

The Witness Paradox

The first witnesses to see and testify of the Risen Savior are a paradox. Considering the time's normal expectations, women were not used as witnesses in a court or included in any reasonable discussion where decisions were made. The historian Josephus mentions this when discussing the Mosaic requirement for at least two or three witnesses before any conviction of a crime: "But let not the testimony of women be admitted on account of the levity and boldness of their sex" (*Ant.* 4.219). The rabbis, chief priests, elders, and even Jesus' disciples would not carry on a conversation with a woman. We can see this attitude in the disciples in John 4. *"His disciples came, and they were amazed that He had been speaking with a woman, yet no one said, 'What do You seek?' or, 'Why do You speak with her?'"* (John 4:27).

It is with this reluctance to converse with women by the men of the day, compounded with restricting them from testifying in court, that Jesus chose women to be His first witnesses. There is a note about the wisdom of God countering the foolish wisdom of men, written to the brethren at Corinth, that comes to mind here. *"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God"* (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

The women who came to the tomb early to complete the preparations of Jesus' body for burial saw the heavenly messenger and the open, empty tomb. The angel sent them to tell the male disciples about the resurrection. On the way to spread the news, Jesus met them and reiterated the instructions. *"Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me'"* (Matthew 28:10). Apparently, between these women leaving the tomb and Jesus appearing to them, He appeared to Mary Magdalene. *"Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. When they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it"* (Mark 16:9-11). Here again, we see the reluctance of the disciples to accept the word of a woman.

Only two people are recorded to have been with Jesus one-on-one after His resurrection, Mary Magdalene and Peter. His conversation with Mary is given, but there is only a brief statement of His being with Peter. Paul points out that Jesus appeared to Peter before appearing to the collective twelve apostles, "He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Corinthians 15:5).

Some have falsely said that Mary was the first apostle to tell the world of the resurrection. However, Jesus had given that "Key" to the Kingdom to the men and the first sermons to Peter (Matthew 16:13-20; Acts 15:7). But consider, in His lessons with the chosen twelve men, He gave them a test to see if "they got it." With the feeding of the multitudes (Matthew 14-15), most other tests, they failed. Now the women are the first to view proof of the resurrection, and Mary the first to see Jesus. The women told the men of their encounter, but the eleven did not believe them. They failed the test again. The men had to see for themselves.

Quite probably, these women, who were also disciples, who had followed Jesus and the twelve through most of Galilee and Judea, would have been shocked if the men had listened to them. *"But*

Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen wrappings only; and he went away to his home, marveling at what had happened" (Luke 24:12). "So Peter and the other disciple went forth, and they were going to the tomb ... So the other disciple who had first come to the tomb then also entered, and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." (John 20:1-10).

The fact is, Jesus had chosen men to be His apostles to the world. He had prepared the selected men for that task. Jewish society of His day would likely ignore women, if not reject them altogether. Even though men ignored them, Jesus told the women to reveal what they saw and heard. Obviously, we are to believe them. Today, with the exception of the assembly where women are to keep silent (1 Corinthians 14:34), women are equal partners with men in converting souls to Christ. *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28).