

Question: Why did Jesus appear after his resurrection only to those who already believed in him?

Jesus wanted people to believe in him (John 8:24), but he wanted them to believe because they chose to do so without any external compulsion or manipulation. He could have called down thunderbolts and forced even his enemies to believe that he was God in the flesh, but that would have removed their freedom to choose whether or not to believe. In the same manner, the experience of witnessing the personal presence of the resurrected Lord was of such an overwhelming nature that one would no longer have the choice whether or not to believe. Jesus wanted followers who would trust and serve him from their own hearts instead of men and women who cowered at his feet in fear because they had no choice. Therefore, he appeared only to those who had already made the choice to believe in him as the Son of God because of his life and teachings before his death and resurrection.

We can also see this principle in operation in the way Jesus used miracles during his earthly ministry. His miracles were not primarily intended to persuade people. They were acts of compassion toward suffering people (Matthew 14:14). Thus, he often performed his miracles in private and then told those he blessed to tell no one about him (Mark 1:41-44; 5:35-43). Instead of attracting people like a magician in a sideshow, Jesus wanted followers with the kind of faith that would result in a life-long commitment. Unlike many modern evangelists who draw crowds by their claims to do miracles, Jesus did not overwhelm those around him by his mighty power in order to remove all doubts. Instead, he put the truth out for people to hear and see—often making it sound anything but easy—and allowed people to decide for themselves whether to believe or walk away (Matthew 19:16-22).

The resurrection of Jesus was the greatest of all miracles. But his appearances after his resurrection were intended to strengthen the faith that already existed in his followers. They needed strong faith in order to persevere through the persecution and challenges that life would soon bring upon them. They had already made the choice to believe in him; but upon becoming witnesses of the resurrected Lord, these followers were then ready both to live and to die for him. The transformed lives of those humble but convicted disciples bore

witness to the fact of the resurrection in such a powerful way that the truth of the resurrection of Christ has been unstoppable in its impact on our world for more than 2000 years.

Proof takes place in each individual mind. If a person does not want to believe, no amount of Christian evidence will persuade him. The Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky once wrote: “The genuine realist, if he is an unbeliever, will always find strength and ability to disbelieve in the miraculous, and if he is confronted with a miracle as an irrefutable fact he would rather disbelieve his own senses than admit the fact.”

However, for those who have seen enough of the suffering and hopelessness that fill much of the unbelieving world, there is more than enough evidence of the resurrection of Jesus to bring faith, hope, joy, love and fulfillment both now and forever. Which will you and I choose: to believe or not to believe?

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