

# Necessity

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So why do we do what we do? It's always good to think about that now and again, but why do we do what we do here tonight? Because what we're doing is something the church has done through hundreds, thousands of years and as I said, throughout the world today, folks have met together as Christians as believers and they've opened the Word of God, and they've tried to learn from it. But why do we do that? What is it that's going on?

Why do we believe that it's important? And just to be absolutely clear, we do believe it's important. I used to work for an investment firm called Templeton and the chap who founded it, Sir John Templeton, he was a great believer in progress and in particular he was very interested in progress and religion and he founded a prize for progress and religion and he's a bit skeptical of sort of dusty old truths and he used to put it this way, if you had a problem and you say a physical difficulty, you go to the doctor, you'd be a bit concerned if the doctor hauled out a sort of two, a hundred, three hundred year old textbook and blew the dust off it and started flicking through for a remedy, you quickly find yourself a new doctor. So why, when it comes to spiritual matters, do you trust a minister, a pastor who thinks that he can give you wisdom and guidance for your life from this book which is two, three thousand years old? It's quite a counter-cultural thing to do today, progress is the name of the game and it really relies on a very distinctive view of scripture because today folks would view scripture as just another sort of piece of God's, of the rather man's search for God. So it was good in its time, it was wonderful, it was maybe very relevant, there's some great stuff we can learn from it but it's just another step in the way and really we should be moving beyond it. That's quite handy and quite helpful because it means that you can take what you want from scripture and then come at the stuff that you don't really want, you can leave behind as archaic and a bit irrelevant and a bit awkward and you'll never get sacked or abused for having that view of scripture. It's a commonplace, progressive, modern view, but scripture has its place, David Cameron can chat about it, use it when he's doing his part of political broadcasts, but we keep it in its place and we've moved beyond it and as we search for spiritual truth, as we search for progress, well scripture will come along in its wake but it's not foundational.

The difficulty with that is it's not how the Bible describes itself, the Bible describes itself in a very very different fashion and in particular it's a very very difficult way to deal with Jesus.

If you try and assimilate Jesus into your way of thinking you actually just end up rejecting him and you reject Jesus, you reject the whole of scripture, you reject the whole of Christianity, because Christianity does not work but the man Jesus Christ, God Jesus Christ at its center.

So by rejecting the Bible I would argue they reject Christ. Let's think about it, I've been asked to speak tonight about the necessity of scripture, so that's really what we're thinking about and I want to talk about resurrection because it seems to me that that's obviously a miracle and if one thing people don't like in scripture it's miracles. There was a famous liberal theologian a hundred years ago, Boltman, who basically said you want to demythologize scripture, it would be great if you could read all the miracles. The classic miracle that we find in scripture is the resurrection, that is the core miracle if you like, man dead, man alive, you can't get much more miraculous than that. So I thought it would be quite helpful to just use that as a sort of foundation text in the perspective to understand whether scripture is something we should base our lives on and it's absolutely essential and a necessity that we can't do without or a scripture something that we can take it or leave it. We're going to look at a couple of passages as we do so. What I think is interesting, the two passages we've read, first of all we think about Luke, well not think about

[ 4 : 26 ]      Corinthians first of all, first Corinthians Paul is one of the sort of, are the great writers of scripture, he's one of the key authors, the key human authors of the Bible. First Corinthians 15, in Corinthians he's writing a book to the Corinthian church. Now this is a church plant that's been incredibly successful. Paul has gone to Corinth, he stayed there I think, they think probably a year and a half, he's preached the gospel, folks have become believers but he's left them and the church has a bit of a shambles in other ways, this is sort of church that Jerry Springer would have planted because there's all sorts of relational difficulties, there's lawsuits among believers, there's immorality, there's the Corinthian believers think they've already arrived and there's a lot of arrogance and a lot of pride. So Paul writes them and he gives them a lot of advice to sort of basically sort yourselves out but two things he focuses on particularly are first of all Christ has died but then secondly and almost more important than that Christ has risen. If you look at first

