner, we answered the question how to know Jesus is Lord. We say that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority, how do we know that, and we spent 11 messages on this, I think, looking at what the prophets did to prepare the way for Christ before he came, and after Christ, how the apostles interpreted and explained the person and work of Christ to us, in unmistakable ways so that this true word from the God who exists has been vindicated by men who were attested by signs and miracles during their earthly ministries that they were men of God and that what they said and taught was to be believed and trusted. And they testified to Christ. And then Christ himself in his earthly ministry performed works and mighty miracles and his

teaching was unlike the teaching of anyone who has ever walked on the earth. So that we have bookends of the spokesman of God and then in the center we have Christ with his person and works on full display in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, in his ascension manifesting his power so that there is no doubt that Jesus Christ is Lord. And again, this is just a 10-minute summary of 35 messages. We just finished knowing how God rules over all and saw that God planned everything that would ever happen before creation; he launched it into being at the creation in Genesis 1, and since then he has been operating the universe and directing the course of all creatures, all events, to perfectly accomplish his will, which he planned before the beginning of time and we see it unfolding before us.

Now, beloved, especially for those of you maybe that are new to Scripture, new to Biblical thinking, what you have laid out for you from these things in Scripture, the existence of God, the authority of his word, the authority of Christ, the fact that God rules over all, beloved, what all of that gives to you is this. It's really wonderful. It's really remarkable and in the miserably lost condition that people are walking in today, I mean, it's always been dark but just people that don't know if they're a boy or a girl, how lost and confused people are to have a biblical mind is to know this. This is to know where you fit in the universe. You're not your own creator. You're not Lord. You're not wise in yourself. But you exist in a realm that is owned by another, that is ruled by another, who is good and godly and holy, and he has made himself known in his word. Suddenly you know where you fit. I am living in a realm that belongs to someone else. He calls me to follow his Son and that's my chief responsibility during the course of my life that is transcendent above family obligations, whether they be to parents, to spouse, or to children; to follow Christ as Lord is more a more preeminent claim on your priorities and upon your perspective than any other thing could be. And until Christ, this Christ of whom we've been speaking, is at the center of your thoughts and the center of your affections, you are out of harmony with the purpose of the universe, and you are out of harmony with God himself and you are living in sin, even if you're an outwardly moral person. If Christ is not at the heart of your affections, you are sinning against the purpose of the universe. And we know these things, these are the natural necessary implications of having a Christian mind. And so we have established, in my opinion, we have established the biblical and philosophical basis for the most foundational presuppositions of human thought. This is all fundamental to proper human thinking. To deny God is to be out of harmony. To deny Scripture, to undermine Scripture, to neglect Scripture is to sin against the purposes of God. To live in independence of Christ is to sin against God. To not be conscious of his providence and to be full of worry and anxiety because you don't realize that God is sovereign over all is to sin against God.

And so these things, and you say, "Well, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait." I could hear someone saying this, and I would not blame someone to say this, say, "I'm a pretty good person. I'm a moral person. I pay my bills. I'm faithful to my wife. I provide for my family. Who are you to be talking about sinning against God when I'm doing the best that I can?" I get that objection at one level, but it's a totally humanistic and wrong way to think because Scripture says, Jesus Christ, the Lord of all said, that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength, and

mind, and if you're not doing that, you are sinning against God, and especially if you're not even aiming or thinking about doing that, you are in rebellion against the most fundamental command that God places on mankind. And so these things have very vast implications and, yes, it's taken some time to do this. You build a wall brick by brick; you try to make sure that every level of the brick is level and then before you start building another one. It takes time to do these things and in light of the utter collapse of thought in culture and in the church, it's necessary for us to deal with these things.

And so we're setting a foundation to know why we believe what we believe, and what we teach, but in our postmodern pluralistic society where everything's true and every opinion is valid and all of that, we need to ask this question, we need to ask this question that is the subject of today's message: how do we know that Christianity itself is true? Having established a theistic view of the world, how do we know that Christianity in particular is true? And that's what we want to address over this message and the next two messages that will come, Lord willing, from the Truth Community Church pulpit. And let me just say this by way of final introduction. Elders in a church have, according to Scripture, very broad teaching responsibilities that take many different forms. In Titus 1:9, Scripture says that an elder is to be a man, not a woman, a man who is holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. There's a positive teaching dimension which we're trying to do, there's a refutation of false teaching, and it takes a broad kind of teaching ministry to do all of those things in any effective way. The Apostle Paul said in Acts 20:27 that he did not shrink back from teaching the whole counsel of God. And in that context, in the city of Ephesus, where he was for three years, it says that he was teaching daily for hours and hours at a time, teaching all these different things that are recorded for us in the book of Acts and in his subsequent epistles. He was teaching broad subjects, covering the whole counsel of God, he was teaching in a variety of ways, and so that's what we're trying to do.

