

# Twelve Witnesses

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1 Corinthians 15:12-19

The resurrection of Jesus is at the center of the witness of the Bible and of the Christian Church. It is no stretch at all to say that if Christ is not risen, all the wheels fall off of our faith.

So it is expected that the Lord would make this foundational truth as clear, sure and persuasive as possible. God wants to talk to you, to lead you to himself – would you gladly listen to him?

Not everyone does – there are many who have said, ‘it doesn’t matter what God has to say, I will not believe that a man arose from the dead.’ You might want to ask yourself why you are so closed off – that even if God were make it plain to you, you refuse to receive it. Maybe today you will open to the message of eternal life which he has provided for people everywhere.

So here are 12 witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

The **first two** touch on how this was promised and prophesied before it happened.

The resurrection message is not a message from these humble fisherman who one day stumbled upon the risen Lord. Paul says in verse 4 that Jesus was raised **ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES**.

So the first witness is the Old Testament. Not only did the resurrection happen, it was predicted at least a thousand years before it happened. David wrote in Psalm 16 that his unique Son would not see corruption,

but would rise from the grave. Both Peter and Paul lead with this verse, in Acts 2 and 13.

We could consider Isaiah 53, that following his tremendous sufferings, the Messiah would extend his days.

And why is this important? Because the OT is pushing off of the catastrophe in the third chapter of Genesis. There Satan wrapped his coils around mankind, and injected his venom – sin – into our race; and with that, we are separated from God, booted from His garden. Sin, Satan, separation – and the judgment – death; to dust you shall return!

God steps in then – He is the one who will address sin by his sacrifice, defeat Satan by the seed of the woman, Jesus; reconcile his lost world to himself, and it is he who gives a life that conquers death! It is he who promises resurrection through a Savior. It is he who promises in Hosea, “Death! I will be your enemy! I will be your foe! I will overthrow the covenant with death by a covenant of life in my Son.”

That Son who was promised is both a sufferer and a victor.

So the OT with its rescue out of death, sin, slavery – points to one who would rise again.

The same is found in our second witness in the NT. Jesus on several occasions says, ‘I must go to Jerusalem, be delivered over to the Jewish leaders, be crucified, and the third day I will rise again!’

From the very beginning of his ministry, he challenged the Jews – ‘destroy this body and in three days I will raise it up!’

And when challenged for some great sign he gave them the sign of Jonah – three days in the depths.

So the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah was predicted, promised by the OT and by Jesus himself.

This brings us to **two more similar witnesses** – that Jesus raised others from the dead.

We have a little girl who had just died, a widow's only son who had been dead for some time, and Lazarus raised after four days.

The OT prepared us for this – Elijah and Elisha were God's instruments to raise two sons.

But when Jesus comes, he lives up to the name he gave himself in John 11 – I Am the Resurrection and the Life!

And the second here is how Jesus raised people *after* his death. He raised people from the dead through his apostles, as Peter raising Dorcas in Acts 9, and Paul raised young Eutychus in Acts 20.

Why, we read that even as Jesus rose on that first Sunday, many others who had recently died also came forth from their tombs!

Now the resurrection by Jesus before his cross and by Jesus from glory through His Spirit – these all died again. But the resurrection of Jesus is one of a own kind; he rises with a life that gives life to others; an indestructible life; and a life which overcomes death for others.

We are told in Revelation 1 of the keys now on his belt – the keys of death and of hell; and he is the firstborn, first-ranked, from the dead.

Now the **next two witnesses** are hostile ones.

We introduce the Romans who set a seal and a guard on the tomb of Jesus; and the Jewish leaders, the high priest, who asked for the guard from Pilate.

The day after the cross, the Romans go to the tomb, open the tomb and assure themselves Jesus' body is still lying there; and then place a seal over the great rock closing the tomb.

To break that seal is a crime against Caesar, and could carry the death penalty. For a soldier to fail in protecting what was Caesar's could carry the death penalty.

So you see how man has made the tomb of Jesus as secure as they could. These two groups did their best to keep Jesus dead.

And it blew up in their face – the very effort to bury him becomes strong proof that God raised him.

For the Romans, they accept a bribe to say – if anybody even asked – that they had fallen asleep when the disciples stole the body.

For the Jewish leaders, they still hoped that they had were done with this troublemaker. But no – those cowardly disciples were turned into lions and began filling Jerusalem with the name of Jesus, the one who was crucified, died, and rose again from the dead.

We turn to them now and **draw two testimonies** from them:

The first is that they were not at all expecting the resurrection.

Unlike the Jews who remembered he said he would rise three days after, the disciples were not looking that way when the train hit them.

We should not at all be surprised by their surprise. They had been overcome with fear and grief; had run in every direction away from Jesus, with even Peter the bold denying him three times. These were not giants in faith then at all.

In fact, when the resurrection occurred and the women reported what they had seen, the disciples continued to disbelieve! They didn't say, 'of course!' – no, not at all. Why some of them couldn't even recognize Jesus until he revealed his identity.

And the most famous of these is Thomas, doubting Thomas – who would not believe until he could see and touch the nail prints.

After confessing “you are my Lord and my God!” the risen Jesus responded: ‘because you have seen me you have believed – blessed are they who have not seen and believe!’

God reveals himself to us by these witnesses – that is the whole point of being an Apostle, as Acts 1 says – a witness of Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection.

So the second of these two friendly sets of witnesses is the variety of those who saw Jesus alive; who testified to others by many sure proofs.