Corinthians 15 it's really interesting, I mean Paul's a brilliant writer, he doesn't use any words loosely, he's always very very tight on what he says, he says here, it's our first importance that you understand the gospel which I preached to you and if you don't understand that you believe in vain and this is what he says is our first importance, Christ died for our sins first of all according to the scriptures, he was buried and raised on the third day according to the scriptures so he's using repetition there and that's a key kind of tool that we use in the Merchison household, you know tidier room, tidier room or maybe it's fair to say get the children, get the children, I better get the children, repetition helps you remember but he uses according to scriptures twice, what's even more significant he uses appeared four times, he appeared to Peter, he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers, he appeared to James, last of all he appeared to me also, I think we can fairly sure that Paul wants us to understand that Christ after he died appeared to his people, his followers on numerous occasions, so there's two things that Paul thinks is absolutely critical for the Corinthian church to know and all their messiness and all their foolishness is Christ appeared and whatever he did he did according to the scriptures, now we go to Luke, look at his another sort of classic you know the great authors of scripture, he wrote two books so you have the book, the Gospel of Luke, that's really going through the history of Jesus, his life on earth, his death, his resurrection and then we have Acts and that really is a book about the church, how the church went from Jerusalem, Samaria through to the whole world, so we got Luke and we got Acts and Luke finishes the book of Luke chapter 24 with this story of the Rotomaius and then he repeats it with the story of Jesus appearing to the disciples, it's fascinating, there's two things going on, one again is that Luke, there's so many things Luke could have told us after the resurrection of Christ, so many things you could have focused on, so many things that we'd want to hear about what Christ was like and after the resurrection and what happened and what he said but he focuses on two straightforward things, one is he appeared and the second thing and this is the voice of Jesus, this is Jesus' priority, he says look everything I have done,

I've done to fulfill the scriptures, again it's repeated, so Jesus tells the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus, everything that's happened is to fulfill scripture and then he goes to the disciples and he says the same thing, it seems reasonable to suggest that Luke and Jesus want us to know that he appeared in physical form after his resurrection and secondly that everything that's happened, everything is according to scriptures, so let's think about just those, I mean that's really got what we're going to think about is he appeared and it was according to scripture, first of all he appeared, one of the fascinating things about scriptures is often what it doesn't say and we kind of can dive straight into the story of the Road to Emmaus and Jesus appearing to these two disciples but let's put it in context, the chapter before Christ has been crucified, he's risen from the dead, the angels see the folks at the tomb and say why are you looking for their living amongst the dead, they're completely foolish, he's risen from the dead and you would think after, I mean the Bible makes it clear that the conflict on the cross was the event in history when Christ the Son of God, man, sinless, crucified for the sins of his people and all the forces of hell, the powers of evil are focused on him and he prevails, he doesn't yield and he dies for his sins and he descends to hell and he rises again, this is the core of our history and you think afterwards well what would Christ be doing, there's so many things one thing that could be doing, we had archangels and angels when he was born, why haven't we got that when he's risen from the dead but the Bible is silent on that, instead while we find him on the dusty road outside

Jerusalem going to meet two of his disciples, why is that, why hasn't he delegated that to one of his archangels or you know divisions of angels that would do his bidding, why hasn't he done that, it's a priority for Jesus to search for and go after his people, the shepherd who searches for his lost sheep, so Jesus in some sense, although he's finished and the cross he says it's finished, he's still fulfilling his ministry, he's telling us something very very important about who he is, he is the Savior, God and man who goes out to search for his people, that's what he does, so we find him here in this dusty road and we've got two of us, I mean we don't know why they're going to mess but they've probably, it seems like they're going the wrong way aren't they, they're kind of getting out of Jerusalem, it's all gone badly wrong and it's a great, I think it's a great story because again the fascinating thing here is we've had this cosmic event, the sort of the epicenter of history, the cross, the resurrection, and then we get this almost comedy like tale of Christ and the two disciples and the Road to Emmaus and the two of them are walking along chatting away, trying to figure out what's happened and why it's all gone so dreadfully wrong, the Savior, the Messiah that they put their hope in hasn't delivered as far as they were concerned and trying to figure it out and this man sort of comes alongside them and they don't know it's

