

Notes on Jesus' Resurrection 1: "The Historical Jesus"

Video Series: **Jesus' Resurrection. Then and Now.** N. T. Wright.
Tabgha Foundation, Minneapolis. Available from CARES (Center for
Advanced Religious External Studies)

Wright's Opening Comments

(Additional quoted material and the summary is taken from "The Mission and Message of Jesus",
Chapter 3 in **The Meaning of Jesus. Two Visions.** Marcus J. Borg; N. T. Wright. Harper San
Francisco, 1998.)

Who was Jesus of Nazareth?

Was he:

- ◆ a moral teacher?
- ◆ great hero of faith?
- ◆ great leader?
- ◆ doom and gloom apocalyptic prophet?
- ◆ teacher of spirituality, offering a new way of going to heaven?

We are secure in saying Jesus was no less than a *first century Jewish prophet announcing the kingdom of God*

A first century Jewish prophet . . .

Three fundamental first century Jews beliefs that Jesus shared:

- ◆ 1. Jewish monotheism -- their God, YHWH, was the only God
- ◆ 2. election -- the Jews were the chosen people of God
- ◆ 3. a sense that "the one god would soon act within history to vindicate his people and to establish justice and peace once and for all."

Jesus lead a movement, announcing that YHWH, the one God was at last becoming king. He spoke and behaved as a prophet.

. . . Announcing the kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God: A Revolutionary Slogan

The "Kingdom of God" or the "Kingdom of Heaven" was a revolutionary slogan with heavy political import at the time: it was not talk about a *place* where God ruled, but rather a declaration that *God would rule* -- and not Caesar or Herod

The Kingdom of God: Isaianic “Good News”

In his Kingdom Announcement, Jesus went beyond this revolutionary ideology. He drew from Old Testament Scripture, including Isaiah’s vision of the “Kingdom of God in Isaiah 40-55 (and summarized in the passage Isaiah 52:7-12).

The “Kingdom of God” in Isaiah (“Isaianic gospel or “good news”) included three hopes:

- ◆ 1. a return from Israel’s exile; a new Exodus
- ◆ 2. the defeat of evil
- ◆ 3. the return of God to Zion

In announcing the Kingdom of God, Jesus was announcing this “good news” -- that God would vindicate Israel, defeat evil and return to Zion.

Jesus was offering far more than just “good advice.”

... Clashing with the Expectations of his Listeners

Jesus’ sense of the Kingdom *clashed* with what most of Jesus’ listeners expected -- they expected political freedom for Israel, God smashing its enemies. Jesus’ message was revolutionary because it overthrew other agendas. In particular:

- ◆ 1. it challenged the power of Herod and Rome
- ◆ 2. it also challenged the militant Messianic expectations of many of his fellow Jews

... Clashing with the “Symbols” Expected by his Listeners

Jesus’ Kingdom Announcement also clashed with the “symbols” his listeners often expected would accompany the Kingdom. For example, they expected a reaffirmation of the Judaism they knew, including Jewish dietary laws and the Sabbath.

... Implying He was the Messiah, the one through whom the true God would accomplish his decisive purpose.”

For example: Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem and his actions in the temple implied the right to stake a claim to the temple. These were royal messianic acts --- but not quite as his followers expected (Jesus did not go to the temple to claim a seat of power, with his followers getting the top jobs around him)

But What kind of Messiah?

Jesus seemed to feel a vocation to be a different kind of Messiah, -- a messianic role that involved suffering and possibly death.

This belief was consistent with ideas of *martyrdom* and *redemptive nature of suffering* in the Scriptures (Isaiah's suffering servant, Daniel interpretation of the suffering servant, Macabees)

Why did Jesus' Messianic Movement Succeed and Others Fail?

Why did Christianity begin? There were other messianic movements that ended with the violent death of the founder; their movement died with them.

Summary: Who is Jesus?

