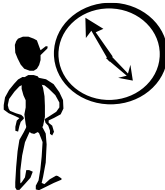


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Evidence of the Divine Authority of the Bible (part 2)

By Benjamin Franklin, 1870

COULD THE APOSTLES HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN?

Could these witnesses have been mistaken? They certainly could not. If they did not testify to the truth, they knew they did not. There was no mistake about it. The reasons for saying they could not have been mistaken must be given somewhat in detail:

1. He was seen on too many different occasions, by too many different persons, and by some of these persons too often, for them to have been mistaken. If but twelve persons had seen him but one time, in open day, the testimony would have been considered conclusive. But he was seen of above five hundred brethren at one time, by the twelve more than once, and by several others again and again, during a space of forty days. So many of them saw him so frequently, that they could not have been mistaken. If what they said about seeing him was not true, they knew it was not true.
2. There could have been no mistake about identifying him on these occasions, for there were so many who saw him, and the opportunities for identifying him were such as to render it impossible for them to have been mistaken. They saw him in daylight, ate with him, handled him, and conversed with him. In these interviews, he rehearsed many things he had said and spoke of many things he had done before his death. The interviews were too numerous, the conversations too extended, and the things on which they discoursed were of such a nature as to identify him beyond all dispute.

3. They were with him in open day; heard him say that he was about to leave them, and return to his Father; and on the Mount of Olives they saw him ascend to heaven, They saw, also, a convoy of angels, who said, "Why stand you here, gazing up into heaven? That same Jesus, whom you see ascending into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him ascend into heaven." There could have been no mistake about the main matter here. If these things were not true, they knew they were not true.
4. The apostles claimed that the Lord, after he ascended to heaven, gave them power to heal all manner of diseases--to give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and speech to the dumb. They said they did all these things. In saying this, they could not have been mistaken. They knew whether they did these things.
5. Some of these witnesses made statements that could have been proved false, if they had been false, by almost any number of persons. As samples: the statements of Matthew, published in Palestine, eight years after the death of Christ, that he fed thousands, in open day, by miracle; that there was a great earthquake when he died; that there was darkness over the whole land from the sixth till the ninth hour; that the vail in the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; that the rocks were split; the statement of Paul, that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once. These, and many more statements like them, could have been disproved by almost any number of witnesses, if they had not been true; and the enemies could have thus defeated the apostles. But instead of these statements being refuted, they are confirmed by all the testimony in the world, in any way bearing on them. They stand, not only uncontradicted by anything written in that age, but corroborated by every authority having a connection with them. These were statements about which they could not have been mistaken.
6. They claimed that they were inspired by the Savior, empowered to make revelations from God, and to speak in all the languages under heaven -- languages that they had never learned. They know whether they had received these revelations and whether they could speak these languages. They could not have been mistaken here.

This is certainly sufficient to show that there was no ground for a mistake on the part of these witnesses in regard to the matter at hand. If the things they testified to were not true, they knew it.

COULD THE APOSTLES HAVE BEEN DISHONEST?

The other side remains to be considered. Could they have been dishonest? Could they have been pretenders? They certainly could not, for the following reasons:

1. They had no inducement to tell falsehoods touching the matter in hand. Every earthly interest they had was against the ground they took, and in favor of their renounc-

ing it.

2. That Jesus rose from the dead, if not true, was the most unpopular and unwelcome story that any man or set of men could have told at the time in which they lived. The idea, that these timid men would have had the boldness and determination to face the world, Jews and pagans, and declare persistently that Jesus rose from the dead, knowing it to be false, is the very climax of absurdity.
3. Admitting the possibility of these timid and cowardly men (as they were before the death of Christ) to have had the effrontery to stand up in Jerusalem, before the learned rabbis, the doctors of the law, the scribes and priests, at the first, and declare that Jesus rose from the dead, knowing that they were telling a falsehood; still, there remains no way of accounting for their persistence in their statement and maintaining that it was true, though every possible means were used to induce them to recant, till they sealed their testimony with their blood. What man of intelligence can believe that these men were dishonest; mere pretenders; telling what they knew to be false, and that they were true to their original purpose, and every man of them stood by every other man in telling and maintaining the falsehood, through stripes, imprisonments, and banishments, till the last one was martyred for telling the falsehood, and not a man of them could ever, by any means, be induced to give it up? The man who can believe this ought to say nothing of the credulity of Christians! It is to believe that men can have two opposite characters at the same time, and maintain both till death; that they can be hypocrites, pretenders and deceivers for life, engaged in palming off a grand falsehood on the world; and yet so true to their falsehood and to each other, that not one of them ever could be induced to betray and expose the falsehood or his fellow-witnesses. Not one of them ever could be induced to save himself from stripes, imprisonment, or death, to turn States evidence! What they stated at the first, they stated at the last.
4. Take Paul as a more particular example. Three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned. Five times he received forty stripes, save one. He was exposed to wild beasts in Ephesus. Finally, in Rome, he was deliberately beheaded. Yet he stood to the same testimony from the first till the last. Can any man doubt that he was an honest man?
5. Those men bore unquestionable marks of honesty, sincerity, and candor in the purity of their lives, the purity, and the correctness of their teaching. They not only taught purity but practiced it.

