

“What If . . . But He Did”

Holiness

Acts 2:22-36

Dr. Bruce Bickel

Good Friday, April 3, 2015

Bruce: Good morning!

Men: Good morning!

Bruce: Good morning again!

Men: Good morning!

Bruce: Don, do you want to give us some semblance of solemnity now? (*Laughter.*)

Participant: Amen!

Don: The name of this piece for Bruce’s lesson is “The Strife is O’er, the Battle Done.”

Bruce: Amen! (*Music.*)

Lord, we thank You that the battle is won. You reign victorious. We do not go *for* victory; we live *from* victory. May it be so for Jesus’ sake, as we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that makes our life and our relationship possible with you. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!”

I invite you to open your Bibles, please, to the book of Acts. And the passage I offer for your consideration and examination this morning is found in Acts chapter 2, beginning at verse 22 through verse 36. The second chapter of Acts, beginning at verse 22. Let us listen to the word of the Lord.

“Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know, this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it. For David says concerning Him, “I saw the LORD always before Me. For He is at My right hand, that I might not be shaken. Therefore My heart was glad and My tongue rejoiced. My flesh also will dwell in hope. For You will not abandon My soul to Hades, or let Your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to Me the paths of life. You have made Me full of gladness with Your presence.”

“Brothers, I say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us today. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that He would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself says, “The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool.”

“What If . . . But He Did”

“Now let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified.”

May God be pleased to open our eyes, that we might behold His glory. This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Amen.

Our relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ is based upon facts. Sometimes people will say, “Well, that’s just your opinion,” or “Those are your views,” or “That’s your interpretation.” But in reality, like a court of law, your views or my views are of very little account or value. What matters only are the facts.

One of the fundamental facts of our relationship to God is that the life of Christ did not end at the cross. Rather, after a time, He rose triumphant over death, and after a little time He ascended to the right hand of God the Father, where He now intercedes on our behalf.

Without the Resurrection we have no Christianity. Without the Resurrection we have no relationship to God, regardless of what people may say about their views, their opinions or their interpretations.

But what if Jesus didn’t rise from the dead? What if there were no Resurrection?

Let me offer for your consideration, men, a couple of insights relating to the answer to that question. What if there were no Resurrection?

Well first of all, if there were no Resurrection, men, Jesus would be a liar. You know, there are several times in John 19, in Luke chapter 9 verse 22 and also in Acts 13 that Jesus predicts the fact that the temple must be destroyed and in three days be resurrected. If there was no Resurrection, then Jesus is a liar.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: If there is no resurrection, then God’s word cannot be trusted. It isn’t the truth because Jesus is a liar and won’t set you free from your sin.

What if? . . . But He did.

What if there is no resurrection? What if Jesus did not rise? The disciples were deceived men. The Resurrection was the hallmark of all of their preaching. Peter preached the Resurrection in chapter 2 and in chapter 10. Stephen preached the Resurrection in chapter 7. Philip preached the Resurrection in chapter 8. And Paul, in chapters 9, 13, and all the way through chapter 28, his primary theme is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Their entire ministry was based upon one single fact, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we can’t believe what the apostles said about the Resurrection, we can’t believe whatever else they said about anything else—about love, about mercy, about our salvation, about service, about humility, about church government, or any other thing in the Epistles.

What if Jesus did not rise? Christ would be a liar, and the disciples were deceived. What if Jesus did not rise? Then the church is a fraud. The church is a majestic organization without any foundation or without any life principle within it. The Holy Spirit came to indwell and empower the church. If Jesus didn’t rise, then we don’t have the Holy Spirit, and our bodies are not the temple of the Holy Spirit. And everything that

“What If . . . But He Did”

we have said about the Holy Spirit leading us and making our decisions is a lie, and it’s a falsehood, and it’s a deception. It’s a fraud, and everything we say about the Holy Spirit leading us. And everything depends upon us, and we’re left to our own devices to figure out how to earn our own salvation.

What if? . . . But He did.

What if there is no resurrection? Then the Christian life is a delusion. Our assurance of forgiveness, our joy in being justified in the sight of God, our fellowship with one another that we enjoy so much,—they’re all imaginary. If there is no resurrection, then God’s wrath has not been removed from us, and the believer is left alone to his own demise. If there is no resurrection, we have no access to God, and our entire salvation experience is a delusion.

What if? . . . But He did.

What if there is no resurrection? Then those who died anticipating heaven have been tricked. Instead of departing to be with Christ, those who have died in their faith have perished like the beasts. The joy and hopes of dying believers are nothing more than a hoax. The expectation of seeing Jesus is an empty fancy. Our entire life, then, has been nothing more than a mere hallucination.