Now this new series, "How to Know Christianity is True," will affirm the most central aspect of biblical doctrine. I'll ask the question one more time: is Christianity true and by implication every other religion false? Is Christianity true and by implication every other religion false? And we answer that question definitively, without apology, without fear, without favor to man, we answer definitively, yes, it is. Christianity is true and every other religion is false. In a society like ours, that is a breathtaking claim to make but it's what Scripture teaches. This is not my opinion. How can we defend something like that in a society like this where we're told not to be too particular and not to, you know, to keep your opinions to yourself? You know, it's bad enough to state your opinion with any kind of dogmatism and authority, it's even worse to look someone in the eye and say, "Your religion is a false religion and will lead you to hell." But beloved, love has to speak the truth. Speaking the truth in love, Scripture says, and that's what we're seeking to do.

Now what I'm about to say today in the next couple of slots, we covered this last year, I freely acknowledge that, but the timing of it, the context of it, I think diluted the impact and the effectiveness that it should have had. Among other things, I was doing this

material right in the lead up to the major event that we had over at Northern Kentucky University in May of 2022, and so this content kind of got dwarfed by bigger things that were happening in the life of our church and so I want to come back to it, fit it into this series, because it is so essential for the way that we are to think. And so here we go.

A while back, I read a book by one of my very favorite authors, whom my respect for him has no bounds, the man named Iain Murray. He's written many books that many of you have read. He wrote a little paperback book you wouldn't necessarily suspect to have such fundamental material in it. The title of the book is "The Undercover Revolution. The Undercover Revolution," I think it's about 80 or 90 pages. It's not a long book at all. And it's a small book, stay with me here, it's a small book that traces how popular fiction writing by men like Robert Louis Stevenson and others, how popular fiction undermined the entire spiritual life of the nation of Britain. Fascinating book, as always extraordinarily well documented, written in such a peaceable spirit but with clarity of mind; that book really helped me in the things that I'm about to say because there's a chapter in it titled "Is Christianity Fiction," and that chapter is at pages 79 to 95, so I guess the book's at least 95 pages for those of you that like to keep track of the math on these things. "Is Christianity Fiction?" And I read that and I just thought, this is so helpful, so compelling, I need to share it with everybody that is under the sound of my voice. So I want to adapt it here and use it in this series because it is so fundamental to building a Christian mind. I'm flipping the nature of the question, instead of saying is Christianity fiction, I'm asking the question is Christianity true, but it's the same thing being approached from different matters.

Today, I want to address two sections as we begin to address that matter, and first question is this, and it's going to take us back to the text that I read at the beginning of our message. First question is this: does this question even matter? Does this question even matter? Is it even important to consider whether Christianity is true or not or are we wasting our time? We should, you know, some people would have us just want to get to really practical teaching and teach me how to live my daily life and, you know, give me instruction on morals and those kinds of things, but why deal with this doctrine and why deal with things that divide people? Well, we want to answer that question does this question even matter? How are we to approach it? Well, beloved, when we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, understand that the gospel is a statement about historical facts and it is an interpretation of historical facts. It tells us what happened, what Jesus did, and the gospel interprets the significance of what he did for us, for sinners, and having explained the gospel, it makes a call upon us to repent and to believe. So the gospel is a statement of historical fact and an interpretation of historical fact and you see that right from the beginning in the passage that I read.

