

AFTER THE RESURRECTION WHAT?

by

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CHAPTER THREE

INFALLIBLE PROOFS

GOD'S GUARANTEE OF FINAL TRIUMPH

THE ARRAY of testimony gathering about the resurrection of Jesus Christ should overwhelm any sincere soul with the assurance that Christ is risen from the dead. I wish to call into court a long line of reliable witnesses and cross-examine them that the world may view the facts and face the issues of such testimony.

Luke gives his testimony in the introductory words of the two great books which he wrote, his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. In chapter one of his Gospel, verses one to four, he gives a convincing record: **“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.”**

Notice what he says. He says: **“These things are most surely believed among us”; “They were delivered unto us by eyewitnesses”; “I have had perfect understanding of all things from the very first”; “That you may know of a certainty all those things wherein thou hast been instructed.”**

And then in his introductory words of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter one, verses one to three, he says: **“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”**

Here is the dependable testimony of a gentile layman, a physician, a secretary, a sane observer of men.

WHO'S WHO?

Let's see who's who in resurrection testimony.

- There are the immortal Marys, so effective in the life of Christ, good women, loved and believed in for generations of an enlightened civilization.
- There is Peter, one of the world's greatest preachers;
- James, pastor of a great early church.
- There are two intelligent men with unimpeachable characters who saw Him, walked with Him, ate with Him.
- There are ten disciples, some of them named, in a closed room with firsthand, eyewitness testimony.
- There are eleven men, grown, with eyes and minds and experiences not given to hallucinations.
- There are seven disciples, most of them named, out on the seashore—no chance for deception.
- There are five hundred people on the mountain top, whom Paul says saw and heard Him.
- There are several other disciples on another mountain in Judea. They saw Him, heard Him, watched Him ascend into heaven.
- Some heavenly men or angels, two at the tomb and two at His ascension, saw Him. This is the witness of heavenly personalities.
- There is Stephen, who testified that he saw Christ standing at the right hand of God;
- There are two other trustworthy preachers of the gospel whose credibility has never been successfully attacked—Paul and John—who saw Him years after.

The value of testimony in all courts of law depends on the credibility and character of the witnesses. If you examine the records of these witnesses, you will find that they were all good people. Their names have been household words in all civilized lands for the passing centuries. If you cross-examine them, you will find that they were eyewitnesses. They had no hearsay testimony.

If we cannot believe these testimonies, is there any reliable testimony in any realm of history?

We reflect on our own sense of historical justification and shame our own credulity if we deny these facts. The historicity and validity of Christ's resurrection are at stake; the most vital, far-reaching facts in all the centuries are tested. If Christ did not rise from the dead, all professed Christians in all these centuries and all the coming years ahead are without hope of eternal life. The awful silence of the grave, the tragedy of all centuries, will be unbroken forever and ever and heaven is a spiritual mirage and all truth is a barren lie if Christ did not rise from the tomb.

THEIR TESTIMONY

Let's call these eyewitnesses into court.

Mary Magdalene. She was a convert of the rich, suburban district of Capernaum—Magdala, probably a well-to-do maiden of the refined strata of society. It is not a necessary conclusion that she was a low character because Christ cast seven devils out of her.

It took a legion of devils, from two to six thousand, to make a man an outcast. There is no reflection on Mary, certainly not after she became a follower of Jesus Christ. She testifies that she saw Jesus, she saw the empty tomb, talked to Jesus, He spoke to her, she recognized His voice, He dried her tears, she went and told the disciples. John, Matthew, Luke and Mark confirmed the testimony of this good woman.

Then the other women—Mary Magdalene was with them, Mary the mother of James, Salome, and some other women. Luke, Matthew and Mark confirmed the testimony of these women. They saw the empty tomb, heard what the angels said about His being risen, and recognized Him after He had come out of the tomb.

Put Peter on the stand. Luke and the Apostle Paul testified that Simon Peter saw the Saviour after His resurrection. Nothing is said as to what conversation passed between them nor where the meeting occurred, nor anything about the meeting. Peter certainly would know the Saviour and could not have been mistaken.

The next witnesses are the two disciples on the Emmaus road. Luke and Mark confirm the record of this interview. One of the men was Cleopas. We do not know who the other was. Emmaus was a village six or eight miles from Jerusalem. These disciples walked with Him and ate with Him and did not recognize Him at first. This is one of the longest visits the Saviour made in His after-resurrection appearances. It has all the marks of genuineness and naturalness. It is one of the most beautiful and revealing of all the appearances. He talked, He walked, He ate, He interpreted the Scriptures, and gave these disciples a burning heart.

Put a large group on the witness stand—ten apostles without Thomas, and maybe other of the disciples, in a room, secluded room, with closed doors. Mark and Luke and John make the record and confirm this appearance. At this meeting one of the strangest of miracles occurred. He entered the room with closed doors. Material things offered no resistance to His resurrection body. He spoke to them. He delivered a remarkable message: “**Peace**” and “**I send you.**” He gave them an inside victory and challenged them with a world program, wide missionary efforts. This group recognized Him and believed Him.

Another group of eleven or more disciples, with doubting Thomas present. John tells us of this story. There is no evidence that Thomas had been in any of the other groups before this to whom Christ appeared. Where he was or what he was doing we do not know, except his refusal to believe that Christ had risen except he put his hands in the crucifixion wounds. His skepticism of the resurrection was evident.

