

A Sermon Of Evidences

Introduction. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). This is Peter’s conclusion to the first gospel sermon in Acts 2. Notice that he admonished them to “know assuredly” that Jesus was exactly who He claimed to be: the only begotten Son of God. “Assuredly” means “worthy of being believed, certainly true, completely believable” (cp. Acts 21:34). This was a study in evidences!

How could they “know assuredly”? How could they know without any hesitation or possibility of mistake? It may shock you to think that they could! It is no surprise that people will make a decision on emotion over evidence time and time again, and we live in an era when both believers and skeptics think “faith” to mean blind faith. Such “faith” is hollow and laughable. “I just feel it in my heart” is not what Peter appealed to! What, then, is the objective historical evidence?

I. Peter Appealed To Miracles, Wonders, And Signs

- A. Miracles had but one purpose: to confirm the truth of a prophet’s message (1 Kings 17:24). In Jesus’ case they also served to confirm the truth of His identity (Matthew 14:33; John 11:27). What is most striking about this line of evidence is that Peter told his audience that Jesus did these “as ye yourselves also know” (v. 22). That is an appeal to common knowledge! These people witnessed the extraordinary events he cited.
- B. If Peter had been lying then he was a fool, for his audience would have quickly known to reject his message. If the author of Acts, the physician Luke, had been lying then his letter would have been thrown in the trash! The internal evidence of the book tells us that it was written in the early 60s — within the lifetime of the people who would have witnessed these events. To leave himself so vulnerable to fact-checking by his audience indicates that he was not out to deceive people.

II. Peter Appealed To Fulfilled Prophecies

- A. He first quoted Joel 2:28-32 in vv. 17-21 which was written about 800 B.C. He quoted from Psalm 16:8-11 in vv. 25-28, and from Psalm 110:1 in vv. 34-35. He alluded to Psalm 89:3-4 and 132:11 in v. 30. All of these psalms were written around 1000 B.C. Again, this is an appeal to common knowledge. The Jews were given (by some counts) over 300 prophecies about the Christ in their Law. These prophecies sometimes were loaded with (literally) excruciating detail, i.e., Psalm 22:12-18 and Isaiah 53:4-9.
- B. There are 43 statements where the New Testament specifically affirms that it is fulfilling Old Testament prophecies (cp. Matthew 1:22-23; 8:17; 27:9). There are eight statements which affirm in a more general way that the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament (cp. Matthew 5:17-18; Acts 3:18; 13:29).
- C. After considering these prophecies, you be the judge: who else but Jesus of Nazareth could have been the fulfillment of those promises (cp. Luke 24:44-48)?

III. Peter Appealed To Jesus' Resurrection

- A. "Whom God hath raised up ... This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (vv. 24, 32). Again, it is partially an argument from common knowledge. Notice the issue is not whether the tomb was empty — that was undisputed! The issue was why the tomb was empty, and what was the significance of it?
- B. Yet again, Peter left himself open to fact-checking by his audience, including the people that conspired to have Jesus crucified. Peter preached the first gospel sermon in the city of Jerusalem, the same city where Jesus had been buried. The tomb would have been within walking distance. Surely he was not lying about it being empty!
- C. Peter also said he witnessed the resurrected Lord (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5). How else do we explain his boldness and conviction before Jesus' murderers? Did he hallucinate? Unlikely. Would twelve men have shared the exact same delusion? How do we explain the boldness and determination of twelve men before an entire nation that had rejected Jesus of Nazareth? Think about it! They would not be this bold unless they witnessed Jesus returned from the dead in a triumphant, resurrected body (cp. John 20:24-29)!

IV. Peter Appealed To Events Of That Day

- A. Jews from throughout the empire had gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost and heard their tongues (various languages of the Roman colonies) spoken by uneducated men through the power of the Holy Spirit (vv. 5-11). In fact, Luke almost exhausts his vocabulary in the passage in an attempt to describe the effect on the hearers.
- B. Paul would later write that speaking in foreign tongues was a sign to those who do not believe (1 Corinthians 14:22; cp. Acts 10:44-46; 11:15-18). This is what gave Peter and his companions credibility. Jesus, through the Spirit, had "shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (v. 33). Common knowledge!

Conclusion. Now we return to his conclusion. "Therefore" is a logical term. Peter took what his audience already knew and connected the dots for them. They were led to the only conclusion the evidence would allow: Jesus is both Lord and Christ. He has the right to rule and make the rules for salvation since He is God's chosen instrument.

Do you believe the evidence? Do you believe that Jesus is both Lord and Christ? Do you believe in His "name" (i.e., what has been revealed about Him)? If you do, then respond to the first gospel sermon as Peter told his audience to in v. 38: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

I am deeply indebted to Todd McAdams for the use of his material.