

1 What Happened on Easter Sunday? (And What Did it Mean?)

- Module: Resurrection
- Lesson 46

2 The Problem of Differing Resurrection Accounts in the Gospels

- Robert Funk (co-founder of Jesus Seminar): The resurrection accounts “are hopelessly at variance.”
- N. T. Wright (conservative historical Jesus scholar): “...the obvious, apparent surface inconsistencies.”

3 Some of the Differences in the Gospel Accounts

- Did only Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus (Matt., Mk., Lk.), or did Nicodemus help (Jn.)?
- Did one (Jn.), two (Matt.), or more women (Mk., Lk.) go to the tomb?
- Were there one (Matt.) or two (Jn) angels at the tomb, or was it a young man (Mk.) or two young men (Lk.)?
- Did only Peter run to the tomb (Lk.), or was he accompanied by someone else (Jn.)?
- Did all the post-resurrection events occur on Easter, including Jesus’ ascension (Lk.?), or was it spread out over a period of days (Matt., Jn.)?

4 The Gospels in Agreement

- All agree it happened on the first day of the week (Sunday).
 - On the third day since crucifixion
 - In the early morning
- All agree Mary Magdalene went to the tomb.
- All agree others women were there also.
- All agree the stone was rolled from the entrance.
- All agree some angel(s) or young man (men) was at the tomb.
 - In white or dazzling white clothing.
 - Informed them that Jesus was risen.

5 The Gospels in Agreement

- All agree the tomb was otherwise empty (Jesus’ body was no longer there.).
- Matthew, Luke, and John agree the women went off to tell the male disciples (Mark is ambiguous).
- Matthew and John agree that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene.
- Luke and John agree that Peter and another disciple (John?) went to see for themselves.
- Matthew, Luke, and John agree that Jesus appeared to people on multiple occasions over a period of days. (Mark is silent on this.)

6 Understanding the Differences

- Is it a contradiction, or a difference?
 - e.g. a “guy vs. gal” way of telling a story (Licona)
 - Differences in eyewitness reports can actually lend credibility to the eyewitness nature of the account. (J. Warner Wallace, award winning cold-case homicide detective)
- Genre of the Gospels
 - They are Greco-Roman bio, and so possess features of Greco-Roman bios. (We need to understand the Gospels according to the literary conventions of the 1st century, not those of the 21st century.)
 - Chronology is not always a critical issue.
 - Time compression (for the sake of brevity or narrative flow)
 - Narrative flow (themes, etc. more important than temporal precision)
 - Portrait vs. photo

7 Understanding the Differences

- What is the historical significance of the variations?
 - Even if some apparent differences remain unresolved, if they are peripheral to the main story, they do not negate that story.
 - e. g. Some survivors following the sinking of the Titanic reported that the Titanic split before sinking. Others insisted that it remained intact while sinking. While both cannot be true, no one ever doubted that the Titanic actually sank because of differing accounts of peripheral issues.
- The nature of the events are complex, as represented by the women.
 - There were “many” women who had followed Jesus from Galilee.
 - It appears there were groups of women, and some owned residences in or around Jerusalem.
 - It is likely that women coming to the tomb did so from various locations around Jerusalem.

8 Bystanders at the Crucifixion

- Matthew 27:55 — “Many women” from Galilee (“among them” were Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee).
- Mark 15:40 — Some women (“among whom” were Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James and Joses, Salome).
- Luke 23:49 — All his acquaintances and the women who accompanied him from Galilee.
- John 19:25 — Mary mother of Jesus, Mary’s sister [Salome, wife of Zebedee], Mary wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene.

9 Women at the Tomb

- Matthew 28:1 — Mary Magdalene and “the other” Mary.
 - Came to look.
 - Beginning of dawn.

- Jesus met them and greeted them. (v. 9)
- Mark 16:1-3 — Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Salome.
 - Brought spices
 - Very early (v. 2)
 - Came together, spoke with each other. (v. 3)

10 **Women at the Tomb**

- Luke 24:1 — The women who had come from Galilee. (see 23:55)
 - Later identifies Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary mother of James, and other women also. (24:10) (no less than five total)
 - Bringing spices
 - Early dawn
- John 20:1 — Mary Magdalene.
 - Came to the tomb twice.
 - Early, while it was still dark. Ran to tell others.
 - Reports to the disciples “We” don’t know where they’ve laid him (v. 2).” Indicating she had not gone to the tomb alone.
 - Returned following Peter and the Beloved Disciple (20:11)

11 **Contradictions? Or Merely Differences?**

- Who buried Jesus, only Joseph of Arimathea or also Nicodemus?
 - Answer: It is unlikely that Joseph handled the body of Jesus by himself, he most likely had assistance which Matt. Mk. and Lk do not mention.
 - John, writing much later than the others, mentions Nicodemus for two possible reasons:
 - John had related the account of Nicodemus’ earlier encounter w/Jesus, so it would make sense to tell about his later activity.
 - The other writers (writing much earlier) may have simply chosen not to include Nicodemus because he remained a member of the Council and they did not wish to compromise him, or because they considered him to be a lesser player in the burial.

