**The Evidence**

Acts 3:1-26

***Why are you a follower of Jesus?***

If you had to give just one reason, what would it be? If someone came up and asked you, “Why do you believe in Jesus?” what would you say? What would your quick reason be for the hope that you have in Jesus?

Our passage today gives us **three answers** - three lines of evidence.

**How we know that Jesus is the Savior:**

* Powerful Signs
* Prophetic Scriptures
* Personal Statements

The first half of the chapter is ***a very public miracle*** where Peter heals a man who had been crippled from birth, and everyone in that area knew him. That was one of many powerful signs documented in Acts to prove the apostles’ authority. The end of the chapter makes reference to ***three specific prophecies*** and general reference to all of the other prophecies about Jesus, of which there are hundreds. And the center of this chapter, right in verse 15, is Peter and John’s ***personal testimony*** that they saw Jesus alive.

When Peter and John were asked to explain what had happened with this crippled man who was suddenly jumping around doing gymnastics, they said, “It is all about Jesus - the one you killed but who God raised from the dead.”

The best and clearest answer for why we are followers of Jesus - is ***“because He lives.”*** We believe in Jesus because God raised him from the dead. There is compelling evidence for the truth of this essential gospel claim. Let’s look at these **three lines of evidence** - the signs, the Scriptures and the statements. First:

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Powerful **Signs** prove the apostles’ authority

“A man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple.” Acts 3:2

Here was a man who had been **crippled his entire life**. This was not a recent injury but was a lifelong issue. And everyone knew him. His family members brought him to this spot every day, and probably had for many years. Everyone who came and went from the temple area knew this guy.

Remember, there was no social security. ***There was no medicaid.*** Social programs were called “family.” If your family members couldn’t take care of you, you lived on the street. This guy was fortunate to have people who brought him daily to this place. But this day would change his life forever.

Peter and John were heading to the Temple for **prayer time**. The ninth hour was 3 p.m. Tradition indicates there were three typical times the Jews would gather to pray - 9 am, noon and some time again in the afternoon or evening. No doubt Peter and John were looking for the God-fearing Jewish people who were willing to devote themselves to sincere prayer and worship.

Interrupted on their way to prayer, they stop and listen to this man who was asking them for money. It’s clear from Acts 2 and 4 that the believers did share money. But, led by the Holy Spirit, Peter gave this man something much better than money.

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Powerful **Signs** prove the apostles’ authority

“Peter said, ‘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!’” Acts 3:6

Immediately the man gets up and not only starts walking slowly around, but starts jumping up and down, singing praises to God for this impossible miracle.

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Powerful **Signs** prove the apostles’ authority

“And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him… And they were filled with wonder.” Acts 3:9-10

***So - what is the point of this miracle?*** What is the application? Every time someone asks us for money on the street should we pray for a miracle? Have you ever tried that? Now, God can do whatever He wants and once in a while He might lead you to pray over someone and God does something miraculous. I believe God is still in the business of doing miracles and He can heal people apart from medical intervention, or using medical intervention.

But the point of this story is not to show us how we should do ministry, other than generally it’s good to pay attention to people, especially those who are hurting. Peter makes it clear **what the point is.**

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Powerful **Signs** prove the apostles’ authority

“Why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?” Acts 3:12

Peter first makes it clear ***what ISN’T happening***. He says, “This is not about US.” This is not the PETER story - oh, wow, look how powerful this guy Peter is! Rule that out. If you ever run into a preacher or “faith healer” who is making a name for him or herself, you can be sure the Lord is not with that person. ***The real deal will always do like Peter and direct attention away from himself and onto Jesus.***

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Powerful **Signs** prove the apostles’ authority

“The God of Abraham… glorified his servant Jesus… you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead.” Acts 3:13-15

Peter says, “This is not about US - **it’s about GOD**. And the key point here is that JESUS is GOD! God proved that when He raised Jesus from the dead.” We’ll come back to that point at the end.

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Powerful **Signs** prove the apostles’ authority

“His name - by faith in his name - has made this man strong.” Acts 3:16

When Peter healed the man it was ***“in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.”*** There could be no confusion on that point. Then, when the crowd came to see the spectacle, Peter repeated the point. “This isn’t about me or John. It’s about JESUS.” The Name of Jesus - the authority of JESUS - the power of Jesus - is what healed that man.

The sign proved that the apostles were ***operating in line with the ministry and authority of Jesus***. It was vital that God confirm those apostles as His official leaders, and one of the keys for doing this was the miracles they were uniquely and powerfully able to do. We will see the same thing with Paul - and Paul will be quick to say, as Peter did, this isn’t about me - it’s about Jesus.