Jesus was a:

- ◆ first century Jewish prophet
- ◆ announcing the "Kingdom of God,"
- ◆ believing "the kingdom was breaking in through his own presence and work"
- ◆ "summoning other Jews to abandon alternative kingdom visions and join him in his." ("get on board")
- ◆ "warning of dire consequences for the nation, for Jerusalem, and for the temple, if his summons was ignored."
- ◆ clashing symbolically with those who embraced other agendas
- ◆ implying He was the Messiah, the one through whom the true God would accomplish God's decisive purpose."

Questions and Discussion

The Kingdom of God

In Jesus's day, this phrase had huge political resonances: God will rule, not Caesar or Herod.

Jesus' Kingdom declaration implied more: a reversal of the normal "power games" of most of humanity (for example, the weak will shame the strong)

The Kingdom of God is about God, but it would be wrong to think of it as purely "spiritual."

"God rules" is still a "revolutionary" announcement, even today for those of us living in an apparently sympathetic democracy.

The Temple at Jerusalem

We must avoid the temptation to imagine it in the same sense we might think of a big cathedral in a modern city.

For a first century Jew, the temple was the *center of the cosmos*, *the center of the entire universe*, the dwelling place of God on earth.

For Jesus to claim authority over the temple was an enormous claim.

The Inclusion of Gentiles in the Kingdom of God

Prophetic tradition: when God does for Israel what God is going to do for Israel, the rest of the world will then become involved. This arises from Jewish monotheism and sense of election: God has chosen Israel for the sake of the world.

- ◆ Jews in Jesus' day often believed that vindication of Israel meant the pagan world would be judged and destroyed

Jesus' Kingdom announcement: God is now doing for Israel what God had planned. So the others will soon come in: "many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Jesus own ministry was however primarily to the Jews; he left evangelization of the Gentiles to his followers

Note that Judaism was itself a very diverse religion in Jesus' day: Pharisees, Essenes, Sadducees.

Revolutionary Fervor in First Century Israel

Despite the diversity of Judaism, there was in general a common and widespread feeling in first century Israel that when the Messiah came, the Jews would be freed of Romans in a new Exodus, and the Gentiles would be smashed

There were both hard liners and other schools which took a "softer" line on the Gentiles. Among the Pharisees, there were two schools:

- ◆ School of Hillel (softline)
- ◆ School of Shammai (hardline) --- probably the dominant school until after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and the failure of the Great Revolt 132-135 AD lead by Simeon ben-Kosiba, hailed (by the greatest rabbi of the period, Rabbi Akiba) as "Bar-Kochba" = "son of the star." Bar-Kochba was killed by the Romans

Galilee, Jesus' home town, a "hotbed" of revolutionary feeling.

Embrace of Christianity by the Jews in the First and Second Centuries

Many Jews were able to see Jesus as the promised Messiah of the Scriptures. The Jews may well have been the people most likely to become Christians in the early centuries of the Church.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us thousands of Jews were able to happily embrace the message of Jesus.

Jesus and his Twelve disciples Among Other Prophetic and Messianic Figures

There were other prophetic figures and messianic figures in Jesus' day, but no evidence that other such figures chose 12 disciples.

Jesus' choice of 12 disciples is highly symbolic of his implied claim of being the Messiah -- he was the one who called the "12" into existence, symbolic of a renewal of the twelve tribes of Israel

More on Jesus' Vision of the Kingdom of God

Jesus described the Kingdom of God

- ◆ in stories, parables
- ◆ by acting symbolically

Jesus drew on both the:

- ◆ revolutionary ideology of his time
- ◆ Isaianic "Good News" from the Isaiah 52: 7-12 (Herald on the Mountain) "Your God reigns." There were three actions in this passage:
 - evil will be defeated at last
 - Israel will be vindicated in a final Exodus / great final return from Exile
 - God (YHWH) will return personally to Zion

Jesus deliberately told these stories in new way and acted them out:

- ◆ calling of 12: a renewal of Israel
- ◆ going to Jerusalem: Jesus the symbol of God returning to Zion

Did Jesus Seek Death, or Just Accept a Kingdom Path That Might Lead to Death?

