

III The Proclamation in the Acts and Gospels

The historic resurrection of Jesus transformed predictions into reality and became the core of Christian preaching from Pentecost to the present day. Before the narrative of Jesus' ministry was reduced to written form, it was presented orally in the synagogues of the Jews and in the public forums of the Gentile cities. The book of Acts preserves in condensed and sometimes fragmentary fashion addresses delivered on strategic occasions, which provide a criterion for determining the importance of this message in the earliest stage of the church's growth.

An examination of the discourses reveals that the topic was the distinctive subject of Christian preaching, whether it were directed to one man or to a crowd, to Jews or to Gentiles. Preaching presupposed both predictive prophecy and material evidence. If the sermons recorded in Acts may be taken as a fair index of apostolic method, more stress was placed upon the personal and spiritual value of the resurrection than upon controversy over its historicity or credibility. In the Gospels also the homiletic motif is apparent, for the authors seek to lead their readers from initial interest in Jesus as a prophet and teacher to faith in Him as their Messiah.

The Preaching in Acts

The value of the sermons has been challenged on the ground that ancient writers not infrequently put into the mouths of their characters speeches fabricated to fit the man and the occasion. Such procedure was not considered dishonest; it was a conventional device of historians.¹ On the other hand, one cannot conclude that Luke manufactured the speeches simply because such procedure was customary. He had direct contact with many persons who had heard them, and, in the case of Paul, he could have obtained a digest from the speaker himself. One cannot fairly reject the content of these sermons as spurious even though they may be fragmentary. Differences in style and close affinities in content and vocabulary with acknowledged works of their reputed authors indicate that the Lukan reports are faithful. For instance, Luke did not profess to quote Peter's sermon at Pentecost in its entirety, for he said, "And with many other words he testified, and exhorted . . ." (Acts 2:40). His reputation for historical truthfulness is high, and it is unlikely that he would have misrepresented or falsified the speeches which he quoted.²

Twelve major addresses, covering the period from the day of Pentecost (c. A.D. 30) to the close of Paul's Caesarean imprisonment (c. A.D. 60), represent the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Its development can be traced by explanations designed to meet the varying needs of different types of audiences, or to elaborate the implications discernible to maturing Christians. In each stage of presentation the place of the resurrection is constant; it is never deprecated or ignored but occupies a prominent place.

The first sermons recorded in Acts were spoken by Peter in Jerusalem and were intended for Jewish hearers. Their main objective was to show that God had reversed the verdict which the national leaders had passed on Jesus. Peter drew a sharp contrast between the Jewish attitude

1 T. Hinshaw, *New Testament Literature* (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1952). See p. 194.

2 R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Methuen and Company, [1904], pp. xliii-xliv.

and the divine purpose. "Ye killed him; God raised him" is the constant refrain (2:23,24; 3:14,15; 4:10; 5:30). The immediate reaction was a sense of guilt, resulting either in repentance (2:37) or in hostility (4:2,18; 5:33). The audiences in Jerusalem, where the circumstances were best known, were neither skeptical nor indifferent. Whether or not they were ready to accept the conclusions that Peter drew, they did not impugn his basic statement as illusory.

The meaning of the resurrection was explained in terms of the immediate circumstances or topic of discussion. On the day of Pentecost, it was the explanation for the coming of the Spirit (2:33). After the healing of the lame man, Peter asserted that the cure had been effected by faith in the name of the risen Lord (3:16), whose advent consummated the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and was the summons to repentance (3:18,19). In the later defense before the Sanhedrin, Peter reaffirmed this doctrine (4:10) and claimed that only in Christ could salvation be found. After the second public arrest of the apostles (4:17,18), they were again put on trial before the Sanhedrin, and they repeated this identical defense: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree. Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to them who obey him" (Acts 5:30-32).

