

Is Christianity True?

By Don Green

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Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Pastors and elders have positive and negative teaching responsibilities. The Bible says in the book of Titus 1:9 that elders are to be those who are "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." The teaching function in the church is to affirm and build up true doctrine, and it is to refute things which contradict true doctrine. There are affirmations and denials that we make. This is true. This is false. And so there's a balance to what goes on. You cannot be a true biblical teacher if you're not refuting false doctrine in addition to teaching the truth.

What we want to do in this three part series is this: I want to affirm the most central aspect of doctrine imaginable, what the most basic point that there is, and to ask and answer this question, is Christianity true? Is biblical Christianity true? Is it real? Is it the way things actually are? And just so you know, those of you that know me can already anticipate my answer, but we answer that question definitively and without qualification, yes, it is true, biblical Christianity is absolutely true, and we make the simultaneous denial in saying that every other religion is false. Christianity cannot be true alongside other religions that are also true. Christianity makes exclusive truth claims and therefore preclude any other competing true religion. And so that's what we're going to look at tonight. Next Friday we're going to skip Sunday, the next Friday and then Resurrection Sunday, we will be addressing this most vital question.

Now what prompted this in my thinking? A while back I read, actually it goes back almost a couple of years now, I think a year or two, I read a tiny little book by the great writer named Iain Murray titled "The Undercover Revolution." It's a small book and it traces how popular fiction undermined the spiritual life of Britain. It sounds like a rather obscure topic but it was actually a very fascinating book. In that book, there was tucked away a chapter titled "Is Christianity Fiction?" He approached the question from the opposite direction but basically we're saying the same things and I want to acknowledge my debt to him here in what I'm saying this evening. It's been nearly two years since I read that book and that chapter in particular, and I have not been able to get it out of my mind. It was so compelling and it seemed so vital to me that I wanted to take that basic material, adapt it a little bit, and preach it here from the Truth Community Church pulpit.

It's important to understand this, these three messages are a single unit. You need all three messages in order to grasp the fullness of the material. So I'm only giving part of it

tonight and so don't judge the material or don't come to final conclusions until you've heard all three messages. I just say that by way of preface and introduction.

Tonight, I want to address two aspects of the question and I want to address a preliminary question in our post-modern age is very important, I think, to ask and answer. First of all, answer this question. Does this question even matter? Is this question even important? Does it matter whether or not Christianity is true or not? And that's what we want to unpack a little bit here in these next few moments. In our godless, cynical society, Christianity is, at best, patronized with words like, "It's nice that that works for you," and the whole issue of truth is just sidestepped and diminished as if it's just a matter of personal preference and personal opinion.

I remember many many years ago in California when Jehovah's Witness duet arrived at our door and went into their little spiel a little bit, and I contradicted what they said and addressed the deity of Christ with them just very briefly and told them plainly that they were in error in what they were propagating, in accordance with the training that I'm sure they received, she said, "Well, that's your opinion, sir. I'll be on my way." You know, and everything is reduced to just a matter of whether it's an opinion or not. Well, beloved, let's ask the question this way: is Christianity simply a personal preference that dupes like you and I can indulge in if we like but the rest can ignore it without any consequence? Is Christianity something like that? Does it matter if it is even true or not? And what are the consequences if it is or if it isn't? That's the question that we're going to consider tonight and Resurrection weekend. Let me keep stating the question in slightly different ways. Does it matter if Jesus Christ was a historical person who actually lived on the earth, died on a cross, and bodily rose from the grave? Does that matter or not?

Well, to get us into the text of Scripture, turn to 1 Corinthians 15 beginning in verse 12, and we can say this, that the Apostle Paul certainly thought that it mattered whether these facts were true or not. 1 Corinthians 15 beginning in verse 12 says this,

12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

Paul says, yes, it matters absolutely whether Christ has been raised or not. The facts of the case matter. The facts of the case are determinative to what is actually true, and if Christ has not been raised, we are wasting our time; if the dead are not raised, Christ is

not raised; if Christ is not raised, your faith is worthless. Everything is pinned on the historical reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And now, again, that is just so contrary to the spirit of our age. You know as well as I do, that some people think that religious ideas and religious instruction are only good for a personal morality or to make you feel better about life, in other words, be a good person, religion might be good for that, and if religion can make you feel better as you go through life, then it serves a purpose, but it isn't a transcendent purpose and it really doesn't matter if it's actually true or not, it's just measured by its pragmatic effect. A pragmatic effect that it makes you live a better life, that makes it worthwhile, but it doesn't matter whether it's actually true or not. If it makes you feel better about yourself or about your life, well, then that's good enough; it doesn't matter whether it's true as long as it has that effect. This is endemic to the way that the world thinks and the whole premise here of that treatment of truth and of Christianity, underlying that is a very vital presupposition to modern thinking that says this: objective truth claims are not really essential. It doesn't really matter if religion is true. It doesn't matter if Christ lived and died. It doesn't matter if the Bible is true or not because this is all just a matter of personal opinion and so it doesn't matter whether it is true or not.

