

## The Church Alive – The Unfinished Work of Christ (Part 3)

### Acts 1:1-3

*1 The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, 2 until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. 3 To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.*

As Laura and I were dating, and on occasions after we were first married, there were many times that we would go to her parents or over to her grandfather's house to find a puzzle sprawled out on a table. As was her family's custom, they would sit and talk and put the puzzle together. I was a bit more hyperactive in those days and the idea of putting a puzzle together was not on the top of my list. However, as I sat there and talked, I could not help but start to look at the pieces and eventually I would find a piece that fit into the bigger picture. Now I may have only put one piece in for every ten or so that everyone else did; but there was something about that unfinished puzzle that enticed me to participate.

We are working our way through the prologue, the introductory words of the book of Acts and we have been noticing that Luke lays out in these first eight verses those things that would prepare the disciples to carry out the unfinished work of evangelism, of proclaiming the truths of Jesus Christ as the resurrected Lord and as the Savior of all who believe.

What we find in these introductory words then are the necessities for effective evangelism. In other words, if we want to see people come to know and exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ, then what we find in these opening words are the very puzzle pieces that are necessary to complete the picture of salvation for all who will believe. If we will just take the time to look at these pieces, then I believe we will become increasingly enticed to participate in this great work of Christ and His church of spreading the gospel.

The pieces that we have already looked at as well as those that we will look at, although they may come at times in different shapes and sizes, will all fit together to present the glory, the wonder, the graciousness of God in the giving of His Son to be the **"Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."**

Thus far, we have considered three necessities of being prepared and effective in spreading the gospel of Jesus. Allow me to summarize. The first necessity was that of "knowing and growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ." Luke states it simply that the book of Acts is about **"Jesus;"** about all that He began to do and teach. The point made to Theophilus and the point for us is that we must know Jesus intimately, we must know Him intently, and we must know Him intentionally. We must know the person and work of Jesus. We must not simply know about Him, but we must know Him; to know Him as the theme and subject of all Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

The French philosopher and scientist, Blaise Pascal, author of the classic work *Pensees* made this declaration about our Lord saying, "Jesus Christ is the centre of everything and the object of everything, and he who does not know Him knows nothing of the order of nature and nothing of himself." We cannot begin to proclaim a Christ that we do not truly know. Therefore, it is of first necessity that we know and grow in the knowledge of Jesus.

The second necessity needful to carry on the work of spreading the gospel effectively is that of obedience to the commands of Christ. In verse two, we find that Jesus gave orders or commands that He expected to be followed so that this work of evangelism could be completed.

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

No effective work of evangelism can be carried out while living in disobedience to the commands of Christ. In John 15:14 Jesus said to His disciples, **“You are My friends if you do what I command you.”** Do you know the commands of Christ? Do you know His rightful expectations of you? Do you know that you were bought with a price, the blood of Jesus; that you belong to Him; that you are owned by Him; that you are in fact His slave? But I know no more gracious and benevolent Master to serve than Jesus. We must know and obey the commands of Christ.

The third necessity for effectively communicating Christ to an unbelieving world is knowing that you have been chosen by Jesus for the task. At the end of Acts 1:2 we see that Jesus, by Himself, to Himself and for Himself, choose the apostles to be the first recipients of the indwelling Holy Spirit and thus the first members of the Church which was established on the day of Pentecost. No effective work of evangelism can be carried out by unbelieving, unregenerate persons. We noted from Scripture this principle of God’s choosing by Himself, to Himself and for Himself. Jesus said to the disciples in John 15:16, **“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain...”** The principle is that God chooses and then appoints a fruit-bearing task. We learn from Ephesians 1 and 2 that we too have been chosen by God for His glory and that being chosen by His grace, we are **“His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (our fruit bearing), which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”** (Ephesians 2:10).

These three necessities are what we have considered. Let me now present you with the fourth of the necessities, reminding you that if we are going to be effective in evangelism, if we are going to rightly proclaim the message of God to the unbelieving world so that, in the words of Acts 13:48 all those that God has appointed to eternal life may believe; then **we must proclaim the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

#### **4. We must proclaim the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

*To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days...(Acts 1:3a)*

In Acts 1:3 we find some of the most intentional and emphatic of language. Consider these words, **“presented”**; **“alive”**; **“suffering”** (a reference to death on the cross); **“many convincing proofs”**; and **“appearing.”** Of all the things we have considered, while not one of them is to be overlooked or lightly regarded, we find that for Luke, the demonstration and proclamation of the reality and wonder of the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is paramount; it is of utmost importance. Never, never in the history of humanity has there ever been a man who has raised from the dead never to die again. For Luke, and indeed for Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the central core truth without which there is no Christianity, there is not Church and there is no truth.

