

“Prove It!”

(Using the OT Prophecies to show Jesus is the Son of God)

Part 1 of 5

I. Introduction – Purpose of this Class

- a. Please read **Luke 24:44-47**, and then **Acts 1:1-3** and **1:8**
 - i. Jesus’ plan was to have the gospel spread to all nations, starting from Jerusalem.
 - ii. Book of Acts documents how this message spread, in the beginning.
 - iii. In this series, will focus on HOW they actually spread the faith and convinced others to believe, using the Old Testament prophecies to persuade unbelievers.
 - iv. Why should this matter to us?
 1. To strengthen our own faith, to make sure it is built on a solid foundation
 2. For evangelism, to convince unbelievers today

II. Reaching Unbelievers and Persuading Them

- a. How many people in the world today do NOT believe Jesus is the Son of God?
 - i. Estimate more than 2/3 (68%) do not believe (Source: *Global Christianity*, The Pew Forum, 2010)
 - ii. Less than 1/3 (32%) even believe in Jesus
- b. Implementing the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:18-20**, **Mark 16:15-16**) has two challenges for us today:
 - i. The first challenge: teaching those who believe (the 32%) to actually follow the commands and teachings of Jesus, the King over his kingdom.
 1. **Luke 6:46** “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do the things which I say?”

2. **John 8:31-32** “If you abide in my word (hold to my teachings) you are my disciples indeed.”
 3. **James 2:19-20** “Even the demons believe – and tremble!”
- ii. The second challenge: persuading *the other 68%* to come to faith (maybe the greater challenge?) This series of lessons was created to equip you to do that, building on a solid foundation.
- c. How do modern Christians typically try to persuade unbelievers to come to faith in Jesus? Some examples:
 - i. “If you become a Christian and follow Jesus, your life will become much better” (better marriage, family, children, real friends; belong to a caring community; straighten out finances; avoid the misery of: immorality, drugs, alcohol)
 - ii. Listen to personal testimonies of others whose lives have changed for the better
 - iii. Bible / church / discipleship used to meet needs/desires expressed by unbeliever (desires for: purpose in life, better relationships, self-control, better family life)
 - iv. “Come to our wonderful, loving, diverse church”
 - v. “God has a wonderful plan for your life.”
 - d. One modern American Protestant version of the gospel is that Jesus paid all the cost, therefore no cost to us. A free ride!
 - i. However, Jesus said that all who follow him must “count the cost”; that it is a very high cost, indeed! (**Luke 14:25-33**)
 - e. REALITY: It is true that following the Bible can help you avoid a lot of misery and pain (drugs, alcohol, divorce, immorality, etc.), HOWEVER
 - i. Jesus reminded us that the world will treat us just as it treated him. His followers will be hated and persecuted. (**John 15:18-20**)

- ii. Paul said that if we are in Christ because of what it will offer us in this life, “we are of all men the most pitiable”. (**1 Corinthians 15:19**)
- iii. Persecution of Christians continues today. Estimated 45 million Christian martyrs in 20th century (1900-2000). Heavy persecutions in recent times in South Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, Indonesia, parts of India, North Korea, China, etc. Estimate 100,000-160,000 Christian martyrs in the world every year, roughly one every 5 minutes (Source: *World Christian Trends AD 30-2200*, D. Barrett & T. M. Johnson, 2001. Another source for info on this topic is *Voice of the Martyrs*.)
- iv. Dr. David Barrett, a British missionary to Africa, devoted the later part of his life to research. He was co-author of the major demographic study, *World Christian Trends*. He also founded the World Evangelization Research Center, forerunner to the Center for the Study of Global Christianity (located at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, north of Boston).
 - 1. Dr. Barrett once was asked to address a group of wealthy Christian donors. They asked him what the most effective means of evangelism was, so that they could invest their money to speed up evangelization of the world.
 - 2. He responded, “We have been engaged in in-depth research on this subject, and we think the most effective means might be Christian martyrdom.”
 - 3. After an awkward silence, someone asked the follow-up question, “Could you tell us *the second most* effective means of evangelism”?
- v. Similar to what Tertullian had said c. 200AD: “The more we are mown down by you, the more we grow. The blood of Christians is seed...For who that contemplates it, is not excited to inquire what is at the bottom of it? Who, after inquiry, does not embrace our doctrines?” (*Ante-Nicene*