Jesus, of course we know it's Jesus so we're sort of in on the joke so to speak but we know it's Jesus and they're blathering away and you kind of, I mean if I was one of them you'd be sort of what's he up to, eventually says well what you're talking about and this really flummoxes them and they stop and it's a sense of they're looking at Jesus and going do you know nothing? Are you from out of town? Are you the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard what's been going on these past few days and they proceed to tell them everything that's happened? They think it's, you know, there's a sense in which they believe they've got the knowledge and they're in control of the situation and Jesus is this sort of simpleton who really doesn't know what's going on and then it changes and it's really interesting the way it changes he just, all of a sudden Jesus slightly reveals himself, he doesn't fully reveal himself but the dynamic definitely alters from the sort of this guy ambling alongside them to all of a sudden this man who says you foolish ones don't you understand what's going on at that point stops and they start listening to him and so it goes on and they keep listening, they keep listening, they keep listening, they get to a maze, they urge him to stay, he breaks bread, all of a sudden they realize this is the Messiah and he disappears. That tells us an awful lot about the way we learn about Christ. You see the whole history of the Bible and the whole history of salvation of Christianity is not man searching for God, it was always God searching for man. Jesus throughout this kind of story is in complete control of what these two individuals know about him and he chooses how much to reveal and when to reveal and slowly but surely they realize this is the Christ, this is the Messiah, Christ who is in from the dead but they only understand it when he determines it's the right time but he's out there revealing himself to them that's exactly the way we experience Christ, we are not in control of this dialogue so to speak and I don't know what's like for you but certainly sort of my history is one of you start at this position of skepticism don't you, you sort of who is this guy, who's this individual, who's kind of come alongside and then you get intrigued and then you learn a bit more but there's still skepticism, not quite sure what's going on, slowly but surely you realize that this is the Messiah and it gets to the point where the only thing you can do is worship so Christ is in complete control, now how do we feel about that, I'm not actually looking for answers, it's okay but it's a rhetorical question, how do we feel about it, we all we like control don't we, we like to have options, we like to feel that we set the agenda and that we determine our circumstances and we determine our future, throughout history throughout scripture Christ has always set the agenda and he's always determined what's going on, initially that's kind of a bit intimidating or you know you can be a bit resentful but actually it's a wonderful wonderful wonderful thing, you see when Christ comes in human flesh he is veiled and he needs to be veiled because if we saw Christ in all his glory we wouldn't be able to stand it, we simply couldn't stand in the presence of Christ fully revealed so Christ comes cloaked to us in human flesh in a way that we can understand in a way that we can actually identify with in a way that we can, he condescends,

[ 15 : 35 ] Calvin talks about God speaking to us like a sort of nursemaid speaking to a child you know cooing them, that's the sort of relationships of Christ is in complete control, our response is one of surrender which can be difficult, we don't like surrendering but Christ causes to surrender because he is the one who comes searching for us and that's the other point, we don't naturally go searching for Christ, he comes searching for us, so we have this beautiful picture of Christ coming out to to meet these two individuals which tells us a lot about who we are but there's more going on here because what's happened Christ has died and Christ has risen and we can see in the Corinthian church already people were saying well hold on Christ didn't really rise from the dead, the whole idea of resurrection, we don't really need to be that, it's a bit awkward but out of popularity and let's just put it to one side, now the Bible does not allow you to put resurrection to one side, Christ appears in the flesh, comes alongside what you're talking about, says to disciples if you want any fish, well you come for breakfast, it's very very earthy, very very physical, this is our risen Savior, that tells us an awful lot about Christ but tells us an awful lot about the resurrection, see it's fascinating although a lot of people say there's nothing left after death, it's probably the majority of folks today would believe in some kind of life hereafter but typically it's a very sort of mystical sort of spiritual, you know not quite sure what it means but there's some people like to feel there's some kind of you know continuation of life after death, the Bible is much much more kind of definitive that it's not just a kind of

Lucy Goosey, well we're kind of all out there sort of floating around in the ether, you know I sense presence of my great grandfather and the stars or whatever, it's physical resurrection that the future will look very very much like the present, it will be completely different but it will be physical resurrection, so against any kind of idea that you know Christ sort of was never really man or if he was man he was only man for a wee brief bit and then he stopped being man, it wasn't really Christ on the cross, the Bible says no this was man, this is man, Christ is man, now second thing is Christ did everything according to the scriptures but before we go to that, I'll go there, I just want to leave one final point about the Christ as man, there's a famous or was famous before our time a free church minister called Rabbi Duncan, Rabbi Duncan and he wasn't a

