

Witnesses of Resurrection



Resurrection (Part 5)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we draw near to the close of another week. Our theme this week has been: Resurrection.

In my previous talks this week I've been speaking about the primary confirmation of Christ's resurrection, that is, the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament. And we've looked in some detail at a number of passages which predicted Christ's resurrection in accurate detail.

Today I'm going to speak about the second main confirmation of Christ's resurrection, that is: the witnesses who saw Him alive after His resurrection.

I want to turn back again to a passage we've looked at several times already in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15, and I want to read again verses 3 through 8. This is what Paul says:

> "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, [Notice the three central facts of the Gospel; Christ died, He was buried, He rose again, and notice the first confirmation is that it was a fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament. And then we have the second source of confirmation, that is, the witnesses who saw Him alive after His resurrection. And so, Paul goes on, in this context, in verse 5 of 1 Corinthians, Chapter 15] and that He was seen by Cephas, [that's Peter] then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as one born out of due time." (NKJ)

Now by Jewish law, which was enforced in the time of Jesus in the apostles, to establish the truth of a statement in a court of law, it was necessary to produce two, or preferably three reliable male witnesses. This principle is stated many

times in the Old Testament, confirmed also in the New. But in this passage in 1 Corinthians, Paul gives actually more than five hundred such witnesses.

Let's look at the list of witnesses that he gives. First of all, in verse 5, he says that He was seen by Cephas; that's of course the Apostle Peter. Now this is referred to in Luke's Gospel, chapter 24, verses 33 and 34 which speaks about the two who were on the road to Emmaus, when Jesus, in a form they did not recognize, joined himself with them, but when He went in with them and they broke bread together, it says He was revealed to them in that act of breaking bread, but at that moment, he disappeared. Then it says:

> "So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" (NKJ)

So the eleven and those that were gathered with them knew at that time what Paul states in 1st Corinthians, chapter 15, that one of the first appearances of the Lord, after His resurrection, was to Simon Peter, or Cephas. Then in verse 5, Paul says also, the twelve; that is, the apostles. Various such appearances are indicated in the New Testament. We'll look at just two of them.

First of all, in Acts, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3, Luke the writer of Acts, says this concerning the earthly life and ministry of Jesus:

> "The former account [That's the Gospel of Luke] I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, [that is, taken up to Heaven] after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, [Notice this is speaking about His relationship with the apostles after resurrection] to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." (NKJ)

So Luke says that Jesus presented Himself alive to His Apostles after His resurrection and demonstrated that He was alive by many infallible proofs.

And then, one of His appearances is described in John, chapter 20, verses 19 through 21:

> "Then, at the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, 'Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.'" (NKJ)

So we see Jesus, in His resurrection body, had the power to pass through locked doors, present Himself inside the room, and then when He was there, first of all, He bestowed His peace upon His disciples and then it says specifically, "He showed them His hands and His side," with the marks of crucifixion still visible. He did that to prove that the body that He had was the same body that had been crucified, and then resurrected.

Then, in the list of witnesses that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 15, in verse 6, he lists more than 500 believers at one time. Now this is not described anywhere else in the New Testament. That's all we know about it. It seems to me probable it happened in Galilee because the Scripture says that Jesus made an appointment with His disciples to meet them at the resurrection in Galilee. Then in verse 4 of that chapter, Paul says that Jesus appeared to James, that is James, the brother of the Lord. Now this is not described elsewhere in the New Testament but we note the subsequent testimony of James Himself in James, chapter 1, verse 1, where he introduces himself as follows: "James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ…" Now during the earthly life of Jesus, James apparently was not a disciple but now he speaks of himself as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's clear that that resurrection appearance had a profound and permanent impact on James.

And then, in verse 7, Paul speaks of all the apostles. We've seen that already, and in verse 8 he speaks about himself as the last witness of the resurrection and he describes the experience that took place on the road to Damascus. We look briefly at his account of this experience in Acts 26, verses 8 through following, where he's speaking to King Agrippa. He's on trial and he says this:

> "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? [That's the key issue, that God raises the dead] 'Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, [and so on] I punished them often in every

> synagogue [and in verse 12 he says] While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. [then he goes on to say] I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' [and he answers] 'Who are You, Lord?' [and the answer comes back] 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'" (NKJ)

So there's the final revelation of the resurrected Christ to his persecutor and enemy, Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul. So we have there Paul's list of the various witnesses who saw Jesus alive after His resurrection from the dead. It's a long list. As I explained, there are actually more than 500 such witnesses.

Now, I want to point out to you certain features which are common to these witnesses; significant, important features. First of all, they were men who never failed to record their own weaknesses and failings. One of the amazing things about the Bible, both Old Testament and New, is that the writers honestly recorded their own weaknesses and failings. They were not grandiose. They were not boasters. They were not trying to present a special picture of themselves as a kind of infallible race of superior beings.

Secondly, concerning all these witnesses, they were all changed from unbelief to belief. They had not believed in the resurrection; subsequently they believed. In Paul's case it was not merely from unbelief, but from active opposition.

Thirdly, the change was permanent and completely revolutionized their whole lives. They were never the same again after the revelation of the resurrected Christ.

And fourthly, no persecution or threat of death could ever cause them to go back on their testimony. They were actually threatened and sometimes punished with death and with various other forms of punishment if they would maintain this testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. But no pressure, no persecution could ever cause them to go back on this testimony. They always said, "We have to speak what we see, what we know." So I ask you, and I ask myself, what other explanation could there be of these facts except that their testimony was true. I don't believe there's any other reasonable explanation available except that they would testify to the truth.

And in this connection, I'd like to close with the words of a well known professor of history from Cambridge University, my alma mater, a professor from the previous generation, Professor Marcus Dodds, who said this: "The resurrection of Jesus is one of the best attested facts of human history."

Well, our time is up for today. I"ll be back with you again next week at this same time, Monday through Friday. Next week I'll continue with this theme of Resurrection. I'll be sharing on the measureless blessings made available to us through Christ's resurrection.

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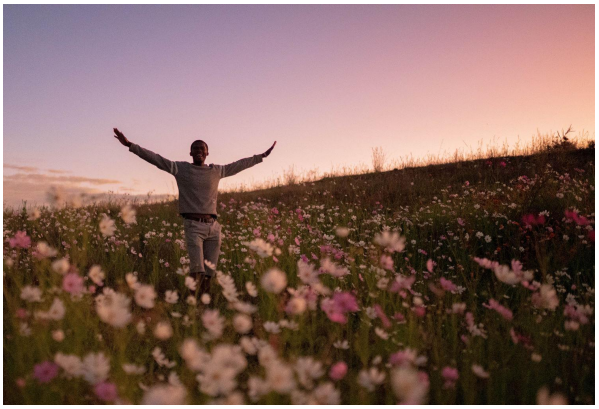

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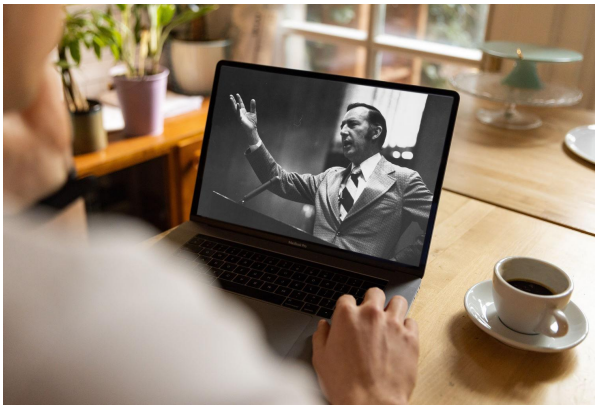

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