

The Steady, Sufficient, and Sure Word of God Part I

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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2 Peter 1:16-21

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. 17For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The first and second epistles of Peter were written by an eyewitness of Jesus. The Apostle Peter was one of the original disciples that Jesus taught, and he was writing to real churches during a very difficult time. If we are right about when this second letter was written, then it was during the terrible reign of Nero and his ruthless persecution of Christians. Under Nero's diabolical orders both the Apostle Peter and Paul were put to death in Rome. It was a very dark and dangerous time for the Christian faith. Peter wrote this second epistle before his execution to encourage and comfort the flock of God.

The early church underwent tremendous hardship. They experienced so much hardship that they believed with much conviction that Jesus would return at any moment. Many supposed they were in the Great Tribulation and the maniacal Roman emperor was the Anti-Christ. That's how difficult it was.

Therefore, we can learn a great deal from our early church fathers on how to live in a culture that is not friendly to the Christian faith. For over 25 years I have sounded an unpopular message that persecution of a worst kind than mere ridicule was coming to Christians in America. The persecution has begun and will both spread and worsen. Although we will not be called upon in the near future to lay down our lives for Christ, we will have to lay down reputations, possessions, and some freedoms. The persecution at first will be stigmatization for being *fundamentally radical* in the interpretation of Scripture. *Fundamentally radical* is the same terminology used for Muslim extremists who commit jihad in the name of Allah. The association will not be not accidental. The common denunciation will be that we are bigots and hate mongers. This has already started. Currently, evangelicals are being marginalized and considered irrelevant to the advancement of culture. Soon, we will be attacked as being the problem with what's wrong with culture.

From there it will move to financial persecution and loss of certain freedoms. Many Christians are already experiencing that. Last year the founder and CEO of Mozilla, a search engine company, was forced by the board to resign because he had contributed to a California proposition against same-sex marriage. It's already begun. The average and ordinary Christian will suffer job loss or demotion for his or her religious convictions. Religious organizations will lose tax-exemption and suffer litigation and the unbearable expenses they will bring; eventually the financial penalties will come to the local church. Finally, it will come to actual criminal charges for holding certain theological viewpoints that are considered illegal. If you think that is a little too far of a stretch, just remember 20-some-odd years ago when I spoke to this church in the early days and said this was coming it seemed a far stretch from reality and now it's upon us.

With Friday's Supreme Court's ruling establishing same-sex marriage legal in all 50 states and thereby changing the definition of marriage, we see the pressure for orthodox Christianity to bow its knee to what is called the progress of the democratic experiment. Well, the democratic experiment ended over 50 years ago when robed men said prayer and the Bible could not be publicly endorsed or used by faculty and administration in the American school system. There could be no acknowledgement of our dependence upon God for life or liberty. When that became the law of the land the American experiment of a democratic republic died.

Our nation's founders said as much would happen. John Adams, signer of the Declaration of Independence and second President of the United States said, "It is religion and morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand. The only foundation of a free constitution is pure virtue." In 1798 Adams stated, "Our constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

George Washington suggested, "While just government protects all in their religious rights, true religion affords to government its surest support." In his farewell address after refusing a third term as president, Washington declared, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

These and others who set this nation into motion attributed the success of the American Revolution and establishment of the United States to the providence and grace of Almighty God. They knew as long as the nation they had conceived believed in its debt to God and exercised a morality that was based upon the commandments of God that nation would long endure. But they equally warned if said nation would sever its moorings from what is inherently moral, good, and virtuous, this country would drift into first moral collapse and then political collapse, and inevitably the loss of democracy and freedom.

American patriot Jedediah Morse predicted what was obvious in 1799, "Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all blessings which flow from them, must fall with them." We are watching in real time the fracture and collapse of a once great people.

We should not be surprised or dismayed by the court's ruling. It was self-evident that this is what they would do. Some have called it the day America died but that is not true. Others have said we have entered into a new era but that is not true. We have legalized sin before last Friday. In 1973 we legalized infanticide, the killing of infants. We have legalized gambling, alcohol, and other narcotics. In the state of Nevada prostitution is legal. This is not the first time sin has been codified and justified in American law. In this sense nothing is new.

