



Sermon Series: All Signs Point to Jesus

To be used with Session 8: The Ultimate Sign

Sermon Title: Eyewitness Testimony

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the Bible study “The Ultimate Sign,” this sermon builds upon today’s Bible study by providing evidence of the resurrection of Jesus.

Introduction: If you have served on a jury, you know that hearsay is not allowed in a trial. Hearsay is considered unverifiable testimony. If I state that I heard someone else say something, that testimony is not admissible. The exact opposite of hearsay is an eyewitness account of the occurrence. If an attorney is able to get multiple independent eyewitness accounts of the same story, the case is much easier to win. Today’s message is a study of multiple eyewitness accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. We will see the testimony of a small group of followers, a large group of followers, and a former critic. Each eyewitness account points to the same conclusion: Jesus had risen from the dead.

1. The eyewitness account of a faithful few (vv. 5,7).

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth to help them understand the resurrection. If someone does not hold to the truth of the resurrection, this person does not hold to the assurance of salvation. This is the reason Paul pointed out that the truth of Jesus’s death for our sins, His burial, and resurrection had been clearly articulated throughout Scripture.

Upon addressing the basics of this truth, Paul told his audience that Jesus had appeared to Peter, the twelve, James, and the apostles. A quick study of this group would find them to be a rather motley bunch. Peter was quick to talk and then consider what to say. James did not initially believe in Jesus yet wrote a book in the New Testament. The twelve were known to argue with each other over who was the greatest. Yet, these were some of the ones Jesus revealed Himself to and they remained faithful.

If you grew up with siblings, there may have been a time in which you tried to coordinate together to concoct a story for your parents in an effort to cover up a misdeed. For those of us who tried this, we all know that said story did not hold up very long. The first sibling cracked when pressure was applied, and lost privileges were discussed. If we cracked that quickly, why didn’t the first eyewitnesses of the resurrection crack? Significant pressure was applied, and it cost them their lives. The reason they did not crack is because they knew it to be true. They saw Jesus themselves and no one was going to dissuade them of this.

Lifeway

2. The eyewitness account of five hundred (v. 6).

Paul also told the church at Corinth that Jesus appeared to five hundred witnesses at one time, and some of these witnesses were still alive. The reason Paul addressed the fact that some of the witnesses were still alive was to encourage others to ask the witnesses directly. This would once again give them a firsthand account of what took place, what was said, and what the witnesses experienced. Paul knew that the testimony from the witnesses would not contradict each other because there was not fabrication taking place.

It might also be good for us to put all of this in context. If someone was to place their faith in Jesus, this person would likely face persecution. The persecution could come from the Roman government because they did not tolerate others saying that Jesus was in authority and not the emperor. The persecution could also come from the Jews, who instigated the death of Jesus and refused to believe that the One they rejected was alive.

3. The eyewitness account of a former critic (vv. 8-11).

Many of us would agree that a former critic of something can become one of the best advocates. A good critic is someone who has reached conclusions based on study. If this critic later becomes an advocate, they are “beyond strong” in their advocacy because they know all of the counter arguments. This was true for the apostle Paul.

Paul described himself as one who persecuted the church of God. We see him living this out in Acts when he was breathing threats and murder against followers of Jesus. He had also received legal rights to imprison those who were following Jesus (9:1-4). Yet, in this passage we find him working harder than anyone else to further the gospel message.

What caused this change? We learn from Acts 9 that he personally encountered the risen Savior. God’s grace also caused this change because he spoke of it three times in this passage. Paul specifically stated, “but by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (v. 10). He did not rely on his religious heritage, his knowledge about the things of God, or any manmade endeavor. Instead, Paul trusted in God’s grace as revealed through the risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: As a case is concluded in a courtroom, it is then handed to the jury. Based on the evidence, we would have to conclude that the resurrection is true. Many here today may have accepted this truth. If this is you, then let’s be like Paul and tell others. Some may have heard this truth but not accepted it. If this is you, please do not leave here today without a relationship with the risen Lord who is Savior.

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