

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Pastor Adam Parker

April 20th, 2025

Sermon Title: “We Are Witnesses”

Sermon Text: Acts 2:22-39

Acts 2:22 ¶ “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—

Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Acts 2:24 God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.

Acts 2:25 For David says concerning him,

“‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;

Acts 2:26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.

Acts 2:27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.

Acts 2:28 You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

Acts 2:29 ¶ “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.

Acts 2:30 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,

Acts 2:31 he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

Acts 2:32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.

Acts 2:33 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.

Acts 2:34 For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

Acts 2:35 until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Acts 2:36 ¶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

Acts 2:37 ¶ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, “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.

Acts 2:39 For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Main Point: In the resurrection of Christ, God is fulfilling his covenant promise that all who call upon his name will be saved.

Outline:

1. The Proof of the Resurrection (2:22-32)
2. The Proclamation of Christ’s Lordship (2:33-36)
3. The Prescription for Salvation (22:37-39)

Introduction

Today’s passage is an excerpt from a sermon by the Apostle Peter, who is preaching about the death and resurrection of Jesus before this crowd of Jews in Jerusalem. He’s telling them what God has done, and he’s calling on them to repent and to believe in Jesus. It’s incredibly straightforward.

Normally I like to begin my sermon with some kind of story or illustration, but I really think this is a passage that speaks for itself. And so because of that, I do have three points that should help us navigate Peter's sermon here.

But I'm going to give much more attention to the first point. Those three points today are the proof of the resurrection, the proclamation of Jesus' Lordship, and the prescription for salvation.

1. The Proof of the Resurrection (2:22-32)

First today, Peter speaks of the proof of the resurrection.

The proof that Peter brings out here fits into a few categories. One category of proof is the miracles Jesus did, and Peter tells the crowd that some of those there listening to him saw Jesus' miracles first hand.

Another proof he brings out is just the public nature of his crucifixion. Everybody knows that Jesus was crucified. It was incredibly public and humiliating.

Peter also uses the Scriptures as a proof. He assumes that some in the crowd will have *theological* problems with the idea of the resurrection, not necessarily historical problems. He anticipates that the argument isn't going to be, "This is historically untenable. Of course Jesus didn't rise." Instead the argument he is facing is, "He doesn't match the Messiah that we're expecting."

So he quotes from David in Psalm 16 to show them that because David died and didn't rise again, it wasn't David that this Psalm was about, but Jesus. He even brings David as a witness of Jesus here.

And then finally he brings himself and the other Apostles out as witnesses. I'll speak about them more in a moment.

But let's talk about this idea of evidence and proof for a moment. We shouldn't downplay the value of arguments and evidence, and I'd like you to reflect on what this passage tells us about these things.

Part of what it means to live in a secular age like our own is that believers live in a time when unbelief feels like a plausible option. I hate to say that, but it's true. The enlightenment and the persistent presence of secular thinking means that

Christians are always surrounded by voices who disagree with them and will loudly tell them so. This represents a persistent temptation: we're always tempted to not believe.

That constant pressure toward unbelief means that Christians need to be intentionally and proactively finding ways to have our trust in God fortified. There is no shame in battling unbelief in our own hearts.

This doesn't mean that doubt is unique to our secular age. John Calvin talks about how the life of the Christian is *always* one of wrestling between faith and doubt. And this was when Calvin was writing in the 1500s. Listen to this. If you ever struggle with doubts maybe you'll find this encouraging. It's a good reminder of what life in a fallen world is like:

“While we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. On the other hand, we say that *believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief*. Far, indeed, are we from putting their consciences in any peaceful repose, undisturbed by any tumult at all...”

Isn't that interesting? “Believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief.” Life is a battle, in other words. If faith doesn't come easy to you, then Calvin is saying that is actually very normal.

In another place Calvin writes about the fact that the disciples were true but weak believers before the resurrection:

“We ought not to seek any more intimate proof of this than that unbelief is, in all men [i.e., who are believers] always mixed with faith...Thus it is he who, struggling with his own weakness, presses toward faith in his moments of anxiety, is already in large part victorious.”

