

Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Third Sunday of Easter – Year B

RCL Readings – Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; I John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

ACNA Readings – Acts 4:5-14 or Micah 4:1-5; Psalm 98; I John 1:1-2:2; Luke 24:36-48

Seasonal Introduction. Eastertide, the season of Easter, is always 50 days long. It follows the pattern of the Jewish calendar with 50 days from Passover to *Shavuot* or Pentecost. During these days we remember the last weeks of Jesus on earth after His resurrection. Easter is all about the resurrection! This season's traditional greetings of "He is risen!" and "He is risen indeed!" can bring hope and light to our broken world. "If Christ is risen, nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen—nothing else matters."¹

Common Theme. The resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is not an event relegated only to the past. The risen Lord accompanies us today in a relationship that is real and tangible. Our fellowship with Him and with each other as His disciples, is current and expressed through our lives in His teaching, in our confessions, and in our deeds.

Hebraic Context. Messiah מָשִׁיחַ (*mashiach*, anointed one), from the verb לָמַשַׁח to anoint, is a future redeemer and liberator figure found in Jewish eschatology.² The doctrine developed from Jewish exegesis from the Hebrew Bible. In contrast, the local Mediterranean Greek pantheon did not produce a saviour figure. The New Testament concept of Messiah, *Christós Χριστός* in Greek, bears no resemblance to anything in Greco-Roman religion.³ Messiah is a Jewish concept.⁴

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan

² Messiah wasn't only a future redeeming figure. Many contemporary figures were also called messiah throughout the writing of Scriptures—including prophets, priests, and kings. There was a sense that an anointed one of God was to be treated with great respect because of their position (I Samuel 24:6, David spares King Saul; Acts 23:5, Paul before the high priest) but not in the same way as many cultures spoke of their kings as either the children of the gods or deities themselves. Messiah's mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures were anointed with a job they were to accomplish—salvation and/or redemption through the power and work of God.

³ In Greek mythology there was a goddess of salvation called Soteria Σωτηρία. She was one of many minor deities, or daimona, and did not have much real effect on the world. She had no real power to deliver people and wasn't even to be seen by any but her priests (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.24.3).

⁴ Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and their offshoots include Messianic figure based on the Hebrew Scriptures. Other religions, of course, have persons of great importance either in an eschatological sense or the present. Maitreya was prophesied as a future Buddha who will renew the teachings of dharma. Greek mythology and history includes figures like Perseus (or whoever was king at a given moment in time) who are, in some way, connected to the gods and perform great tasks. But Judaism's messiahs are people appointed by God to save and redeem, not simply to teach or rule.

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During the 1st temple period we see in the Hebrew Scriptures those anointed (*messiahed*) could be prophets, priests, or kings. For example in Leviticus 4:3 the priest who officiated at the altar was called the הַכֹּהֵן הַמָּשִׁיחַ *hacohen hamashiach* the anointed priest. It was also possible for non-Jews to be anointed and designated a messiah, such as Cyrus the Persian king who released the Israelite captives from Babylonian exile. Both served in a position that brought some form of redemption.

The return from Babylon brought Israel into the 2nd Temple period in which the hope for a better future, as described in the Prophets, developed in conjunction with a single eschatological redeemer figure known as 'the Messiah'. At the time of Jesus the debate over who, what, or how the redeemer would come was still very much undecided.⁵ However, it was a Jewish concept and the redemption that the Messiah would bring was seen in that light. In this context Jesus says to the Samaritan woman that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).⁶

Acts 3:12-19. Peter's first two recorded sermons (Acts 2 and Acts 3) both occurred in the Temple precincts in Jerusalem, demonstrating the important role that the Temple continued to play in the lives and faith of the disciples.⁷ In both speeches, Peter emphasized the veracity of

⁵ While the doctrine of a single eschatological and authoritative Messiah was prevalent, the exact form of the doctrine did vary: from the two messiah theory of Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David, to how long the messianic reign would last (from a single generation to 1,000 years), to messiah being a divine character as seen in one of the writings of the Dead Sea Community.