Think about it. **The early church needed anchors.** It needed definite and firm foundations. The Old Testament was good and important, but there was a lot that had to be explained and clarified. How would the early church know what to believe and how to move forward? They needed a definite set of leaders to listen to and follow. God confirmed the authority of the authentic apostles with miraculous signs like this one.

There was **no New Testament yet**. That would take DECADES to produce in its entirety. In the years from the resurrection to John’s Revelation 60 years later, the church needed guides, it needed APOSTLES. The reason we have the New Testament we have is that God made it very clear who the real apostles were. The primary test for whether to include a book in the New Testament was if it was written by one of the apostles or had the BLESSING of one of the apostles. Luke and Acts were written by Luke, who was a close friend of both Peter and Paul. He wrote with their blessing and affirmation.

We will see many more miracles in Acts. It’s important to remember why those are in there. It is not so we can be amazed like the crowd at the Temple that day - and say, “Wow, Peter was like a super hero!” No. This was Jesus flexing His muscles and reaching down from heaven to shine a spotlight onto 12 men, 13 with Paul - and say, ***“These guys are the real deal. Listen to them. Keep their letters.”*** That’s the first line of evidence - powerful signs that proved the authority of the apostles. Second.

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Prophetic **Scriptures** confirm God’s sovereign plan

“What God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.” Acts 3:18

Peter references ***ALL the prophets*** - from Moses to Haggai. As we saw last year, the whole Bible is one story and it all points to Jesus. Let’s look at three key prophecies, knowing that Jesus fulfilled over 300 specific prophecies. What all of these prophetic scriptures confirm is that God is sovereign over history. Through the prophets God predicted hundreds of very specific things - many of which have been wonderfully fulfilled. The first one we will look at is the clearest reference to what Peter mentions here - that the “Christ would suffer.” **Isaiah 53**.

1. Prophetic **Scriptures** confirm God’s sovereign plan
	* Isaiah - a sacrificial **payment** for sin

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him; and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:5 NIV

From Isaiah 42 through 63 the great prophet describes the Messiah, the Savior of Israel, as **the Suffering Servant**. It’s clear that Israel itself was SUPPOSED to be that faithful servant of the Lord - supposed to even suffer for the sake of the Lord. But, of course, Israel failed miserably to live up to this calling. And the prophecies, like this one in chapter 53, clearly point beyond Israel to the Messiah who would succeed where Israel failed.

This prophecy, written 700 years before Jesus was born, is one of the best specific prophecies to prove that ***Jesus’ death was not an accident*** - it was central to God’s plan. Jesus came to die. And His death is what saved us. “By his wounds we are healed.”

Liberals and skeptics wanted to believe that the early church added this chapter in the second or third century AD. It is often called “the fifth gospel,” because it rings to much in harmony with the New Testament. But the discovery of **the Dead Sea Scrolls** - including the great Isaiah scroll - proved once and for all that the entire book of Isaiah as we have it - including chapter 53 - was written at least 100-200 years before Jesus was born. It was sealed up and hidden in a cave long before Jesus or the church came on the scene.

This is strong **evidence for the truth of the gospel** - that Jesus is the Savior He claimed to be. 700 years before Jesus was born, ***the prophet Isaiah saw a crystal clear vision of what Jesus would do*** - that the Savior would die as a sacrificial payment for the sins of the world. Not just for Israel, but for the whole world, as we’ll see in another prophecy in a minute. Here’s the second key prophecy, from Moses.

1. Prophetic **Scriptures** confirm God’s sovereign plan
	* Moses - a revelation of **truth** that saves

“Moses said, ‘The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’” Acts 2:22; Deut. 18:15

What else would the true Messiah do? He would give His life as a sacrificial payment for sin. Two: he would be ***like Moses***, **bringing a revelation of truth that saves**. Moses was the first and greatest prophet in Israel’s history. He wrote the first five books of the Bible, the Torah or Pentateuch. He literally spent days and weeks in the shekinah glory of God’s presence, bringing down the 10 commandments and then a huge chunk of the Bible. His face radiated the glory of God for days until it faded.

Jesus is the prophet like Moses. The prophet who came directly from the presence of the Father, and who shows us - even more clearly than Moses could - what the glory of God looks like. And where Moses gave ***the Law of God that could theoretically save*** you IF you could obey it completely, Jesus proclaimed ***the Grace of God that can ACTUALLY save you*** because you can’t obey the Law perfectly.

