

1 "Witnesses of the Resurrection"
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3 St. John Henry Newman
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5 "Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but
6 unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after
7 He rose from the dead." Acts x. 40, 41.

8 IT might have been expected, that, on our Saviour's rising again from the dead, He
9 would have shown Himself to very great numbers of people, and especially to those
10 who crucified Him; whereas we know from the history, that, far from this being the case,
11 He showed Himself only to chosen witnesses, chiefly His immediate followers; and St.
12 Peter avows this in the text. This seems at first sight strange. We are apt to fancy the
13 resurrection of Christ as some striking visible display of His glory, such as God
14 vouchsafed from time to time to the Israelites in Moses' day; and considering it in the
15 light of a public triumph, we are led to imagine the confusion and terror which would
16 have overwhelmed His murderers, had He presented Himself alive before *them*. Now,
17 thus to reason, is to conceive Christ's kingdom of *this* world, which it is not; and to
18 suppose that then Christ came to judge the world, whereas that judgment will not be till
19 the last day, when in very deed those wicked men *shall* "look on Him whom they have
20 pierced."

21 But even without insisting upon the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, which seems to
22 be the direct reason why Christ did not show Himself to all the Jews after His
23 resurrection, other distinct reasons may be given, instructive too. And one of these I will
24 now set before you.

25 This is the question, "Why did not our Saviour show Himself after His resurrection to all
26 the people? why only to witnesses chosen before of God?" and this is my answer:
27 "Because this was the most effectual means of propagating His religion through the
28 world."

29 After His resurrection, He said to His disciples, "Go, convert all nations:" [Matt. xxviii.
30 19.] this was His especial charge. If, then, there are grounds for thinking that, by
31 showing Himself to a few rather than to many, He was more surely advancing this great
32 object, the propagation of the Gospel, this is a sufficient reason for our Lord's having so
33 ordained; and let us thankfully receive His dispensation, as He has given it.

34 1. Now consider what would have been the probable effect of a public exhibition of His
35 resurrection. Let us suppose that our Saviour had shown Himself as openly as before
36 He suffered; preaching in the Temple and in the streets of the city; traversing the land
37 with His Apostles, and with multitudes following to see the miracles which He did. What
38 would have been the effect of this? Of course, what it had already been. His former
39 miracles had not effectually moved the body of the people; and, doubtless, this miracle
40 too would have left them as it found them, or worse than before. They might have been

41 more startled at the time; but why should this amazement last? When the man taken
42 with a palsy was suddenly restored at His word, the multitude were all amazed, and
43 glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today."
44 [Luke v. 26.] What *could* they have said and felt more than this, when "one rose from
45 the dead"? In truth, this is the way of the mass of mankind in all ages, to be influenced
46 by sudden fears, sudden contrition, sudden earnestness, sudden resolves, which
47 disappear as suddenly. Nothing is done effectually through untrained human nature;
48 and such is ever the condition of the multitude. Unstable as water, it cannot excel. One
49 day it cried Hosanna; the next, Crucify Him. And, had our Lord appeared to
50 them *after* they had crucified Him, of course they would have shouted Hosanna once
51 more; and when He had ascended out of sight, then again they would have persecuted
52 His followers. Besides, the miracle of the Resurrection was much more exposed to the
53 cavils of unbelief than others which our Lord had displayed; than that, for instance, of
54 feeding the multitudes in the wilderness. Had our Lord appeared in public, yet few could
55 have touched Him, and certified themselves it was He Himself. Few, comparatively, in a
56 great multitude could so have seen Him both before and after His death, as to be
57 adequate witnesses of the reality of the miracle. It would have been open to the greater
58 number of them still to deny that He *was* risen. This is the very feeling St. Matthew
59 records. When He appeared on a mountain in Galilee to His apostles and others, as it
60 would seem (perhaps the five hundred brethren mentioned by St. Paul), "*some*
61 *doubted*" whether it were He. How could it be otherwise? these had no means of
62 ascertaining that they really saw *Him* who had been crucified, dead, and buried. Others,
63 admitting it was Jesus, would have denied that He ever died. Not having seen Him dead
64 on the cross, they might have pretended He was taken down thence before life was
65 extinct, and so restored. This supposition would be a sufficient excuse to those
66 who *wished* not to believe. And the more ignorant part would fancy they had seen
67 a *spirit* without flesh and bones as man has. They would have resolved the miracle into
68 a magical illusion, as the Pharisees had done before, when they ascribed His works to
69 Beelzebub; and would have been rendered no better or more religious by the sight of
70 Him, than the common people are now-a-days by tales of apparitions and witches.

