

The Centrality Of The Resurrection

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[0 : 00] Okay. On why we're going through the book of Acts this year. So as I mentioned last week, there's been a trend in churches for many years to try and answer the question, how do we get more people to come to church?

For several decades, countless studies have been conducted on how to grow the church. And as a result, there have been models of church growth that have been published and sold.

Celebrity pastors have risen up and have been emulated by other lesser celebrity pastors. And every type of program that could be thought up and implemented has been tried to one degree or another.

All of this in response to, in trying to answer the question, how do we get more people to come to church?

And despite all of these attempts to draw them in and grow the churches, the presenting problem has remained. Church attendance has been declining.

[1 : 13] But why? I know I've shared this with you before. I think last year, May sometime. But it's worth looking at again.

So according to a recent Gallup study, U.S. church membership, which was at 73% when Gallup first measured in 1937.

So 1937, first Gallup study, church membership, 73%. And it's remained near 70% for about 60 years or so until the turn of the 21st century.

And then from that time on, it's been in decline. And in 2020, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church or another house of worship, a synagogue or a mosque, which was down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1999.

So the decline in church membership is primarily, I'm sorry, the study shows that the decline in church membership is primarily a function of the increasing number of Americans who expressed no religious preference.

[2 : 29] And when you look at those numbers over the last 20 years, the percentage of Americans who did not identify with any religion has grown from 8% in the 1998 to 2000 study.

To 13% in the 2008 to 2010 study. To 21% over the past three years. So as the amount of people, the percentage of people identified with no religious affiliation or preference, that has affected the attendance and membership in churches and synagogues and mosques as well.

And naturally, as I mentioned last week, when attendance decreases, so does the amount that gets put in the offering plate. Right? And when the offering is down, churches have to seriously consider cutting programs or staff or both.

And as more gets cut from the budget, eventually the only thing left to cut is the church building entirely. And when the church building is gone, people typically disperse and start attending another church.

Which then really calls to question, was that really a church that was meeting in that building? And that is the slow death of the American church model.

[3 : 54] As we see it. When people don't show up, giving goes down, giving goes down. Things get cut out until eventually it is no more.

It's sad. I don't share that to bring you down. I mean, it's a reality. It's a sad reality. Fact is, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of churches closing every year.

Because of what's happening. Right? But does it have to be this way? Does this need to be what happens and how things go about in the, quote, American church model?

Right? Isn't there a program or a formula that can be enacted that will magically turn things around for the church? Well, I mean, as I showed in the opening slide, you know, you've had books.

You've had celebrity pastors. You have programs. You have all these models that are put out there that have been emulated to no avail. So I wouldn't say that there's a magical formula.

[5 : 04] I wouldn't say that there's a book to pick up and read written by some pastor who's got 20,000 people attending his church that's going to give you the answers.

That doesn't exist. Is there a way that First Baptist Shapley, among other churches, can see more people in the pews?

On a Sunday morning. Is there a way that First Baptist Shapley, among other churches, can avoid the slow death that is in this American church model?

And I said, the answer is yes. Yes, there is a way. In John 14, 6, Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. I know it seems canned and hokey, you know, to answer this question, like, is there a way we can avoid church dying?

[6 : 09] Oh, yeah, Jesus is the way. You know, the Sunday school answer of Jesus thrown from the pulpit. But the only way that churches can see a change in their condition is through Jesus.

Right? Because the church is not about the building. The church is not about the programs. The church is not about the staff.

It's not about the pastor. The church is about Jesus. And it's through the Savior himself that change must take place.

He's the only one who provides the means for the forgiveness of sin. And when there is forgiveness of sin, the Holy Spirit takes residence in the believer and begins the lifelong process of sanctification.

In changing that person into the image of Christ. And as sanctification is taking place in the life of the believer, he increasingly lives in obedience to the word of God.

[7 : 24] And as he increasingly lives in obedience to the word, he increasingly expresses his love for God through his love for others.