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, as testified to by Luke here in Acts 1:3, is the pinnacle proof of Christianity. It is not an overstatement to say that everything else that Jesus said or did; and everything else that was accomplished by the apostles hinges on the reality of the resurrection. For if Jesus did not rise from the dead, then Christianity is a false religion. But if the resurrection did take place, then Jesus is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth.

Let me remind you that the greatest enemy of humanity is not some rogue dictator in a foreign land; rather the greatest enemy is death. The enemy death has and will conquer, defeat and devour every man, woman and child save one; Jesus Christ. There is not one who is clever enough to outwit death; there is not one who is wealthy enough to purchase eternal life for himself; and there is not one who is powerful enough to subdue death. Apart from Jesus Christ,

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"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

the most lopsided of contests is between man and the grave. And the grave always wins as everyone will eventually return to the dust. Not one of humanity's greatest of men or holiest of men have cheated death; not Buddha, not Mohammed, not Confucius, not Marx, not one Pharaoh of Egypt, and not one Caesar of Rome. While such men certainly made profound and lasting impacts upon humanity, every one of them is dead, rotting in a tomb or blowing away as dust and ashes. Charles Spurgeon put it this way:

*We see on the shore of time the wrecks of the Caesars, the relics of the Moguls, and the last remnants of the Ottomans, Charlemagne, Maximilian, Napoleon, how they flit like shadows before us! They were and are not; but Jesus forever is!*

And this is what we read in our text of Acts 1:3, that Jesus "**presented Himself**"; that is "revealed; but on display, substantiated; proved as in a court of law" the fact that He is alive! Yes, it is true that Jesus died and was buried like any other man. The disciples saw His death; some had stood at the cross; some had heard the hammer pounding in the nails; some had even seen that spear pierce through Jesus' side. They believed and knew Jesus was dead. So certain were they of His death that they even scattered in fear. While it had been nice to have known Him, they were not willing to give their own lives for the mere memory of a man who had died just as any other man hung on a cross.

But Jesus was not like any other man. For while truly human and surely dead upon that cross, Jesus did something no other man had done. He returned from death; He was resurrected, His own dead body was regenerated, reanimated, recreated and clothed with immortality. Can we begin to fathom the wonder? If we lose this one truth, then we lose our Christianity. If we lose this one fact, we lose our identity in Christ. If we lose the wonder of this one truth, that there is a person who has been raised from the dead never to die again, then our evangelism will suffer. What is the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Beloved there is nothing else like it in all creation. We marvel at how a dead seed may be planted in the ground and spout and yield its fruit. We can marvel at the conception and birth of a human baby knowing that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. These are indeed miracles; but they are miracles of nature. They are regular, routine occurrences in the every day lives of humanity. But it is not as if we see persons popping out of graves on some kind of regular basis never to die again. In fact, we do not even see persons popping out of graves on an irregular basis only to die again, as was the case with Lazarus and a handful of others noted in Scripture. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the most unique event ever to happen to a man, apart from perhaps the incarnation, the process by which God Himself became man, but this too belongs to Jesus Christ.

It is this wondrous event of the resurrection that Luke wants to capture the hearts and attention of his readers because it becomes the cornerstone of the gospel message. As we will see in moment, the very preaching found in the book of Acts is constantly centered on this historical truth – that Jesus is risen from the dead.

Luke does not leave it to our imagination as to whether or not the apostles had any doubt of His resurrection. Our text goes on to say that Jesus presented Himself alive.... "**by many convincing proofs**". I love how the amplified version of this verse reads:

***To them also He showed Himself alive after His passion (His suffering in the garden and on the cross) by [a series of] many convincing demonstrations [unquestionable evidences and infallible proofs]...***

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“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

This series of many convincing demonstrations is what needs to capture our attention. What were these infallible proofs, these convincing arguments that verify the phenomenal truth of the resurrection? Luke was seeking to prove the truthfulness of the resurrection. It is as if he is saying, “As I chart the spread of Christianity from the eastern outskirts of the Roman Empire all the way to the very heart of Rome itself, you need to know from the beginning that this religion is based upon historical facts, the greatest of which is the awesome truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” And we must never forget that Luke is assuming in part that we have already read his gospel, the closing chapter of which presents a series of demonstrations that presented Jesus as alive!

