

Jesus Makes his Disciples Witnesses of his Resurrection

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I don't know if you've ever thought of this, congregation, but it is a real privilege, isn't it, to have been led by the Lord in such a way, in his sovereignty in our life, that we have been brought into fellowship with a Christian church. Whether we've been brought in from outside of the church or whether we've been born within the church, it is a privilege because the Christian religion is the only religion that can claim that the founder of our religion was dead and is alive again, and that he is alive now in heaven making continual intercession. We worship the living God with a living mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is now alive in a glorified human nature in heaven at the right hand of the Father making continual intercession on the basis of his blood and obedience on earth.

What a privilege. There are so many other distinctive features of Christianity, but certainly this is one of the, if not the, primary doctrine, the doctrine of the resurrection that impels the spreading of Christianity throughout all the world. It is a religion that has the power of resurrection not only as one of its foundational facts, but even as the fountain of life-giving power that accompanies the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that the Lord Jesus focused on proving his resurrection to those apostles and those disciples whom he would send into the world to spread this gospel. It is for this reason that Jesus focused especially on equipping those twelve apostles as witnesses of the resurrection so that through those credentials they may be personally and powerfully and with great conviction authorized to speak infallible words and write the record of the gospel and write those inspired letters of all the New Testament writings so that we may receive them and believe them. This was an important fact that was consciously pursued, not only by Jesus, but it was verified also in Acts 1:22 where the Apostle Peter, knowing that there was a vacancy among the twelve on account of Judas' betrayal and his suicide, and there needed to be a filling of that vacancy, and the Apostle Peter in Acts 1:22 specifically says that there needed to be "one of these who must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

So, there was a special qualification for being one of the twelve apostles and Jesus verifies his motivation for doing what we see in our text passage also in that manner because he says in verse 48, which kind of summarizes the whole incident here, "And

you are witnesses of these things." To be a witness, I don't know if you've ever been a witness in court, but when you go into the witness stand, then under oath you're called upon to,¹ on the basis of what you have heard with your ears and seen with your eyes or felt or concluded with your reasoning, you are there to testify what you have been witnessed to passively, you're to testify now as a witness actively and speak that which you have witnessed. And the apostles were to be sent out with the disciples as witnesses of the resurrection. So, we're going to focus on Jesus equipping his disciples, authorizing, giving credentials, equipping them and making them witnesses of his resurrection. Jesus makes his disciples witnesses of his resurrection in three manners: by his repeated appearances; secondly, by his confirming signs; and thirdly, by his word and Spirit.

By his repeated appearances, he equips his disciples. Jesus arose on the first day of the week, and that's the reason why we're here on the first day of the week, by the way, because just as I indicated in the Old Testament, the Sabbath was the commemoration of the very day they came out of Egypt, the first day of the week is the commemoration of the very day of the week that Jesus arose. He arose out of the bondage of the grave, and his people with him are risen with him through the power of his resurrection, and that is why on that day in which his redemptive work was fully accomplished, that he invites us to enter into the joy of the rest, the resurrection, and the renewal that comes forth out of his finished work. And so it's so appropriate that the first thing Jesus says when he comes to see them there in that upper room as they're gathered behind locked doors for fear of the Jews, that he says to them, "Shalom, peace," because they were so fearful and the Lord Jesus wants them to enjoy the peace and rest that he has accomplished.

So how does he equip his disciples? Well, first of all, we can list ten resurrection appearances. Now there are more appearances, but that will be your homework. There are at least ten that we can list quite clearly. The Apostle Paul lists others as well, and together we take the gospel records, the four gospel records, and we take what is mentioned in the further apostolic writings, especially 1 Corinthians 15, and we find these. The appearance to the women. Mary Magdalene is included in that appearance to the women. It is possible that Jesus did appear actually to Mary before he appeared to the rest of the women. That's debatable. And it's because Mark says in Mark 16:9, "He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons." It's so interesting the way Jesus gives attention to those who are kind of sidelined in society, isn't it, that tender mercy. He gathers the outcasts of Israel, the Bible says, and so he favors the women, and then of all the women, Mary Magdalene with that special appearance that's recorded for us in John 20.

