

The Apostles Are Our Example

by
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Christians have a difficult time understanding why skeptics are so skeptical of the miracles of Jesus and the apostles, especially the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus himself. After all, we have all the eyewitness testimony of the New Testament writers, who were disciples of Christ. Christian apologists have for centuries defended the testimony of the New Testament writers, showing how the resurrection of Jesus is the best explanation for the origin of the Christian faith and its continued existence even in the face of persecution. Even non-Christian writers of the first and second century made reference to the historical Jesus and allude to his rising from the dead.

How could anyone not take all this eyewitness testimony, toss in a bit of faith, and come to the conclusion that Jesus did indeed die on the cross for our sins and rise from the dead three days later? My answer to this question is that Jesus' apostles are our example and I want to be like them. What do I mean by this? Well, let's take a look at a few verses from the Bible and see what we find.

At the beginning of the 24th chapter of Luke, we find the women visiting the tomb, which they find empty. Angels announce to them that Jesus has risen from the dead. Then in verses 9-11, we find this strange passage:

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.

What? The 11 apostles and all the others did not believe the women, thinking that what they were saying was nonsense? Why would they think this, given that there were at least five women who were giving the testimony? And not only that, these women were themselves disciples of Jesus and most likely good friends with many of the ones who did not believe them. Yet, their eyewitness testimony was totally unbelievable to them.

Let's look further. In the 20th chapter of John, Jesus appears to the disciples. Unfortunately, Thomas was not present. Later, when Thomas comes back, the apostles tell him that they have seen the Lord. Then in verses 25b-27, we find this interesting passage.

But he [Thomas] said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

How could this be? Thomas was one of the 12 original apostles. He had supposedly sojourned with the other apostles and fellowshiped with them for three years. They were best friends. Yet, Thomas disbelieved his brethren, even when they all claimed to be eyewitnesses of Jesus' appearance. He had to actually see Jesus for himself before he would believe.

Now, it is understandable how the apostles might be skeptical of the reports of others, even those of close friends, had they never experienced any miracles. But what makes the skepticism of the apostles far exceed that of any skeptic alive today is that they *had* experienced miracles. The Gospels record miracles on top of miracles that Jesus performed and the apostles witnessed. Turning water into wine, healing the sick, feeding the thousands, walking on water, making the blind see. On and on the list goes. In addition, Jesus raised at least two people from the dead (Jairus' daughter and Lazarus). And in Matthew 10:5-8, we read about Jesus sending out his 12 apostles.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."

Here we see that even the apostles performed miracles, including raising people from the dead.

So, let's see what we have here. Jesus performed many miracles, including raising people from the dead. The apostles not only witnessed these miracles, but they also went out and performed miracles themselves, including raising people from the dead. Jesus had told his apostles that he was going to be killed and then resurrected three days later. This should have been a very believable prophecy considering that seeing the dead raised was a somewhat common thing for the apostles. And to make it even more believable, the person they considered to be the one and only Son of God and a speaker of truth was the one telling them this.

Yet, in light of all this, the apostles could not even fathom the possibility of Jesus having been resurrected, even with the eyewitness testimony of other disciples, without actually seeing him in the flesh. Talk about your skeptics! And as if you couldn't get any more skeptical, we read in Matthew 28:16-17:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

Wow! Some of the disciples doubted Jesus' resurrection even after seeing him alive after his entombment. I don't see how you can get any more skeptical than that!

So, the next time someone asks you why you do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, tell them you are just following the good example set by Jesus' hand-picked apostles. Tell them you will not believe *any* eyewitness testimony that Jesus rose from the dead until you can see him alive for yourself. And hey, even then you might have a few doubts!