

Bethel Christian Church
Growing in Grace
Studies in the Book of Acts
Study 4

Witnesses of the Resurrection

Judas replaced as a Witness

Luke now describes the final sad days of Judas and the appointment of his replacement. Two men were selected and then Mathias was chosen. These men must have been with Jesus from the time of John the Baptist till the resurrection. But Peter was clear that Mathias would, by his appointment, become a “witness to the resurrection with us.” So the reality and meaning of the resurrection became the central focus of the early church. It was the qualification for being an Apostle (Acts 1:22), the central plank of their proclamation (2:24; 3:15; 4:33 etc.), the focus of their argument with the Jewish leaders to show that Jesus was indeed the Messiah 4:10; 5:30 etc), the truth by which God’s power accompanied their witness (4:33).

Resurrection life not Creed

The Apostles acceptance and teaching about the resurrection was not simply as some article of faith. It was far more than saying, “I believe in the resurrection of Jesus.” In Paul’s later letters we see two clear features about the events of the cross and the resurrection.

These events had happened in Jerusalem as the prophets had spoken, and all humanity had been taken into these events. So what happened to Christ in his death and rising was truly for them.

The necessity of the Resurrection

Of course, if we believe we have no need of dying and being raised again in order to become truly human then the second aspect, the central aspect of our participation in the cross and resurrection becomes a piece of unnecessary theological nonsense and a deep offence to our egos.

The resurrection of Jesus will be powerful in our experience only in so much as we have become aware of our utter need to be born again. The offence to our ego and to the world is clear. According to God we must be taken into the cross in Christ and die. Then we must be raised again to newness of life which is only in Christ. Only in Christ can we live to God. Only in Christ can we live in the way we were created to live; as the children of the Father. This whole process of dying and rising with Christ leaves all our schemes of ‘making something out of ourselves’ in a shattered wreck.

Attempting to live with the world’s alternatives to the Resurrection

The evil one has been called the ape of God. That is he can create nothing so he must go around copying the things of God. Of course what he copies can not deliver us into life only death. His alternatives to death and resurrection deceive us into thinking that we don’t need the real thing. Therefore the world over which he presides offers a myriad of ways by which we can attempt to resurrect ourselves.

There are the obvious religious schemes of reincarnation in which our behaviour in this life determines the quality of our next incarnation. This is a clever scheme as it

provides a 'hope' which is determined by our own effort. We supposedly stay in control of our destiny, a strong lust which drives every sinner's heart.

All forms of utopian philosophy such as Marxism, capitalism, socialism, the counter-culture movements of all shapes are methods of reinventing ourselves. We think that if we can discover the 'secret' of these movements than we don't need God to die and rise for us.

The health industry can become another system in which we place our trust. Instead of facing the fear of death we may get into a continual pattern of dependence upon all manner of programmes, gurus and potions to keep us 110% alive and dynamic. We will be less stressed, internally clean, wrinkle-less, have rock hard abs, smaller backsides, bigger these and smaller those. Just Google it and we have every system in front of us in a second.

Then there are the self help gurus who promise that we can become what we have always wanted to become, rich, powerful, rich, successful, rich; always rich. They appeal to our insecurities and operate within our self determining lusts. They are deceitful alternatives to dying and rising with Christ. They are places where we go in preference to going with Christ.

Turning aside to our own place

Luke drew the attention of the Apostles to Judas. Judas had *turned aside and gone to his own place* (Vs. 25). His true place had been with Christ. For whatever reason he had become dissatisfied with that place. Especially it seems the closer Christ came to the cross. John identified Judas as a thief. Thieving is a state in which we are driven to get what is not ours to establish our little kingdom. The giving of the Father is discounted. We feel his gifts are stingy and insufficient. So Judas had gone to his own place. Whatever his plans and hopes in that place it turned into a place of death and terror. The evil one had deceitfully promised him much and Judas had believed him. But he could not deliver a new heart and a future with Christ in the Father's household. He could only offer a terrible death and then judgment.

But the witnesses of Christ's resurrection went out into the world. Their testimony has reached us. Who do we believe? Do we listen to the deceiver who says, "Come with me and you can be the master over your own place!" Or do we see that all our towers of independence amount only to death and judgement? Do we come humbly to Christ, lost in wonder and awe that he could deliver us into the Father's place, full of everlasting joy.