The Petrine preaching of these early days in Jerusalem does not contain any broad development of latent theological implications. The appeal to the Jewish audience was simple and direct, being confined chiefly to the verification of Jesus' messiahship and the establishment of the national guilt in rejecting Him. Peter directed his remarks to Israel rather than to the Gentile world at large. Within this proclamation, however, lay the germ of all Christian preaching, for the Gentile Luke recorded it as part of his volume, which was intended to serve the needs of friends outside the fold of Israel.

The address of Stephen (Acts 7) did not mention the subject directly, but the following vision certainly implied it. Had Christ not risen, Stephen could not have seen Him standing at the right hand of God (7:56). The address itself assumed the fact, for it was essentially an elaboration of the first half of Peter's charge, "[Ye] killed the Prince of life" (3:15). Stephen, having reviewed the historical rejection of God's appointed leaders by the people of Israel, accused them of having betrayed and murdered the Messiah. For him the resurrection marked the end of one revelation and the beginning of another.

Stephen's speech was pivotal. Until this crisis the apostles and other believers had been worshiping in the synagogues or in the Temple and had combined the observances of Judaism with belief in the messiahship of Jesus. Stephen declared that God is not confined to temples (7:48), but that with the advent of Jesus a new revelation had begun. The message of life could not be restricted to any one race or ritual; it was destined to be a faith for all mankind.

The transition from Judaism to universal Christianity is indicated more by the trend of the narrative in Acts than by argumentation, although later it came to a crisis in the debate at the Council of Jerusalem (15:1-29). At the end of the first stage of apostolic preaching, the gospel of the resurrection was accepted; but it had not been expanded into a theological system.

The persecution precipitated by Stephen's speech and the consequent dispersion of the church produced a new type of preaching. Of the four addresses which can be assigned to this period, one was spoken by Peter in the house of the Roman centurion, Cornelius (10:34-43), and the

remaining three were given by Paul at Antioch of Pisidia (13:16-42), Thessalonica (17:1-3), and Athens (17:18, 22-32). Two of these, the first and fourth, were addressed to predominantly Gentile audiences; the other two were delivered in synagogues which some Gentile proselytes attended. No one of the four, with the possible exception of the speech before the Areopagus, was offered strictly as a defense, for each was designed to be an evangelistic sermon rather than a plea before a court. The four contain greater variety of appeal than Peter's early addresses, for they were directed to audiences located in cities widely distant from each other and varying in cultural background.

At Caesarea (10:34-43) Peter reiterated the basic theme of his previous preaching but added significant corollaries. One was the exclusiveness of the resurrection revelation. "God . . . made [him] manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead" (10:40-41).

Cornelius, a hard-headed Roman centurion, might have challenged Peter's statement because Christ had not been manifested publicly after He emerged from the tomb. The preacher forestalled the objection by affirming that Jesus appeared only to select but competent witnesses who could testify that He truly had risen. Their united testimony provided a foundation for the faith upon which the apostles built the superstructure of their theology.

A second corollary is the concept of judgment. Jesus was "ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead" (10:42). By one sentence Peter established the fundamental eschatological framework of Christianity. Judgment implies human responsibility for ethical behavior and a goal toward which the entire universe moves under the direction of God. Jesus was not merely a wandering prophet whose epigrams had casual literary or moral virtue. The resurrection validated His claim to be the Son of God, whose words were an eternal criterion of spiritual and moral values. As He Himself said, "the word that I spoke, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). A new age of probation was being introduced, decisive in its character and final in its outcome. There could be no more tolerance of moral indifference, for every act would be scrutinized in the light of Christ's resultant authority. Judgment would take place not only through the process of history, as Israel had already experienced it, but also at a future crisis when the righteous and risen Son of the Father would confront both the dead and the living.