This nation died long ago and we are now reaping the decay. We remark about how fast the moral change in our nation has happened; again, I don't think that is quite true either. It is nothing more than the accumulative affect. The longer the snowball rolls down hill the more speed it accumulates and the more it grows in mass.

Apart from God's grace to awaken this people, which is still possible—and let us therefore pray—the American society is on borrowed time. The clock of destruction is running out of time and the grim reaper of nations is fast approaching with its pay out. The Bible warns us, “Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34). Any. Including the United States. We are not exempt from that warning, although we have thought we were.

I seldom address political matters in the pulpit because I do not see from the Bible that the business of the church is to be a political machine. Some believe it is because of Jesus' words that we are to be salt and light. But “salt and light” does not mean political seasoning but spiritual seasoning, an influence on the hearts and minds of people and society using the Gospel as the source of influence and not mere morality. The Moral Majority was doomed to failure in the late seventies and eighties and any like organization. The hope of this nation is not in conservative politics and ideology; the answer is in the Gospel changing one heart after another. Therefore we are salt and light and we must be busy dispensing ourselves, giving ourselves away to this culture no matter the loss of freedoms we may suffer. The church of Jesus Christ will make societal change as it brings to bear upon a society the Gospel proclaimed and lived out as Christ did. It will not be instantaneous for not even Jesus or His apostles changed culture in their lifetimes.

Having said that I believe it is the Lord's will that I say a little about this issue; not so much about the political aspect of the Supreme Court's ruling and the Democratic party's embrace of homosexuality, but I want to address what I believe is the biblical response to the increasing tides of moral decay and the inevitable persecution of Christianity and all those who do not agree with the political decisions of government.

So I direct you to the text. In verses 16 through 21, the Apostle Peter is approaching his death and the persecution of many of the churches. He is writing to churches in Asia Minor in the face of such assault. He says it is necessary that they have a Christian apologetic.

I. The Necessity for a Christian Apologetic

From this text I see the demand that you and I have a Christian apologetic. Peter is anxious that his readers understand that their faith was genuine and based upon truth. He says in verse 16, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” He reminds them that the Gospel he gave them was certain. They were to have the upmost confidence and they were to be committed to knowing it. It was the same apostle who said in his first epistle, “But sanctify (set apart) the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

What does the word *apologetic* mean? It does not mean, the way we normally use it, to give an apology; to say you're sorry. This is certainly not what the Apostle Peter is advocating or insinuating. No, the word *defense* as in the New King James is an accurate translation of the Greek word *apologia*. It means to defend; give an answer; answer the critics; to give a reasonable answer to the validity of the Christian faith and why you've placed your faith in Christ. The Apostle Peter says to persecuted Christians, it is essential, it is a necessity, it is required that you have reasonable answers in the face of persecution. It is all the more reason to be ready to give an answer for the Christian faith when you are undergoing persecution and suffering for that faith.

A. The Challenge of Culture Demands An Apologetic.

When the culture challenges your faith, you must be ready with a defense. At this moment you are living in a culture that is not friendly to you and your beliefs. You are not living in an atmosphere that is conducive to your safety, freedom, or popularity and therefore I ask you to consider some things with me. This culture demands an answer and we must give it.

For example, how will you answer—How can you know that the claim of Christianity is true? This is the question that is being asked. Not only is it being asked by the scientist or the politician or the sociologist or the professor at the university, it's being asked by the common man, the average man, even fellow employees. Do not be surprised when your fellow men and women will ask you this question. “How do you know that the claim of Christianity is true? All religions are claiming they are true, how do you know you are right?”

There has been, through the educational system of our public schools, a success by convincing the children of this nation for more than 50 years that there is no such thing as absolute truth and that everything is relative. Therefore, many of your friends, your neighbors, and your fellow employees believe that though they may not be able to express it. How do you answer their questions when they ask you how you know the Christian faith is true?

