

Acts - Commentaries by R. Beacon

Bible Treasury: Volume N2, Jesus and the Resurrection

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Acts 17:18

"He preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection." That is to say, the apostle preached a person and a fact—a supreme Person and a supreme fact about Him. And he coupled the two together in a way that modern preachers sometimes fail to do, but which is characteristic of all the summaries of the apostolic discourses recorded in the Acts. Clearly God's way of putting things must be infinitely wise, and the order of the presentation of the truth by the first inspired preachers may well serve as a model to speakers of to-day.

Christianity then is a religion of facts, having a Divine Person, yet man, for their center. Merely human religions give us theories, speculations, philosophies; sometimes ingenious, sometimes foolish, always vain and unsatisfactory. They can give nothing else; though they can darken wisdom by a bewildering maze of words. They may couple with the system its founder, or promoter; such serve only as distinguishing labels, so to speak, and affect in no degree the value of the religion or philosophy in question. But in Christianity how different! How impossible to separate Jesus from the truth that He proclaimed Himself to be. Hence when Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection, he preached the central truth of the Bible, and the seal God had put on it.

Another point to note is that our Lord was preached unto the men of Athens by His most personal name—Jesus. In truth everything—all the glory of God, all the blessing of man—is summed up in that name. In the power of () that name every knee must bow, of cultivated Greek no less than of rude Scythian. It was useless for Paul's hearers to boast of their great men, of that long roll of poets and philosophers, of artists, and heroes. They were less than nothing when compared with One Who had lived obscurely in a remote corner of the great world-empire of that day, yet was the only Savior and Lord of all. Such truth, no doubt, can hardly have been welcome to the fastidious taste of these Greeks; though as long as their curiosity was diverted, and the strange preacher seemed to be merely commending two new divinities to their notice (for in their ignorance they took the "Resurrection" for the name of a god, or rather goddess), they probably accorded him a ready, if somewhat languid, hearing. It was really refreshing to their blas minds to hear something so singular. For these Athenians were the product of a decadent civilization, and like many of the present day, who, having abandoned the faith, are ready for any novelties, however dangerous or absurd; as in fact, like many to-day, their chief occupation was "to hear or to tell some new thing," something newer than the last (for this is the full force of the very expressive phrase in the Greek,). But now they heard of what was novel indeed, yet God's sober and solemn truth, which would judge them in that appointed day, of which the apostle subsequently told them in his sermon on Areopagus.

And so Paul preached unto them Jesus, the infinite and eternal Son of God. They of course were not unfamiliar with stories of gods becoming men; such fancies were the theme of many a classic tale, and formed the stock-in-trade of much of their poetical lore. But how different was this talk! Their gods had not seldom appeared in human form for purposes, of which most even of them would have been ashamed. But God becoming man to die; God veiling His glory and manifesting His love; God in the Person of His Son, walking on this earth in stainless purity! Here was a new thing, which must have seemed strange to these philosophers, so proud of their country's wisdom and so scornful of others. Alas! but few received the truth, and, as has often been observed, the Lord had more people in dissolute Corinth than in intellectual Athens.

But, turning from those who were the immediate subjects of Paul's addresses at Athens, it is not difficult to perceive why the resurrection was singled out for presentation among other important facts in our Lord's life. For, as said above, it put the seal on all that had gone before, as necessarily presupposing the Savior's death with all its weighty consequences. In fact once establish the truth of this stupendous fact, and everything else follows by implication. Nor indeed is there a fact in history so well attested. We know how a learned divine, who flourished earlier in the century, showed that there was better evidence, on merely human grounds, for the truths of the gospel than for most of the readily accredited facts of secular history; and that the story of so recent a celebrity as Napoleon I. might be better doubted, if the same methods of criticism were employed as men bring to bear on the sacred history. No doubt the believer in Christ has far higher grounds of trust than the soundest of critical canons. He has the witness of the Holy Spirit. No syllogism can persuade one who sees the light, that he does not see it. That which makes manifest is light. But in fact all is wonderfully bound up together; the wonderful works, as one has said, and the wonderful words can only have proceeded from the wonderful Person. Was not His very name of "Wonderful" predicted of old? And how blessed that it is a Person Who is preached: so emphatically is this the case that scripture never says, "Whosoever believeth in the atonement shall be saved," though it is by Christ's "death" alone that any are saved. It is "whoso believeth in the Son." For to acknowledge and have the Son is to have the Father also. And he who believes in His person will believe also in His work. This is in short to believe in "Jesus and the resurrection." "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." R. B.