Many Convincing Proofs

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Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0:00] Welcome here for this Sunday, April 14th, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon, and it is my joy to be the pastor here. So we're continuing in our sermon series, Acts to All the World.

And through this series, we're going to be looking through the New Testament book of Acts. And as I promised, threatened, whatever, however you want to frame it, last week, this could be weeks, months, or years.
So we'll just see how the Spirit leads me in that. So you can pray for brevity, you can pray for depth and breadth, whatever you want, you pray for those things.
So last week, we identified or were reminded of some important details. The book of Acts was originally a letter written from Jesus' disciple, Luke, to a man named Theophilus. Perfect.
Perfect. And Acts was actually the second letter that Luke had written to him. And the first being what we now know as the Gospel of Perfect. So Acts is essentially part two.
[1:07] I talked a little bit about it last week being like a sequel. It's part two of Luke's reporting. And first, he began with the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

And then second, continuing in Acts, the story of the first 30 years of the early church. So last week, we explored the context of Acts, as well as the original purpose of Luke's writing to Theophilus.
So if you were here, great. You're all caught up. If you weren't here, website. Perfect. So we also considered that eventual ongoing impact that the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts would have. That they would become canonical pieces of Scripture. And that they comprise actually 27% of the New Testament.
And I think that I still marvel at that. That's over 25%. I'm bad at math. That's over a quarter of the New Testament was written by Luke. So it's interesting to note that 2nd century theologian Irenaeus referred to the book of Acts as, here's your Greek for this morning, Praxis Apostolon.
[2:23] Apostolon, perhaps. Which means, in English, the Acts of the Apostles. So that's certainly a descriptively accurate title. If you're familiar with Acts, and we'll dig into it more over the weeks, months, and years ahead, it is absolutely accurate.

That is what it is. The Acts of the Apostles. So many, if not all, of the events that take place in the book are the actions or acts of the Apostles themselves.
And we'll come to see that more and more. So it's not known, actually, whether this was a name for the book that previously existed, or if it was coined by Irenaeus himself.
But however, the name, the title that stuck, the one we know the book by nowadays, is simply Acts.
So let's take a moment to look at the ending of the Gospel of Luke.
So you don't need to turn, but you can turn to the end of Luke. In Luke 24, the very end, the two angels appeared to the woman who discovered Jesus' body is gone. And it's in Luke 24 that the story turns from tragedy to victory, from despair to hope.
[3:37] Luke's narrative speaks of Jesus appearing to more and more people. And it fulfills what Scripture had said about him. So then we get a fairly brief summary of the Great Commission.

And we know we should have a pretty good idea of what the Great Commission is. From Jesus to his disciples before the ascension. So Jesus presents that commission. So this is a short teaser as Luke's Gospel wraps up.
And this is where we find ourselves in the book of Acts. So why does Luke essentially recount or even expand upon some of the events in the end of his Gospel when it comes to the beginning of the book of Acts?
Well, it's a good question. So it's maybe to refresh theophilus' mind, maybe to refresh ours, because if you look in the New Testament, it's Luke, not Luke-Acts, Luke-John-Acts, right?

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So it might be a, this is part two, and I'm just going to give you a previously on recap. So maybe it was to refresh theophilus' mind, or ours, maybe to emphasize the importance and significance of the events, or maybe both.
[4:47] So after his opening salutation in Acts 1, verse 1, we talked about that last week, Luke picks up, picks right up with a summary of some of the things that he shared at the end of his Gospel.

He says his Gospel described things that Jesus had both done and taught, he says that in Acts 1, 1. It covered events leading up to Jesus' ascension, he says that in Acts 1, 2.
And that Jesus presented many infallible proofs of his resurrection. It says that in Acts 1, verse 3. And some translations say many convincing proofs.
And that is our sermon title for this morning, many convincing proofs. So while Luke mentions that somewhat in passing, we're going to consider the evidence more deeply together this morning.
I think I can safely state for all of us here this morning, hopefully anyone who claims to be a Christian, and a follower of Jesus, we can agree on a few essential things.
[5:51] The importance of Christ's resurrection cannot be overstated. Do you agree with me on that? Silent group. Don't be too pious.