⁶ In all Jewish eschatology, the Jewish people remain as Jewish people. The Gentiles may also embrace the truth of the living God but they likewise remain as Gentiles. The advent of the Messiah would not negate the existence of Jews. Hence the Jewish disciples of Jesus remain as Jews post resurrection—they retain their Jewish heritage, culture, and traditions and do not 'become Gentiles' in their faith in Jesus. In like manner, the priests mentioned in Acts 6:7 were not admonished to leave their position serving in the Temple after they became obedient to the faith.

⁷ Some commentators, like John Calvin, rejected the idea that Jesus' disciples went to the temple because of any remaining attachment to Jewish tradition citing they only went for opportunities to share the gospel. "Furthermore, if any man ask, whether the apostles went up into the temple that they might pray according to the rite of the law, I do not think that that is a thing so likely to be true, as that they might have better opportunity to spread abroad the gospel." (Calvin's commentary on Acts 3) Calvin, like many commentators often divorced Jesus from His Jewish roots after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (indeed, some commentators divorce Jesus from His Jewish roots altogether) as though Jesus died as a Jewish man and resurrected as a Gentile one.

When the Jewish apostles and disciples acted as faithful Jews, there is sometimes an accusation of hypocrisy. It is true that they were sometimes hypocritical, but not because they obeyed and worshipped God in following the Torah. Jesus did not come to abolish the Torah, Jesus taught and guided His disciples to live a life where they loved God with all their heart, soul, and might and their neighbours as themselves. Interestingly, Calvin further notes in his commentary that, "The Lord appointed that the Jews should offer sacrifice morning and evening. By this exercise were they taught to begin and end the day with calling upon the name of God, and with worshipping Him." Yet Calvin somehow divorces the two

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the resurrection through the testimony of eyewitnesses. A crowd had gathered to hear Peter after seeing the miraculous healing of a lame man as the disciples entered the Temple for prayer.⁸ Practically, a miraculous healing had occurred at one of the gates to the temple and everyone knew about it. The formally crippled man, who had been leaping and praising God, now clung to the Apostles. Peter answered the question; from where did the power to heal come? The power came by faith in the risen Messiah Jesus.

The first thing Peter did was to connect Jesus as the servant of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.⁹ Jesus is also called the Holy One, a term used in the Hebrew Bible more than 40 times as a title of God the Father, particularly in Isaiah.¹⁰ This is an obvious divine exaltation of Jesus by Peter, and yet, interestingly, he is not challenged as a blasphemer (the Sadducees seem to be more interested in preventing talk of the resurrection, a doctrine that would overthrow their long-proclaimed teaching). The Holy Spirit and the truth of the resurrection gave the apostle great boldness to proclaim the Good News. The healing of the lame man is then attributed to the Name of Jesus.¹¹

thoughts, that obedience to the Torah and “rite of the law” can (and often does) lead to worship of God. Torah (and tradition that leads to godliness) is not to be rejected. It cannot justify a person (Romans 3:20), but “the law (Torah) is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” (Romans 7:12) As we shall note in I John, practicing righteousness is good—including the early disciples' discipline of going to the Temple to pray and worship, as was their tradition.

⁸ Peter and John saw no problem with continuing their Jewish tradition of praying at certain times or places during the day, including the Temple.

⁹ Peter calls Jesus God's “servant” (v. 13). This may be an early understanding of the “suffering servant” as found in Isaiah 52-53 and spoken of in the developing 2nd Temple theology of the Messiah. The word here for servant *παῖς* *pais* can also be rendered boy or son so different translations will have different versions of this verse. However, the same word (*παῖς*) is used in the LXX translation of Isaiah 52:13 to translate *עבד* (servant). Not only does Peter connect Jesus to the Jewish heritage of the Patriarchs but also to the prophecies.

¹⁰ “The Holy One of Israel”, in particular, is used 25 times throughout the entirety of Isaiah in addition to terms like “The Holy One” or “I am your LORD, Your Holy One, the Creator.”

