

1 What is Resurrection?

- Module: Resurrection
- Lesson 44

2 Some Recommended Sources

- Gunning for God, John Lennox
- On Guard, William Lane Craig
- The Case for Easter, Lee Strobel
- The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus, Gary Habermas and Michael Licona
- The Resurrection of the Son of God, N. T. Wright
- The Resurrection of Jesus, Michael Licona

3 Three Questions About The Resurrection

- What does the New Testament mean when it talks about resurrection?
- Did the resurrection of Jesus actually happen?
- What really happened on Easter Sunday, and what does it mean?

4 Resurrection: The Essential Fact

- But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ... and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.
- 1 Corinthians 15:13-19

5 If There Is No Resurrection...

- Christ has not been raised.
- The preaching of the Gospel is in vain.
- Our faith in the Gospel is in vain and worthless, since we are still in our sins.
- Christians are false witnesses against God.
- Those who died believing in Christ are simply dead and gone. Period.
- We, of all men, are the most pitiable.

6 Common Views Dismissing the Physical Resurrection of Jesus

- The Jewish context was one in which resurrection could have a wide variety of meanings.
 - The earliest (Jewish) Christians did not believe in Jesus' bodily resurrection, but used resurrection as a metaphor for some kind of spiritual exaltation/ascension/glorification of Jesus.

- Paul did not believe in bodily resurrection. (Based on a particular reading of one or two Pauline passages.)
- Resurrection accounts of Jesus' bodily appearances in the Gospels were a late invention, after the early church.
- The reported appearances of Jesus after his death were some kind of religious experience, internal to the person, or some kind of fantasy or hallucination.
- Whatever happened to Jesus' body, it was not raised from the dead.

7 **How is Resurrection used in Scripture?**

- It is used in a literal sense to refer to a physical/material coming back to life after a period of physical death.
- It is sometimes used as a metaphor for something else.
- It is never used to refer simply to "life after death." (Some kind of disembodied afterlife.)

8 **Understanding a Metaphor**

- A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one clearly understood thing (the referent) is used to help visualize or understand something else.
- Metaphors have a concrete (material reality) referent:
 - e.g. "boiling mad" where "boiling" is a concrete referent (a real thing) used as a visual representation of the intensity of anger.
 - e. g. "this class is a breeze" where "breeze" is a concrete referent (a real thing) used as a visual representation of simple, light, or easy.

9 **Resurrection as Metaphor in Scripture**

- Resurrection is sometimes used as a metaphor in Scripture:
 - e.g. as a picture of the renewal of the nation Israel (Ezekiel 37), or the Christian's new life in Christ (Romans 6), etc.
- When resurrection is used as a metaphor in Scripture, its concrete referent is actual restoration of physical life. Without the concrete referent, the metaphor becomes empty or ambiguous.
- Metaphor does not mean abstract.
 - abstract: existing in thought or as an idea but not having a physical or concrete existence; (e. g. a feeling, an idea, numbers, etc.)
 - Scripture does use resurrection as a metaphor, but resurrection itself is never abstract in Scripture.

10 **An Important Distinction**

- "Life after death"...
 - Refers to one's existence following death. (The ongoing life of the soul.)
 - It is generally a non-physical, non-material existence.
- "Resurrection"...

- Refers to something that happens to a person's body after a period of physical death—"life after life after death."
- Resurrection is the reversal of death.
- The New Testament teaches both:
 - a non-material life after death (e.g. "absent from the body, present with the Lord" 2 Cor. 5:8)
 - and a subsequent resurrection of the body after a period of physical death (e.g. "the resurrection of the dead" 1 Cor. 15:21).

