

ISSUE

21.1

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

January 6,  
2019

## Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

### Elders:

Pat Ledbetter  
Brady McAlister  
Jeff Nunn

### Deacons:

Steve Dixon  
Ryan Ferguson  
Ben Hight  
Blake McAlister  
Walker McAnear  
Ryan Matney  
Sam Nunn  
Lance Purcell  
Justin Smiley  
Kevin Wise  
Trevor Yontz

### Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



## The “Memoirs of the Apostles”

By Kyle Pope

Critics of faith have long tried to argue that the biblical books that preserve the inspired account of Jesus’ life, known as the “Gospels,” were not written by eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life, but centuries after Jesus by authors who wrote under the pseudonyms of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*. Even though this has been disproven by manuscript evidence of the Gospels dating to the second century, popular media still perpetuates this false claim. A compelling piece of evidence pertaining to this issue recently came to my attention that I would like to share.

### Justin Martyr

One of the earliest authors who wrote in defense of faith in Christ was a second-century Christian named Justin. He was put to death for his faith under the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (Eu-



sebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.16-18), thus earning the epithet by which he is generally identified—*Justin Martyr*. Before his death around AD 165 he wrote many works explaining his faith. The two longest that have survived are a defense of the faith written to the emperor, known as the *First Apology*, and a defense of the faith written to a Jewish man named Trypho. In both of these works Justin refers a number of times to what he calls the “memoirs of the apostles.”

The first examples of this come in his letter to the emperor. As he describes how Christians worshipped on the Lord’s Day, he explained that Christians, “gather

together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits” (*First Apology* 67). By using the term “memoirs” Justin is not claiming this was just the creative imagination of the apostles, nor is he ignoring the Divine inspiration of these texts. “Memoirs” translates the Greek word *apomnēmonēutis* (ἀπομνημόνευτις) meaning “recounting, summarizing, commemoration” (LSJ). He is referring to the accounts that the early church had already come to view as authoritative and held on a par with Old Testament Scripture.

What is Justin calling the “memoirs of the apostles”? Just before he first used this description, in discussing the Lord’s Supper he explained, “For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels” taught “do this in remembrance of Me” (ibid. 66). We note here that he identified these “memoirs of the apostles” as texts which Christians were already calling “Gospels”—the term we still apply to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

We know that there were many other works that were Gnostic or apocryphal in nature that are also called “Gospels.” Could Justin have been including them in his description? To answer this we must look further at his use of this term in his work known as *Dialogue with Trypho*. In this work Justin used this term at least eleven times. By considering his usage we can determine the scope of what Justin includes in the term “memoirs of the apostles.”

For example, Justin will discuss either the Jews plotting to take Jesus or the dividing of His garments and claim these “memoirs” as the source for his understanding of these events (*Dialogue* 104). These are things recorded in all four Gospels in our Bibles today. Justin used the term in discussing the temptation of Jesus (ibid. 103)—something recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).



In addition to this, Justin also used the term “memoirs of the apostles” when citing events in the life of Christ recorded in only two of our Gospels. These include Jesus singing praise to God (*Dialogue* 106), recorded in Matthew and Mark (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26); the virgin conception of Mary (*Dialogue* 105), recorded in Matthew and Luke (Matt. 1:23; Luke 1:27); and the Jews’ request for a sign and Jesus’ reference to the sign of Jonah (*Dialogue* 107)—something recorded only in Luke and Matthew (Luke 11:29; cf. Matt. 16:4).

Justin also used “memoirs of the apostles” in reference to teachings of Jesus recorded in only one of the Gospels. These include the appearance of the star at Jesus’ birth and the visit of the Wise Men from the east (*Dialogue* 106); Jesus’ teaching that Christian righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (*ibid.* 105); and the shout raised while Jesus was on the cross, “He was the Son of God: let Him come down; let God save Him” (*ibid.* 100)—things recorded only in Matthew (Matt. 2:1-2; 5:20; 27:43). Or, Jesus’ words from the cross, “Into Your hands I commit My Spirit” (*Dialogue* 105), recorded only in Luke (Luke 23:46).

### Mark and Luke

Two final examples demand our special attention. Justin discussed Jesus’ nickname given to James and John, Boanerges—an Aramaic term meaning “sons of thunder.” In referring to this Justin spoke of Peter, claiming to learn about this from “his memoirs” (*Dialogue* 106). What is Justin calling Peter’s “memoirs”? There is an apocryphal work known as the *Gospel of Peter*, but it does not contain an account naming James and John, Boanerges. The answer likely rests in what early church writers claimed about Peter’s relationship to the Gospel of Mark. For example, Ire-

naeus (ca. 140-ca. 202) wrote, “Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter” (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1). Tertullian (ca. 155-ca. 240) claimed, “That which Mark published may be affirmed to be Peter’s, whose interpreter Mark was” (*Against Marcion* 4.5). Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-218) as quoted in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* (6.14.5–7) and Origen (AD 184-253) in his *Commentary on Matthew* (1.1) affirm the same view. Justin’s reference to Peter’s “memoirs” claims it as the source of the record of Jesus’ nickname “Boanerges”—something recorded only in Mark 3:17. Justin is likely calling the Gospel of Mark Peter’s “memoirs.”

There is a similar understanding related to the Gospel of Luke. After referring to Peter’s relationship to the Gospel of Mark, Tertullian (ca. 155-ca. 240) continued, “For even Luke’s form of the Gospel men usually ascribe to Paul”



(*Against Marcion* 4.5). This is interesting as it relates to Justin's use of "memoirs" when he cites something from Luke alone. He refers to the account that in the garden Jesus had sweat falling down like drops of blood (*Dialogue* 103), something found only in Luke 22:44. He attributes the source for this to, "the memoirs which I say were drawn up by His apostles and those who followed them" (ibid. 103). Although Luke was not an apostle, his close associa-

tion to Paul led Justin and other early church writers to view his Gospel as if it was Paul's (or sanctioned by him).

### Conclusion

What conclusions can we draw about Justin's use of what he calls the "memoirs of the apostles"? First, it is clear that Justin used the term to refer to the four Gospels contained in our New Testament to this day. He applied the term to things found in all four Gospels, but never to things found in Gnostic or apocryphal sources (such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Judas*, etc.). Second, it is clear that the false claim that our Gospels were written long after the first-century by writers who were not eyewitnesses to the life of Jesus is absurd. By the middle of the second century early Christians already viewed these inspired works as authoritative records of what Jesus said and did among His apostles. We can trust that what we have in our Bibles today are in fact the inspired accounts of our Lord's life as preserved in the "memoirs of the apostles."



Faithful Sayings Issue 21.1 January 6, 2019

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**We are so glad that you joined us today.  
Please come again.**

● **Let us know if you have any questions.**