Let's go back to 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, and here today I'm using the term Christianity as equivalent, as a synonym for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're using those two terms as synonyms even though they could be distinguished in other contexts. 1 Corinthians 15, beginning in verse 1. "Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved." So Paul says, "I want to remind you about the gospel. You've believed the gospel, you stand

in the gospel, you are being saved by the gospel. I want to remind you of that," and he adds a little clarification just to warn people that sometimes there's false faith, as our two friends in baptism reminded us today. They knew what it was like and I know what it was like to be a false Christian, claim to be a Christian, be a church person, have some basic Bible knowledge, and yet to be miserably lost in sin. And so Paul, speaking to people like that, which I once was, he says, you know, "you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you--unless you believed in vain." There's such a thing as professing a faith that's not real, that's not genuine, that's not that which is born from above. So he's preaching the gospel to these people and saying, you know, most of you believe this, now let me remind you of what it is, and then in verse 3 he says this, notice the history of what he says and the interpretation of the history which he says. Verse 3 he says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance," this is primary matter of which he is speaking, "what I also received." Paul received the gospel from the Lord Jesus Christ and Paul, in turn, delivered it to others. That's the way it's supposed to work. You receive the gospel, you believe the gospel, you turn it and you give it to others. 2 Timothy 2:2 speaks about that as well. Paul says, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died," historical statement. As a matter of historical fact, Jesus Christ died on a cross outside of Jerusalem. That's historical fact. He actually died. Then Paul gives the interpretation, the significance of his death, when he says "Christ died for our sins." If you were there in the first century and just looking at the death of Christ, you would not have understood why he was dying. You wouldn't have understood it correctly. Scripture comes and tells us that Christ was dying as a substitute sacrifice for his people. And so Christ died, historical fact, for our sins, historical interpretation, "in accordance with the Scriptures." This is what the prophets foretold. What they said would happen. Isaiah 53, for example. He goes on, verse 4, "he was buried," historical fact, "he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." Historical fact, Christ died, buried, and was raised. Theological interpretation, he did this for our sins. That is the gospel by which we stand and by which we are saved.

Now as he goes on in the passage, he does something very interesting, in my opinion, those of you that enjoy legal documentaries are fascinated by courtroom things. Paul, having stated these historical facts, as it were, I'm speaking metaphorically here, he calls hundreds of people to the witness stand to verify and to attest to the accuracy of what he just said, that Christ died, he was buried, he was raised again on the third day. And look at this impressive list of witnesses, of impeccable witnesses that he calls to the stand to affirm what he had just said historically. Verse 5, "that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me." Now, beloved, understand the great profound significance of what Paul is saying and doing right here in this portion of Scripture. Christ died in approximately 30 AD, 30-33 AD, depending on which interpretation of the chronology of his life you choose to follow. Paul here is writing in the late 50s, in the early 60s. He's writing within a generation or two of the time that Christ lived, you know, within 20, 30 years after Christ had died and all of these historical events happened. He's writing 20 or 30 years later to, watch this, to people who were acquainted with the whole episode. He's writing to people who were contemporaries

of the historical events and he is telling them, "You know about these witnesses." He's telling them in a way that draws upon their own knowledge, calls upon their own knowledge and says, "All of these witnesses testify to what I'm saying and many of them are still alive. You can go and talk to them right now. You can search them out and talk to these witnesses and verify what I'm saying to you." The historical reality has been established and so these historical facts were attested by a multitude of witnesses so that as Paul makes these statements, you couldn't contest it. It'd be like making a statement to an audience today, let's say, just choose a president at random, you know, that there was a man named Barack Obama who was president of the United States, and George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Well, I can make a statement like that and there's no contesting it. It's common public knowledge and many of you in this room were alive and know and remember aspects of the presidencies of these men. It's like that. This is public undeniable knowledge attested by hundreds of witnesses at the time and so what Paul is doing here is he's giving historical fact that is attested by witnesses and he's giving a divinely interpreted explanation of what those facts mean.

Now listen, beloved, we kind of have to have our feet planted in two different worlds as we consider these things, one foot planted in the historical context in which Paul wrote and to recognize the significance of what he's saying in the context of what he said to the church at Corinth during his lifetime, and for what we're doing today to keep our other foot planted in our modern age, the modern age and system of thought in which we live and have our being, to have those two things side by side in our minds and to understand how they fit together and what the significance of them is. Because, beloved, in our godless, cynical society that mocks truth, that wants nothing to do with truth, that laughs at it in a media environment that just soaks Christians in scorn and misrepresentation, in our godless, cynical society, Christianity is at best patronized with words like, "Well, that's nice if it works for you," and to realize that that's, you know, on the one hand we say, okay, I kind of see something of the way our society thinks, and yet now I'm seeing here this dogmatic presentation of historical fact divinely interpreted and what am I supposed to do with those two things joined together? Beloved, thinking about it from this perspective of our postmodern society, we ask this question: is Christianity simply a personal preference that dupes like us can indulge if we like but doesn't need to be taken seriously elsewhere? Does it even matter if it's true? Does it matter if Christ was actually a historical person who lived on earth, died on a cross, and bodily rose from the grave? Does that matter or is this a waste of time? Why can't we just dismiss and get on with the first weekend of the NFL? Why are we spending our time on this?