11 Hellenistic (Greek) Views on Resurrection

- The ancient non-Jewish world in which Jesus lived and the early church was born was largely Hellenistic (Greek thinking) and was thus divided...
 - into those who believed resurrection could not and did not happen, though they might have wished it could. (the Homeric view).
 - into those who believed death was an escape, and would never have desired resurrection, knowing that it couldn't happen anyway. (the Platonic view)
- In the Hellenistic world, death was a one-way street.
- Regarding resurrection, everyone knew it did not happen.
- "Death was all-powerful. One could neither escape it in the first place nor break its power once it had come. The ancient world was thus divided into those who said that resurrection couldn't happen, though they might have wanted it to, and those who said they didn't want it to happen, knowing that it couldn't anyway." —N. T. Wright, in *The Resurrection of the Son of God*—

12 Hellenistic (Greek) Ideas of Life After Death

- There were cases of people said to have eaten with the dead.
- There were myths and novels about "cheating" death.
 - e. g. Scheintod motifs (scheintod=apparent death)
 - Developed and proliferated after the mid-first century.
- Translation to be with the gods.
- Transmigration of souls. (reincarnation)

13 Hellenistic (Greek) Ideas of Life After Death

- Dying and rising gods. (Discussed in earlier lessons.)
 - A metaphor symbolized by a ritual reenactment of death/rebirth within the fertility rites associated with agriculture and with human procreation.
 - A metaphor enacted w/cycle of seed time and harvest and human reproduction as the referents.
 - Happened annually.

- Never imagined to actually happen in time/space to real people or gods. No one believed someone actually returned to physical life.
- No evidence of belief in dying and rising gods in the Jewish world.

14 **Hellenistic (Greek) Ideas of Life After Death**

- Dying and rising gods. (cont.)
 - Most such myths postdate Christianity.
 - Those that appear to predate Christianity have no connection whatsoever with Christianity.
 - Radically contrasts with the biblical view of resurrection, and also with the Greco-Roman bio genre of the Gospels.
 - In none of these Hellenistic ideas about life and death is there anything remotely parallel to the resurrection of Jesus or of the resurrection of the saints.

15 **Life After Death in Second Temple Judaism**

- The two hopes of Second Temple Judaism.
 - The Messiah and the Messianic Kingdom (the primary focus of Jewish hope).
 - Resurrection at the end of the age (a peripheral hope in Jewish eschatology).
- Use of resurrection in Second Temple Judaism.
 - As the restoration of bodies after a period of death.
 - As a metaphor for the restoration of Israel with physical restoration as the concrete referent. (e. g. Ezekiel's Valley of Dry Bones, Ezk. 37)

16 **Life After Death in Second Temple Judaism**

- How resurrection was understood:
 - The Greek word *anastasis* was understood as physical.
 - Never referred simply to "life after death", but life after life after death.
 - Not a redefinition of death, but a reversal of death.
 - Based on a strong doctrine of God as creator, and as the creation, including our physical bodies, as God's good plan. (Contra the Platonic view of the physical world, including our bodies, as unwholesome.)
 - There was no resurrection without the body in Second Temple Judaism's view.
- The timing of resurrection: one occurrence at the end of the age. (e. g. Martha to Jesus in John 11:24)

17 **A Startling Development**

- Gentiles and Jews alike all knew precisely what resurrection meant.
 - To the Hellenists, it couldn't and wouldn't happen, whether they wanted it to or not.

- To most Jews, it would happen once, at the end of the age. (To others, such as the Sadducees, it wouldn't and couldn't happen.)
- Something radically changed all this on the first Easter Sunday.
 - Many devout Jews suddenly, "on a dime", changed their long-held beliefs about resurrection.
 - Something happened for which "the readily available language of ghosts, spirits, and the like was inappropriate, and for which their previous belief about life after death had not prepared them."
 - N. T. Wright, The Resurrection of the Son of God-

18 **A Startling Development**

- A new view of resurrection.
 - Resurrection moved from the circumference of belief to the very center.
 - It was no longer a single event at the end of the age, but a split event.
 - It was the transformation of the body, not mere resuscitation.
 - When used metaphorically, it no longer referred to national restoration of the Jews, but to baptism and holiness.

19 **Resurrection in the Early Church**

- A physical body, once dead, had returned to life.
- The body was both transformed (had new characteristics), yet had continuity with the previous body.
- Jesus' resurrection was the first fruits of the Great Resurrection at the end of the age.

20 **The Early Church's Message to an Incredulous World**

- The God/man had died by crucifixion as atonement for sins—a moronic and scandalous idea.
- That same man had been physically resurrected—The Hellenists knew this never happened. The Jews knew it would only happen once, at the end of the age.
- Yet this message of the crucified and resurrected Jesus swept the Greco-Roman world and eventually subdued it.

21 **Next Week:**

- Did Jesus Really Rise From the Dead?