

## **WHO WOULD DIE FOR A LIE?**

Those who challenge Christianity often overlook one area of evidence: the transformation of Jesus' apostles. The radically changed lives of these men give us solid testimony for the validity of Christ's claims.

I can trust the apostles' testimonies because eleven of those men died martyrs' deaths because they stood solid for two truths: Christ's deity and his resurrection. These men were tortured and flogged, and most finally faced death by some of the cruelest methods then known.

The perspective I often hear is, "Well, those men died for a lie. Many people have done that. So what does it prove?"

Yes, many people have died for a lie, but they did so believing it was the truth. If the Resurrection had not happened, obviously the disciples would have known it. Therefore, they would not only have died for a lie—here's the catch—but they would have known it was a lie. It would be hard to find a group of men anywhere in history who would die for a lie if they knew it was a lie.

### **They Were Eyewitnesses**

The apostles wrote and other disciples spoke as actual witnesses to the events they described. Peter said, "We were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes (I Peter 2:16).

In his first letter, John emphasized the eyewitness aspect of their knowledge, explaining how he and other disciples got their information about what Jesus "did" and "said": "We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands . . . . We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us" (I John 1:1-3).

Luke said, "Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you."

Then in the book of Acts, Luke described the forty-day period after the Resurrection, when the followers of Jesus closely observed him. The central theme of the eyewitness testimonies is the resurrection of Jesus. The apostles were witnesses to his resurrected life.

### **They Had to Be Convinced**

The apostles thought that when Jesus died, it was all over. Only after ample and convincing evidences did they believe.

A classic example of a man convinced against his will was James, the brother of Jesus. Although James wasn't one of the original twelve, he was later recognized as an apostle. While Jesus was growing up, James didn't believe that his brother was the Son of God. No doubt James participated with his brothers in mocking Jesus, possibly saying things such as: "You want people to believe in you? Why don't you go up to Jerusalem and put on a big show with all your miracles and healing?" James must have felt humiliated that his brother was going around bringing shame and ridicule on the family name with all his wild claims: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me."

But something happened to James. After Jesus was crucified and buried, James was preaching in Jerusalem. His message was that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected and is alive. Eventually James became a leading figure in the Jerusalem church and wrote a book, the Epistle of James. Eventually James was stoned to death on orders from Ananias the high priest. What could have changed James from an embarrassed scoffer to a man willing to die for his brother's deity? Was James deceived? No, the only plausible explanation is what we read in I Corinthians 15:7: "Then [after Christ's resurrection] he was seen by James."

Michael Green, principal of St. John's College, Nottingham, observed that the resurrection "*was the belief that turned heart-broken followers of a crucified rabbi into courageous witnesses and martyrs of the early church. . . You could imprison them, flog them, kill them, but you could not make them deny their conviction that 'on the third day he rose again.'*"

### **THEIR BOLD ACTIONS**

The bold conduct of the apostles immediately after they were convinced of the Resurrection makes it highly unlikely that it all was a fraud. They became courageous almost overnight. After the Resurrection, Peter, who had denied Christ, stood up even at the threat of death and proclaimed that Jesus was alive. The authorities arrested the followers of Christ and beat them, yet they were soon back out on the street speaking out about Jesus.

Jesus' followers could not have faced torture and death unless they were convinced of his resurrection. The unanimity of their message and their conduct was amazing. If they were deceivers, it's hard to explain why at least one of them didn't break down under the pressure they endured.

One writer descriptively narrates the changes that occurred in the lives of the apostles:

*"On the day of the crucifixion they were filled with sadness; on the first day of the week with gladness. At the crucifixion they were hopeless; on the first day of the week their hearts glowed with certainty and hope. When the message of the resurrection first came, they were incredulous and hard to be convinced, but once they became assured, they never doubted again. What could account for the astonishing change in these men in so short a time?"*

*Think of the character of the witnesses, men and women who gave the world the highest ethical teaching it has ever known, and who even on the testimony of their enemies lived it out in their lives. Think of the psychological absurdity of picturing a little band of defeated cowards cowering in an upper room one day and a few days later transformed into a company that no persecution could silence—and then attempting to attribute this dramatic change to nothing more convincing than a miserable fabrication they were trying to foist upon the world. That simply wouldn't make sense."*

The steadfastness of the apostles even to death cannot be explained away. The apostles went through the test of death to substantiate the veracity of what they were proclaiming. I believe I can trust their testimony more than that of most people I meet today.

--Taken from **More Than a Carpenter** ©2009 Josh McDowell Ministry and Sean McDowell, Chapter 7