There is a sense of both:

- ◆ Jesus both sought death in the sense of *redemptive suffering*, and
- ◆ also accepted a Kingdom Path that he would not compromise (like Socrates) even if it led to death

Redemptive Suffering in the Jewish Scriptures

A concept of *redemptive suffering* is present in Isaiah, Daniel, Macabees: that through suffering, God can redeem the world.

Jesus evoked these traditions.

Jesus' Vocation

Jesus seemed to be aware of a vocation:

- ◆ "to go where Israel and the world was in pain"
- ◆ to take that pain and suffering upon himself
- ◆ for the redemption of the world
- ◆ acting as a suffering servant.
- ◆ In Jesus' self-understanding, the return of God to Zion culminates on the cross

Jesus on the Cross

Jesus did not go to the cross convinced it would all be fine in just a couple days.

- ◆ Jesus had a sense of darkness and abandonment: he knew the path he had taken was a *gamble*.
- ◆ Fully human, Jesus surely could not help but wonder if he had taken the right path -- after all, it was failed Messiahs that were crucified

Both then and today, we have to say Jesus is either:

- ◆ craziest blasphemer that ever lived
- ◆ or the son of God

You cannot turn Jesus into a nice teacher of ethics

Further Reading

- 1. The Meaning of Jesus. Two Visions.** Marcus J. Borg; N. T. Wright. Harper San Francisco, 1998. *Wright's vision of the historical Jesus described in this video is fleshed out in Chapters 3 and 5 of this book ("The Mission and Message of Jesus"; "The Crux of Faith")*
- 2. The Challenge of Jesus. Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is.** N. T. Wright, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1999

Notes on Jesus' Resurrection 2: Jesus, the Resurrected Messiah

Wright's Opening Comments

What Kind of Movement was Early Christianity? Why Did it Arise?

Early Christianity was:

- ◆ a *Messiah* movement
- ◆ a *Kingdom of God* movement
- ◆ a *Resurrection* movement

All of these terms -- "messiah," "Kingdom of God," and "Resurrection," had particular meanings and expectations for first century Jews that Jesus' life did not seem to fulfil. Yet, early Christians confidently and joyfully believed Jesus was the Messiah, that the Kingdom of God had arrived, and the Resurrection had taken place. What had happened that allowed early Christianity -- which grew out of first century Judaism -- to have such a faith?

Christianity was a Messiah Movement

There were many messianic movements in the century and a half before and after Jesus:

- ◆ Judas Maccabeus 160's BC
- ◆ Simeon bar Kochba 130's AD

In general, Jewish expectations of a Messiah were that a Messiah would:

- ◆ defeat the enemy (in Jesus' day: Rome)
- ◆ purify / rebuild the temple

So: "The crucifixion of a Messiah did not say to a first-century Jew that he was the true Messiah and that the kingdom had come. It said exactly the opposite." [1]

The failed Messiah might be considered a very righteous man, a man living in heaven with God, but *by definition* he was not the Messiah.

When a messianic movement's founder died or was executed:

- ◆ the movement usually ended.
- ◆ the movement occasionally gathered about a new Messiah, often a relative of the original Messiah (for example, the messianic movement of Judas the Galilean in 6 AD passed to his sons and grandsons in the 50's, to a descendant Menahem in the war of 66-70, then to Eleazar. [1])

Christianity could have done the latter -- James, the brother of Jesus, was head of the church in Jerusalem. Yet early Christianity never considered James the Messiah.

Even though Jesus had failed the Jewish expectations of a Messiah, had been crucified by the Roman, early Christians continued to proclaim him as the Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles. Why? What had happened to cause them to confidently make this claim?

(The early Christian answer: because of the Jesus' Resurrection)

Christianity was a Kingdom of God Movement

The Kingdom of God: A Revolutionary Slogan

For first century Jews, the "Kingdom of God" or the "Kingdom of Heaven" was a revolutionary slogan with heavy political import: it was not talk about a *place* where God ruled, but rather a declaration that *God would rule* -- and not Caesar or Herod

The Kingdom of God: Isaianic "Good News"

For many first century Jews (including Jesus), the term "Kingdom of God" also drew meaning from Old Testament Scripture, including Isaiah's vision of the "Kingdom of God in Isaiah 40-55 (summarized in the passage Isaiah 52:7-12).