71 Surely so it would have been; the chief priests would not have been moved at all; and
72 the populace, however they had been moved at the time, would not have been lastingly
73 moved, not practically moved, not so moved as to proclaim to the world what they had
74 heard and seen, as to preach the Gospel. This is the point to be kept in view: and
75 consider that the very reason *why* Christ showed Himself at all was in order to raise
76 up *witnesses* to His resurrection, ministers of His word, founders of His Church; and
77 how in the nature of things could a populace ever become such?

78 2. Now, on the other hand, let us contemplate the means which His Divine Wisdom
79 actually adopted with a view of making His resurrection subservient to the propagation
80 of His Gospel.—He showed Himself openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses
81 chosen before of God. It is, indeed, a *general* characteristic of the course of His
82 providence to make the few the channels of His blessings to the many; but in the
83 instance we are contemplating, a few were selected, because only a
84 few *could* (humanly speaking) be made instruments. As I have already said, to be

85 witnesses of His resurrection it was requisite to have known our Lord intimately before
86 His death. This was the case with the Apostles; but this was not enough. It was
87 necessary they should be certain it was He Himself, the very same whom they before
88 knew. You recollect how He urged them to handle Him, and be sure that they could
89 testify to His rising again. This is intimated in the text also; "witnesses chosen before of
90 God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead." Nor were
91 they required merely to know Him, but the thought of Him was to be stamped upon their
92 minds as the one master-spring of their whole course of life for the future. But men are
93 not easily wrought upon to be faithful advocates of any cause. Not only is the multitude
94 fickle: but the best men, unless urged, tutored, disciplined to their work, give way;
95 untrained nature has no principles.

96 It would seem, then, that our Lord gave His attention to a few, because, if the few be
97 gained, the many will follow. To these few He showed Himself again and again. These
98 He restored, comforted, warned, inspired. He formed them unto Himself, that they might
99 show forth His praise. This His gracious procedure is opened to us in the first words of
100 the Book of the Acts. "To the Apostles whom He had chosen He showed Himself alive
101 after His passion by many infallible proofs; being seen of them forty days, and speaking
102 of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Consider, then, if we may state the
103 alternative reverently, *which* of the two seems the more likely way, even according to a
104 human wisdom, of forming preachers of the Gospel to all nations,—the exhibition of the
105 Resurrection to the Jewish people generally, or this intimate private certifying of it to a
106 few? And remember that, as far as we can understand, the two procedures were
107 inconsistent with each other; for that period of preparatory prayer, meditation, and
108 instruction, which the Apostles passed under our Lord's visible presence for forty days,
109 was to them what it could not have been, had they been following Him from place to
110 place in public, supposing there had been an object in this, and mixing in the busy
111 crowds of the world.

112 3. I have already suggested, what is too obvious almost to insist upon, that in making a
113 select few the ministers of His mercy to mankind at large, our Lord was but acting
114 according to the general course of His providence. It is plain every great change is
115 effected by the few, not by the many; by the resolute, undaunted, zealous few. True it is
116 that societies sometimes fall to pieces by their own corruption, which is in one sense a
117 change without special instruments chosen or allowed by God; but this is a dissolution,
118 not a work. Doubtless, much may be *undone* by the many, but nothing is *done* except
119 by those who are specially trained for action. In the midst of the famine Jacob's sons
120 stood looking one upon another, but did nothing. One or two men, of small outward
121 pretensions, but with their hearts in their work, these do great things. These are
122 prepared, not by sudden excitement, or by vague general belief in the truth of their
123 cause, but by deeply impressed, often repeated instruction; and since it stands to
124 reason that it is easier to teach a few than a great number, it is plain such men always
125 will be few. Such as these spread the knowledge of Christ's resurrection over the
126 idolatrous world. Well they answered the teaching of their Lord and Master. Their
127 success sufficiently approves to us His wisdom in showing Himself to them, not to all
128 the people.