Well, beloved, listen, that does not work at all for biblical Christianity. Biblical Christianity proclaims a gospel that says God will forgive all of your sins if you come to Christ in repentant faith, believing that he offered his life on the cross as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God and to take away your sins. And there's something essential to realize about that: real salvation requires a real sacrifice to atone for real sins against a real and holy God. If salvation is to be real, it has to be objectively true. It's something that transcends your personal opinion or mine. It must be real, it must be grounded in reality, it must be grounded in historical truth and Paul makes this very clear. He says that if the resurrection is a fiction, then your faith is worthless.

So everything, everything depends on whether this is true or not. The history of this matters. But that still leaves unanswered the question: is Christianity actually true? Is it actually the way things really are? And what Christianity says is this, Christianity says that the one true God revealed himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth some 2,000 years ago, and the Bible contains the record of his life, his death, and his resurrection, and in the Bible it is all available there for anyone to take and read in the language of words that were instrumental in the conversion of Augustine some 1,600 years ago. The Bible says that you and I owe Christ the same kind of obedience that we owe to God himself therefore putting Christ on terms of equality with God. And the message of salvation is about you coming to Jesus Christ and personally receiving his love, his forgiveness, his resurrection power, and submitting your life to him in a pledge of obedience, not because you can work to earn your salvation but because Christ is Lord and he has rightful claim over your life. And if someone would have Jesus as Savior, they must also take him as Lord, you cannot separate those two offices of him.

Now what that means, then, is that true Christians, true Christians honor and obey Jesus Christ. Someone who does not honor Christ as God is not a Christian. Someone who does

not have an inward heart principle of obedience and submission to Christ is not a Christian. It does not matter what they say to the contrary if their life is one of rebellion against Christ. You know, and perhaps that applies to some of you. You say in a vague sense that you're a Christian but you live for yourself and you don't really belong to Christ. He's not your Christ. He's not your Lord. He's not your wisdom. He's not your righteousness. You live for yourself in disregard to his claims. Well, we go to this passage so very often but it's just very important that we do, please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7 and in a basic message like this, it's good to include basic fundamental Scriptures. Remember, we're asking and answering the question: is Christianity true? And as part of that theme, we are asking the question: does this question even matter? Is it important or not? Or is this just some kind of speculation by some rube preacher who lives in Kentucky and should not be taken seriously? It has nothing to do with the preacher and everything to do with the authority of the Bible and the authority of Jesus Christ and the destiny of your eternal soul so that look at Matthew 7 and I'm going to read a little bit more extended passage here to set the stage. In Matthew 7:13 it says,

13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

The very fact that one way is narrow and one way is broad suggests that there is a true way and a false way. Scripture does not countenance this idea that truth is just a matter of personal opinion at all. It utterly refutes on a deep philosophical level the prevailing mindset of our culture today.

Now Jesus having said that the gate is narrow that leads to life, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, he goes on and says this in verse 15. He says,

15 Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Jesus after pointing out that there is a true way and a false way, warns his hearers to distinguish false prophets from true teachers of the word of God, and the only reason that you would bother making a distinction like that is because the truth actually matters. It is not enough to just fall under the power of some kind of spiritual teaching, you must be under true teaching and Jesus warns everyone who hears his words to take personal responsibility for their need to distinguish the true from the false. If the truth did not really matter, there would be absolutely no purpose whatsoever to a warning against false prophets.

Now going on in verse 21 Jesus says,

21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

I said a few moments ago that true Christians are those who honor and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus makes that principle explicit there when he said, On the day of judgment there are going to be many who gave lip service to My name but I am going to tell them in that moment, 'Depart from Me because I never knew you. You were a practicer and you are a practicer of lawlessness.'" Well, when people depart into eternal judgment, when people depart into destruction in that biblical place called hell, no one in that moment is going to think that the truth didn't matter. It's going to be clear and obvious in that moment, in that time when people are fearfully and frightfully sent away by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as he personally consigns them to eternal judgment, at that moment it's going to be very clear that the truth mattered. There is no escaping this.

