

Is a new dawn really coming?

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- [0 : 00] So let's pray now and let's ask God to enlighten us. Heavenly Father, we praise you again as we have just sung this morning that you are indeed our rock, the one in whose promises we can trust.
- So we pray Lord that as we come to your word this morning, help us to come with a humble posture and a trusting posture, ready to receive your word as you have given it to us.
- So be at work in our hearts this morning by your Holy Spirit. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now if there's one thing that we've learned over the last two years or so, is that there are many things in life about which we can't be certain.
- Maybe it's starting to fade a little in the memory now, but remember those days when we were all asking how long will the lockdown last? Two weeks? Two months? Any idea?
- Will school actually reopen on the day it said it would? Would the just-released SOP still be the same tomorrow when I show up for work? There were so many uncertainties.
- [1 : 14] Those were exhausting times, weren't they? But even if we put aside the pandemic, how many things in life can we truly be certain of?
- How certain are you, for example, that your health will remain good? How certain are you that in the coming week, nothing bad will happen?
- And when we escalate that to a national scale, we can multiply the uncertainties. How certain are we that any of the alphabet soup we have on offer in the upcoming election, BN, PN, PH, GPS, PSB, will guarantee a brighter future?
- Those uncertainties even extend to the notion of truth itself. How certain are we that what we are reading or watching is true and not fake?
- Are there any certainties that we can build our lives upon? Anything certain that we can base our decision-making on?
- [2 : 22] Now, at this point, someone might interrupt. Well, I know what you're going to say, Pastor. I mean, it's a no-brainer, right? I'm sitting in church right now.
- I'm listening to a pastor. He's got a Bible open in front of him. So, of course, he's going to say, Jesus. Okay, now that I have guessed correctly, I'm allowed to sleep for the rest of the sermon, right?
- Well, hopefully none of us here are so cynical. But it wouldn't be a surprise if today, some, maybe even many of us, do struggle with knowing that is going to be the answer.
- It's not that we don't believe in Jesus. We've heard about him. We've been taught about him. We have even accepted him. But sometimes, at the back of our minds, there's a nagging doubt.
- I know in my head that Jesus should be my firm foundation. But can I truly be certain about him? Can I trust that he really is who he says he is?
- [3 : 37] I know the scriptures say, in Christ, the old is gone, the new has come. But can we be certain?

Is a new dawn really coming? Well, here is what Luke tells us. He says that if that's you today, he has written down the longest book in the New Testament, especially for you.

You see, I wonder what was going through your minds when I announced last week that we were going to dive into Luke's gospel. Maybe one or two of you were thinking, really?

Do I really need to look at the gospel again? Isn't that too basic? Isn't this just Sunday school stuff? I've been a Christian for a long time already.

I've already been taught this stuff. But Luke says, actually, you're the audience I'm looking for. You see, in verse 3, he tells us that he's writing for someone called Theophilus.

[4 : 46] And today we have absolutely no idea who this guy is. That's another uncertainty for you. But given that he's called most excellent, we can tell he's a man with status.

probably a man of wealth and honour. We can tell from his name he's probably Gentile, that is, a non-Jew, possibly Roman even.

And we can tell from the end of verse 4 that he's already heard the gospel. He's been taught about Jesus. His name, which literally means lover of God, probably reflects where he's at.

But he's likely a believer. He already knows some of these things. So why is Luke writing to him?

Well, verse 4, Luke tells us why he's writing to Theophilus. Have a look. It says that, So that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

[5 : 55] That's his overarching purpose. So perhaps this morning, you're a teenager. You've grown up in a Christian home.

You've been through Sunday school. Maybe you're even attending our youth group right now. But you're realising that you need some reassurance. You know some of this stuff.

But you need some confidence that Christianity isn't just some every-very thing that your parents believe in. You need to own the faith for yourself.

Well, Luke is for you. Or perhaps this morning, you're a long-term churchgoer. You've been to all sorts of churches. Roman Catholic ones.

Protestant ones. You've heard stuff about Jesus. But you're starting to realise that Christianity is not just a weekend hobby. It's a call to make Jesus your number one priority.

