

Resurrection: Witnesses

by J. Glyn Owen

The resurrection is a manifestation of God's power and a testimony to the reality of Christ's death and burial, and it is a privilege given to chosen witnesses.

Duration: 50:34

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:1

Topics: "Resurrection"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a living mediator, Jesus Christ, who brings us into communion with God. The Apostle Paul is highlighted as a witness to the resurrection of Jesus. The speaker explains that Paul's experience of seeing the risen Lord was not a subjective vision, but an objective reality. The fact of Christ's resurrection is emphasized as the foundation of the Gospel, and the speaker encourages believers to recognize the significance of Christ's resurrection in their own lives.

Transcript

In the word of scripture to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and we'll read together verses 1 to 11 Now brothers I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you Which you received and on which you have taken your stand By this gospel you're saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you otherwise You have believed in vain For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures That he was buried that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and Now begins the passage that we shall be looking at this evening And that he appeared to Peter Then to the twelve After that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time Most of whom are still living those some have fallen asleep Then he

appeared to James then to all the Apostles and Last of all he appeared to me also as to one Abnormally born for I am the least of the Apostles and Do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the Church of God But by the grace of God, I am what I am and his grace to me was not without effect No, I worked harder than all of them yet not I But the grace of God that was with me Whether then it was I or they this is what we preach and This is what? you believe may the Lord grant his blessing upon his word tonight and Enable us to meditate upon these very precious truths to our prophet Now as to the importance of the resurrection to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we have Already been dwelling upon this and saying as Paul does at the opening of this great chapter that

it is absolutely basic What he delivered he delivered as a first importance Not only that Christ died and was buried and rose again, but that he died according to the scriptures and That he was raised again according to the scriptures and This is the message that was proclaimed a way back there in early Corinth This is the gospel that brought into existence the church at Corinth in that very Inhospitable environment speaking morally and spiritually the gospel of the crucified buried and risen Christ brought new creatures into being new men and women in Christ and Thus there emerged the community of sanctified men and women in unholy Corinth of old Now we move on to The list that the Apostle gives us of those to whom our Lord Jesus Christ appeared as the risen Lord after his death What Old

Testament writers prophetically foresaw from their distant vantage point What by inspiration of the Spirit they foresaw in terms of a Suffering Messiah and in terms of a risen Messiah Witnesses called of God and chosen to the privilege saw a close range For they were given as John tells us at the beginning of his first epistle They were given the privilege of hearing and touching and handling The risen Lord And as Thomas did at least Thomas did he put his hand in the wounds and touched his side and Only thereby was he assured of the fact That this indeed was none other than the Christ who had died and thus the Messiah of God So did our Lord appear Now that little word appear this may seem very prosaic but I suggest to you that it is very important This little word translated.

He appeared is really quite important here Uh FF Bruce has a little comment on it, which I think quite succinctly brings out the point. I want to make The use of the Greek word translated appeared in our version says FF Bruce is of some considerable significance It marks the experience out as one in which Christ takes the initiative He sought out Chosen men and women To whom he would reveal the fact that he was risen from the dead To whom he would manifest himself and when he discovered them He revealed himself to them he appeared to them To quote again from Bruce Peter and the others Saw him in resurrection because he Manifested himself to them or in the sense of the Hebrew tolerative nipah, which is a form of the Hebrew verb He he let himself be seen by them.

He's taking the initiative He's seeking men and women of his own choice to behold that having Been nailed on the tree and buried in the tomb He is now Lord over life and over death. He is risen from the dead Here then we are not dealing with something that is utterly subjective Peter didn't have a vision of the risen Christ. He saw him Christ appeared to him These to whom the Apostle Paul appear refers in this chapter.