All religions have a moral ethic that is very similar to Christianity. That is true. The Islamic faith, as much as we may not agree with it, has a moral ethic very similar in some senses to the Christian faith. In fact, one of the criticisms of Islam of America is that we are a sleazy, undisciplined, and immoral nation. Martin Luther King learned his non-violent demonstration from a Hindu named Gandhi from India. Many religions have the code of love, peace, and joy. That's not peculiar to the

Christian faith so in light of that, how do you answer the Christian faith is real for today and that it's true in light of all the different religions that support a very similar morality or ethic?

Other religions and cults have a track record of changing lives as well. Some of the most conservative, clean, moral people are people who subscribe to the teachings of Joseph Smith. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are very moral people who live by a moral ethic very similar to that of orthodox Christianity and they too present their testimony of changed lives. How many cults today can produce people who could say, "had it not been for the teachings of this church I would have self-destructed but its teachings saved me and here I am a changed person"? Many other religions and even aberrations and forms of Christianity make that claim. So when you are asked that question you cannot think your answer of, "Well, Jesus changed my life" will be sufficient.

I'm not saying you shouldn't give that as one of the reasons of your defense but it can't be the foundation of your defense when there are other religions and even cults that can produce changed lives. So how do you answer? If you simply answer by your testimony you will convince no one, and yet your testimony is a powerful tool of the witness of Jesus Christ. I'm not saying lay it aside, no, pick it up and use it more than you do, but it is not the foundation of our defense of the Christian faith. We need something more reliable than that.

How do we answer the critic that says our position that homosexuality is a sin is a sin and not in accordance with Jesus' teaching that we should love one another or that we should judge one another? I will not touch that today but we will next week. We will try to answer that and give a defense to that question, but how will you answer that in the days to come when you are in the minority that says the Bible declares homosexuality is a sin? What do we say to the homosexual who says he or she is a devout Christian? More and more this is what we hear from many in the homosexual movement. They say they are a devout believer in Jesus Christ and that the New Testament position is not against homosexuality but actually supports their lifestyle? How do you answer that? Do you merely say, "I don't agree with you. The Bible says that's not true"? They're using the Bible too, how do you answer these questions? Could you answer? Peter wants the churches to which he's writing to be able to give an answer to these questions because culture demands it.

What answer do we give to science that discounts the miraculous? If you say, "Jesus was raised from the dead," science is going to laugh and say there are no such things as miracles. To simply say, "The claims of Christianity must be taken by faith. You can't reason your way into the kingdom, you must take a blind leap of faith," is not only *not* going to win anybody to Christ but it's not true. The Bible does not ask you to take some blind leap into the dark. The Christian faith is very reasonable and evidential. There are secure historic reasons to believe in the Christian faith. It is true you cannot argue someone into the kingdom, you can't intellectualize yourself into heaven and into the forgiveness of sins, but God gave us minds. We've been dealing with the mind for weeks now. God gave you a mind in order to be able to reasonable to perceive Him, understand Him, to know Him, to think about Him. It's true, the mind cannot get us all the way there but God does not bypass the mind and faith doesn't either.

Not only does culture demand an apologetic, your own conscience demands it.

B. Your Own Conscience Demands An Apologetic.

From time to time, questions arise in your own mind. Some you wouldn't dare tell us or verbalize them because you would be afraid that somehow we would think you are turning to the dark side and are giving up your Christian faith. How many of you know what I mean? Questions come whether you invite them or not; questions like,

*Am I believing the truth?
Is Christianity the only way?*

Those thoughts are quite normal. In fact, if you don't ever ask yourselves those questions, I wonder about your faith. God created us with the ability to question the validity of everything, including Him. Jesus was never bothered by peoples' questions. Your unbelief in Jesus doesn't bother Him one bit. He's not shaken when men and women don't believe in Him. He's not ringing His hands in despair, "Oh, so-and-so doesn't trust Me! They don't believe I tell the truth!" Not at all. He can answer the questions. He created you to ask them. It would be actually discrediting to Jesus if you didn't ask those questions. How do I know Christianity is the only way? How do I know if I'm believing the truth or not? How do I know that I'm not deluded? Why do I say it would be in His honor that you ask those questions? Because He gave you a mind to question the validity of everything, otherwise you become gullible for anything that comes by. No, we have answers to these questions. There are biblical responses to them and just because you are sometimes frightened when a thought blazes across your brain, "How do you know you're not deceived?" don't be alarmed. Meet it. Face it. Answer it.