[6 : 55] But that's a little scary. Is that the right step to take? Well, Luke is written for you. His purpose is to give you certainty.

And the certainty that Luke wants to give us isn't simply some vague certainty that God exists. He's not here to convince you merely that religion is usually a good idea or that you should be in church every week.

No. He's here to convince you that Jesus changes everything. After all, in just a few weeks' time, he's going to tell us, via Mary, that Jesus will bring down rulers from their thrones and lift up the humble.

He's going to tell us, via Zechariah, that those living in darkness and under the shadow of death will now come into the light of freedom. He's going to tell us, via John the Baptist, that all people will see God's salvation.

That is what the Gospel of Jesus is all about. And when we grow in certainty in the Gospel, we will live differently.

[8 : 11] Now, in English, sometimes we have this saying, you know, we say something like, my valuables are under lock and key at the bank, meaning that they are being stored securely and safely.

And that word translated certainty in verse 4 is a word that has those very connotations of security and safety. It's a way of saying, when the storms of life hit us, our trust in Jesus remains under lock and key.

When we are safe and secure in the Gospel, we have been taught, we can face all the uncertainties life throws at us. So today, in his opening words, Luke wants to begin building our certainty.

And he does this by assuring us in two ways. Firstly, he says the words, you can have certainty because my Gospel isn't a bunch of hot air.

Because my Gospel isn't a bunch of hot air. Look at verse 3 again and notice how Luke intends to achieve his purpose.

[9 : 31] With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus.

So this is based on careful investigation. Now, how does that work? Well, as a pastor, sometimes I get people walking in to see me.

They claim all sorts of things and ask for money. But not all of them are trustworthy. So there's one guy whom I've tried to help on and off over the last few years.

But I wasn't fully convinced about his story. So I decided to do a little bit of digging. Now, he claimed at one point to have a part-time job at a certain store in Aeon.

As it so happened, I was going to be at Aeon that week, so I went into the store and I asked the staff whether so-and-so worked there. Nope.

[10 : 34] Never heard of him. They didn't know of anyone who fit his description. Another time when he claimed that he just needed a little bit more money to cover his rent before he would fly back to Johor on such-and-such a date because his old boss had supposedly offered him work.

I then got in touch with an Air Asia pilot who sometimes is in this congregation. And he confirmed for me that on the date that this guy was meant to be flying to Johor, there were no flights from any airline heading to JB from Guqing that day.

So, my own investigation, which I don't claim to be as careful as looks, already poked multiple holes in his story and expose him as untrustworthy.

And so that's what Luke is doing. You see, Luke does not simply tell us to trust our own intuition when it comes to Jesus. He doesn't just say, oh, just go with how you feel, whatever floats your boat.

If that's how you feel about Jesus, okay, just go with that. No. He doesn't bypass our mind, but instead asks us to use them. Sometimes critics of Christianity misunderstand faith.

[12 : 00] They think of faith as simply, to quote a TV character, believing something that no one in his right mind would believe.

Or as the writer Mark Twain supposedly once said, faith is believing what you know ain't so. So they think faith, by definition, is completely irrational.

And unfortunately, sometimes even Christians think of faith this way. But Luke says that's a complete misunderstanding. After all, he did his research, he checked things out, he didn't want to be lied to, and so his faith was not based on pure speculation.

And neither should ours. Is your faith today based on careful investigation, or is it merely a second-hand faith?

Is it your faith, or just the faith of your parents, or your culture? If it is the latter, you can be sure that you won't be able to persevere when the storms of life hit.

[13 : 18] So don't base your life on pure speculation. For the gospel is grounded in historical events. That's why Luke can even run an investigation in the first place.

Now, imagine if yet another person, let's call him Along, came up to me to ask for more money. and his justification for his request was this.

He claimed that he had a dream in which Jesus had spoken to him. And in the dream, Jesus told him to tell Pastor Brian that I am to hand over a thousand ringgit to him.

Now, how am I to check whether Along really did have this dream or not? Well, I can't because I have no way of verifying it objectively or externally.

Perhaps he did, perhaps he didn't, but there is no way for me to do any investigation to test whether that's true or not. Why not?