What if? . . . But He did.

What if there were no Resurrection? Then all believers are to be the most pitied people in the world.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: We are to be pitied. Eternal life in Christ is a rip-off. If He couldn’t conquer death for Himself, how is He going to conquer death for you and give you eternal life? If there is no resurrection, we are to be pitied. It means our preaching is useless. It means that our faith is foolishness. We are all false witnesses, and we are all still in our sins. If Christ can’t handle and overcome sin, then you have to pay the price yourself. If there is no resurrection, no payment has been made. If no resurrection, then no pardon has been issued. We are all to be pitied because we have wasted our lives in a mere delusion and a fancy.

What if? . . . But He did.

In the message that Peter preached that I just read from Acts chapter 2, Peter preaches the first sermon that he made, and he begins by quoting the prophet Joel by saying that the last days are here. They have begun. The time of the Messiah, Peter says, has come. Peter’s sermon was blasphemy to the Jews. They had crucified Jesus for being a blasphemer. And Peter continues that theme of blasphemy by affirming four facts about Jesus to authenticate and validate His Messiahship

“Jesus was a Man accredited by God” in verse 22, “a man delivered up by God” in verse 23, a Man nailed to a cross in verse 23, and a Man raised up again by God in verse 24. Let’s look at these four facts, because what if? . . . But He did.

Here are the facts about the Resurrection that Peter preached to the Jews that day. First of all, he says, the first fact is this. “Jesus was a Man accredited by God.” Peter is addressing the men of Israel. He does not refer to the theological name of Jesus as the Christ, but he refers to the common name for Jesus which was “Jesus of Nazareth”—His

“What If. . . But He Did”

common name, His ordinary name, the name the Jews used in mocking Him. In John chapter 1 Nathanael’s response to Philip’s statement that Jesus was the Messiah was this. “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”, saying that nothing significant could ever come from that little town, implying that nothing was significant in the name of Jesus the Nazarene.

Imagine the reaction of the Jews to being told that Jesus the Nazarene was the Messiah. Do you see how blasphemous that would be to the Jews? Nothing good comes out of Nazareth, and you’re telling me that Jesus is the Messiah—this man from Nazareth?

The word *accredited* means attested or approved of or proven. Who approved God? He is “a Man accredited by God,” we see in verse 22. God is the One who credited Him or tested Him or proved Him. God has proven Him to be the Messiah, Peter says. He has put Him on display as the Messiah, proclaimed Him as the Messiah, His high position as the Messiah. Peter states that Jesus’ life has been proven, put on display, and proclaimed by God to be the Messiah by “miracles, wonders and signs.”

Notice. He was attested by God, accredited by God through three things—miracles, wonders and signs. Now what do those things mean?

Well, miracles are what He did, what God did powerfully through Jesus. These are the wonderful, magnificent things that God did through the life of Jesus. There are 43 miracles which happened during Christ’s earthly ministry, which were mighty acts of God through Him. God was attesting Him as the Messiah, was proving Him as the Messiah. That is a fact, Peter says. Forty-three different miracles, God’s wonderful power of working in Jesus’ life.

But what are wonders? Wonders are how people responded to these miracles. They responded with wonder. Their reaction was marvelous—awe, a sense of fear, a sense of hope. These miracles produced a certain response in them and it was a wonderment on the side of the people who saw them. You see, that was part of the attesting, the people’s response to these miracles. They were filled with awe, honor and fear.

And thirdly, He was attested by signs. Signs are what the miracles point to. The intention of a miracle is always to point to something else, and it’s to point to truth. These miracles were mighty acts of God to get the attention of the people, to point them to the spiritual truth that Jesus was the approved Messiah. Peter says, in effect, “That’s a fact, and you know it.”

What if? . . . But He did.

The second thing that Peter tells us about the facts of Jesus’ life is not only was He a man accredited by God, but He was also a man delivered up by God. The words “handed over”—the NIV says “delivered”—were commonly used to describe being turned over to one’s enemy for death. It means he was turned over. The words “set purpose” mean by will or design that is decreed. In other words, it is a predetermined plan. He was delivered up by God according to a predetermined plan.

The logical question, then, would be this. When was this predetermined plan decreed? Well, Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:9, “before the world began.” That’s when it was decreed. And in Acts chapter 4 verse 28 people carried out God’s predetermined plan.

“What If. . . But He Did”

The word *foreknowledge* does not mean before it happens, but it means to determine something that is carried out. It doesn't mean that I know that you're going to do this. It means that there is a decree that says it will occur. It will happen. Foreknowledge can't act or cause, but foreordination can. In other words, God planned what Christ would do.

