

***Acts 10:34a, 36, 39-43. <sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak: <sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. <sup>39</sup> "We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, <sup>40</sup> but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. <sup>41</sup> He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."***

### **Peter Proclaims Proof that Provides Peace.**

“Are you sure?” It’s a question that can just drive you nuts, even though most of the time the question is well intentioned. Someone says it to be nice or because they are trying to be helpful, but then all of the sudden, because of that one little question, you *aren't sure*. For example, let’s say that you packed all day for a trip. You laid out your clothes on the bed. You checked and you doubled checked that you had everything, and then your mom walks in, or your wife checks in, or your husband says in passing, “Now are you sure you have everything?” You sigh and blurt out yes, but then you begin to wonder. “Did I pack enough socks? Did I remember that thing that I really wanted to bring?” Now at the very least you have this nagging feeling of doubt, at the worst you begin rifling through your stuff two or three more times to make sure that it is all in there.

Rather than simply saying, “Are you sure?” a person who is trying to help should probably consider walking the person who is packing through a list of some essential items to reassure that person that she or she has everything needed for the trip. “Do you have your toothbrush, your socks, “x” number of outfits, your cell phone, and your cell phone charger?” And so on. That simple exercise, that simple run through of items - especially if the person is looking for some assurance - can be very beneficial. It can provide welcome reassurance. It can provide proof that produces peace.

In a way this is what Peter did for the Gentile believers in this section of the book of Acts. He ran through a list of events that provided proof to these believers; so that this proof would produce peace in their hearts. For whatever reason, (perhaps because these Gentiles had been told that they were inferior to the Jewish people and even to the Jewish Christians) a level of uncertainty had led these believers to wonder if they were saved or forgiven or even loved by Jesus Christ at all.

To assure them, Peter first pointed to their knowledge and to their faith. He said to them, ***“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.”*** And then Peter reassured them that this was all part of God’s plan, Jesus was the one that John the Baptist had pointed to, and the one that God had chosen and anointed to be the Savior of mankind. Peter continued to pile on the proof as he reassured these believers that he and the other disciples had witnessed these great things that so many people throughout the whole land had been talking about for the last few years. Peter saw with his own eyes the miraculous things that Jesus did during his ministry as he traveled throughout Judea and Galilee and preaching and teaching and healing so many. He was there when Jesus raised the dead and he saw Jesus casting out demons. It was remarkable and Peter was there to see it. He had proof that Jesus was God.

And then when Jesus died, he died the death that he was sent to die. He died on the cursed tree. He died as the perfect sacrifice for sinners. Pleased with his sacrifice God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen to assure the faithful that he was the Lord. It was the ultimate proof that Jesus was who he claimed to be. Jesus then visited his disciples, ate and drank with them, taught them and instructed them, explained what this all meant to them, in order to provide them with precious peace and confidence. He appeared to that special group that he had chosen, that he had instructed, so that they would know that this was more than some death defying act, or some strange trick, or some wild dream or spiritual experience but this was what the scriptures had proclaimed. He was the one God had chosen to bring forgiveness and salvation. He was the promised Messiah who had given his life for the sins of the world and God the Father would not let his Holy One see decay.

The risen Christ had provided his disciples with peace and assurance and then he sent his disciples out to pass that peace onto others. As he spoke to these Gentile believers here in Acts 10 Peter very likely remembered vividly how Jesus breathed on him and the rest of the disciples and sent them out to proclaim repentance and forgiveness. Peter very likely remembered vividly how Jesus restored him on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and sent him out to feed his sheep, to feed his lambs with the precious word of God. Not that long ago Jesus had stood in front of Peter, ate with him, spoke to him, assured him, restored him, and commissioned him to share the good news. He was hand-delivered the assurance and peace and love that Jesus offers to all his children. And so armed with this arsenal of proof Peter spoke boldly and confidently to these Gentile believers in order to shoot down all their doubts and fears and then provide them with the same kind of peace he enjoyed.

And now his words are recorded for us and preserved for us so that we might have this proof and we might have this peace - because we too are prone to doubting and uncertainty and fears. We have this human nature which the devil knows how to exploit. With the worst intentions Satan comes to us and asks, *“Are you sure?”* He climbs into our minds and questions the certainty of our relationship with God. *“Are you sure he did all*

*these things for you?" Are you sure that he rose from the dead?" Are you sure that you are forgiven? Are you sure that he loves you? Are you sure that he will let you into his heaven?"* He plants this simple question in our minds because he knows that it will drive us nuts. But his intentions are more sinister than to simply annoy us, but his desire is to slowly surround and drown us with doubt and despair and fear. *Are you sure?* The devil hisses. And for whatever reasons we listen.