They were not visionaries Her dream that the Lord was risen he appeared to them. He disclosed himself to them and They beheld him in the reality of his lordship on The way to his enthronement Now that brings us to the list and this is what I want to do tonight may sound quite prosaic But as I've indicated already Sometimes it is necessary for us to let these Simple but basic truths speak to us in all the simplicity in which they appear in the record and I want in the prosaic way maybe to look at at what we have before us tonight and see how the Apostle Paul refers to the various Witnesses To whom Jesus chose to reveal to expose to manifest himself Now you notice that the first is Peter and he appeared To Peter Mark tells us that the two Marys and Salome Went very early to the tomb on the first day of the week You remember Mark Chapter 16 verses 6 and 7 and when they came to the tomb they found the stone rolled away and There was no one inside the tomb inside the grave that is Jesus was not there, but there was a young man there who appears to have been an angel and He said to them Don't be alarmed. He said You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified He has risen He is not here see the place where they laid him and Then there follows these words but go tell his disciples and Peter He is going ahead of you into Galilee there.

You will see him Mm-hmm Excuse me there you will see him just as he told you Peter then was very clearly marked out for this privilege of Beholding of seeing with his own two eyes That the one whom he had denied The one who has been crucified and buried is alive again Luke 24 34 records how upon their return to Jerusalem Cleopas and her unnamed companion were greeted by the 11 disciples who were there and This is what they say, this is what is they said to Cleopas and her unnamed companion it is true they said The Lord has risen indeed and has appeared to Simon to the Apostles It was most amazing most Remarkable that their Lord was risen But perhaps it was still more remarkable that he had appeared first of all, it would seem to Simon Peter This would appear to mean I suggest that Peter was the very first person to whom our Lord thus Manifested himself and if so, it betokens great grace For Simon Peter had sinned grievously and Yet it is true as Paul says elsewhere where sin abounded grace did much more abound and does much more abound and Simon's penitence is now met by this amazing privilege That he who swore and cast and denied with all Is allowed to see with his own eyes that Jesus the Messiah crucified In a lie What an electric moment so when Peter is found preaching in the book of the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 2 and Is saying that God has raised this Jesus to life and we are witnesses of the fact. He means exactly what he said It isn't that he'd received a vision of it he had witnessed the reality of it He had met with the Lord alive from the dead and that interview and What took place in the privacy of that interview had transformed the blasphemer and brought him back again and set him on the path of apostleship and the victory and Of usefulness for the Christ to the Christian Church. He appeared to Peter Very wonderful to think and very necessary to be reminded of the fact That though saints in the making blunder our Lord pursues his sheep into the wilderness and he comes to lay hold of us and to snatch us back again and carry us back into the fold and so he did with Peter But he did not only appear to Peter.

He appeared also to the twelve the second part of verse 5 then to the twelve Now the term the twelve is here used probably to designate the what is called the college of the Apostles Not so much It is not so much a reference To a numerical number twelve as just to designate the company of the Apostles or the college of the Apostles as they're sometimes referred to Actually, neither Judas nor Thomas was present at that time But our Lord appeared to the twelve together And this again is exceedingly important. It wasn't only given to Peter to see him alone That would have been wonderful If one among them a reliable witness had proved that their Savior was alive If the one who was chosen to be the leader as far as the work among the Jews is concerned If he was given to know that Jesus was alive from the dead but you see our Lord's grace and his purposes were wider than that and He appeared to the whole community of the Apostles. He appeared to the twelve Peter whose gifts of leadership and was calling to the apostolate to the Jews set him apart Was the first to be granted the privilege but not the only one Then the same privilege was extended to his fellow Apostles thus confirming their faith likewise in our Lord's Messiah ship and Qualifying them to be witnesses as well as preacher Witnesses of his resurrection as well as heralds of his salvation now in verse six We move another step ahead after that says Paul.