The "Kingdom of God" in Isaiah ("Isaianic gospel or "good news") included three hopes:

- ◆ 1. a return from Israel's exile; a new Exodus
- ◆ 2. the defeat of evil
- ◆ 3. the return of God to Zion

The Kingdom of God: Renewal of the Cosmos

More broadly, for first century Jews, the "Kingdom of God" ultimately implied

- ◆ "the renewal of the world,
- ◆ the establishment of God's justice for the cosmos." [2].

Paul: The Kingdom of God as Shorthand for what Christianity Was All About

Early Christianity thought of itself as a "Kingdom of God" movement. Paul used the term "Kingdom of God" as shorthand for what Christianity was all about.

Christians declared that in some significant sense the "Kingdom of God" had already come (Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 describes the coming of the Kingdom as a two stage process, Jesus the first stage, and a coming second stage in which the Jewish hopes for the renewal of the cosmos and the full rule of God would be fulfilled).

Yet how could the Christians -- coming from their first century Jewish background -- believe the Kingdom of God had, in some significant sense -- already come? Rome still ruled. Evil still had not been defeated. Justice for the cosmos still had not come.

(The early Christian answer: because of the Jesus' Resurrection)

Christianity was a Resurrection Movement

In the earliest writings in the Old Testament (Paul's letters), Jesus' death and Resurrection are woven throughout Christian theology and worship.

First century Jews had specific ideas about the meaning of "resurrection:"

- ◆ a metaphor for the return from exile,
- ◆ a sense the righteous and martyrs would get their bodies back at the end of history

Christians declared that the "Resurrection" *had already occurred*. Yet anyone could see that Jewish expectations for resurrection had not occurred:

- ◆ Israel was still "in exile," under the domination of a pagan empire,
- ◆ it was not the end of history with martyrs walking about with new bodies

So why would Christians say the Resurrection *had already occurred*? And why had they made "resurrection" such an integral part of their worship practice and theology?

(The early Christian answer: because of Jesus' Resurrection).

Christianity was not a Personality Cult

The details of Jesus' life, his personality, his charisma -- however compelling they may have been to those living in the first century -- cannot by themselves explain the movement of Christianity.

Without the Resurrection, the movement of Christianity could never have arisen in the form it did.

Concluding Question

"What precisely did they [the early Christians] mean by Resurrection, and what do we say about the great claims that they made?"

Questions and Discussion

The Title of Messiah

There was a great deal of Messianic expectations in Judaism during Jesus' time. Basic Jewish expectation for a Messiah (which continues through Judaism today) are that the Messiah will:

- ◆ defeat the enemy
- ◆ rebuild the temple

Some sects or movements in Judaism have redefined

- ◆ who the enemy is,
- ◆ what the true temple is,

but all have retained these basic expectations.

Jesus and the Temple

In Jesus' time, some Jewish groups had redefined what the true temple was. For example

- ◆ Pharisees (a lay movement, based away from Jerusalem) -- when praying, fasting, giving alms, studying the Torah, it is as if you are in the temple)
- ◆ Essenes -- their community was the real temple (Herod's physical temple considered corrupt)

Jesus' sense of the "true temple" was also probably not the "bricks and mortar" building, but rather the community of the people of God. So Jesus' reference to the rebuilding of the temple was a reference to a reconstitution of the community of the people of God.

The very early Christian community also seemed to think of itself as a "counter-temple" movement -- believing that the community itself was the "true" temple.

- ◆ For example Paul in Galatians speaks of Peter, James and John as the "pillars," suggesting the community they led was the true temple.

The Disciples' Confusion Over Jesus' Reference to His End

The disciples likely did not understand what Jesus meant when he referred to the raising of the Son of Man. They had the Jewish ideas of Resurrection:

- ◆ a symbol for the return from exile, or
- ◆ the bodily raising of the righteous at the end of history.