But how do you answer? That's the question. I want to help you today through this text.

II. Christianity is Based Upon Eye Witnesses' Account.

"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)

"Cleverly invented stories," what does he mean by that? He's talking about the Roman and Greek mythology of his hour. This was the religion that ruled the masses. The popularly accepted religious belief was that gods had come down to earth and did many spectacular things. Roman mythology taught the human race was a product of these gods; this was the polytheism of the day. Then there were the fables of the Jews. Jews were known for taking the Old Testament stories and creating new mythological fables, apocryphal stories, and by the second century we're already beginning to see apocryphal, untrue, stories about Jesus, His childhood, and other things that did not take place. Peter is saying, "We did not come and our religion is not like the religion of the majority with these clever stories. We did not even come, as Paul said to the Corinthians, with a clever intellect trying to philosophize you into the kingdom. No. We simply told you what

we saw. We are eyewitnesses of His majesty. We declared to you exactly what we saw.” That was the content of the preaching of the apostles.

A. Truth Claims of Christianity are Evidential.

The preaching of the Apostles was based upon historical events and their eyewitness account of it. This is a genuine, insurmountable answer for Christianity. This is a defense of it.

Peter, before the Sanhedrin said,

“For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:20)

Peter said, “The content of our preaching is Jesus and what He did, what we saw, what we heard, what we experienced. That’s all we can preach.” When you follow the messages, the sermons of the apostles through the book of Acts this is what you see. Their sermons mainly were Jesus, what He did, and how He did it. They were historical events. Christianity is a historical faith based upon events that can be historically proved or disproved. When it comes to historical events you can either prove them or disprove them.

The Apostles preached Christ. They preached about His life and what they saw. A perfect example of this is in Acts chapter ten when Peter preaches to the Gentile Cornelius. In verses 38-42, we have the record of his message. Of course, it was probably longer than that but this is the gist, the highlights.

“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

He begins his sermon by saying, “This is what Jesus did! Here’s what I saw Him do.”

³⁹And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

“I saw this! I’m telling you, this is what happened.”

⁴⁰Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, ⁴¹ not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. ⁴² And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” (Acts 10:38-42)

That was his entire message and at that, the Bible says the Holy Spirit came and fell upon Cornelius and all those who had gathered with him. If you dissect the message you get Christ, His miraculous life, His death, and resurrection.

The Apostles believed that if they would preach Christ, what they saw Him do, what they heard Him say, then the Holy Spirit would bless that. Why is that? Because Jesus said the Spirit of God had been given to glorify Christ. Wherever Christ is honored, there the Holy Spirit will make His presence known and bless. ? Not necessarily all the time but whether we see results or not, if we are to see any results our message must be about the glorification of Christ. We must preach Christ and this message has not changed. Regardless what happened Friday, regardless of what will take place in the days to come, we have only one message and that is Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected and ascended unto the Father. Political power or prosecutorial pressure does not change the message. If we are to see hearts change then Christ must be the message because that's the only message the Holy Spirit will attend.

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— ² the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— ³ that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:1-3)

Three times in three verses John says, “We have seen. We have heard. We have touched. We have seen. We have heard. We have handled.” Why? Because that is the Gospel—Jesus came into this world, born of a virgin, died on a cross, rose from the dead—and there were eyewitnesses to all the events of His life. This begins to be the foundation of our Christian defense. We're dealing with historical events and there were men and women who saw them and testified of the same.