So 1, Mary Magdalene, the women together. Thirdly, Peter. He appeared to Peter, and they tell us here in this account as these disciples come together in verse 34, the men on the way to Emmaus come into this upper room after having seen Jesus on the way, and these gathered disciples, and they meet each other with these announcements, "He is risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" That's noteworthy. Jesus had sent the message with the angels, "Tell his disciples and Peter," and now they say, "Jesus is risen, and He has appeared to Simon Peter." What a beautiful announcement that was.

So Mary, the women, Peter, the two men on the way to Emmaus, there, they met Jesus on the way and here, this account of the ten disciples together in the upper room without Thomas, you see. Thomas missed church that day. Not good to do. And he wasn't there when Jesus appeared and so he spent another week in doubt.

6. Paul mentions above 500 people, above 500 brethren at once. It must have been a large crowd.

And then 7, that he appeared to James. He was seen of James, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15. James, the blood brother of Jesus, the oldest brother of the family, you know, they did not believe in Jesus at first and Jesus appears to his blood brother who led that skeptical campaign and even said Jesus is insane. Yes. And Jesus so graciously appears to him. And he's converted. And he writes the letter of James.

8. The disciples together with Thomas this time, the disciples went out and they weren't comfortable with him not being there, and they showed him or told him what they had seen and witnessed. So next Lord's Day, he was in church. If you know anyone who's in that category, make sure they're in church, okay, or that they make use of the means in the way that's available to them.

And number 9, John 21, they go fishing and while they're fishing, someone on the shore says, "Throw the net in the other side of the boat." I'm not a fisherman, but I don't know if that really made a lot of difference. The boat's been around, you know, but Jesus said it, that makes the difference. And the net was full, while Jesus appeared so many merciful times and so graciously and so tenderly.

And then the last time that, or the last one I'll mention anyway, he appeared on the Mount of Olives when he ascended into heaven, number 10.

What's Jesus doing with this? What is he intending to do with these various appearances? Well, one thing he's doing, he is putting to rest their fears, their doubts, and their questions about what they heard from the angels and from the women. The women seem to have believed it sooner than the men. You know, they're kind of skeptical, we've got reason, we want to think things through and figure it out, and the women believed. They remembered his words.

The second thing we can point out is not only to put all the fears and doubts and questions to rest, but he wanted to equip them in such a way that they embrace the truth of the gospel with comfort and assurance and conviction. What a beautiful shepherdly care that he had predicted to them that they would be scattered when he was arrested, and so they were. They ran like scared sheep, but by his sovereign leading, they are finally gathered in this upper room together, except one. That's what the Lord loves. It says in the Old Testament that the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the tents of Jacob. Why? Because he loves where his people are gathered together in his name. There he wants to appear. There he wants to manifest himself in his gospel power. What forgiving dealings of a tender-hearted shepherd.

Still throughout this account, there seems to be some growing, but there's reluctance. Verse 37, "they were terrified and frightened, they supposed that they had seen a spirit." There's this mixture. There's a beginning of some belief, and we read also the expression, at a certain time, they believed not for joy. It's like their emotions got ahead of their mind. "I haven't figured it out yet in my mind, but there's this joy that's starting." We have these moments when we can say, "Just unbelievable," and it's really an emotional statement that means, because we're so emotional, we do actually believe it. We're just amazed about it. It's so great. We almost think it's too good to be true, but it's true, and so we're rejoicing about it.

"Why are you troubled," Jesus says to them in verse 38? "Why do doubts still arise in your heart?" And so he's going to deal with that. He deals with that doubt and that trouble, and he's going to give them peace, and he's going to give them comfort and conviction about the reality of his resurrection. "See, it is I, myself," ego emei. And it must have reminded them of the many times he said, "I am. I am. I'm the Good Shepherd. I'm the Bread of Life. I'm the Light of the World." Here is the "I am" himself, standing in front of them.