Since judgment would inevitably entail the doom of all men, for none is righteous, a provision for salvation is necessary. Peter had referred to it previously (Acts 4:12), but for Gentiles he made the teaching more explicit. "To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name everyone who believes on him shall receive remission of sins" (10:43). This promise is the culmination of the history of the Old Testament and the focus of its prophetic message. The grace of God which had been revealed progressively in His providential dealings with Israel overflowed all national barriers and became available "to everyone who believes." Universal blessing was assured by Christ's rising from the dead, which confirmed His authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:10), and which guaranteed His eternal competence to make His promises effectual (Heb. 7:25).

A similar presentation characterized Paul's initial address to the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia. Like Peter, he followed the historical and prophetic interpretation with the theological application that through Christ forgiveness of sins was guaranteed. He added one further qualification, "*and by him everyone who believes is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*" (Acts 13:39). Paul carried the argument farther than

Peter; not only does he say that forgiveness is available through faith in Christ, but in addition he states that the law is inadequate to justify the sinner. In that sentence lies the germ of the entire Pauline theology of justification by faith, which was a reversal of the rabbinic theology of salvation by works. Justification, however, is through "the man" whom God raised from the dead. One may fairly deduce that the resurrection was the beginning of Paul's revolutionary idea, and that the few words quoted from his sermon in Pisidian Antioch may have marked the inception of the total complex of theology appearing in his epistles.

The brief account of Paul's sermons in the synagogue of Thessalonica (17:2-3) gives no extended review of content but does outline his procedure. He reasoned that, according to the Scriptures, Messiah must suffer and rise again from the dead, and that Jesus of Nazareth was identical with the promised Messiah. Both ideas were disputed, for Jewish theologians of Paul's day had no concept of a suffering Messiah and were unlikely to accept the repulsive doctrine of one that had been crucified. Furthermore, the emotional reaction against the historical person would prejudice them more deeply against accepting His claims. Nevertheless, Paul's evidence was sufficiently cogent to induce a number of Jews and proselytes to commit themselves to the new faith. Once he had established the continuity between the Old Testament prophecy and the life of Jesus via the resurrection, it was possible to inaugurate an entirely new system of theology.

Paul utilized a different approach in the speech before the Areopagus in Athens (17:16-32). Since he was addressing philosophers rather than students of the Old Testament Scriptures, he began with natural theology. Taking his cue from an altar inscribed "To An Unknown God," he skillfully presented the transcendent Creator who could not be confined to any of the temples that filled the city. Paul emphasized the ethical duty of man to God and the certainty of judgment on the discharge of that duty. The inevitability and the finality of divine decision were assured by the resurrection of Jesus, whom God had appointed to be the judge.

The Athenian reaction of polite scorn was normally to be expected, because Greek thought allowed no place for the reconstitution of the physical body (17:32). Paul, however, adhered rigidly to this fact as the basis of his faith, even though he knew it would bring him into disfavor with the philosophers. His assurance of moral values and of cosmic purpose was founded on the supreme manifestation of divine power, which revealed the eternal justice and authority of God.

The last group of addresses were the apostle's replies to formal accusations before a court. Although they may not represent his usual sermonic style, they contain the substance of his faith, compressed into small compass to answer his judges concisely.

The first hearing was conducted by the Sanhedrin, the same body that had tried Peter and John. Because of the relentless prejudice against him, Paul recognized that any attempt to defend himself against his accusers would be futile. He adopted the stratagem of creating dissension in the ranks of his enemies by declaring, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees: touching the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (23:6). His motives for interjecting a controversial issue were not unmixed, for he wanted to escape from the trap into which his enemies had thrust him. At the same time he attempted a sincere and vigorous defense of his faith. Paul was not magnifying a side issue solely to divert the attention of the council from himself; he was rather emphasizing the principle at stake.

At the second hearing, before Felix the Roman governor, Paul repeated the reason for his behavior and beliefs. "But this I confess unto you, that after the Way which they call a sect, so

serve I the God of our fathers . . . having hope toward God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust" (24:14,15).