The idea of Resurrection as an individual coming back from the dead in the middle of history was not a ready concept to them.

The Resurrection may have thus started as a metaphor for the restoration of Israel (the "return from exile"), and then the "metaphor" became literal. The disciples weren't expecting such a thing.

The Longing for the Messiah in the Canticles of Luke's Gospels and Christian Joy

In the Canticles (The Song of Zechariah, for example, in the Book of Common Prayer p.92) we see poetical descriptions of the longing of Israel for the Messiah, for the freedom to worship God without fear.

In early Christianity, you find joy. Why? What was the source of their joy, despite persecution. The answer of Christians: Jesus' Resurrection.

Apocalyptic Expectations of Jesus and the Early Church

Did Jesus or the early Church feel the end of the world was coming soon?

Wright feels the language about the end has been misinterpreted by many, that the language would have been understood by first century Jews as references to "decisive, climatic, earth-shattering events" within history, not to events that are going to occur at the end of time.

Second and third generations Christians were not in general worried that the end had not come.

Early Christians felt more they were living in the first days of God's New World.

The Post Resurrection Stories in the Gospel

Jesus' post Resurrection appearances occurred over a brief period of time. We find:

- ◆ in Luke - Emmaus Road story
- ◆ most of the stories in John's gospel
- ◆ we may have lost stories at the end of Mark (Wright best guess is that we have lost the beginning and the end to Mark -- a common problems with scrolls)

Challenges Faced by the Early Church

In Acts we seen the early Church faced with the beginning of God's new world, without a road map.

There was also the problem of trying the explain the resurrection to the Gentile world that did not have the groundwork of Jewish thinking -- for example, Paul trying to explain the Resurrection to the people of Athens.

Jesus' Divinity versus Jesus' Resurrection

Divinity does not imply resurrection from the dead.

Early Christians did not have to bring up Jesus' resurrection to explain that Jesus was God.

Christianity was Not an Angel Movement

Somewhat like today, in Jesus' day, there was a great deal of speculation about angels. Yet the early Christians did not try to revere Jesus by saying he had become an angel.

Further Reading

1. Chapter 6 "The Challenge of Easter" in **The Challenge of Jesus. Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is.** N. T. Wright, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1999.

Notes on Jesus' Resurrection 3: The Jewish Understanding of the Resurrection

Wright's Opening Comments

Resurrection Means More Than Just Life After Death

“Resurrection” today is often used loosely as a reference to life after death.

But for first century Jews, it had a very specific meaning: the “concrete reembodiment of those who have died.”

Jewish Views on Life After Death

There was a range of first century Jewish beliefs on life after death:

- ◆ **Sadducees**, the ruling elite, based mostly in Jerusalem, believed in no life after death.
- ◆ **Pharisees**, believed in a bodily resurrection.
- ◆ Many believed in a continued existence in a “disembodied bliss.” The Alexandrian philosopher Philo, who blended Plato’s philosophy and Jewish tradition, was among those who took this view.

The Scriptural Basis for the First Century Jewish Belief in Resurrection

Passages in the Prophetic Literature:

- ◆ Ezekiel 37 The Valley of the Dry Bones. (Here the stories of corpses coming back to life may be metaphor for the renewal of Israel).
- ◆ Isaiah 25, 26
- ◆ Daniel 12 (last chapter)

Stories of the Maccabean martyrs. (Here, “Resurrection” clearly used as a concrete word for re-embodiment.)

A quote:

- ◆ Daniel 12:3: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”

The Pharisees' (and later the Rabbis') Belief in Bodily Resurrection

It was not a belief in the raising to life of a particular individual, but a belief in the raising of all the righteous to a New World where God would rule.

It was “part of the larger package in which Israel’s God would create a new state of affairs in the space-time world, bringing about justice and people, overthrowing oppression and wickedness – and raising to life, in order to enjoy this new day, all the righteous dead. . . Resurrection, for the Pharisees, was thus part of their belief both in the goodness of the created, physical world and in the ultimate triumph of the justice of God.” [Ref 1, p. 112].

