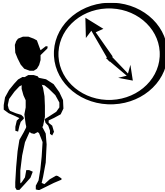


Inside this issue:

<i>Evidence of the Divine Authority of the Bible (part 1)</i>	1
Duty Rosters	7
Announcements & For the Record	8



Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Evidence of the Divine Authority of the Bible (part 1)

By Benjamin Franklin, 1870

Text: "*To whom he showed himself alive, after his sufferings, by many infallible proofs*" (Acts 1:4).

The Evangelist Luke, author of the book styled Acts of Apostles, made the statement just read, and now selected as a text for a discourse on the Divine Authority of the Bible. It is a fundamental statement when properly considered. It is not simply that Jesus was shown to his apostles after his sufferings, nor that he was shown to them alive, but he showed himself to them alive. Nor is it all, that he showed himself to them alive, nor that he did this by proof, nor that he did it by proofs, nor that he did it by any proofs, but he showed himself alive by many **infallible** proofs. The apostles not only saw the Lord, and saw him alive, but he showed himself to them alive; and gave them proof and not only proof but proofs; not only proofs but more, many proofs; and even more than that, many infallible proofs, that he was the Lord himself. This grand statement is fundamental; involving the great issue between the believers in the Bible and unbelievers; the friends of the Bible and the enemies. It involves the foundation of the entire revelation from God to man. If this statement is true, the Bible is true and from God, and all the consequences follow, whether we understand them or not. With this statement, the Bible stands or falls, and with it stands or falls our faith and our hope of all beyond this life.

If Jesus showed himself alive after his sufferings by many infallible proofs, he rose from the dead. On his resurrection from the dead, the entire question turns. An impostor could not have raised himself from the dead. God would not have raised an impostor, and thus aided him in palming off an imposition on the world. If Jesus rose, God raised him. If God

raised him, he is Divine. If he is Divine, all he ever said is true. This is the foundation of the entire matter of revelation. He said he was with the Father before time began; that the Father loved him before the foundation of the world; before the founding of kosmos or the material world. *"Before Abraham was, I am,"* said he. He said he came down from heaven. *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last; the Bright and Morning Star, the Root and Offspring of David. I am He who was dead, and am alive; and behold, I live forever and ever. I am He who was, and who is, and who is to come, the Omnipotent."* He was before all things, and by him, all things consist. It was by him and for him the universe was made. He is the express image of the invisible God and the brightness of the Father's glory. In him dwells all the fullness of the Deity bodily. The apostles say He knew all things. He came before the world as no other teacher ever did, declaring, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father but by me."* *"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to me."*

There is no account of his having been educated, or having any opportunities, in continuous association with the wise, the learned, and the great. On the contrary, he was evidently brought up in comparative obscurity. Yet, on coming forth from this obscurity to the position of a public instructor, the very first time he opened his lips, and on every subsequent occasion, he showed that he knew all about man, what was in him, even to his very thoughts; that he knew the Scriptures thoroughly; the patriarchs, the prophets, and the entire history of man, from the creation down to his time. He was never deceived nor disappointed by any man, nor set of men, but saw through them and all their designs; knew and frequently foretold the results that would follow. From the day he entered his public ministry till he ascended to heaven, it is clear that he saw all things in advance, comprehended all that was coming, and that even his enemies were blindly following the program he had marked out for them, without seeming to know that they were confirming his claims as a prophet, and proving that he could see the future as clearly as the past.

The issue to be examined in this discourse is not about an opinion, speculation, or some intricate theory, but about a person--the most wonderful person that ever appeared as an inhabitant of this earth. The issue now in hand is not about his personal appearance either, his manners, or peculiar points in his teaching, but about Him, **as a person**. The whole issue centers in and turns on one question. That question is, Did he rise from the dead? If he rose, his claims are all established. The Bible is a Divine Book. If he did not rise, his claims amount to nothing, and the Bible is without Divine authority, and only to be regarded as any other book of antiquity. Before coming to the main point of discussion, it is necessary to array before the mind the two parties -- the friends and the enemies of Jesus, the believers and unbelievers; examine their ground, what they claim, what they propose; what they affirm and what they deny; how far they agree and wherein they differ.