In this short speech Paul confined himself to generalities, since the hearing involved only the high priest and Felix, neither of whom would have appreciated a dissertation on theology. He claimed that he had not deviated from Israel's hope for a resurrection, both of the righteous and of the wicked. He made no direct reference to the risen Christ, but if the principle be admitted, the instance could not logically be rejected. This truth was the focal theological issue of his controversy with Judaism.

Paul's insistence was not arbitrary or subjective. When Festus succeeded to the governorship of Palestine two years later and reopened Paul's case to clear the court docket left by his predecessor, the same question recurred. At the informal hearing before Agrippa, Festus introduced the prisoner by declaring that the accusations against him concerned "one Jesus, who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" (25:19). Irrespective of whether Festus believed in the resurrection or not, he understood the question to concern the specific historic instance of Jesus' reputed return from death. Paul subsequently confirmed Festus' impression by the narration of his conversion, concluding with a defense. "Having therefore obtained the help that is from God, I stand unto this day testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that the Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles" (26:22-23).

The total argument might be summarized as follows: Raising the dead is not impossible with God, and therefore the resurrection of Jesus is not excluded on a priori grounds; the objective appearance of the glorified Christ on the Damascus road transformed his career; and the historic fact was anticipated by the predictions of the prophets and of the law. The appeal to Agrippa to believe the prophets thus became a challenge to accept the proposed thesis and to commit himself to Paul's side of the hearing (26:27).

Festus' impulsive interruption, "Paul, you are mad," and Agrippa's sarcastic scorn, "With but little persuasion you would fain make me a Christian," showed that neither man took the prisoner seriously. They dismissed Paul's beliefs as fantasy and adjudged him to be a harmless fanatic. He, however, made the doctrine central in his personal experience, and basic to his preaching.

The last allusion to the resurrection in the book of Acts was Paul's oblique reference in his message to the Jewish community in Rome. He introduced himself by saying, "because of the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (28:20). From a comparison with his words to Agrippa, "And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers," and, "Why is it judged incredible with you, if God does raise the dead?" (Acts 26:6,8), one may deduce that the "hope of Israel" is the resurrection, and that it becomes the channel of divine blessing for both Jews and Gentiles.

The discourses in Acts, whether public or private, indicate that this doctrine was the central tenet of the new faith. Christianity did not evolve from an accidental combination of Jesus' teachings with Jewish ethic and temple ritual but was the spontaneous outgrowth of the overwhelming fact that Christ had risen. The dynamic of this unique event produced the church and inspired its distinctive message.

The Preaching in the Gospels

The presentation of Christian truth in Acts is necessarily brief and fragmentary. In order to include the history of thirty year's missionary endeavor within the limits of one scroll, the author could not reproduce addresses extensively. The four Gospels are a more satisfactory source for early Christian preaching. Apart from the question whether they are based upon oral tradition or upon documentary sources, they were obviously written to perpetuate the essential message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. His advent, career, teaching, death, and resurrection are the principal topics because they formed a total complex directly related to the spiritual needs and welfare of those for whom the Gospels were written.

As the story of Jesus was repeated, different phases were emphasized. Luke, who stated explicitly both his motive and his method, directed his Gospel to Theophilus to confirm his confidence in the truths which he had already learned by oral transmission (Luke 1:1-4). John's purpose was to establish his readers' belief in Christ (John 20:30,31). Mark calls his writing "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1), and Matthew introduces his work as "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). For each of these Gospels, diverse in content and in purpose, the resurrection is the climax.

For an adequate comprehension of meaning, the Gospels must be studied individually, since their approach varied with the didactic purpose of each.