Do you feel like a weak believer? You have that in common with the disciples. Here's Calvin again:

“Faith is tossed about by various doubts, so that the minds of the godly are rarely at peace—at least they do not always enjoy a peaceful state.”

What I would say is this: if you're a Christian and you think you're strange or odd because you wrestle with questions and doubts, perhaps take some comfort. Because here Calvin is writing in the 16th century and he's saying, "Actually, doubt is a part of life in a fallen world."

This was true in Calvin's day. How much more now that we live in a secular age. And so now perhaps more than ever it sometimes feels plausible that Christians could be wrong, and so we wrestle with that, and we're meant to answer that – not with claims that those kinds of questions are bad, but by following through on the questions, by looking for answers, and yes, learning things that help us see more and more why there are good reasons to believe more firmly in what God has told us.

Part of how we answer it with passages like the one before us today where the disciples say, "We are eyewitnesses to these things."

But living in a secular age means there is doubt in *all* directions. Doubt doesn't just threaten the believer. Living in a secular age also means that unbelievers are constantly tempted by belief, as well... by that nagging fear: what if the religious people are right? What if what the Christians say is true?

20 years ago, the New Atheists – typified by men like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins – boldly proclaimed that not only is there no God, but that even the idea of his existence is an absurdity. In the time since, the claims by most atheists have now softened. Richard Dawkins has even begun to call himself a cultural Christian. It is now very unusual to find an iron-bellied atheist willing to absolutely proclaim that there is no god. Instead, they almost always want to say, "As far as I can tell," or "as far as I know," which is more honest, but also far less bold. I think it shows that the demise of God has been far harder to convince people of than was once thought.

It is right to be uncertain of your dogmatic claim that there is no God. You should be haunted by that fear that you might have missed something if you are an atheist – that there is something else going on in the universe that you've blocked out or dismissed out of hand that you perhaps shouldn't have.

The unbeliever is haunted by this fear: what if I'm wrong? What if God is there? Where if Christ is risen? Why are there so many religious people who are perfectly sane, and they believe that God raised this man up from the dead 2000 years ago? It's a haunting thought.

And there is a deeper reason for that fear, according to Scripture; which is that we still live in this world, whose heavens declare the glory of God. We're surrounded on all sides by God's works screaming in our ears that He is there, and He is not silent. Something about the world around us testifies loudly to the creator, and the moral law within each of us does the same. Even the staunchest unbeliever can't escape the fact that unbelief does not adequately make sense of the world.

There have been a number of high profile intellectuals who have converted to Christianity in recent years.

If you know who Niall Ferguson is, he is a great historian who was an atheist. He is married to a former Muslim who famously became an atheist named Ayaan Hirshi Ali.

Niall and Ayaan both recently became Christians. And individually each of them said that their atheism did not do what it promised. Ayaan said two things. The first thing she said was that when she converted to atheism from Islam that she was inundated with death threats from Muslims, but that what she heard from Christians was, "We will pray for you." She was struck by the love of Christians. Secondly, she said that she found life without spiritual solace unendurable and self-destructive. She stated that atheism failed to answer fundamental questions about the meaning and purpose of life, or to account for her strong sense of morality. This ultimately led her to Jesus Christ.

Ayaan's husband, Niall Ferguson said that he found the Judeo-Christian tradition to be the most consistent way to safeguard the value of human life, dignity, and personal freedom. He observed that societies organized solely on atheistic principles have historically been unsuccessful and led to catastrophe. He also said that he found it impossible to speak about morality apart from religious faith.

These are of course only two examples, but it shows that as I've said, living in a secular age means that it's not just believers who are tempted to unbelief. Doubt assails everyone. Secular people are pressed upon by the temptation to believe, just as believers feel pressure to disbelieve. Maybe that's you here today. You've come today, but you struggle to believe. Or you've come today, and you don't believe, but maybe you're at least willing to think about it.