What, then, do unbelievers claim? What do they affirm? What do they advocate? What do they defend? The deliberate answer to each of these four questions is, Nothing, nothing under the shining heavens, either for this world or the world to come. They claim nothing, affirm nothing, advocate nothing, defend nothing. They deny Christ, the apostles, the prophets, and the Bible, as possessing Divine authority, but propose nothing instead. They would take the Bible from us, our faith and hope, but propose to give us nothing in return. They would take away the Church, the ministry, and all our religious edification, but propose nothing in return. They would take away our worship, and all the hallowed memories of the kingdom of God, but give us nothing in return. In casting away the Scriptures and the Savior, they do not propose any other system of religion. They believe no other. They believe nothing, advocate nothing, and defend nothing.

They simply deny what others believe, pull down what others build-up, oppose what others defend. They have nothing to offer you but doubts, instead of your unshakable faith; confusion, instead of your clear and intelligible understanding of the right way of the Lord; their want of confidence, instead of your confidence; their restlessness of mind, instead of your peace with God; their wavering and continual distrust of everything, instead of your full assurance of faith; their want of confidence in God, instead of your everlasting trust in him.

We might have some reason for listening to a man who proposes something, but certainly, none in listening to a man who proposes nothing; who has nothing to believe; no theme, except how many things he does not believe; how many things he does not understand; how much is absurd, inconsistent, and contradictory to his mind. We cannot lean on things that we do not believe, nor things that are absurd. We must have something in which we have confidence, which we believe, living and dying, in order to happiness. To be happy, the soul of man must have something on which to rest; on which to lean with the fullest assurance of faith.

Nor is it in the way of the full assurance of faith, that we find some things in the Bible that we do not understand, or cannot explain. That only proves that the Bible, in that respect, is like all the works of God, deep, profound, and wonderful, beyond the comprehension of the human mind. But the matter now to be investigated is not of that character. It is a question of fact. The same mind required in the investigation of questions in the arts, in science and history, is required here; the same reason and understanding also. The friends of the Bible come before the world with a proposition, on which, in the nature of the case, everything rests, and on which they rest everything--an affirmative proposition. But to approach the question with intelligence it is necessary to look at the surroundings, and ascertain what is admitted, what is denied, and the real ground of controversy. The following items are admitted:

1. That there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth.

2. That he lived at the time assigned to him in the Bible.
3. That he lived in the country assigned to him in the Bible.
4. That he was nailed to the Roman cross.
5. That he actually died on the cross.
6. That the body was given to Joseph of Aramathea.
7. That Joseph laid it in his own new tomb.
8. That a great stone was placed at the entrance of the tomb, and an armed guard of Roman soldiers was stationed over it to guard it; that the directions given those who posted the guard there, were, to "make it as secure as you can."
9. That the reason for posting the guard there was that the enemies remembered that he said he would rise the third day, and they feared that his disciples would steal the body and tell that he had risen from the dead.
10. That early on the morning of the third day, the body was missing -
- that it was not in the tomb.

In all these points there is a perfect agreement among both friends and enemies. A dissenting voice is not heard. But here comes the real issue. It is in accounting for the absence of the body. The two parties--the friends and the enemies--account for its absence in two different ways. The friends say the body was raised from the dead. The enemies say the body was stolen. Here is the issue. So far as the information goes, no other ground has been taken by anybody.

The judgment must be made up between these two grounds. The testimony and surroundings on each side must now be briefly considered. Turn your attention to the enemies' side first. What is their position? It is that the body was stolen. Who were their witnesses? The Roman guard, consisting of sixty soldiers. The number of witnesses is sufficient to prove anything, all things being equal. To what do they testify? That the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb. So far the testimony appears clear and conclusive. Who stole the body? They say the disciples stole it. That statement also appears clear and conclusive. Where was the guard when the theft was committed? They were all at their post. That appears to place them in a proper position for witnesses. What were they doing while the disciples committed the theft? They say they were asleep. This involves their testimony in the depths of absurdity and completely destroys it. Stop and consider the matter.

