

The Resurrection Series: Acts 1:1-3

Introduction:

Over the next few weeks we will be looking at the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will look at how the resurrection transformed the lives of the disciples. We will discover the importance of the resurrection to our everyday lives, giving us the power to fulfill the purposes of God. The entire New Testament story is founded upon this historical fact. The resurrection of Jesus is one of the two primary doctrines of the gospel. 1 Cor 15:3-4 tells us what Paul preached to us as the Gospel, **“I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...”** It is pointless to try to resolve which is of greater importance; his death or his resurrection. One without the other does not adequately establish the full reality of salvation. In his death our sins are forgiven, and in his resurrection our lives are made new. In fact 1 Cor 15:14 tells us that if Christ had not been raised from the dead, our preaching is useless and so is our faith. One of the sermons preached to the masses after Jesus' resurrection was given by Peter. He boldly proclaimed the necessity of Christ's resurrection, quoting Old Testament Scripture, to biblically support this reality to the Jews and to the Gentiles. In the course of his preaching he declares that we are all witnesses of this fact, that God raised Jesus to life.

The Jews and Gentiles present on the Day of Pentecost had great difficulty in the concept of the resurrection of the dead, let alone the resurrection of Jesus. The Jewish believers had little or no concept of the resurrection as there is little about the resurrection in the Old Testament. And in fact the Sadducees of Jesus' day denied that there was a resurrection. On the other hand, the Greeks believed that the body was an unholy hindrance to life and needed to be set free from the soul in order to enjoy immortality. But this Greek idea of immortality firmly rejected any connection to the resurrection of the dead. In Peter's preaching he affirms the resurrection of the dead by the fact that Jesus is alive and appeared to many.

In fact there are ten different times recorded in the New Testament that Jesus appeared to his followers after his resurrection; to Mary Magdalene alone at the tomb, to certain other women, to Peter, the two disciples of the road to Emmaus, to the ten disciples except Thomas, to the ten disciples again with Thomas present, to the eleven disciples and about five hundred others, to James and to the apostles and others before his ascension. In these encounters Jesus talked with them, ate with them and they touched him just to make sure he was real.

Acts 1:1-3

This morning we will look at this Scripture and pull out the truths of the resurrection for us to consider and apply to our lives. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Dr. Luke uses a number of sources as he writes down the book of Acts. First and primary were his own personal experiences. Secondly, he would have spent much time with Paul, as seen in the apostle's conversion and his experiences in ministry. A third source is seen in the other witnesses whom Luke contacted like James who is mentioned as being one with whom Luke met. Why is this important? The fact of the resurrection is based upon eye-witnesses. So in writing the Book of Acts Luke wants Theophilus to know that his accounts are based on first hand experiences.

Acts 1:1-3 - In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.³ After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

To do and to teach:

As we think back on the Gospel according to Luke, we will see Jesus doing great works for the Glory of his Father. We are told that Jesus returned to Galilee after his temptation in the power of the Spirit. He drives out evil spirits and heals many while preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated the Kingdom with signs and wonders and proclaimed the Kingdom in parables and at times very plainly.

In light of the resurrection, on three occasions Christ brought back people from the dead; the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus. These power encounters show us that Christ is the master over death. This comes out again in the fact that he prophesied that he would rise three days after he was crucified. This point is important in that it shows Christ as the Lord of Life. And it also means that the resurrection is of the very first importance for verifying who Jesus is, the Son of God.

The Gospels reminds us of the instructions given by Jesus (the Great Commission of the Gospels) after his resurrection. It is interesting to note that Luke tells us that the instructions were given through the person of the Holy Spirit, once again revealing the inter-dependant relationship of God in ministry. In light of the holy dependence upon the Holy Spirit, John records in his gospel that after Jesus' resurrection breathes on the disciples and says "Receive the Holy Spirit." I believe this was to indicate the relationship between the disciples and the fulfilling of the Great Commission. Jesus was wetting their spiritual appetites for more of heaven on earth. He was pointing towards the future fulfillment of the Day of Pentecost.

After his suffering:

In the introduction this morning we looked at Paul's gospel – Jesus died for our sins; that he was buried, and that he was raised (according to the Scriptures). From 1 Cor. 15:3-8 we learn that the truth of the resurrection was based not on the empty cross or tomb, but on the appearances of the Lord.

1 Cor 15:5-8 - and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Luke tells us that after his suffering, or passion in the Greek, Jesus appeared to many of his disciples. The impact of these encounters would be powerful:

- Firstly, Jesus is alive. We saw him crucified and buried and now here he is alive. It is amazing. Without a doubt he is the Son of God...
- Secondly, it was a time of great humility for the disciples for they all abandoned Jesus. Their great failings of human heart were exposed and yet he loved them...
- As well, we begin to see in the Book of Acts the uniting of the disciples into a community of believers, later designated as the 'church'. This group of people would turn the Jewish and Roman worlds upside down with the message of the resurrected Saviour – Jesus Christ...

As well, the word used for 'appeared' is the same Greek word used elsewhere for visionary experiences. This is significant in light of Jesus' Ascension. Even though Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God in heaven, he still appears to sinners and saints affirming his resurrection from the dead. Remember Peter's preach in Acts 2 – "your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams." We can say that today Jesus is still appearing revealing himself to mankind as Lord and Saviour...

Luke uses the phrase, "with many convincing proofs" with regards to Jesus appearing to his followers; eating and drinking together, coming near or alongside, speaking, touching and sharing life together. All of this took place over a forty day period.

The Kingdom of God:

What an amazing conference that would have been; Jesus alive and interacting with his friends, sharing time and stories together. All the while Jesus is explaining the ways of the Kingdom of God. He had given them general ideas of that kingdom prior to his death and had demonstrated the reality of the Kingdom of God on earth through various signs and wonders. But now he speaks of the Kingdom as its Resurrected Champion; how important is perspective.

In light of the Resurrected King, we cannot overlook the transformation this brought upon the disciples. It was like they had been looking into the kingdom of God but not fully seeing or believing its reality. But now the King we speaking and he is alive. Before his resurrection they were unbelieving at times, fearful, fighting among themselves, beaten and dispirited at the crucifixion. And yet several months later they were as bold as lions, ready to go to prison and even to die for the person of Jesus.

Why the change? Men, for the most part, do not take great risks unless they are very sure of themselves. The disciples were completely convinced that Jesus was alive. He spoke of the Kingdom of God, a new way of living in a corrupt world that was passing away. He spoke of the Kingdom of God that is yet fully established and of the new heavens and the new earth. The disciples were fully transformed in thought and action.

There is so much to say about the Kingdom of God but that is another series...

In Conclusion:

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is eternally profound and significant to us today. It is the foundation not only of our faith or beliefs, but also as to how we live. Jesus is alive and appearing to his people today in order to fully establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. It is the desire of God to fully convince us that he is alive today and we the church are to live in the light of his resurrection life and power...

In Application:

Small group questions:

How has the resurrection of Jesus impacted your life?

When was the last time Jesus appeared to you?

How is your life being changed or transformed?