Well, beloved, let's keep reading in 1 Corinthians 15. The Apostle Paul certainly thought that the historical facts matter, that this isn't just a system of morals or a vague abstract system of philosophy that we're talking about, these are historical facts of a tested historical record that matter. And so Paul gives a counterfactual argument. He says, "Let's assume that these historical facts didn't happen," as we get down to it later. He says in verse 12, "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" He says, "The historical record is that Jesus was raised from the dead; 515 witnesses support what I'm saying." Paul says, "Now in light of that," he looks at those who are undermining the doctrine of the resurrection and says,

"Then in light of the historical record, how can you say what you're saying? And let's just work through the implications of what you're saying."

Verse 13, he takes their argument to its logical conclusion. He says, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead," verse 13, "then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised." These contrary-to-fact arguments can sometimes be a little bit difficult to follow. The gospel says that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead but there are those who say he wasn't raised from the dead; in our day, those who say it doesn't matter. What Paul was saying, he says, "Based on that presupposition, let's work through what that means. If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ himself isn't raised from the dead contrary to historical fact, but, you know, we're just going with what you're saying here. If Christ hasn't been raised from the dead, our preaching is worthless, it's vain, it's empty, because we're proclaiming a resurrected Savior and calling men to save them, and yet that preaching is false if Christ isn't raised from the dead. And we're saying that God testifies that Christ is raised from the dead and therefore we're making God a liar if Christ isn't raised from the dead because we say that God says this and it really wasn't true if what you're saying is true."

Verse 16, "For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." If Christ isn't raised from the dead, truth collapses. Christian salvation collapses. Hope for heaven collapses. It's all vain, useless and of no account.

Beloved, listen, I realize we're kind of thick in the weeds in some argumentation, some facts here, but it's crucial to know, it's crucial for you to think through these things as you're raising your children. So many people think that religion is a waste of time, or that religious ideas are only good for morality, or even more so today, just good for making us feel good about ourselves and feel good about our lives, and if it feels good, it's achieved its purpose, and whether it's true or not doesn't really matter. Objective truth claims are not essential for them. You and I have to understand, you and I have to put our feet down on this ground and say, "I will not move from what I'm about to say." That that mindset, that whether it's true or not, that does not work for biblical Christianity. That is just not feasible because Christianity is rooted in time and space events that actually happened, that have historical witnesses to them, and the time and space matter of history continued on after the apostolic age, as we're going to see. Real salvation requires a real sacrifice to atone for real sins against a real and holy God that we know exists because we've established that earlier in our series. What are we going to do with our sin? And our sin is true and real, we better have, beloved, we better have a real and true Savior, a real and true salvation that can deliver us from our bondage and guilt and condemnation of our very real sins against a very real and a very holy God. It better be true because everything depends on it.

Paul says, if the resurrection is a fiction, our faith is worthless. We're wasting our time. The history of this matters. But is it actually true? The Bible contains the record of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for everyone to take and read. This is freely available to everyone in the English-speaking world and in many, many other languages as well. There's no excuse. To be ignorant is to make a choice to be ignorant of these things. And the message of salvation is about you coming to Christ and personally receiving his love and resurrection power. True Christians honor and obey Jesus Christ. They no longer live for themselves, but they live for Christ, as again we heard so well expressed in the baptism testimonies. You know, when you get baptism testimonies like that ahead of your preaching, it makes your preaching a whole lot easier so I'm grateful. True Christians live for Christ. True Christians honor Christ. True Christians obey Christ. And here's the thing, beloved, here's the thing, that if Christianity is not really true, our reason for living utterly collapses. There is no point to it. This is existential for the truth. This goes to our very existence and the validity of our existence as Christians and as a Christian Bible teaching church. Everything depends and hinges on the reality of the factual truthfulness of what we say. We're not engaging in silly secular philosophical speculation here. God has said this is true. And so we need to know, how do we know that? How do we know that?

