

YOU

Bible Study

Sermon Series: Essentials of Christianity

To be used with: The Resurrection of Jesus

Sermon Title Possibilities: An Eyewitness Testimony

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study “The Resurrection of Jesus,” this sermon will expound upon the consistent testimony of various people who personally witnessed the fact that Christ was raised from the dead.

Introduction: A significant difference exists between hearsay and eye-witness testimony. Hearsay is built upon someone telling another person. Eye-witness testimony gives a first-hand account. Hearsay is not admissible in a court of law. Eye-witness testimony is admissible and desirable in proving what is true. Today’s sermon is eyewitness testimony from a variety of people all coming from different backgrounds. The one thing that each witness has in common is that they testified to the truth of the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

1. The testimony of the faithful few (v. 5)

The first group to provide eye-witness testimony was Peter and the disciples. As a means of background to the disciples, they were an extremely diverse group. One was a tax collector and worked for Rome. One was a zealot and despised all things regarding Rome. The group had several fishermen and various other characters too. They, however, all shared a common story in that they testified to the resurrection of Christ.

It is vital that we point out at least two things about their testimony. First, all within the group testified to the same thing. If the resurrection was not true, it would be next to impossible to get the same story from all twelve men. Second, their consistent testimony cost them dearly. If the resurrection was not true, the disciples would not have submitted themselves to the persecution they experienced. Tradition would have it that all but one (John) suffered a martyr’s death because of their testimony. If the resurrection was false, someone would have recanted.

2. The testimony of the five hundred (v. 6)

Our next eye-witness testimony comes from a group of more than 500. If getting twelve to agree to the same story is next to impossible, what would it take to get more than 500? The Bible does not provide information as to who this group of people were or where Jesus appeared to them. But Paul does make it a point to acknowledge that a much larger group than the twelve were able to corroborate the disciples’ story.

A key point in this group of 500 is that most of them were still alive when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. This was Paul's way of telling his audience that if they did not believe him then feel free to ask this other group. If Paul did not believe the resurrection was true, he would be reluctant to invite his hearers to ask others. Paul was 100% convinced of the fact that Christ had defeated death. He invited his audience to ask a large group about this if they still wanted additional testimony.

3. The testimony of the former critic (v. 8-11)

It is one thing to say that twelve faithful followers continued to believe in the resurrection. It is another thing, however, to say that a group greater than 500 also believed the same story. But it is beyond reason to say that a former critic now testifies to the exact same thing. Furthermore, this was no ordinary critic. Paul told his audience in verse 9 that he personally persecuted the church of God. The manner in which this was written shows a systematic and well thought out plan. Paul was zealous in his efforts destroy the message he was now heralding.

What caused this turnaround? The text shows us two things. First, Christ appeared to Paul. The account of this is found in Acts 9. Paul was on his way to Damascus in order to destroy those who were following Jesus. While on the road to Damascus, he encountered the resurrected Christ, and this changed him forever. The second reason for the dramatic change was the grace of God. We find the word grace no less than three times in verse 10 alone. Paul knew that he did not deserve God's favor because of past actions. He also knew that he could not earn God's favor as he had already tried. The only reason he had any hope was because of the grace of God found in the fact that Jesus was no longer dead.

Conclusion: Let's assume that you are a juror and the case before you centers around the resurrection of Christ. You have heard from a variety of witnesses and you have seen their unhindered loyalty to the truth of the story. As a juror, what are you going to do? Are you willing to believe as they have in the truth of the resurrection? What you choose to do with their eyewitness accounts will determine your eternal home. This diverse group of witnesses placed their eternal hope in the truth of the resurrection. Are you willing to do the same thing today?

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