1. Prophetic **Scriptures** confirm God’s sovereign plan
	* Moses - a revelation of **truth** that saves

“And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.” Acts 2:23

Remember Moses’ job. At first, God spoke DIRECTLY to the nation of Israel. That was too terrifying for everyone, so they begged Moses to speak to God and then come back to speak to them for God. They were afraid if God kept speaking directly to them they would all just die. ***Moses was a MEDIATOR.*** He spoke to God for the people, and spoke to the people for God.

**Jesus is the ultimate Moses** - the ultimate mediator. Moses could only draw near to the Father. Jesus is ONE with the Father. Moses could only give some rules and principles for the people to follow. Jesus can give us a new heart. Moses could only reflect God’s glory for a few days. Jesus is the perfect, complete, ultimate reflection of the full glory of God! And that glory NEVER fades from Jesus!

So as important as it was for thousands of years for the nation of Israel to listen to Moses, it is even MORE important that the whole world listen to JESUS. What you do with Jesus and His teaching will literally determine where you spend eternity. As predicted 2,000 years before Jesus was born - ***the Messiah brought the revelation of a truth that saves!*** One more Scripture.

1. Prophetic **Scriptures** confirm God’s sovereign plan
	* A child of Abraham who would **bless** the whole world

“Saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’” Acts 3:25; Gen. 22:18

* Moses was 2,000 years before Jesus.
* Abraham was around 1,500 years before Jesus.
* Isaiah around 700 years before Jesus.

3 prophets provided three specific and wonderful prophecies of the coming Savior.

* Isaiah saw the suffering of the Savior who would die for our sins.
* Moses heard the revelation of truth that would bring salvation through grace, not condemnation through Law.
* And Abraham saw the sky filled with stars representing all of the children God would give Him - SPIRITUAL children who would be a part of Abraham’s family forever through their relationship with His offspring. Abraham was promised a great-great-great-grandchild who would bless the entire world. ***What is that blessing like specifically?*** Verse 26.
1. Prophetic **Scriptures** confirm God’s sovereign plan
	* A child of Abraham who would **bless** the whole world

“God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you, by turning every one of you from your wickedness.” Acts 3:26

***The blessing comes through repentance*** - and brings freedom from sin! Back in verse 19 Peter talked about repenting “that your sins may be blotted out.” What a gift! What greater blessing could there be than to know that all of your sins - every bad thing you’ve ever done, said or thought, can be ERASED - wiped away from God’s great ledger in heaven.

***Isn’t that the ultimate relief?*** The great gift of peace? To know that NOTHING YOU HAVE DONE will be held against you. “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!”

God promised this child of blessing **1,500 years before Jesus was born**. This prophecy and the hundreds of others confirm that God had a plan from the beginning. Nothing confused God. Nothing threw off His plan. God foresaw it all, guided it all, made sure it all happened exactly according to plan.

Powerful signs proved the apostles were Jesus’ representatives on earth. Prophetic Scriptures confirmed that everything that happened with Jesus was always part of the plan. One more key piece of evidence, the biggest piece, right in the middle of this chapter: the personal statements of many eyewitnesses.

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Personal **Statements** of many who saw Jesus alive

“You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.” Acts 2:15

Here is the center of the message the apostles proclaimed and the cornerstone of our faith - **Jesus rose**. He is alive. He died to pay for our sins, but He did not stay dead. On the third day God raised Jesus from the dead. How do we know? Peter saw Jesus. John saw Jesus. Several times they both saw Jesus at the same time - along with Andrew, James, Matthew, Bartholomew, Philip and even Thomas, the most skeptical of the group. Plus the women - Mary Magdalene, Salome and others.

Plus **Jesus’ own family** - and remember that Jesus’ brothers and sisters were not on board with him at first. They thought he had taken this religious thing too far and were trying to get him to quiet down. But later James the brother of Jesus became the leader of the church in Jerusalem! Something convinced James that his brother really was the Messiah. It is safe to infer the thing that convinced James was the resurrection. If your brother died on a cross and a week or two later you saw him alive, walking, talking and eating, it would have an impact on your view of him. Maybe he wasn’t a religious nut… What he said about being God’s Son and all that about the kingdom of heaven - it was all true!

Coming back from the dead makes an impact. Listen to 1 Cor. 15.

