

“And That He Appeared ...”

“... to Cephas, then to the twelve, then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once of whom the greater part remain until now but some have fallen asleep, then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles, and last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also” (1 Cor. 15:5-8).

The resurrection of Jesus was preached, as part of the gospel it is, to the Corinthians and the declaration of that faith was justly established by the fact that the scriptures had predicted he would be. Now, to further confirm the resurrection, Paul declares that what the scriptures had foreshown had come to pass: there were many witnesses of Christ's resurrection, adding human testimony to that which was divine. In the list of witnesses (six in number), some of them were only a repeat of what the four gospels had revealed: Christ's appearance to Peter, to the 12 and to all the apostles. Paul tells of witnesses nowhere otherwise recorded; that of the appearance to James, to above 500 brethren. Jesus' appearance to Paul, however (while not found in the gospels), was first given by Luke in Acts 9, then recited by Paul himself as he preached to unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem and to Agrippa in Caesarea (Acts 22, 26).

There are at least 12 recorded appearances of Jesus to human witnesses from all the accounts given of that momentous event. He appeared to several women (Mt. 28:5); to Mary Magdalene (Mk. 16:9) and while Paul speaks of two appearance of Jesus to the apostles; there were at least five such: one time to a few, then sometimes to the total number of them. He also appeared to two on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-31). The last appearance of Jesus was to Paul, whose appearance shattered Paul's unbelief and was the turning point of his life, from a persecutor of Christ to one of its strongest defenders. Nor are we to suppose these were the only time Jesus made appearance to His disciples. Luke state that Jesus *“showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of 40 days ...”* (Acts 1:3). These proofs included Him eating with disciples (Lk. 24:42) or else allowing them to touch Him (Jn. 20:27, 1 Jn. 1:1). His appearances were to those who knew Him before His crucifixion and who would recognize any impostor as being just that. They, by their intimate knowledge of Him, knew He had been raised from the dead!

Human testimony of the resurrection of Christ was a significant proof of the reality of that event. His appearance to James, apparently he who not believed in Him (but who came to be one of the pillars of the church, as well as the author of the epistle which bears his name); was no doubt a major

factor in James' conversion. In his epistle, James acknowledges Jesus as Lord (James 1:1), something he did not do (so far as can be determined), before Christ's death.

It has been perceived that whether deliberate or incidental, Paul's witnesses fall into two groups: three friendly witnesses (Cephas, the 12 and 500 brethren), then three hostile witnesses: James, all the apostles, and Paul. Notice has already been given of James' earlier unbelief. As to the third "hostile witness," Paul clearly distinguishes between the "twelve" and "all the apostles." The "twelve" was the designation of those chosen by Jesus to be His ambassadors and the number did not always refer to a number. After Judas' death there were really only 11 surviving apostles and at the first appearance of Jesus to the disciples (which Paul calls "the twelve") the number was 10 for Thomas was missing! When Thomas was apprised that Jesus had appeared to the others, he was not shy to express his unbelief. He said, "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and shall put my finger into the print of the nails and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*" (Jn. 20:35). At Jesus' next appearance (to "all the apostles") Thomas was present and was invited by Jesus to "*reach hither thy finger and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand and put it into my side ...*" The response of Thomas was immediate: "*My Lord and my God*" (Jn. 20:27f). That Paul was a hostile witness of Jesus goes without saying.

The testimony of hostile witnesses is greater in impact than that of "friendly" ones. After all, one expects "friendly witnesses" to give testimony favorable to the claims of the questioned one! But, when one has been opposed to a person yet gives testimony very favorable to him, that impact is great! Such is the force of the witnesses Paul produced to prove that Jesus had, on the third day, been raised from the dead.

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