So in verse 24 he goes on to say,

24 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell and great was its fall."

That parable, that teaching only matters if the truth matters. If his words are true, then there are these consequences. Those that respond to the truth in faith and obedience find that their lives are established on a foundation and their souls are set on a foundation that will survive that judgment that he had just described, but if someone rejects his words as so many many many do, if his words are rejected they're going to find that they've built their house on a structure and on a foundation that cannot withstand the pressure of judgment, and the house falling is a picture of their souls falling into destruction. Well, look, that's only true, that only makes sense if the truth matters. If Christ is true, if Christianity is true, then those consequences make perfect sense. If it doesn't matter whether it's true or not, Jesus is speaking empty vanities that have no meaning. If all roads lead to God, if good people go to heaven, then none of this matters and Jesus has wasted our time by saying the things that he said there in Matthew 7. I tend to think that Jesus didn't waste our time and therefore the truth matters, and it matters whether Christianity is true or not.

Now just bringing this back around to the nature of being a Christian, you could say, as I said earlier, true Christians are those who honor and obey the Lord Jesus Christ. They no longer live for themselves but they live for Jesus Christ. They've put aside self as the center of their existence and they submit to Christ and their heart prayer, as expressed in Matthew 6, is, "Your will be done as in heaven so also upon earth. When it comes to my life, O Lord, Your will be done, not mine." And so true Christians no longer live for themselves but for Christ.

Now think about it this way with me: if Christianity is not really true, then the reason for living that Christians have utterly collapses. If Christianity is not true, there is no point in your existence in saying that, "I live for the glory of Christ. I live for the glory of God." You know, what the Apostle Paul said in Philippians 3, you know, "I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection." Well, if Christianity is not true, Paul's aspirations for living were utterly meaningless and empty, they were not based on reality. And the same thing for you and me 2,000 years later, if Christianity is not true, we're really wasting our time and those who give themselves over to a life of seeking the glory of Christ or serving him in a local church or whatever the case may be, they have really missed the boat. So you can see the question is Christianity true, it really matters, and so it matters to us, speaking corporately as those who gather together in the name of Christ, it matters to us whether Christianity is true because this is, for many of us this is the reason that we live. For those that are not Christians, whether Christianity is true or not matters greatly because if it's true and they reject Christ, they're going to hell eternally. That's a pretty significant consequence of the answer to this question. And so it's very vital for us to know whether Christianity is true or not.

Now so I think we've established that the question matters. Let me just add this and I'll come back to this a little bit later. The Bible says in Acts 4 that there is no other name beyond Christ that has been given by which men must be saved; there is salvation in no one else. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." And so Christianity makes an exclusive truth claim. Christ says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me," it's an exclusive truth claim. We're not simply saying that Christianity is a true religion, we're saying it is the only true religion and that every other religion is false. Every effort to approach God apart from biblical Christianity is a delusion and it's a falsehood that does not actually save. That's how vital this is, and so for, you know, for the 1.25 billion Catholics in the world, billion with a "b," I always like to say, you know, for the hundreds of millions if not billions of Muslims, this question of whether Christianity is true is of great massive consequence and this cannot be avoided. Same thing for Hindus and their polytheistic thinking, and their polytheistic worship. If Christianity is true, that is damnable idolatry, that's how significant it is.

Now pivoting, what we want to do here in the remainder of our time tonight, we want to look at the testimony of history. That's the second point if you're taking notes: the testimony of history to this question. Then on Good Friday, a week from this coming Friday, we'll address this from the perspective of Christianity and the early church. Then

on Resurrection Sunday, we'll address under the title "Christianity Today." Today we look at Christianity true, on Friday we look at Christianity in the early church, and then on Resurrection Sunday we look at Christianity today. So we try to cover the broad sweep of time if the Lord is pleased to help us in this, but we want to consider the testimony of history for the remainder of our time here this evening and let me flip my question, let me flip my question and answer it as Iain Murray framed it in the title of his chapter to his book. He titled the chapter of the book, "Is Christianity fiction?" He's addressing the exact same point just from the perspective of debunking a falsehood rather than affirming the truth of the statement.