Jesus taught that faith should be evidential. Even Jesus said your faith must rest upon reasonable evidence.

“Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.” (John 14:11)

If you won't believe I am who I say I am, God in flesh, well, at least believe the evidence. The evidence is what I do. What did He do? The Bible says He healed the sick, He caused blind people to see, deaf ears to hear, He even raised the dead on three occasions. Tell me, who could this be but the Son of God? Jesus says that is evidence that He is who He said He was—believe the evidence. Your faith must rest, not on thin air or imagination or fabled stories; it must rest on the reality that Jesus Christ did all He said, therefore proving He was who He claimed to be.

Some might argue they can't tell this to their neighbor. Why not? It's what the apostles did. In the last 30 years in the development of Christian apologetics, I fear that we have begun to believe that unless we are intellectuals who are well-schooled in the arts of apologetics that we cannot give a Christian defense. I love Ravi Zacharias, I am thankful for his ministry. He is an incredible man and his associates are incredible people. I'm thankful for people like William Lane Craig, another brilliant apologist of our time. When you read these men, you don't read many paragraphs. Sometimes it's hard to understand what they're trying to say they're so brilliant. If you're not

careful, you'll begin to think as you listen to them and hear their amazing minds and arguments that, "Man, I just can't do that. I can't remember all of that stuff." You'll start believing you're not capable of a true Christian apologetic, a defense of the Christian faith. But that's wrong. If you know the truth of Jesus Christ, if you believe the record of these men and preach what Christ did and that He was crucified and rose again from the dead, then the power of the Holy Spirit has something to use because He will use no other message.

Is it right to accept the miraculous as evidence? "Some people won't accept that. Science doesn't accept the miraculous," you say. Let me address that just for a few moments. It doesn't take a scientist to understand what I'm about to say.

Science cannot prove or disprove the miraculous. It is impossible. You say, "I've never heard of that. That's an audacious claim." Yes, but it's true. Science cannot function in the realm that we are discussing. Science does not have the wherewithal to test and prove or disprove the miraculous. It can only test and validate the natural. Therefore, when science disclaims the miraculous they are begging the question. Their reasoning is circular. To say that science proves that only the physical and natural laws exist and there is no other plausible explanation can be given for the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, or the resurrection of our Lord, therefore these things did not happen is circular reasoning.

Science can only test the physical universe and its laws. Science cannot test the spiritual or the ethical. When science turns their profession into the realm of philosophy, dealing with ethics—what is right and wrong, what is good and evil—they have left science altogether and have entered now into a completely different realm of science. To answer the question by science, "is there good or is there evil? Is there evil DNA or there good DNA and that's the answer to the good and evil of mankind," is impossible. You're dealing with the realm of the unseen. You're dealing with the metaphysical now. There is no science lab and there is no scientist—I don't care if his name is Stephen Hawking—that has the wherewithal to disprove the miraculous. Science simply has no means of testing it's own truth claim. When it says "there can be no miraculous," how do you prove that? Give me a science experiment that there can be no miraculous. They can't. It's not in the realm of science. The miraculous does not fit the realm of science. It cannot do experiments on the supernatural.

If there is a God, which of course I believe there is, then He surely is greater than the physical universe He created and the laws of physics and nature which He created. Surely it is not hard to see that He could supersede or suspend any of these laws which are under His command.

I would like to see a scientist test love in a test tube to see if it's real or not. They can't test love. Why? It's not of a physical nature and therefore unable to be physically experimented.

Either the things the apostles said happened or not. And with any historical event it can only be proven or disproven by the eyewitnesses accounts and the harmony of their testimonies. Did these things happen? How do we know they happened? Because we have eyewitness testimonies.