**Evidence for Jesus**:

1. Personal **Statements** of many who saw Jesus alive

“He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive.” 1 Cor. 15:5-6

This is what the apostle Paul describes as the center of the gospel - ***what was delivered “as of first importance.”*** That Jesus died; that he was buried and on the third day he rose again. How do we know this to be true? Peter and the other apostles saw him alive on numerous occasions. Then he appeared to 500 at one time! 500!

Paul adds the detail, ***“most of whom are still alive.”*** In other words, you have 500 people you can go and talk to about this. You can VERIFY the story by going to the people who saw it.

Do you remember the 1997 event “Stand in the Gap”? https://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/05/us/hundreds-of-thousands-gather-on-the-mall-in-a-day-of-prayers.html



Estimates range from half a million to over two million men on the mall in front of the Washington monument. It was the height of the Promise Keepers movement. Were any of you there that day? October 5, 1997? That was 23 years ago. We have a photo. You can google it. Do any of you doubt the fact that this event took place? That Bill McCartney spoke? That hundreds of thousands of believers knelt together in prayer and stood together in commitment to purity and faithfulness in their families?

The point is that ***20-30 years is too short a time to invent a myth.*** It doesn’t work. You need 100 years or more for a myth. In just 20-30 years too many people are still alive to correct any false details. Let’s say someone claimed there were only 10,000 people there. Lots of people could give testimony to how shoulder to shoulder the rally was. That whole mall was filled with people.

That is Paul’s point in 1 Cor. 15. Around 20 years had gone by since the resurrection. But most of the people who had seen Jesus risen from the dead were still alive. It was still possible to go and find them - to ask them what they saw, what Jesus was like. It was too soon to invent a myth. The claim of the resurrection only worked ***BECAUSE IT WAS TRUE***. Lots of eye witnesses who confirmed and corroborated each others’ stories.

Let’s contrast this evidence for the resurrection with the source material for Mormonism. **Joseph Smith**, a known fortuneteller who used a seeing stone to predict peoples’ future and try to help them find lost items, claimed he was visited by the angel Moroni who gave him the book of Mormon in the form of golden plates. When his leadership team asked to see those plates he said they were gone.

The leaders were not happy with this answer, so Joe went back to the angel and asked if he could have those plates again for a minute. The angel apparently agreed and one by one Joseph Smith brought his twelve apostles into a secret room where each of them got to “see” the golden plates, one at a time. After that secret, private viewing, the plates disappeared and were never heard of again.

Does that give you **the ring of TRUTH** that those plates really existed? What did slippery Joe tell those apostles? What went on with each of them in that secret room?

By contrast, Jesus appeared first to a group of women, then to his apostles in a room together. Later he appeared to them again including Thomas who was able to touch Jesus’ scars. Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emaus. Then he appeared to a group of 500 believers all at one time.

These were **SHARED experiences**. Repeated experiences. Small groups, large groups, individual meetings. 40 days, over and over. The eyewitnesses were able to compare notes, share what they saw and heard. Hundreds of believers.

And how do we know that these believers were really convinced of what they had seen? Many of them - maybe MOST of them - died for what they claimed. This was not like, “I saw Justin Bieber at the mall!” where you claim that and everyone thinks you’re so cool. This was like signing the declaration of independence in 1776 - it was going public with your allegiance to a revolution. If you got caught by the British you would be executed on the spot.

***All of the apostles died for what they saw*** (except John who died in exile). People don’t die for a lie. They only die for something if it is true and important.

The risen Jesus was not a dream or vision or hallucination. The disciples were not so blinded by a religious experience that they invented the IDEA of a risen Savior. They saw him. He was really there. He really rose from the dead. And those fearful, confused, timid disciples were never the same again. They went from a terrified little band huddled together in a small room to a powerful team mobilized to bring the gospel to the nations. And the transformation happened in a matter of weeks. 50 days to be precise. 40 days with the risen Jesus. 10 days until the Holy Spirit was poured out. And those apostles never looked back.

So why do you believe in Jesus? Here are our three lines of evidence:

**How we know that Jesus is the Savior:**

* Powerful Signs
* Prophetic Scriptures
* Personal Statements

God was so gracious to **confirm the truth of the gospel** with miracles, signs and wonders. He had already provided hundreds of specific prophecies in the Old Testament and the New Testament is filled with detailed explanations of how those promises were gloriously fulfilled. And at the center of all of this is the resurrection of Jesus.

We believe in and follow Jesus ***because He lives.*** He died to pay for our sins and He rose victorious over sin and death forever. We do not serve a dead religion but a living Savior! Hallelujah, Jesus is alive!

Let’s pray.