So the matter is this: if Christianity is a fiction – this is just so compelling, this is so compelling remembering that we have two other messages that we have to bring to bear on this fact as well, but this is so compelling and just follow the logic of what is being said here – if Christianity is a fiction there must be a date at which it was invented. If Christianity is not true, if it is not rooted in historical reality, there must have been a time when it was invented, when someone made it up. You know, when some guy names Julius and some guy named Brutus sat in a corner of their Roman coliseum and said, "Hey, I've got an idea. Let's make up a story." There must have been a time when that happened.

Now having stated the issue like that, let me simply say this: as a matter of unchallenged and unchallengeable historical record, Christianity has been around for a very long time. A very very long time, indeed, I have some 20-30 volumes in my library of writings from the early church fathers that were written in second-third century AD, if not earlier, you know, and there are all of these writings from that early time suggesting that there was an understanding and a presupposition that Christianity was true and therefore to be defended. You know, I mean, there are just thousands and thousands and thousands of pages in modern books that are traceable back to the second and third century. That says something. It means that it couldn't have been invented, you know, after that. Let's pick a random date and see if that works to establish a time at which Christianity could have been first invented, okay? We're just trying to sort through the historical record and see if we can find a time when this thing started, and we'll just assume that for the moment, for the sake of argument, in the truest sense of the word to be the devil's advocate, we'll assume that we can find a place where it was started and we'll just work our way back.

So as Iain Murray does, we choose a random date to see if this works. 200 AD. 200 AD. You know, 1,800 years ago. Let's go back 1,800 years ago and see if that might possibly work for a time when Christianity could have been invented. Well, what we're going to find is that Christianity could not possibly have been invented in that timeframe. That's utterly, utterly impossible. By that time in 200 AD, the gospel, the Christian message, had spread from Jerusalem to Spain, to Egypt, perhaps to Britain, and also to the Far East. As I said, there are many written documents from the second century talking about Christianity and Christian issues, there are Christian statements and there are symbols – and this is very significant – Christian symbols carved into the walls of the catacombs in the city of Rome.

What is a catacomb? A catacomb is like an underground cemetery and the authoritative Oxford Classical Dictionary says this at page 302, page 302 in the edition that I have in my library. It says this, "The official," and just stay with me here. I don't want anyone falling off the boat. I don't want to have to go rescue anyone out of the water here so just stay in the boat and stay with me, okay? Quoting the Oxford Classical Dictionary, "The official organization by the Church of public catacombs mainly for the poor of Rome's Christian community began in approximately 200 AD." Let me say that again, "The official organization by the Church of public catacombs mainly for the poor of Rome's Christian community began in approximately 200 AD." Why is that so very significant? Think with me: if the city officials needed a burial place for large numbers of Christians in order to establish a place where they could all be put, then the origin of Christianity must predate 200 AD by a significant amount of time. You can't make it up in 200 AD and simultaneously need large burial grounds for professing Christians. This is unquestioned secular history from an authoritative source.

So it couldn't have started in 200 AD. There were too many people. There had to be time for those people to become Christians to live and to die in large numbers in order to justify the need for such a place. It would be like, you know, 1,500 years from now somebody suggesting that the United States was a fiction and then having to explain away Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC. If America had never existed, why did they need all of these graves for their soldiers and their public dignitaries? The cemeteries point to a prior existence of the organization, the entity.

So 200 AD doesn't work. Christianity has to be older than that just based on the historical record, and so we have to keep going back further. Remember what we're doing here is we're pretending that Christianity is a fiction and we're just looking for a place where it could have started in order to explain everything that followed afterwards. Well, as we keep working our way backwards in time, we keep finding evidence of the existence of Christianity, we keep finding it in places where it's being affirmed and testified to by secular authorities, so that in 112 AD, nearly a century further back from the Roman catacombs, there is a letter written by a man named Pliny, spelled P-l-i-n-y, Pliny. He was a Roman governor in an area of modern-day Turkey, northern Turkey, Asia Minor. And in this letter from 112 AD we find Pliny saying this, he says, "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." In 112, there were sufficient numbers of Christians that a Roman governor was aware of them and was aware of their religious practice. If Christianity was a fiction, it had to significantly predate that in order to be explained on the presupposition that it's a fiction and isn't really true, isn't really historically rooted.