It's interesting what Peter says in verse 17 and 18. He cites the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus' appearance changed and He shone brighter than the sun. His garments were completely white and there was Moses and Elijah with Him. A voice came from heaven saying, "This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased, hear Him." It's interesting why he cites this and not the resurrection. I think the answer is clear. Of all the things Peter saw in the life of Jesus, this one event clarifies exactly who Jesus is. It's interesting though that by itself without the resurrection it doesn't make as much sense. That's why Jesus said to Peter, James, and John who were with Him on the mountain to not tell anyone what happened until after the resurrection. Why? Anybody could have seen that and think, "Wow, Jesus is a great prophet on the order of Moses and Elijah," but it was the voice, the voice of God that testified and said, "This is My Beloved Son," and when Jesus was resurrected from the dead, then Peter, James, and John, who were with Him understood what they saw. You see, not even they understood what they saw that day. But the resurrection sealed that this was the Son of God and He was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Either this happened or it didn't.

Here we have the Apostle Peter who, as he's writing these words, is in prison for his faith and is awaiting execution. I want to ask you some reasonable questions. Isn't it sensible to assume that if he had created or invented this teaching and there was no truth in it that he would not have endured all the hardships and difficulties and imprisonments that he endured? It's very foolish to think that a man would have had to endure the many beatings and imprisonments for a lie. Earlier in the book of Acts we see that after James, the brother of John, was martyred by Herod that he was going to do the same with Peter and the Bible says the night before he was to be executed Peter was fast asleep in his prison cell. He's not anxious. He's not worried. Anxiety is not keeping him awake. He's fast asleep. Why? Because he knew the things he had preached were true. They were not the devising of his own mind. They were not a created ruse to fool people. This was true.

Dear friends, I want to give you more security and a greater answer for our Christian faith.

B. Christianity is Not Based Upon the Testimony of Only One Witness.

It's based upon the testimony of many men and women who saw these things. We know, by eyewitness testimonies if something happened or did not happen. Eyewitness testimonies can be examined according to proper procedures to discover whether or not the testimony is true. I shall give you a case in point.

Last year, in Ferguson, Missouri, when a police officer shot and killed a young black man there were many eyewitnesses to that event. Some eyewitness testimonies disagreed. They didn't all say they saw the same thing. Yet, after crime scene investigation and thorough analysis of forensic evidence, authorities were able to prove beyond a shadow of reasonable doubt the testimony of the police officer rather than the other testimonies that contradicted his. I believe they came to the right conclusion. Here's how I know. The federal government wanted to press charges

against that police officer. The attorney general was eager to do so. But he couldn't because the testimonies of the eyewitnesses that truly saw and reported the truth fit together one with the other. The testimonies that disagreed did not fit with the other testimonies that disagreed nor did they stand the scrutiny that testimonial evidence must meet.

Beloved, we don't just have the Apostle Peter's testimony, we have at least 12 other apostles. Where's the 13th testimony coming from? The Apostle Paul. Jesus revealed Himself to the Apostle Paul and these 13 men went into the known world and preached that they had experienced the resurrected Jesus and this was the Gospel, and the Bible said they turned the world upside down. Not only that, Paul said in the first epistle to the Corinthians chapter 15 that not only did they, the apostles, witness the resurrected Jesus but more than 500 people saw Jesus at one time. It's interesting, when you look at the eyewitness account of the apostles. Were these men deluded or had they created one of the greatest hoaxes in all human history? No. Their own record shows they didn't even believe the report of the very first witnesses of the resurrection. When the women came and said, "He's alive!" they did not believe. In fact, one of them would not even believe the testimony of the other apostles. Thomas refused and said, "Unless I put my finger in the print of His nails or put my finger into His side, I will not believe." And yet, when Jesus appeared to him, he cried out, "My God and my Lord! I believe." What changed their testimonies? What changed their belief? They saw Him!

The historicity of the Christian faith is solid to believe. It is evidential for your faith to rest upon. You can know what you believe it true because the eyewitnesses testified and they did not disagree. Their testimonies are harmonious. It fits, it works together because they saw the same thing and therefore they testified the same thing.

