

**Were the Apostles Credible Eyewitnesses of Christ's Resurrection?
Easter 2008**

Jesus said that He was the Son of God and that He had been sent by His Father into this world to die for our sin in order that through His death He might open a door to heaven through which any person, if they so chose, might enter and be saved. This is what Jesus said.

But why should we believe Him? There are many different answers that could be given to this question but let me give you what I believe is the best answer, "Christ's resurrection!"

Christ's resurrection, I believe, is the bedrock upon which our faith in the gospel of Christ is built. This is why the resurrection became so central to the proclamation of the gospel in the early church.

If the apostles could convince people that Christ had in fact been raised from the dead then of course those people would be far more inclined to believe in Christ and what He had said about His person and work. And this is exactly what happened!

The apostles, bearing witness to their personal encounters with a risen resurrected Lord, found multitudes of people who were willing on the basis of that proclamation to embrace Christ as their Lord and Savior. These multitudes of people obviously believed that the testimony of apostles, concerning the resurrection of Christ, was credible. But why would they believe the apostles? They obviously concluded that the testimony of the apostles was in fact credible.

So let me ask you this question. What constitutes the legal description of a credible witness? There are four different criteria that are used in a court of law to determine whether or not a witness should be considered credible. And what are those four criteria?

Let me read those four criteria for you from "The Lectric Law Library's Lexicon" and this is what it says.

**A credible witness is one who is competent to give evidence,
and is worthy of belief. In deciding the credibility of a**

witness, it is always pertinent to consider **1. Whether he is capable of knowing the thing thoroughly about which He testifies. 2. Whether he was actually present at the transaction. 3. Whether he paid sufficient attention to qualify himself to be a reporter of it; and 4. Whether he honestly relates the affair fully as he knows it, without any purpose or desire to deceive or suppress or add to the truth.**

So the question that we will seek to answer this morning is did the apostles of Christ, in bearing witness to the resurrection, comply with the four legal criteria necessary in order to establish them as credible witnesses? And I believe that the answer to this question is yes!

So now let us consider those criteria and see how they apply to the apostles and their testimony that Christ had in fact risen. So what would be the first one? The first one would be this:

Were the apostles capable of knowing thoroughly the things about which they testified in respect to the resurrection? In other words, if the apostles were going to testify that they saw something, then of course those listening to their testimony must be convinced that the apostles were not blind. If the apostles were going to testify that they heard something, then of course those listening to their testimony must be convinced that the apostles were not deaf.

So the question that is once again before is this: Were the apostles capable of knowing thoroughly the things about which they testified in respect to the resurrection? Did they have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hands to touch?

Let me now read for you the words of the Apostle John in **1 John 1:1-3**. **“What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life— (2) and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us— (3) what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.”**

Based on the words of John, were the apostles capable of knowing thoroughly the things about which they testified in respect to the resurrection? Did they have eyes to see, ears to hear and hands to touch? And the answer is yes! Therefore, based on the testimony of the apostles and the willingness of others to receive their testimony, we would have to conclude that the apostles were capable of knowing the things about which they testified (1 John 1:1-3). So now let us consider the next legal criteria that must be considered in determining whether or not the apostles were credible witnesses in respect to their declaration that Christ had risen. So what is that next criteria? The next legal criteria would be this:

Were the apostles actually present to see what they said they saw and to hear what they said they heard? It would certainly appear so.

In order to establish this point, let me quickly list for you the various appearances of Christ subsequent to His resurrection that are recorded for us in the Scriptures. There was Christ's appearance to Mary Magdalene recorded for us in **Mark 16:9** and **John 20:14**. There was Christ's appearance to the women returning from the tomb in **Matthew 28:9-10** and then to Peter on that same day in **Luke 24:34**. There was the appearance then to the Emmaus' disciples in **Luke 24:36-43**, and then to the apostles with Thomas absent in **Luke 24:36-43** and **John 20:19-24**, and then again to the apostles with Thomas present in **John 20:26-29**, and then to the seven by the Lake of Tiberias in **John 21:1-23**, and then to a multitude of 500-plus believers on a Galilean mountain according to **1 Corinthians 15:6**, and then to James according to **1 Corinthians 15:7**, and then to the eleven, once again and probably with a number of others as well, at His ascension.

Now why am I mentioning this to you? I am mentioning these many different accounts so that we might be able to appreciate why so many people would accept the fact that the apostles were actually present at the events that they said they witnessed. The reason is quite simple; that reality was confirmed.

What the apostles said about being present at various post-resurrection appearances of Christ not only was confirmed through their own mutual testimony, but by the testimony of others.

Let me read for you a quote from Bernard Ramm.

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Note that when the Disciples of Jesus proclaimed the resurrection, they did so as eyewitnesses and they did so while people were still alive who had had contact with the events they spoke of. In 56 A.D. Paul wrote that over 500 people had seen the risen Jesus and that most of them were still alive (I Corinthians 15:6). It passes the bounds of credibility that the early Christians could have manufactured such a tale and then preached it among those who might easily have refuted it ...

So were the apostles actually present to see what they said they saw and to hear what they said they heard? Certainly it would appear so since if they were not actually present it would have required them to have totally fabricated the stories that they declared to be true as well being able to find many others who were willing to support them in that fabrication. In my mind the likelihood of having so many people fabricating a story and then needing so many other people to support that fabrication seems rather absurd to me.