And as others are increasingly exposed to the love of God through the saved and sanctified life of the believer, like the experience of the woman at the well in John 4, they will encounter the Savior for themselves and be changed in the process.

So the answer is yes, there is a way. And that way is Jesus.

After last week's sermon, I was approached by someone who was looking for guidance in the how-to aspect of disciple making. They cited the fact that they believe the word of God.

They're unwavering in their convictions. But the question was, how do I go about reaching people where they are at? That's a good question.

[8 : 34] Yeah? This is one of those questions where ample books have been written on the matter. Some good and some not. Some based on scripture. Some based on experience.

And you can get some good ideas from reading books on that very topic. One that keeps coming to mind. I don't know why. I've never read it. But it's a book Bill Hybels wrote, I think back in the early 90s, called Just Walk Across the Room.

It was 96 he wrote that. And it's one of those books that encourages evangelism and evangelistic relationships and such. But there are lots of books.

Good and bad. Written on this very issue. Lots of books about church models. Lots of books about how to be an effective leader and whatnot. Yeah, there's...

I mean, right to the writing of books, there is no end. To the reading of books, thankfully, there will be an end. And I think the one book, though, that we need to be taking seriously and considering, as it relates to this very issue, is the book that sits before me now and sits before you as well.

[9 : 47] It is the Bible. So... As I said, there's lots of good books. Bad books. They're out there. But the fact is, there is no cut and dried answer.

There's no cut and dried answer to, quote, church growth. There's no cut and dried answer to, how do we reach them where they're at? And the reason why there's no cut and dried, like, model, like, formula or whatever, that you've just put into motion and do it and it works, is because people are so very different.

And that's something that I think gets lost in the conversation. There is no model. There's no one thing you can do for all people that's going to work, quote, unquote.

I really hate talking about this because there's so much... I feel like it's so much philosophical and not so much biblical as far as the conversations go.

But my intention is to lead you into the biblical and not so much the philosophical. The fact is that people are so very different. The person who is seeking to make a difference and the person who is, for lack of better terms, the target of that individual.

[11:08] The person that that individual is trying to share the love of Christ with. So very different. I mean, even just in this room alone, you know, looking at all of you and knowing most all of you is the way I do.

I mean, we are all very different in our personalities and our approaches, our interests, our life situations, everything. Right? And the people we engage with and interact with are going to be different among the crowd that is here.

So that is why I say there is no such thing as a cut and dried answer. Because people are so very different in their life situations and circumstances. Well, I mean, it's not cut and dried, but I think scripture gives us some principles and things we can take from.

And in an effort to answer this question for ourselves in this church, I think it's wise to take a look at the book of Acts and see how the early church went about the process of making disciples.

Acts is the second major contribution to scripture by Luke, who is responsible for writing about 27% of the New Testament.

[12:25] Between the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, it's about 27% of the New Testament. In a sense, Acts serves as a part two to the account previously written.

You notice in Acts 1.1, he references Theophilus. Theophilus is a name that literally transliterates as lover of God, when you get into the meaning of his name.

And he is the one to whom Luke wrote his gospel to. If you go to Luke 1, verse 3, he references Theophilus and the purpose of his writing the gospel.

So Acts is kind of a part two of that account, because part one, the gospel of Luke, is the earthly ministry of Jesus culminating in his death, burial, and resurrection. Part two, the book of Acts, is the post-ascension ministry of Jesus through the Holy Spirit-empowered disciples.

As you get into the book of Acts, there's one truth that stares you down, that I feel like stares you down, and I think is pretty evident through the first three verses of this text that we're going to look at today, and that is the centrality of the resurrection to the post-earthly ministry of Jesus.

[13:38] And just so we're all on the same page, and I'm not using a lot of big terms and whatnot. What we are in today, 2,000 years after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, is the post-earthly ministry of Jesus.

We are empowered by the Holy Spirit like the disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit. We have a mission to go and make disciples. As the apostles were given the mission to go and make disciples.