Rabbi, he's from Aberdeen but he was a missionary to the Jews in Hungary so they called him Rabbi Duncan, he's got a great quote I think it's fantastic and it really kind of sums up quite an amazing truth about who Christ is, the dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe, the dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe, that's the message we believe today that Christ is resurrected from the dead, a physical body and he sits today on the throne of the universe, that's a very counter-cultural concept, the dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe, let's move on to according to the scriptures, it's really interesting that both Paul and Luke are determined to sort of base and root everything that goes on in the life of Christ in the Old

Testament and you can study the New Testament and it's almost a sort of extended essay on how the life of Christ is grounded in Old Testament prophecy and history so a lot of folks will tend to divorce the two and say great we've got the New Testament this is wonderful, the Old Testament a bit bloody, some stories there I don't particularly like, some stuff I don't really understand, we can put it to one side, a bit primitive, the New Testament does not allow you to do that, the two are linked, can't pull them apart, now what's going on here, why is Christ and the authors of the New Testament so determined to ground everything that Christ did in the Old Testament and it's more than just, you know it's nice to be able to go back to Isaiah and go wow look there's a prophecy that's really interesting, you know he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, that sounds like that was Christ or you know the woman shall, the virgin shall give birth, that sounds like Christ as well, it's great the Old Testament is full of individual prophecies, you've got this is fantastic that sounds like Christ but it's more than that, it's a bigger claim than simply you can dip into the Old Testament, find a couple of verses that kind of support your idea that Christ is king, it's much more than that, much much more because Jesus here talks about the entire Old Testament, the law, the prophets, everything, everything and the New Testament is continually quoting from the whole spectrum of Old Testament scripture, the proposition behind or the idea behind this is that every single point in Old Testament history, every single point, every event, every Psalm, every lament, every prophecy, every bloody war, every horrific sacrifice, the politics, the nation against nation, everything going on is leading up to the birth of Christ, so from the foundations of the world through Genesis, the Ark, Israel, King David, the terrible sort of falling away, the losses to Egypt, the losses to Babylon, the losses to the Assyrians, the prophets, everything, everything, everything is leading to Christ, everything, it's quite a remarkable claim that the whole of history, the whole of history is leading to this point when Caesar Augustus is king and Herod is on the throne in Palestine and Christ is born in Bethlehem, that all of the Old Testament is leading up to this point. Now when Christ is telling the two chaps on the road that this is the case, of course we know that he's the Christ, they think he's speaking in the third party, but irrespective of that, it's a fairly outrageous claim, isn't it? What sort of person would claim that from the very beginning of history, when the spirit of God was floating over the waters and God said let there be light, or when God parted the Red Sea and Moses and the Israelites went through it, any other event you can pick in history throughout the Old Testament that was all about him, you and I couldn't say it without it sounding extremely silly, but Christ could say it because it was all about him. And there's a couple of ways of looking at it, but one of the most important things is if Christ appeared, if we didn't have all that history, we wouldn't have a clue what was going on if Christ appeared today, we wouldn't have a clue. We have no concept of love, grace,

sacrifice, all the fantastic atonement. Pick a concept that is central to our faith and it's grounded and rooted in the Old Testament. So it's not just that a man died on the cross and came to life, that in itself is an incredible miraculous event, it's that God was on the cross and that the whole of history was leading up to the cross. Only God can make that claim, only God can make that claim. So when we're told that everything was done in accordance with the scriptures, it has to be in the basis that there was a God who was controlling everything, a God who, the cross isn't a response to something out of God's control, where things have gone dreadfully wrong and God has had to step in if you like and figure things out and sort things out. From the start the cross, the suffering of our Savior was baked into the history and expectation of the

[ 24 : 51 ] Old Testament, that there would be a Savior and it would be Jesus. So where do we go with this?