[14 : 26] Because he is not making a historical claim. Assuming God doesn't speak to me directly there and then to tell me the plain truth, all I can do is decide whether to trust him or not.

But this is where the gospel is very different from so many other sacred books. As the historian John Dixon says, at the heart of the world's largest faith, that's Christianity, it's not a lone spiritual insight, a mystical story drawn from the dawn of time, or a dictation of holy words in a holy book, but a series of events that are said to have taken place in public, in datable time, recorded by a variety of witnesses.

That's why Luke can play detective. He's not investigating a dream, he's looking at historical events. As verse one puts it, he's examining things that have been fulfilled among us.

And so he can check it out. Now, suppose Along claimed instead that he met someone called Jesus at Seven Stars Cafe for lunch. So that is an event in history.

And I can check it out. I can interview the waiters, I can check the CCTV, I can investigate and make a more informed judgement.

[16 : 03] That's exactly what Luke does, as we'll see in a moment. So here is the unique thing about the Gospel. In comparison to other religions, it is unashamedly historical.

If we have zero idea about Buddha, when Buddha was born, or what happened to him, it would not affect the teachings of Buddhism because they don't stand or fall on historical events.

But Christianity is the opposite. It is unique in the way that it willingly exposes itself to historical analysis. Let's think about this.

You see, what happens when you read Luke's Gospel itself? You would notice that it's filled with all sorts of factual historical data. Let's just take one example.

Listen to me as I read Luke 3, verse 1. In the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod, tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip, tetrarch of Eturia and Trachonitis, and Lysanius, tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas.

[17 : 30] Now, can you hear all those specific dates, the specific reigns, a specific listing of who is who? There is a wealth of historical information.

Now, why would Luke bother to mention all of that? If he was making it up, doing that would simply increase the risk of him messing it up and exposing his work as a fraud.

After all, if Ah Long wanted to lie to me, he would not say, oh, I was at the spring from 2.30 to 3.30 on that Wednesday when the boss of Taikyong supermarket also just happened to be there.

No, the more specific he is, the easier it would be for me to check. He would keep it vague. But one reason Luke is giving us all this information is precisely because he is not making it up.

He is simply presenting the results of his historical investigation. It is his way of helping us to be more certain. And so he certainly would have been careful to be accurate because it's easier to check if he's wrong.

[18 : 49] So here's the key thing. The gospel is historical. It is not made up. And that means you don't have to base your beliefs merely on a hunch.

You can make a reasonable assessment as to whether Jesus really lived, whether he did all those miracles, whether he rose from the dead. Recently, I've been following a controversy in Australia where a Christian was appointed the CEO of a football club, only to be forced to step down on the same day when it was discovered that he was on the leadership team of an evangelical church, because it was felt that his Christian beliefs would not be compatible with the club's values.

But what struck me was how many people on social media said something along these lines. How can modern adults today still be believing in fairy tales?

Why in the world are these Christians still basing what they do on some ancient 2000-year-old book, which is so outdated anyway? That is the assumption of the average non-Christian.

But my friends, our gospel is not the product of a wild imagination. It is not mere myth or legend. It is based on careful investigation and grounded in historical events.

[20 : 22] And it is informed by eyewitness testimony. Look at who Luke sources his material from. Verse 2. They were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

He got all his information from the people who were actually there when those events happened. He wasn't indulging in hearsay.

And such testimony would have been especially valuable. During that time, throughout the Mediterranean, education at all levels involved considerable memorization at a level that we find hard to imagine now.

yes, even to those of us who grew up in the Malaysian education system. Completely illiterate Bards, in fact, could recite from memory the entirety of the Greek poem Iliad, which has over 15,600 lines.

So eyewitnesses could probably recall quite a great deal. In fact, the scholar Craig Keener tells us, a primary role of disciples in this period was to learn and propagate their teachers' messages.

[21 : 44] Even disciples who came to disagree with their teachers were expected to accurately report their views. What more those who agree?

And there is no doubt that the sources Luke got his information from were motivated to report what Jesus said and did accurately. after all, Luke describes them as servants of the word.

