

April 3, 2005
Easter 2

"Spirit-Filled Christians Boldly Witness to Jesus' Resurrection"

ACTS 2:14, 22-32

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ²² "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, {²³ Or of those not having the law (that is, Gentiles)} put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵ David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷ because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." ²⁹ "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰ But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹ Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³² God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Imagine for a moment that you are interested in learning how to play the game of golf. You have never played golf, never picked up a club, never taken a mighty swing at the ball on the tee, or chipped a shot on the green, or putt the ball into the hole. You can try to learn the game yourself, or even pick up video tapes on how to develop the right swing, but the best way to learn the game is to take lessons from a pro and get your golf game started off on the right foot.

There is something far more important in life than developing a good game of golf, or improving your skills in cooking, or learning a new program for the computer. We want to speak to you about the reason the Lord has left you still living on this earth. He has left you here for one purpose and one purpose only and that is to witness to your Christian faith, especially to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We bear about in our bodies and our daily lives the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus.

This morning we want to observe a person witnessing to Jesus resurrection by the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter was not the quintessential witness to the Christian faith prior to Holy Spirit's coming on Pentecost. Peter was the coward who denied Jesus the night before Jesus died, and Peter was with the others on the night of Jesus' resurrection hiding behind closed doors for fear of what might happen to them. When the Holy Spirit filled the life of Peter, the way my hand can fill this glove, he became a powerful witness to Jesus, especially to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Come and let's learn more about boldly witnessing to the resurrection, trusting that the Holy Spirit who gave Peter great power will also be there to give us a power and boldness we simply do not have on

our own.

1) The Holy Spirit helps us point to the facts of Jesus' life

Look again at how bold Peter was in sharing the facts of Jesus' life. "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you with miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him." Peter tells the crowd that Jesus was a man, fully human like the rest of us, but also someone who was accredited by God with miracles, wonder and signs. Some of the people listening to Peter had seen with their own eyes the miracles Jesus performed such as feeding 5000 people with five barley loaves and two small fish, or healing a blind man, or raising people from the dead. The Holy Spirit led Peter to point to the facts of Jesus' life and challenge the crowd to look at the evidence and ask whether Jesus were more than just a man who talked to people in the villages and walked the dusty paths of Palestine.

The reason the Lord has left us living here on this earth is to challenge the people of our generation and call on them to look at the facts of Jesus' life. We are bridge between those who may be skeptical and doubting like Thomas and the miracles that Jesus performed in his life, including the greatest miracle of all, his resurrection from the dead. After showing us the example of doubting Thomas, the gospel of John tells us so clearly the purpose of the miracles of Jesus. "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of the his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name."

A few years ago around Easter time, Newsweek magazine had an article by Kenneth L. Woodward on *Rethinking the Resurrection*. Here is a surprising statement from that article, "It was the appearance of the resurrected Christ that lit the flame of the Christian faith and the power of the Holy Spirit that fired the motley and fearful disciples to proclaim their risen Christ throughout the Greek and Roman world." The scientific world has had to come to grips with the possibility of miracles that account for sudden huge gaps in the theory of evolution and no rational explanation for what happens inside of the tiny atom. We have the privilege of talking to people who are interested in things that are spiritual and pointing them to the great miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially the miracle of the resurrection. Doubting Thomases can have their doubts removed by a first hand witness to the miracles of Jesus, especially the resurrection.

Maybe you have met people who have been like the man who came to a detour. The yellow sign said, "DETOUR, ROAD UNDER REPAIR." Two months before, he would never have thought twice about that sign. He would have grumbled, but he would have taken the detour. But now the man was sitting behind the wheel of a brand new, four-wheel-drive, high road clearance, SUV. The sign wasn't a detour, it was a challenge. A washboard road, no problem; slippery gravel, no sweat. After about twenty-three miles, he came to the end of the road.. It stopped at a ravine which dropped about forty feet down and was thirty feet across. With no other choice, he turned around. Approaching the original detour sign, he now noticed another sign, this one hand-painted on the back of the first. It read, "WELCOME BACK, DOUBTING THOMAS." How many doubting Thomases do you know?