Fathers, vol. 3 p. 55. For similar quotes from other early Christians, see article on Martyrs in *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, D. Bercot, Scroll Publishing.
www.scrollpublishing.com)

III. How did Jesus, the apostles and early disciples persuade unbelievers in the beginning? After the resurrection, they used prophecies from the Hebrew Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. I found 14 examples from **Luke** and **Acts**:

- a. Jesus to two on the road to Emmaus, in **Luke 24:13-35**
- b. Jesus to the Eleven in Jerusalem, in **Luke 24:44-48**
- c. Peter to Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost, in **Acts 2:14-41**
- d. Peter to the crowd at Solomon's Portico, in **Acts 3:11-26**
 - i. "But those things which God *foretold by the mouth of all His prophets*, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled." (**3:18**)
 - ii. "...all the prophets, from Samuel and those who followed, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days." (**3:24**)
- e. Peter to Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, in **Acts 4:5-12**
 - i. "This is the stone that was rejected by you builders." (**Acts 4:11**, referring to **Psalms 118**)
- f. Stephen to the Sanhedrin, in **Acts 7**
- g. Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, in **Acts 8:26-35**
 - i. "Philip...beginning at this Scripture (**Isaiah 53**) preached Jesus to him" (**8:35**)
- h. Peter to Cornelius' household, in **Acts 10:34-43**
 - i. "to him all the prophets witness" (**10:43**)
- i. Paul at the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, in **Acts 13:14-48**
- j. Paul at the synagogue in Thessalonica, in **Acts 17:1-4**

- i. Paul “as his custom was...*reasoned with them from the Scriptures*, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead” (17:2-3)
- k. Paul in Berea, in **Acts 17:10-12**
 - i. The Bereans “*searched the Scriptures daily* to find out whether these things were so” (17:11)
- l. Apollos at the synagogue and in public debate with the Jews, in Ephesus in **Acts 18:24-29**
 - i. “A Jew named Apollos... mighty in the Scriptures... vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, *showing from the Scriptures* that Jesus is the Christ” (18:24, 28)
- m. Paul preached to King Agrippa and Bernice at Caesarea, in **Acts 26**
 - i. “...to this day I stand, witnessing to both the small and the great, saying no other things than those *which the prophets and Moses said* would come – that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.” (26:22-23)
 - ii. “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.” (26:27)
- n. Paul to the Jews in Rome, in **Acts 28:23-28**
 - i. “...persuading them concerning Jesus *from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets*, from morning till evening. And some were persuaded...” (28:23-24)

IV. Q: So why don’t we reach out to people in the same way as in Acts, today? (Starting by persuading them from the OT prophecies) Three objections I have heard:

- a. OBJECTION No. 1: “That’s because they were reaching out to Jews.” HOWEVER,
 - i. In **Acts**, also used to reach out to Gentiles (**Acts 8**/Ethiopian, and **Acts 10**/Cornelius)

