

"The Risen Christ: Convincing, Commanding and Conquering!"
Acts 1:1-11
Easter 2018

Turn with me to Acts 1:1-11 on this Resurrection Sunday as we consider the Risen Christ: Convincing, Commanding and Conquering. Please stand in honor of the reading of God's word (Read and Pray).

I. THE RISEN CHRIST APPEARS - CONVINCING

In the text before us, we have a brief report of the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry after His triumphant resurrection until He ascended back to the right hand of God the Father. And during this 40 day period after His death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb, He had a twofold ministry with His disciples (v 3). He showed Himself beyond a shadow of a doubt as being risen from the dead, and He spoke to them about the kingdom of God.

A. Presentation of Infallible Proofs (v 3): First, we read that Jesus gave His disciples many infallible, convincing proofs (v 3). Luke tells us that "After His suffering, He showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive." In the cold aftermath of his agony in the garden, his arrest, his trial, his scourging, his crucifixion, his humiliation, and his entombment, He deliberately presented Himself to them as the Living One. The Greek present tense participle means the One who would be continually and continuously alive.

How did He present Himself? The text says that He did it with many convincing proofs. I like how the KJV puts it when it says: "many infallible proofs." As Dr. Luke wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he chose a technical term that means that the Lord Jesus gave His disciples such compelling, convincing, infallible proofs, that together, these proofs drove away every doubt, and quelled every question that He was risen indeed. I like the word "many" here. He gave them an over-abundance of evidence that having been dead, He was now alive.

Why should you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Because of the compelling eyewitness evidence of His resurrection. On eleven specific occasions we are told that Jesus appeared to His followers across this 40 day period. He appeared indoors and outdoors. He appeared on a mountain in Galilee and on a suburban road outside of Jerusalem. He appeared by day and by night. He appeared to individuals, small groups, and to one group as large as 500 people.

He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, at dawn, in the garden, by the tomb, and then to a group of women who were coming to anoint His dead body. His third appearance that first Easter was to two disciples on their way to Emmaus. When he came to their home, He blessed the bread, broke the bread, and gave the bread to them, and their eyes were opened and they knew that it was the risen Lord. And on that same first Easter, the record tells us that He appeared to Simon Peter--a private, individual encounter between the risen Lord and this fallen follower that helped turn Him from Peter cowering before a servant girl to Peter boldly preaching at Pentecost.

The fifth and final appearance that Easter Sunday was in the evening to a gathering of the ten in

the upper room, Thomas being absent. Jesus came and stood in their midst, and when they saw his hands, feet, and side, they were overjoyed to see the risen Lord. The next week, Thomas, the doubter, came face to face with Jesus. Jesus said "Reach here your finger and see my hand. Reach here your hand and put it into my side. Be not unbelieving but believing." Thomas fell on his face and cried: "My Lord and My God!" According to Luke, Jesus even ate broiled fish as proof that he was risen indeed. This was no ghost hovering about. He gave them infallible proofs. He appeared again to the disciples on the shores of Galilee, fixed them a meal and told them where to let down their nets for a catch.

In 1 Cor. 15, Paul mentions the most impressive appearance of all, in which He appeared to over 500 people. This was likely the same appearance recorded by Matthew in Galilee when Jesus gave the Great Commission. But then Paul makes this stunning statement: that most of them were still alive, in AD 55 when he wrote the Corinthian letter. He put his own character and name on the line. Look them up! Ask them! You can find them! They have identities, they have addresses, and families! More than half of them still alive! Someone observed that if those 500 people had testified 6 minutes each in a court of law, you would have more than 50 hours of accumulated evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

He also appeared to his younger half-brother James acc. to 1 Cor. 15. They grew up in the same Galilean home there in Nazareth, but according to John 7, we are told that James didn't believe in Him. And yet something changed his brother James from being a doubter and a skeptic to becoming the first pastor of the Jerusalem church, a writer of Scripture, and a martyr for the Christian faith. Could it have been anything other than the appearance of his resurrected older half-brother, standing in the presence of this one who had grown up along-side of him in that home?

