

“The Resurrection of Jesus”

READING: I Corinthians 15:1-8, 20 – Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.....But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

In the past couple of months you have heard me mention a book I was reading, “The Resurrection of Jesus” by Dr. Michael R. Licona. It was a fairly technical book done by a man who is not a trained theologian, but rather a trained historian. He approached the resurrection of Jesus from a historian’s perspective, not from theology. His was not the attempt to determine “How” Jesus was raised nor “by Whom” Jesus was raised. He said that was the theologians’ work. He simply wanted to determine if the actual, physical resurrection of Jesus was the best hypothesis for the Easter events as told in the four Gospels. He himself is a Christian, so he was very aware of what he called his “horizon”, that is presuppositions that can tilt one’s conclusions toward a certain end. He set out to be as open-minded and methodical as he could be.

The first task he undertook was to determine the “historical bedrock” under-lying the Resurrection, that is what were the facts that are nearly unanimously agreed upon by scholars: Christian, skeptics, and atheist. These three facts are:

- 1) Jesus of Nazareth truly died by crucifixion under the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate.
- 2) Very shortly after his death, Jesus’ disciples had experiences that led them to believe and proclaim that Jesus had been resurrected and had appeared to them.
- 3) Within a few years after Jesus’ death, Paul converted after experiencing what he interpreted as a postresurrection appearance of Jesus to him.

He went on to describe and delineate six different hypotheses that claim to explain how the doctrine of the Resurrection came to be the foundation of the Christian Church. These six were the following:

1) *Vermes’s Hypothesis:* The tomb was empty and the followers experienced an “apparition” they interpreted as the risen Jesus. Cannot determine what happened to Jesus’ body. The “mystical experience” they had at Pentecost made them feel Jesus’ presence and propelled their ministry and testimony.

2) *Goulder’s Hypothesis:* Psychological conditions caused the Disciples to have “communal delusions” and later writers “filled in the gaps” with their own thoughts and hopes.

3) *Ludemann’s Hypothesis:* Peter experienced a “psychotic disorder” because of his shame and guilt in denying Christ. Then his report to the rest of the followers caused them to have a “shared hallucinatory fantasy” that became the foundation of their belief.

4) *Crossan’s Hypothesis:* Paul experienced a hallucination on the Road to Damascus. The “empty tomb story” was invented by Mark and copied by the other evangelists. His followers perceived that the Kingdom of God continued to grow and assumed Christ’s presence.

5) *Craffert’s Hypothesis:* The Disciples were in an “altered state of consciousness” and experienced the resurrected Jesus in a “subjective” sense – real to them but not physically.

6) *The Physical Resurrection of Jesus*: As the Christian Church has maintained from the start – Jesus’ corpse returned to life, in the flesh, breathing, eating, walking, talking.

Licona subjected each one of these hypotheses to 5 historiographical criteria and rated each criteria either *plausible, tentative, or fail* based on how well the hypotheses met each criteria. After assigning values to each hypothesis, Licona himself was surprised that of the six, the only one to receive plausible in all five criteria was the sixth one, The Physical Resurrection of Jesus. Only Verme’s Hypothesis had three of the five. The rest scored two or less.

For all of them the passage of Scripture that carried the most weight was not from the Gospels but our text for today. Paul’s proclamation of the Resurrection witnesses is widely considered the first *written* account available to the Church. Since this was written about A.D. 55, Paul is only about 20 yrs. from the first Easter. He is recording the facts as he has received them, and in turn is delivering them to his readers. Jesus LIVES! That’s the only good explanation for the Gospel accounts, Paul’s conversion, the fantastic growth of the Church, and the faithfulness of the Apostles and witnesses in the face of threat and martyrdom.

It is also OUR proclamation. We don’t NEED Licona’s research to affirm the truth of the Resurrection. We hold the Scriptures to be God’s word and truth. But, for some who teeter on the fences of faith, his method leads to the same conclusion: Jesus Christ took up his life again on the Third Day as he said he would. He lives to all eternity and so shall we, redeemed and saved by the blood of the Lamb. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) ATTENTION IU FANS: we are taking a bus tour to IU Bloomington to take a guided tour of Assembly Hall and a visit to the Fine Arts Building on campus on Wednesday, May 15. The tour costs you \$10.00 and you’ll buy your own lunch. Sign up outside the office or call Karen to get your name on the list.