I must bring this message to a conclusion. We will continue and we will deal more with the ruling of last Friday in the next message and what our responsibility and appropriate response should be. But I want to conclude today by telling you that whether physical or not, whether social or private, we are always subject to attack by an enemy who hates us. Nothing is new here. The only thing that is probably new about all of this is that now we as Christians are living in an atmosphere that we ourselves have not experienced before. For over two centuries, Christians have enjoyed the labors of our nation's founders and early Christians who secured for us an atmosphere where Christianity was free with little to no resistance. That day is gone, at least for now. That is probably the only thing that is new about all of this. But whether the persecution is physical or it's just social stigma or trials of difficulty, it is all attacks on our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith rises or falls with Jesus.

We must preach and witness to Christ as we find Christ according to the record of the Apostles. Jesus told us that because of Him people would stand or stumble. He warned us that if we followed Him we would be hated by the world. Now because that is becoming more of a reality for us, let not our faith be shaken today. Do not let your heart be troubled or afraid. These men knew of what they spoke and they were willing to give their lives because it was real. They saw it, they believed it, and they knew it. So do we. We know it's true.

Did you know that the only record of the Gaelic wars of Julius Caesar, we only have about 10 copies and they are only copies, they're not the original and yet there is no college professor that would ever doubt there was a Julius Caesar and say there were no Gaelic wars and campaign into Britain. No, they substantiate it, they confer degrees based upon research on it, and they test students on these things. I want you to know that in the New Testament there are over thirty thousand copies or pieces of copies, some within 25 years of the dates of the very events. There is more historical evidence and proof of the Christian faith than there is for Julius Caesar and the Gaelic wars.

Your faith is not in imagination. Your faith is not resting in some fantasy. No, it's resting in the historicity of Christ. He was born and He died and He rose again and He's coming again! He is coming. Don't let your faith be shaken because you're now a minority voice. Let our voices never be silent because of our numbers. That's all the more reason to raise our voice and cry, "Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life." If our voices are few then let us all the more, with all the strength we have, cry even louder, "He is a God of mercy and love and He will forgive any who will come to Him!" You can rest your faith upon Jesus Christ.

Should you ask if all you have to do is believe the historical record of Jesus Christ and the apostles and that makes you a Christian, well, let's clarify something. It all depends on what you mean by the word *believe*. This is the crucial word and it must be correctly defined. If you mean *believe* to mean simply agreeing and mentally assessing that these things are true and you can't argue history and the proof is there, then I would say that is the beginning of faith but it's not the conclusion of the matter. Faith is more than just mental agreement though it includes that.

When the Bible says to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, it means that you believe and therefore you obey. You are so convinced that it's true that you know there can be no other spiritual reality; therefore you do what He says. There are no other spiritual authorities to heed or follow, He is the Way, He is the Truth, He is the Life, and you believe to the point that you're not only mentally convinced but you are so persuaded in the heart that you are willing to let Him shape and dictate the entirety of your life based on His commandments.

Beware. I did not say your obedience will save you. No, not at all. I'm saying that if you truly believe you will be saved and the proof that your faith is genuine and of a spiritual nature and not just mental is that you will gladly follow Him. You will gladly obey Him because you trust in Him. We do not obey Jesus because we weighed the odds and figured that we could not get by eternally if we did not obey. We heard who He was, we heard what He did, we heard that He died for us and that He rose again and we so believed it that we were willing, gladly, to reorder our lives around Him so that we might follow Him. It's because of Him we believed that we found Him worthy to obey.

I told you before, quoting Dallas Willard, "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning." Grace will empower you and your effort to obey but if you're trying to earn your favor with God and say, "I believe the record therefore I deduce that I should be saved because I believe."

No, you believe because of who He is and the record is irrefutable that He is who He said He was therefore you deem Him worthy of your allegiance. *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.* Why? Because it's Him, it's God, our Creator, who came in the form of flesh and became one of us. God showed up on this earth! He is worthy of my soul, my life, my all. It's not a matter of having to obey Him, I get to and gladly so, for He is who He said He was and the record is clear, it proves it undeniably. Jesus is Lord. Amen.