



Jesus appearing to James

After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

(1 Cor. 15:7)

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is the good news of life out of the self-inflicted corruption of death. That new life is not in any way “self-inflicted”; it is not in any way the result of any self-motivational effort. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not merely *about* Him, but it is *of* Him because He is the source of it. Salvation and its message spring forth from Jesus Christ, sent by His Father and equipped by the Holy Spirit for this purpose.

That this is so is made evident by the standards which the ascended and glorified Lord laid down for apostleship. These initial stewards of the “manifold grace of God” were to possess a unique qualification: they were to have been witnesses of the risen Christ. Sometimes this is interpreted as if apostleship required having been with Jesus during the time of His humiliation, thus limiting it to “the Twelve.” Indeed, seeing the move by the early church to appoint Matthias to fill the vacancy caused by the ultimate sin of Judas Iscariot, and to read the comment “*he was numbered with the eleven apostles*,” may lead one to think that this number was not to be altered: it was the foundation of the New Testament church even as the twelve patriarchs formed the foundation for the Old Testament church.

But then we come to Paul, an apostle by special appointment of the Lord, whose apostleship may have been challenged (perhaps by believers who wanted a continuation of the Old Testament idea of twelve). It is likely for that reason that this apostolic authority was boldly proclaimed in each of his epistles except in those with dual or triple authorship (i.e., Philipppians and Thessalonians). There is no doubt Paul is an apostle. Sometimes accommodation is made to honor the notion of twelve by calling him what he truly was: “*the apostle to the Gentiles*.”

Is that it? Twelve apostles plus one? “*After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles*.” James also received the one essential gift required to be an apostle: he had seen the Lord! Of course, he had seen the Lord before. And, of course, there were many others who saw the Lord, also after His resurrection. We read in this same passage that “*He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once*” – did that make all of them apostles? The Greek structure underlying the next statement – “*then of all the apostles*” – strongly implies that James was an apostle in addition to the twelve. He was later and separately appointed.

But who was this James? He was not James, the son of Zebedee, who was among the first of the “twelve” to respond to Jesus (Matt. 4:21-22). He was also the first apostle to die the martyr’s death (Acts 12:2). Sometimes this James is referred to as “James the Greater.” Then there was James, son of Alphaeus, mentioned only three times in Scripture and then always in connection with his mother’s name, Mary, as in, “*Mary, the mother of James and Joses*.” He is designated “*James the Less*.”

The James mentioned here is the one who had a leading role at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and is also the author of the Epistle of James. He is the half-brother of the Lord, born of Mary, their common mother. He was, with his other brothers, initially a non-believer (John 7:5) who became with them (Acts 1:14) a believer. Most likely the transformation took place between the resurrection of the Lord and this gathering in awaiting the outpouring of His Spirit.

What this meeting must have been we cannot begin to imagine. The Spirit has veiled it and should we try to lift that veil? We can note with amazement that a denier of the Lord, even with having had such a close relationship on a daily basis, became a pillar of the church (Acts 12:17, Gal. 2:9-10), a servant of his Lord (James 1:1).

Jesus no longer appears in that way. But the Lord does appear in His Word, applied by His Spirit, and such an appearance is needed in order to experience His life-renewing gospel. What is the result of such an appearance? When we have seen the Lord, we cannot but speak of Him. And then even we, born long after the closing of the apostolic age, are compelled by apostolic fervor to witness of His life-renewing grace. By word, by deed, at home and in public, wherever the Lord calls and places us, we will bring the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what happens when He is seen of us.

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