There were those who were there from the first or from the beginning, meaning they were most likely the disciples of Jesus himself, who knew his story from the day of his birth to the day of his death and on to the day of his resurrection.

But are their memories reliable? Well, interestingly, psychologists have done some research as to what kind of events are remembered more accurately.

Amongst some of the criteria are the following. We're more likely to remember well events that are unique or unusual, especially when they're unexpected.

[22 : 58] If those events are important and meaningful to us personally, we are also better at remembering them. And usually, memories of these events could include irrelevant details, things that are not crucial to the event, but which we still remember nonetheless.

Well, the disciples of Jesus would certainly have witnessed many memorable events of healings and exorcisms. And they did sometimes remember details that, strictly speaking, were not necessary to know.

For instance, in Luke chapter 19, Luke will record a story where the tax collector Zacchaeus climbs up a sycamore tree.

Now, what tree Zacchaeus climbed up is not really that important to the story. Luke could have just said he climbed up a tree. So, why say sycamore tree?

Well, the answer must simply be because that's what he climbed. Sycamore trees were not common in many parts of the Mediterranean, but they were common in Jericho where this story takes place.

[24 : 15] Now, the question is, how did Luke know that? Remember, he couldn't Google what trees are common in Jericho. He can't even consult a written encyclopedia.

There's no such thing. The simplest answer is, Luke knew either because he was there himself or he had spoken to someone who had been there.

It's an irrelevant detail that nonetheless gives a sense of authenticity to the story. And you can multiply such examples across the four written biographies written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

So, Luke wants us to know, you can be certain my gospel is not a bunch of hot air. It's credible, it's reliable, it shouldn't simply be dismissed.

Now, perhaps today, you're not a believer and Luke is for you too. If you want to check out whether Christianity is true or not, one of the best things to do is simply to read on in Luke's gospel.

[25 : 30] We have an upcoming program called Hope Explored, which you will hear more about later in this service, where you have an opportunity to do precisely that.

But that is not all there is to win. You see, it's necessary but not sufficient for us to know that the gospel is true. After all, I'm certain it's true that Ronald Reagan was the President of the United States from 1981 to 1989.

But does that fact really matter to me personally? Is that truth really significant to my life? Not really. And so Luke says, you need to know a second thing.

You can have certainty because my gospel is a word from Yahweh. My gospel is a word from Yahweh.

Come back with me to verse 1 and notice how Luke describes these historical events. He calls them an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us.

[26 : 45] In other words, these are not merely things that randomly happen. These are events that accomplish something. They have brought to completion something God has started.

They are, in other words, significant. But what is their significance? Well, the key word in that verse is fulfilled.

You see, back in the Old Testament, God made a whole bunch of promises. And those promises were significant. You see, let me try to show you how significant it is.

And I'll do that by asking you guys, first of all, a question. Do you feel the frustration today of realizing that you often don't do what you know you should do, and you do what you know you shouldn't do?

I think all of us feel that frustration, right? And that's because the Bible says we've been infected by the curse of sin. And God has promised someone who will come who will reverse the curse of sin.

[28 : 01] Or let me ask you another question. do you long for a leader who has 100% integrity, who is completely incorruptible, who can administer justice perfectly, and yet also with great mercy?

Well, God has promised that there will be a righteous king who will do all of that, who will reign forever. And here is what Luke wants to get across.

Those very promises it has now been fulfilled in what I'm about to tell you. And Luke says it is God who has brought about all that fulfillment.

That is probably why Luke says in verse 3 that he wants to write an orderly account. It's not so much that he thinks that everyone else who has attempted to write down the story of Jesus has done so in a haphazard manner and so he better make sure that he's writing everything in a very nice, strictly chronological order.

Now, of course there is chronology. After all, Luke does start with Jesus' birth and then he talks about his early ministry and then his journey to Jerusalem so there is a kind of chronology there.

[29 : 23] But more importantly, he wants to tell us the story in such a way that you are left in no doubt this is all God's doing.

Indeed, one of the most striking things about Luke's gospel is how frequently he uses the phrase it is necessary. In other words, he wants to highlight that God is working out his purposes and that Jesus is the fulfillment and culmination of those purposes.