All we are told of this appearance is of the convincing proof to Thomas that Christ was alive. Christ readily submitted to the pragmatic test demanded by the doubting Thomas. He must have been of a doubting, analytical mind. Christ had not gotten over to him even the expectancy of the resurrection. When his fingers entered the nail holes and spear holes in the wounded body of our Saviour, Thomas was overcome and said, “**My Lord and my God!**” Thomas was the slowest in expectancy and trust, but was as thoroughly convinced as any. Crucifixion’s scars convinced him. Doubt added its testimony to the reality of the resurrection triumph.

Christ's withering, rebuking words should fall heavily and sadly on all "doubting Thomases" from that time until now: "**Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.**"

Skeptics inside and outside of Christianity are not even willing to believe that Thomas believed. These unconvinced skeptics will someday see Him whom they have pierced. John tells us of the first meeting of this group, Thomas being absent. Mark and Luke join John in that record, but only John tells us of Thomas' confession of Christ's resurrection.

The other recorders must have been ashamed of Thomas. Judas the betrayer and Peter the denier and Thomas the doubter are sad representatives of these early disciples. They could have done better. What would be your and my classification if an inspired record were made of us in our day?

I have more sense of commiseration for Thomas than I have for the modernistic skeptics in this day of nineteen hundred years of infallible proofs of Christ's resurrection. I fear that many of them, with the full light of sacred history and gospel triumphs falling on their trained heads, should be put in the Judas classification of betrayers instead of Peter's and Thomas' classifications of deniers and doubters.

We now change the scene from Jerusalem and Judea to Galilee, many, many miles away. John tells of this story.

Peter led six others of the disciples on a fishing trip. They were discouraged and backslidden. Peter led them in a backtrack movement. He quit fishing for men and tried out his old job of fishing for fish. Peter's behavior in the last few days or more had been bad. He cried; he lied; he denied. He not only lost his sword, but lost his courage.

A little Jewish lass made him lie, and a rooster crowing at the time of his denial established a memorial to his cowardice. So he told the others, "**I go afishing,**" and they said, "**We go with you.**"

They immediately caught nothing. People who run from God and the spiritual never catch anything worthwhile. This group appearance of Christ is the longest and most interesting in some respects of all the appearances. It is a wonderfully revealing appearance. The great truths and lessons of this visit are discussed at length in another chapter.

Here another miracle (if not two) was performed.

Here the most puncturing question Christ ever put to the consciences of the disciples and to ours is given: "**Lovest thou me more than these?**" Love's debtorship to service has here left us in a pointed interrogation. These disciples were wide awake. They saw the Saviour.

At first they did not recognize Him. Later then they did recognize Him. They ate the fish and bread and warmed by the fire He had provided. They talked with Him close up. You must make them out bold, bald liars or else believe their story.

The witness of a multitude on a Galilean mountain far distant from Jerusalem is brought thundering down to the consciences of a doubting world. Mark, Matthew and Paul guarantee the genuineness of this story. Three unimpeachable records bear witness to its genuineness. Matthew says the eleven disciples were there. Mark does not tell the number unless Mark 16:14 refers to it, and it probably does not.

Paul tells us there were over five hundred present, many of whom were then living.

Christ first appeared to one, and next to the last time He appeared to five hundred. They were all His disciples, because no unsaved eyes ever saw Him after His resurrection, unless it be the eye of the unsaved Paul of Tarsus, and He opened that eye. This was before the Pentecost. Here He delivered His great commission, found in Matthew 28:18-20, not to one hundred twenty only but to all the disciples who followed Him there, whether members of His first church or not.

His commission is a church obligation, but it is also a personal, individual obligation, and is also a kingdom matter, a world-wide debtorship. This appearance was a multi-magna meeting—five hundred people looking on Him, hearing His eternally meaningful words in which he was enfolding all His towering authority, all His people, all the world, all His commandments, for all eyes and all climes.

It also commandeered all His presence and power for all ages to come. This meeting is discussed in another chapter. Here is a climax of testimony to the reality of Christ's resurrection. One little, frightened woman might be mistaken; one impetuous disciple like Peter, who had denied Him, might be overawed by a mystic vision; two people with blinded eyes might walk six miles with a spirit and be mistaken, but when you add to these other witnesses five hundred people in the daylight, on top of a mountain, you cannot easily imagine all of them to be liars or deceived visionaries.

Not to believe this accumulated testimony is to reveal in one's self a dangerous incredulity in historical testimony. Paul says, "**I saw him**" and I tell the world five hundred other people saw Him. To make Paul a deceiver is to reveal yourself blind and destroy all historical values.

James comes on the witness stand (I Corinthians 15:7). Paul says Christ appeared to James. When and where and to what effect nobody knows. Paul is a true historian. James must have told Paul about this visit, but no further record appears. But James pastored a church whose foundation was built on Christ's resurrection.

The final pre-ascension appearance occurred as far away as Bethany.

In his Gospel (24:50) Luke says He led them out as far as Bethany, and in Acts (1:12) he says the disciples returned from the Mount of Olives, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

Mark says: "**So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.**"

Here in this last appearance before His ascension He gave the last commission, reinforcing all others, and promised the Holy Spirit's power for witnessing. The two men in white told them: **"This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."**

Luke tells us that Christ told them to tarry in Jerusalem until enduement came. He then led them out as far as Bethany and lifted up His hands and blessed them, and He was carried up into heaven. They watched Him, worshiped Him, and returned to an upper room in Jerusalem with great joy, and continued in the temple praising God.

This completes the testimony of this company of pre-ascension eyewitnesses to the fact that **"Christ has risen indeed."** Who can be fair and unbiased or unprejudiced and gainsay or deny this accumulation of eye-witness evidence? These are not all the infallible proofs. There follows in the next chapter a further accumulation of convincing, direct and circumstantial testimony.

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