All right. So let's go to 1 Corinthians 15, 12 to 14. So Paul says there, now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?
I'm reading from the ESV. Some people are confused, nervous. If there's no resurrection of the dead, Paul says, then not even Christ can be raised.
Not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain. And your faith is in vain.
But the historical fact, that fact, the foundation of our faith, as Paul correctly states, if it didn't actually happen, if Jesus wasn't raised from the dead, preaching about it is pointless.
[6:57] Living our lives in light of it is misguided. This lovely white cloth on this depiction behind me has no meaning.

Because that white cloth signifies something important about what we believe. But we do recognize, we proclaim, we declare, we serve a risen Jesus Christ.
Thank you. We'll get you there. I'm not even that charismatic, but I'm gonna, let's go. So we do recognize that. We live in a world, follow me here, we live in a world that is often skewed towards science and evidence.
Correct? People want proof and facts. I would even include myself in that. Well, that's interesting that you read on the internet. What's your source? So that comes from being a media relations guy, right?
I want sources. I want facts. People need evidence, often, to precede belief. Can you recognize that? Now, we tend to want facts to come a little bit before faith, right?
[8:07] Do you know anybody who is a show me Christian? I have known some show me Christians. It's like, yes, I believe in Jesus. Yes, he died for me. Yeah. But can I just have a little backup?

A little something, maybe, to sweeten the deal a little? So with that in mind, let's consider some convincing proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because faith and evidence in the resurrection of Jesus was deeply, as we'll come to see, deeply interwoven in the growth of the early church in Acts.
And it should be just as equally interwoven and boldly proclaimed by Christ's church to this day. Lots of churches are very concerned with filling pews, very concerned with making people feel welcome, comfortable, not too guilty, good about yourself, and good about what you're doing in your life.
That's all great, but it's not really the core of what we're supposed to be about. So, we're going to get into more truth. So what was the first convincing proof of Jesus' resurrection?
Well, Jesus physically appeared to many people. So we're going to look at that. After he rose from the dead, scripture records every or many interactions as we read in scripture.
[9:30] There are so many things that Jesus did and said and miracles that he performed that are not recorded in scripture. So we don't know for sure how many other appearances might have happened, but we're going to look at some of them.

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So let's look, first of all, there's the list. So let's look, first of all, at John 20, verse 11 to 18. John 20, 11 to 18, and I'll read for you.
But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept, she stooped to look into the tomb. And she saw two angels there in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet.
They said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. Having said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus.
Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking? Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.
[10:43] Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned to him and said in Aramaic, Rabboni, which means teacher. Jesus said to her, Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.

But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord, and that he had said these things to her.
Mary Magdalene saw Jesus and talked to him. Matthew 28, 9 to 10 says, And behold, Jesus met them and said, Greetings.
Wouldn't you like Jesus to come and say, Greetings to you. They came up and took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, Do not be afraid.
Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee and there they will see me. Jesus appeared to other women and they touched him, recognized him, and worshipped him.
[11:54] Both the Gospels of Mark, Mark 16, 1 to 13, and Luke, Luke 24, 13 to 34, relate the story of two disciples walking in the country who recognized Jesus.

They walked with him. They talked to him and interacted with him and even ate with him. Those two disciples returned to Jerusalem, Scripture tells us.
They reported to others and Luke notes that Jesus also appeared to Simon alone. Paul reports and confirms those events in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 5.
Peter and others saw Jesus. Luke 24, verses 36 to 43, and John 20, verses 19 to 25, relate that Jesus appeared to the apostles and they ate with him as a group when Thomas wasn't with them.
So then, of course, we know Thomas, right? When Thomas heard the news, he expressed a doubt and a need for proof. proof. Thomas received that proof that he wanted a week later when Jesus appeared.
[13:10] Thomas was able to see and touch his wounds. John 21, verses 1 to 25, relates the story of Jesus appearing to seven disciples by the sea, including Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James, and John.