129 4. Remember, too, this further reason why the witnesses of the Resurrection were few
130 in number; viz. because they were on the side of *Truth*. If the witnesses were to be such
131 as really loved and obeyed the Truth, there *could not* be many chosen. Christ's cause
132 was the cause of light and religion, therefore His advocates and ministers were
133 necessarily few. It is an old proverb (which even the heathen admitted), that "the many
134 are bad." Christ did not confide His Gospel to the many; had He done so, we may even
135 say, that it would have been at first sight a presumption against its coming from God.
136 What was the chief work of His whole ministry, but that of choosing and
137 separating *from* the multitude those who should be fit recipients of His Truth? As He
138 went the round of the country again and again, through Galilee and Judea, He tried the
139 spirits of men the while; and rejecting the baser sort who "honoured Him with their lips
140 while their hearts were far from Him," He specially chose twelve. The many He put
141 aside for a while as an adulterous and sinful generation, intending to make one last
142 experiment on the mass when the Spirit should come. But His twelve He brought near
143 to Himself at once, and taught them. Then He sifted them, and one fell away; the eleven
144 escaped as though by fire. *For* these eleven especially He rose again; He
145 visited *them* and taught *them* for forty days; for in *them* He saw the fruit of the "travail of
146 His soul and was satisfied;" in them "He saw His seed, He prolonged His days, and the
147 pleasure of the Lord prospered in His hand." These were His witnesses, for they had the
148 love of the Truth in their hearts. "I have chosen you," He says to them, "and ordained
149 you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." [John xv.
150 16.]

151 So much then in answer to the question, Why did not Christ show Himself to the whole
152 Jewish people after His resurrection. I ask in reply, what would have been the use of it?
153 a mere passing triumph over sinners whose judgment is reserved for the next world. On
154 the other hand, such a procedure would have interfered with, nay, defeated, the real
155 object of His rising again, the propagation of His Gospel through the world by *means of*
156 *His own intimate friends* and followers. And further, this preference of the few to the
157 many seems to have been necessary from the nature of man, since all great works are
158 effected, not by a multitude, but by the deep-seated resolution of a few;—nay,
159 necessary too from man's depravity, for, alas! popular favour is hardly to be expected
160 for the cause of Truth. And our Lord's instruments were few, if for no other reason, yet
161 at least for this, because more were not to be found, because there were but few faithful
162 Israelites without guile in Israel according to the flesh.

163 Now, let us observe how much matter, both for warning and comfort, is supplied by this
164 view. We learn from the picture of the *infant* Church what that Church has been ever
165 since, that is, as far as man can understand it. Many are called, few are chosen. We
166 learn to reflect on the great danger there is, lest we be not in the *number* of the chosen,
167 and are warned to "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation," to "work out our
168 salvation with fear and trembling," to seek God's mercy in His Holy Church, and to pray
169 to Him ever that He would "fulfil in us the good pleasure of His will," and complete what
170 He once began.