And what do we do with it? Because we have a Savior on the cross who is man and we have a Savior on the cross who is God and you have to have both, he has to be both, he has to be both. Again, that's core to the Christian faith is that Christ is man and represents us as the Colossians, sorry, Corinthians says here, through one man sin came into the world and through a man sacrifice was paid. If Christ isn't a man, then the whole thing of suffering is a mirage. It has to be a man who died for us but also has to be God, has to be God because it was just a man then what on earth is going on? Why is God crushing him? I mean if God isn't on the cross, suffering in our place, and the whole story is a little bit odd, the whole story is actually quite unpleasant. You have a father in heaven punishing this man who's one of the most, the best men that ever lived, only works if God is also on the cross. So if we think about it, the necessity of scripture is totally bound up in the person of Christ because you and I cannot, we cannot look around the world, look at the beauty of nature, look at the history of the world, look at biology, physics, chemistry, sociology, whatever, and figure out the identity of a saviour. We cannot deduce from what we see around us that Christ is Lord and that he died for our sins. We need, we need this, we need it.

The dust of the earth is on the throne of the universe. So we can't live without that revolution. It's absolutely critical to anything that the church has to offer. The church has nothing to offer. The Christian faith has nothing to offer anybody unless it's Christ on the cross and Christ's Son of God, Son of Man. So that's why, I mean, as soon as you start unraveling that, there's nothing left. There is nothing left. So that's what we preach and that's what we believe. Now say, okay, that's all wonderful. It's all a bit theoretical, though, isn't it? Christ cross, what, what does it mean for me? I'm sitting here, 2013. What does it mean for me? Let's sort of scroll back to 1 Corinthians 15. The poem makes it very, very clear that if Christ is not raised from the dead, our faith is in vain. It's a waste of time. It's a complete waste of time. If Christ is not raised from the dead, we could all find much better things to do with this hour on a Sunday evening. If Christ is not raised from the dead, then as Paul says, we make God out to be a liar. Why would God, we make out Jesus to be a liar? Because Jesus certainly claims to be the Son of God who was raised from the dead. We divorced Jesus from the truth and were lost on a sea of confusion. But more than that, if Christ did not die on the cross, if Christ did not rise again from the dead, if Christ is not the firstborn, and this is what we're promised in the Bible, the firstborn of those who are raised from the dead, then all we're left with is dust. Dust you are and to dust you shall return.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Because those are the only sort of two alternatives I can see. This life is all you have and when the brief moment is gone, it's gone. And a lot of people think that's the case. There's nothing left. Dust returns to dust. The only alternative is the dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe. And that's our hope. That's our expectation. And what that means, and Paul talks about in Corinthians, is that death has lost its sting. The grave has lost its victory. And that's a Christian hope. That is the core to everything that we believe that death has lost its sting. And death is horrific. You can't minimize the horror and the awfulness and the sheer wrongness of death as it divorces people one from another, as it cuts community, as it sunders relationships and as people bury people they should never have to bury. It's awful. But, but it's been conquered. So we don't kind of, we don't kind of minimize death. We're not kind of no sticks or go, ah death doesn't matter. Death is awful. Death is horrific. And on this side of death, there is no answer to it. But we're promised that death has been conquered. The grave does not have the victory. There's a wonderful, there's a poet, author, George MacDonald, about a book diary of an old soul. And it's really good. One of the beautiful images he has is that death is no longer kind of raging lion or a wolf howling at your door waiting to come and get you. But when death, as he says, when death comes through his bedroom door, it will be led on a lead by Christ.

Death has been tamed. And so when death, and death will come, let's not be around the bush. But for the Christian, the Christian hope, the Christian expectation is that death is entrance into life.

[ 31 : 14 ] Death has been swallowed up in life. So again, comes back to necessity. Well, it depends what you want to base your life on. But if you want to base your life on the hope and expectation, and the certain hope that Christ is king, that he reigns, sits on the throne of the universe, that he has conquered death, then the Bible has to be the core, and the cornerstone of all that you believe. It's not something you can sort of pick and choose from, pick and mix. I like that bit.

I don't like that bit. The Bible reveals who Christ is. And because it reveals who Christ is, it reveals life to us. So I'd like to leave it there. And you can forget everything I've said, that's fine. But please remember the one thing that I didn't say about Rabbi, what's his name said, the dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe. And that is our Christian hope. Thank you.