But just because someone might be present at a particular place at a particular time and would be able to testify to what they saw and what they heard does not mean that they would necessarily be able to accurately testify to what they saw and heard, which leads us to the next legal criteria that we must consider when thinking about the testimony of the apostles in respect to their declaration that Christ had risen. So what is that next criteria? The next legal criteria in determining whether or not the apostles' declaration that Christ had risen was credible would be this:

Were the apostles of Christ paying sufficient attention during their post-resurrection contacts with Christ to qualify them as competent reporters of those contacts? In other words, could the disciples have been mistaken about what they said they saw and what they said they heard in respect to Christ and His post-resurrection appearances?

Now of course I know that we can all appreciate the possibility that there will be times when we think we may have seen something or heard something only later to find out that we were mistaken, but there is no way

that the disciples could possibly have been mistaken about what they reported about Christ.

I believe that all we have to do in order to establish this as a fact is to consider what the Apostle John recorded for us concerning one of these encounters with Christ, once when the Apostle Thomas was absent, and then again when the Apostle Thomas was present. These two separate encounters are recorded for us in **John 20:19-29**.

So let me read these verses for you. **“So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciple were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ (20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (21) So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’ (22) And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. (23) If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.’ (24) But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them, when Jesus came. (25) So the other disciples were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I 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.’ (26) After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ (27) Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ (28) Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”**

Do you believe that these disciples, when Christ appeared to them for the first time, would have been paying close attention to the person who presented Himself to them as Christ? Would they have been paying close attention to Him when He invited them look at the wounds in His hands and in His side? Of course they would!

When Christ appeared to His disciples again eight days later, would they have been any less interested in paying close attention to everything that

they were seeing and hearing? Of course not, and I would think that there would have been no disciple that would have been more in tune to what was taking place in that room than Thomas.

So therefore I believe that we would have to conclude what? We would have to conclude this: The apostles, in light of the extraordinary nature of their encounters with Christ, would have paid close attention and would have would have been considered competent reporters of those events (John 20:19-29).

But there is still one more criteria that we must consider before we can deduce that the apostles of Christ were in fact credible witnesses. So what is this fourth and last criteria? The fourth and last criteria would be this:

Were the apostles honestly relating their encounters with Christ fully as they knew them without any purpose or desire to deceive or suppress or add to the truth? I believe there can be only one answer to this question. I believe that the only answer would have to be that the apostles of Christ honestly related their encounters with Christ.

In light of all that the apostles suffered in declaring what they declared about their encounters with Christ, subsequent to His resurrection, their honesty in respect to those declarations should be readily accepted.

Let me read for you something that was written over 150 years ago by a man named Simon Greenleaf. And this is what he said:

The great truths which the apostles declared, were that Christ had risen from the dead, and that only through repentance from sin, and faith in Him, could men hope for salvation. This doctrine they asserted with one voice, everywhere, not only under the greatest discouragements, but in the face of the most appalling errors that can be presented to the mind of man. Their master had recently perished as a malefactor, by the sentence of a public tribunal. His religion sought to overthrow the religions of the world. The laws of every country were against the teachings of his disciples. The interests and passions of all the rulers and great men in the world were in the world

were against them. The fashion of the world of the world was against them. Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, they could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, revilings, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonments, torments, and cruel deaths. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate; and all these miseries they endured undismayed, nay, rejoicing. As one after another was put to a miserable death, the survivors only prosecuted their work with increased vigor and resolution. The annals of military warfare afford scarcely an example of the like heroic constancy, patience, and un-blenching courage. They had every possible motive to review carefully the grounds of their faith, and the evidences of the great facts and truths which they asserted; and these motives were pressed upon their attention with the most melancholy and terrific frequency. It was therefore impossible, that they could have persisted in affirming the truths they have narrated, had not Jesus actually risen from the dead, and had they not known this fact as certainly as they knew any other fact, if it were morally possible for them to have been deceived in this matter, every human motive operated to lead them to discover and avow their error. To have persisted in so gross a falsehood, after it was known to them, was not only to encounter, for life, all the evils which man could inflict, from without, but to endure also the pangs of inward and conscious guilt; with no hope of future peace, no testimony of a good conscience, no expectation of honor or esteem among men, no hope of happiness in this life, or in the life to come.

If there ever were a group of people who had nothing to gain in terms of this world by telling the truth, the whole, truth and nothing but the truth, it would have been the apostles. Therefore the only conclusion I believe that we can come to is this. The apostles of Christ, in matters related to the resurrection of Christ, honestly related their encounters with Christ fully as they knew them without any purpose or desire to deceive or suppress or add to the truth.

So were the apostles of Christ credible witnesses to the resurrection? Absolutely! They were certainly capable of knowing thoroughly the things about which they testified. They certainly were present to see what they said they saw and to hear what they said they heard. They certainly paid sufficient attention to the details of their encounters with Christ to qualify them as competent reporters of those contacts! And their honesty in relating their encounters with Christ fully as they knew them without any purpose or desire to deceive or suppress or add to the truth cannot be questioned in light of all that they suffered.

Jesus said that He was the Son of God and that He had been sent by His Father into this world to die for our sin in order that through His death He might open a door to heaven through which any person, if they so chose, might enter and be saved. This is what Jesus said.

May we in light of the absolute certainty of Christ's resurrection be as courageous and resolute in proclaiming the gospel of Christ as the apostles.