He Appeared

The risen Lord Jesus appeared to His __________ over a forty-day period. Today, we’re examining the eyewitnesses of Jesus _______ His resurrection. God has not been _________. He revealed His written _______ in both the Old and New Testament. He also revealed Himself through the ________ Jesus, who is called the “Word.” John 1:1-3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. And all things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Jesus Christ has always existed and is ________! It’s easy to see how He rose again. The One who made the world could overcome death.

We’re looking at the historical ________ of the appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus presented Himself _______ by many convincing proofs to His disciples. If we were to question these eyewitnesses whether Jesus really rose from the dead, the record reveals that they were fully convinced of His resurrection and were willing to ________ and to die preaching the gospel message of His death burial and resurrection. They wouldn’t take it back!

We’ll also briefly ________ whether Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are credible witnesses. Can we ________ them? We’ll see _______ we can trust their independent accounts of His resurrection. We’re certainly not the first to do this, and we’ll see how historians and legal scholars have handled the ancient __________. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ have been the most investigated events in ____________. No stone is unturned. The facts of the first century ________ still remain the most important witnesses to the resurrection. We’ll see what conclusions scholars and investigators have made.

Our reading today comes from I Corinthians 15:3-8.

An undeniable evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ came in the ___________ of those who followed Him and knew Him best. Virtually all critical scholars recognize an unmistakable ________ in the disciples after Jesus “presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Before the appearances and proofs of His resurrection the disciples had lost _______; they were depressed, afraid, and doubting. Though the women brought back word of the empty ________ and what the angel said about His resurrection, Luke 24:10-11 says, “But these words seemed to them an ________ tale, and they didn’t believe them.” John 20:19 speaks of the apostles hiding in an upper room with the doors locked, for _____ of the Jews. Thomas said in John 20:25, “Unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” It’s evident these disciples ________ convincing before they would believe Jesus fulfilled His prediction. Even though they had seen many miracles, they couldn’t grasp how God would raise Jesus up.

The risen Jesus Christ, however, did ________ Himself to His disciples. The New Testament provides numerous appearances of the Lord Jesus to the people who ________ Him best. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene weeping outside the tomb in the garden. When she realized Jesus was speaking to her, she grabbed _______ of Him. Jesus sent her to tell the disciples. Later that day Jesus appeared to Peter, to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to the apostles without Thomas. Later He appeared to Thomas and invited him to feel the mark in His hands.
Jesus appeared to seven disciples while they were ________ at the Sea of Galilee and enjoyed a breakfast of fish and bread with them. Jesus appeared to “more than _______ brethren at one time.” He appeared to James. Matthew records His words telling them to make disciples of all the nations. Last of all He appeared to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul later received many revelations from the Lord. The book of Revelation in chapter one reveals how Jesus appeared to John.

Lee Strobel, interviewing Gary Habermas, put the number of witnesses to the resurrection appearances into perspective in his book, The Case for Christ, he wrote: “Without question, the ________ of testimony and corroboration of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances is staggering. To put it into perspective, if you were to call each one of the witnesses into a ________ of law to be cross-examined for just fifteen minutes each, and you went around the clock without a break, it would take you from breakfast on Monday until dinner on Friday to hear them all. After listening to 129 straight hours of eyewitness testimony, who could possibly walk away unconvinced?”

The apostles are convincing to us because they themselves were convinced. The disciples, after the forty days of convincing proofs of the Lord’s resurrection, were a very ________ group of men than they were just days before. No longer did they _______ faith or hope. No longer were they unsure. No, they were a bold and outspoken band of witnesses who couldn’t hold back their ________. You can hear it in the words of Peter at Pentecost: “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with ________ works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite _______ and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be _______ by it (Acts 2:22-24). The twelve declared that they were witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 2:32). This public declaration was exactly what the Jewish leaders wanted to _________. Interestingly, they knew the stone was moved and the tomb was empty. Now they know Jesus appeared to John.

The New Testament reveals how the Jewish leaders with ________ stoned Stephen and began persecuting the church. Acts 8:1-3 says, “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to _________. And on that day a great persecution began against the ________ in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And some devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and
dragging off men and women, and he would put them in prison.” In those days, to be a Christian meant there was a ________ to pay, in those days and for some even today there is a price!