He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time Most of whom are still living though. Some have fallen asleep if I were to do To follow my inclination I would stay a long time with this verse because it means something very precious to me However, I shall not I shall not indulge tonight But this is a very Wonderful verse for many reasons here we move outside the company of the twelve and We come to a much larger group the composition of which we really we really do not know But it's a much larger group as Paul so clearly tells us there was some individuals such as Peter and the ten as a group They saw Jesus Alive from the dead more than once They were to see him once twice in some cases three times, maybe four times or even more but on one occasion There were says the Apostle Paul some five hundred of the brothers Who at one in the same time beheld Their Lord to be risen. Though some he says have

fallen asleep As to the precise identification of Appearance here where it took place Really we cannot we cannot dogmatize this was possibly indeed probably the appearance of the Lord Which we find recorded at the end of Matthew chapter 28 When Disciples seem to have congregated in Galilee met on a mountain and worshipped him Matthew tells us both some Doubted and on that occasion our Lord revealed to them that all authority had been given to him in heaven and on earth and Commissioned them to go and make disciples of all nations teaching them whatsoever.

He had taught them Baptizing and so forth. It was probably that occasion, but we cannot dogmatize the fact is That there was one occasion when over 500 people all at once beheld the one Lord Risen from the dead After he had been crucified after he had been buried in Joseph's borrowed tomb Risen again, and it is important to notice this and particularly the fact that the Apostle here says that most of them were alive When he was writing Now he was writing most certainly within 22 23 years of the event may be much earlier than that at the most 20 to 23 years after and Within that space of time. He says most of the 500 are alive today as if to say if you've got any doubts any real doubt Then you can you can confirm what I'm telling you You can find out if you're prepared to pay the price and make the journey you can discover men and women who saw him and Are in the true sense of the word Witnesses to the fact but then you know, there is a hidden little gem of Truth here, but some says Peter have fallen asleep Notice the difference in the complexion of death To those who die having known that the crucified Lord is alive again the differences between Death in all its gruesomeness and a falling asleep in Jesus Now Paul has much to say about this elsewhere.

I've no time to stay with it, but it's a very precious truth To die in Jesus and because he is alive from the dead is to fall asleep Until the morning breaks Until he sounds reverie Until he calls us back from the dead. It is to it is to fall asleep In Jesus the thing is taken out of it as we shall see later and it is something as natural as that We should not be unduly disturbed by it It is almost as natural as falling asleep at the end of the day to await the morning and the dawn But we're in the keeping of one who is Lord of life and Lord of death Then we have to come to the next Then he appeared to James Now since Paul has already referred to our Lord's appearance to the twelve Thomas and Judas apart and His next reference is to all the twelve probably meaning the eleven actually numerically with Thomas present He has evidently been including James the son of Alpheus and James the son of Zebedee in the numbers to which he has already referred Now if that is the case then He is evidently referring now To James the brother of our Lord Now here we cannot utterly dogmatize That it would seem As I understand it to be reasonable and natural to conclude that that is who he's referring to James the brother of our Lord Who later of course as you remember from Galatians chapter 2 verse 9 Paul refers to as one of the pillars of the church in Jerusalem Now if this is so then this is evidence again of amazing grace When we first encounter the remainder of Mary and Joseph's family in the gospel narratives They're far from sympathetic towards Jesus You remember that?

I don't want to exaggerate this but I do want to point to the facts as they are recorded They were far from sympathetic Whether or not they are to be included Among the so-called friends who thought that Jesus was to quote beside himself Mark 3 21 The friends who thought that he was gone a little Way toward madness They are certainly in our Lord's mind when in the last paragraph Mark 3 verses 33 to 35 He has them in mind and he tells us he tells us something about his relationship to his own family Listen to what he said He asked the question first who are my mother and my brothers and then he answered his own question He looked at those seated in a circle around him and said and these of course were his disciples Here are my mother and brother my brothers Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and Mother and notice what he's doing He sets this little company over against Mary and his brothers and sisters who

had come down to see him at that point in that context and he says My family my family Includes all those who know the will of God and do it here They are he says in this circle Now we are probably justified in concluding from such a statement that our Lord found little if any understanding Any real sympathy among his own kinsfolk at that stage in time?