Paul mentioned these at the outset of 1 Cor. 15. We have time only to summarize these, from the words of Robert Reymond: he appeared to individuals (Mary, Peter, James), to a pair of disciples (on the road), to small groups and larger assemblies; *second*, he appeared to women and men; *third*, in public as well as in private; *4<sup>th</sup>*, a different times of the day; *5<sup>th</sup>* both in Jerusalem and in Galilee.

One must be hallucinating to believe so many and varied witnesses all were hallucinating! They physically saw him, touched him, spoke with him, and he with them; had food together and saw him physically return to heaven.

Now we come to some of the strongest proof – that is the lives of these men turned upside down. **And again, we have two sets.**

The sceptic David Hume – no friend to Christianity – said “no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the miracle it is trying to establish.”

You can see the skeptical bent in all his thought; miracles are automatically put on a disadvantage at every turn.

Yet even here, what he says helps us. It would be a greater miracle, a most wonderful and surprising thing, for these humble followers of the carpenter – fisherman, tax-collectors, common folk – to so cover up, unanimously, their own colossal lie, believe that lie with all of their hearts and lives, turn the world upside down to persuade others to believe what they know is false, and give their lives for the glory of a name that is rotting in a grave!

That is harder to believe by a longshot! And yet people pull the shades of their eyes down tight and refuse to believe Jesus lives!

The testimony of these weak instruments in the hands of the one and only risen Savior is powerful, incontrovertible, except to stubbornness. And let me say that we are all stubborn.

We said there are two sets here – the disciples are one; Saul of Tarsus, perhaps one of the most stubborn men of all – is the other.

The British author, George Lyttelton, wrote:

*The conversion and apostleship of St. Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a divine revelation.*

Paul preached what he once so fully and vehemently sought to destroy. He was a lion against the cross, and then was made a lamb in the cause of Jesus.

He did so with the utmost sense of doing God service in both camps – so purposeful deception is out of the question.

And the reason for his faith? He had seen Jesus, alive, risen, glorious!

I should say here that Mr. Lyttelton, whom I just quoted, along with a friend at Oxford where they met – both set out to disprove the claims of the New Testament, and in their pursuit against the truth, both came to be Christians and apologists for the faith!

This nicely introduces our **two last witnesses**:

We have seen prophecy predicting Christ's resurrection – OT and Jesus in the NT. 1 and 2.

We have seen lesser resurrections – by Jesus himself in his humble life and by the risen ascended Lord through his apostles afterwards. 3 and 4.

We have seen the testimonies of the Romans and the Jews, who all they needed to do to disprove the resurrection was to produce the body. 5 and 6.

The unbelieving surprise of the disciples at his resurrection, and the great variety of those who saw the Lord alive – 7 and 8.

How fully turned to this resurrection truth in these otherwise weak men disproves all conspiracy, and especially in the chief enemy turned chief proponent – the Apostle Paul. 9 and 10.

Eleven and twelve is found in the continued work of the risen Christ by his presence and Spirit.

In speaking before King Agrippa, Paul in Acts 26 says much the same as he does in 1 Corinthians 15.

*<sup>22</sup> "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; <sup>23</sup> that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." (Act 26:22-23 NAU)*

He adds this element – that Christ's light would shine to Jews and the Gentiles. In other words, his kingdom, his power, his glory, through his resurrected life, would dawn in his church. He has brought life and immortality to light!

The empty tomb of Christ becomes the cradle of the NT church.

Three things stand out regarding the founding of this church.



1. The Christian Gospel centered all in Christ Jesus who conquered, is the fulfillment of the Old Testament – the resurrection of Jesus seals his blood-work for all sinners.
2. The Gospel of the risen Savior has also knocked down the wall that separated Jew and Greek; the church is now international as his rule extends to the reaches of the world! Our Sabbath has been moved from the last day of the week to the first by his resurrection!
3. The empty tomb is now the beginning of the end. With his resurrection, we have entered the last days, the final period, before the return of Christ. A new day has been ushered in.

“Jesus has forced open a door that had long been locked since the death of the first man. He has met, fought and beaten the King of Death. Everything is different because he has done so.” CS Lewis

So the establishment of the church on the foundation of the Apostles – the New Testament story – is the first.

And then the second part of this set – number 12 – is the witness of believers down through the centuries.

The Christian has been transformed by his life, head to toe. In a very mystical but powerful and true sense, the one who believes in Jesus has died with him and risen with him, ascended with him and is seated above with him, is the center of everything to him and he is returning for him.

The church is not at all a perfect witness to this perfect Savior, and you will find in every Christian house and life that which should not be there.

BUT – that does not remove the fact that He who is the Resurrection dwells there!

His Testament has done more good and great things in this world can be told!

And if you are outside of him and his life-giving gospel – you are not only missing the great purpose for your life; you are missing the great purpose of the whole world; of all of history.

There is a reason why God has made your calendars orbit around the Savior's advent!

A new heavens and a new earth has begun, in the coming of the risen Lord.

Do you really think it is possible that the God who made this universe would let sin, Satan, death, win? Have you *read* the last book of the Bible???? Jesus is going to win!

You need to look at things as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15.

The first creation begins with God making the world and all that is in it – light, dark, days and nights, or time, earth and sky, land and water, plants and animals, and last of all – man.

But in the final world, the coming new heavens and new earth, God begins by making man first and bringing him into his rest first; and then to make a world for His Son and his own people.

You are called today to be a part of that risen, eternal people – to flee from your ways, from your own ideas, and believe God! He say, ‘This is my beloved Son – hear him!’ Hear him today – and come to him.

Now is the accepted time to come to Jesus, turning from the foolish things you love way too much and being changed by his death-defeating cross.

May you say with Paul today: God forbid that I should boast in anything but the cross, by which the world is crucified to me and I to the world – because we have been raised to a new one, by the defeater of death himself!