

Scripture Reading:

Acts 17:22 “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; 23 for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 24 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; 28 for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' 29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.””

'Paul on Mars Hill: The Resurrection of Jesus'

We have been studying Paul's address to the Greek Philosophers on Mars Hill there in Athens

- Paul used one of their own idols to draw attention to the fact that the one true God who created and sustains all there is was very near and proclaimed Him to them.

Paul added that they must repent and believe that this God is the just judge of all because... “He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.”

- That man is Jesus and Paul goes on to proclaim that God “has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Jesus told the disciples to be His witnesses and we have seen and will see many references to the resurrection of Jesus here in the Book of Acts. This morning's message will be a “back to the basics” sermon about the resurrection of Jesus... Something we know well and talk a lot about here at Church of the King. The resurrection is not something to be remembered only on Easter: It is a truth that should be contemplated often: A Truth that gives us...

- Great comfort in our lives.
- Great confidence in our witnessing to the lost.

Lord willing, we never tire of hearing and believing this great truth, but before I review what we should know this morning I want to remind us that Paul is proclaiming this truth in a way that we must learn to imitate today.

- Paul is saying to these Greek skeptics, that they must believe that God raised Jesus in history!

Paul is saying that there is good and sufficient reason to believe the Gospel, something we will consider at greater length next week.

- Paul is commanding these Epicureans and Stoics to believe in a REAL event in REAL history.

Today it is very important that we remember what Paul is doing and how critical it is for us to do so as well.

- Paul is declaring, as he does throughout his ministry that Jesus was a real person who lived and died in Judea and that He was raised from the dead and ascended to God's right-hand where He rules as the King of Kings & Lord of Lords.

It is not a fairy tale, not a religious symbol nor just someone's dream: It is real history that is to be believed.

Allow me to use a few examples to help us understand more about how we are to believe in the resurrection and how we are to call others to that same belief in our own skeptical age:

[Introduce the Vogt's] Now I am going to ask a simple question: Are the Vogt's married?

We believe they are because a real event happened in real history! Now what if we have someone like the stubborn unbelievers that we often encounter come in & say "prove it!" Well, you could begin by just saying that they should observe them, here they are a man and a woman who act married, have children together and are each wearing a wedding ring. The skeptic could grow more stubborn and say, sure that all looks good but how do we REALLY know they are married, they could be faking it!

We could then begin to pile on the witnesses, having Leah and Birken affirm that they are married, have them produce their marriage certificate and even as a final effort have this skeptic talk with myself as the one who officiated the wedding and others here who served as witnesses.

- Now it is possible that today's type of skeptic could be so stubborn that he or she would NOT believe still, because they were not present to see the wedding themselves.

Now obviously almost anyone would say this person was being completely unreasonable and simply say there is no way to convince them about the truth of the Vogt marriage.

That case is pretty straightforward, so let's make things a bit tougher. Let's move to Linda and myself and a skeptic who questions our marriage: Again, we can witness to our own marriage, we have children and lots of grandchildren and can produce a marriage certificate, I think. So this skeptic says, that is all fine, but you could be faking it as well, so they will not believe unless we produce the minister and some of the witnesses at the wedding. With our wedding, even though it took place in very recent history when you think about the history of the world, this might present a challenge. I am not sure that the minister who performed the wedding is still alive and as I run down the small number of people that attended, I begin to think that no one may still be alive!

- Then I remember that Al was there and he can try to witness to our skeptic.

We might still have a hard case who says they can't believe because they were not there and perhaps even say they will not believe unless we can produce multiple LIVING witnesses, setting a standard we cannot meet.

- Now let's make it really tough: Let's say someone comes along and questions the fact that Al's grandparents were married!

Al remembers them and especially the sweet prayers and songs that Grandma lifted up over him and his brother as they went to bed at their home. Al might be the only living witness, I am sure with enough work the marriage certificate could be found and for most this would be sufficient.

- But I hope you can see that someone who wanted to be skeptical could more easily say they that we have not made a good case, so they cannot believe in that marriage.

Go back another hundred years and there would certainly be no living witnesses and perhaps the only records of some marriages would be the ones kept in the family Bibles.

- So, all of that to get us to think a bit about why we believe things have happened at some point in history.

I have used an example of marriages, but we could have the same discussion about whether you can believe that people or places are real. For example, why do we believe that George Washington was the first President of our nation under the current Constitution? It is what we would call 'common knowledge,' just as most would not question whether Leah & Birken are really married.