If it was presumed by Luke that his readers know these **“many convincing proofs”** – then we are bound to explore several of them; that we might be thoroughly convinced ourselves and armed with such knowledge of Jesus’ resurrection that we might proclaim it to others; knowing that our very faith and hope in God rises or falls with the truthfulness of this event. For in the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, **“if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless [empty, vain; profitless; without substance and hope]; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).**

If Jesus did not rise from the dead and our faith is built upon some kind of delusion, then Jesus is no different from any other great person of history. If the resurrection is a hoax, then Jesus is actually worse than other men in history because He was either a liar and knew that what He said about His being raised from the dead was a false claim; or he was a lunatic believing Himself to be God and promising to rise from the dead when He could not deliver on such a promise.

So the question before is simply this; is the resurrection and demonstrable fact of history? And if so, then not only are His claims about His deity and His purpose to save His people from their sins vindicated, but so are His promises. It is by these many convincing proofs that we are to rejoice in the truth that as mighty a warrior as Death has been against humanity, in Jesus Death is a defeated foe! Jesus is the Victor, the Conqueror and the Author of Salvation. Beloved, do you rejoice in the truth that your hopes, your future, your eternal well-being is tied up in the monumental truth of the resurrection? Does your heart cry out with Peter and say,

***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...***

Of course we do not have time to examine all the convincing proofs, for there are, in Luke’s own words, many; but let us look to what Luke himself considered as a part of this testimony. Turn with me to Luke 24 and let us walk through this chapter, noting some of these proofs of the resurrection.

Luke’s testimony begins with the simple proclamation that Jesus is risen just as He promised. The story begins with some of the women going out to the tomb early Sunday morning. In Luke 24:1-8 we read:

***1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus [proof #1 the empty tomb]. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; 5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground,***

"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

**the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6 He is not here, but He has risen. [proof #2 – the testimony of the angels]. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." 8 And they remembered His words...[proof #3, the promise of Jesus].**

Excited, the women wanted to report what they had just seen and heard. We read next in Luke 24:9-11 that their report was received with mixed reactions:

**9 and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. 10 Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. 11 But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them.**

All the men must have thought was "Crazy women, your emotions are making you see things." All the women must have thought, "Crazy men, always thinking that women are driven by emotions." However, there was one, actually two according to John 20:4-6 who had to see this for themselves and so Peter and John ran off to the tomb. We read in Luke 24:12

**But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened.**

And now both Peter and John could testify of the truth that the tomb was empty. But where was the body? Where was Jesus? An empty tomb is impressive, particularly when you look into all the details that there was no way humanly speaking for the tomb to be raided and robbed as it was guarded by well-trained soldiers, which is yet another convincing proof.

Luke answers this question as to the whereabouts of Jesus in the next verses of his testimony. For Jesus here, presented Himself alive with many convincing proofs to the two on the Road to Emmaus. I want to encourage you to read through this account, but let me summarize what takes place in verses 13-35. The story begins with two men leaving Jerusalem having become quite disappointed with the way things had turned out with Jesus, believing Him to be dead. In verse 15 Jesus appears to them but somehow veils His identity from them and begins to ask them about what and whom they were talking. Almost scoffingly, Cleopas, one of the men says to this veiled Jesus in verse 18, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" In other words, everyone was talking about Jesus and all the hopes they had had concerning His promises.

They even make reference to what the women had seen and reported in verses 22-23, stating again that the tomb was empty, but that no one could find the body. They even testify that some of the other disciples, namely Peter and John also reported the same thing in verse 24.

