

Building our Faith The Sign of the Resurrection #5

Intro: In our "Building Our Faith" series this year I tried to show that our faith in the Bible as the word of God and in Jesus as the Son of God is built on solid irrefutable evidence. It is verified by the amazing unity of the Scriptures and its fulfilled prophecies. It is verified by the evidence of miraculous signs that reveal the presence and work of God.

The ultimate sign and proof of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus. In our lessons on the resurrection we have explored the facts the gospel writers give us concerning the death, burial, and the circumstances at the tomb of Jesus on the first day of the week. And now we are looking at the capstone of the proof of the resurrection--the witnesses who saw Jesus after His crucifixion. In our last lesson we looked at three remarkable witnesses of the resurrection:

Mary Magdalene at the tomb

To the women near the tomb

To Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus

Now let's consider three more witnesses of the resurrection.

The appearance to Simon Peter

The details of the appearance

Luke records this appearance indirectly by describing the return of the two disciples to whom Jesus had appeared on the road to Emmaus.

After having seen the Lord in the breaking of the bread, Luke reports: *And they arose that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord has really risen, and has appeared to Simon." (Lk. 24:33-34)*

Before they could give their own report of the risen Lord, the people gathered testify to them that Peter had also seen the Lord.

Wouldn't you have liked to know what was said at that meeting?

How would Jesus have responded to Peter in view of his denial as well as his unwillingness to believe the women who had reported the empty tomb?

The apostle Paul confirmed this appearance to Peter in 1 Corinthians 15 as he enumerates the witnesses of the resurrection. In 1 Cor. 15:5 he wrote:

He appeared to Cephas. (1 Cor. 15:5)

Cephas is the Aramaic name that means a "stone" just as Peter (Petros) is the Greek name that means a stone. It is the nickname Jesus gave Simon when He first met him (Jn. 1:42).

The two men refer to Peter by his Hebrew name "Simon."

Observations about the appearance

Though we know nothing more about Jesus' appearance to Peter, we can certainly say that Peter would have had no reason to fabricate such a report.

Nor would Paul, who had occasion to meet Peter, have indicated an appearance to him if Peter had not testified of it.

Peter's changed behavior after the death of Jesus (his leadership, his boldness on Pentecost and before the Jerusalem authorities strongly corroborate the gospel claim that he was a personal witness of the resurrection.).

The appearance to ten of the apostles on the first day of the week

Details of the appearance

On the evening of the first day, after having appeared to these we've already mentioned, Jesus appeared to ten of his apostles (Judas and Thomas were absent).

*When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and *said to them, “^bPeace be with you.” And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus therefore said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and *said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” (Jn. 20:19-23)*

Luke likewise gives an account of this appearance:

And while they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst. But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” [And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.] And while they still “could not believe it for joy and were marveling, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them. (Lk. 24:36-42)

Observations about the appearance

The evidential value of this account is truly impressive. First note that the disciples, though having already received testimony that Jesus was alive, continued to act in fear and skepticism.

When Jesus appears in the room with them, their first reaction is to be frightened because they thought they were seeing a spirit. That might have been encouraged by Jesus' sudden appearance in the room while the door was locked.

But Jesus assured them by giving them tangible evidence of His existence by showing them the wounds of His crucifixion.

This would make it clear to them that He was not someone else or merely the spirit of someone who looked like Jesus. But in addition Jesus gave them tangible evidence of his real existence in a body by doing what only a person in physical form can do--eat something. No physical object can be transferred into the realm of the imagination. No fish could be transferred into a dream or vision. When Jesus ate the fish in front of them, he gave them clear proof of the reality of His physical presence with them.

In the aftermath of this appearance and these assurances, they in turn are sure that Jesus has appeared to them.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called "Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" (Jn. 20:24-25)

The imperfect verb "were saying" would suggest repeated action.

Clearly we have an impressive array of people who saw Jesus on the third day after His death. But would there be solid proof that this was no mere anomaly? Would testimony continue beyond this one day? And the answer is "yes."

The appearance of Jesus to eleven apostles eight days later

Details of the appearance

John records a second appearance of Jesus to the apostles eight days later, on the first day of the week following resurrection day.:

*And after eight days again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, "Peace be with you." Then He *said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand, and put it into My side; and be not unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (Jn. 20:26-29)*

Observations about the appearance

The testimony of the resurrection seems to always be presented against a background of unbelief and skepticism. Again and again we are able to see that those who said they saw Jesus after his death were not predisposed to do so. In fact, the opposite was the case, especially here with Thomas. The assurances of his fellow-apostles that they had seen the Lord were not enough for them.

But he said to them, "Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (Jn. 20:25)

When Jesus shows awareness of what Thomas had said in His absence, he knows that it is Jesus. Jesus offers him the opportunity to touch the places that would have proved that Jesus was alive; but Thomas seems already convinced by Jesus' appearance and what He has said.

Again there is now no doubt: "My Lord and my God!" (Jn. 20:28)

Conclusion: So now we have seen that over a span of two weeks Jesus gave proof of His resurrection by appearing to Mary Magdalene, the women, the two on the road to Emmaus, Peter, to ten apostles, and then to eleven a week later. But this is not the full evidence of the resurrection; yet is it not enough to know with certainty that Jesus is alive?

Have you believed the testimony of the resurrection? maybe this is a good time to go back to Jesus' words to Thomas: *Jesus *said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."* (Jn. 20:29)

We do not have to have a personal manifestation of Jesus to us to believe that He is the living Lord. The testimony of those who saw Him is sufficient to establish the truth. and Jesus pronounces a blessing upon those who can accept in faith the evidence God has given us. Will you receive that blessing?

This is the word of faith Paul preached:

that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.
(Romans 10:9-10)

Have you confessed Jesus as Lord and been baptized in His name?