- ii. Consider what Paul said to the *Gentile* Christians in Corinth:
 - 1. “you were Gentiles/pagans” (**1 Corinthians 12:2**)
 - 2. Read **1 Corinthians 15:1-5**
 - a. “I delivered to you first of all that which I also received,
 - b. That Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures
 - c. And that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...”
- iii. Consider Christians from the early church, Gentiles who reached out to other Gentiles with the same message. In *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin explains how it was the Jewish prophecies that had convinced him, a Samaritan, to come to faith. Justin uses same approach to reach out to Romans, in his *First Apology* (c. 150AD):
 - 1. “To the Emperor Antonius sons, Marcus Aurelius Verus Pius and to his adopted and Lucius Verus, the philosophers. Also to the venerable Senate and to all the people of Rome....”
 - 2. “Centuries ago there were certain men among the Jews who were prophets of God. Through these men , the prophetic Spirit foretold things that would happen in the future.....In the books of the prophets we find prophecies about Jesus, our Christ.”
 - 3. “They foretold his coming. His being born of a virgin and growing as a man. His healing every type of disease and sickness and even raising the dead. His being unrecognized and hated. His crucifixion, death and resurrection. His ascension into heaven. And his being the Son of God.”
 - 4. “It was also predicted that he would send persons into every nation to proclaim these things, and that it

would be primarily the Gentiles who would believe in him.”

5. (Quotation above are from modern translation of Justin’s First Apology, found in a book I highly recommend: *We Don’t Just Speak Great Things, We Live Them*, J. Martyr & M. Felix, published by Scroll Publishing, www.scrollpublishing.org)

b. OBJECTION No. 2: “I’m not a Bible scholar” (so don’t know enough to teach someone that way); HOWEVER:

- i. Good news: they weren’t academic, scholarly-types, either! Many were fishermen and tradesmen.

1. **Acts 4:13** “they...perceived that they (Peter and John) were uneducated and untrained men”

c. OBJECTION No. 3: “That was so long ago; it probably wouldn’t work so well *today*.” HOWEVER, consider a few examples.

- i. First example: George, the father of my friend Finny Kuruvilla. From Christian background in Kerala state, southern India
 1. His faith was shipwrecked in his college years; embraced atheism. Very analytical; pre-law student.
 2. While in college, attended a lecture where the speaker asked, “How many people do you know whose biography was written 1,000 years before he was born? Or even 100 years before he was born?”
 3. The speaker went on to show how Psalm 22 prophesied the crucifixion of Christ, well before crucifixion was known by the Jews.
 4. George decided to investigate this on his own (to disprove it), but instead it led him to faith. He quickly turned from being an atheist into someone who was out on the streets in India, sharing and teaching about Jesus.

5. George has continued to use that approach, and founded a school to teach natives of India how to plant churches and spread the gospel in Northern India (most hostile part). His students are often beaten up, even hospitalized, for their faith.
- ii. Second example: Mike, good friend of mine since my freshman year in college (1971), currently in Mexico. Was a philosophy major; spiritually-minded, truth-seeker, calls himself a Buddhist. Recently I sent him a link to a YouTube lesson on this, *Jesus in the Psalms*. He listened, was intrigued; led to weekly studies via Skype. I am teaching him about Jesus fulfilling the ancient prophecies.
- iii. Third example: Muslims who state that they believe Jesus was a great prophet, but that he did not die on the cross nor raise from the dead on the third day. They claim that “Christians changed the story in the first few centuries”. My response: let’s look at the earlier Hebrew prophecies!

V. A New (Actually Very Old) Way to Share Your Faith Today

- a. Like Paul and Apollos of old, “showing/proving from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (**Acts 18:28**)
 - i. Could *you* do that today? Prove it from the evidence, ‘beyond any reasonable doubt’?
 - ii. That may seem like a high bar to clear, but it can be done. You can do it!
- b. Issue the challenge to others: “*If I can prove to you from the OT prophecies that Jesus is the Son of God, would you believe it and follow Him?*” (How can an honest person say ‘no’ to that??)
- c. Suggested, to prepare yourself for the next lesson in this series:
 - i. Read/study **Acts 2** & **Acts 13**. Notice how Peter and Paul used the OT Scriptures to convince others. Also read the OT passages they quoted or cited, in context.
 - ii. Issue the great challenge to unbelievers; invite them to join you in the great banquet!