So we are under the same kind of umbrella. Experiences are going to be different, and we'll deal with that as we get to it in the text. But the fact is, the book of Acts is what starts our story.

And I believe we can get a lot from it if we want to look at it and check it out. So let's go ahead and read Acts 1, verses 1 through 3. In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. Father, please give direction and clarity and help us to understand what you want us to grab from this.

[15:10] Amen. So there are two things, and I so graciously gave you an outline in the bulletin if you got it. Front and back pages. Wow, there's a lot here.

So there are two main points I want you to grasp from this text. First, as it relates to the centrality of the resurrection. And the first is that the resurrection points to the continuing story.

The resurrection points to the continuing story. You notice in verse 1 that Luke is saying that I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach.

It's all that Jesus began to do and teach. There are 24 chapters in the Gospel of Luke.

As I said, Luke and Acts make up almost a third of the New Testament. And Luke is saying that first account, Theophilus, that is what Jesus began to do.

[16:22] When something is at the beginning, that means there is much more to be done. Just like this sermon is at the beginning, there's much more to come.

Nobody's laughing now, are they? In a careful reading of the text of Scripture, it makes this quite obvious. In Luke 1, Gabriel revealed to Mary.

He said, He will be great, and He will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.

In the very beginning of the Gospel of Luke, when the miraculous birth of Jesus is being foretold and being expected, Gabriel gives a prophecy here where he's saying that it's really a prophecy, it's a restatement of previously made prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah.

And these words that Gabriel spoke are yet to be fulfilled. because Jesus is not currently sitting on the throne of David in Jerusalem, and He's not currently reigning over the house of Jacob in a literal sense.

[17:54] And just so you know that it does actually take place in a literal sense, in case you might be wondering, oh no, this is not a literal thing, all you've got to do when we're done here and you've got your fill of soup and chili and all that stuff, and you go home and you take your nap and you wake up, open up Revelation 19, 18 and 19 and 20.

I'm asking you to read three chapters. In case you're wondering, is there really a literal fulfillment? Yeah. Yeah, there's a literal fulfillment. A literal Jesus returning to this earth to set up a real kingdom that happens on this earth.

I'm just kind of pointing you in that direction. If you have any further questions, we do have a tremendous program called Faith Bible Institute that we have after church on Sundays at 1 p.m. If you have any further questions, talk to Jenny Silcox. That do good? Okay. She's not paying me anything for that. But, the fact is that this is a prophecy made by Gabriel before Jesus was born about what he would be and do and it has yet to be fulfilled.

That means there is more to be done. And we see at the end of Luke's gospel that this is the case. In Luke 24, verses 46 and 47. And he said, this is written, you know, Jesus making known to the disciples, thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name in all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

[19:35] I underlined that. The underline doesn't appear in the Bible, but it appears on that screen because it shows that there is more coming. There is more to be done.

He's saying, he was showing his disciples on the road to Emmaus that from the Old Testament scriptures that the Christ must suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. He's saying, this is just the beginning. Jesus came. He lived. Unjustly tried. Executed. And risen again.

Now starts in part two. Why we have the book of Acts. So the first phrase that points to the continuation story of Jesus is that the Gospel of Luke pointed to all that Jesus began to do and teach.

The second phrase that points to a continuation of the story of Jesus is that before Jesus was taken up, he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles.

[20:49] apostles. That's in Acts 1 verse 2. Considering that there's more to be done for the cause of Christ, you would expect that there would be directions given to follow.

Right? God doesn't just leave you in the lurch. He doesn't give you an impossible task and then not give you the directions of how to follow through with it. Luke 24 verse 49.

Jesus said, Behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you're clothed with power from on high. So the first of these commands that he gave his apostles was that they would stay where they're at.

Stay in the city until I send to you the promise from my Father. What's his promise? All you long-time church goers, what's his promise?

That Jesus is going to send to them? That they have to stay and wait for? What? What? The Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Yep. That's good. Same person, different names.