If, therefore, these were not honest, sincere, and candid men, the world never contained any.

They gave the highest evidence that men can give of honesty and sincerity. It is, therefore, impossible for men who understand what evidence is, men of intelligence, to

conclude that they were dishonest. It is morally impossible for them to have been dishonest. It follows, then, with the force of demonstration, that, as they could not have been dishonest, and could not have been mistaken, their testimony is true. The Lord rose from the dead. He is Divine, and the Bible of Divine authority. He was dead, but is alive, and lives forever and ever. In him, all fullness dwells. He is head over all things to the Church. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

But now turn back to the first preaching of the apostles. Where did they first preach after he rose? In Jerusalem, where, fifty days before, it was unanimously agreed, he died. Here was the place where the people were better prepared than anywhere else in the world to judge of the truth of their preaching; and among the people who had all the opportunities of knowing whether they told the truth or not, and they, too, the most decided and determined people in their religion on the face of the earth. Here the apostles first stand up, with all the late and present surroundings in the minds of the people, and preach. What is the main ground of the first discourse? That the same Jesus, whom the people had crucified some fifty days before, had been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God, and the sublime display of supernatural power which they saw and heard was from him. Here the people, in thousands, who were posted in the events of the past few weeks, stood around the apostles, and saw and heard what was before them. Their prejudices were all against them. Popularity was against them. All worldly interests were against them. All existing church relations were against them. What is the result? Three thousand sturdy and determined Jews turn their backs on their former church, their worldly interests, and sins, and yield to the authority of Jesus the Christ. In a few days, five thousand became obedient to the faith. Shortly the Gospel reached Samaria, and the people, with one accord, gave heed to the things spoken by the preacher of Jesus. Triumphantly, grandly, and sublimely it moved onward. In ten years the Gentiles became obedient to the faith. In less than forty years it traveled the length of the Mediterranean Sea and throughout the Roman empire.

Did uninspired fishermen of Galilee; illiterate, timid, and weak men, do all this, in their own strength? Did they do this by telling a falsehood, sticking to a falsehood, and, in their mere human strength, preaching a falsehood? If they did, their falsehood did more than any truth ever did since the beginning of time, for such a revolution had never been brought about before by any sort of preaching, true or false. To say that the apostles did this in their own strength, by preaching a falsehood, and one of the silliest falsehoods ever told, too, if it was a falsehood at all, is to say, that the most stupendous, grand, and sublime religious movement recorded in the world's history, was achieved by weak and ignorant men by preaching a falsehood, in spite of all the learning, talent, money, prejudice, pride, popularity, civil and religious authorities on the face of the earth! The man who will say this is not a subject of argument.

No doubt, many statesmen, philosophers, men of wealth, and powerful men of

the world of different kinds, as well as distinguished religionists of different kinds, of that day, thought the whole affair about Jesus of Nazareth a shallow thing, with which the people had been carried away, and that, in a short time, there would be nothing more heard of Jesus or his apostles. But how stands the case now? Eighteen centuries have gone into the past, and their events are known in history. What has become of the statesmen of Greece and Rome? Excepting a few, their names have gone into oblivion. Where is that mighty civil superstructure, on which they put forth their greatest power and skill? In less than four hundred years, it was divided into petty kingdoms, and the wisdom of the great men who framed the Roman government was shown to be foolishness with God. Where are the philosophers of Greece and Rome? Excepting a few, their names are not even found in history. Their systems of philosophy have been exploded, and many of the things in which they gloried and prided themselves most, have been demonstrated to be erroneous and false. Where are the men of wealth of those times? Gone, ages since; their vast estates scattered to the winds, and they forgotten.

But where is the name of Jesus of Nazareth? It has been interwoven with the history of the civilized world for eighteen hundred years. Every infidel that now writes a letter, in some form or other, puts down "the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-eight." Every note of hand, bond, deed, mortgage, bank check, summons, receipt, no matter by whom written, believer, or unbeliever, bears "the year of our Lord on it," either in full or in some abbreviated form. If any man thinks the power of our Lord Jesus the Christ is nothing, or a matter of no consequence, let him inquire for the origin of the observance of the Lord's day or the first day of the week. What statesman, philosopher, or great man of the world, originated the observance of the first day of the week? No great man did it. It originated with Jesus of Nazareth. Has he any power on earth now? Lift up your eyes and look at the stupendous business operations of the civilized world. See the busy multitudes in the departments of agriculture, mechanic arts, commerce, and trade, as the week closes. Then, open your eyes on the Lord's day morning, and see the general suspension! Where is the power that suspends all this? Whose wonderful hand stays and suspends all those busy multitudes? Where did all this originate? You trace back and find the origin of it in the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. Before that event, nothing of the kind described had ever existed on the first day of the week. There had been such a thing as the observance of the Sabbath or the seventh day, but no observance of the first day as a sacred day, since the beginning of time.

(To be continued...)

