

March 27, 2016 by Steve Brandon



The Apostolic Preaching of the Resurrection

Acts

Peter

- Acts 2
- Acts 3
- Acts 10

Paul

- Acts 13
- Acts 17

I have long had an interest in the evangelistic sermons recorded for us in the book of Acts. From Peter's message on the day of Pentecost, where 3,000 were saved to Paul's message on the top of Mars Hill, where he was mocked and scorned by the academic elite. From Stephen's message that resulted in his death to Peter's message to Cornelius that brought the gospel to the Gentiles. They all are fascinating to me.

Certainly a major reason for my interest is that I'm a pastor who preaches God's word every week. So I'm interested in sermons. I'm especially interested in the inspired sermons that we have recorded for us in God's Holy Word, as they are a model for us of what the gospel is and how it should be proclaimed.

But my interest in these sermons came long before I was ever a pastor. I think it's because I'm interested in the gospel. I'm interested in the message we need to believe to be saved. And there's no better place to find out the core elements of our faith than to look to the inspired sermons that are recorded for us in the book of Acts.

So, this Easter morning, I want for us to look at these sermons. Because what we will discover is that there is a strong emphasis on the resurrection in these sermons. And my question to you is this: Does it translate into the way that you think about the gospel? Does it translate in the way that you talk about the gospel? I'm sad to say that the resurrection isn't always on my mind when I think of the gospel.

For instance, this past week, I received a phone call from a reporter at the Rockford Register Star. She is doing an article on "How to find a good church." And she found our church somewhere on a website. And so, she asked me this question, "What is important in looking for a church?" So, I responded with what I believe is the most important quality of a church: their view of Scripture. Because when the Bible is central to the life of a church, when it is believed and taught and followed, then it sets the trajectory of a church. It sets a trajectory for what a church believes. It sets a trajectory for how a church does ministry in accordance with what God has written.

And I told this reporter that when you believe in the Bible, you will come to know God as the sovereign one who reigns over all. You will believe in Jesus Christ, the perfect God-man who died on the cross for our sins. When you believe in the Bible, it will create a community of love.

And after a few minutes our phone conversation ended. And I'm praying now for the article that will appear in the newspaper, hoping that it will bring attention to our church.

Now, afterwards, as I reflected upon our conversation, I was filtering it through Easter and the resurrection. I realized that my one-sentence summary of the gospel had mentioned nothing of the resurrection. Everything I said was true, especially about the gospel: "Jesus Christ, the sinless God-man died on the cross for our sins." But I said nothing about the resurrection. Now, that can be excused because my sentence was so compact. But here's what I know. The resurrection wasn't even on my mind to mention in explaining the gospel.

In other words, if I would have sought to explain the gospel with another sentence or two or three or four, I don't think that I would have mentioned anything about the resurrection. "Jesus Christ came, and lived a perfect life. And he died on the cross for our sins. It was his life for our life. It was Jesus bearing our sin upon the cross. He took the wrath of God for us. The call of the gospel is that we would repent from our sins and believe in Jesus. Believe that our salvation was accomplished entirely by grace. Not as a result of our works of righteousness, but according to his mercy. And when you believe, it will make a difference in your life. God will grant you new desires to live for him. Such is the fruit of our salvation."

That's how I often think about the gospel. That's how I often speak with those who don't know Christ. It's all focused upon the cross and our response. Very little attention (or thought) is given to his burial and his resurrection.

Now here's the interesting thing. When the apostles preached the gospel in the book of Acts, they almost always preached the resurrection. Not always, but almost always. And, on this Easter morning, as we reflect upon the resurrection and the sermons preached in the book of Acts, here's my aim: that we would gain a prominence of the resurrection in our thoughts as we think about the gospel and speak about the gospel to others.

Paul did. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 and 4, he summarized the good news like this:

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, ... Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, ..., he appeared also to me.

