Reason to Be Bold

Luke 24:36-53

Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024

Christ is risen!

[He is risen indeed!]

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is a powerful sign that should encourage us in many, many ways.

First, God’s resurrection of Jesus is the vindication of everything Jesus ever said and did during His ministry on earth.

Jesus claimed boldly to know God and taught about God frequently.

But Jesus met stiff resistance from other people who claimed that God is different from who Jesus says He is.

Yet God raised Jesus from the dead and no one else.

God’s choice to raise Jesus into a body that can never die and that can dwell with Him in heaven is the highest possible approval that God could ever give.

God approves of Jesus and everything Jesus said and did.

Raising Jesus from the dead proves this.

The resurrection is God’s vindication of Jesus against those who try to discredit Him.

Thus Easter, the day of Jesus’ resurrection, is a great encouragement to us, first of all, because it proves that in a world of untrustworthy people, there is one person that we can trust fully and completely.

We can trust Jesus, the one whom God raised from the dead.

Second, God’s resurrection of Jesus from the dead into a body that lives forever encourages us to trust God’s promises about the future.

If someone is going to shoot an apple off your head with a bow and arrow, it really helps to have first seen them shoot an arrow at an apple from a great distance and hit the center of it on their very first try.

God has promised to raise his people from the dead at the end of the age into bodies that though recognizable as us, will be very different from our current bodies in that they will be immortal.

This is what God means and has always meant when He promised eternal life through His prophets.

It’s a big promise!

How can we be sure that God will or even can do it?

Well, the best possible evidence would be for God to do it for one person in advance, so that we have proof of His power to keep His promise.

And that is exactly what God did on Easter Sunday.

In raising Jesus from the dead, God proved that the promise He made to give eternal life to those who believe in Him is a promise He can and will keep.

God did it for Jesus.

He can and will do it for you and for me.

Jesus’ resurrection is the greatest possible encouragement for us to believe that God will keep His promise to raise us from the dead.

These two great encouragements from Jesus’ resurrection, His vindication by God and His example of God’s power to keep His promise to raise us to, are emphasized in numerous texts in the Bible.

But there is another great encouragement that comes from Jesus’ resurrection that is emphasized in the passage read to us this morning from Luke 24 verses 36 through 53.

Jesus presents this great encouragement from his resurrection to us in two stages.

First, in verses 36 through 43 Jesus lays the foundation for the great encouragement.

And second, in verses 44 through 49 Jesus reveals the great encouragement.

So, Jesus prepares the disciples for the great encouragement.

Then he reveals to them the great encouragement.

So, first, let’s look at how Jesus lays the foundation for the great encouragement, how he prepares the disciples for it.

Or, it might be more helpful to simply ask “Why do the disciples need any preparation at all?”

Why do Jesus’ disciples need to be made ready to hear the great encouragement Jesus is going to reveal to them?

Well because, as Jesus puts it at the end of verse 38, the disciples still had doubts in their minds.

At the end of the previous story, the story about the two disciples who met the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus, the disciples react to the news by saying “It is true! The Lord has risen.”

That sounds like they had no doubts anymore, doesn’t it?

Yet no sooner had they said this than Jesus appeared in their midst and said, “Peace be with you” and we’re told in verse 37 that,

(Read v. 37)

Interestingly, it seems to be this sudden and startling appearance of Jesus that actually raised doubts in their mind again.

After all, what human being can just suddenly appear?

Well, in the Bible, it is “spirits,” which includes angels, that can suddenly appear and disappear.

Human beings are not able to do this.

At least not before Jesus was raised from the dead.

Jesus goal with his disciples in the next 6 verses is simply this, to thoroughly convince them that He is physically risen into a body that cannot die.

He is not a “spirit” or “ghost” as the NIV translates it.

This is why he says in verse 39, “Look at my hands and feet.”

The nail marks from his crucifixion three days earlier are still there.

This is Jesus’ proof of continuity.

That is, Jesus didn’t get a new or different body.

This is the same body that Jesus has always had, the same body that was nailed to the cross 3 days ago.

Now, it’s just miraculously alive and transformed.

Next, knowing that appearances can be deceiving, Jesus invites them to touch him saying in the second half of verse 39,

(Read v. 39b)

And then Jesus takes it even further by eating some food in their presence.

Despite his sudden and unexplained appearance in their midst, Jesus proves that He is not a ghost by showing them the scars from before He was raised, by letting them touch him and by letting them watch him eat some fish.

It’s the same Jesus they knew before, just risen from the dead and glorified.

Jesus then points out that these proofs to the first disciples are a special grace.

They are not the normal way things are going to be.

Jesus demonstrates this in verse 44 where we read that,

(Read v. 44)

Jesus’ point, interestingly, is that He shouldn’t have had to do any of what He just did in order for them to believe.

