

Standing up in Court – 1 Corinthians 15: 1 - 11



If you watch crime dramas on TV, you will probably have noticed how much ways of collecting evidence have developed in recent years. A modern drama will show the police using mobile phone records, CCTV and DNA matching, all of which were unavailable a few decades ago.

Go back to the first century AD, and just about the only evidence available in a court of law was the testimony of eyewitnesses. If you needed to bring a charge against someone, or to defend yourself, you had to find men who would be willing to back up your story. Notice that I say “men”, because in the Jewish and other patriarchal societies of that time, the evidence of a woman was considered unreliable and therefore inadmissible.

The religion of the Jews was inextricably bound up with their Law, and St Paul, educated as a Pharisee, knew the Law well. That is why, in his account in 1 Corinthians 15 of the resurrection appearances of Jesus, he makes no mention of the women who discovered the empty tomb. He is speaking like a lawyer addressing a court, and setting out the acceptable evidence, that of men.

What a lot of men, too! In his book, “The Case for Easter”, Lee Strobel, a legal affairs journalist, points out that if you were to call each one of the witnesses mentioned by St Paul to a court of law to be examined for just fifteen minutes each, and you went round the clock without a break, it would take you from breakfast on Monday until dinner on Friday to hear them all! He quotes the words of the High Court judge, Sir Edward Clarke (1841 – 1931): “To

me the evidence is conclusive, and over and over again in the High Court I have secured the verdict on evidence not nearly so compelling. As a lawyer I accept the gospel evidence unreservedly as the testimony of truthful men to facts that they were able to substantiate.”

St Paul was writing to the church in Corinth not much more than twenty years after the events he was describing. He pointed out that the majority of the eyewitnesses to whom he was referring were still alive. Like a lawyer in court, he was declaring, “This is the evidence, and it can be validated here and now by people who were present at the time.”

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.

A prayer:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you demonstrated the power of your love in the resurrection of your Son from the dead.

Help us to face the future with courage and assurance, knowing that nothing in life or death can ever separate us from your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN.

- Rev John Barnett

Image: St. George's Hall Courtroom, Liverpool.