And so these statements, though they don't produce instantly assurance, yet there is such a gracious offer of what he intends to do to them. And friend, when the gospel comes to us, it is Jesus coming to us, and especially on the first day of the week, and he's coming to us and he is saying, "I don't want you to be going through life with all these fears. I don't want you to go on in life with all these doubts and with all these questions." And especially he's saying to us, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they live." And as John puts it in his letter, "that you might have life more abundantly." And so they are hearing Jesus who has this intention to minister to their hearts in such a gracious way. He is going to equip them, not only in such a way that he puts their hearts to rest, but to equip them to be believers and witnesses.

Now on that first day of the week, earlier in the day, he had appeared to these men on the way to Emmaus, and he had said to them, "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!" They were living like Jesus is dead. They were so sad, and they were saying something like, "Well, we had thought He would be the Messiah. We had thought it would be Him, He who would redeem Israel." Like he's dead. "We hear some rumors from the women about what they have seen and saw." And Jesus says, "You're so slow, aren't you?" Now honestly speaking, aren't we sometimes quite slow on the uptake when it comes to embracing the gospel and embracing the comforts of it and the assurance of it?

And so Jesus stays there, even though he's seeing that in the first part of his visit there they seem to be so slow and so incredible in their reaction. And so he goes on. In addition to all of these appearances of Jesus, we see here particularly that he gives confirming signs, secondly. We know from Acts 1:3 that there were other things, because in Acts 1 we read in verse 3 that he proved to them "by many infallible proofs." So there are so

many other things that we say, "Well, this could not be explained in any other way than that this is really Jesus and that He has really risen from the grave." He's alive.

Now listen to the confirming signs then. He appeals to their senses, their various senses. First of all, he appeals to their hearing. He speaks. It's the Master's voice. And he has told us, "My sheep hear My voice. They recognize My voice. They know Me." Not only in the manner, but in the content of what he is saying, they recognize, "This is our Master. This is the Lord." The Shepherd's voice is known by the sheep. He appeals to their hearing.

Secondly, he appeals to their sight and we notice it a number of times there's this reference to sight. First of all, in verse 39, "Behold My hands and My feet. Have a good look. If you don't believe it, look at My hands. Look at My feet." If you wear sandals, you can see the feet. And what else? John tells us in John 20:20, that he said also, "He showed them His side." Children, do you know why? Why the hands and the feet and his side? That's where he had the evidence of his crucifixion. That's where he was showing to them, "The body you saw on the cross, and that you're all sad about because you saw that He breathed his last and He commended to His Father His Spirit, that body is in a glorified manner." He just came through the locked door. Amazing power, that body has. Have you ever thought about what kind of bodies we're going to get in the resurrection? Well, Jesus is showing this as Paul said in Philippians 2:20, that he shall come. We're waiting for him to come, and then he will renew our bodies out of the graves like unto his, that is Jesus' most glorious body. And he has hands, he has feet, he still has even some identifying marks. I hope tattoos won't show up then, but for this purpose, for a gospel purpose, he has the marks to help prove to them. They're still there in his hands and his feet and the wound where the spear. None of the other two, none of the other two needed that spear thrust, that was sort of the coup de grace, the, you know, "Okay, if he's not dead yet before we bury Him, thrust the spear into His side," and we read, "Out of His side came blood and water." The blood had separated into its constituent parts.

So that's what he showed them and he appealed now not only to their hearing and their sight, but he appealed to their sense of feel and he invited them, "Handle Me. Go ahead, touch My hands, touch the wound, My feet, My side." For a while I was wondering, do you think they did? And then John tells me in 1 John 1 that they did. They did touch him. And in fact, that's what they bragged or declared about to Thomas and he became jealous and he wanted to experience that too, that they had put their finger in the wound and they had put their hand in his side. They could feel the body of Jesus. How marvelously, they touched a glorified human body. Glorified bodies can be touched. They can be hugged.

Jesus appealed to their reasoning, the fourth sense that he appealed to. Spurgeon says, he appealed to their common sense. Like think about it. You feel, feel your own hands, muscle, skin, bones. He says, "You're thinking it's a ghost? A spirit doesn't have flesh and bones like you see Me have." And then he went one further. Now think about this one. "Do you have any food?" he says. So they give him a piece of a broiled fish and a piece of a honeycomb and like, "Okay, try that one out." If a ghost eats, what happens to the food? So he ate and he chewed and he swallowed and the food went inside of him. Like think about that.