The continuity of this phrase, found so often in Isaiah but only six times outside of Isaiah (II Kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22, 78:41, 89:18; Jeremiah 50:29, 51:5; [and Ezekiel 39:7, “Holy One in Israel”]) is one argument against the division of Isaiah into Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trito-Isaiah. While there is an obvious difference in Isaiah 1-39 and Isaiah 40-66, the modern literary criticism of a pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic analysis of Isaiah is being challenged more and more by scholars who point to the literary unity of the book as from a single author at a specific time.

¹¹ The disciples of Jesus were to become known in the Jewish community as miraculous healers. As an example, in the Talmud, *Tosefta Chullin* and *Avodah Zarah*, there is a story where Rabbi Ishmael's nephew was bitten by a snake. Though a follower of Jesus named Jacob is available to heal the nephew using Jesus' name, Rabbi Ishmael, aware of the miraculous healing powers ascribed to Jesus' disciples, declines the offer, allowing his nephew to die.

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Peter did not shy away from declaring that the people rejected Jesus and allowed His execution under Pilate. But also that they did so in ignorance. They were not immediately or eternally condemned by Peter or God, in fact, they should be blessed.¹² He did not want them to remain in ignorance though and called for repentance.

Peter started by reminding the people that he was not talking of a new God but the same God of Israel. Faith in Jesus as the risen Messiah would not change who the God of Israel was, He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. What is also the same is the call to repentance.

Repentance has been the clarion call of the New Testament since the days of John the Baptist and long before.¹³ The salvation process begins with repentance, a turning (or returning) to God as a new creation in the Messiah with the result of the forgiveness of sins (described here as the blotting out of sins as though from a book or the pages of a ledger). Peter's boldness was met with repentance as many turned from their ignorance.

Psalm 4.¹⁴ David began this short psalm by appealing to both God and men to hear his request and then he asked a valid question: "How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?"¹⁵ Though God is righteous and His people are godly, it often seems like the world continues to

¹² The blessing was dependent on whether they would listen to Jesus, who Peter declared to be the prophet spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy 18, and turn from wickedness in repentance (as it is for all people). Peter only had to briefly reference Moses, the prophet (Jesus), and the former prophets as he was on the Temple Mount and most of his audience was very familiar with the Scriptures.

¹³ The call for God's people to repent and return to the Lord is found in the ancient prophets. Acts 3:19 used the Greek word ἐπιστρέψατε *epistrephate* (sometimes translated as "converted", particularly in the KJV). But it also had the Hebraic undertone of תשובה *teshuvah* (translated in the LXX as ἐπιστρέψατε in Ezekiel 14:6; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7; II Chronicles 30:6) *Teshuvah* is the Hebrew word for repentance but really means to return. One doesn't return to something new, one returns to something or somewhere they have been before. When Peter called on those gathered in the temple, he called on them to repent and return back to the God of Israel through the risen Messiah.

¹⁴ Psalm 4 is to the conductor, לְמִנְצֵחַ, or chief musician. Exactly who this person is remains unclear. It could be one of the choir leaders (Asaph, Heman, or Jeduthun) or someone else, some even suggest God. It was written for, or by, David.

¹⁵ The lies of this world are not natural. The lies spoken of here are reminiscent of the veil spoken of in Isaiah 25 where the council of the nations blinds the world. (The veil in Hebrew is פְּרוֹקֶת, *peroket*, and is not in Isaiah 25:7, nor is καταπέτασμα, *katapetasma*, in the LXX translation. The LXX roughly translates the unusual Hebrew phrase as the council or purpose that is spread over all nations.) They will one day be done away with but we still sometimes wonder when it will be done away with and why it hasn't been done away with yet.

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walk in darkness.¹⁶ Despite the pressures of the secular world, the psalmist urges self-control—avoiding sin and trusting in God.¹⁷

We do not have to be content with how the world is progressing, nor should we be content with it. But this can bring on the feeling of anger. Anger may not be a sin in and of itself, for even God gets angry, but David did not want to remain in a state of anger and spoke of meditating on God.¹⁸ That meditation led David to acknowledge that God brings gladness and goodness,^{19 20} even in times of distress or when the lies of the world seem to prevail.