When Paul summarized the life of Christ, it was with four events: His death, His burial, His resurrection, His appearances. Regarding Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 15, ... His death and burial play a minor role. But his resurrection and appearances play the major role. Indeed, the entire chapter is about the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Now, that's not to say that you can't present the gospel without mentioning the resurrection. As John Newton famously said toward the end of his life, "Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." There's a sufficient gospel: "I'm a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior."

And yet, when you drill down for a bit more detail, the resurrection should be a prominent aspect of the gospel. So, let's look at the book of Acts this morning and discover how prominent the resurrection was in the teaching of the apostles. I invite you to open your Bibles to Acts, chapter 2. My message this morning is entitled, "The Apostolic Preaching of the Resurrection."

1. Peter

Acts 2 comes in the context of the day of Pentecost, the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the church, the day when the disciples began speaking in other languages. To this, those who heard this happening were "amazed and perplexed" (Acts 2:12). They were saying to one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:12). Others were mocking, saying "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13).

To this, Peter stands and speaks. He first addresses the issue of the tongues.

Acts 2:14-21

"Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

"And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit,
and they shall prophesy.

And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes,
the great and magnificent day.
And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls
upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

In other words, what you are seeing and hearing is exactly what was prophesied through the prophet Joel. Having addressed the context, Peter then turns to speak of Jesus.

Acts 2:22-25

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know -- this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,

And here he quotes from the last half of Psalm 16, which prophesied of the resurrection.

Acts 2:25-28

"I saw the Lord always before me,

for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

Now he expounds what he just read.

Acts 2:29-32

"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

He now returns to the situation at hand -- the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:33-36

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.
For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,
"'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool."
Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

And Peter barely gets to his application when the people are "cut to the heart," saying "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). To which Peter replies,

Acts 2:38

... "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Now, obviously, there is much in the text that we will skip over this morning, as our focus is upon the resurrection. But, did you notice the prominence of the resurrection? Once Peter explained the tongues phenomenon, he went right to Jesus, and explained how the Jews crucified him. But God raised him from the dead. Peter moves on to proving that this would take place by quoting from Psalm 16 and explaining what David meant when he said, ...

Acts 2:27

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.

This wasn't about David, because his body decayed in the tomb. It was about the Messiah, whose body wouldn't decay in the tomb. He then said that this is exactly what happened to Jesus. He was raised from the dead (Acts 2:32). This was fulfillment of prophecy. His resurrection is proof of His Messiah-ship.

Let's move on to the next scene in the book of Acts, in chapter 3. Here we see Peter and John encounter a lame man who was begging for money. Peter said to him, ...

Acts 3:6

"I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

And when the people saw this "they were filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to him" (Act 3:10). And again, Peter used this opportunity to preach about Jesus.

Acts 3:12-16

"Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

At this point, Peter turned his sermon to application, ...

Acts 3:19

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.

He's calling the people of Israel to confess their sins and turn to the Lord that they might experience forgiveness of sins! The same application comes to us today.

If you are apart from Christ this morning, I exhort you to repent of your sins. Turn from them. And come to Jesus who God raised from the dead. He has the power over death. He has the ability to forgive your sins.

Now, Peter's preaching didn't sit well with the Sadducees. Rather, they were provoked. We know that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection. Look over at the beginning of chapter 4, ...

Acts 4:1-2

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

The resurrection was a main theme of Peter's preaching. And so, the Sadducees arrested Peter. And they brought him before the "rulers and elders and scribes" (Acts 4:5) to give a defense. Here's what Peter said, ...

Acts 4:8-12

... "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

This is the great reality that the apostles preached! This is the great reality for us this Easter morning.

Acts 4:12

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

But notice in Peter's message that he didn't shrink from the resurrection. It was front and center (in verse 10). In fact, giving a final defense before the religious leaders who were telling them not to preach any more in the name of Jesus, Peter said, ...