And all of these details are being recorded for us in the Scriptures and they're written down for us. Jesus so meticulously goes through all of these evidences. And then later we can talk about the fish miracle and all of that where John said, "It's the Lord. Nobody tells us to throw the net on the other side and suddenly gets it filled like that. That is Jesus." And Peter jumps in the water and goes to shore. You see all of those evidences appealing to their thinking and enabling them to jot it all down so that they can be defenders of the truth of the resurrection with conviction and power in their heart. No doubt about it. He is risen indeed. It really happened. These are not idle tales that the women just imagined. No, it's real. Now we believe it too.

And notice all four gospels record the truth of the resurrection, and we notice that this was important for them in their qualification as apostles because as I indicated, Peter mentioned that in Acts 1, but later on in Acts 2, he is preaching to the crowd that gathered on the day of Pentecost and he says, "You by wicked hands have taken Him and crucified Him and put Him to death whom God raised up having loosed the pains of death." And Acts 2:32, "This Jesus God raised up of which we are all witnesses." No fear. He stands up. He preaches the word. He does not deny his Savior. He is a convicted, convinced, assured witness of the resurrection. Later in Acts 3, "You killed the Prince of life whom God raised from the dead of which we are witnesses." And again, Acts 4, "And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and great grace was upon them all." God blessed the testimony of their witnessing about the resurrection and resurrection power came down.

And here is the text I was referring to in 1 John 1, and we know that John starts his gospel and his purpose is that they might believe, read the gospel of Jesus, believing in him, having life. And he starts off, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God and the Word was made flesh." All of that so you would believe. And the letter, by the way, is so you would become totally convinced and assured in your hearts of your salvation through him. And so he starts off, verse 1, in his letter, "that which was from the beginning," so if you've read, you know what he's talking about, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, we took a second look, we examined, we really looked closely, and our hands have handled of the Word of life, the life that was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us, and that which we have seen and heard, we declare that you also may have fellowship with us, that you could have that sweet and blessed communion with the risen Savior with us. Our fellowship is with the living Lord Jesus Christ."

Well, what about us? You're sitting there and you're saying, "Well, that's great that that's all recorded in Scripture, and what about me? I mean, we didn't live during Jesus' time. We didn't experience these proofs the apostles experienced. We cannot even hear the apostles preach with conviction about these things. How can we come to a saving faith and full assurance of the gospel of the resurrection?" Someone else might say, "Well, I do believe. I do believe in Jesus. I believe in His resurrection, but it's just so weak. I'm like the man who said to Jesus, 'Lord, I believe, but help my unbelief.' I'm like these disciples

in this early stage where they still have questions and doubts are arising in their minds and hearts."

The most effective and most enduring method by which Jesus convinced his disciples is further demonstrated here and is demonstrated in his account of walking with the men on the way to Emmaus and so what we, thirdly, need to see here is the very best proof, and that is his own words, first of all. It's by his word and his Spirit, thirdly, then. So first we see his words. He is the true prophet. He's the one, if you quote him, you can say he speaks truth. He's the way, the life, and the truth. And every word he speaks is truth. Why? Because Moses told us in Deuteronomy 18 that the true prophet is the one who, if he prophesies something and it happens, you know he's a true prophet. He is the prophet of all prophets. God spoke in times past, we read in Hebrews at the beginning, in so many different ways, but in these times he has spoken by Jesus Christ his Son. The express image of his own person, he spoke. And so that's why Jesus says in Luke 24, "These are the words which I spoke to you." That's why the women were ahead of the men in some degree, because it says they remembered his words. It's good to memorize Scripture. The Lord Jesus said, "I will send My Spirit and He will bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have spoken." First you have to listen to what he spoke and you've got to take it serious. It's got to go into your mind. You say, "But I forget so much." Pray for the Spirit to bring it to your remembrance.