1. If they were confessedly asleep, how did they know the body was stolen? How did they know the disciples stole it? If they were asleep when the body disappeared from the tomb, how did they know that it did not rise and walk out? The confession that they were asleep when the body disappeared from the tomb, had it been true, was a clear confession that they knew nothing about the question of how the body disappeared, and could not be

competent witnesses touching the question in dispute. Had they been asleep, they could have testified that, when they awoke from their sleep, the body was gone from the sepulcher, but certainly could not have testified as to the manner in which it disappeared. These considerations set aside their statement as wholly unreliable.

2. But their statement is unreliable on another account. It was certain death, under the Roman military law, for a soldier to be found asleep while on guard. Then the guard was divided into different watches, and each watch was only required to be on guard six hours at a time, involving no necessity for being sleepy while on guard. Then, it would have been marvelous for the entire watch to have fallen asleep at once, and so soundly asleep, as not to have been awakened by the rolling away of the stone from the entrance of the tomb, which was "very great," and the entire transaction of taking away the body! This is an incredible story.

3. But if they were asleep, why were they not brought to account and punished, for violating the military laws, especially in such an important case? There is not a word about their being tried or punished! If the confession of their having been asleep had been believed, would the whole thing have passed off thus quietly? By no means. They would have been tried and punished.

4. They had the disciples completely in their power. Why did they not confront them with the body, and compel them to return the body when they commenced telling that it was risen? The reason is, they did not believe the story themselves. They knew that the disciples did not have the body in their possession.

5. What motive could the disciples have had in stealing the body? They could not have made it alive. They would have known that they could have been compelled to return it, and that, it being found in their possession, would have been a means of exposing them. They knew they were powerless, and that there would have been no difficulty in bringing them to punishment.

6. It is also true that the disciples never understood what he said about rising the third day, and did not believe that he would rise. They believed, till the last, that his kingdom would be an earthly kingdom, and that he would be an earthly king; and when he died, all their expectations in him were blasted. They went away, saying, "*We thought it was he who was to have redeemed Israel.*" They gave all up as lost. After he rose, they still had the idea of a civil government in their heads, and said to him, "*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?*"

7. The thing reported was impossible. The moon was at its full, giving

light all night. The Jews from all nations under heaven were there, in attendance on their great anniversary, tented in all directions; and the Roman guard, ever watchful, was there, rendering it impossible for those discouraged and disappointed disciples to have gone to the tomb, rolled away the stone, taken the body, and conveyed it away unobserved. The man who can believe the story that the disciples stole the body of Jesus, as reported by the guard, ought never to say anything about the credulity of Christians, for he can believe not only without evidence, but against all evidence and reason. There is nothing here on which any human being can rest the soul.

But now turn your attention to the other side, and consider the account. How do the friends of Jesus account for the absence of the body from the tomb on the morning of the third day?

Their account of the matter is, that he rose from the dead. Who are their witnesses? The following list is given by Paul:

1. He was seen alive, after his resurrection, by Cephas.
2. He was then seen by the twelve apostles.
3. Afterward, he was seen by more than five hundred brethren at once, the greater portion of whom were still living when Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians.
4. After that he was seen by James.
5. Then by all the apostles.
6. Last of all, by Paul.

These witnesses were not all present, it will be observed, on all the occasions alluded to; nor are these occasions the only ones on which he was seen; nor are the persons here enumerated the only persons who saw him after he rose from the dead. But these are sufficient for the present purpose. They did not all see nor observe the same things; but among them were some who saw him repeatedly during a space of forty days; who ate with him, drank with him, handled him, heard him, and, on sundry occasions, had the fullest opportunity to make themselves competent witnesses. In these interviews, he talked over many of their previous transactions, explaining things he had taught them, and bringing all things to their remembrance. Concluding these personal interviews with them, he took them to Mount Olivet, and in their presence, and in open day, ascended up into heaven. This makes substantially the case. The next thing is the examination. There are but two grounds on which testimony can be made doubtful.

1. If there can be shown a possibility of a mistake on the part of witnesses, it renders the testimony doubtful.
2. If the honesty of the witnesses can be questioned, it renders the testimony doubtful. But if the witnesses could not have been mistaken, nor dishonest, there remains no ground of doubt. These are the two points now to be examined...

(to be continued)