- But if we were asked to prove that he was, we would go through the same exercise we just did with those marriages.

Now if you talked about the sixteen men who served as President in the United States under the Articles of Confederation before we adopted our current Constitution you might get some strange looks and more people would want you to prove that they existed and served in that role.

- This is something that can be done, and is much easier in the age of the Internet, but I think you can see that folks could more easily be skeptical.

With places we could again begin with something that would be common knowledge: Does San Francisco exist? Is it a real place? There would be a TON of information you could look up and we have many eye witnesses in this very room who have actually been there.

How about Moscow Russia? I don't think anyone here has been there and yet its existence would be considered common knowledge because of the vast amount of information that we have about that major city: Information we would turn to if challenged.

Well, how about Chibale? Anybody been there?

- It is a small village in the eastern part of Zambia!

Do you see how much more difficult it would be to prove such a place exists if someone really wanted to be a skeptic? Sure I can pull it up on a map with the Internet but he or she could claim that was faked. I would be hard-pressed to find an eye-witness who had been there... But they do exist!

So I have gone through all of this to get us to think a bit about a very important question:

- How do we know something is really true?
- How do we know that people, places or events are true?

We trust eye witnesses: But even here prefer multiple witnesses. We trust documentation but want it to be verified: What if I produced a picture of someone standing near a place I call Chibale using Photoshop? We use these proofs or verifications for the present and what I want us to see is that we do the same for the past:

- We have eye witness accounts and documentation.

This is why we have no problem believing that the magnificent hanging Gardens of Babylon existed but are not sure about the City of Atlantis. This is why we are sure that Julius Caesar lived and ruled as an emperor of Rome, but we are not quite as sure about Robin Hood.

- So of course, I am leading up the great question about Jesus and His resurrection.

Paul asserts that God has given assurance to everyone that there will be a future judgment by raising Jesus from the dead!

- How do we know this is true?

Is it any different than other things that we believe are a part of history?

- No it is not and that is why I talked about the many examples that I have given.

If someone says they will not believe in the Resurrection unless they can be present when it happens, they are no different than the one who could never be convinced the Leah & Birken are married unless they attended the wedding.

If they insist on speaking directly with someone who witnessed the resurrection, then they cannot believe: If they are consistent, then they can only believe in very recent events & cannot believe ANY events taking place before 1900.

And finally, and most importantly, IF they try and say that there are not enough witnesses to the resurrection or that their accounts are not well documented, then they will lose the truth about ALL of ancient history as well, and by ancient I mean that which is over a thousand years old.

There are very few events that are over a thousand years old that we have eye witness accounts of: Most are second or third hand accounts that have been passed down. It is also very rare to have multiple witnesses for these ancient events.

Now before I quickly review the evidence given for the Resurrection of Jesus in history, let me say a word about how our modern skeptics will try to debunk what I present:

They will say there is no evidence that Jesus actually lived: This despite His being mentioned by three contemporary historians. They will claim that we have no actual writings from Jesus, despite the many first hand witnesses who recorded what He said and did. Finally, they will say that everything that we claim to have comes from a very narrow group of followers who had an agenda and that this agenda was molded and changed down through the centuries so that we don't really know what Jesus did or said, nor even what the disciples really wrote.

In most cases these proud humanists will compare what we know about Jesus and the early church with what is known about Emperor Julius Caesar and the Roman Empire! They should be more careful about what they ask for in this discussion: We all accept the fact that Caesar was a great military man, but most of what we know comes from his own book on the Gallic Wars which even secular sources admit had some propaganda.

- **We also have a grand picture of the Roman Empire from annals and histories that were written between 480BC and 100AD.**

But there is a minor problem these proud humanist must face... The earliest copies that we have for any of these books come from the 10th and 11th centuries, over a thousand years AFTER they were written. Even then they have only ten copies of Caesars Gallic War, two copies each of the Histories and Annals from the first century and eight of the History from the 4th century BC.

- **How does that compare with what we know about Jesus and the early church?**

Looking only to the New Testament, we have twenty-seven books written by at least nine authors.

These claim to be penned by first hand witnesses, or in the case of Luke, one who had full access to the first hand witnesses.

