

Why Should We Believe the Resurrection Testimony of the Disciples?

There is little dispute among Christians concerning the importance of the resurrection, and why is this?

It is through the resurrection that Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power. If there is any doubt about this let me read for you **Romans 1:4**. **“Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.”** But this is not all.

It is through the resurrection that we, those who have placed our faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation, can know we have been saved. If there is any doubt about this then let me read for you **1 Peter 1:3**. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us [those who have placed our faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation] to be born again to a living hope [And how did it come about that we came into possession of this living hope? The verse goes on to say] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”** But again this is not all.

It is also through the resurrection that God has confirmed that a time of judgment has been fixed and that all people everywhere, in light of the certainty of this future judgment, should repent. And if there is any doubt about this let me now read for you **Acts 17:30-31**. **“Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, (31) because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed [And how do we know that?], having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”**

So is the resurrection important? Absolutely! It is through the resurrection that Christ has been declared to be the Son of God with power. It was through the resurrection that Christians can know that they have been born again to a living hope. It is through the resurrection that God has confirmed that a time of judgment has been fixed and that all people everywhere, in light of the certainty of this future judgment, should repent. So yes, of course the resurrection is important.

So now we come to a very important question. Why do Christians believe in the resurrection? A number of answers could be given but clearly there is one answer that stands head and shoulders above all other answers and that is the eyewitness testimony of the disciples of Christ.

In other words, if it were not for their testimony, the church would not have been born and we would not be here today celebrating His resurrection, which is so fundamental and important to our faith. And this leads us to the question that we will be asking this morning.

Why should we consider the disciples of Christ to be credible witnesses of the resurrection? Or in other words, why should we, when reading their so-called eyewitness accounts, pay any attention to what they have to say?

First of all, we should consider the disciples to be credible witnesses because they, not anticipating the resurrection, were not inclined to believe in the resurrection when it occurred.

And doesn't this make sense? If the disciples were not anticipating the resurrection, would their lack of anticipation make them more credible witnesses? Yes, of course it would! For if they were not anticipating the resurrection they would not be inclined to interpret what they saw and heard as evidence of the resurrection. In other words, if they were not anticipating the resurrection they would not have been inclined to interpret every shifting shadow and every unexplained noise as evidence of the resurrection.

But how can we explain their lack of anticipation in light of the fact that we know that Jesus on a number of occasions when speaking to His disciples about His impending death would immediately follow-up that very dire declaration with a promise of resurrection? I believe that answer can be found in **Mark 9:30-32**.

“From there (the area of Caesarea Philippi) they went out and began to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it [to know about what? To know that He and His disciples were going through Galilee. And why would he not have wanted people to know that? He wanted seclusion. And why would He have wanted seclusion? He wanted to tell them something that He only wanted His disciples to hear.] (31) For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, ‘The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He

has been killed, He will rise three days later.' [So there it is the very dire declaration that He was going to be put to death, followed by the promise that after three days He would rise again. And did they understand what He was saying? No! They did not. So let us continue to read and see if this is not so.] **But they did not understand this statement** [and not only did they not understand this statement the verse goes on to say] **and they were afraid to ask Him.**" So, what is clear from these verses?

It is clear from Mark 9:30-32 that the disciples not only failed to understand what Christ meant when He prophesied His death and resurrection, but it is also clear they did not want to understand. And it is for these reasons that the disciples, though having been told about the resurrection, were not anticipating the resurrection.

And this lack of anticipation now leads us to a second reason why we should consider the disciples credible witnesses of the resurrection. And what is that second reason?

We should consider the disciples to be credible witnesses because they, in not anticipating the resurrection, had to be persuaded of the resurrection (Mark 16:9-11 cf. John 20:19-21, 26-28). So where do we see this?

Let us first of all consider **John 20:1-10**. In this particular passage we see Mary Magdalene on the first day of the week, or in other words three days after Christ's crucifixion coming to the tomb, not to be a witness of the resurrection but rather to anoint Christ's body for burial. And it was there to Mary Magdalene that Christ made His first post-resurrection appearance.

And who did she think Christ was? She initially thought He was the gardener. And why did she think this? First of all, it was still rather dark according to the text and besides this we also have to remember, according to **John 19:25**, that she just three days earlier was one of those standing by the cross when Jesus was so brutally crucified. So in light of these two things it should be very understandable why she did not initially recognize Him and mistook Him for the gardener.

But eventually through seeing Him, through talking with Him, and even through touching Him she what? She believed. She believed that He had been resurrected. And was this belief in her mind based on some kind of

flimsy circumstantial evidence? No! This belief in her mind was based on irrefutable evidence.

So then what did she do? She did exactly what Jesus told her to do. And what was that? She went to the disciples and told them, **“I have seen the Lord,”** and He has told me to tell you, **“I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.”**

And did the disciples believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene? No, they did not! Let me read for you **Mark 16:11** and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, **“When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it.”**

Because the disciples were not anticipating the resurrection of Christ the initial eyewitness report made to them by Mary Magdalene failed to persuade them and was therefore rejected (Mark 16:11).