Now, let me just say something quickly because this comes up. In one sense, we've been answering this question all along. At one level you can say, we know that Christianity is true because the Bible says so. The Bible is the authority, the final authority, and we can go and we can base it on that. Yes, absolutely. Full stop. We can say in another way that I personally came to Christ, I know that these things, I'm persuaded of these things in my heart because of the work of the Holy Spirit in my heart. The Spirit of God opened my eyes. As Scripture says, he shined the light of the knowledge of Christ into my heart and brought me to saving faith. Yes, absolutely. The word of God, the Spirit of God, without those things we would not believe. And that is our authority. And what we're doing here in this brief series of messages is we're adding more to that, because as we've seen, Christianity is a historically based religion, and what we see is that the history continued on. The testimony of history continued on, and that's our second point for this morning. The testimony of history that we want to add as another supporting reality to the things that we say, and here's where we enter into some historical matters that developed after the time of the apostles. So point number 2, the testimony of history. This is not at all the fullness of everything that we say to prove that Christianity is true, but it's really necessary and essential for us to know.

Here we go, the testimony of history. By unchallenged historical record, beloved, Christianity has existed for a very, very long time. This is not something new and recent as ignorant people who have no concept of looking at something beyond what happened 15 minutes ago on social media. Christianity has long existed and if the accusation is that Christianity is just a fiction, that these things never really happened, that there was never really a person named Jesus of Nazareth who walked on the earth, if that was all made up, beloved, there must have been a date – follow me here, this is a crucial pivot point – there must have been a date when someone made the story up, okay? When a book of fiction is released, at some point the author had written it and introduced it into the mass

market; something that only existed in his mind, he made it up, he wrote it, put it on paper, and now it's out available on the marketplace. Can we say that about Christianity? Not very well. In fact, you can't say it at all. The historical argument on these things is conclusive, and just follow me here as we do a little bit of, as we kind of go back and step back increasingly into history to consider these things.

And so let's take a random date to say maybe Christianity was invented on this date, in this time period, and let's just pick a date 200 years after the time of Christ, okay? 200 years after the time of Christ, 200 AD. Is it possible that Christianity was invented then and then developed from there without any prior historical record to support it? Is that possible? No. It's absolutely not possible based on the most verifiable things that you could ever imagine. Christianity could not have been invented for the first time in AD 200 because, my friends, by that time the Christian message had spread from Spain to Egypt, perhaps to Britain, and also to the Far East. Many, many written documents exist from the second century pointing to and talking about Christ in the Scriptures and the church. And I just find what I'm about to say just so interesting, so amazing, so clear. You can go to the city of Rome and you can go to the catacombs, the Christian catacombs in Rome. Catacombs were like an underground cemetery and so you can go and you can see these places. In those walls are carved all kinds of Christian symbols from the time. When did all of this take place? When did they start putting people in those tombs with Christian symbols? Follow what I'm saying here. The very authoritative secular source, the Oxford Classical Dictionary, says this on page 302 of the edition that's in my library. It says, and I quote, "The official organization by the church of public catacombs, mainly for the poor of Rome's Christian community, began about AD 200." You say, "Well, so what? Who cares?" Well, I care. You should care. Think about what that means. Look at that evidence and think about what that means. In AD 200, they needed many burial places for many Christians. Obviously, the origin of Christianity predates 200 AD because if the fiction started in 200 AD, you wouldn't need burial places for all kinds of Christians who existed before that.

So obviously the origin of Christianity predates 200 AD. You can continue to work your way back in time and find other prior evidence of the existence of Christianity. In 112 AD, going back almost another century from our arbitrary starting point, in 112 AD, we find a letter written by Pliny, a Roman governor in the area of modern-day northern Turkey, and this secular leader wrote this. He said, "Christians are people who were wont on the appointed day to meet before it was light and to sing with one another a hymn to Christ as God." A political figure reporting on the facts that existed in his realm at the time, describing Christians singing hymns of praise to Christ as God AD 112. So it couldn't have started then because it was so widespread that a secular leader with no inkling toward Christianity had to take note of it and reported it and recorded it.