He probes our doubting nature, he appeals to our rational and sensible minds, he pricks and disturbs our tender consciences and suddenly we are unsure. And so we rifle through all the evidence in our lives. We look at our disobedient lives and our inability to obey perfectly. We look at the troubles we face. Our rational minds struggle with the miraculous acts and resurrection of Jesus and doubt pushes its way in and it spreads and it grows and it sends our faith into a panicked state. *Am I forgiven? Does God love someone like me? Am I going to heaven?*

But dear friends, don't doubt but believe! We are blessed with proof that produces peace. God's Word goes over the list with us to assure us. This all happened just as promised. Jesus was who he claims to be. The Bible assures you that Jesus has forgiven you and loves you and cares for you and has prepared a place for you. God's Word speaks to our troubled hearts with his precious promises and the waves of doubt and fear and uncertainty that crashed against us are suddenly calmed. When his word comes to us we are still, we are at peace and we know that He is our God. In that calmness we can see clearly the proof that is so abundant and so clear. The prophets foretold that he would come. Not one, not two, but four accounts of his life and death and resurrection are given and we know that gospel, and by faith we believe that good news. The apostles like Peter gave their eyewitness testimony, and we are assured, and are reassured. We have all this proof readily available to us. The Bible that is worn from use, the devotions that are a just a page, or tap, or a click away; the worship services and classes and special services that we are able to attend and hear his word and be reassured by his precious promises. The sight of the font, the taste of the bread and the wine, the favorite passages, stories, and songs, they all stick in our hearts and in our minds and provide the peace that we need. No, we were not there, but we have the testimony of the apostles who were. We have the prophets who predicted what would happen. We have this wonderful pile of proof, this blessed list of evidence that we can refer to over and over again. And so we are at ease, we are at peace.

We know that God sent his promised Savior just as he promised. We know that Jesus has won forgiveness for all those who believe in him. We know that God's loves us, because he came to this world to demonstrate and prove his love for us, by dying the death we deserved. He rose from the grave to assure us that it is all true. He appeared to his disciples and sent them out with confidence so that this good news would be passed on to the people of this world. He does love us. He has forgiven us. And when he comes to judge the living and the dead we will be brought safely to our Savior's side to live with

him forever because we have been given the gift of faith. We believe. God gives us so much proof that all this is true and it provides us with unmatched peace.

As I was reviewing the Easter story I was reminded of interesting detail that seems to offer proof that Jesus both rose from the dead and that he will come again to judge the living and the dead. We are told that when Jesus rose from the dead he folded the cloth that had been placed over his head and kept it separate from the other linens that had covered Him. John 20:7 brings special attention to this small bit of information. The obvious bit of proof this offers is that Jesus rose from the dead and that no one stole the body. Scared disciples, afraid to be caught, would not have been so careful. Grave robbers or enemies of Jesus would not have paid the grave clothes this much respect. But Jesus rose and carefully folded this piece of cloth. The obvious bit of proof that the folded cloth provides is that Jesus rose from the dead.

This may also serve to prove that Jesus will return again, because you see there was a Hebrew tradition in that day that every Jewish boy would have known about. When the servant set the dinner table for the master, he made sure it was exactly the way the master wanted it. The table was furnished perfectly, and then the servant would wait, just out of sight, until the master had finished eating, and the servant would not dare touch the table, until the master was finished. When the master was done eating, he would rise from the table, wipe his fingers, his mouth, and clean his beard, and then he would *wad up* the napkin and toss it onto the table. The servant would then know to clear the table, because in those days, the wadded up napkin meant: "I'm finished." But, if the master got up from the table, and *folded* the napkin, and laid it beside his plate, the servant would not clear the table... because the folded napkin meant... "I'm coming back." Jesus folded that napkin that covered his head. As if to say: "I'm coming back!" And so He shall!

Jesus clearly taught that he would die and rise again. He clearly taught that he would return. And the apostles and the prophets stand by as reliable witnesses. There is so much evidence that is given. There is so much proof that is provided, even down to the smallest of details because the Lord wants to give you peace. When your hearts are troubled, when your sins bother you, when your sinful flesh or the devil himself nags at you and you become unsure of God's love and your forgiveness and your eternity remember your Lord is there. His precious words of peace and comfort and blessed assurance are never far away. Even at the thought of death, even at the notion of judgment, we have peace. We are not terrified, we are not shaken, because the one who is coming to judge the living and the dead is the same one who defeated sin and death and hell for us and then sent his disciples to go out and pass on this proof and peace that he has provided. Dear friends, this is the message that your living Savior gives to you to have and to share, "Peace be with you". Amen.