Mark presented the resurrection as the explanation and goal of Jesus' active life. He divided his biographical sketch into short segments of irregular length, each of which pertained to a different geographical location. Beginning with the baptism at the Jordan (Mark 1:9), he traced the progress of Jesus' ministry by successive episodes of teaching and healing to its climax in the retirement to Caesarea Philippi (8:27). There Jesus appealed to the disciples for their verdict on His person, "But who say ye that I am?" When Simon Peter voiced his confession, "Thou art the Christ [Messiah]" (8:29), Jesus enjoined them not to publicize His claims. From that time He began to teach them that He would suffer and die, and would then rise again (8:31). Although these words were spoken exclusively to the disciples, for Mark distinguished sharply between them (8:27) and the multitude (8:34), they introduced a new element into the presentation of the Lord's person. The period of popularity had passed, and the suffering of the cross began to loom before Him. Tragedy, however, was not the end of His mission. The successes and the sufferings alike found their completion in the triumph of "the third day."

The Transfiguration which followed shortly after the revelation at Caesarea Philippi was closely related to this theme (9:2-10). Some scholars have suggested that it is a misplaced resurrection appearance.³ To regard it as a preview of the glorified Christ in His kingdom is a better alternative (9:11). His appearance in a luminous body, accompanied by Moses and Elijah, was undoubtedly the means that Jesus utilized to prepare the disciples for the shock of the cross. His admonition to say nothing about the incident until He rose from the dead excited their curiosity and stimulated speculation. Since there is no record that Jesus explained His allusion, the disciples probably did not interrogate Him further. "Questioning among themselves" (9:10) implies that they hesitated to press Him for further information. The concept, however, was firmly lodged in their memory and may have provided the key by which John, one of their

³ See C. E. Carlston, "Transfiguration and Resurrection," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXX (1961), 233-240. Carlston's defense of this view is not convincing.

number, realized the significance of the empty tomb.

Overshadowed by the threat of impending death, Jesus seems to have been strangely preoccupied and aloof. The fate of John the Baptist had depressed His spirit, for it presaged His own end. On the last journey through Galilee, He deliberately avoided publicity (9:30) and kept telling the disciples that He would fall a prey to His enemies in Jerusalem, but that He would afterwards rejoin them (9:31).

Jesus made the final allusion to His resurrection when He and the disciples were approaching Jerusalem prior to the Passion week. "And they were on the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed; and they who followed were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them the things that were to happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him unto the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall spit upon him, and shall scourge him, and shall kill him; and after three days he shall rise again" (10:32-34).

The unusual silence of Jesus puzzled and frightened the disciples. Instead of talking with them freely He retreated within Himself, walking a few paces ahead of them and paying little attention to their comments. Finally He reiterated the prediction of His death and again reproved them for their selfish aspirations.

Mark's motive for recording these instances seems to have been a desire to put the cross in its proper perspective. The inevitability of rejection weighed heavily upon the Master. The disciples did not comprehend the circumstances, and they tended to dismiss His predictions as idle fears or as improbable of fulfillment because He possessed miraculous power. Mark, contemplating the words in retrospect, endeavored to show that the resurrection was the climax of the divine plan.

The disclosures of the Saviour's purpose introduce the reader to the eternal quality of His person. Any astute man, surrounded by unscrupulous enemies and conscious of their determination to destroy him, might foretell the mode and the approximate time of his death, but could he predict that he would rise from the dead? If he made such an assertion, who would believe him? And if any did believe him, could they maintain their faith if he failed to substantiate the claim? Jesus' language contains no trace of hopeless tragedy or of futile despair; on the contrary, He took for granted that He would triumph over His enemies.

Two aspects of the ending of Mark's Gospel confirm this impression. One is the angel's word, "He goes before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you" (16:7). Jesus had previously announced at the time of His betrayal that He would rise (14:28), and would meet His disciples in Galilee. They had good reason to expect a future reunion, but the present ending of the Gospel leaves the thought incomplete, for it omits any reference to Galilee. If, as some suppose, Mark terminated his narrative at 16:8 with the words "for they were afraid," he may have purposely left the question open because the story of the living Christ merged with the continuing experience of the apostolic preachers, whose witness provided the logical sequel.

