

Acts 4:33 Giving Witness to the Resurrection

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One of the main elements of a Gospel presentation is an explanation that Jesus rose from the dead. Without the resurrection of Jesus, we have no hope. Everything in Christianity rises or falls with Jesus' resurrection. If that event happened, it means that Christianity is true. If that event did not happen, it means that Christianity is a fraud, a hoax.

The NT writers repeatedly and strongly assert that Jesus really did rise from the dead. In fact, Jesus' resurrection is what gives us confidence that Jesus is who he claimed to be.

Ro 1:4 *[Jesus is] declared to be the Son of God with power, ... by the resurrection from the dead:*

The most basic statement of the Gospel message is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4

... Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

These truths form the basic, fundamental teachings of Christianity. Without them, you simply do not have the Christian faith.

We should not be surprised that the apostles proclaimed the resurrection as they were preaching the Gospel.

Our text today is Acts 4:33.

Context: Peter, John, and the other apostles were preaching the Gospel message in Jerusalem at the Temple. There had been a great disturbance because of this – read Acts 4:1-3. That disturbance gave the apostles the opportunity to preach the Gospel to a large crowd of people. The Jewish leaders told them to quit preaching, but the apostles refused—vs. 20. Vss. 24f record an eloquent prayer that Peter or one of the other apostles prayed, and the result is vs. 31 (read). Then we come to our text for today:

Ac 4:33 *And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.*

Today I want to explore what it means to give witness of the resurrection of Jesus. The apostles did it, and we ought to do it as well. Whenever we proclaim the Gospel, we must testify to the fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

What does it mean to give witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus?

- I. Giving witness of the resurrection means believing that it really happened.
 - A. The disciples did *not* believe this message when they first heard it.
 - B. Immediately after Jesus' death, the disciples were fearful, weak, disappointed, and disillusioned.
 - C. When Mary and the other women said that the tomb was empty and that they had seen Jesus, the disciples did not immediately believe it. They were skeptical of these claims.

Luke 24:10–11 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.
 - D. What changed their mind? How did this group of disillusioned, weak, scared skeptics become believers? The original disciples believed in the resurrection only after they were absolutely convinced that it happened. And what convinced them? Jesus appeared to them repeatedly. Over the course of forty days after his crucifixion, Jesus appeared to the disciples several times.

Acts 1:3 [Jesus was] seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:
 - E. Thomas was the last of the original disciples who believed in Jesus' resurrection, and he came to that belief unwillingly. He doubted the claim even when the other disciples testified that they had seen Jesus. He would not believe it until he could verify it personally, with his own senses.

John 20:25 *The other disciples therefore said unto [Thomas], We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*

A few days later, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, and this time Thomas was there. After Thomas had seen Jesus and personally verified that he rose from the dead, he made this profound confession of faith:

John 20:28 *And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

- F. The apostles believed in the resurrection personally because they had all verified that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had seen him, heard him, and touched him after the resurrection.

That's how the apostles could be so bold in their preaching of this message—4:31end. Even after the Jewish authorities threatened them and commanded them to stop preaching, they refused; they kept on preaching the Gospel.

Acts 4:20 *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

Trans: The apostles gave witness to the resurrection because they believed that it actually happened. Jesus rose from the dead. It was not a spiritual resurrection or a symbolic resurrection; it was not a mere continuation of his teaching or a wish that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Jesus rose from the dead actually and physically. They knew that Jesus had conquered death and was the living Savior. They knew that those who believed in Jesus would be saved. That's why they were bold in their testimony for the resurrection of Jesus.

We still believe that message today, and we still proclaim salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. We should proclaim that message boldly and courageously, like the original disciples did.

- II. Giving witness of the resurrection means providing proofs that it really happened.

Ac 1:3 [Jesus] presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs,

- A. Jesus proved himself to be alive to the apostles, and the apostles testified to that fact. They proclaimed the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead and provided evidence that it really happened.
- B. What are some of those proofs of Jesus' resurrection?

The primary proof of the resurrection is the fact that Jesus appeared to many people and interacted with them after his death. A good number of people testified that they had seen Jesus alive after his crucifixion.

These appearances were not dreams or visions. Normal, reasonable people saw Jesus after his death and burial. The tomb was empty because Jesus had risen.

1. Mary Magdalene was the very first to see Jesus after the resurrection. She came to the tomb, found it empty, and then encountered Jesus and talked with him.
2. Then Jesus appeared to a group of women.
3. Then to Simon Peter
4. Then to two disciples on the road to Emmaus
5. Then to all the disciples, without Thomas; then a week later, to the disciples again, this time with Thomas
6. Then to the disciples again, at the Sea of Galilee
7. Then to "more than 500 brothers" all at once
8. Then James, Jesus' half-brother who was not a believer until he saw Jesus after the Res.
9. Then other disciples (besides the 12) also saw him
10. Then Paul on the road to Damascus saw Jesus.

We have three accounts of Paul’s experience seeing Jesus on the road to Damascus in Acts—when it first happened and twice later Paul describes it.

1 Corinthians 9:1 [Paul said] *Am I not an apostle? ... have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?*

11. Altogether, we have testimony that Jesus appeared about 17 times to hundreds of people after the resurrection.

Ac 2:32 *This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

Ac 3:15 *And [you] killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.*

Ac 5:32 *And we are his witnesses of these things; ...*

Acts 10:40 *God raised up [Jesus] on the third day, and showed Him openly,*

Trans: The Bible contains multiple, independent, first-hand, eyewitness records of reliable people who were willing to suffer and die for the claim that Jesus rose from the dead. We have the writings of these people recorded in manuscripts that extend way back to a short time after the events happened. Historically speaking, that is very good proof. Like the disciples, we have very good reason to believe it.

