

Lecture 30 – Resurrection & Its Meaning

The angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” Matthew 28:5-6

Key Terms

Swoon theory, theft theory, hallucination theory

Objectives

*To respond with clarity and confidence to the historical attacks against the resurrection

*To identify some pastoral roles of these responses for Christian living

*To briefly explain the importance and meaning of the resurrection

Lead Questions

*Is the historicity of the resurrection essential to our faith? Why or why not? Is the historicity of other elements of our faith (the creation, the flood, the fall of Jericho, the Babylonian captivity, the birth of Christ, etc.) essential to our faith? Why or why not? If you answered differently for the resurrection and for other elements of our faith, how do you account for the discrepancy? How you use your discussion of the historicity of the resurrection as an encouragement or exhortation for yourself, a Christian brother, or a Christian sister?

Resurrection & Its Meaning

I. The Event Proper

A. Resurrection, not resuscitation. Jesus’ body changed

B. Historical attacks the resurrection

1. Many critics ignore factual issues. Others deny it on anti-supernaturalist grounds.
2. Classic critical theories of swoon, theft, or hallucination discredited. Critics have generally used three lines of argument to explain the claim that Jesus rose from the dead: the swoon theory, the theft theory and the hallucination theory.
 - a. Swoon Theory: Jesus did not die but lapsed into a coma. After resting in the tomb, He revived. Reply:
 - i. The Roman soldiers were trained executioners. They would not misjudge the condition of a victim.
 - ii. There is striking eyewitness testimony to His death in reliable documents, the Gospels.
 - iii. Even if He had only swooned, Jesus could not have survived His crucifixion and burial. We conclude this both from medical analysis of the effects of crucifixion and from an event Josephus records in his autobiography. Josephus once saw a number of captives from a war being crucified. Noticing three of his acquaintances among them, he asked Titus, the Roman commander, that they be taken down and cared for. This was granted. Yet although physicians devoted the greatest care to their recovery, two of the three died.
 - iv. Consider that Jesus neither ate, drank nor slept for many hours before His execution, that the Roman style of lashing produced an effusion of blood, that after His swoon He lay at least thirty-six more hours without food and water. Upon awakening He would somehow have to escape yards and yards of burial cloth in which His hands and feet were bound, push away a stone weighing several tons, then overpower an armed Roman guard that

would forfeit their lives if Jesus escaped. Finally He would have to make such an impression of vitality and grandeur that His disciples would tremble in awe at His feet. Truly resurrection is more likely than this stream of impossible events!

- b. Theft Theory: The disciples overpowered or bribed the guards at Jesus' tomb and stole the body. Reply:
 - i. The disciples could have neither overpowered nor bribed the guard, for failure on a watch was a capital offense.
 - ii. The disciples were crushed after Jesus' death. They were too defeated and frightened to attempt a rescue of Jesus' corpse.
 - iii. Theft cannot account for the change in the disciples. Once dispirited and cowardly, they were suddenly bold and fearless.
 - iv. If the disciples stole the body and lied about it, nearly all of them died for a lie. It is contrary to human nature and experience to suppose people would die for something they know to be false.
- c. Hallucination Theory: Moved by loving remembrances and fervent hopes, the disciples passed from the idea, "He must live," to the hallucination, "He does live." Reply:
 - i. The appearances of Jesus were too numerous and varied to be hallucinations. He appeared to individuals and groups, to women and men, in a city, on a hillside and by a lake, on a road and in a home.
 - ii. Paul "published" a list of over five hundred eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection about two decades after the event, as if to say, "If you don't believe me, check it out!"
 - iii. If the Jews or Romans still had Jesus' body, all they had to do to crush Christianity was produce it. But they never did!

On the other side of these rationalistic attempts to explain away the resurrection, a vast amount of testimony supports the claim that he arose. Jesus' body was gone. Reliable men and women testified that they saw Him, and backed their testimonies with their very lives. The disciples were changed men - bold, courageous and self-sacrificing. The church came into existence, grew and endured despite ongoing persecution. Only Jesus' physical resurrection can adequately explain these historical realities.

3. Critical scholars often avoid the issue now. E. P. Sanders "I do not regard deliberate fraud as a worthwhile explanation. That Jesus' followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What the reality was that gave rise to the experiences, I do not know."
4. The attack from anti-supernaturalists and radical skeptics rests on three connected pillars:
 - a. Q Source and Gospel of Thomas regarded as earlier, more reliable accounts of the Jesus movement.
 - b. The hermeneutic of suspicion
 - c. Radical historical skepticism
5. What really happened to Jesus at His death and burial?
6. What really happened with regard to the resurrection?
7. The factuality of the resurrection is not our sole concern; meaning is paramount.

How is belief in the Gospel compromised if there is no resurrection?

II. The Meaning of the Resurrection: Jesus is All He Claimed to Be, as God and Redeemer.

A. Jesus claimed deity, in various ways. Failure to rise would be devastating.

- B. Jesus as prophet - predicting future
- C. Jesus as priest - offering an acceptable sacrifice
- D. Jesus as king - a claim that resurfaced at trial is confirmed at resurrection.
 - 1. Defeating enemies, protecting from danger
 - 2. Providing for welfare
 - 3. Providing just laws
- E. Matthew: the conclusion of Matthean themes
 - 1. From the crucifixion
 - 2. Fear
 - 3. Angels and guards
 - 4. The prophetic words of Jesus are fulfilled. All occurred as He said.
 - 5. The power of God overcomes all obstacles.
- F. Matthew: The Great Commission
 - 1. A true commission - introduction, confrontation, reaction, charge, assurance
 - 2. Given to disciple still struggling toward full faith
 - 3. Sandwich structure of the commission
 - 4. "All authority"
 - 5. The central command: Make disciples of all the nations
 - 6. By going, baptizing, teaching them all Jesus commanded
 - 7. The promise of His presence
 - 8. Applications: the notion of a coach
 - 9. The "contract" for preaching at Easter