But you keep going back further and further, you find this, and again this is extraordinarily well-known and uncontested, a Roman historian named Tacitus, T-a-c-i-t-u-s, Tacitus, writes about the burning of Rome in AD 64. AD 64 and this is Rome, far removed from the city of Jerusalem in AD 64, mind you. Tacitus says that the Roman Emperor Nero set the city on fire and he singled out Christians as the scapegoat. He blamed the burning of the city of Rome on the Christians that were in Rome and Tacitus writes this, and this is a more extended quotation. Speaking about the Christians he says

this, Nero "punished them with the most exquisite sufferings. The author of that sect was Christ, who, in the reign of Tiberius, was punished with death by the Procurator Pontius Pilate." Tacitus continues, "but the pestilent superstition which for the present was suppressed broke out afresh not only in Judea but in Rome." You see, Tacitus called Christianity a superstition. He wasn't writing to affirm that it was true but he was reporting the historical reality there were all these Christians around that Nero was able to turn into a scapegoat for the burning of Rome to escape his own responsibility for the arson. Tacitus goes on to describe the sufferings of these Christians and I've spoken about this in the past. It's horrific. Tacitus says, "First, then, those who confessed were apprehended and next, by their information, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much of the burning of Rome as of the hatred of mankind. These were made a sport in their death."

Here's the point: contemporary Roman historian explaining a massive event on the par of 9/11 for the United States of America, writing and recording the history of what happened in the burning of Rome, says that the Roman Emperor knew of a religious group of Christians and he blamed them for it. Now whatever else we think about Nero and the sufferings of the Christians and anything else that could be attributed to that, understand that the historical record is speaking of a vast number of Christians in the city of Rome in the year 64. In the year 64. So this information from Pliny and Tacitus on the spread of Christianity helps us date the beginning of Christianity. For the faith to be so widespread geographically speaking in an era without modern transportation, mind you, for the faith to be so widespread by 64 AD, its origin has to predate 64 AD even more. Whether it's true or false, whether it's true or false on the presupposition that we're talking about here this evening, the origin of Christianity must have occurred close to the time of Christ himself and you know when Christ was crucified, by most Christian estimates AD 30. In other words, the equivalent of looking back to the beginning of the presidency of Bill Clinton from our time period, 30-35 years prior to the burning of Rome Christ was crucified.

So we've gone from a possible 2,000 year window to say that Christianity is fiction, we immediately reduced it in looking to find the date when the fiction started if Christianity is fiction, we've eliminated 1,800 years and we've narrowed the window to a 200 year period at the start of the modern era. As we read on, we narrowed it down to 112 years and then to 64 years, and then when we realized that Christ was crucified in AD 30, then we're left with such a tiny window of time for this whole fiction to have been created and to institute it and to spread throughout the world. Well, let's just keep asking our questions here. We're going to come back to Scripture soon here. Could Christianity have been invented? Could it have been made up as a fiction in light of those dates? From 64 AD to 30 AD, could it have been made up during that time? Well, again, the answer is no. No, that's not possible.

How is it that the disciples of Christ preached as they did from the time of his resurrection or his alleged resurrection? In light of the timing of his resurrection, how could the disciples of Christ preach as they did? Because, beloved, their argument in front of their contemporary audience was based on one simple fact: Jesus Christ of Nazareth

was crucified at Calvary and he was the Christ. And let's look at some Scriptures here to help us see this and to see the emphasis that is placed on the resurrection. Let's go to the gospel of John, first of all. The gospel of John 20. John 20. This is so magnificent.

John 20, beginning in verse 24. Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, which means "the twin," was not with [the other disciples when Jesus first came to them, and so they come back to Thomas, they come back to Thomas, telling Thomas this in verse 25,

25 [they] were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." [Now going on in verse 30,] 30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

What the Apostle John did with this gospel is he reported objective historical information, he recorded the words of Christ, he recorded the miracles of Christ, and pointed to objective historical fact and objective historical record and called upon men and women, called upon his readers to believe in Christ. "These things have been written in order that you may believe." And the climax of his gospel is the climax of the resurrection. Thomas is believing not on the basis of his internal feelings or his internal opinions about the matter, he believed in response to something outside of himself. He saw Jesus Christ resurrected, living with mortal wounds in his body, proving to Thomas through his physical senses that Jesus was really alive and was really resurrected, and on that basis, on the basis of the resurrection, John calls his readers to believe.

Now go over to the book of Acts 2. In Acts 2:29 we see the Apostle Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost and he's coming to the grand climax of his message, but actually as I think about it, let's go back a little further to verse 22. Acts 2:22. Peter is preaching to men who were contemporary eyewitnesses of the facts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were contemporary eyewitnesses. That is critical. He says,

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know

He's telling these contemporaries who had rejected and crucified Christ, he is telling them and reminding them of historical facts that occurred in the immediate past which they themselves knew. A hostile audience knew the facts of which Peter was speaking. And Peter goes on and explains the theological, the spiritual significance of it in verse 23. He says,

23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Drop down to verse 29 now.