It goes still earlier, beloved. A Roman historian in AD 64 named Tacitus wrote this about the burning of Rome in AD 64. Tacitus says that the Roman Emperor Nero, and this is so well attested, the Roman Emperor Nero set the city on fire and then he blamed Christians as the scapegoat for the whole event. Christians in AD 64 being blamed for a very public catastrophe still spoken of today. Well, if it was a fiction, who is he blaming to exonerate

himself from responsibility for it? These Christians existed and Tacitus goes on to say, Nero punished them with the most exquisite sufferings. He's writing in AD 64, beloved. He says, the author of that sect was Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius was punished with death by the procurator Pontius Pilate. This is AD 64. And he goes on, that Roman historian goes on to say, but the pestilent superstition, see he's no friend of Christianity, he's calling it a pest and a superstition. He said, it broke out afresh, not only in Judea, but in Rome. First then, those who confessed were apprehended. Next, by their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much of the burning, but as of the hatred of mankind. These were made a sport in their death. Christians were thrown to wild lions in the arena and had to fight for their lives as wild brutes tore them from limb to limb. Beloved, this Roman historian, not a friend of Christianity, said there was a vast multitude convicted and there was a vast multitude in AD 64, which is the exact same time frame in which Paul wrote 1 Corinthians.

Now, this information from the catacombs in 200 AD, the writings of Pliny in 112 AD, the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus in 64 AD, put all of these things together and realize what the cumulative testimony of this historical witness of a historical religion is telling you. My friends, for the Christian faith to be so widespread by AD 64, its origin must have occurred close to the time of Christ himself who was crucified in AD 30. Here's the point, there was no time for anyone to make this up and to have it take root and to spread about because contemporary witnesses knew the factual matters of what had happened, contemporary witnesses were around and could have refuted. No one would have believed this within the lifetime of the apostles if it wasn't historically true to go and say, Christ lived, Christ died, Christ raised, if he really hadn't. No one would believe that! It would be like someone coming in here and saying 30 years ago there was a television entertainer named Johnny Carson and he was elected president of the United States. Every one of you would say that's nonsense. That's not true based on common knowledge and the common mind of the time. That's utterly impossible and ridiculous and no one would believe that. The fact that the apostles were preaching the resurrected Christ and appealing to knowledge of the facts shows us that this wasn't made up. This is based on what really, really happened.

The argument of the apostles was built on one simple historical fact, Jesus of Nazareth, crucified at Calvary, was the Christ of God. From the beginning, I want to just take you quickly to a couple of passages, from the beginning, from the beginning, going back into just weeks after the ascension, look at Acts 2. Look at Acts 2 and notice how Peter preaches and notice what the ground of his appeal is in his argument as he speaks to those who crucified Christ. In Acts 2:29, he says, "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." When Peter said that, they knew where the tomb of David was. Everybody knew it was built on, you know, the common knowledge in society. Verse 30, "Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, [David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption." Look at verse 32 in light of everything that we've said here this morning, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses." We all know this to be true. We've all seen it. We all

have heard the testimony. We've talked to the eyewitnesses. You've talked to the eyewitnesses. You cannot deny what I'm saying. It's true.

And then he gives, having stated the historical facts, he gives the interpretation of those facts. Verse 33, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Verse 36. Is Christianity true? Here's the question. Is the gospel true? Is it the way that things really are? Is it actually the truth of the eternal God revealed to men with a call for them to repent and believe? Verse 36 answers. It says, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Know it for certain, based on historical fact, and here's what the facts mean.

One last passage as we close. Acts 4:8. This same Peter, again being challenged by the authorities, in Acts 4:8 says, "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified,' historical fact, "whom God raised from the dead," historical fact, "by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Peter says, "I can tell you with confidence this is true. You know it. You cannot deny what I'm saying. And here's what it means, Jesus Christ is Lord and God and there is no other name under heaven by which sinners like you can be saved except through repentance and faith in him."

With the Apostle Peter and in historical continuity with the church, we confidently say that Jesus Christ died and was buried, and here's the significance of everything we've said today, beloved, the historical continuity of a historical religion confirms for us what we see biblically. God raised Christ from the dead. He is Lord and Christ. There is no other name given under heaven by which you must be saved. And this is no matter of opinion. This is most sober truth. What have you done with it? What will you do with it?

Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, gracious Father, as we look around at the environment of thought in which we live, we see what a polluted river it is, and each one of us to one degree or another have drunk from those putrid waters and are thinking wrongly and not according to truth to one degree or another. Father, our prayer today is that you would take these things of most sober truth. There is a God who exists. There is a Bible that is true. There is a Jesus who is Lord. There is a God who rules over all, and Christianity is true. We pray that you would take these things, purify our thinking that we would be more devoted, faithful disciples of yours, and for those dead in sin, Father, would you

awaken them that they might flee from the wrath to come and to flee from this world, to be saved from this perverse generation by coming to Christ in repentance and faith. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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