Hebraic Perspective. There are two main authors who use the term Children, or sons, of God in the New Testament. Paul wrote to a largely mixed group but in a Roman setting, and so he sometimes used Roman culture in his teaching on the children of God, such as Galatians 3:24-27, while also keeping a Jewish background. The author of John and the Johannine epistles largely stuck to the Hebraic meaning.

The term son of God בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים *Beni HaElohim* is not a common phrase in the Hebrew Scriptures. It most commonly refers to the angels. Genesis 6:1-4 does not speak directly of angels, but the sons of God are traditionally said to be angels.²¹ This interpretation seems to be most likely as Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7, the other uses of בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, all seem to speak of angelic

¹⁶ In the context of the Easter season, when we look at the secular, postmodern world, we might ask, “Has the resurrection had any real effect at all?” I would argue it has. “You have put more joy in my heart...In peace I will both lie down and sleep for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.” But the world, for all its pain and the shroud placed over it, is also better off with the Gospel than it would be without it.

¹⁷ Psalm 4:4 begins with רָגַז *ragaz*, to tremble or quake. It is often used in relation to the physical reaction of a man trembling—either in rage or terror. The Septuagint Greek reads verse 4 as, “Be angry but do not sin.” Which I think is truer to the context of the psalm and the appeal of David.

¹⁸ The meditation referred to in the Scriptures should not be confused with the Eastern practice of meditation, often in the context of Buddhism. Biblical meditation does not involve emptying oneself but rather filling our hearts and thoughts with the Word of God. David says in Psalm 119:97 that he meditates on the Word of God day and night.

¹⁹ David requests “Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!” This should quickly remind us of the Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6:24-27. The Psalmists used this phrase many times: Psalm 31:16, 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19; 89:15; 119:135. The phrase wasn’t just a generic reminder of the blessing of God, it should also remind the hearer of God’s glory, power, salvation, and presence among His people (such as Exodus 13:21-22 and Exodus 33:7-22, 34:29-35)

²⁰ Meditation led to action, specifically righteous sacrifice. This phrase is only found twice in the Davidic Psalms, Psalm 4 and Psalm 51. In line with the rest of the Scriptures, sacrifice is a good thing, but is most useful after meditation on God and repentance.

²¹ 2nd Temple Jewish literature, such as Jubilees and Enoch, clarify that the sons of God referenced here are fallen angels known as the Watchers. Additionally, some fragments on Deuteronomy from the Qumran caves seem to also reference the sons of God as angels.

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beings. Finally, Daniel 3:25 speaks of four in the midst of the fire and uses the Aramaic term, בר-אלהין *Bar-Elohin*, to speak of the fourth.

But it should be no surprise that Nebuchadnezzar thought the fourth was some kind of angelic being or demi-god. In the ancient world many of the pagan rulers applied the title of son of god or son of heaven to themselves, with many considering themselves to be divine beings. In the Greek world, there were many sons of the gods. They were the rulers of their world, either by the calling of the gods or because they themselves were thought to be true demi-gods—the sons or daughters of the gods.²²

So how did John (and Paul) come to use the term “children of God” in a relational sense for ordinary people with an almighty God? The Hebrew Scriptures speak of a close relationship between the people of Israel with God the father. Deuteronomy 32:6-7 uses the term “Father” for the first time to describe God. If God is a father, what is He the father of? The foolish and unwise people of Israel.²³ Hosea also speaks of Israel as being a child whom God loved, once again referencing the Exodus as God took his children out of Egypt. Paul quotes from an earlier passage of Hosea in Romans 9:26, “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” Isaiah 1 and 63 also looks back at the relationship God has with His people as a “Father” even though the people rebelled against Him.