They should have just believed what was already written about Jesus in the Old Testament Scriptures which is what Jesus is referring to when he mentions the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms.

In other words, Jesus is not going to make a habit of suddenly appearing and eating fish in our presence.

His expectation is that you and I will simply believe the Bible.

Jesus gives the first Christians special appearances like this because He had a special task for them, a task He names in verse 48, where Jesus says to the first disciples,

(Read v. 48)

Jesus uses courtroom language here.

He is, in effect, preparing these first disciples like a lawyer would prepare witnesses to take the stand in a court of law.

The people who witnessed these resurrection appearances of Jesus are the same people whose witness makes up the writings that we now call the New Testament in the second part of the Bible.

So, Jesus’ appearance here has a special purpose.

It is to prepare the first disciples to be able to give witness to “these things.”

And what are “these things”?

Well, there are three things that Jesus names just before this call to bear witness.

Each of the three things they must bear witness to were things they originally found challenging to believe.

But each of these things were already prophesied in advance in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The problem was that the disciples simply weren’t capable of understanding what was written without the help of Jesus.

They didn’t need simply to be prepared by Jesus to bear witness.

They needed Jesus to reveal to them what they must bear witness about.

They needed Jesus to reveal to them the three major parts of God’s salvation plan, the plan God had spoken of in advance through the prophets.

This is why it is written in verse 45,

(Read v. 45)

So, by His resurrection appearance to them, Jesus prepares the first disciples to be His special witnesses.

And by opening their minds to understand the Old Testament Scriptures Jesus reveals to them what they must bear witness about.

And there are three things, the three major parts of God’s salvation plan that they must bear witness to.

Two of the three have now happened.

But the third has yet to be completed.

And it is in grouping this third thing with the first two that Jesus gives us our great encouragement.

So, Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures and then He says, starting in verse 46, “This is what is written.”

In other words, here’s a summary of the three main things the Old Testament prophesied would come to pass.

First, “The Messiah will suffer.”

Although in hindsight we can look back and see passages like Isaiah 53 that seem so clear on this point, none of the Jews in Jesus’ day believed that the Messiah would suffer.

And they certainly did not believe that the Messiah, God’s Anointed King, would have to die and die a criminal’s death at that!

But the people Jesus is talking to here all saw it happen.

They were witnesses.

They knew Jesus.

They saw the plots against Him unfold.

They witnessed His suffering, wrongful conviction, and death on the cross.

They knew He was God’s Messiah and they watched Him suffer and die.

It was not what they expected to happen.

But Jesus opens their eyes now, after the fact, to show them that it was what God had planned all along.

The first part of God’s plan of salvation was that the Messiah will suffer.

And that part of the plan is now finished, complete.

So, Jesus goes on to mention the second major part of God’s salvation plan when He says that the Messiah will then “rise from the dead on the third day.”

This, of course, is what the disciples have just witnessed.

As God’s special witnesses, the first disciples were given special access to the risen Jesus so that they, in turn, could give reliable witness to us that the second major part of God’s salvation plan is also now complete.

The Messiah Jesus has suffered, once for all.

And the Messiah has now risen three days after His death on the cross.

Both of these things were accomplished by the power of God and according to the plan of God, the plan laid out for us in the Old Testament even though we were too blind to see it without Jesus’ help.

And now we get to the third part of God’s plan for salvation.

God’s Messiah has suffered for our sin.

God has raised Him from the dead.

And now, Jesus declares in verse 47,

(Read v. 47)

The death of Jesus paid the price for our salvation.

The resurrection of Jesus demonstrates God’s power to accomplish this salvation.

But it is when you and I tell other people the good news about Jesus, when we “proclaim” it, which is God’s means of accomplishing this salvation.

Or, to put it another way, Jesus could not have willingly suffered and died on the cross without relying on the power of His heavenly Father to sustain Him.

Jesus could not have risen from the dead without the power of His heavenly Father to raise Him.

And that same mighty power of God is at work every time a Christian chooses to share even the smallest bit of the good news about Jesus to someone who has yet to believe.

And that, my brothers and sisters, should be very, very encouraging to us.

Because it’s certainly not what we expect is it?

People’s hostility towards Jesus and Christianity on the television, on radio, and in person conditions us to think that we need to do something special, even incredible, in order for other people to believe.

Just like Jesus’ first disciples found it so hard to believe that the Messiah had to suffer until it happened,

And just like Jesus’ first disciples found it so hard to believe that Jesus had risen until he showed them His hands and His feet,

We find it so hard to believe that the news about Jesus, which is so old and familiar to many of us, has miraculous power to save other people.

Not just a little power.

Miraculous power, the same kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead!