The authenticity of the last twelve verses is dubious since they do not appear in the most ancient manuscripts and are not noted by the earliest commentators. If genuinely Markan, they are probably a postscript which was added later for the benefit of those who had no contact with living witnesses. In any case, they doubtlessly preserve an ancient tradition which accords with

the teaching of the rest of the Gospels. They do not alter the main presentation of the resurrection in the other accounts but confirm the impression that the doctrine was dominant in the preaching of the church.

The basic framework of Matthew's Gospel is almost identical with that of Mark. The differences lie chiefly in the use of available information. Matthew offers fuller explanation of the resurrection, employing it as one of the proofs of Jesus' messiahship. Answering the query of John the Baptist's disciples whether He were the Messiah whom John anticipated, Jesus said, "Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them" (Matt. 11:4-5). Power over death was included among the signs which verified His authority.

In replying to the Pharisees' request for a "sign" (12:39,40), Jesus likened Himself to Jonah, who returned to life after three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish. The illustration reflects the growing interest in a parallelism between Jesus and the Old Testament. Undoubtedly He originated the comparison, but the homiletic practice of relating His career to the divine action chronicled in the prophets may account for the preservation of the simile. Its typology suggested that, like Jonah, He would voluntarily give His life for the safety of others, and that His greatest ministry would follow the three-day parenthesis of death.

In other predictive passages (16:21; 17:9,22,23; 20:18,19; 26:2) Matthew connected the event with the time schedule of Jesus' life. "From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up" (16:21). The repeated forecasts of death and resurrection disclosed the purpose of Jesus and dominated His teaching during the last year of His life. They marked the stages of progress from Peter's great confession of faith in His messiahship to the climax of the cross. Evidently Matthew desired to impress upon his reader that the denouement of Jesus' career was as important as His discourses.

Matthew's chief divergence from Mark appears in the narrative concerning the Easter morning. Both agree that the women visited the tomb, and that an angel⁴ informed them of Jesus' departure, announcing that He would meet the disciples in Galilee (Matt. 28:6,7; Mark 16:6,7). The difference lies in the reaction. Matthew declares, "they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word" (Matt. 28:8). Mark adds an explanation: "they . . . fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them: and they said nothing to anyone; for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8).

Enslin claims that the Gospels are contradictory because Mark stresses the absolute silence of the women, whereas Matthew conveys the impression that they left the tomb with the avowed purpose of announcing the good news that Jesus had risen.⁵ Enslin overlooks the obvious truth that the episode at the tomb would have remained unknown had not the women reported it to somebody. Mark means that they did not tell anyone apart from the disciples, for they had a commission to discharge and would be reluctant to discuss their experience with unsympathetic listeners. They would not dare to publish what they had witnessed, either because they would be regarded as religious fanatics or because their presence at the tomb would be a cause for suspicion of a plot.

4 Mark's Gospel says "a young man."

5 Morton S. Enslin, "And That He Hath Been Raised," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, XLIII (1952-53), 29.

The apologetic purpose of Matthew shaped his account of the resurrection. The appearances of the angel and Jesus to the women asserted the supernatural character of the event, and the explanation of bribing the guard was evidently intended to correct a falsehood that had been widely circulated in the society to which Matthew and his readers belonged. His Gospel epitomizes the explanation given to Gentile groups that derived their initial impressions of Jesus from Jewish contacts. Matthew wished to free his readers from the misinformation circulated by the Jewish hierarchy and to clarify the true prophetic relation between Jesus and the promises of the Old Testament.

According to this Gospel, the appearances of Jesus were not the terminus of His career but were the beginning of a new stage. Jesus commanded that the message of the resurrection should be preached to "all the nations" (Matt. 28:19), or, as the phrase could be rendered, to "all the Gentiles." On this truth He founded His authority and made it the mainspring of the entire missionary enterprise.

The majority of the pertinent passages in the Gospel of Luke parallel those in Matthew and Mark and contribute no new information to the common stock, but there are a few significant additions revealing the author's interest in this doctrine.