[21:55] Good. Yeah, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. That's what he's saying. He's telling them, stay. First command. That, by the way, is a command. Stay. Wait here.

Don't move. I mean, you know, live, but wait. It's coming. John 20, verse 21 and 22. Remember, these are commands that he gave his apostles.

Jesus said to them again, peace be with you. So he's appearing to them. This is after his resurrection. Peace be with you as the Father has sent me. Even so, I am sending you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, receive the Holy Spirit. Command. Receive. Like he's commanding them to receive something. The Holy Spirit. Matthew 28, verse 19. We looked at this last week. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.

[22 : 53] Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. That make disciples of all nations. That is the only command in that passage of Scripture that we call the Great Commission.

Is to go and make disciples. So the immediate instructions at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry after the resurrection was for the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit and then to go make disciples of all nations when they have been empowered.

When they have the indwelling Holy Spirit living in them. The post-resurrection ministry of Jesus was to prepare the disciples for the continuation of the story.

And the gospel describes what Jesus began to do and teach and Acts relates the book of Acts relates what he continued to do and teach through the apostles and other witnesses. So the resurrection points to the continuing story.

Point number two. I believe we get it in verse three. The resurrection provides confidence confidence for the believer. The resurrection provides confidence for the believer.

[24 : 10] Verse three. He presented himself. Acts 1-3. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs. Appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

one of the hardest things about the miracle of the resurrection. I would say the hardest thing about the miracle of the resurrection is believing it.

It's believing it. I just you know it's somebody who says I just watched the guy that I believe to be the Messiah who I believe to be the son of God be unjustly tried beaten crucified breathe his last breath and be buried in a in a cliff in the side of a in a rock basically.

He was wrapped up put in there and the stone was put in front of the door guards were placed there and you want me to believe that he's risen again?

You want me to believe that he's alive when I saw him die? You could understand why believing the resurrection would be very difficult to do nay is still very difficult to do.

[26 : 01] Gary Habermas is a professor who specializes in resurrection studies has excellent material out there as it relates to the resurrection the proof of the resurrection from from secular sources not just from what we have in scripture and he says one of our first thoughts when we hear someone claim to have witnessed a miracle is that there must be some sort of natural explanation.

If someone claims to have witnessed a miracle there must be a natural explanation right? Because for majority of people miracles don't happen.

it's fantasy it's fairy tale it's story Habermas continues by saying that the gospels are no exception I mean before I get to the gospels think about that there's always got to be a natural explanation doesn't there?

The parting of the Red Sea well the water was low and they strategically stepped on the rocks okay then the miracle goes the other way it's not the parting then it's the drowning with such little water okay what else do we have?

Jonah well I know the Bible says he was swallowed by a fish but that fish must have been a whale if it was a whale is the only thing I can think of that's got a mouth and throat big enough to swallow a human being natural explanation for a miracle right?

[27 : 51] Abraham continues with saying the gospels are no exception think about this in Matthew 28 the Jewish priest spread the tale that Jesus disciples stole his body the stolen body hypothesis started right when it happened right?

the Jewish priests were like this is not good we can't let this happen tell him the disciples stole his body alright John 20 Mary Magdalene at an empty tomb supposed Jesus to be the gardener remember that?

she assumed it was the gardener wherever you place his body let me know and I will go take care of it Luke 24 verse 11 the disciples thought that the women who had gone to the tomb were spreading rumors or false tales they didn't believe him Luke 24 verses 36 through 43 the disciples