"These words which I spoke," he said, "while I was still with you in that other form before My death and resurrection, while I was still with you then, that I told you all these things must be fulfilled." And they were. You can trust him. And then he goes on to say, "which were written." So not only does he refer to his own words that he spoke with them before, but he's referring to the words that are written and he refers to that very specifically. In verse 44 we read and "all these things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me." And he opened their understanding to that. Wouldn't you have wanted to hear that sermon? I wouldn't care if it was two hours. I wouldn't care if it was three hours long. I'd want to be there and listen to it. I'd like to take my computer and type it all out too. Or listen so that it's written in my mind and heart. What a sermon.

And the men on the way to Emmaus, the same thing. Jesus preached from the Old Testament Scriptures and showed to them, "All these things, they're all predicting My coming." It's Christ on every page. It's a beautiful thing. And that's how he appeared to the men on the way to Emmaus. And that's where it connects with us because you're saying, "Well, I wasn't there. I didn't hear His voice." But now someone comes walking along the way to these disciples and they're so sad and they're thinking, "Christ's dead. Our hope is gone. We thought He'd be the Messiah." Why are you so sad? "Well, you know, are You a stranger here? You don't know what happened in Jerusalem?" And so then he gets in this conversation with them and then he says, "You're so slow to understand. You're in this pit of despair unnecessarily." And then we read in verse 27, and then Jesus, without showing anything visible, without them recognizing him, he simply preaches from the Scriptures. You get that? "Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." And what happened? There's something mysterious here that I read, I think. It says, "He

opened their understanding." I get it that he opened the Scriptures in the sense that he quoted the Scriptures and he explained it to them but, you know, I hear various things and my mind's not open. But that's another thing. It's one thing for your mind to be open, but your understanding. He opened their understanding. How did these men on the way to Emmaus describe it? They said, when Jesus revealed himself to them and then disappeared, they said, "Hey, didn't our hearts burn within us while He spoke to us on the way?" And every time we open the Bible, every time we go to Bible study, every time we sit in church and hear the word, it's that word expounded to us from the Scriptures.

And you say, how does it really come home? Well, John gives us another detail, that as he was speaking to them, how was he opening their understanding? It says, Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." It wasn't the same measure as they received on the day of Pentecost, which really equipped them for ministry at that time, but just to bring home the comforts of the gospel to them at this time, he gave a foretaste or a pledge manner, or a small pledge, an earnest the Bible sometimes called it, just a down payment of what they were going to get on the day of Pentecost. He breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit to some extent then.

And that's how it came together. And that's how their minds were opened and their understanding was open, and they got it. They really understood it. They really believed it. And, "Unlock those doors. We're going to talk about this," because afterward, these scared sheep, these timid disciples are described in the last verse of this gospel account, "And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God." In the temple right under the noses of the high priests and scribes and Pharisees who had crucified Jesus. They didn't care. No fear because they were witnesses, witnesses convinced, convicted, assured, and comforted, and full of the words of truth.

They couldn't keep quiet and that's a marvelous thing. That's the way, by his word and Spirit, that he desires so regularly to equip us so that in our life, the rest of the week, and in our walk, and in our talk, we too would manifest that there is resurrection power that has come from the Lord because of Jesus' death on the cross, his resurrection. And because of his word and Spirit we can know he's alive because he lives within our heart. Amen.

Let us pray together.

Gracious eternal God, we do thank Thee for Thy holy word, which speaks to us of the tender-hearted way in which Jesus meets the unbelief and doubts and fears of His disciples and makes of this timid gathering of weak sheep, witnesses who go forth with power. O Lord, we pray, refresh our hearts so that if we become fearful and timid and weak, that our hearts would be reconfirmed, convicted, and anointed with Thy Spirit to show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light. O Lord, we pray, descend with Thy Holy Spirit upon the heart of those who have heard many things but whose understanding is not yet opened. Lord, open those minds, open their understanding, and open their heart to the incoming of the Spirit of Jesus as Savior and Lord. We pray, refresh us through Thy word and Spirit today and throughout

our life that we might anticipate that glorious day when He comes again, and witnessing will be perfect in heaven forever. Amen.