Luke alone records Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar. Whether this narrative should be interpreted as a parable, or whether Jesus was proffering a literal description of the unseen world, its final line reveals His belief in a return from death--and possibly is premonitory of His own experience. "And he [Abraham] said unto him [the rich man], If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead" (16:31). Jesus cherished no illusion that His resurrection would persuade all men of His authority. If in the period when the appearances were still verifiable by eyewitnesses their reality was disbelieved, how much more incredible would they seem in later years? Luke's quotation possibly reflected the current disbelief which he and his colleagues encountered.

Luke's chief contribution is the story of the journey to Emmaus. He could easily have obtained the details from Cleopas, who was one of the principals in the episode. The author's interest may have been prompted by the relation of Jesus' teaching to the Old Testament Scriptures. He intimated that the Stranger's two companions possessed full knowledge of the events which preceded the interview, but that they were unable to comprehend either the reason for His suffering or the phenomenon of the empty tomb. The facts were incontrovertible, but their understanding was inadequate.

There may have been other persons who were equally bewildered. They might acknowledge the reality of the empty tomb, but they were unsure of its meaning. Astute minds had already begun to speculate on the miracle involved. Had Jesus really risen as the apostles asserted, or had the body been stolen as the Jewish authorities averred? The writer sought to show from Jesus' own testimony that the entire Passion was predicted in the Old Testament and was a part of God's design (24:27,32,44,45). His repeated emphasis is an introduction to the literary presentation of apostolic preaching in Acts. The "certainty" which he wished to inculcate in Theophilus (1:4) was based at least partially on Christ's fulfillment of prophecy and upon His interpretation of the Old Testament teaching concerning Himself. Luke developed this aspect more than did Mark, who contented himself with merely recounting the facts, and more than Matthew, who specialized in the content of the teaching rather than in its framework.

Theophilus belonged to the cultured stratum of Roman society. His title, "most excellent" (1:3), may imply that he was a government official. If so, he was accustomed to travel and was familiar with the cults and beliefs of many lands. He would probably have regarded their extravagant legends concerning gods and goddesses as either superstitious or meaningless. The subjects of these legends had lived in the indefinite past, and their deeds could not be verified by acceptable proof. The converse was true of Jesus, for He was a contemporary of Theophilus' older Christian friends, and His numerous miracles were amply attested by eyewitnesses. The resurrection, which was the crowning wonder, was not only a historic fact established by external testimony; it was evidence that Jesus was unique. Theophilus' acceptance of His claims would be tantamount of an acknowledgment that He was different from the cult deities of the ancient world that belonged to the realm of imagination. Jesus, on the other hand, was a person whose human relations could be traced and whose impact upon His generation could not be denied.

The Gospel of John associated the resurrection directly with the theme of eternal life. The incarnation was a manifestation of God in human surroundings, the coincidence of time and eternity. John did not minimize the material aspects of Jesus' life, but he used select instances of His action and teaching to illustrate the principle that "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). A comparison of the content of John with that of the Synoptic Gospels reveals that the peculiarly Johannine sections of text frequently consist of elaboration upon situations which the Synoptics have described. John assumed that his readers were acquainted with the general outline of gospel narrative and devoted his efforts to explaining more fully the One of whom it spoke.

According to the Fourth Gospel, eternal life and Christ are synonymous. The Father endowed the Son with life in Himself, which He in turn could impart to others (5:26; 10:10,18). The impartation involved the new birth, a transformation of the character and will of the individual concerned (3:5-15), and was destined to reach its climax in the resurrection at the last day (5:25,28,29; 6:40,44). Jesus identified Himself completely with this power when He said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he who believes on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believes on me shall never die" (11:25-26).

The raising of Lazarus illustrated vividly the foregoing promise. Jesus' delay in responding to the announcement of Lazarus' death had plunged Mary and Martha into deep discouragement. When Jesus finally arrived at Bethany, they had relinquished all hope of restoration because four days had elapsed since the burial (11:39). Jesus assured them that their brother would rise again and challenged them to accept His word in spite of contradictory circumstances. His command, "Lazarus, come forth" (11:43), resuscitated the inert body by the impact of divine might and was a foretaste of the last summons that will marshal the dead before His judgment seat. The resurrection is the culminating manifestation of the life of God in a world of death.