12 **Contradictions? Or Merely Differences?**

- Who/how many women went to the tomb?
 - Answer: Several different women went to the tomb (at least five), likely from different locations in Jerusalem or the vicinity.

- While they may have had different experiences, none are inherently contradictory. Mary Magdalene, according to John, went twice, with obviously two different experiences.
- Each author refers only to those women important to his story, possibly those who were most likely the most prominent in the early Jerusalem church, and/or those whom he knows could corroborate the account to his readers (e.g. were eyewitnesses accessible to his readers).
- Mark's account appears to be truncated for some reason (the original ending, after 16:8 was lost?), so it is impossible to know what the women actually did after verse 8.
 - That they "said nothing to anyone" (v. 8) most likely refers to them as they were going through Jerusalem from the tomb, before they reached the disciples. Clearly they eventually told others (as they were instructed to do), as we have a record of their experience.

13 **Contradictions? Or Merely Differences?**

- Was it angels (Matt.) or men (Mk & Lk.) at the tomb?
 - Answer: Scripture frequently refers to angels as men or describes them appearing as men. This is not a contradiction. (e. g. Heb. 12:2; Gen. 32:24 with Hosea 12:4)
- Was it one (Matt. & Mk.) or two (Lk. & Jn.) angels?
 - Answer: If a witness reports "an" angel or "a" man, that does not preclude the possibility of more than one which may have been observed or reported by other witnesses. (e.g. see the next point about Peter going to the tomb)

14 **Contradictions? Or Merely Differences?**

- Did only Peter go to the tomb (Lk. 24:12), or did another disciple accompany him (Jn. 20:3)?
 - Answer: Actually twelve verses later (Lk. 24:24) Luke himself records the remarks of the Emmaus disciples that "some who were with us" went to the tomb in response to the women's report. So Luke is clearly aware that Peter did not go alone though he only mentions Peter.
- Did everything happen on Easter day, as Luke seems to report, or over a number of days (Jn. 20:26)?
 - Answer: This appears to be an example of time compression. Luke does not explicitly say it all happened on Easter, and in the book of Acts he reports explicitly that it happened over a period of 40 days. (Acts 1:3)

15 **What Does the Resurrection Mean?**

1. Prior to his death, Jesus said his resurrection would be the evidence for his authority for his acts and teaching.
 - "The Jews then said to Him, 'What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' ...
 - But He was speaking of the temple of His body. So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." (John 2:18-22)

16 **What Does the Resurrection Mean?**

- 2. Proof that Jesus is both Lord and Christ
- “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. ...
- ...Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David...he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.
- This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.
- ...Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Peter’s Pentecost Sermon, Acts 2:22-36)

17 What Does the Resurrection Mean?

- Proof that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (cont.)
 - By the resurrection, God has declared Jesus to be both Lord and Christ
 - Romans 1:1-4 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, ...who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.
 - The Emperor’s claim that “Caesar is Lord” is now countered by God’s counter-claim, echoed by the church, that “Jesus is Lord.”
- 3. The implication of this counter-claim was that in the resurrection of Jesus, God has announced the in-breaking of a new Kingdom taking precedent and authority over all other kingdoms.

18 What Does the Resurrection Mean?

- 4. Jesus’ resurrection is the first fruits of the general resurrection of the saints.
 - Resurrection is not a redefinition of death, but the defeat of death.
 - “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.” (1 Cor. 15:20)
 - “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom. 8:11)

19 What Does the Resurrection Mean?

- 5. Jesus’ resurrection is proof of God’s satisfaction with the sacrifice made for our transgressions.
 - “He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” (Rom. 4:25)
- 6. Resurrection is a re-affirmation of the essential goodness of the creation:

- God did not abandon Jesus' physical body to decay. (Acts 2:31)
- Nor will he abandon our physical bodies.

20 **In Summary, The Resurrection —**

- Is the seal of authority on all Jesus did and taught.
- Is God's declaration that Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord (God) and Christ (Messianic King).
- Is the annunciation of a new Kingdom to which we owe allegiance over all other kingdoms.
- Is the first fruits of the general resurrection of the saints.
- Is the evidence of God's satisfaction of Jesus' offering for our sin.
- Is evidence of the essential goodness of the creation.

21 **Our Ultimate Apologetic: The Resurrection**

- "Blessed are those who having not seen, believe."
-Jesus-
- This is the blessed hope we defend.
 - "...but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;" (1 Peter 3:15)

22 **Next Week:**

- Joint Campus Groups