Our Lord appeared to all of the apostles, and then appeared here in Acts 1 at His ascension on the Mount of Olives: 11 specific times across 40 days, not to mention the unnamed appearances during that time, and then after that, first to Paul on the road to Damascus, and then finally to aged apostle John on the isle of Patmos. Folks, if you simply take the evidence as it is given to us in the documents of the NT, there is no other conclusion that to confess that Jesus Christ who was dead, is now alive, for God raised Him out of that Tomb, and He triumphed over death, hell and the grave.

Infallible proofs. Too many people saw him on too many different occasions for it to have been a hoax. 500 people couldn't be kept under hypnosis. Somebody would have leaked it, had it been a sham. He gave them infallible proofs. And years later they were still convinced. John wrote in his first epistle (1:1): "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard with our ears, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have examined, and our hands have touched--the Word of Life." The audible, visible expression of the invisible God! Half a century later, John still maintained that He had seen, heard, and touched the risen Lord. Or Peter, that gruff fisherman, by no mean a mystic, in his second letter, he said: "We have not followed cleverly devised fables when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)

What would a secular historian say about this kind of evidence? Dr. Paul L. Meyer is a Professor

of Ancient History at Western Michigan University; he states and I quote: "The documentary evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is better attested than some events in secular history from 50 years ago...We have more eyewitness evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead than for the death of Alexander the Great in Babylon in 323 BC or than we do for the famous assertion that Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon River." More eyewitness evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ! And these same disciples who saw him live and die and live again, saw him return into the heavens. Infallible proofs! During those forty days between resurrection and ascension, He appeared and offered proofs, then he gave instruction about the Kingdom.

B. Instruction About the Kingdom of God (3b): The subject that permeated his ministry before the cross, was the subject to which He returned after his resurrection. And the Kingdom of God simply means this: It is the rule of God as King. When you become a follower of Jesus, you are declaring that Jesus is Lord over every area of your life. Jesus was speaking during these 40 days about the kingdom, the rule of God. Then Dr. Luke gets specific in v 4. The Father had promised a gift, and indeed the Father had for centuries. The promise stood unfulfilled, that the Holy Spirit, that is the personal presence of God, would invade history and indwell every believer and change the world! Peter quotes the prophecy of Joel over in chapter 2:17-21. This is the promise of the ages, that not only would God be with us, as He was at Bethlehem, and not only would God be for us, as He demonstrated at Calvary, but that God would be in us through the person of the Holy Spirit. And He is the source of our power (v 8). That brings us to verse 8 and the second point. Not only does the Risen Christ appear, convincing them that he is alive, but secondly....

II. THE RISEN CHRIST ASSIGNS - COMMANDING

Here in v 8 there is an assignment given to the disciples and to us. There are five parts to this: The Power, the Purpose, the Priority, the Personality, and the Place of it.

A. Power: First there is Power to accomplish the mission: What could enable a bunch of unlettered, uncultured men to grow a church from 120 to 25,000 in 6 months? The power of the Holy Spirit. Ever since the wind blew and the fire fell and the Spirit of God came, we have had the power to do what this early church did. Do you believe that? The Bible says in Mal. 3:6: "I am the Lord, I do not change." Hebrews 13:8 says: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Now if God hasn't changed, and He hasn't, then He can do the same thing in our midst today, Amen? His power is available now like it was in the book of Acts.

B. Purpose: Second, that power is purposeful. Jesus said: "You will receive power and you will be my witnesses." It is power with a purpose. Unfortunately, one of the great tragedies of the 21st Century Church, is that we desire the power and we've discarded the purpose. For many, the power of the Holy Spirit has come to mean eccentric or bizarre behavior. But when you read of the power of the Holy Spirit, there's one common denominator, and that is when the Holy Spirit is present, the disciples brought forth a clear, compelling, and commanding witness to the risen Christ!