John linked the resurrection closely with belief. When the Jews demanded proof of Jesus' authority to expel the merchants from the sacred courts of the Temple, He replied, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). His enemies erroneously assumed that His cryptic remark concerned Herod's Temple, which after forty-six years was still in process of construction. They dismissed His statement as irrelevant or foolish; He had merely confused them. They recalled His words, however, and misused them when they charged Him with disloyalty at His trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:61). In an explanatory footnote John adds that He was speaking of His body, and that after the resurrection His disciples remembered His

prediction, and believed both the Scriptures and His word. The footnote implies that one must view Jesus' life in the perspective of a mature faith in order to evaluate it correctly.

Prior to the resurrection the disciples regarded Jesus as a prophet with a message from God (John 4:19; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17), or as a potential king who could provide economic security and political independence for their nation (6:15). The Master, however, made a greater claim, for He promised that His obedient followers would live forever (8:51). Replying to the indignant protest of His opponents, who charged Him with sacrilege, He elevated Himself above the prophets when He declared, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (8:58). Using the present tense of the verb *to be*, He asserted His eternal existence. By rising from the dead He confirmed this claim, and validated retroactively both His own promises and the faith of His followers.

In agreement with the Synoptic tradition the author unquestionably accepted the objectivity of the resurrection, but he did not represent it solely as a miraculous event, never to be repeated and dissociated from the normal currents of life. He interpreted it in terms of its effect on individuals, and showed that it imparted new courage and hope to those who witnessed and believed it. On the foundation of the external historical reality they built the assurance of Christ's continuing participation in their activities and His sovereignty over their destinies.

During Jesus' final conversation with the disciples before the betrayal, He promised to rejoin them after His death. "Yet a little while, and the world beholds me no more; but ye behold me: because I live, ye shall live also" (14:19). Later He became more explicit, "A little while, and ye behold me no more; and again a little while, and ye shall see me" (16:16). His language seemed ambiguous; it might describe either the ascension and second coming or His immediate return after death. The second alternative is probably the correct interpretation, for He explained that on the occasion of His departure His followers would lament, while the world would rejoice, but that their sorrow would be turned into joy. The resurrection became a standard of progress for the disciples. Not only could they refer to it later as the proof of Jesus' claims and the vindication of their faith, but also they could consider it a harbinger of their own victory over death.

The political and social aspects of prophecy are not discussed in the Fourth Gospel, which maintains a complete silence concerning the future of Israel and the church. Johannine eschatology is largely ethical and personal, emphasizing the ultimate relation of the individual to Christ. The language of John's First Epistle summarizes his viewpoint: "We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is" (I John 3:2).

Jesus' final challenge (John 21:19) was given subsequent to the resurrection. When He first gathered His disciples, they expected the immediate establishment of the Messianic kingdom. His death crushed their hopes, but His subsequent appearance renewed the prospect for further development of His plans. Without defining His objective, Jesus commanded the disciples to follow Him. The resurrection became the basis of their confidence for a greater venture than the initial call to discipleship had involved. His invisible leadership, mediated by the Holy Spirit, would be the key to their future.

The conclusion of the Gospels marks an advance in the apostolic preaching concerning the resurrection. Whereas the earliest addresses reported in Acts stress the pivotal event upon which hinged the acceptance or rejection of Jesus' messiahship, the Gospels magnify the climactic reversal of fate which distinguished Him from all other religious leaders. The uniqueness of His

person stimulates an analytic contemplation of His claims. The theology and ethics of the Epistles therefore spring naturally from an attempt to evaluate the risen Lord, who, as Paul said, was "declared to be the Son of God with power . . . by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4).