The group saw Jesus. Jesus liked breakfast. They had breakfast with him again then and they talked to him. In 1 Corinthians 15, verse 6, Paul relates that Jesus appeared to more than 500 people at one time.
So this was a huge crowd, right? That appearance would have really ruled out any suggestion that contemporary people had that one person could have hallucinated, could have had a vision of some kind of the Lord appearing to them, but it wasn't actually Jesus.
500 people? Pretty hard to make that same case. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 7, tells us Jesus also appeared to his brother James, but we don't get a lot of detail on that appearance, that meeting. Luke 24, verses 44 to 49, and Acts 1, 3 to 8. I don't think you expected to get quite so much scripture this morning, but there you have it. Those two passages relate that Jesus appeared to the disciples with information and instruction and they studied with him.
[14:40] So there was an extended period of time there. The Gospels of Mark and Luke, as well as the book of Acts, relate that there were witnesses who watched intently as Jesus ascended into heaven.

So we can agree that there were many appearances, many interactions with Jesus after his resurrection. But can we consider this to be convincing or infallible proofs?
Well, I believe that proof really begins to shine through after Jesus' resurrection, as we can see in the behavior or acts of the disciples. So what was the second convincing proof of Jesus' resurrection?

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I believe it was the testimony of the disciples themselves. So let's consider their testimonies. They testified to a risen Jesus because they had personally experienced a risen Jesus.
The testimonies of the disciples were based on first-hand accounts. They were based on factual evidence and objective observation. they relied on first-hand accounts of people who had been with and interacted with Jesus after his resurrection.
[15:57] They had seen him. They had had breakfast with him. They had heard and touched him. They had eaten and drank with him in different occasions. And the reality is the vast majority of the appearances or accounts were to groups of people.

It wasn't just one here or there. And this kind, friends, this kind of eyewitness testimony is the same kind of evidence that's used in courts every single day.
Always. So next, let's consider the transformed lives of the disciples. And this was part of their testimony. So prior to his resurrection, particularly when their situation, the intensity and opposition surrounding Jesus was mounting, scripture tells us the disciples were denying him.
Right? They were fleeing. They fled when he was arrested. They mourned at his crucifixion and his death. They saw that as the end.
They were hiding behind closed doors. But then after the resurrection, we see this immediate 180. They fearlessly praised God and proclaimed Jesus.
[17:17] Talk about a change of attitude. Have you ever done that? Been super anchored in what you believe about something and then had an experience that completely changed your mind? Doesn't always happen that often.

We're stubborn. Human beings are stubborn, stubborn people. Ask God. He knows. So in Luke 24, we learn that they praised God in the temple. And in Acts 5, they proclaimed Jesus despite being persecuted.
So I don't know about you, but the kind of transformation in conviction and confidence and commitment by the disciples is in itself strong evidence for the resurrection.
Don't you think? So I'm going to share a quote with you. A man named Pinchas Lapid. He was an Orthodox Jewish theologian, former chair of the applied linguistics department at Israel's Bar-Ilan University.
Said this in a May 7, 1979 article in Time Magazine. I was 10 years old. There we go. If the disciples were totally disappointed and on the verge of desperate flight because of the very real reason of the crucifixion, it took another very real reason in order to transform them from a band of disheartened and dejected Jews into the most self-confident missionary society in world history.
[18:47] What a 180, right? If the disciples were totally disappointed and on the verge of desperate flight because of the very reason of the crucifixion, it took another very real reason in order to transform them from a band of disheartened and dejected Jews into the most self-confident missionary society in world history.