They obviously needed something more than the testimony of one solitary woman. And they did not have to wait long for that “something more.”

So now let me read for you **John 20:19-20**. And what does it say? It says this, **“So when 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, ‘Peace be with you.’ (20) And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side.”**

So, what was their response to having seen Him, to having heard Him, and to having been being invited by Him to inspect His hands and His side? The latter part of **John 20:20** tells us that the disciples **“rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”**

Unfortunately, however, according to **John 20:24** Thomas, one of the twelve disciples, was not with them when Christ made this initial appearance, so what happened when the disciples told him about what they had experienced? 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.”** Obviously Thomas, very much like his fellow disciples earlier, wanted “something more” than simply being told by

someone that they had seen the risen Christ, even if those people telling him were his fellow disciples. And did he get that something more? Absolutely!

So now let us read **John 20:26-28**. **“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 you hand and put it into My side, and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and My God.’”**

The disciples, not anticipating the resurrection, were not persuaded until they saw Him, heard Him, and were invited to inspect His wounds (John 20:20, 28).

So how long did Christ continue to make appearances to His disciples? **Acts 1:1-3** tells us. **“The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, (2) until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen. (3) To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.”**

So how long did Christ continue to make appearances to His disciples, proving Himself alive by many convincing proofs? He continued to make appearances to them for forty days!

So considering these various appearances and the nature of those appearances over such a long period of time, could the disciples have been mistaken about what they were reporting? And what is the answer? The answer would have to be absolutely not. There is no way that they could have been mistaken about what they were reporting. These multiple appearances over such a lengthy period of time were far too up close and personal.

And I would expect everyone in this room this morning should quickly and easily agree with what I just said. For if the disciples truly did experience what they reported, there would have been no possible way for them to have been mistaken about what they reported.

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So are you all on board with what I just said? Hopefully you are. Even if you are a professed unbeliever the logic of what I just presented to you is something you should be able to embrace.

But what if the disciples fabricated everything that they had reported as true? What if the disciples never did “see” Jesus? What if the disciples never did “hear” Jesus? What if the disciples were never invited “to inspect” His wounds? This is what I would say to that. Such a thought would be totally and completely unfathomable and would border on lunacy.

And why is this? If the disciples had lied about all that they reported to have seen and heard it would have required a grand conspiracy. And what would have been the motivation of such a grand conspiracy? Think about it! What did they have to gain? They had nothing to gain in terms of the things of this world. In fact, the only thing that they had to look forward to in proclaiming the gospel message and testifying to the truth of the resurrection was suffering.

And this leads us to the third reason why we should consider the disciples of Christ to be credible witnesses of the resurrection.

We should consider the disciples to be credible witnesses of the resurrection because they would never have been willing to suffer what they suffered in proclaiming the gospel unless they had been fully persuaded that the resurrection was a **fact**. Again this should make perfect sense to us.

Let me ask this question. Is there anyone in this room who would be willing to suffer your entire life and die a cruel death for what you know to be a lie? I would like to think that there would be no one in this room so twisted as to think this would be something that you would like to do. But now let us consider something even more outlandish. If we were able to find one such twisted individual, what would be the odds of us finding ten others just like him in this room this morning that would be willing to join themselves together with him to knowingly perpetuate the same lie as he with the same miserable results and to persist in doing so together over the course of their lives without one defection? I don't believe such a scenario could be considered even in the realm of possibility.

To drive the point home to you let me read for you something written by a professor of Law at Harvard University in 1846. **“The great truths which**

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these individuals [referring to the disciples] 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 whole world. The fashion 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 like heroic constancy, patience, and unblenching 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.

So can we, based on the information I have shared with you this morning, consider the disciples of Christ to be credible witnesses of the resurrection? Absolutely! The one who was dead is now alive!

And is this historical fact important? It is incredibly important. Why? It is important because the resurrection assures us that our faith in the person and the work of Christ has not been misplaced, for it is through the resurrection that Christ has been declared to be the Son of God with power according to **Romans 4:1**, and it is through the resurrection that we can know that we have been born again to a living hope according to **1 Peter 3:1**. Therefore, on this day of celebration, let all of us who have placed our faith in Christ alone for our salvation be filled with praise, for there is much for us to praise God about.

But what about those who are here this morning who have not as yet placed their faith in Christ? How should they respond to this morning's resurrection message? Hopefully they will repent knowing, according to **Acts 17:30-31**, that the resurrection of Christ is God's proof of future judgment, for all those do not turn from their self-serving and self-seeking ways to embrace Christ as their Lord and Savior by grace through faith. And this leads us to our prayer.

May we, by God's grace, know beyond all doubt that Christ has triumphed over death, and may this confidence produce joy in believers and repentance in unbelievers.

If you believe that you came into this room unrepentant and are now leaving this room repentant or would like to leave this room repentant, please come up to me after this service and I will make sure that you get some help.