- **We have found over a hundred fragments of these books from as early as fifty years after they were written in scattered locations**
- **This confirms the early dating and first hand accounts.**

As to the reliability of the New Testament documents...

- **We do not have just a handful of copies as we do with ALL of the Roman literature, but over 3,500 copies from before 500AD.**

This does not even begin to deal with the writings of all the early Church fathers who discuss and quote these Books from the New Testament. The last gasp of defiance from the skeptic today will be to say, yes but what about the Gospel of Thomas and all the other “lost” books?

- **The truth is they were not “lost” they were rejected as not being authentic by all of the early church.**
- **So again, when Paul says God has given assurance of the need for repentance by raising Jesus from the dead he is calling on all men everywhere to believe the evidence!**

All four Gospels come together to tell us the story of the death burial and resurrection of Jesus:

Matthew tells us that many came out of their graves on Easter morning and witnessed to people in Jerusalem. He tells us how the soldiers who witnessed the resurrection were given bribes to lie about what happened.

Mark along with the others tell us about the many women who saw the risen Jesus on Easter morning.

Luke tells of the two disciples who meet the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

John tells us how Mary Magdalene met her risen master near the garden tomb.

- **As the disciples of Jesus go forth as His witnesses the resurrection is always what they point to:**

Peter declares at Pentecost: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”

Peter again says they are witnesses of the resurrection when he speaks before the Council in Acts three.

Peter reminds them that this truth is a call to repentance and blessing when he concludes by saying that God “having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.”

- **Peter & John declare the truth of the resurrection again in chapters four and five.**
- **After his great sermon, Steven testifies that he sees the risen Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father!**

Paul sees the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and proclaims this truth throughout the rest of the Book of Acts and throughout his many epistles.

In Acts ten we see Peter preaching the first sermon to the Gentiles in the home of Cornelius and he says of Jesus, Him God raised up on the third day!

Now we have Paul doing the same here in Athens saying God has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.

And if there was any room for doubt about the evidence, the Apostle Paul gives us this great summary in his Epistle to the Church at Corinth:

I Corinthians 15:3: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.”

- **I said that we focus on this great truth about the resurrection for two important reasons and I trust this review this morning will strengthen us in both areas.**

First, the evidence of the resurrection gives us great comfort: I will leave as your homework the rest of that 15th chapter in First Corinthians where we see the great comfort we receive from knowing that Jesus has been raised from the dead and the impact it will have on history and eternity!

- **These are great truths that we should dwell on for the rest of our lives as we draw more and more comfort from them!**

And finally, I hope this will give us more confidence to be the witnesses that are called upon to be!

Of course we must remember that we cannot argue anyone into the Kingdom [tell the story of the young man at L'Bri] As we have learned over the past two or three weeks, we are not in this to win debates or show off our great rhetorical skills.

- **We are called upon to proclaim the truth and to defend that truth.**
- **The response of the hearer is in the hands of our sovereign God.**

Our calling is to be the beautiful feet that bring the Good News and we should do so with much confidence. Confidence which grows as we experience the truth and love of Jesus in our own lives...

- **But also a confidence that grows as we understand the weakness of those who stand against the Gospel.**

We are to know and believe what Jesus proclaimed to His disciples:

The Gates of Hell will not prevail against the confession of Peter and all the Church down through the centuries regarding our risen Lord: "'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

-- Our modern world will tell you that this book is full of contradictions!

-- They will tell you that it is a book written by men to control other men [or keep women down!].

-- They will tell you that there is NO real evidence that Jesus even lived...

- **No less any evidence for the fact that He was raised from the dead.**

AND they will proudly proclaim that all of these "myths" stand in contrast to the great wisdom of man we saw in the great Greek and Roman ages...

- **A better study of history would remind folks that these empires did not run well nor end well.**
- **And of course it is no coincidence that both they and our modern scholars argue that all that we know to exist; including mankind came about by chance.**

We must have the confidence to stand our ground against such assaults which of course includes knowing how to defend the faith in some of the ways I have outlined this morning:

- **But first and foremost it is heeding the final admonition from one of the eye witnesses we often read here at Church of the King:**

The Apostle Peter writes to the Saints in his final epistle:

II Peter 1:17 "17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; 20 knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Thus we join with Paul in saying that God "now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained.

He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

Communion Meditation: Luke 24:

“25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. 28 Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. 29 But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. 30 Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. 32 And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" 33 So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, 34 saying, "The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" “