C. Priority: Third, that purpose ought to be top priority, it ought to be primary. Steven Covey, a popular management guru in America, wrote the book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Heard of it? Well several years ago, he wrote a book entitled: *First Things First*. And in that book, he has a chapter entitled: "The Main Thing, is to keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing." And the main thing for a believer on Jesus, a follower of Christ, a disciple of the Lord, is found here in v 8--"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses." That's the main thing. That's the Great Commission, and its worded variously in each of the Four Gospels but the thrust is the same. The Risen Lord says: "I'm going to empower you to bear witness to me! I'll give you power with a purpose, and that purpose is to be top priority." But we have a hard time with that, don't we?

What would you think of one of the big three American car companies: Ford, GMC, or Chrysler, if every year, with their great production facilities, ten's of thousands of employees, and multiplied millions of dollars of capital, they were able to produce 40 or 50 cars? And yet, when you run the numbers, less than 5% of us who claim to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord bear witness to Him on a regular basis. That's one out of 20. No wonder it takes 40 people a year to win one person to Jesus Christ on average. That's pitiful. A company like that would go bankrupt. And yet we think we're doing well if we baptize our children and get people to transfer their letters. But Christianity is receding in America, and the "None" category is rising rapidly. No religion, no faith is the fastest growing category.

So we must accept the responsibility of being a witness. What is a witness? I mean if you were called to testify in court, what would they assume? That you saw something, that you had first hand knowledge of the person or event in question. So Jesus is saying that when the Holy Spirit takes over your life, you're going to be relating what you know from first hand experience with Jesus Christ. That's a witness. And the reason why so few witness is because so few have anything to say, they haven't had any first hand experiences with Jesus Christ. Now usually, this statement is considered as a command, as if Jesus is ordering us to witness. And that is true in the other statements of the Great Commission, but in this case it is merely the description of a fact. It is unavoidable. If you are a believer living in submission to the Spirit of God, you are a witness!

D. Personality: Fourth, look at the personality of it. He said: "You will be my witnesses." Now that is not only a possessive word, that we belong to Him. But it means the *direction* of our witness. The risen Christ said: You are witnesses *to me* as the object, the personality. We bear witness *to Him, to the risen Lord*. Now I'd like to clarify something. Most people think only about giving our personal testimony, and that's a vital part of it. But in the NT it is always secondary. Primarily, a witness is to the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ! His pre-existence as God the Son, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His substitutionary death on the cross, His burial, and His victorious resurrection. Without those facts, there would be no personal testimony. I like what Roy Fish, Professor of Evangelism at SWBTS used to say: "If you put faith in somebody's testimony, its like trying to anchor a boat by throwing the anchor on the deck. It won't hold anything." Your anchor must be in the great acts of God in the person of Jesus Christ and then tell your personal experience as corroborating evidence.

And as you flip through the pages of the book of Acts, that's what you find that witnessing is. In Acts 2:32, Peter stood up and said: "God has raised this Jesus to life and we are witnesses to this fact!" In Acts 3:15, "You killed the author of life, but God raised Him from the dead, we are

witnesses of this!" Or look again in Acts 4:33, "With great power, the apostles continued to testify, that is witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ." Or look in Acts 5:30-32-- "The God of our Father raised Jesus from the dead, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior that He might give repentance and forgiveness to Israel. We are witnesses of these things!"

When you bear a witness, you are to tell someone of the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ. Now that can be brief remark or it can be a lingering conversation, depending on the situation you find yourself in and the opportunity that the Lord provides you with. A witness may be a brief word of truth, or move beyond that to a personal testimony, or beyond that to a full biblical presentation of the Gospel. Sometimes a witness is just a word about Jesus Christ, shot like an arrow into another person's heart. Sometimes, you can tell about what the Lord has done in you, for you, with you, and through you. Still other times, you can open your Bible and walk that person through the plan of salvation and lead them to a saving encounter with Christ. But our witness is to the personality - Jesus Christ--He said: "You are witnesses *to me*."

