

**Luke 24:44-49**

44 Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."

45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

46 Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,

47 "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48 "And you are witnesses of these things.

49 "Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

I am by nature a skeptical individual. And I don't think that's always a bad thing, it's occasionally served me well. If you send me an email from a yahoo mail account telling me you are the son of an African dictator and asking for my help in transferring heaps of ill-gotten gains I don't tend to believe you. If you send me a letter in the mail telling me I may already have one 10 million dollars, I probably won't believe you. I tend to think that you're offering me a "free" trip to Las Vegas, you are probably going to spend the entire time trying to sell me a time share, and that the free show on the strip you are throwing in is not likely to be *Cirque de Solei* or Wayne Newton, and its likely that I'm going to need a telescope that bends at a 45 degree angle in order to see the stage.

Likewise, if you tell me you have a brilliant plan to improve the church by doing something that has historically always hurt it, I'm probably not going to believe that either. Or if during a pastoral visit I ask about what sins you are struggling with and you answer "none" and insist "I'm fine, we're fine, no problems" then I'm probably going to be skeptical about that too because both the bible and experience tell me that saints continue to sin until glory. Those of you who know me well I trust know all that about me, that I'm not credulous by nature.

The funny thing is though, that as I evangelize or do internet evangelism, the immediate assumption that people in the world make is that *I am entirely gullible*. Now why is that?

Well, its because I believe the gospel of course, and to do that, I must have been willing to take a leap of faith into non-reason, and to ignore evidence and common sense, to accept the impossible, to become entirely gullible. How can I believe in Angels appearing to people, for instance, if no one has ever been able to hand me fossilized angel wings? Unbelievers tend to think believing the Gospel is like Peter Pan – *its all a matter of “faith, hope, and trust with a little bit of pixie dust”*

But friends, the bible doesn’t ask you to believe without a shred of evidence. Yes it calls you to believe it calls you to faith in Jesus, but a faith that is founded on fact.

For instance, in the verses we just read, Jesus in speaking to the Apostles goes over what has happened to Him, that He was crucified and that He rose again from the dead, and that these things will be central to the gospel message that is going to be preached in his name to all nations. And that they were “witnesses” of them. Think about that word. In the Greek it’s *Martus* from which we get the word Martyr and prior to its being used in the Christian sense, you know what its primary application was? It was legal language, law courts, a *martus* was one who testified under oath as to what he had seen. Now Jesus is saying to the Apostles, you will be that just to the Jews here in Jerusalem, but to the entire world - My Witnesses, who testify truly as to what you saw and heard.

And the Apostles understood that, so that Peter in writing to the church about the scriptures that even then were being written said: ***“Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.”*** (2 Peter 1:16)

This isn't once "upon a time stuff" and it certainly isn't hearsay or gossip. Kids, you understand what Gossip is right? If someone says to you that they *heard* from someone else that someone you both know did something bad, then that is gossip. *They didn't see the bad thing with their own two eyes, or hear it with own two ears.* But what Peter and the Apostles said is we were eyewitnesses of these things – *we saw and heard them ourselves.*

Now if you did your homework from last week and all read 1 Cor. 15, and there I'll suspend my natural skepticism for a moment or two, then you'll remember that Paul started out talking about the death and resurrection of Christ in this way:

***1 Cor. 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.***

What's he doing there? He's setting the evidence of faithful witnesses before them. He's saying these men saw and testified, and though some of them have already died for the faith they knew to be true, most of them are still alive, you can ask them yourselves.

But that isn't all, the risen Jesus himself in verse 44 here set before the Apostles another major evidence for the truth of the gospel, that all these things that happened to Him, happened in fulfillment of prophecies that were written hundred or even thousands of years before they took place. And do you really believe that the Old Testament is just a vast collection of incredibly lucky guesses?

I mean do you know how much "luck" would have had to have been involved for Jesus to have been a descendent of King David according to the

flesh after Isaiah 11:1, that he would be born in Bethlehem according to Micah 5:2, but raised in Nazareth that he might be despised and rejected by men in accordance with Isaiah 53:3, that his hands and feet would be pierced and his clothing gambled for in accordance with Psalm 22. And so on and so on... Mathematically its impossible. In fact to call all of that evidence "coincidence," that is what really requires a credulous faith. If you really want to irk an atheist sometime, say to them **"You know, I'm sorry but I just don't have the blind faith not to believe in Jesus the way you do."**

But it's not just the prophecies of Christ's birth and death that were fulfilled were they? It's all the things that were written about Him. Including that He should become the Savior of the whole World.

The Old Testament is filled, with beautiful prophecies that the gospel would go forth to the Gentiles and that they too should become believers, even that that proclaiming of that message would begin at Jerusalem, let me just give you one - Is. 2:2-3 *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days That the mountain of the LORD's house Shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Before it had happened, on that night when the disciples were still only just recovering from their amazement that He had risen again, Jesus himself promised that day that the gospel would be preached to all the nations, and that before that could happen that the great day of Pentecost when the church would receive the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish that mission and lay down the sure testimony of the scriptures would happen.

