

Developing Creditable Witnesses

It seems that after his resurrection there was one more task for Jesus. That was to get the disciples ready to be credible witnesses for him - to help them be able to say 'We have seen him, we know who he is and we can tell you all about him so you too can believe in him.'

John the apostle describes it this way: 1 John 1:1-4 (The Message)

From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.

We saw it, we heard it, and now we're telling you so you can experience it along with us, this experience of communion with the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our motive for writing is simply this: We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy, will double our joy!

As Jesus kept meeting his followers over those 40 days before he ascended to heaven – what happen in order to prepare them to be creditable witnesses?

Firstly, Jesus met them personally – they saw he really was alive. He “*proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive.*” (Acts 1:3) Individuals and groups met him - even 500 at one time, says Paul in 1 Cor.15. They touched him, he ate with them. His body was recognisable, but it was a superior, resurrection body.

Have you met him? How will you know if you cannot see him with your eyes? The disciples on the road to Emmaus said their *'hearts burned within them'* when they were with him. This is a common description. Hearts are warmed, burdens lifted, eyes opened to who he is, peace imparted, an explosion of joy happens. You will see life differently. When it happened to me at 30 yrs of age I knew that I knew he was real and alive and true in all he said. A seismic shift took place and nothing has ever the same since.

We cannot be his witnesses until we have met him personally. Have you met him personally?

But they needed more than meeting him. Twice it is recorded that he explained to them who he was from the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25-27 and 44-47) They needed to get a clear picture from the Scriptures about him so there was no confusion. Previously they had an inadequate picture. But to be credible witnesses they needed to put together their experiences of Jesus with the Scripture that talked about him.

Have you discovered Jesus in the O.T.? Have you seen how it all points to him – how it describes what he will do hundreds of years before he came? It is a fascinating exploration.

To be a credible witness we need what they needed – to understand from the Scriptures who Jesus is.

But there is more.....

More than understanding who he was – he wanted them to grasp what he is about – to understand how his kingdom worked on earth. How they were to continue his work of changing lives. Over those 40 days it says only this “*He talked to them about the Kingdom.*” Nothing else – because he wanted them to understand how the prayer he had given them would be answered. “*Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*”

They could not be creditable witnesses to Jesus until they had met him personally, had a clear understanding from the Scriptures about who he is – and they had grasped what he is about in this world – because they were charged with continuing his work of changing lives.

Have you discovered this too? Have you explored the teaching of Jesus about his Kingdom – the way God works in this world to redeem and transform lives? To be a witness for Jesus, it is crucial we understand these things. God's ways are not our ways. We need to know his ways, and recognise his Kingdom at work in this world.

But there was more... More even than understanding – they needed also to recognise that ‘without him they could do nothing’ – so he told them to wait in Jerusalem until they experienced his power – that is, to be so filled up with him that they had the courage and zeal and insight and ability that would equip them to be his witnesses – and to do this work of the Kingdom. They needed an ‘immersion’ in the Spirit – an outpouring of his life and

reality and zeal that would propel them into loving service and powerful witness. This happened at Pentecost, and again on other recorded occasions.

Jesus had a most important task before he ascended to the Father. He challenged the disciples unbelief and their misunderstanding of him. He taught them extensively about himself and then about his work. There is no report of miracles at this time – they had seen these ‘signs of the Kingdom’ many times before. His task was to prepare them so they could adequately represent him and effectively carry on his mission in this world.

Have you let him do this for you? Have you met him personally? It is the most incredible and life-changing thing... are you asking for this personal meeting. You can ask today. ‘Lord Jesus, reveal yourself to me so that I know without a shadow of doubt that you are real, and that you love me.’”

Have you explored the Scriptures so you can clearly see him in it, and explain that to another person? He wants you to be able to do this. This is the first task of a disciple – to be able to tell others who he is.

Have you learnt how he works in this world – how he changes broken lives and how we are to walk in his ways? This is so important that he made this his one topic over 40 days of explaining things to them. Have you given time to discover these wonderful realities so you can walk in them?

And have you ever received ‘the gift of the Father’ ‘the power from on high’ that Jesus talked about? He said you can’t be my witness until you do. You won’t have the courage or the insight or the zeal or perseverance until you do receive his Spirit in this way.

We can see clearly in Acts how different the disciples were after they had received this power. Nothing could stop them. They were willing to risk their lives for Jesus now.

Jesus spent these 40 days preparing creditable witnesses – because the whole future of his work on this earth depended on these people. If they had not understood, if they had not waited and received... would we be here today? It was crucial. It was his last task on earth.

It is crucial for us too - to meet him personally so we can say with John – I speak about what I have seen and heard – he is so real to me because I have met him.

It is crucial we understand from exploring the Scriptures all we can about who he is.

It is crucial we grasp the nature and working of his kingdom on earth, so we can continue his work.

It is crucial we receive what Jesus received, and the first disciples received... the power of the Spirit given to us so we can be his witnesses, without fear or confusion or hesitation.

Leanne Payne, a very perceptive teacher with incredible understanding about how God heals broken hearts and lives, describes how she had been teaching and praying with people at a conference for days, and had come to a point of exhaustion. There was one last session, and she did not know if she could do it, so she prayed

“I am so tired I’m not sure I could tell anyone my full name today, and I do not know how I’m going to speak and minister one more time. But I love you, Lord, and I have come to do your bidding. I have no strength left. Please love these people through me, Lord; You will have to do it all today”.

As I was called up to speak, I consciously and deliberately reached out my hand and took His as we, my invisible Lord and I, walked up to the podium. Not sooner had I situated myself and my Bible at the podium and began to speak than people all over the great auditorium began to weep. It had nothing to do with what I was saying, I well knew. So I simply thanked Him for blessing His people, prayed a general healing prayer over them, and then closed the meeting. No sooner had I stopped speaking than people rushed up, saying, “Do you know that the whole time you were speaking Christ was standing next to you? He was like a cylinder of Light, standing beside you.”

Christ stood with me and ministered to the people that day, just as He always does when His messengers go in His name and at His bidding. But in my extreme weakness, He showed Himself strong.” (The Healing Presence p.29-30)

This is a moving picture of a creditable witness – one who has experienced, and learnt, and totally trusts in the reality and presence of Jesus. May we all pursue such reality – so we can share him with others.