People resist the sovereignty of God because they can't understand it. They can't figure it out. Just be grateful for the sovereignty of God, men, because without it we have no Savior, and we are still dead in our sin.

What if? ... But He did.

Not only does Peter say that He was a Man approved by God, accredited by God, a Man delivered up by God, but He was also a Man nailed to a cross. You see, Peter is dealing not with opinions, not with interpretations. Peter is dealing with nothing more than facts. And he says to these men of Israel, (*paraphrase*), “You know it.”

A Man nailed to a cross. Here Peter reminds them of the reality of their personal responsibility. Here we see the perfect balance between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. If you don't see how they fit together, don't worry about it. God is the only One who can do that. Just trust the fact that God is sovereign and you and I are responsible. God knows how to do that.

So far Peter has reminded them that a real Man from a real place, proven, proclaimed and put on display by a real God, through real acts of power lived a real life in front of real people, died a real death at the hands of real people, and Peter says this. (*Paraphrase.*) “And you know it.” Peter is dealing with facts about the Person and work of Christ, not opinions. He's not dealing with presuppositions. He's not dealing with interpretations. He's dealing with facts.

He says this. He was a real Man from a real place, proven, proclaimed and put on display by a real God through real acts of power. He lived a real life in front of real people. He died a real death at the hands of real people, and you know it.

But there's more. There is one other fact that we need to understand. Not only does Peter say that He was a Man accredited by God, a Man delivered up by God, a Man nailed to a cross, but He was also a Man raised up again by God. He had a real resurrection.

Notice the contrast. “You killed Him, but God raised Him.” That's a fact, because He was a real Man from a real place, lived a real life in front of real people, died a real death at the hands of real people, and you know it. And the other reality is this. “You killed Him, but God raised Him.”

Peter deals very logically with facts. He says that two people, then eleven people, then five hundred saw Him, and they all saw the empty tomb. This was by the divine plan of God.

Peter says this, dealing with facts alone. Jesus was a real Man who lived a real life, had a real death, and He had a real resurrection, and you know it.

What a joyful sound, just like the blast of the victory trumpet that Don played on the piano. We are alive in Christ because Christ had a real resurrection.

Do you know what that means, men? It means this: that our preaching is valuable. Our preaching is valuable.

“What If . . . But He Did”

Participant: mm-hmm.

Bruce: Because we are dealing with facts. Our faith is priceless because we’re dealing with facts. The apostles can be trusted because we believe what they say, because they are dealing with facts.

We are not in our sins because Christ the Messiah has come and cleansed us of all unrighteousness, and wrapped us in robes of righteousness. We are no longer in our sins.

Dead believers are with the Lord. Our dearly beloved friends who have gone before us are with the Lord. That’s not an interpretation, Peter says. Peter says that’s a fact. And we believers are the most gracious and glorious people who exist because of the resurrection of Christ.

So men, what does the Resurrection stimulate within you? Does it cause you to rejoice? Get over this trend of celebrating Easter. Easter has nothing to do with the Resurrection. It’s a pagan holiday that was designed to Christianize something that the world was doing. It’s not about Easter. It’s about the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: What does that cause you to do? Does it cause you to rejoice? The greatest thing that could happen this season, if you’re not in Christ, is to be raised from the dead spiritually, to experience your own personal spiritual resurrection, and that is a fact. That can happen through God’s grace. What the Father ordained the Son accomplished and the Holy Spirit applies. If you don’t know Christ today, friends, you can trust the Resurrection. It’s fact.

History is the basis of the reality of the Resurrection. It is not about Easter. It’s about our being set free from our sins because of the grace of a foreordaining God who proclaimed that this would be His set plan and purpose for all of eternity. We are talking about history. We’re not talking about interpretations or views or opinions. Jesus was a real Man, Peter says. He came from a real place, had a real life, had a real death by real people, and He had a real resurrection. Brothers, that’s history. That’s fact. Jesus is alive. Yes, Don?

Don: Bruce, I fear that this reality is diminished or lost to a lot of people even in the church today. I like to describe it as Christian Gnosticism. So many people think, “Well, when I die I’m just going to be this spirit that floats around in heaven, and what’s the big deal about the Resurrection because, after all, when I die I’m just a soul, and I’m going to be with Jesus anyway in my spirit.” And what people don’t realize is that it’s not that that we’re looking forward to. I mean, I believe that there are people whose souls are in heaven now. “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” But we’re looking forward to a resurrection.

