Beyond All Reasonable Doubt
(A Message For Easter)
Acts 1:3

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the first chapter of the Book of Acts.

READ: ACTS 1:3

PRAYER

***************************************

INTRODUCTION

Everything about our CHRISTIAN FAITH rises or falls on whether or JESUS CHRIST truly arose from the dead on the third day as the scriptures tell us.

The Resurrection of Jesus is either the most “cruel hoax” ever devised by man.......OR.......it is the most wonderful event in the history of the world!

How can we, who are CHRISTIANS, be absolutely sure our belief in the resurrection is not based on a “cruel hoax?” How can we be absolutely certain JESUS did in fact resurrect from the dead on the third day following His crucifixion?

In our scripture text, Luke tells us “CHRIST GAVE MANY CONVINCING PROOFS THAT HE WAS ALIVE.

For a few minutes this morning, let us consider some of these CONVINCING PROOFS that beyond all reasonable doubt, JESUS DID TRULY RESURRECT FROM THE DEAD.

***************
I. The Empty Tomb Itself

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 28:11-15.

1. One of the most popular theories of skeptics to explain away the resurrection of Christ is that Jesus did not in fact die, but that He only “swooned” or temporarily lost consciousness. In fact this is even called, “The Swoon Theory.”

2. Is this theory even believable? Well let me share some valuable information with you and you decide.

For one thing, all four Gospels tell us that Jesus crucifixion was carried out by Roman Soldiers. Roman Soldiers were the most highly trained soldiers in the world at that time. They had carried out hundreds of thousands of crucifixions before they crucified Jesus.

These men were “professional executioners” who job it was to make absolutely certain the victim was dead before taking them down from the cross. It was their custom to break the legs of the victim which would cause the body to slump down on the cross and they would die of suffocation in less than a minute.

But John 19:31, 32 tells us, “The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with Jesus, and then those of the other. But when they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.”

Did these highly trained “professional executioners” make a tactical error by not breaking the legs of Jesus? NO! This was to fulfill a prophecy David made centuries earlier in Psalm 34:20 which says, “Not one of His bones will be broken.”

So how did they insure Jesus was dead? John 19:34 tells us “One of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.” Did that soldier come up with this idea on his own? No! Once again it was to fulfill a prophecy made centuries earlier by the prophet Zechariah which says, “They will look on the One they have pierced.” (Zechariah 12:10)
I would also have you to consider this. Matthew’s Gospel tells us Jesus was buried in a new tomb that had been cut out solid rock. (Matthew 27:60) After Jesus’ body was covered with about 75 pounds of spices, the body was then wrapped extensively with strips of linen cloth in “mummy-like fashion,” just as Jesus had been wrapped in “strips of cloth” as a baby in Bethlehem thirty three years earlier.

After the wrapping of the body, a stone the scriptures describe as “big” (Matthew 27:60) was rolled over the entrance to the solid rock tomb. Some Bible scholars estimate this “big” rock could have weighed between 1-2 tons.

After the stone was in place, a ROMAN GUARD was then set in place at the tomb. Now if you have ever seen pictures of the Soldiers at the tomb, you likely saw two guards, one on each side of the big stone covering the entrance to the tomb.

But judging by what is said in MATTHEW 28:4, 11, it appears there were far more than two guards at the tomb. Some Bible scholars believe the number of guards could have been as high as twelve to sixteen. And remember, these were some of the most highly trained professional soldiers in the world at that time. In all likelihood, the TOMB OF JESUS was literally “crawling” with Roman soldiers.

And consider this: Matthew 27:66 tells us…….

“So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.”

Now this is a critical piece of information so listen carefully.

Before the Roman soldiers could “seal the tomb” they first had to do a very detailed inspection of everything inside the tomb. They had to make absolutely certain the body was there and note where the body was placed and the exact position of the body. After completing this detailed inspection they would then roll the stone over the entrance to the tomb.
Once the stone was in place a small rope or cord would be stretched across the tomb entrance and sealed on either side with hardened wax bearing the official seal of the Roman Government. Think of this as a “tamper-proof” seal.

Now put all this together........

-Jesus’ body is inside the tomb wrapped like a mummy in strips of cloth.

-The tomb has been carefully inspected.

-A stone weighing as much as 1-2 tons is rolled in front of the entrance to the tomb.

-A “tamper-proof seal” is then placed across the entrance to the tomb.

-And as many as 12 - 16 highly trained professional Roman soldiers are stationed to guard the tomb.

AND YET THREE DAYS AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION THE TOMB OF JESUS WAS FOUND TO BE EMPTY.

NOW HERE’S THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BODY OF JESUS?

If you believe the lie the ROMAN GUARDS were paid to tell, you would have to believe that a band of ELEVEN UN-ARMED, UN-TRAINED APOSTLES snuck past as many as sixteen sleeping soldiers..........broke the official Roman seal..........rolled a 1-2 ton rock out of the way and stole Jesus’ body without ever being detected by some of the most highly trained soldiers in the world.

You see, NONE OF THAT STORY adds up!

So I submit to you the first “CONVINCING PROOF” of the resurrection of JESUS is THE EMPTY TOMB ITSELF.

********************************************************************
The Second convincing proof of the resurrection of Jesus is

II. The Eyewitness Accounts

1. Do you realize many of the earliest Christians didn’t believe JESUS AROSE FROM THE DEAD because they had seen His empty tomb. They believed He arose from the dead because they saw JESUS HIMSELF.

2. How many EYEWITNESSES actually saw JESUS with their own eyes after His resurrection? Well, let’s look at some scriptures and do a little arithmetic.