- III. Giving witness of the resurrection means proclaiming the message that it really happened.

Ac 4:2 *... they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.*

Ac 17:18 *... he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.*

- A. The main subject of the apostles teaching was that Jesus died for our sins and rose again to provide salvation to those who believe. They gave their witness to verify that great message.
- B. The word “witness” (τὸ μαρτύριον) means “testimony.” The apostles give their testimony that Jesus rose from the dead.

To testify to something means that you affirm that you have seen or heard something. To give testimony means that you tell what happened, you tell your experience. You validate what happened by telling others what you experienced personally.

- C. And in the original language, “witness” has the article—literally, “the witness/testimony” or “their witness.” This implies that there was a particular message in mind; they wanted to communicate a particular set of truths regarding Jesus’ resurrection.

Ac 17:3 explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.

1 Cor 15:15 We have testified of God that he raised up Christ.

- D. We should also note that the grammar in Acts 4:33 “gave witness” (imperfect of ἀποδίδωμι) implies that they “kept on giving the/their witness.” This suggests that their proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection was not a single event/occasion. They were giving this message repeatedly.
- E. What was their testimony? If we put together various passages from the NT, we find this Gospel message that the disciples preached probably included the following ideas:
1. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. He proved that claim through his message and his miracles.
 2. Jesus foretold his own death. He repeatedly told his disciples that he would die in Jerusalem long before it happened.
 3. Jesus was arrested, tried, and turned over to the Romans for capital punishment. Although the Roman official, Pilate, did not believe Jesus deserved to die, he agreed to the Jews’ demands. The Roman soldiers nailed Jesus to a cross and crucified him.
 4. He really died. He said, “It is finished” and gave up the ghost. A Roman soldier made sure that he was dead by thrusting a spear into Jesus’ chest.

5. He was buried in a rich man's tomb. There was no doubt about whose tomb it was or where it was located. Several of Jesus' disciples placed Jesus' body in the tomb. The Jewish authorities secured the tomb with a large stone, an official seal, and guards.
6. Several people came to the tomb on the third day and found it empty. Multiple people verified that Jesus' body was not in the tomb. Even Jesus' enemies had to admit that his body was no longer in the tomb.

The disciples did not take the body, nor did the Jews or the Romans. The tomb was empty, and the only legitimate explanation for that was that Jesus had risen from the dead.

7. Jesus repeatedly appeared to his disciples and taught them how the OT predicted his suffering and death.
8. Multiple people saw, heard, and touched Jesus on various occasions after his death. They saw him ascend bodily into heaven.
9. The disciples traveled around proclaiming that, because of Jesus' death and resurrection, those who believe in him will be saved.

Acts 3:26 To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities.

Ac 20:21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

So the universal testimony of many people who give credible witness of their personal experience is that Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus' death and resurrection is the basis of conversion, forgiveness, and eternal life.

Sinners can be forgiven through Jesus' death and resurrection. Believers in Jesus have a home in heaven because Jesus rose from the dead. We have the confidence of our own future resurrection because Jesus rose from the dead. The apostles proclaimed that great message, and that's what we should do as well.

F. Going back to Acts 4:33, we find that two things accompanied the apostles' witness:

1. .33a Great power (μεγάλη δυνάμει)

a) This power could be miraculous signs/wonders. The apostles verified their message by miraculous acts.

b) This power may refer to powerful preaching; the HSp was working through the preaching of the message, and many people were believing in Jesus.

Note vs. 31—*they spoke the word of God with boldness.*

c) I suppose it could be both—powerful signs as well as powerful preaching.

2. .33end Great grace (χάρις μεγάλη)

Great grace is simply a way of saying that God was blessing their lives and their witness to others. People were listening and the faith was growing.

App: Power and grace are still necessary when we testify of the Gospel message. The power comes from the HSp working through the word of God. Rom 1:16

The grace comes from God as well. Without God's grace, people will never accept the message. Eph 2:8

All we can do is pray that God will grant us power and grace as we proclaim the message. We should be like the apostles by testifying to the resurrection of Christ. We never know how God might use us to reach others.

3. How do people respond to the witness of the resurrection?

Acts 17:32–34 *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." ... However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.*

- a) “some mocked” – ridicule, disbelief, indifference, hostility; this is the most common response to the Gospel message. It’s foolishness to the unsaved.
- b) “we will hear you again” – mild interest, curiosity; perhaps the 2nd most common response.
- c) “some men...believed” – faith, acceptance, belief. God will use our witness of the resurrection to lead others to salvation. The HSp will use the message of the Gospel to convince people that the resurrection is true.

One of the most significant truths in all of history is that Jesus rose from the dead. That claim, if it’s true, has profound and momentous consequences. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we are of all men most miserable. The whole Christian enterprise is false and phony if Jesus did not get up out of that tomb. But the central truth of Christianity is that God raised Jesus from the dead. Since Jesus rose again, we can be confident and bold in our belief in the Gospel and in our proclamation of the resurrection. We can be confident that belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection results in salvation from sin, gives us a life of meaning and purpose, and ultimately grants us an eternal home in heaven.

The apostles set a good example for us in testifying to the resurrection of Jesus. That’s what we ought to be doing as well. And we need to rely on God’s power and grace to proclaim this message. We cannot convince anyone that Jesus rose from the dead. The only way anyone believes that message is that God’s power and grace convince them. We are not responsible to make other believe; we are responsible to testify—to proclaim the message, to tell what we know. We cannot control how others respond, but we can control whether we tell others.

On this Resurrection Sunday, we boldly and confidently affirm the witness of the apostles—Jesus rose from the dead. May God give us great power and great grace to testify of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.