The exact phrase sons of God, בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים, may have referred to angels, but God chose to speak of Israel as His children and He their father. They “are sons of the LORD your God. (בָּנִים אֲתֵם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם)” (Deuteronomy 14:1). The LORD spoke again in Isaiah 1:2, “Children have I reared and brought up”. Pirkei Avot 3.14, states, “Beloved are Israel in that they were called children to the All-Present.”

Unfortunately, there were also sons of someone besides God—the sons of Belial. These are those who are worthless and without a yoke. If people did not take the yoke of God and follow Him they were sons of Belial, of darkness and the devil. But God was always a father, wanting

²² Interestingly, Jesus does not use the term “Son of God” when speaking of Himself during His ministry. He preferred the term “Son of Man.” In the Jewish world of the 1st century, had Jesus walked into a synagogue and declared Himself the son of God everyone in the room would likely have agreed with His statement and thought of themselves in the same way. “The Son of Man”, on the other hand, referred to a specific eschatological character that had authority over all people for all time, given to him by the Ancient of Days. Likewise, in the Greek world, a proclamation of “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54) was not necessarily a statement of faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob nor of God’s messiah, but recognition of someone sent by the gods or related to the gods. (Although Orthodox tradition states that the centurion, named Longinus, who made this proclamation did eventually come to true faith.)

²³ This is a very different view from the Egyptian and Babylonian idea, and later Greek and Roman, that the rulers (and certainly not the common citizens) are either incredibly wise or powerful because of their demigod status.

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to save and live with His children—the foolish and unwise, the sinful but repentant who returned to their Father.

I John 3:1-7. In John's Gospel and in John's Epistles, "children of God" not only refers to Israel but all believers in the risen Messiah. John 11 closely connects the resurrection with the making of children of God, even those beyond the nation [of Israel]. Jesus described Himself as *the* resurrection in John 11. The resurrection is more than an event, it is a person and we have a relationship with that person—namely Jesus of Nazareth. Because of that relationship, we too have the honour to be called children of God.

John raises an interesting question: Can the children of God keep on sinning? I doubt John is suggesting by this question that people can live in a state of perpetual sinlessness, considering his earlier statement in 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." John defines sin as lawlessness, that is being in a position or state of complete rejection or disregard for the law of God. The antichrist is described as the 'man of lawlessness', the man who operates without regard to God's law.²⁴ In contrast, Jesus was fully obedient to the Father so that "in Him is no sin" and His work was efficacious to "take away our sins".

If sins are taken away can the children of God keep on sinning? God as a Father to Israel was always a Father despite their rebellion.²⁵ Of course, He constantly asked them to repent (return to Him) just as I John also strongly encourages. However, John urged us to abide with Him (the sinless one, Jesus) as whoever does so does not sin.²⁶ This is consistent with all other Scriptures which tell us that a habitual life of sin is inconsistent with being obedient to the living God. John warns against a deceptive lie that subtly suggests you can be righteous before God without obvious evidence of righteous living. One of the paradoxical aspects of the Christian life is the constant tension between human effort to save themselves and God's divine generosity and the gift of salvation.

John explained clearly that "he who practices righteousness is righteous". Dallas Willard reminds us in his book *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus Essential Teachings on Discipleship* that "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace, you know, does not just have to do with forgiveness of sins alone."

²⁴ Christians who continue to refer to themselves as those who are not 'under the law' should be careful where this actually places them. If we find ourselves in a position where we are not under God's law or Christ's law then we verge on lawlessness. Those without a yoke do still have a master, but it is the Enemy.

²⁵ See Hebraic Perspective.

²⁶ The Greek tense is suggestive of a continual lifestyle of abiding or continuing not to depart from the teachings of Jesus.

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Maintaining a relationship with the Sinless One involves applying His teaching and instructions in our lives, with the result of avoiding the state of lawlessness.

Luke 24:36b-48. Luke's Gospel, like John's, places the first resurrection appearances of Jesus with his disciples in Jerusalem, while Matthew focuses on the Galilee appearances. The exact sequence of events is not as important as the testimonial proof itself.²⁷ The Gospels all bear witness that the appearances of the risen Jesus are many and numerous. In this passage the resurrection is confirmed, not only by appearance, but through physical contact and consumption of food. The mystery of Jesus' incarnation from God to Man continued even in His resurrection (even as He remained God, proved by His authority and power over death).