E. Place: Fifth, what about the place of it? It begins where we are, with those immediately closest to us, then in ever widening circles we go til we reach every man and woman, boy and girl on earth. I'm going to make a statement and I hope it is not misunderstood, but I believe with all my heart that it is hypocritical to send money to the mission field if we're not trying to win people where we are. Thank God for missions, home missions and foreign missions, and I believe that we ought to give and give sacrificially to those worthy evangelistic efforts. But we can't "hire it all done." We can't "delegate it all." Jesus said to you and to me that we need to start in our Jerusalem!

Oswald Smith once said: "The Light that shines farthest shines brightest at home!" What about sharing your faith in your home among your family members, on your job among your co-workers, where you live among your neighbors? Listen, God gives us opportunities every single day to bear witness to Jesus Christ, we just need to be sensitive enough to see them and then submissive enough to be obedient and give a witness. And we need to pray at the start of every day: "Lord, help me to see that open door to share Jesus, and help me be obedient." We are to begin where we are but then we are to reach out in ever widening circles of witness until we reach the ends of the earth. So the risen Christ appears, convincing and the risen Christ assigns, commanding, but then thirdly...

III. THE RISEN CHRIST ASCENDS – CONQUERING!

Look at v 9-11. So Jesus convinced them that he was indeed risen from the dead and then commanded His followers to be witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, and then ascended back to heaven as the Conquering King! What a miracle, what a mission, and what a master?!! Now as we have seen, with that mission, the Master promised the power to accomplish it, and that power is His personal presence in the Holy Spirit! That is why we call it the Great Commission, because we don't do it alone. The Spirit of God empowers us! And of course that prophetic promise was fulfilled 10 days later on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God came in power and filled those disciples and they came out and preached the Gospel and thousands were saved. The promise made was a promise fulfilled! But what had to happen

before the promise could be fulfilled? The Ascension.

Look at John 16:5-7. Jesus told His disciples on the night before His death that He had to leave so that the Holy Spirit could come! So in answer to the question: Why did Jesus have to return to heaven? Why the ascension? The answer is this: He had to *leave* so that the Spirit could *come* and begin His unique ministry. The Ascension was necessary for Pentecost to happen when the Spirit would invade and energize those witnesses to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, just as Jesus commanded.

A. The Circumstances: Now let's look at the event itself. After Jesus spoke these words of promise and commission, He ascended. And this event is recorded with a sublime simplicity (v 9). Three facets of the Ascension assure us that it was a historical fact. First, it was *public*--It happened before their very eyes (v 9). It happened while they were looking intently up into the sky as He was going (v 10). Second, it was *gradual*. He didn't just disappear. They watched Him go. In fact, the word translated "intently" in v 10 literally means to stretch. They fixed their eyes on Him and stretched their necks to watch Him go up. Add to that the fact that the participle used here is in the present tense: While they were looking intently at him go up. It was gradual. Third, it was *literal*--Jesus was literally and bodily lifted up and a cloud finally hid him from their sight. Where did He go? Well the angels tell us in v 11. Where is Jesus? He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father.

B. His Continuing Ministry: What is He doing in Heaven? He existed before time, He was born of a virgin, He lived a sinless life, He died on a Roman cross, He was raised from a now empty tomb, He has ascended into heaven, and as the angels reported, He's coming back. But what is He doing in between His ascension and His return? What's He doing? Well the Scripture says that He is helping us, He is pleading our case, He is interceding for us. Hebrews 4:14 says: "Therefore since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens (speaking of the ascension), Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence..."

What is Jesus doing in Heaven? He is there interceding, praying for us. Hebrews 7:25 says that "He," Christ "always lives to make intercession for them" that is, the saints. Paul said in Romans 8:34 that Jesus is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. He's praying for you and me. Isn't that great? To know HE's praying for you? About that secret sin you're struggling with, that depression you're battling, the death of a loved one you're sorrowing over, the financial strain weighing you down, the marriage that is in trouble, the child who has gone astray and broken your heart. He's praying for you, interceding with the Father on your behalf. That answers the question of what He's doing right now, but what happened as He arrived in heaven?