The transforming power of God. Isn't that a powerful perspective? The radically transformed post-resurrection lives of Jesus' followers is strong evidence for his resurrection.
But there's other evidence we can see in the disciples. What about their high moral standards? So let's look at that for a second here.
They taught others to live holy lives. We see this kind of teaching by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Thessalonian and Ephesian churches.
Paul talked about the importance of this. The disciples also sought to live their own lives in an unimpeachable way. They recognized that they themselves, how they behaved, how they lived, how they spoke, was a witness for Jesus Christ.
[20:11] So both the examples of what they were teaching and also to point other people to Jesus. Does that sound like the behavior of people who had concocted an elaborate and desperate scheme and were trying to maintain it?

When someone, you know, we always talk about what a tangled web we weave, right? Have you ever tried to, well, no show of hands, have you ever tried to, have you ever told a lie and you think, yeah, this will work and then you realize, oh no, I have to tell another lie to back up the first one. Oh no. And then another one and then, and quite often, thankfully, I hope, it falls apart, right? The house of cards begins to collapse because you can't maintain dishonesty forever.
forever. It's very hard. So, I think the model that we see there of the disciples is their behavior, the way they spoke, how could you maintain that if it wasn't true?

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How exhausting a way to live their lives. So, what about even more their personal sacrifices? Would you die for a lie? Get it put on a shirt, I guess.
[21:25] In both 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Paul speaks about all the apostles willingly endured, sometimes, and continued to endure due to their testimonies.

As you may know, all but one of the disciples was martyred for what they claimed to believe. Would that have been worth it if it wasn't true? I've said to Michelle, I don't know if, you know, I don't want to widow you, but if someone came up to me on the street, put a gun to my head and said, deny Jesus Christ, I'd say, pull the trigger.
Maybe I'm dumb. But even Jesus' own brother James, he was thrown off the temple. He was clubbed to death for his testimony. There was nothing, my friends, there was nothing in it for them. Certainly from a temporal perspective, there was no motive or reward, there was no fame or power or wealth, there was no influence. they were being counter-cultural.
There was nothing the world could have offered that would have warranted them perpetuating a lie. Perpetuating a lie, recognize this, from the time of Jesus' death until they were eventually killed themselves for what they claimed about him.
[22:47] That's a long time to continue to lie knowing that your life is literally at risk. Jesus' disciples gave many proofs.

He appeared to them several times over a period of 40 days. He spoke with them. He shared meals with them. He physically interacted with them.
He met with them in small and large groups and also one-on-one. The proof Jesus gave them seemed to have not only been convincing but transformational.
not a single eyewitness recanted their testimony of the resurrection. Have you ever recognized that? Not one. And they endured significant hardships throughout their lives because of their testimonies.
Their belief was so strong that they were willing to die for it. And many did. My brothers and sisters, those same many convincing truths and proofs that Luke mentioned in Acts 1 verse 3 just in passing that we've explored this morning are no less true today than they were nearly 2,000 years ago for the early church.
[24:03] We still have the nature of the disciples' testimony and first-hand accounts. The New Testament is full of it. We can still read about the amazing transformations that took place in their lives and we will in the coming days.

the high moral standards that they taught and lived by example and the personal sacrifices that they made. Why not allow this same proof to transform your life as it did the disciples in the first century? The Gospel of John concludes with these words from John 20 verse 30 and 31 and I touched on this at the beginning. Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in his book but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and by believing you may have life in his name.
John's noting there that there was even more proof we've gone through so much this morning more proof existed of Jesus' claims that wasn't even recorded in Scripture many convincing proofs.
Are you truly looking for Jesus in your circumstances? Or are you so busy worrying about things that you've forgotten to look for him to talk to him and to trust him?
[25:33] Are you like the disciples traveling along that road heading away from the direction that God is calling you rather than towards Jesus and towards fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ?

My friends Jesus is risen. This is fact fact and we've been given many convincing proofs to support that but it's up to us to live in fellowship with Jesus and with others to continue to be his hands and feet in and to a world that so desperately needs him.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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