Initially the disciples were shocked and fearful, presuming that a spirit stood before them in the guise of their former master. Jesus sought to calm them and assured them He was real through the medium of touch.²⁸ Truly the body that went into the tomb was the same body that came out of the tomb. Jesus confirmed that He was not a spirit but had 'flesh and bone'. He went into the tomb as a Jewish man and returned, not as a Gentile nor spiritual being only, but as the Lion of Judah (Rev 5:5). Jesus could speak. He could eat. He could touch. Jesus' incarnation truly is a mystery but a glorious one.

Following the resurrection, Jesus continued to teach his disciples for 40 days before the ascension (Acts 1:3). While the Jewish biblical canon had not yet been closed, we can note in Luke 24:44 that three distinct sections had been defined by the late Second Temple period. They were the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Jesus proceeded to teach about Himself from all known Hebrew Scripture. Luke describes how "He opened their minds" (v. 45) giving them understanding of redemptive history, and reminded them they were witnesses of these things.

ACNA Readings

Acts 4:5-14. Following a miracle on the steps of the Temple, the apostles were arrested and Luke narrates the court scene where the apostles Peter and John were brought before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a legislative and judicial assembly of either 23, called the small

²⁷ The Gospels do not state that they are chronological nor all-inclusive concerning the life of Jesus, to the contrary, they contain only a small portion of what Jesus did and taught.

²⁸ Using all the senses in worship of God and in walking out our faith was important for the Jewish people. David declares in Psalm 34:8 "taste and see that the LORD is good." Too often, perhaps, we focus only on hearing or reading the word of God and too little on the thanksgiving, joy, or labour that comes with taste, touch or other everyday senses and activities we should also participate with to walk out our faith. But the senses are also important in grounding us in reality—including the reality that God created a beautiful world and, in this case, that He truly had power over death itself as He was raised from the dead.

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Sanhedrin, or 71 people known as the great Sanhedrin. During the 2nd Temple period the great Sanhedrin met in the Temple courts at a place called the Court of Hewn Stone.²⁹ Peter and John appeared before what appears to be the great Sanhedrin, made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees, priests and scribes, the High Priest and his entourage.³⁰ This was the same judicial body that condemned Jesus, sending Him to the Roman governor Pilate for execution.

The inquiry began with the question “By what power or by what name did you do this?” In the ancient world names held power, hence the double reference in the question.³¹ In Jewish tradition, people could use or misuse the name of God to perform miracles. In response to the question Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit”.³² God gave Peter the power to answer that very question.

The proof was seen and known by all on the Temple, the crippled man could leap. And so Peter did not have to prove that there was power, instead he rhetorically connected salvation and healing to the name of Jesus even as the Sanhedrin had connected the healing to a power or a name. Peter did not only answer the question—the crippled man was healed by Jesus Christ of Nazareth³³—he also returned to the reality of the resurrection. This topic would be quite divisive in the Sanhedrin.³⁴

²⁹ Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 88b

³⁰ Peter and John were originally arrested because the Sadducees, who had long taught that there was no such thing as a present resurrection of the body, could not have the disciples of Jesus proclaiming that they were eyewitnesses to a physical, present resurrection. However the Sanhedrin was not only Sadducean but also included Pharisees (who both believed and taught the resurrection of the dead). And so when Peter and John were brought to trial a completely separate accusation had to be brought against them.

³¹ Men could not do miracles on their own, they needed the authority of greater powers. This authority was not always assumed to be from God. In Luke 11:15 Jesus was accused of casting out demons by Beelzebul.

³² Peter had already received the Holy Spirit in John 20 when Jesus breathed on His disciples. Jesus later instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem (Acts 1) to receive power from the Holy Spirit. While we all have the Holy Spirit, we can also be filled with the Holy Spirit when the situation and occasion demand. It is not a one time event but something that the Lord does continually in our lives and ministry.