Indeed John tells us in chapter 7 and verse 5 even his brothers did not believe in him. That's unequivocal Then came this otherwise unrecorded appearance of the risen Lord to Jane With all that such an event would imply and in consequence Everything was transformed for the whole family You say to me, how do you know that? Well, I know that because I read in the book of the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 1 and verse 14 They all joined together Constantly in prayer.

This is in Jerusalem after Jesus was ascended. They all joined together constantly in prayer along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and His brothers We probably have here therefore a reference to something that was as significant as our Lord's appearance to Peter and later to Saul of Tarsus Here he invades his own familiar family circle the children of Joseph and Mary and Discloses to James But he was indeed the Christ risen from the dead and the family were never quite the same after that And then we read later on and then to all the Apostles the second part of verse 7 at his previous Appearance to the apostolic group as such Thomas was missing. We have a record of this in John chapter 20 I'm not going to refer to it again it was the occasion when Thomas was allowed to put his Finger in the wounds in his hand and thrust his hand into the side into the wound in the master's side and In consequence upon which he said my Lord and my God Thomas the doubter had become a veritable believer now move on one step again, and we come to what Paul refers to in these words and last of all You see in one sense Peter was the first on the list Paul was the last we have here recorded a series of manifestations of the risen Lord to chosen witnesses the first was Peter Paul was the last and Last of all in the series says Paul He appeared to me also as to one abnormally born Literally what he said was as to an abortion Now we may not understand exactly what Paul meant when he said that but that's what he said Now, let's look at what we have here Paul saw the Lord's appearance to himself As we have indicated as the last in a series There is no difference in kind Between the Lord's appearance to Peter and the Lord's appearance to Paul The same word the same basic word for appearing refers to both Jesus takes the initiative and he Discloses himself he reveals himself as the risen one to Peter and to the others and then last of all to Paul Ff Bruce quotes dr.

Ash Hooks Statement on this and I recorded to you. It goes like this if Paul uses the same language of his own experience as of Peter and the others It is not to suggest That their experience was as visionary as his But rather that his was as objective as theirs in other words Paul was not given a vision of the risen Lord that was subjective in his own mind in his imagination Just as Peter just as the twelve just as the five hundred the hell the Lord in the reality of his risen body So was Paul granted to see him in the reality of his being the objective reality of Paul's vision of the risen Lord has of course been challenged on many many counts and Many of you are aware of some of the some of the arguments that have been brought forward those who have an a priori Antipathy to every notion of the supernatural Find this claim wholly unacceptable But that's that the risen one appeared to Paul when he was already ascended from the dead How could he the thing is impossible? There is no such resurrection anyway, and there could be no such manifestation of himself But as to the importance of this issue let me let me warn you it is a very important issue as to whether This was possible and Unless Paul saw the risen Christ then it is doubt doubtful whether he had any right to call himself an apostle Or an apostle was essentially a witness to the fact that Jesus was risen from the dead Not only that there is something even beyond that If Paul is mistaken

About what he says he saw here Then he could be mistaken anywhere in the process of divine revelation of truth to him and in the Inspiration that was necessary to record what was revealed the Apostle Paul could have been Very much at fault there if he was at fault here He tells us By Inspiration that Actually, he just as Peter and the others Was privileged to behold the Lord as he manifested himself risen even to the arch enemies of the church Salter now when we consider this and consider the various Suggestions of Unbelievers and liberal people we I think we are left with three alternatives that we must choose from First of all, we have the charge that Paul's claim To have seen Christ risen was deliberately fraudulent. There are those who say that It was Someone has said a planned hoax He could not have seen Jesus Jesus was not only dead and buried He was gone forever.

Some go so far as to say. Well, he may have been risen and ascended Still more reason why Paul could not say that he beheld Christ the Lord on the Damascus Road. How could he see the Lord of Glory? Well now among those who have seriously taken this view were the deists of the 19th century, of course There were some before them and there have been many after them But neither they nor anyone else can explain what possible motive could have been for so perverse and In terms of ordinary human reckoning so utterly unrewarding a thing as as as to to Undertake this kind of hoax For Paul to say that he had seen Christ risen from the dead.

