

Today, we rely upon the testimony of witnesses for our faith that Jesus was indeed “divine.” (John 20:31) As we read about the amazing miracles and signs which Jesus performed; and about the unparalleled teachings which He uttered; and about His stunning resurrection from the dead, we find ourselves asking about the credibility of those who wrote these accounts. If we could only trust their report, we would be compelled to accept that God actually “became flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:14)

In a court of law, it is common to question the motive behind the testimony of a witness. Does this person have something to gain by the testimony? Might this person be unstable or incompetent? Is this witness vengeful, or otherwise hostile? Let us closely look at the people who introduced to the world a Resurrected Savior.

In the first place, they were ordinary people. The apostles chosen by Jesus represented a good cross-section of educational and social levels. From simple fishermen to well-to-do tax collector; from political activist to conservative lawyer, these witnesses did not represent only one single class of Jewish society. In addition to the apostles, thousands of other equally ordinary people were also convinced about Jesus in the days which shortly followed His death.

These early witnesses did not appear to be unstable, nor did they seem to be some sort of maniacs. When Jesus was arrested, it is recorded in Mark 14:50 that everyone “left Him and fled.” The instinct for self preservation was strong. Yet, a few days later, in Acts chapter 4, something had happened which emboldened them to defy the very council which had crucified Jesus. You know what it was that happened between Mark 14 and Acts 4 . . . it was the resurrection of Christ. The same folks who had “left Him and fled” were now testifying to angry magistrates that “Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified,” they said, “God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:10). They refused to withdraw this testimony, even under threat of punishment, and they said, “We cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

Not only the apostles, but countless multitudes of early Christians could not be stopped from telling about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Even when they were arrested or beaten or crucified or burned or thrown to the lions, they held to their testimony. They knew what they had seen. They were credible witnesses. They were there. They knew that eternal life was in Christ Jesus. They suffered greatly so that everyone could hear that God had been among us. They did what they did because they honestly believed they had seen the resurrected Christ.

They had nothing to gain by continuing in this story. They did not profit from this testimony, but rather, they suffered. Their testimony did not harm their oppressors, but rather, they hoped it would save their oppressors. If their testimony was not true, then they had no possible motive for its fabrication.

Simon Greenleaf, former Royal and Dane Professor of Law at Harvard University wrote a three volume Treatise on the Law of Evidence. Concerning these witnesses he wrote, “According to the laws of legal evidence used in courts of law, there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for just about any other event in history.” Professor Thomas Arnold, Roman History Scholar at Oxford University wrote concerning the resurrection of Jesus, “I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer . . .”

The witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus are reliable. Their documents have been proven to be correct in countless, verifiable details of historical record. Even modern historians, like Arnold Toynbee, Will Durant, and H.G. Wells concur that the historical person of Jesus and the reliability of New Testament documents rest upon historical footing. They are reasonable and accurate, and could not have been invented.

Was Jesus really “God in the Flesh”? These witnesses certainly believed He was. Do you? When your faith rests upon the testimony of these witnesses, you can be sure that your faith is not a blind leap in the dark. Your faith rests solidly on rational evidence in light of historical facts. The

Teachings of Jesus, His Resurrection, His Miracles, and Prophecies fulfilled must all be considered; as well as the credibility of His Witnesses. God has left us a trail of evidence which makes the Deity of Jesus a reasonable proposition.

You know, it boggles the mind to think about God becoming flesh. We cannot entertain that thought for long before we have to ask, "Why?" Why did God become flesh? And that is the topic of the next Bible Talk, # 106.



**Bible Probe**

**WERE THE WITNESSES CREDIBLE?**

**105**

1. Is there any reason to doubt that the earliest disciples of Jesus were ordinary, rational thinking people?
  
2. Do you believe that early Christians shared a collective "Death Wish"? (Mark 14:50)
  
3. What do you think motivated the Lord's apostles to challenge the very power which had crucified Jesus? (Acts 4:8-20)
  
4. When you think about the intense persecution endured by early Christians, does this thought enhance or diminish their credibility in your eyes?
  
5. Do you think the early witnesses of Jesus really believed He was the Son of God?
  
6. What did the apostles of Jesus gain by continually maintaining the story they told?
  
7. Do you believe the testimony of these witnesses?