And then Jesus gently rebukes them, challenging them to see the reality that is before their eyes; asking if this was not exactly what was promised by Jesus and the Scriptures in verses 25-27. What a Bible study as Jesus, **"beginning with Moses and with all the prophets...explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures"** (v 27). This is yet another proof, that the resurrection was foretold in the Scripture and thus had to be fulfilled. And then, in verses 28-32 Jesus actually prepared to eat with them when He then presented Himself alive! So excited now were these two that they, according to verse 33, **"got up that very hour,"** in order to say in verse 34, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to

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Simon (that is Peter)." Not only did they see Jesus, but they also had heard Peter's testimony that he had seen Jesus. Where was the body? Jesus was not only miraculously risen, but He was visiting His people, presenting Himself alive. And while they were relating these experiences, what happens in verses 36-43! He presents Himself alive! He shows up in the midst of the disciples. They thought He might be a ghost and so Jesus tells them to see and touch His resurrected body in verses 39-40; and then He eats with them in verses 41-43 (the point here is to prove that He was not a ghost as ghosts do not eat. Yet another convincing proof. And then another bible study in verses 44-49 proving from the Scriptures the reality of the resurrection.

Beloved, without the resurrection I can say with all certainty that there would be no Christian church. After such an ignominious death of their Master, the disciples had been troubled, fearful and scattered for their lives. No one would have dared teach the doctrines of Jesus Christ, nor persuade others to follow them with their so-called leader, the liar/lunatic, in the grave. But Luke communicates these convincing proofs of the resurrection of Jesus. Yet one of the greatest proofs of the truthfulness of the resurrection is the changed lives of the disciples as they moved from fear to faith, from pondering what might have been to proclaiming the reality of Jesus Christ. These scared disciples, convinced that Jesus was alive, went forth everywhere, in every conceivable setting and proclaimed as the gospel this truth, that Jesus had risen from the dead. This is in fact the very theme of all the preaching and proclamation in the book of Acts. Whenever someone spoke of Jesus, they based the truthfulness of their teaching on the fact of the resurrection. I know we are running out of time, but let me quickly show you this extraordinary proclamation. Get your fingers ready as we are going to fly through these.

First, look in Acts 2:22-24 in Peter's very first sermon to the people we read these words:

***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 — 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.***

And then, just a bit later Peter continues in Acts 2:32-33 saying:

***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.***

In Acts 3:13-15 and Peter's second sermon we read:

***13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. 14 But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, 15 but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses.***

And then in Acts 4:8-10 as Peter and John were arrested and standing before the Jewish leaders on trial for preaching Jesus we read:

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"...about all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:3).

**8 Then Peter, 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 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.**

And Acts 4 ends with this statement found in verse 33:

**And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.**

In Acts 5:29-32 we find Peter and some of the apostles once again arrested and challenged not to teach about Jesus. But we read:

**29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. 30 "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. 31 He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32 And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him."**

In Acts 10:34-41 Peter finds himself in Caesarea, preaching to the Gentiles and what does he include in his gospel exhortation beginning in verse 39 -

**39 We are witnesses of all the things He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross. 40 God raised Him up on the third day and granted that He become visible...**

In Acts 13:27-31 we have one of Paul's first sermons. And what do we see him including in his message? The resurrection. We read:

**27 "For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled these by condemning Him. 28 And though they found no ground for putting Him to death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. 29 When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. 30 But God raised Him from the dead; 31 and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people.**

Time simply does not permit me to take you through all the references, but in Acts 26:22-24, as Paul is giving his defense before King Agrippa and the governor Festus, hear what he says:

**22 So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. 24 While**

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:3).

**Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.”**

Festus obviously thought such a teaching that a man has risen from the dead never to die again was nonsense. And we know that many will respond this way, but beloved, if we are to be effective in evangelism; if we would see hearts radically changed by and for Jesus Christ, then we cannot shy away from proclaiming boldly and without reservation that Jesus is wonderfully, marvelously, miraculously, bodily and eternally risen from the dead. By His resurrection He was, in the word of Romans 1:4, **“declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead...”** By His resurrection, Jesus not only proves His deity, He not only confirms His teaching, but He proves to us that we will be like Him and be fit to be with Him. Romans 6:5 declares, **“For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death [dying to sin], certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.”**

Beloved, let us know, study and love the convincing proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul put it this way to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8:

**3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; 7 then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.**

Beloved, this is to be our proclamation, that Jesus was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. This is the hope of the gospel, that because Jesus lives, we who believe in Him will live also. Some may wonder about our sanity, others may mock our beliefs; but may we never be deterred from proclaiming the very message that turned the Roman Empire upside down and continues to radically transform people into the image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Like puzzle pieces may we see just how we fit in to complete this great work of Jesus!

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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