The Bible does not tell us that believing the gospel is something we are meant to do based on blind faith without arguments or reasons. Charles Hodge, one of the giants of Princeton in the 19th century said this:

“Faith is a conviction of things not seen, on adequate testimony. Even our Lord himself, in whom the fulness of the godhead dwelt bodily, was approved by miracles, signs, and wonders that God did by him.” (ST, Vol. 1)

This is why verse 32 is so important. Peter says, “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses.” What this crowd is hearing is not hearsay. What they are hearing is first hand testimony. Peter is not saying, “I know someone who saw Jesus raised up.” He's saying, “I saw it. We all saw it.” In the immediate it seems Peter is talking about himself and the other Apostles. Paul mentions that there were 500 witnesses at one time who saw the risen Jesus. And we know that these things were written within the lifetime of such people, so that those witnesses could still be interviewed or spoken to. The original readers could have found people and looked them in the eye as they said, “I saw him. I saw the nail holes in his hands. Jesus lives, and I know it for a fact. You can kill me if you want to, but I know it's true.” History tells us that these people sealed the truth of it with their own lives.

Even skeptical historians like Tom Holland, when trying to explain the birth of the church, will admit, “The disciples saw something. Something that changed them forever, whatever they saw.” Often you'll hear a historian like Holland pull back at the last moment from saying that they saw the risen Jesus. Often they just say, “They saw something, but I'm just a historian. Who am I to say?” but it baffles the mind to contemplate that there is *anything* other than the actual risen Jesus that could have led them to give their lives claiming that that is *precisely* what they had seen!

These sorts of things should strengthen what faith is already there.

And it should challenge the unbelief of those who don't yet have faith in Jesus. You explain this to me how this is possible.

Let's appreciate the precious importance of these witnesses. If there are arguments that can strengthen our trust in the testimony of the Apostles, we should by all means be built up and have our trust in the Gospels increased and improved.

Arguments are important. Adequate testimony is a part of our faith. This is what we're reading today. But notice that Peter doesn't say everything and make every argument that he could. Instead, he makes a reasonable case and points to solid evidence.

Arguments are good, but not every argument has to do everything and prove everything, nor will every argument be absolutely convincing to everyone who hears it – especially if they aren't open to it. Instead, we can often appreciate the little arguments, the little proofs that often add up to a very clear and sure, hard to deny faith that we live in the confidence of.

It's not an act of faithlessness to want to have *more* faith, or to want to see it incrementally grow. It's not an act of faithlessness to recognize that we don't trust God and what he has said in his word as much as we could. We should always be finding arguments and testimonies and reasons why our faith can and should be stronger than it is.

I think that the eyewitness testimony of the Apostles is one of the most powerful arguments that exist for the truth of the resurrection. The more you look at their testimony, their life, the price they paid for their words, the less and less it makes any sense that they would have done this if they hadn't actually seen the risen Jesus as they claimed.

Yes, people can be so convinced of something that they are willing to die for it. But the disciples are unique because they aren't saying, "I believe my friend who said he saw Jesus." If there is anyone who knew whether they were lying it would have been they themselves. Yet the disciples themselves are saying, "We all saw him, and we'd rather die than say otherwise."

That's our first point today: the proof of the resurrection.

2. The Proclamation of Christ's Lordship (2:33-36)

Second, this passage includes the proclamation of Christ's Lordship.

We see in this passage that Jesus is Lord and Christ. The language here is Lord and Messiah. Messiah is the Hebrew word for the promised and anointed Savior that Israel had been expecting.

The identity of Jesus is what Peter is talking about. This is actually very important. When I was a young man I was an atheist. But I came to faith by studying the historical facts of the resurrection.

But I distinctly remember believing that Jesus rose but not really internalizing why. I hadn't thought of why he had risen from the dead, nor was I initially interested in who he really was. It wasn't until later that I realized I had to take *Jesus* seriously, not just the history of the resurrection.

But the point was not for him to simply rise because it would be neat if that happened. The resurrection is designed by God, in part, as proof that Christ really was who he said he was, and that through faith in him we can receive the eternal life that he proclaimed and preached during his earthly ministry.