And brothers and sisters, today in your presence you see the fulfillment of that promise. In this very room you are hearing the gospel proclaimed to people not from the same nation or even region, but to people who were separated by thousands of miles. I was born in Rochford, England, some of you are from California, that's what almost 6000 miles away, some from Korea about 6000 miles in the other direction, and yet here we all are on this

morning, united by the faith that went forth almost 2000 years ago with that power that Christ promised.

And that power of the Holy Spirit is so necessary isn't it? Because without it, all the evidence in the world will never convince one person. What is so necessary is for us to have our hearts changed by the work of the Holy Spirit, only that can bring us to spiritual life, and as it says in verse 45 open our understanding so that we might comprehend the scriptures. Think about that, a man might read the word of God thousands of times, and yet never truly grasp its message or understand, believe, and trust the Gospel message.

Think about the Apostle Paul for instance, here was an expert in the Scriptures, a man who had studied the word of God under Gamaliel one of the greatest Rabbis of His time. And keep in mind, this back before we had the printing press and therefore a compact portable bible, it was before we even had the numbering system that divides the bible in chapters and verses. So a Rabbi or later an Apostle would be expected to have huge portions of the word committed to memory and be so familiar with it, that like Jesus in the synagogue, he could open one of these enormous scrolls and find the passage he wanted from memory. One of my teachers at seminary commented that while he was studying Aramaic he had roomed next to a Rabbi who knew the entire book of the Psalms, the largest book in the Bible, by heart, and could sing the whole thing in Hebrew.

Paul had read the scriptures, and yet what did it take for him to *understand the scriptures*? It took the filling of the Holy Spirit, and only at that point did the scales not only fall from his earthly eyes but his heart. That is why he wrote to the Corinthians: "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

That is why that Rabbi who could recite the book of Psalms, didn't believe the very book he had memorized.

And that is why J.C. Ryle counseled the following: "***He that desires to read his Bible with profit, must first ask the Lord Jesus to open the eyes of his***

*understanding by the Holy Spirit. Human commentaries are useful in their way. The help of good and learned men is not to be despised. But there is no commentary to be compared with the teaching of Christ. A humble and prayerful spirit will find a thousand things in the Bible, which the proud, self-conceited student will utterly fail to discern.” – J.C. Ryle*

Let me leave you with two applications:

1) *The first follows obviously from what we’ve been talking about.* If one does not believe the Gospel message, if you cannot believe that Christ was Crucified for Sinners and Risen again, then the impediment is not a lack of evidence, or a lack of credulousness on your part. The problem is a lack of discernment and not just about the events of the scripture, but about yourself and your own condition. Jesus told his disciples to go into the world and preach repentance and remission of sins. Repentance and remission, because all men are sinners, lost and without hope of salvation, *unless it be through a turning from SIN to Christ.*

You see friends the reason these things had to take place, the reason Jesus had to come into the world and suffer crucifixion, was so that you might be saved from your sins. Because you see only He could pay the penalty for those sins in full and then establish your righteousness before God. And unless you believe that Gospel message, you will never obtain the benefit of His work. Because it *by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.* Without that faith, there is no hope of salvation for any man, with it then there is sure hope for any man.

Let me give you an example of what I mean, there was once a thoroughly rotten man who went by the name of Staffordshire Bill, he was a foul mouthed mean tempered brawler, and a drunk, a man so mean he once killed his own dog for eating his dinner. One night in the Pub he heard two men talking of a local church, "yes," said one man to the other, "I was there last Sunday night and that preacher said nobody was hopeless – he said there was hope for everybody." Staffordshire Bill heard nothing of the rest of the conversation because in a moment he thought to himself, "If there’s hope for

everybody, there's hope for me – I'll go to that chapel myself and see what that man says."

Well eventually he plucked up the courage to go, and Bethan Lloyd Jones, the wife of the Pastor who knew him, says "he found that he could understand the things that were being said, he believed the gospel and his heart was flooded with a new great peace. Old things had passed away, all things had become new." As he would out he was introduced to the Pastor's Wife as "Staffordshire Bill" she wrote "I shall never forget the agonized look on his face, for he flinched as though he had been struck with a sudden blow. "Oh no, oh no," he said, "that's a bad old name for a bad old man; I am William Thomas now."

2) Application: I tell you that because I think the real William Thomas would have wanted you to hear it because he lived the rest of His days according to that call of Christ "**You are my Witnesses**" so Christians are you his witnesses? Are you testifying to what you have seen and know to be the truth about Jesus and the Gospel, and not just in what you *say* but what you *do*. Because one of the greatest evidences of the truth of the gospel is the evidence of a changed heart, a changed life, because only the gospel can really make a Staffordshire Bill into a William Thomas. Or does what you do on Saturday night before the world repudiate what you say you believe on Sunday morning. Either way You are His Witnesses, *oh I pray you are telling the truth about Him!*