C. His Coronation: Well we have to turn to other Scriptures for that. Turn to Ephesians 1:20-23. What are these rulers and authorities and powers and dominions? This enters into a whole realm of mysterious spiritual powers that we do not fully understand, but the NT teaches that there are scores of malevolent minions, putrid principalities, ruthless rulers, angels and arch-angels of darkness itself. And as our Lord ascended back to the right hand of the Father we're

told by the word of God that He stripped them of their power. Heb. 2:14-15 says: "By His death He destroyed the one who has the power of death--that is the devil--and He freed those held in slavery." Not only did He free those in slavery, friend, He took prisoners. Ephesians 4:7 says of Christ, "When He ascended on High, he led captive a host of captives!" And Paul adds in Col. 2:15 that "He made a public spectacle of them and triumphed over them!" And that means this. Whatever there is that hovers over us, and around us, trying to trip us, snare us, brutalize and abuse us, as Christ ascended back to the Father, He stripped them of their weapons and their power!

And then as Paul puts it, when Jesus returned to the streets of heaven, He openly, publicly triumphed over them! Paul was speaking to a world under Roman rule, so his original readers caught the imagery and made the connection. See when a Roman general had defeated a foreign power, the highest reward that the Roman Senate could bestow upon him was what they called the "Roman Triumph." On the battlefield, the soldiers took their spoils, but the day of all days for the commanding general was the triumphal procession.

After Julius Caesar returned from four great conquests, the Roman people organized a "Roman Triumph." He had brilliantly conquered in North Africa, Pontus, Egypt, and Gaul. So at dawn, the Roman senators lined up in their white togas. Following them, there were the musicians sounding the praises of the conquering Caesar. Behind them came the spoils that were captured, wagons loaded with the spoils of war. There was gold, silver, precious stones, ivory, spices, and fine linens. Then came the animals that were representative of the region. Next came the conquering army, carrying their commanders on their shoulders. And behind them came the banners of war, the flags of the kingdoms they had defeated as they marched across the land. Then came a picture parade, which artist's renditions of the great victories won on the battlefield and preserved for this great day of triumph. Behind the picture parade came the prisoners of war who had been defeated in chains, snarling and cursing at the Romans who had conquered them. And then following that, the victorious Caesar in his chariot, and behind him--his own army. And they snaked their way among the Seven Hills of Rome until they came to the Forum, he was crowned with a laurel garland, and he was HAILED as mighty Caesar! It was a day of Triumph!

The apostle Paul chose that image and that language in Col. 2:15 when He said: Our ascending Lord disarmed the principalities and powers, robbed them of their weapons, and He triumphed over them! Paul would have us see the ascension to the right hand of the Father as if it were a victory procession through the streets of Heaven itself! But instead of Senators clapping and Heralds singing, it was the angels lining the streets of heaven and singing His praises! And instead of natives in chains it was demonic rulers and dark powers bound. And Christ strode the streets of heaven and ascended to the right hand of the Father a victorious conqueror, having bested death, hell, and the grave!

But He did not have His army directly behind Him. He left His army here on this earth, the church, to finish the work He started, the work He commissioned us to do. Until finally, that which was inaugurated at His first coming will be consummated at His Second Coming. And we'll be caught up with Him, to share in that victory song where even now they chant: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain; To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12).

No wonder Charles Wesley wrote this hymn: "Hail the day that sees Him rise--To His throne above the skies! Christ, the Lamb for sinners given, Enters now the Highest Heaven! There for Him high triumph waits; Lift up your heads, eternal gates! He hath conquered death and sin! Take the King of Glory in!" What an awesome moment, when our Lord returned to His place in glory! All hail the power of Jesus name, let angels prostrate fall, bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all!

The risen Christ convincing with infallible proofs that He is risen indeed. The risen Christ commanding that we will be His witnesses to the ends of the earth til every person hears. The risen Christ conquering sin and Satan, death and hell as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Now let's go out and live like we believe that, Amen?!

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A pastor for 20 years and a pioneer leader in the values voter movement, Dr. Kenyn Cureton, former Vice President for Convention Relations for the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, currently serves as Vice President for Church Ministries with the Family Research Council in Washington, DC.