INTRODUCTION: Luke 24: 1-35

Luke 24:32 They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”

Question:

1. Who were the early Christians?
   1. FAITH and ZEAL are the two words that characterize the New Testament Church and First Century Christianity as recorded by Luke. It is the purpose of this study to reproduce both the First Century kind of FAITH in our hearts, and the kind of unique ZEAL in our lives. In God’s eternal wisdom he has not left himself without witness. This record of LUKE is filled with evidence that will build our faith. The early church was composed of men and women who were fearful, timid and uncertain. Peter denied the Lord and many of the Twelve forsook him at the crucifixion, yet with their wavering and faltering faith became the fire that consumed the Roman Empire.
   2. It is our goal to recognize the power that turned these timid and fearful disciples into a force that could not be quenched. Luke records in 24:32, “Did not our hearts burn within us…”, then in the second letter to Theophilus he seeks to demonstrate that the power which caused the fire to burn was the gospel of the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. The central theme of Luke and this work will be the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection produced the faith and then the faith produced the zeal. Our goal is to return to this form of New Testament Christianity.
2. Why they succeeded where we often fail.
   1. One of the secrets of the early Christians was that they were able to reject the ungodly attitudes, practices of their culture because they had conformed to a different culture.
   2. The early church was a disciplined church. They relied on sound teaching, righteous example
3. Political Commentary
   1. Donald Trump told us recently that the Bible is his favorite book. Ted Cruz announced, rather unoriginally, that God speaks through the Bible. Cruz père has declared that the Bible establishes criteria for political electability. Sarah Palin dreams of enacting Biblical law in the United States, and ponders her own biblical magnitude.
   2. Faith-fiend Rowan County (Kentucky) clerk Kim Davis purports to be defending “biblical marriage” by refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, but she would do well to check and see just what biblical matrimony actually looks like. Even Hillary Clinton looks at the Bible and thinks “It’s alive!” and has apparently spent a lot of time studying it.
   3. These politicians are hardly alone in supersizing the Good Book’s stature. The masses throughout history have used their cash and credit cards to assert the Bible’s primacy; they have, in fact, made it the best-selling book of all time, though Guinness World Records commits the unpardonable error of listing it in the non-fiction category. Fantasy would have been a better choice, if fantasy of a particularly absurdist bent.
   4. Yes, absurdist. The Bible is brimming with rank absurdities that insult our intelligence and affront our dignity as twenty-first-century, post-Enlightenment humans residing in one of the most developed countries on Earth.
   5. Such absurdities include, exempli gratia, the following:
   6. 1. Our soi-disant “savior” was born not following intercourse between a man and a woman, but as a result of God “debauching” (to use Thomas Paine’s word) an unconsenting (per Matthew) virgin two millennia ago. (By today’s standards, Mary would be entitled to file sexual assault charges against the Lord, all the more so since He, according to the Bible, must have been at least four thousand years her senior, and occupied a position of authority over her. Imagine the settlement she could get!)
   7. 2. This “savior” derived his standing from his filial relationship to an invisible, inaudible, altogether undetectable supernatural being we now understand would have to hover above us in the minus-455-degree-Fahrenheit vacuum of outer space that exists beyond the Earth’s Thermosphere, a region formerly known as “heaven.”
   8. 3. Said “savior” wandered about Middle Eastern territory under Roman occupation allegedly performing scientifically impossible deeds (raising people from the dead, sashaying across a body of H2O, influencing meteorological phenomena, curing chronic diseases in an era before sanitary wipes, and so on).
   9. 4. A thrice-repeated ornithological omen presaged betrayal of said “savior,” who then, after a supper with close associates (known now as “apostles”) that involved the ingestion of flour-based baked goods and grape alcohol, suffered an unspeakably ghastly death, and yet managed to resuscitate himself and officiate at a number of colloquies with the aforementioned associates.
   10. 5. Bizarrely, and certainly suspiciously, not one of the “savior’s” close associates thought to publish memoirs of said colloquies or even take notes, thereby leaving the so-called Word, purportedly critical for the salvation of our species, to be recorded by unknown scribes decades later. Worse, the “savior” spoke Aramaic and probably some Hebrew, but his eventual, long-after-the-factoid biographers wrote in Koine (common) Greek. The result: a mishmash of inconsistent accounts (the Gospels) that were composed in a language other than the original, and eventually translated into English, that, beautiful as it may be in the King James version, is nevertheless replete with errors. Subsequent interpretations may have eliminated some of these mistakes, but not the contradictions in the Gospels.
   11. (One wonders, as an aside, if Jesus were really such an up-to-snuff savior, couldn’t he have vetted his apostles a bit more thoroughly?)
   12. It outrages common sense to be asked to accept the Bible, bristling with improbable inanities and known inconsistencies, as authoritative in any way — and much less as some sort of public-policy guidebook. An inevitable question arises as to the Lord’s competence: If He was so smart, why would He have chosen to communicate with us through such a shoddily composed tome? And a lot of time has passed. Given all the confusion and conflict nowadays over religious matters, why hasn’t He issued an updated edition? Why doesn’t He at least have His own website or Facebook page? He doesn’t even tweet! Some Lord.
   13. Seriously, though, it insults our intelligence to be enjoined to believe, now that we have split the atom, discovered the Higgs Boson, and sent a probe to Pluto, in the veracity of a supernatural account of the origins of our cosmos.
   14. It insults our intelligence to be enjoined to believe, now that we have mapped the human genome and fathomed our manifest kinship to other species of the animal kingdom, that a supernatural being verbally conjured us into existence.
   15. It insults our intelligence that we are expected to believe, even venerate, all the rubbish found in the Bible, a book written — no one disputes — by mere humans. After all, humans have always been self-interested, and given to exaggeration, confabulation and outright lying. Who’s to say that the authors of the Bible didn’t just make it all up?
4. What is Apologetics?
   1. Apologetics may be simply defined as the defense of the Christian faith. The simplicity of this definition, however, masks the complexity of the problem of defining apologetics. It turns out that a diversity of approaches has been taken to defining the meaning, scope, and purpose of apologetics.
   2. The word “apologetics” derives from the Greek word apologia, which was originally used of a speech of defense or an answer given in reply. In ancient Athens it referred to a defense made in the courtroom as part of the normal judicial procedure. After the accusation, the defendant was allowed to refute the charges with a defense or reply (apologia). The accused would attempt to “speak away” (apo—away, logia—speech) the accusation.1 The classic example of such an apologia was Socrates’ defense against the charge of preaching strange gods, a defense retold by his most famous pupil, Plato, in a dialogue called The Apology (in Greek, hē apologia).
   3. The word appears 17 times in noun or verb form in the New Testament, and both the noun (apologia) and verb form (apologeomai) can be translated “defense” or “vindication” in every case.2 Usually the word is used to refer to a speech made in one’s own defense. For example, in one passage Luke says that a Jew named Alexander tried to “make a defense” before an angry crowd in Ephesus that was incited by idol-makers whose business was threatened by Paul’s preaching (Acts 19:33). Elsewhere Luke always uses the word in reference to situations in which Christians, and in particular the apostle Paul, are put on trial for proclaiming their faith in Christ and have to defend their message against the charge of being unlawful (Luke 12:11; 21:14; Acts 22:1; 24:10; 25:8, 16; 26:2, 24).
   4. Paul himself used the word in a variety of contexts in his epistles. To the Corinthians, he found it necessary to “defend” himself against criticisms of his claim to be an apostle (1 Cor. 9:3; 2 Cor. 12:19). At one point he describes the repentance exhibited by the Corinthians as a “vindication” (2 Cor. 7:11 nasb), that is, as an “eagerness to clear yourselves” (niv, nrsv). To the Romans, Paul described Gentiles who did not have the written Law as being aware enough of God’s Law that, depending on their behavior, their own thoughts will either prosecute or “defend” them on Judgment Day (Rom. 2:15). Toward the end of his life, Paul told Timothy, “At my first defense no one supported me” (2 Tim. 4:16), referring to the first time he stood trial. Paul’s usage here is similar to what we find in Luke’s writings. Earlier, he had expressed appreciation to the Philippians for supporting him “both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel” (Phil. 1:7).