³³ Christ is used here not as a surname but as the answer to the question. Jesus was a very common name in the 2nd Temple period as the Jewish people looked to great heroes in their history: Matthew, Judah, Simon, Eleazar (Lazarus), John, and Jonathan were incredibly common, but Joshua (Jesus) may have been one of the most common. There was only one eschatological Messiah (Christ) that the Jewish people looked forward to—one who would have great power and authority from God.

³⁴ Paul uses this same defense in Acts 23:6-10. For those who do not believe in the supernatural or miraculous, the resurrection must be absurd and even vile as it offers hope but also declares a power greater than our own.

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The Temple leadership are amazed at the rhetorical skill of the apostles, assuming them to be ignorant fisherman and not acquainted with public discourse. The Sanhedrin were unable to offer rebuttal to the claims of the apostles due to the presence of the healed man in front of them. The unnamed man who was once completely lame, now stood completely healed as an eyewitness testament to the veracity of the healing in the name of Jesus. The question then was: if the healing was true in the name of Jesus, which it was (the proof stood before their eyes) then what of salvation in the name of Jesus?

Micah 4:1-5. The first three verses of Micah 4 are almost verbatim repetition of the words in Isaiah 2:2-4. The prophets Micah and Isaiah were contemporaries, and their message to the people of Judah has some obvious overlap. Both prophets emphasized that God will teach us His ways and that the ways of God will bring peace to a troubled world. Both Micah and Isaiah also declare this to occur in the prophetic future called the “last days”.³⁵

Jerusalem will take a central role as the city of God in the world. Where once Jerusalem was a burden and a cup of trembling to the nations, in the future those nations will come to Jerusalem for wisdom and teaching from the Lord. The response to the instructions of the Lord is that we will “walk in them,” that is, we will enact God’s teaching in our lives and actions.³⁶ It is by walking in the name of the LORD that peace can come to the nations consumed by violence and war. At the same time, God will judge. Micah and Isaiah both make use of a familiar phrase, “and they shall beat their swords into plowshares” to describe how the kingship of God and His judgments bring peace.

While the passage is prophetic and speaks of the future messianic age, faith can and should be put into action now and not merely be a hoped for future. We don’t simply wait for peace to come, instead we try and effect peace in our communities now. The teaching from Jesus “blessed are the peacemakers” would have no meaning if it was something only the Lord would do in the future.

Psalm 98. This psalm demonstrates the universal nature of salvation that we commonly find in the book of Psalms. The Lord’s righteousness and salvation are made known to all the nations of the world. God’s salvation for all nations does not diminish His steadfast love and the faithfulness God shows to His people Israel. It is a statement that acknowledges that the

³⁵ The last days was a common phrase used of an eschatological period in the future, usually connected to the Messiah.

³⁶ The verb ‘to walk’ in Hebrew is ללכת *l’lechet*. The walk of faith (or the way to walk out your faith) is called הלכה *halacha*, being derived from the verb to walk. In the Hebraic mind *halacha* is the practical application of the commandments of the Lord—how we do our faith. Without this practical application, the faith is dead and useless.

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kingship of God is over all the earth.³⁷ In fact, verse 3 declares that God has “remembered His mercy and faithfulness to the house of Israel” through the salvation of God being seen by “all the ends of the earth”.

God's promises to Israel through the Abrahamic covenant doesn't only affect Israel, though Israel are Abraham's descendants, through these same descendants all the world will be blessed. If the good news of God does not go out to the Gentiles, God's promises to Israel aren't true. As part of the future redemption the psalm declares that the Lord “will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.” If God were restricted to being the Lord of only Israel then why would He be bothering to expand His rule to non-Israelites? Interestingly, this psalm was prayed by Jewish people in the Temple in Jerusalem. But, particularly at the end of the 2nd Temple period, many Jews and Gentiles were together on the Temple as the promise to Abraham was being fulfilled—both through them and through the Messiah.

