



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

“You Call Me Teacher”

In the gospels, Jesus is frequently called “Teacher” (45 times) and “Rabbi” (13) (translations are from the ESV). Peter’s initial sermon suggests “miracle-worker” would also be apt. The words, “mighty works (*dunamis*), wonders (*teras*), and signs (*sēmeion*)” (Acts 2.22) appear 88 times in the gospels. So we are not surprised to also see “marvel” (*thaumazō*; 30) and “astonished” (*ekplēssō*; 12). It may surprise some, however, that those words are used 16 times to refer to reactions to Jesus’ *teaching* (marvel-7; astonish-9). See Mt 7.28; 13.54; 19.25; 22.22, 33; Mk 1.22; 6.2; 10.26; 11.18; Lk 4.22, 32; 20.26; 24.41; Jn 3.7; 5.28; 7.15. Jesus’ miracles are integral to his story; to excise them (cf. “The Jefferson Bible”) completely alters it. But his teaching is equally integral and is in fact often the catalyst for his miracles (cf. Lk 4.31ff.) and the reactions of the people. (Remove his teaching and try to imagine his opponents reacting as they did—cf. Mk 11.18.)

Making the effort to maintain the correct balance between Jesus’ deeds and teaching (Acts 1.1) is challenging. For his body to correctly imitate our head, we must embrace it.

John’s Stand for Jesus (3)

John’s Method

David Anguish

A book by Ronald Nash helpfully introduces the process of evaluating worldviews, the workability of Christianity, the problem of evil, naturalism, the New Age movement, and the incarnation and resurrection. I benefited from all of it, but one statement in particular justified the cost and time invested.

Furthermore, consider all the other things we can settle once we know Jesus is God and that his words are God’s words. We then have an authoritative answer to all our most important questions: Is there a personal God who loves us? What is our duty in life? How do we become children of God? Why did Jesus die? Is there life after death?¹

Simply stated, everything about our faith begins with, centers in, develops from, and stands or falls based on our belief about Jesus. John’s writings suggest he would have agreed.

First John was written to believers who were susceptible to “false prophets” and had seen some of their number leave. Because they opposed the basic teaching about Christ, John called his opponents “antichrists” (cf. 1 John 2.18-19, 22; 4.1-6). His response to their teaching began with his first sentence.

¹ We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³ we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1.1-3 NRSV).

Note that John recalled the first disciples’ *experience*: “we have seen.” He used the perfect tense form of *horaō* (ὁράω), indicating a present state resulting from past action or the continuance of completed action.² Used with “heard, looked at, and touched,” John was appealing to events in history.

He *continued to persuade* his readers about the reasons for

Testimony & Miracles

The paragraph from which the excerpt from Bernard Ramm at right was taken:

“If miracles are capable of sensory perception, they can be made matters of testimony. If they are adequately testified to, then the recorded testimony has the same validity for evidence as the experience of beholding the event. No matter what Hume said at this point, *legal procedure in thousands of courts of the world, as well as scientific historiography*, is conducted on the grounds of reliable testimony by word of mouth or by written document. For purposes of *evidence* the courts treat the testimony of a man who saw a crime as if the court itself saw it, if they have no reason to doubt the integrity of the witness. Furthermore, the mere passage of time does make them increasingly difficult of examination. But once an event is recorded reliably in document form, the reliability of the document is not at all changed by the mere passage of time. If the raising of Lazarus was actually witnessed by John and recorded faithfully by him when still in soundness of faculties and memory, for purposes of *evidence*, it is the same as if we were there and saw it” (140-141).

Food for Thought

“[The] growth of Christianity is taking place despite its decline in the West . . . Despite the profound forgetfulness of Jesus in the popular culture of contemporary Europe, people still connect with his story when it is told.”

Richard Bauckham,
Jesus: A Very Short Introduction
(Oxford University Press, 2011), 1, 3

belief, utilizing the word “testify” (*martureō*, μαρτυρέω), to “attest to a fact or truth,” used here to “focus on confirmation and attestation.”³ John said that Jesus’ story can be verified.

He *kept teaching* the basic beliefs, even to believers who had already responded to the message. He said, “we *declare* it,” a present tense form of *apangellō* (ἀπαγγέλλω), “relate, report . . . announce, proclaim.”⁴ The term is related to *euangelizō* (εὐαγγελίζω) which is never used in John’s writings. As he repeated the basic message, John helped his readers be better prepared to share it themselves (cf. 2 Tim. 2.2).

We can summarize John’s approach this way: *Don’t modify the teaching to fit changing times and circumstances; keep declaring, applying, and defending it.* How we utilize his method will not look the same in every culture—or every sub-culture. We will need to flesh it out and present it in appropriate terms. But as we contend with the many alternative views in our marketplace of ideas, we should make the effort to think through how we can make use of John’s method.

Do we experience the story as the apostles did? Can we “testify” as they could? No, and no. They were eyewitnesses to the events and we can only show the credibility of their testimony. But it’s been that way since the earliest times. Even in the first century, as the word spread, most believers were not eyewitnesses (cf. Luke 1.2; Heb. 2.1-4; 1 Pet. 1.8-9). That doesn’t invalidate the apostles’ witness, as we know from the courts which, “for purposes of *evidence* . . . treat the testimony of a man who saw a crime as if the court itself saw it, if they have no reason to doubt the integrity of the witness.”⁵

For us, the bigger questions are whether we will commit to mastering the evidence we have available, think creatively about how to present it in different situations, and make the effort to teach it often and widely enough in our churches to equip more of the body’s members to present it.

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Notes

¹ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 154.

² See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1996), 573. Quoting Moulton [*Prologomena*, 140], Wallace notes that “the perfect tense is ‘the most important, exegetically, of all the Greek Tenses.’”

³ Frederick William Danker with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 222.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Christian Evidences* (Moody Press, 1953), 140.

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