The Rabbis, the successors to the Pharisees, even debated how God would re-create the new physical body.

The Shocking Claim of First Century Christians

Early Christians made the shocking claim: the Resurrection had, in some sense, already happened.

Discussion

A New Heaven and a New Earth, Not Just “Going to Heaven”

Resurrection involved not just redemption for individuals, but a new nation; a new creation. The Bible talks primarily about a new heaven and new earth and a reemodiment in that new heaven and new earth, not about “going to heaven.”

The Lord’s Prayer: “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

- ◆ Does not mean give us a little taste of heaven down here on earth, since we hope to live up in heaven someday. Rather, it means “praying the present life of heaven down onto this earth.” God wants holiness and peace to live *here*.

In Revelations the church comes down to the earth to a shining new Jerusalem. It is a “downward movement, not an upper.”

Resurrection and the new Temple

When Jews spoke of the New Creation, they spoke of a new temple in the middle of it (as in the book of Ezekiel)

In John’s gospel, Jesus said: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will build it again.”

John suggests Jesus was referring to the temple of His body.

- ◆ Thus the Jewish idea of the destroying and rebuilding the temple became, for Christians, a metaphor for the Crucifixion and Resurrection

Resurrection and the Kingdom of God

For God to be king of a new creation, God must defeat those things that deface the creation, in particular human lives. This includes decay, corruption, and death.

“Resurrection is the gift of God in the New World, which is the sign that God really is ruling the World in the way that He always intended, so that the Kingdom of God entails the Resurrection.”

When God is truly king, death will be defeated.

The Symbolic Rhythm of Feasting and Fasting in Christian Life

Celtic saints:

- ◆ affirmed the goodness of God’s creation
- ◆ also knew they need to be holy, and were acetic.
- ◆ They valued God’s creation without being hedonistic

Pharisees had a symbolic rhythm of feasting and fasting. Christianity at its best shares this same rhythm:

- ◆ feast: to affirm the world is God’s world
- ◆ fast: to affirm the world is not what God wants it be.

For Christians, the greatest feast of all is the Resurrection Feast – Easter

“We live as feasting people who sometimes fast because we know there is more to come.”

Resurrection and Death

Modern culture often suppresses, hides the reality of death -- analogous to Christians who try to ignore Good Friday.

- ◆ “You only get Easter if you actually agonize through Good Friday.”

In first century, death, often horrible, was a daily reality.

For a Jew in the first century, who believed that humans beings were made in God’s image, that human life was good, God-given, wonderful, death of a loved one was not only horrible, but was a *theological affront*.

- ◆ “Then you feel the promise of the Resurrection coming through the middle.”

The Holocaust and the Promise of Resurrection

Where was God in the holocaust?

God’s presence in suffering, God’s suffering with people, is a modern insight into God. (although some first century Jews may have been prepared to say a little bit of it), an insight that both Jews and Christians can share. It also offers a way we can dialog with the Jews about Resurrection.

The First Century as the “Right Time”

Jesus came in the fullness of time. Paul, in Galatians 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” (NRSV)

“The history of God and world, the history of God and Israel, had strangely been moving towards this point.” Perhaps the Jews “needed to go through the experience of exile in order then to know that there was a new life on the other side, that there was something out beyond that was different.”

Summary

In the first century Jewish world, Resurrection was not a loose way of talking about life after death. “It was about God remaking, re-embodiment human beings to a new sort of life to live in the new world that God was going to make.”

Further Reading

- 1. The Meaning of Jesus. Two Visions.** Marcus J. Borg; N. T. Wright. Harper San Francisco, 1998. *The main points of Wright’s opening comments in the video are also presented in the first section of Chapter 7 (“The Transforming Reality of the Bodily Resurrection”)*

Notes on Jesus' Resurrection 4: Paul's Understanding of Jesus' Resurrection

Wright's Opening Comments

Paul's Letters

Paul's letters are the earliest written record we have of Jesus' life and resurrection, written in the 50's

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written from the 60's to the 90's.