29 Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, 31 he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay 32 This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. 33 Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. 34 For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, 35 until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified."

Listen, Peter could never have said these things if the facts weren't true because his immediate contemporary audience would have known that it was a fiction. Peter never would have preached such magnificent facts as the death and resurrection of Christ to an audience that would have known that it was false if indeed Christianity is a fiction. Peter was able to preach like he did because it was true, because these facts happened, and because his audience knew that it was true. They could not refute it. They could not deny the factual accuracy of what Peter was saying to them and the result of that, the result of that is that Peter had led them to the truth, he had led them to the fact that Christianity, as we call it today, is true. It's the way things really are. It's accurate. It's what really happened and it's the truth and the revelation of God as found in his written word and in the person of Jesus Christ.

Look at it there in verse 36 with me once again, "let all the house of Israel know for certain." What is Peter saying except, "Brethren, this is true. This must be believed. Jesus Christ is Lord and He is the very One that you crucified." Verse 37,

37 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?"

They couldn't refute it because it was absolutely true, the fact of the matter had been conclusively established as they knew from their own eyewitness observations of the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

So the apostles, here's the point for is it possible that this is fiction? No, it's utterly impossible. It is utterly impossible for the apostles to have preached a fiction to those that would have been able to immediately reject it and know that it was false. Rather, instead, they asserted historical facts that the audience could not refute and therefore cried out, "What must we do in response to what you have shown to us to be conclusively true?" He said, "Know this for certain." This is not a matter of opinion. Nothing about the waves of philosophy in the intervening 2,000 years change what the historical facts are, and the fact that we live in an age that has such a distorted depraved mind that questions the very principle of whether objective truth exists or not, the fact that God has allowed men to develop such a depraved mind does not change the historical reality of what actually happened and what is true. We measure what is true by Scripture, by the Lord Jesus Christ, not according to the tenets of modern philosophy. I'm going to have a whole lot more to say about this over the next three months or so, beloved, so you might as well sit in and get comfortable with it because this really really matters. This really really matters.

Now look over at Acts 4 in verse 8. Peter preaching again, Acts 4:8,

8 ... filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you [again, let it be known, take this as settled truth,] let it be known [to all of you] and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified,

They could not deny that and that's why there is no timeframe for this to have been made-up. 200 AD. 112 AD. 64 AD. The resurrection of Christ, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, there is no timeframe for this to have been made up because you find in the aftermath of the resurrection of Christ the apostles appealing to the contemporary knowledge of their hostile audience. If they could have refuted it, they would have. They couldn't and so they didn't. And so there is no time for this to have been made up, that's the point.

So verse 10,

10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief corner stone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

As they spoke to the truth of the historical facts, they drew out what those facts meant. There is one and one only Savior of men. It is Jesus Christ. There is no other man, there is no other mediator with God, there is no one else who can offer forgiveness of sins except Christ himself. Every other religion is false. Christianity is true. That's the significance of the biblical testimony. We're going to talk about this more in the following weekend but with Peter we confidently say, as the Spirit bears witness to his word, as the Spirit bears witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, and as the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God, we confidently say with Peter that Jesus Christ died, that Jesus Christ was buried, and that God raised him from the dead and he is Lord and Christ and that is irrefutable truth. "There is no other name under heaven which is given by which you must be saved." Beloved, we've got more to say, a lot more to say about this, but these things are not a matter of personal opinion. This is the most sober truth.

Let's pray together.

Gracious Father, we pray that Your Spirit would be pleased to add His infallible affirmation to the things that have been said from Your word here this evening. We ask You, Father, to bear witness by Your Spirit to the hearts of men, to those who believe that they might be strengthened and sanctified further in the truth, and that You might seal the truth to those that to this time, to this moment have not been Christians, Father. May there be an overwhelming work of Your Spirit in their hearts that resounds within them that says, "This is true. This is true. This is true. I must flee to Christ for salvation." And Father, may they have the sweet assurance that Jesus said, "Whoever comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." Father, honor Your truth, honor the truth, honor Christ, honor Your word for the salvation of souls, for the strengthening of the saints, for the great advance of Your glorious kingdom. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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