* 1. Here again the context is Paul’s conflict with the government and his imprisonment. However, the focus of the “defense” is not Paul but “the gospel”: Paul’s ministry includes defending the gospel against its detractors, especially those who claim that it is subversive or in any way unlawful. So Paul says later in the same chapter, “I am appointed for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:16).
  2. Finally, in 1 Peter 3:15 believers are told always to be prepared “to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.” The context here is similar to Paul’s later epistles and to Luke’s writings: non-Christians are slandering the behavior of Christians and threatening them with persecution (1 Pet. 3:13-17; 4:12-19).
  3. When challenged or even threatened, Christians are to behave lawfully, maintain a good conscience, and give a reasoned defense of what they believe to anyone who asks
  4. How can we Defend Our Faith?

(1) Prophecy

(2) The Empty tomb

(3) Witnesses

(4) Bribing the Guards

(5) Testimony of Secular History

CLASS STUDY SCHEDULE: ACTS OF THE APOSTLE’S

INTRODUCTION: LUKE’S HISTORICAL APOLOGETIC ACTIVITIES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

12/13/2015 APOLOGETICS INTRODUCTION

12/20/2015 CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

12/27/2015 GOALS & OBJECTIVES OF OUR STUDY

01/03/2016 “OUR HEARTS BURNED WITHIN US”

Section 1. Part 1 HISTORICAL APOLOGETIC

01/10/2016

01/17/2016

Section 1. Part 2 THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

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Section 1. Part 3 THE WITNESSING OF THE RESURRECTION

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02/14/2016

Section 1. Part 4 PERSECUTION FROM SATAN AND VICTORY FROM GOD

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Section 2. Acts 1 & 2 OBJECTIVES: THE BEGINNING

03/06/2016

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Section 3. Acts 3 OBJECTIVES: PETER’S MESSIANIC SERMON

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Section 4. Acts 4 & 5 OBJECTIVES: THE IDENTIFYING MARKS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

04/03/2016

04/10/2016

Section 5. Acts 6 & 7 OBJECTIVES: STEPHEN’S DEFENSE

04/17/2016

Section 6. Acts 8:4-11:18 OBJECTIVES: MIRACLES AND CONVERSION-SIGN AND SALVATION

04/24/2016

05/01/2016

Section 7. Acts 10:1-16:5 OBJECTIVES: THE GREAT TRANSITION

05/08/2016

05/15/2016 EDIFICATION MEETING

Section 8. Acts 16:5-19:2 OBJECTIVES: THE NEW ENEMY: PAGANISM AND HUMAN WISDOM

05/22/2016

Section 9. Acts 19:21-21:6 OBJECTIVES: HISTORICAL CONFIRMATION & DOCTRINAL CERTAINTY

05/29/2016

Section 10. Acts 21:17-28:30 OBJECTIVES: “LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS EVEN UNTO”

06/05/2016

06/12/2016

Section 11. Acts 26:1-32 OBJECTIVES: PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

06/19/2016

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