when they saw the risen Jesus thought they were seeing a ghost or a hallucination can't be him kind of like when they were in the boat on the water and they're like halfway out to sea and here comes Jesus walking on the water they thought it was a ghost thought it was some kind of aberration it can't be Jesus he's on the shore but it was had to be a natural explanation but or in that case I guess it's still natural explanation hallucinations yeah that's what they thought about the risen Christ hallucination or ghost for many years there have been ample explanations to try and explain away the resurrection yet they have all failed to provide an adequate answer the appearance the appearances of Jesus provide the best evidence for the resurrection and the fact that they are recorded for us turn to 1st Corinthians 15 1st Corinthians how important is the resurrection and how important was the resurrection to Paul that in itself could take weeks to study just because there's so much to talk about but 1st Corinthians 15 now I would remind you brothers verse 1 of the gospel I preached to you which you received in which you stand and by which you are being saved if if you hold fast to the word I preached to you unless you believed in vain for I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received how high of a priority is what Paul is about to say go ahead how much of a priority is it a big priority or a little priority is it a big priority or a little priority big thank you I know there's you know not as many as we usually have but there's more than just the one saying big thank you it's a big priority it's a first importance what I received that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures pause this is first priority this is top notch this is big [31 : 45] Paul saying this is a first importance Jesus died was buried and was raised on the third day according to the scriptures verse 5 and that he appeared to Cephas that's Peter then to the twelve then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time most of whom are still alive though some have fallen asleep then he appeared to James and all the apostles and last of all is to one untimely born he appeared also to me I love the way Paul puts this he says listen most important thing Jesus died buried raised again and he appeared he appeared to Peter to the twelve then he appeared to more of five hundred brothers at one time and then just in case you want to substantiate it most of them still alive though some of them have already died but you can go substantiate what I'm saying with the testimonies of the people who saw him the appearances of Jesus provide the best evidence for the resurrection and these people believed it without question that he was raised from the dead

Luke 24 verse 34 the Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon that would be the reference to Cephas there that Paul mentions Acts 10 verses 40 and 41 Peter preaching but God raised him Jesus on the third day and made him to appear not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead so you see these are just a few examples of many how important the resurrection is to the life of the believer and for Jesus to have given his disciples a command to preach a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins while he lay dead in the grave would have been ridiculous for Jesus to have given his disciples a command to preach a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins while his disciples move and hide his body and create this great deception would have been stupid but for

Jesus to have given his disciples a command to preach a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins while showing them that death has no power over him is exactly the confidence needed to believe and preach it Jesus told them what to do and he said oh by the way you thought I was dead I'm not here I am and how's that go with Thomas no he appears to the 11 or the I guess the 10 at that point Judas is gone right and he appears to them and they're like oh yeah we believe it and then Thomas says even like I have to put my hand I put my fingers in the to believe it now we were talking about that at Wednesday Bible study you know in John 20 you see like the succession like how much more proof is needed for somebody to believe in the resurrection of Christ and you had Thomas I got to touch I got to touch his hand I got to touch his side to see that it's really him and what should Jesus do go for it man here I am put your fingers in don't be unbelieving but believe but blessed are those who do not see and yet believe how are those who don't see going to believe when people preach the gospel shared people are making disciples people are going and sharing the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ with them that's how they believe ladies and gentlemen as we search the scriptures for life changing church shaping truth as it relates to what making disciples looks like let us remember the centrality of the resurrection as it relates to our mission and our confidence the risen

Jesus has made clear that there is more work to be done related to his story we need to go make disciples of all nations and the fact that Jesus is indeed risen ought to provide us with the confidence to believe and preach the gospel we should have no fear there should be no fear in talking about Jesus with people unless he's not really raised again and at which point Paul says it in Corinthians if Jesus is not raised then our preaching is in vain no one is saved let's just eat drink and be merry because tomorrow we die I added that but you get the point the resurrection was so vital nay is so vital and important and is central to what we do as a church the church universal the church local and as a

[37 : 40] Christian part of the church body let's pray gracious father I thank you for your word I thank you lord that you convict us that you drive us to your word that you provide opportunities for us to show your love lord I pray that we would be convicted and convinced of the centrality of the resurrection to our lives to the life we live to what we do as a church body to the message that we share with others you've called us for a purpose you've given us a job to do lord help us to remain confident that you will see it through and carry it out through your faithful disciples who are empowered with the holy spirit the comforter which you have promised indwells us and us to carry it out to us and keep likely

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