

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Centrality of the resurrection belief

a. 1 Cor 15:17, 19. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... we are of all people most to be pitied.”

b. Gerd Theissen: “Easter Faith involves the decision whether one can see the ground of one’s own existence in the story of Jesus... Easter faith involves a decision about one’s human self-understanding. If here something ultimate is disclosed (even through ‘subjective visions’), then death and anxiety about death do not have the last word. For however one thinks about Easter, it is a protest against death, and especially against violent death.”¹

c. Tom Wright: “I have heard, for instance, that Jesus’ resurrection proves the existence of life after death. That certainly was not the point for the first Christians: they already believed in life after death... I have heard, too, that the resurrection means that Jesus is now alive, and one can enter into relationship with him. That is true so far as it goes, but it is not the specific truth of the resurrection... Rather, the meaning of the resurrection must begin with the validation of Jesus as messiah... the resurrection declares that the cross was a victory, not a defeat... It is the resurrection that declares that sins have indeed been dealt with... The deepest meanings of the resurrection have to do with new creation. If the stories are metaphors for anything, they are metaphors for the belief that God’s new world had been brought to birth.”²

2. Types of resurrection tradition

- Empty tomb accounts
- Appearance stories
- Exit (the tomb) story
- Resurrection confessions
- Ascension stories

3. Questions

- Was the tomb empty? Is that important or irrelevant?
- What is meant by “resurrection”? Bodily resurrection? Spiritual resurrection?
- Can we believe in the resurrection, if the tomb was not empty; that is, if Jesus’ body returned to dust?
- If Jesus rose bodily, where is his body now? Did it vanish into another dimension; ascend into heaven?

B. EMPTY TOMB ACCOUNTS

1. Mark is the earliest account and it only has an empty tomb scene.
2. Matthew grafted unique material onto the Markan account, reworks the story, adding:
 - An appearance of the risen Jesus to the women near the tomb
 - The bribing of the Roman soldiers by the chief priests
 - An appearance of Jesus to the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee
3. Luke grafted unique material onto the Markan account, reworks the story, adding:
 - A lengthy narrative of the appearance of Jesus to the two disciples near Emmaus
 - An appearance of Jesus to the eleven and others in Jerusalem
 - The ascension of Jesus near Bethany

¹ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 474-75.

² N. T. Wright and Marcus J. Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) 125-126.

4. John account is unique and independent of the Synoptics and has:
- A story of the empty tomb with Mary Magdalene, Peter, and the beloved disciple
 - An appearance of Jesus in Jerusalem to the disciples minus Thomas
 - An appearance eight days later in Jerusalem to the disciples plus Thomas
 - A final appearance of Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee to disciples (secondary addition)

When historians are faced with the empty tomb account, here is what they are faced with?

Gospel	Events	Witnesses	Angels
Matt 28:1-10	Earthquake? What happens to the stone? What do the women do? Does Jesus appear?	How many? Who were they?	Angel? How many? Where?
Mark 16:1-8	Earthquake? What happens to the stone? What do the women do? Does Jesus appear?	How many? Who were they?	Angel? How many? Where?
Luke 24:1-12	Earthquake? What happens to the stone? What do the women do? Does Jesus appear?	How many? Who were they?	Angel? How many? Where?
John 20:1-18	Earthquake? What happens to the stone? What do the women do? Does Jesus appear?	How many? Who were they?	Angel? How many? Where?
Gos. Pet. 13:1-3	Earthquake? What happens to the stone? What do the women do? Does Jesus appear?	How many? Who were they?	Angel? How many? Where?

- What do you *observe* when you compare the different resurrection accounts?
- What are the differences?
- Is there a core that all four (or five) accounts agree on?
- How do you *explain* these similarities and differences?
- Are the inconsistencies in the documents cause to question the historicity of the empty tomb?
- What are we to make of Kenneth Bailey and James Dunn's idea that early oral tradition is both *informal and controlled*, allowed for *performance variation* and maintained stability over time

C. THE CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1. What happened after Jesus died?

2. Did the disciples stay in Jerusalem or go on to Galilee?

3. Who did Jesus appear to and in what order?

a. Matthew:

- \ Appears to Mary Magdalene and to the other Mary (28:9f)
- \ Appears once to the eleven disciples (28:16-20)

b. Luke:

- \ Does not appear to the women (see Lk 24:8-11)
- \ Appears first to two unnamed disciples (Lk 24:11-35)

- \ Appears to all the disciples and eats with them (Lk 24:36-49)
- \ Was with the disciples for 40 days, appearing on and off (Acts 1:3f)

c. Paul:

- \ First to Cephas (Peter)
- \ Then to the twelve (not eleven!)
- \ Then to more than 500
- \ Then to James (Jesus' brother)
- \ Then to all the apostles (more than the twelve!)
- \ Then to Paul himself (1 Cor 15:3-8)

D. APPEARANCE TRADITIONS

1. Paul

1 Cor 15:3-9. 15:3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received:

that [*hoti*] Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 15:4 and
that [*hoti*] he was buried, and
that [*hoti*] he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5:5 and
that [*hoti*] he appeared [*ōphthē*] to Cephas, then to the twelve.

5:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 15:8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (NRSV)

2. Appearances of Jesus in the Gospels

3. Other Appearances of Jesus

4. Was the resurrected Jesus bodily or non-physical in nature?

E. AN INTRACTABLE PROBLEM

"The followers of Jesus were sure that he was raised from the dead, but they did not agree on who had seen him" (Sanders 279).

- (1) Not a deliberate fraud—They dedicated their lives to Jesus and died for their beliefs (Sanders 279)
- (2) Not calculated deception—It would have produced more unanimity. Instead, it created competitors: I saw him first. No, I did. (Sanders 280).
- (3) Not mass hysteria—It is suggested by the appearance of Jesus before 500, but it does not explain the traditions (Sanders 279)
- (4) Paul's evidence is suggestive—Paul does not distinguish between the Lord's appearance to him and that of other appearances *in kind*. If Paul had a *vision*, maybe the others did too.