And Jesus himself makes that clear at the end of Luke's gospel. After his resurrection, he appears to two men who are on the way to a village called Emmaus.

And he tells them in Luke chapter 24 verse 44 to 46, everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms.

That's the Old Testament. Then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. He told them, this is what is written, the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.

[30 : 34] That, Jesus says, is the point of it all. Luke's gospel is not just eyewitness testimony, but God's testimony that he has kept his promises.

He has sent the righteous king who can reverse the curse of sin. He has sent his only son into human time and space to die on the cross in our place and rise again to defeat death.

And the fulfillment of those promises cannot be separated from historical fact. The two go together. So do you see why it's so important to know?

Can Luke's words be true? can Luke's words be trusted? Because if what he says is really true, then this really, really, really is the best piece of news that we could ever hear.

If what he says is true, that means that even though life can be full of uncertainties, marked by tragedies, even spoiled by our own depravity, God, that doesn't have to be the whole story.

[31 : 51] For if Christ truly died and rose again to be our saviour and king, we can have true certainty that those things no longer have the final word. If we trust in Christ, you and I can be certain that our eternal inheritance is under lock and key.

We can be certain a new dawn is coming. And my friends, if that is the certainty we can have today, what does that mean for us?

Well, as we finish, let me just bring out one concluding implication. And it is this. We can stake our lives on what is certain.

You see, Luke's purpose is not just to reassure us about the future. He expects that if we are conflicted confident, this is really true, then that would transform our lives today.

Imagine for a moment that you are making a big move. So you've got a huge moving truck and it's carrying lots of stuff. It's pretty heavy.

[33 : 04] And you're on a journey to your new home. And you come to this very scary-looking river and there are two bridges. bridges. And it's hard to know which bridge can take the weight of your moving truck.

But what if you know something about one of those bridges? You know that it's constructed by the best bridge maker in the land who is incapable of constructing a bad bridge and he personally guarantees it can hold the weight of your truck.

There is no uncertainty about that. Now, which bridge would you choose? It's obvious, isn't it? Even if it doesn't look as nice or as sturdy as the other bridge, you're going for that one.

Now, just imagine that this journey represents the duration of your life here. And everything that goes into that truck represents everything in your life.

Your possessions, your finances, your relationships, your ambitions. Everything. And the river represents all those uncertainties and depravity in your life.

[34 : 19] And those two bridges represent Jesus and every other alternative to Jesus. So the question that lies before you now is, which bridge would you travel on?

Who would you stake your life on? Well, if you're confident that Jesus will certainly get you true to the other side, you would choose Jesus.

Even though the Jesus bridge doesn't look so impressive at times. Even when it looks shakier than the alternatives sometimes. Even if the bridge deliberately takes you on a winding path that you don't want to take sometimes.

Even if the bridge contains instructions which seem costly and contrary to our desires at times. you would stake your lives on what is certain.

And Luke says we can have that certainty because what was written has been fulfilled. The Messiah must die and he will rise again on the third day.

[35 : 27] So my friends, if you have never bothered to get certain about the gospel, will you start doing that today? And after that, would you stake your lives on him?

Would you build on what is certain? Let me encourage you to stop procrastinating, stop messing around, stop playing on any other bridge other than Jesus because you never know when it's going to collapse.

Get your track of life onto the right path and you can be sure you will live to see the dawn of a brand new world, which is your brand new home coming.

Let's pray. Father, we pray that even in this opening words of Luke, which seem nothing more than just a mere introduction, and yet, Lord, you already have things to say to us.

And I pray, Lord, that you would help us to have that certainty of knowing that Jesus is the sure and firm foundation on whom we can build our lives, a rock that will never be shaken.

[36 : 43] So, Father, for those of us who might have been tempted or who have slowly moved away from that rock, who is on some other bridge other than Jesus, help us to get off that bridge now and help us to come back to the bridge of Jesus.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. You Don't Mi Not My one perceptive saja to the treasure is in the sanctuary, and we live here tak█ glory,███ and die truth and█