Bruce: Amen to that.

Don: You know, it’s our bodies also that are valuable, not just our souls. And that’s why I call it Christian Gnosticism. If Christ hadn’t been raised and there is no resurrection, then death and the grave would have the victory. And we’re looking forward to new heavens and a new earth!

Bruce: We’re looking for a new body also.

“What If . . . But He Did”

Don: Amen! Amen!

Bruce: And I’m looking forward to that.

Men: (*Cheers and applause.*)

Bruce: I’m looking forward to that. May God be glorified. Brothers, Jesus is alive.

Men: Amen!

Bruce: We don’t celebrate Easter. Every day for us is a resurrection day.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Every day is Resurrection Sunday.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: Charles Spurgeon said that the moment you forget that every day is a resurrection day you lose sight of the maturity of what it means to grow in Christ. You won’t be grateful or gracious in your understanding of following Him until you understand this, that every day for us is a resurrection day.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: It’s a resurrection day. What if, brothers? But He did. Yes, Jim?

Jim: Bruce, one of the things you frequently hear people saying is that we can’t prove that God exists. (*Laughter.*) It seems to me that what you’ve been giving us here today is the facts of this proof.

Bruce: Absolutely. That’s what Peter did. Peter had the courage to say, in effect, “I’m not going to deal with my opinion. I’m going to deal with facts that you know that are real. You know that.” And that’s why he says twice that you know it. I mean, he really wasn’t blasphemous in saying that this Jesus whom you crucified is the Messiah, and you know it. Factually, you know it, because He was a real man from a real city, who had a real life in front of real people. He experienced a real death and a real resurrection, and you know it. He’s dealing with history; he’s dealing with fact. Our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father is based upon facts, folks, not on interpretations. Jesus is alive! That’s a fact. Yes, Tom?

Tom: I think that because it is a fact, we now have a future. It’s not just that I feel good because He’s alive and someday I’ll go to heaven. But I have a definite future that God has planned out, and that should really affect how you live day to day.

Bruce: Absolutely. When we finish 1 Peter in a couple of weeks, we’ll move into 2 Peter. The theme of 1 Peter is holiness. The theme of 2 Peter is also holiness, but from a different perspective. 1 Peter basically says this. Doctrine precedes practice. Right doctrine produces right holiness, right living.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: 2 Peter says this. Error in doctrine produces unholy living. In 1 Peter the persecution came from outside the church. The world system is after us, and he taught us how to live a consecrated, consistent life in the midst of persecution by the world system. In 2 Peter he changes. He says that the real persecution now is going to come from inside the church because you’re going to hear false doctrines. You’re going to have people try to tickle your ears and give you the things that you want to hear, not the things you need to hear. So 2 Peter is going to be full of this. You’ve got to understand that erroneous

“What If . . . But He Did”

doctrine produces unholy life, just as true doctrine produces true life. Doctrine precedes practice.

Men, we need to understand and help people understand what the Resurrection is about. It’s not about Easter eggs. I had a pastor friend of mine years ago. He called me, rather disgusted and discouraged because he was (being considered as a candidate) candidating for a church. And he was really excited about this church because he thought it was a perfect fit for him theologically, and for his family the best thing he could do. He said he got a note from an elder of the church who said, “you know, we appreciated your coming to preach for us and we liked you very much. But we can’t hire you as our pastor because you don’t have the right view of the Easter bunny.” (*Laughter.*)

Participant: What?

Bruce: “You don’t have the right view of the Easter bunny. Because, you see, the big event in our church for our children is the Easter egg hunt, and you basically said that the Resurrection is more important than the Easter bunny.”

Participant: Oh, for heaven’s sake!

Bruce: And I said, “Hey! You ought to be jumping up and down and praising the Lord because you’ve just been rescued. You’ve been protected, my friend.” (*Laughter.*)

Participant: That’s right.

Bruce: “Don’t be discouraged. Just say, “Hallelujah! Thank You, Lord, for protecting me,” “because you don’t want to get into that mess.”

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Erroneous doctrine produces unholy living. That’s 2 Peter. And it starts with our understanding of the facts of the Resurrection—that Jesus was a real Man who lived a real life in a real city. He lived before real people. He had a real death and a real resurrection. That’s fact. Yes, Don?

Don: You know, what’s unbelievable to me, Bruce, is how many people try to come up with other explanations for what happened. The Resurrection is the only logical explanation. What could have caused Peter, who denied his Lord, and all the apostles who were cowards, to suddenly—you know, Peter giving that sermon,—people giving their lives? No other explanation. I mean, they come up with silly things like the swoon theory, or well, they were just delusional, or whatever. But there is no other logical explanation than the Resurrection to account for what happened to the apostles and the founding of the Christian church.