Acts 5:29-32

We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Now, this is where the apostles stood in a different place than where we stand. They were eye-witnesses to the resurrection. Seeing Jesus alive from the dead made such an impact upon them that they couldn't stop speaking about him. They saw him raised from the dead. They proclaimed his resurrection far and wide.

And though we haven't seen him risen from the dead. It is the ground of our faith. It is what we believe. And we should proclaim it.

Let's skip ahead now to chapter 10. Here we see Peter bringing the gospel to the Gentiles for the first time. To make a long story short, Peter finds himself in the home of Cornelius, a god-fearing Gentile. And Peter says this to those who had gathered together:

Acts 10:34-43

... "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him 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. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

And all of those gathered in that room who heard the message that morning believed. And they received forgiveness of sins that day.

Do you believe? Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins? Do you believe that Jesus Christ was buried? Do you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead? Do you believe that Jesus Christ appeared to the apostles who couldn't stop giving their first-hand testimony (verse 41). But, they instead proclaimed Jesus far and wide.

May we all believe! May we all speak about the resurrection!

Well, we have seen Peter. Let's turn our attention now to the apostle Paul.

2. Paul

Turn over to chapter 13. Here we find Paul in Psidian Antioch, where he and Barnabas were traveling. He found himself in a synagogue on the Sabbath. And he was invited to speak.

So he began with a brief history lesson of the nation of Israel. They are God's chosen people whom God made flourish in Egypt (verse 17). He gave them the land of Canaan as an inheritance (verse 19). He gave them a king after God's own heart (verse 22), promising that from his line would come the Messiah.

Let's pick it up in verse 26. And as I read, listen for the prominence of the resurrection.

Acts 13:26-41

"Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

"'You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.'

And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,
"'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'

Therefore he says also in another psalm,
"'You will not let your Holy One see corruption.'

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about:

"'Look, you scoffers,
be astounded and perish;
for I am doing a work in your days,
a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you.'"

Paul knew full well of the difficulty of believing in the resurrection. That's why he ended with the words from Habakkuk of the amazing work that God did in his generation. God did an equally amazing work in the generation of Paul's day. He raised Jesus from the dead! And he warned those who didn't believe! Lest they be like those of Habakkuk's day.

The resurrection was prominent in Paul's preaching. Here, we see the resurrection mentioned some four times! (verses 30, 33, 34, 37). And although Paul had seen the risen Christ, it was in a vision, and not in flesh and blood. That's why he spoke of those who had seen Christ (verse 31).

And as we have opportunity to speak with others, we, too, should be front and center with the resurrection. For it is the cornerstone of our faith. It demonstrates that Jesus was everything that he claimed to be.

Paul stayed on with this message, preaching the resurrection. We see this in Acts 17, when he was with the academic elite in Athens. Let's pick it up in verse 22, ...

Acts 17:22-31

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and

perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for
"In him we live and move and have our being";

as even some of your own poets have said,
"For we are indeed his offspring."

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

And it is that last phrase that provoked the reaction.

Acts 17:32-34

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Did you notice in Paul's message on the Areopagus, that he said nothing about the life of Jesus? Simply the resurrection.

And the response to Paul's message is typical. Some mocked. Others were lukewarm. Others believed.

This is how it always is when we proclaim the gospel. Some will hate it and mock the messenger, "How can you believe such a silly thing, that God raised people from the dead?!" Others will be lukewarm about it all, "I just don't know. Maybe? Let me think about it Let me read about it." Others will believe.

Our job is to be faithful with the message. And the resurrection is an integral part of that message, even if that message seems fantastical. Paul said to the counsel, ...

Acts 23:6

Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.

He said to Felix, ...

Acts 24:21

I cried out while standing among them: 'It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.'

He said to Agrippa, ...

Acts 26:8

Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

Is the resurrection integral to your faith? Do think that it's incredible? Do you think that it is too strange to believe? Paul didn't Peter didn't. And neither should we.

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