But let's look back at Peter and see how the Holy Spirit also helped him witness to the fact that Jesus suffering and death was carefully planned from all eternity. "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Peter witnessed boldly to the fact that Jesus' death was all part of a predetermined plan to rescue people. This was not some plan that went astray, or some spontaneous lynch mob, or the unbridled anger of Romans soldiers that put Jesus to death.

If you have an opportunity to talk to someone about Jesus, consider pointing out the fact that everything Jesus did was carefully planned out in great detail. Consider showing our need for Christ, by pointing to a cup and asking your friend the question, "What if everything you ever did wrong was placed into this cup and you were forced to drink it?" How would it taste? The Bible says that we will have to be punished for all our sin in Romans 1 where it says, "The wrath of God will be poured out on all unrighteousness." God's carefully crafted plan was to have his Son drink the bitter cup of your sin, along with the sin of the entire world, down to the very last bitter drop.

Peter also boldly witnesses to the way the Father raised Jesus from the dead. "But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." The Greek word for "hold" is a strong word, sometimes used in the New Testament for grabbing a hold of person and shaking them, or arresting them. Death had its agony for Jesus and death will probably cause most of us some pain and agony unless it happens very quickly. Death has a sting and the sting can be real ugly as the poison of death pumps itself into our system. Death was not able to hold on to Jesus. Have you ever held a small insect cupped and trapped in your hand? How different that would be from holding a firecracker and having it explode! Death tried to hold on to Jesus and crush him as another helpless worm in its hand. When Jesus rose from the dead, there was a powerful explosion that shattered the power of death.

Peter was given boldness by the Holy Spirit to witness to Jesus life of miracles, Jesus death on the cross that was predetermined to save us from sin, and the amazing resurrection that blasted into pieces the power of death. That same Holy Spirit is with us, each of us. If you find yourself in a bind, start talking about Jesus using the words of the Apostle's Creed, and let the Holy Spirit take over.

2) The Holy Spirit helps us point to the testimony of Scripture

Have you ever had to take back something that didn't work right? Then you know how important it is to have the paper work that proves your case. You and I have the paperwork to prove that what we believe about Jesus is true. That paper work is found in the Bible, especially the Old Testament and its predictions about Jesus death and resurrection.

What does Peter do to prove his case to his fellow Jews? He hauls out the Old Testament, King David, the psalms, and quotes from Psalm 16 where David is speaking for the Messiah. "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken.. because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see corruption." A first we might think David is speaking about himself. Notice what Peter says in verse 31, "Seeing what was ahead he spoke of the resurrection of Christ." David

was in the tomb. His body decayed. Jesus was speaking here in this psalm about not seeing corruption after his death. The body of Jesus did not have bone broken. It was placed into a tomb in which no body had ever been placed before. Peter used the Old Testament to show that there was a testimony that points to Jesus as Messiah and tells us that we need to take him seriously for our salvation.

The night of his resurrection, Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They did not recognize him as he spoke to them and asked them why they were so sad. Then this person who was a stranger began to speak to them from the Old Testament Scriptures and show them how Jesus had to suffer and die and rise again the third day. Even after Jesus made himself known to them, what lingered most was the way he opened the Scriptures to them. "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the way." Some of the halcyon moments in your life and mine occur when we have faith strengthened by Old Testament revelations of the Messiah. Our heart burns within us and we are not ashamed to share that moment. We speak about Kodak moments, or we have special moments such as the sunset scene on your bulletin cover. Some of the best moments are those where Christ is real to us on the basis of what is revealed to us in the Scriptures.

Are you ready for the Holy Spirit to fill your life this week and use you to witness to the risen Lord and Savior? Golf lessons are expensive but the gift of the Holy Spirit is free. Jesus said, "Will not your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" Are you ready to share the facts of Jesus life as Peter did, and even use the Scriptures to prove your point? Amen.