

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

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.

This morning we continue to look from our text at what is necessary for the church to be effective in proclaiming the teachings and truth of Jesus. We have identified this call as our part in completing the unfinished work of Christ. Thus far we have noted that to be effective in talking to others about Jesus' work and person we must know and grow in the knowledge of Jesus, seeing that this book called Acts is all about what *"Jesus began (and therefore continues) to do and teach,"* that we must seek to live in obedience to the commands of Christ (does your life reflect one of obedience to Christ); and that we must be certain of Christ's choosing and calling us for service (answering the simple question, 'have you been born again?').

Last week we added another necessity. For if we are going to be effective in completing the unfinished work of evangelism; we must proclaim, we must announce, we must have at the very core of our message to others, the reality and the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now we did not make it much past the statement that that opens verse 3 of our text, ***"To these [a reference to the apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering..."*** We were just beginning to see in this statement the importance of the resurrection and it is this theme we need to continue and expand upon this morning.

It has been said, *"The best proof of Christ's resurrection is a living Church, which itself is walking in a new life, and drawing life from Him who hath overcome death."* In other words, if you really want to see and know the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, then look at how this truth has and continues to transform the lives of people; turning them from sin to serve the living and true God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

For if the faith of believers is or has been built upon a falsehood; upon a the perceived notion that there was nothing special about Jesus' death beyond its gruesomeness; that there is no such thing as physical, bodily resurrection from the dead, that this leader who promised His own resurrection after three days and eternal life to all who believed that He would rise; and that therefore the body of this lunatic madman is truly rotting somewhere in the ground at this very moment; then we are of all people to be the most pitied; we are the most ignorant and we are the most deceived people on the face of the earth. But does our faith and belief in Jesus' rising from the dead rest on such shaky and scanty grounds? Not according to our text, for Jesus presented Himself alive by many convincing proofs.

Our belief in the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is not built on some abstract, unverifiable hope or wish. The Church does not stand on puny or pathetic evidence when it comes to the Resurrection. But what is at issue is a skeptical, unbelieving community that has constantly countered the church; a community that has been programmed to see belief in the resurrection as nothing more than a leap of blind faith; a house of cards ready to collapse at the slightest wind of any scholarly or sane criticism. Such is simply not the case. Our belief in

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the resurrection of Jesus is built upon Jesus, presenting (revealing, proving) Himself alive by many convincing, infallible, foolproof, watertight, absolutely credible proofs. As one theologian has stated,

If one refuses to believe in the possibility of miraculous occurrences altogether, the resurrection will seem an absurdity. But large numbers of "modern scientific" people recognize that science itself is merely descriptive [it merely describes how things work by observation] rather than prescriptive [authoritatively laying down guidelines and rules for living]. If a God exists, it is only natural to expect Him to have powers beyond that which science has discovered or can explain and to be able to use them for His purposes. It is arguable that of all the alleged miracles in ancient history, the resurrection is actually the one with far and away the most historical support.¹

In other words, if you are going to believe in anything miraculous at all, your best verifiable miracle is the fact of Jesus rising from the dead, just as He said. When we read in our text that Jesus **"presented Himself alive...by many convincing proofs,"** then we should expect this statement we just read, that the resurrection *"is actually the one [miracle] with far and away the most historical support."* And yet we as Christian can often be woefully ignorant of these many convincing proofs. It is the very fact of the resurrection that forms the basis of every gospel message presented to us in the book of Acts. In other words, it was not simply some ignorant belief, some vague hope that Jesus rose from the dead that formed the centerpiece of the early church's preaching; but it was concrete conviction, based upon fact and evidence that caused the early church to proclaim boldly and often that a dead man had actually been raised to life never to die again and to stand firm in that proclamation regardless of what others thought or when others mocked such statements. The lesson for us is clear: we must learn to proclaim boldly the reality and the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we noted last week, everything we believe about God, about Jesus and about the hope of eternal life hinges on this one truth of the resurrection. It has been said, *"If the resurrection is not historic fact, then the power of death remains unbroken, and with it the effect of sin; and the significance of Christ's death remains uncertified, and accordingly believers are yet in their sins, precisely where they were before they heard of Jesus' name."²*

May I suggest to you that it is this series of many convincing demonstrations that 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;

¹ Blomberg, Craig L. cited from the "Holman NT Commentary: Luke" p.412

² Sparrow-Simpson W. J. cited from "The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict" p. 206

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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 a 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 – promises of eternal life; of the gift of His indwelling Spirit, of the fellowship of the saints as His body, the Church and so forth. 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-how do you explain this?]. 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, 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 promised and prophesized this event].

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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 we still have a problem; where was the body? Where was Jesus? That the tomb was empty 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 find the disciples and to say in verse 34, **“The Lord has really risen and has appeared to 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

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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 and wonder of the resurrection.

Beloved, without the resurrection I can say with all certainty that there would be no Christian church. After the horrifically demeaning 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, he based the truthfulness of his teaching on the fact of the resurrection. Let us note this and allow me to 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.

Turn please to Acts 4. Here we just come off of Peter's second sermon, a sermon that had been prompted by Peter and John healing of a lame beggar. Peter and John were disturbing the

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Jewish leaders because, according to verse 2, they were **“teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead;”** Peter and John were subsequently arrested and standing trial before the Jewish leaders, being challenged to give an account for what they were preaching and doing. Listen now to Peter’s testimony in Acts 4:8-10 where we see him boldly proclaim the reality and wonder of the resurrection:

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.

The Church Alive

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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 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 radically continues to transform people into the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

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