



Links Players

From Atheism to Christ! - Legend or History?

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Cor.15: 3-8, ESV)

Most every golfer knows the name O.B. (Pop) Keeler. Author of numerous books, a famed sports writer, and the highly recognized friend and biographer of the great Bobby Jones.

Bobby Jones once described “O. B.” as “the greatest golf writer that has ever lived.” As one author said about Keeler, “He rubbed elbows with Ernest Hemingway, argued the rules of tennis with baseball great Ty Cobb, and sang a duet with the famed opera singer Enrico Caruso.” He even wrote a famous Babe Ruth obituary.

Nothing brought Keeler more recognition than writing about his eyewitness accounts of Bobby’s unparalleled career in newspaper articles and the only authorized biography of Bobby Jones, Down the Fairway. To say he “had a way with words” is a classic understatement.

In Lee Strobel’s efforts to uncover the facts of Jesus’ death and resurrection, he couldn’t avoid the early eyewitness accounts and “the Creed” found in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8. For years, many have argued that the tale of Jesus’ death and resurrection was a Legend; that is, the story of Jesus Christ’s dying and rising was nothing more than a folktale.

Of course, there is a slight difference between a folktale and a legend; the first is pure fiction, and the second emerges over two generations or more but is inspired by true historical events. In a legend, what was once historically true is embellished over time so that the later versions of the story hardly resemble the original account!

As Lee eventually discovered, the eyewitness accounts of Peter, the Twelve, the five hundred, James, and Paul were written down in a creed within a couple of years. Some scholars argue that The Creed was formed within months or weeks of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Lee’s case against Jesus Christ was crumbling.

As we consider this story of a modern skeptic’s effort to undermine the reliability of first-century eyewitness accounts and the early written attestation,

let’s recall that Jesus appeared to Peter, a friend who had denied knowing him. He appeared to James, a first-century skeptic. Jesus also appeared to “The Twelve” at one time. Furthermore, Jesus appeared to more than 500 people at one time. Remember, there is no such thing as “collective hallucinations.”

And finally, Jesus appeared to Paul, an enemy who persecuted the early church. Not only had the resurrected Jesus appeared to all these men, but he had also forgiven them for all their sins.

If we have great confidence that O.B. Keeler accurately reported the historical accomplishments of the great Bobby Jones, why would we not trust the eyewitness accounts of those who suffered martyrdom for their reports about the crucified and resurrected Lord?

Prayer: Empower us to “contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all given to the saints.”

READING - 1 Corinthians 15: 1-20; 1 Peter 1:3-9

OPENING QUESTIONS:
Have you or someone you know ever had a hole-in-one with no one to witness it?

1. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reminds them of what “he had received.” This is “the Creed,” referred to in the video by Lee Strobel. What is the importance of having a creed (written testimony) this soon after Jesus’ death and resurrection? The answer is in the video.

2. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul lists several eyewitness testimonies. Name them and discuss what significance each might have.

3. In 1 Peter 1, Peter ties two things to Jesus’ resurrection. What are those? Discuss why a bodily resurrection and not a Legend is essential to the Christian faith.