You see, the point wasn't just to change history by making us all think, "Wow. This man rose from the dead." The thought isn't supposed to stop there.

The point is, "If he rose then he's right. If he rose, then God was telling us to trust Jesus. If he rose, then his preaching and words aren't just good ideas – it's God really shining a light into our dark world and putting an end to our guesswork and assumptions."

And what Jesus taught wasn't just moralism. It wasn't just a message about being good people. His lesson was, I'm dying in your place. I'm rising in your place. I'm dealing with the wrath of God so that you never have to, yourself.

Because Jesus was raised, he is the Lord. Because he was raised, we have to follow him. It's not just a good idea, it's what (it turns out) life is all about.

Now, I do love this. The people demand an application to Peter's sermon.

First Luke tells us that they were "cut to the heart." In other words, this message lands on them. It really hits them that we've got to do something. We've got to respond. What are we supposed to do?

Do you feel that way right now?

Have you been feeling cut to the heart for a while? That is God working on your heart. Please do not resist. Please do not ignore it. The question the crowd wants to know is, "is there anything we can do? Are we just in big trouble because we crucified the Lord of glory? Is this whole sermon just a giant threat, Peter?"

3. The Prescription for Salvation (22:37-39)

And Peter's answer is our third point, which is the prescription for salvation.

This doesn't have to be difficult. In fact, it isn't difficult. In fact, if it was difficult it wouldn't be good news.

Because Jesus is who he said he was, what should we do? Here's the answer. We see it in verse 38. Peter tells them what they should do.

"Peter said to them, '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. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.'"

He says this is for every one of you. Every one of you. Not the guy next to you, not the person you don't like who isn't here. No, this is for every one of you to hear. You are not special. You're not an exception. If you are in earshot, then this is for you.

Peter says two things. First, Peter calls us to repent and be baptized (v. 38).

To repent means to change, to turn. It means to realize that your sin is real, that it is a problem, and that you can't erase or solve it. But it also means then turning from it, turning from your own way, and turning toward Christ, where we will find not only our sins erased and wiped away, but where we'll find life and

righteousness and all the things we cannot do on our own, no matter how hard we try. He will take all of that weight for us, and lift it off of us.

The second application Peter mentions is baptism. He says, “Repent,” and then he says, “Be baptized.” Baptism is the sign of the covenant that God made with his people. That sign used to be circumcision, but now the sign is baptism.

There are two things to keep in mind here when it comes to the response Peter calls for. The first is that all people are called to repent and be baptized. It is a both/and command. If you have repented and come to Christ but not yet been baptized, you should be baptized.

If you *have* been baptized – perhaps as a covenant child – but never repented and turned to Christ for yourself, then you should do that. That’s what Peter is calling for here. Our repentance drives us to baptism, but our baptism drives us to repentance. This is true whether you remember your baptism happening or not.

Also in Peter’s response he says that the promise of salvation is open to *all* the families of the earth (v. 39), not simply people of one nationality. And the promise is one that’s true.

But the promise is not, “you got baptized so you are unconditionally saved.” That would mean that everyone is saved simply because you have an ancestor who is a Christian, or that everyone is saved just because they were baptized. The baptism is the sign of the promise, but the promise still has to be believed by faith. The promise and covenant of God is a covenant of faith: “believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.” This is a promise for us. It’s a promise for all who believe. And it’s a gospel that our children must hear and believe for themselves as well.

Conclusion

Whenever the church gathers for worship my assumption is that there are at least two kinds of people here: there are those who need their faith increased, and there are those who do not yet have faith in Christ.

Usually I have a different message for believers and skeptics, but I want to just end on this point. It’s something for all of us: We must all repent and believe in order

to experience the power of the resurrection for ourselves. It happens by faith. That doesn't mean all your questions are answered. It doesn't mean that you have no struggles or issues that need to be resolved. But it does mean that you're willing to reach out to Christ, resting on him alone, taking things one step, one day at a time as his disciple.

Believe Peter when he says what he saw. And having believed, repent and be baptized. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

Let's pray.