Why on earth should he have done it? It could not have been Because he wanted to satisfy any worldly ambition What did Paul get materially in terms of physical pleasure? in terms of Material reward in terms of social status in terms of the things that Fallen human nature hankers after what did he get? By the declaration that Jesus was alive from the dead and that he'd seen him. What did he get? Did somebody put a check in his hand? Did somebody put him on the honors list for the next year? Did somebody did somebody write? About him and give him a great name Did he become popular? Not on your life In declaring that Jesus the Messiah was crucified Buried and risen again and that he'd seen him Paul put his neck down and his life on the altar and it was the beginning of the greatest suffering that the any man could suffer and it was all because he insisted that The Messiah whom the Jews have had at the main hand in crucifying Was now by God raised from the dead. He'd seen him and he was serving him throughout his life because of that Paul lost everything a member of the Sanhedrin ceased to be He was from henceforth an Unimportant nobody as he tells us he was henceforth accounted as the offscouring of the world the filth of the world No, you don't you don't you don't Indulge in a hoax Unless you're going to gain something from it and Paul was sufficiently alive Intellectually to know a good bargain or a bad one when he saw it He wasn't a man who would be easily led up a cul-de-sac No, no, no, he knew he knew from the very beginning What would happen if he acknowledged that Jesus was alive from the dead but acknowledge he had to because it was true Then we have the charge that it was in that he was involuntarily mistaken But this second approach may not appear to be as aggressively militant in its character But if it is true, it is equally devastating in its implications If this charge is proved to be true, then the fact of Christ's resurrection The gospel as such and the entire writings on the ministry of Paul become shrouded in a mist of uncertainty How could Paul be? unwittingly mistaken as to the claim he is here making Well, says some people he may have imagined that Christ was risen from the dead Or he may and this has been very popular in some ages.

He may have been subject to hallucinations I know very little about hallucinations, but I know that Paul's approach to life was generally speaking the very reasonable approach to life and there is absolutely nothing in all his writings in the New Testament to Suggest that he was subject to hallucinatory Experiences nothing whatsoever. Not a shred of evidence on the contrary Paul says that he beheld the

Lord risen That Jesus manifested himself to him. This must be a reference to what took place on the Damascus Road What did that Damascus Road? Disclosure of Christ in his glory in his risen glory in his ascended glory.

What did it mean? What did it do what it did was the change of blasphemer into a saint What it did was to make a new creature of him What it did was to take the bad blood out of his system and pour the spirit of God into him And what it did was to bring him into a place of reconciliation with God This man who knew so much about the God of the Old Testament God Jehovah The creator of the universe the God of his people and the Lord of destiny and of history Now began to know God not know about him and He began to commune with him and he began to fulfill the purposes of God so much So that the tokens the evidences of an apostleship were manifest in his life In the second letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul speaks about about the evidences of an apostleship You have the same reference also in Hebrews chapter 2 about Witnesses to a genuine claim to be an apostle the Lord grants something that confirms Apostleship the Apostle Paul was given the privilege of knowing the presence of God in the most remarkable Circumstances of knowing what it was to live with God in communion with God and the power of God through him was such As to bring not only a church into existence in Corinth, but in other places as you know full well if any man Anywhere any time knew the power of God in very truth in his life Here surely is the man and it began with what some people would call an hallucination That just doesn't make sense. If it was not a delusion nor a deliberate fraud Then it must have been what Paul claimed it to be namely the appearance of the risen Christ and here again, we we are face to face with amazing grace that our Lord Jesus Christ should have chosen a rebel such as this a blasphemer a persecutor a murderer He who had cast men and women and children into prison for the sake of the name he Chose this man his enemy chose him to the highest honor in life and in death in time and eternity and Revealed himself to him as his Savior and his Lord and his master and in the experience Transformed him won him over changed him So that the blasphemer becomes in the past now, you know the story and so Paul Speaks of himself here are so utterly unworthy of this Not only was he the last in time that he was the lead to be to have such a revelation of Christ risen But he was the least worthy You notice how he puts it I am the least of the Apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I Persecuted the Church of God. I recognize this he says and so last of all he appeared to me also as to him Abortion, I frankly don't know what he means by that.