I John 1:1-2:2. Many of the senses were described as bearing witness to both the reality and the physical nature of the risen Lord. Many people saw the risen Lord, becoming an eyewitness. But people also smelled the frying fish and bread Jesus had prepared and ate with the risen Lord. They physically interacted with Jesus as they were invited to touch the wounds of Jesus' crucifixion. And they heard Jesus declare “peace” to those who had previously betrayed Him.³⁸

I John starts with, “That which was from the beginning”. The readers of the epistle may have only recently heard about this thing which was from the beginning but it was not recent. Exactly which ‘beginning’ is being referred to by the Epistle of John is vague. However, it is very reminiscent of the Gospel of John which begins with, “In the beginning”. The author states that they too were an eyewitness to the resurrected Messiah, described as the word (*logos*) of life.³⁹

The resurrection is more than a theological construct. It is a historical fact. And eternal life is more than a theological construct. It is a person. The Messiah was called ζῶην τὴν αἰώνιον *zoen ten aiōnion* the eternal life, having preexisted with the Father before becoming man to “fellowship with us”. The nature of eternal life is not relegated to a future hope but is a present reality. Jesus is, and offers, eternal life right now. John wrote that the purpose of declaring the

³⁷ This theological truth is preserved in the way Jewish blessings begin “*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam*” (Blessed are you the Lord our God king of the universe). In this very common blessing it is affirmed that God is not simply the king of Israel but king over everything!

³⁸ Using all the senses in worship of God and in walking out our faith was important for the Jewish people. David declares in Psalm 34:8 “taste and see that the LORD is good.” Too often, perhaps, we focus only on hearing or reading the word of God and too little on the thanksgiving, joy, or labour that comes with taste, touch or other everyday senses and activities we should also participate with to walk out our faith.

³⁹ Again the wording of *logos* is similar to the opening of the Gospel of John lending some support to the notion that John is referring to the beginning of time and creation—and, specifically, its creator. This life was manifest to many eyewitnesses, as testified also in John 21:1, 14.

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things we⁴⁰ have seen and heard is for fellowship.⁴¹ Unbelievably, the fellowship relationship is extended even for us to be with the Father and the Son. Except that is what God always desired—to be with His people.⁴² The result of this fellowship is pure joy.

But fellowship with God, like faith, is walked out in the light. In his epistle, John returned to the treatise of John 1 (and Genesis 1)—God (and the *Logos*) is light and has no darkness! But he then makes a connection between the desire for fellowship with one another and with God to obedience and the walk of faith—described as a pattern of life by walking in light (or darkness in disobedience). Faith is an action and walking in the light is being obedient to the Lord.

John 3:21 says that those who do the truth (not only believe the truth) come to the light. Walking in darkness is a lifestyle of disobedience, not simply a moment of falling into sin. John states that we all sin, even those who are walking in the light. The truth is something that is put into practice and not only accepted as belief or fact. We are urged to confess those sins, having the assurance and knowing that God is faithful to forgive.⁴³

John notes the connection between fellowship, walking in the light, practicing the truth (being obedient to the Lord, including acknowledging and confessing our sins) and the redemptive blood of Jesus, who is our advocate in heaven. Walking in the light wasn't to be a terrible burden, it should be an encouragement as we are able to fellowship with a faithful and forgiving God.

⁴⁰ The author of John and the Epistles of John is anonymous and unknown. Lazarus and John are the most common names associated with the works.

⁴¹ The Greek word for fellowship is κοινωμία *koinonia* which is derived from the root word κοινωμός *koinonos*, which literally means partner or sharer, in the sense of something mutually shared by everyone. Romans 15:26-27 is a prime example of fellowship. The Greeks were happy to share what they had, money, as the Jewish people in Jerusalem had shared with them the spiritual blessings.

⁴² Exodus 25:8, 29:45; Leviticus 26:12 (and II Corinthians 6:16) and, as at the beginning (Genesis 3:8) so to at the end (Revelation 21:3)

⁴³ Confession is not something invented by Christianity or the Catholic church, it has a long history in the Hebrew Bible and Judaism.