I know I often feel the complete opposite, that if I try to bring up the subject of Jesus with other people that the only thing that will happen is that they’ll get angry with me.

And some of them will get angry.

But that doesn’t mean the gospel doesn’t have power to save.

The apostle Paul was one of those people who was angry about the gospel, so angry he was throwing Christians in prison and trying to get them killed.

But one sentence out of the lips of Jesus turned Paul’s life around forever.

And for the rest of his days Paul never lost his conviction in how powerful simply sharing the news about Jesus with anyone who will listen can be.

And Paul’s confidence in the power of the gospel was not disappointed!

And Jesus, in this passage read to us this morning has just explained why.

Because the same power that was at work in raising Jesus from the dead is at work in the gospel every time the gospel is shared.

Telling others about Jesus has the power to turn their lives around, that’s what the word “repentance” means.

And telling others about Jesus has the power to help them experience the joy of God’s forgiveness.

Yes, at times, they may try to shoot the messenger.

After all that is what happened with Jesus Himself.

But that in no way lessens the power of sharing about Him.

And Jesus encourages us in doing this even more by naming two major resources to help us in sharing about Him.

First, as we heard in verse 48, Jesus specially prepared witnesses who were faithful in writing down the news about Jesus.

Matthew, John, Peter, James and the rest of those whose writings and testimony make up the New Testament are the very people to whom Jesus declares “You are witnesses of these things.”

Therefore, we do not have to think up clever things to say about Jesus.

We simply need to invite people to consider and read along with us the testimony found in the New Testament of the Bible.

People in our culture love ready-made things where someone else has already done the bulk of the work for us.

We love cake mixes and vacation packages and five-step plans to a better marriage.

Well, in the New Testament we have ready-made witness to the good news about Jesus.

What’s up to us is finding creative ways to invite people into reading or listening to it with us.

So, we don’t have to make things up to share about Jesus.

We already have the New Testament.

In fact, I’d say that one of the biggest barriers to knowing Jesus in our culture is that everyone has an opinion on Jesus, but almost no one has read through a Gospel.

Would your book club be willing to read through the Gospel of John?

Do you have a friend from another faith who might be willing to do a “book swap” with you, where you read part of the Koran if they’re Muslim, or part of the writings of Guru Granth Sahib if they’re Sikh, and they read a Gospel in return?

Does your friend listen to audio books?

Have you tried giving them an audio recording of the New Testament to listen to and pay to take them out for coffee to discuss it when they’re done?

Don’t be sneaky or deceptive about it, tricking people into doing something they would not have chosen to do.

But are there ways we can be creative about it?

Discussion groups on the Bible in-person or online.

Even an Alpha group to get things started.

Whatever creative ways we find to do this, of course, are only going to come about if we’re convinced that the same life-giving power that raised Jesus from the dead is also at work through the witness of Jesus’ first disciples found in the Bible.

The Bible is our first great help in living out the great encouragement of Easter to share the news about Jesus.

But there is a second great help that Jesus refers to in verse 49 where He says,

(Read v. 49)

As we’ll see next week when we begin a series on the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts, what the Father has promised is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is the biggest reason why simply sharing the news about Jesus with others in whatever ways we can is so powerful.

Because it’s not just us who is there sharing it.

God is there too, by the power of His Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit of God who works to open people’s hearts as they hear the good news about Jesus.

People regularly come to me with questions about whether or not God would approve of them doing this or that.

If the Bible has some guidance, I try my best to point them there.

But there are times when I simply can’t give an answer.

But one thing I can always answer and assure you of is this:

God always approves of you sharing about Jesus with others.

Always.

This is why He has given you the Bible as a ready-made witness and has given you His Holy Spirit to convince people of their need for Jesus.

Through His Spirit and His Word God is pouring out the same kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead out of your lips when you speak of Jesus.

When you share about Jesus, you participate in the third major part of God’s salvation plan, the part where, “repentance for the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in his name to all nations.”

And just as God made sure the first two parts of the plan worked, the death and resurrection of Jesus,

God will make sure that our part, the third part in the plan works too.

By His Spirit and His Word, He is powerfully at work in us even in our weakest attempts to tell other about Jesus.

Therefore, Easter should always be a time of great encouragement.

For Jesus’ resurrection is His vindication, it proves that every word Jesus has spoken is completely trustworthy.

And Jesus’ resurrection is proof of God’s promise.

Just as God raised Jesus, He will also raise us when Jesus returns.

And Jesus’ resurrection is also a reminder to be bold in sharing the good news about Jesus.

For the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in every word you speak to another person about Jesus.

And, I don’t know about you, but I find that encouraging.

So, my brothers and sisters, be encouraged!

God is mighty to save!

So mighty that truly miraculous power is at work every time we share the news about Jesus.

Amen.