Pauls' "Gospel"

Paul's narrative of the "good news" – Paul's "gospel," has always included the Jesus' death, burial and resurrection of Jesus

The Resurrection is not "bolted on" in Paul's theology, but rather "woven in through the fabric of his thought." We can see this, for example, in:

- ◆ Romans 6: Paul's theology of baptism
- ◆ Colossians 3: living Christian Ethics
- ◆ Romans 11: the future of Israel

1 Corinthians 15: Introduction

Paul's main exposition of his views on the Resurrection

Why did Paul write this?

- ◆ The Corinthians had a tendency to "collapse" Christians teachings back into pagan religion. In particular, they had a tendency to view the afterlife as a bodiless immortality of the soul.
- ◆ Paul is trying to teach them "eschatology" -- the story of God's plan to put the world right in Jesus (Eschatology = the branch of theology dealing with the ultimate destiny of mankind and the world)
 - In the middle of this, he is trying to teach them the Christian view of our future – a bodily resurrection

The Climax of the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15: 1-11)

Paul starts 1 Corinthians 15 by reviewing his "gospel:" The Messiah died for our sins, was buried and was raised "according to the scriptures" – that is, these events were the culmination and climax of the whole story the scriptures had been telling

He marshals evidence: 500 eyewitnesses

He stresses his “seeing” of the risen Jesus as “last of all”

The Two Marks in the God’s Victory over Death (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

This is the “big story.”

The enemy is death itself.

The victory of God over the forces of evil, over death, has split into two:

- ◆ Victory mark 1: began with Jesus’ resurrection
- ◆ Victory mark 2: our own resurrection (“corruption and decay will not have the final word in this universe.”)

“Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of the end,” and the resurrection of all believers is (one feature of) the final end of the ‘end.’” [1]

We now live between these two marks. “The world as a whole has entered the last days, in which Jesus rules as Messiah and Lord. These days will continue until all that opposes or threatens his rule has been dealt with. Finally, death itself – the ultimately dehumanizing and anticreation power – will be destroyed, and God will be all in all.” [1]

Transformed Physicality (1 Corinthians 15:29-58)

What is this new resurrected body?

“The resurrection body possesses both continuity and discontinuity with the existing body.”

- ◆ For example the plant and its seed in 1 Cor. 15:38 give us an example of this continuity, discontinuity.
 - “The plant grows from the seed yet is a different sort of a thing.” [1]

The resurrection body should be thought of as a “transformation of the existing body into a new mode of physicality.” [1] – “transformed physicality.”

Main difference between the present body and our resurrected body is that the first body is a “soul” body; the resurrected body is a “spirit” body. That is, the difference is a difference in what “animates” the body, what holds the body in being.

- ◆ Verse:44: “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.” (NRSV)
 - Wright suggests this is a misleading translation:
 - “physical body” (*soma psychikon*); is better translated a “soulish” body
 - “spiritual body” (*soma pneumatikon*)
 - Our present body is animated by “soul”
 - Our future body will be animated / held in existence by God’s *pneuma* (God’s spirit)
- ◆ Verse 50: “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, . . .”
 - This does not mean the resurrection body is “nonphysical.” Flesh for Paul, does not mean corporeal, but rather that which can decay, is corruptible, perishable, and at times, rebellious.

What We Do Now Matters Because of the Continuity of This Life with the Next (1 Corinthians 15:58)

1 Cor. 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

The point of this:

- ◆ “What you do in the present body matters. What you do in the present body is in continuity with who you are going to be in the future body.”
- ◆ “. . . the resurrection, precisely because it will possess continuity as well as discontinuity with the present life, and will therefore be the reaffirmation of the present, this worldly existence, gives not only hope for the future but a sense of purpose and meaning to the present.” [1]
- ◆ Paul further discusses the meaning of the transformation of the present body in:
 - End of Philippians Chap 3,
 - Beginning of 2 Corinthians Chapter 5

Summary:

Paul holds to a robustly bodily view of the resurrection. It is a very Jewish view that involves a bodily resurrection, and clearly implies an empty tomb.