I can tell you what people say what people have suggested Calvin thought the reference was to an apostle whose conversion was sudden and violent one writer says that the more Probable understanding of it is something like this All others who had seen the risen Lord were Apostles or at least brethren in the sense that they were fellow believers But Paul saw him before he had arrived at that ripeness of spiritual rebirth Paul saw him as he was still on horseback going to Damascus as an enemy of the Lord appeared Greater than the glory of the sun at midday of the glory of the enthroned Lord and he beheld him the lady whose words I always listened to Suggested to me at supper time tonight But it might have meant something else and I think she's right The reference to the abortion may very well be of course to Paul's old life He was moving in a certain direction He had his plans ready-made with the seal of the Sanhedrin upon them all and he was moving majestically forward Ruthlessly forward when suddenly his plans were aborted they were cut short By an omnipotent Lord by a crucified reason reigning Lord of glory whose very glory Shone into the darkness and banished the ignorance and the man was made Brothers and sisters, this is the Christ of the gospel This is the Christ of the Apostle Paul.

This is the gospel is based not upon the visions of Christ Risen, but upon the fact of Christ risen as much as on the fact of Christ crucified Now a rising out of the fact of course there are experiences The fact that our Lord is risen from the dead means he lives he lives Christ Jesus lives today He walks with me and he talks with me along life's narrow way But there is something which is even greater than that behind that experience you see is the fact the historicity the reality of his resurrection and it's the reality of objectivity of the resurrection that gives credence to the experience of being in touch with him makes it possible and Through him brings us into Living communion with God my friends.

Do you do I do we? Do we know what it is to be in touch with God through a living mediator? Do we have a Savior who communicates with us? whose glory floods our souls from time to time and convinces us of God's grace and glory and transforms God grant that as we read the epistles of this man Paul Now made a servant of the Most High God Now made an apostle of Christ God grant that as we read his words and on into this great 15th chapter That we shall recognize the witness for what it was and is the only thing that Paul gained was the most important thing of all but It is not to be measured in monetary terms or in worldly terms in the knowledge that Christ was risen he gained Life eternal for he came into fellowship with him and in that link of fellowship Saul of Tarsus like All the believers of the ages came to know the life of God within his soul May we be able to go out into a world that desperately needs this You know when we were with Hades singing that chorus Because he lives I confess tomorrow.

I wonder whether we realize how How needy the world is how great the need of men and women to face tomorrow It's come home with me like an upon me like an avalanche in recent days How great the fears how great the timidity and the anxiety of men and women abroad? the fear of war the fear of AIDS the fear of cancer the fear of Coronary the fear of this the fear of that the fear of life the fear of death Brothers and sisters there is only one answer to it if there be one who bore our sins away on his body to the tree according to the scriptures and therefore to the appointment of God in eternity and Having been buried rose again as was foretold of him. Then he is thereby proved to be Not a self-appointed man or so-called Savior, but God's Anointed the only answer to the fears and anxieties of human beings anywhere and everywhere is to know Let us trust him Let us witness to him Let us be loyal to him. Let us worship him.

Let us see him for the in the glory. That is uniquely his by his grace Be loyal to him Let us pray. Oh Lord God most high and most glorious And we would weep with rivers of tears as we consider How unworthy we are of the privilege of knowing what we have been declaring tonight and we would weep still more tears, oh Lord In the realization that we so Scarcely live up to what we believe Transfer this head knowledge that is given to us our father Into real living faith and experience we pray and make this community of your people associated with this place and all the other believers of this city and Indeed of this whole age from north to south and east to west.

Oh make us Witnesses To the reality of your grace that comes through Christ your son crucified and risen We ask it in his name. Amen Whether it is historical

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