The Scripture records Stephen’s death by stoning in Acts 7 and the beheading of the apostle James in Acts 12. Ancient tradition provides _______ the apostles and other leaders died for their faith. Though these are human sources and may be flawed, they reveal what the ________ church recorded about these martyrs. Matthew suffered death from the ________ in Ethiopia. Mark was dragged through the streets in Alexandria, Egypt. Luke was ________ in Greece. John was sentenced to the mines on the ______ island of Patmos. Peter was crucified ________ down in Rome. Accounts about James the Just, the brother of Jesus, differ. Some say he was thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple, while others say that he was beaten to death. Bartholomew was whipped to death or crucified in Armenia. Andrew was crucified in Patras, Greece. Thomas was stabbed with a ________ in India. Jude was killed with _________. The Emperor Nero had Paul tortured and beheaded outside Rome.

These men remained __________ to Jesus and were committed to preaching the gospel, even if it cost their lives. One cannot ________ their faith and total commitment. One must attribute their unquestionable loyalty to the ________ that they preached. They wouldn’t have suffered death for a fraudulent _______. Paul expressed his conviction, “But I do not account my life of any ________ nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). We must take this radical change into account!

You may ask, “Phil, how can we trust the four gospel accounts as historical?” Gary Habermas, a recognized university professor and historian, in his book The Historical Jesus recorded and examined 45 ancient sources for the life of Jesus ________ the New Testament. Some were Christian, but many were non-Christian, and some were archaeological. He found 129 reported ________ revealing the life, person, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He noted that Jesus is one of the most mentioned and most substantiated lives in ancient times.

The early church fathers, who lived in the second and third centuries, ________ the New Testament an astounding 36,289 times; and one can reconstruct the ________ New Testament from these quotations with the exception of eleven verses. If the life, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus were simply a ______ without credibility, one must wonder why so many writers within such a short time wrote about Him, quoted the witnesses, and regarded the New Testament testimony as the ultimate, divine authority for life and godliness.

Dr. Harvey W. Everest in his classic textbook, The Divine Demonstration, lists some criteria used to ______ historical evidence. When the criteria are met, we can judge the testimony to be the ________. First, the evidence is credible when the witnesses are honest, competent, and have the opportunity to ________. The apostles and disciples were ________ witnesses.

Second, evidence is credible when the witnesses ________ in general statement, although they may differ on minor points. This is exactly the case with the four gospel accounts. They all note the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They all say the tomb was empty and the stone rolled away.

Third, evidence is credible when there is no known ________ for imposture or faking. The apostles and preachers who witnessed Jesus didn’t become rich or powerful because of their testimony.

Fourth, the testimony is reliable when the facts recorded are strongly ________ the well-being or interest of the narrator. Since most suffered martyrdom for their preaching, one cannot question whether they believed what they preached. God raised Jesus up!

Fifth, the testimony is reliable when such witnesses are _________. More than 500 people saw Jesus alive, and some saw Him numerous times.
Sixth, the testimony is reliable when the recorded facts and the existing facts are ______ as cause and effect. One can substantiate the lives of many New Testament people in history. Geographical and historical references are to be correct.

Seventh, the testimony is reliable when recorded ______ are sustained by existing documents, coins, games, or other public institutions. The existence of the church, their meeting on the first day of the week (that is, the resurrection day), the taking of the Lord’s Supper, and baptizing penitent adults in water uniting them with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection are direct results of the life, teaching, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Since the testimony of the New Testament meets these criteria, one can have confidence that these Biblical books are credible! For the earliest disciples, the Lord’s resurrection was not a “leap in the dark”; there were too many witnesses who knew the truth!

Simon Greenleaf, professor of law at Harvard, and author of a three-volume classic work, On A Treatise on the Law of Evidence, wrote a small work about the Testimony of the Evangelists. He concluded, “Let [the Gospel’s] testimony be sifted, as it were given in a ______ of justice on the side of the adverse party, the witnesses being subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. The result, it is confidently ______, will be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability, and truth.” He believed the ______ accounts could hold up in a court of law!

First Corinthians 15:1-2 speaks of the gospel message; Paul defines that message as the ______ ______ of the Lord’s death, burial and resurrection. Paul wrote, “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.” They believed the message of Christ’s resurrection and took their ______ on it! As long as they held to their faith and conviction, they were saved by it!

Those who lived at the time saw Jesus ______ and knew the truth. They touched and ate with Him. Their preaching of His death, burial, and resurrection cost them dearly, but they were willing to ______ to proclaim the gospel message. They sacrificed their lives, because the message is ______.

What about you? Do you believe the message is true? Will you hold fast? The salvation of the Lord comes to those who make a total commitment! Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him ______ himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24)

Your love for and faith in Christ must lead you to repentance, turning from sin to righteousness, from the world to following Jesus. Repentance is necessary; Jesus said that unless we repent, we’ll perish in Luke 13:3. Peter follows up in Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Won’t you repent and be baptized today?

Focus your heart on God today by worshiping at church. Everyone needs a church family. There’s probably a church of Christ in your area. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll be happy to help you find one.