(A) Let’s begin in MATTHEW 28:1, 8-10...........

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

(now verses 8-10) So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell Hi disciples. Suddenly JESUS met them. “Greetings,” He said. They came to Him, clasped His feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see Me.”

So here we have two eyewitnesses who saw Jesus with their own eyes, heard Him speak with their own ears, and even embraced His feet.

(B) Now let’s turn over to the Gospel of Luke 24:13-16; 30,31...

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, JESUS HIMSELF (repeat!!) came up and walked with them; but they were kept from recognizing Him.

(now verses 30, 31) When He was at the table with them, He took bread, gave thanks and broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their sight.

OK, so you have the TWO WOMEN at the tomb and the TWO MEN on the road to Emmaus. That gives us four eyewitnesses.
(C) Now let’s turn over to the Gospel of John 20:19, 20……..

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After He said this He showed them His hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the LORD. “

Well, we know originally there were twelve apostles. We know Judas Iscariot had already hanged himself, leaving eleven apostles. But we learn in John 19:24 that Thomas was NOT present that first time when Christ appeared, but He was present one week later, when Christ appeared to His disciples again.

So let’s do the math. We now have THE TWO WOMEN AT THE TOMB…….THE TWO MEN ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS…….AND THE ELEVEN LIVING APOSTLES, that now brings our total to FIFTEEN EYEWITNESSES.

(D) Let’s move on to I CORINTHIANS 15:3-8…………

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Two women at the tomb plus the two men on the road to Emmaus equals FOUR.

FOUR plus the ELEVEN remaining apostles. That’s FIFTEEN.

FIFTEEN plus more than FIVE HUNDRED BROTHERS AT ONE TIME, that’s brings our number to no less than FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN.

FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN plus the Apostle Paul to whom Christ appeared much later. That brings our total to NO FEWER than FIVE HUNDRED
AND SIXTEEN EYEWITNESSES who saw Jesus after His resurrection.

There’s not a LAWYER in AMERICA who wouldn’t give his right arm to have 516 EYEWITNESSES to prove his case!!

So we now have TWO TOTALLY RELIABLE, UNDENIABLE, CONVINCING PROOFS that Jesus Christ truly rose from the dead.

.........We have THE EMPTY TOMB ITSELF

.........And we have THE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS of no less than 516 people.

But there is one more “CONVINCING PROOF” that Jesus truly did rise from the dead, and that is.........

III. The Evidence of Changed Lives

1. If the resurrection of Jesus is nothing more than a “hoax” as skeptics say, how does one explain the radical transformation that has come over the lives of those who believe JESUS did resurrect to life on the third day after His crucifixion?

2. Consider the transformation that came over Jesus’ disciples.

   - When Jesus was arrested the disciples scattered.
   - When Peter was questioned about his connection with Jesus, he denied he even knew Him.
   - When Jesus was crucified, John was the only disciple brave enough to stand near the cross.
   - When Jesus appeared to His disciples on the evening of His resurrection, He found them hiding in fear behind locked doors.

   Here we see “cowardice” at every turn! So what was it that miraculously transformed these “frightened cowards” into some of the bravest men this world has ever seen? What was it that motivated these same men to travel hundreds of thousands of miles to preach the gospel? What was it
these men believed in so much that they would be willing to die brutal, painful deaths?

I’ll tell you what exactly what it was! They had seen THE Risen Savior! Their lives were miraculously transformed by their belief in THE DEATH....BURIAL....and RESURRECTION of the LORD Jesus Christ.

3. But not only do we see this miraculous transformation in the lives of those eleven apostles.

   - Consider also the 3,000 lives that were changed on the day of Pentecost after Peter preached to them the message of Christ’s death.....burial.....and resurrection.

   - And consider the apostle Paul who was miraculously changed from a persecutor of Christians into one of the most powerful evangelists this world has ever known.

   - And consider the change that came over the Philippian jailer and his whole household after Paul told them the “good news” of the death.....burial and resurrection of Jesus.

The New Testament is filled with numerous accounts of lives that were changed by the power of the resurrection!

4. And the fact that Jesus is still changing lives to this very day is even more convincing proof that He truly arose on the third day.

5. You see, Jesus didn’t come here to make “bad people” good.........Jesus came here to make “dead people” live!
CONCLUSION

As we close this morning, I want to draw your attention to one little detail about the resurrection of Christ that is often overlooked.

John 20:6, 7 tells us, “Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus’ head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.

The Bible takes one entire verse to tell us that the napkin that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head was neatly folded and placed separately from the strips of cloth Jesus had been buried in.

Why is that significant? I’ll tell you why. It was a Jewish custom that the servant would set the dinner table for his Master, then the servant would wait just out of sight until the Master had finished eating.

If the Master would rise from the table, wipe his fingers and mouth and throw the napkin aside, the wadded napkin meant, “I’m done!” But if the master got up from the table, and neatly folded his napkin and carefully laid it beside his plate, the servant knew the folded napkin meant, “I’m not finished yet!” “I’m coming back!”

JESUS FOLDED HIS NAPKIN! HE WASN’T FINISHED YET! HE WAS COMING BACK!

He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!

THE EMPTY TOMB shouts “He lives!”

THE EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS shout “He lives!”

THE EVIDENCE OF CHANGED LIVES shouts “He lives!”

Does it really matter? Does it really matter whether or not one believes JESUS CHRIST resurrected from the dead? Absolutely! It means
the difference between ETERNAL LIFE and ETERNAL PUNISHMENT. It means the difference between going to HEAVEN or going to HELL when you die. (LEAD INTO INVITATION)