171 But, besides this, we are comforted too; we are comforted, as many of us as are living
172 humbly in the fear of God. Who those secret ones are, who in the bosom of the visible
173 Church live as saints fulfilling their calling, God only knows. We are in the dark about it.
174 We may indeed know much about ourselves, and we may form somewhat of a
175 judgment about those with whom we are well acquainted. But of the general body of
176 Christians we know little or nothing. It is our duty to consider them as Christians, to take
177 them as we find them, and to love them; and it is no concern of ours to debate about
178 their state in God's sight. Without, however, entering into this question concerning God's
179 secret counsels, let us receive this truth before us for a practical purpose; that is, I
180 speak to *all who* are conscious to themselves that they wish and try to serve God,
181 whatever their progress in religion be, and whether or not they dare apply to
182 themselves, or in whatever degree, the title of Christian in its most sacred sense. All
183 who obey the Truth are on the side of the Truth, and the Truth will prevail. Few in
184 number but strong in the Spirit, despised by the world, yet making way while they
185 suffered, the twelve Apostles overturned the power of darkness, and established the
186 Christian Church. And let all "who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" be quite sure,
187 that weak though they seem, and solitary, yet the "foolishness of God is wiser than men,
188 and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The many are "deceitful," and the
189 worldly-wise are "vain;" but he "that feareth the Lord, the same shall be praised." The
190 most excellent gifts of the intellect last but for a season. Eloquence and wit, shrewdness
191 and dexterity, these plead a cause well and propagate it quickly, but it dies with them. It
192 has no root in the hearts of men, and lives not out a generation. It is the consolation of
193 the despised Truth, that its works endure. Its words are few, but they live. Abel's faith to
194 this day, "yet speaketh." [Heb. xi. 4.] The blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church.
195 "Fret not thyself" then "because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the
196 workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the
197 green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good ... delight thyself also in Him, and He shall
198 give thee the desires of thy heart; commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and
199 He shall bring it to pass ... He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy
200 judgment as the noon-day ... A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches
201 of *many* wicked. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholdeth the
202 righteous ... I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green
203 bay-tree, yet he passed away, and, lo! he was not; yea, I sought him, and he could not
204 be found." [Ps. xxxvii. 1-6, 16, 17, 35, 36.] The heathen world made much ado when the
205 Apostles preached the Resurrection. They and their associates were sent out as lambs
206 among wolves; but they prevailed.

207 We, too, though we are not witnesses of Christ's actual resurrection, are so spiritually.
208 By a heart awake from the dead, and by affections set on heaven, we can as truly and
209 without figure witness that Christ liveth, as they did. He that believeth on the Son of God
210 hath the witness in himself. Truth bears witness by itself to its Divine Author. He who
211 obeys God conscientiously, and lives holily, forces all about him to believe and tremble
212 before the unseen power of Christ. To the world indeed at large he witnesses not; for
213 few can see him near enough to be moved by his manner of living. But to his
214 neighbours he manifests the Truth in proportion to their knowledge of him; and some of
215 them, through God's blessing, catch the holy flame, cherish it, and in their turn transmit

216 it. And thus in a dark world Truth still makes way in spite of the darkness, passing from
217 hand to hand. And thus it keeps its station in high places, acknowledged as the creed of
218 nations, the multitude of which are ignorant, the while, on what it rests, how it came
219 there, how it keeps its ground; and despising it, think it easy to dislodge it. But "the Lord
220 reigneth." He is risen from the dead, "His throne is established of old; He is from
221 everlasting. The floods have lifted up their voice, the floods lift up their waves. The Lord
222 on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the
223 sea. His testimonies are very sure; holiness becometh His house forever." [Ps. xciii. 2-
224 5.]

225 Let these be our thoughts whenever the prevalence of error leads us to despond. When
226 St. Peter's disciple, Ignatius, was brought before the Roman emperor, he called himself
227 Theophorus; and when the emperor asked the feeble old man why he so called himself,
228 Ignatius said it was because he carried Christ in his breast. He witnessed there was but
229 One God, who made heaven, earth, and sea, and all that is in them, and One Lord
230 Jesus Christ, His Only-begotten Son, "whose kingdom (he added) be my portion!" The
231 emperor asked, "His kingdom, say you, who was crucified under Pilate?" "His
232 (answered the Saint) who crucified my sin in me, and who has put all the fraud and
233 malice of Satan under the feet of those who carry Him in their hearts: as it is written, 'I
234 dwell in them and walk in them.'"

235 Ignatius was one against many, as St. Peter had been before him; and was put to death
236 as the Apostle had been;—but he handed on the Truth, in his day. At length we have
237 received it. Weak though we be, and solitary, God forbid we should not in our turn hand
238 it on; glorifying Him by our lives, and in all our words and works witnessing Christ's
239 passion, death, and resurrection!