

Sermon 4, "The Bible On Trial Series" October 19, 2014

EYEWITNESS TESTIMONY

Selected Verses



Dear Friends in Christ

Our meditation this morning focuses on the last theme in the series "The Bible on Trial." During the first theme we learned of the need we have to read the Bible. Then on the second we learned the Bible has so many critics and that we are to respond to them based on what God does with us through Jesus Christ. On the third Sunday we learned that we are to "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls." Jeremiah 6:1a, 16, as God through the prophet Jeremiah, asks us to do. Those paths are proven by ancient sources that will override the "what if" what if the Bible wasn't what we have believed so far.

Then on the fourth theme we focused on the role of archaeology to the veracity of the Scriptures. And today on this last theme we will focus on another set of witnesses, the eyewitness testimony. Primarily of the Gospels, specifically of those who wrote the Gospels, men, eyewitness, that God chose to record the life of His Son Jesus Christ, and who by the power of the Holy Spirit He gives confidence in their writings that we may know the truth about our Savior and His great plan of salvation. Those witnesses are: Matthew, Mark, John and Luke.

Luke wrote the Gospel of the same name and the book of Acts. He begins the book of acts like this: "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ² until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God."

As you know, the primary job of an eyewitness is to "give a report on what he or she has seen" not to comment or interpret but to tell it as it was, as it happened, and these men do so.

Now, as in most court cases, neither the judge nor the jury would be present at the scene of the crime. So to reach their verdict they must weigh the testimony of those eyewitnesses who were. Since none of us were present during Jesus' earthly life, we, too, must weigh the testimony of His eyewitnesses. But the question is how reliable are those witness, can we trust them in their account of events? In what they saw or learned from other eyewitness? Are they telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Or did they exaggerate and add their own interpretations and embellishments?

But to help us trust the testimony of the eyewitness knowing their credentials is important. So today let's review some of their background and credentials:
The Gospel of Matthew, was written by an eyewitness named Matthew or Levi. He was a tax collector, and Jesus called him to be one of His twelve disciples (Matthew 9:9). He accompanied Jesus, heard His teachings and witnessed

His miracles. Though he was in hiding during Jesus' trial and crucifixion, he was a witness to the risen Lord.

The Gospel of Mark, was written by a near-eyewitness named John Mark (Acts 12:12). He accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:5, 13), then later became a close associate with the eyewitness Peter (1 Peter 5:1b), who was one of Jesus' twelve disciples (Matthew 4:18-20). Peter was one of three disciples Jesus chose to witness the rising of the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue ruler (Mark 5:35-43), Jesus' transfiguration (Mark 9:1-13) and His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42).

The Gospel of Luke was written by a near-eyewitness named Luke. Luke was a physician who accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys (Acts 21:1; Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24). He carefully investigated the events of Jesus' life, interviewing eyewitnesses to those events (Luke 1:1-3).

The Gospel of John was written by an eyewitness named John. John was a fisherman whom Jesus called to be one of His twelve disciples (Matthew 4:21-22). With Peter and his brother James, John was in the inner circle of disciples who witnessed the three events miracles.

As you see the Gospels were written by men who had a fresh involvement in Jesus ministry either one way or another.

But why, why would we want to examine their credentials? Why would we ask who were these men? It is because of the importance of the Gospel. It is because of our salvation as it affected them directly so it will affect us directly as well, in our own time and place.

That's why the Apostle Peter did not write a Gospel but he himself says what he heard and saw as is confirmed by the Gospel writers, said: "For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ¹⁷ For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased", ¹⁸ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain." (2 Peter 1:16-18)

What an experience they had, seen Jesus himself perform all what he did, and learning from him directly. Friends, it is still happening today. Through his word we do hear from him directly. Not as in a myth as Peter says, but here in the Scriptures God tells us who he is, even as he hear the Old testament reading for today: "⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, ⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other."

Lots is being said about who these men are, those who wrote the Gospels and for other parts of the Scriptures as well, scholars and critics might reject or put a doubt in the historical backgrounds of the Scriptures, but I say, that's ok, not that we accept their propositions but that we know what these men, the biblical writers are doing. Notice what God tells us in the Old Testament reading for today: "I call you by your

name, I name you, though you do not know me. ⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.”

That alone is a great reason to Hold on to God’s words, that He has named you by your own name! No other of the so called gods can claim that! Not science, not reason, not intelligence! But God alone who is love, mercy and care! He says: “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.”

It doesn’t matter what men think or believe about God and His writers, because it doesn’t take away from what God is and can do, and desires to do for each one of us, to forgive our sins, to deliver us from satan, sin and death, and to give us the freedom of a new life in Christ.

Are you tired, or know someone who is tired of all that is going in the world? Around them? Loosing hope and losing face? May the Lord give us an opportunity to let them know, to witness to them that in Jesus we have renewed hope and a new life, for His words stand forever and He is our only God, the only one of the universe, creator and Redeemer, and that is not a myth or an invented story but real as real men were touched then, and real men are being touched even today, and that God too calls them by name.

Friends, in the Gospels, we are given the eyewitness account of two of the three inner-circle disciples, Peter, John and James. Then in the book of acts we hear that the testimony of one of them, James, was cut short when he became the first of the apostles to be executed for his testimony by Herod the king. We read in Acts 12:1-2: “About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword.”

Talking about witnessing even to the point of death! Here we find the first martyr of the Christian faith. In fact, the word “martyr” comes from the Greek verb which means to witness," and an apostle was a witness of Jesus' life, death and resurrection (Acts 1:15-26). Which is your death, your resurrections and your life.

And more, it is not just the testimony of those men that bring us God’s word, but the Holy Spirit who inspired them to write and help us see the veracity of their testimony.

Friends, God did not give us the Bible to create a blind faith that drifts around like a boat without an anchor. God stepped into human history through His Son Jesus Christ and touched people's lives through His life, death and resurrection. The events of His life provide the anchor that gives shape to His message of faith, and provides meaning for the events in our lives.

And for that we give thanks to God.

In his name amen.