Bruce: Amen. That’s why, when you read the book of Acts, the primary theme was one thing, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, because they were dealing not with interpretations, ideas, views or opinions. They were dealing with fact.

What if? ... But He did.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: Would you contend that if Christ didn’t rise and didn’t ascend that the sacrifice on the cross wasn’t sufficient, because there’s a lot of language in the Bible about Him being the final sacrifice. His blood. You need all the other places—

Bruce: You need all the other places. There would be no value in the cross.

“What If . . . But He Did”

Men: Yes. Amen. He just died like everybody else.

Bruce: He just died like anybody else. If He could not conquer death for Himself and live eternally, how in the world is He going to give that to you? You see, there would be no value in the cross if there is no resurrection. The power. The confirmation of the Resurrection was God’s foreordained plan. The Resurrection is proof of the fact that it was acceptable.

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: And it met God’s justice. That’s the proof. The resurrection of Christ is the proof. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: He’d have been a Messianic pretender.

Bruce: Yes, exactly.

Participant: Right.

Bruce: A Messianic pretender. What if, brothers. You’ve got to remember these things.

What if? . . . But He did. Yes, Tom?

Tom: That’s very true. But even if our sins were forgiven, so what? We’re dead. There’s no future.

Bruce: First of all, who would forgive them?

Tom: Yes.

Bruce: You’d have to forgive yourself. So what? Whoop-dee-doo! Great value in that! I’m forgiven because I can do what I want and say I’m forgiven!

Tom: And you’re dead.

Bruce: And you’re dead. Yes?

Participant: In Russia, even though under the Communist rule, the first day of the week was called Resurrection Day.

Participant: Oh, really?

Bruce: That’s correct.

Participant: Interesting!

Bruce: Resurrection Day. That’s really what it is for us. Every day is a resurrection day for us.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: What does that say our response should be to these facts, what Peter taught? What is our response? What are you going to do, brothers, about what we just learned? We learned facts today, not opinions. We learned history. We learned facts. Jesus did rise. Our preaching is valuable. Our faith is precious, all those things that we talked about. What’s your response going to be? What am I going to do about what I’ve just learned?

First Participant: Joy.

Second Participant: Tell others. Tell other people.

Bruce: First of all, joy. Have a great sense of joy, absolutely! Secondly, tell other people. What else?

Participant: Apply it to our lives.

Bruce: Apply it to your lives. How would you apply it to your life, sir?

“What If. . . But He Did”

Participant: Let it work in our lives and give it out.

Bruce: Let it work in your life and give it away. Ministry is giving away to somebody else what God has given you. Brothers, men, God has just given us some wonderful facts about the Resurrection. That’s the message that we need to proclaim to the world. What are you going to do about what we’ve just learned?

Participant: Tell others.

Bruce: Tell others. What’s your own personal response going to be, other than telling others? Corky mentioned it a moment ago.

Participant: Thanksgiving.

Bruce: Thanksgiving and joy!

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Brothers, we ought to be the most grateful people in the world, because I understand this, that I’m no longer in my sin.

Participant: Mm-hmm.

Bruce: I’ve been wrapped in the robes of righteousness. There was value to the cross. God’s justice was met. His mercy was given to me.

You know, when I studied this message and I was preparing this, and I saw the word *foreordained*, a predetermined plan, it reminded me of “In Him we were chosen before the foundation of the world.”

Bruce: In Christ we were chosen before the foundation of the world. For me, it helped me understand this. If you deny the doctrine of election, you’re saying that God has no mercy, because what is election? It is mercy, because I’m lost in my own sin! And God was pleased before the foundation of the world to call me to Himself in Christ before the world began. You see, brothers, if you deny election, you’re saying that God has no mercy, and you’re left on your own.

What if? . . . But He did.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Let’s pray. Father, all we can say is, “Thank You.” All we can say is, “Thank You,” that You did not leave us in our sin, that You sent a Man who had a real life in a real city, who lived a real life in front of real people, who experienced a real death for Your glory and our benefit. And He also had a wonderful, powerful resurrection for Your glory, who sits at the right hand of the Father right now, interceding for us. Father, intercede for us. Strengthen us in our churches. May the church of Jesus Christ rear up its banner of victory, because every day for us is a resurrection day.

What if? . . . And the response is,

Men: But He did.

Bruce: But He did. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Participant: He is risen!

Men: He is risen indeed!

Participant: Hallelujah!