Discussion

We Are People of the New Creation, Looking Forward to the Completion of the New Creation

Our culture lives in the “story” that world history reached its climax in the 18th century Enlightenment. But as Christians, we know the climax of history was Jesus’ Resurrection

The “story” we must live in is that:

- ◆ “God has begun the New Creation” with the first mark of victory over evil and death of Jesus’ Resurrection. “We are people of the New Creation, looking forward to the completion of the New Creation, and responsible in the present for bringing bits of that future into birth here and now.”

Paul was telling stories and acting symbolically

- ◆ His “planting” of churches, building communities in which men and women, people from different cultures could live as family (very counter cultural for the times) was symbolic of the new humanity, “The body of Christ;” of God’s New Creation

Living within this story today will require:

- ◆ poetic sensibility
- ◆ resources of the imagination, music, art

to reconstruct the imaginative (not imaginary) sense of the world necessary to grasp the truth

The Present Body and the Resurrected Body: Seed and Corn; Tent and Temple. The Present Body as Shadow of Our Future Self.

The corn and seed analogy

- ◆ Looking just at a seed of corn and having no other knowledge, it would be hard to imagine its future transformed physicality as a stalk of corn,

The Tent and the Temple

- ◆ 2 Cor. 5:1-4: “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling – if indeed, when we have taken it off, we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed. . .”
- ◆ This passage has echoes of the Old Testament stories of the tabernacle in the wilderness, which is finally placed within the physical temple

Those sick are often described as “shadows” of their former self.

- ◆ But compared to the transformed physicality of the future, “you are just the shadow of your future self”

What We Do Now Does Make a Difference and Will Be Lasting

What we do in this life, in this body:

- ◆ acts of justice, mercy
- ◆ creation of art, beauty
- ◆ writing about truth
- ◆ living a holy life

will not be meaningless. We are not “simply oiling the wheels of a machine that will one day go off a cliff”

1 Cor. 3:10-13: Paul talks of laying a foundation and building on it with gold and silver and precious stones (a temple image).

- ◆ We do not know how, but we are promised that what we do now that is worthy will someday be embodied in the New Creation. There will be continuity between the present creation and the new (God will not chunk the present creation in the trash and start all over again)

Our Lives are Part of the Story of God's Covenantal Plan for Creation

We must live with integrity because the story in which we as Christians live is the story that includes God's story with God's Creation, with Israel, with Jesus. And as part of that story, we are making a new story for those after us

The Transformation Which God will Effect in the End Should Infect Us Now

Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world [age], but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." (NRSV)

Means:

- ◆ "This transformation which God will effect at the end, is to "infect" you now."
- ◆ That "infection" should be in our minds, so we understand God's will (God's plan and purpose)

A Bit of the Past, a Bit of the Future Coming Together in the Present

The Resurrection includes

- ◆ Jesus' Resurrection coming up to us from the past,
- ◆ our own Resurrection coming down to us in the future,
- ◆ both meeting us in the present, washing over us and changing us.

Because we live between the past of Jesus' resurrection, and the future of our own resurrection (God final victory over death) we should live as "Exodus People; we have left Egypt behind. We no longer belong to the land of slavery.

- ◆ We can find Exodus language in
 - Romans 6
 - 1 Corinthian 10's discussion of Baptism

Our life is already somehow bound up in the Christ who has died and who has risen

- ◆ Colossians 3:3-4: "for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory." (NRSV).
- ◆ Means: "Your true life is already somehow already bound up with Christ, the risen Christ, in the heavenly places, with God."

This is what sacraments are all about, bringing to us in the present a bit of the future and a bit of the past

- ◆ For example, Eucharist: a bit of the future (the feast to come), a bit of the past (the Last Supper)

Conclusion

“We live in this odd interval in God’s purpose in history, between the resurrection of Jesus in the past, and our own future resurrection, and God’s remaking of the whole world in the future, and these two together hold us in a newly storied world, in a new imaginative world, in which we can live and work as Christians and in which we know that what we do in the present is not in vain, is not going to be thrown away. We are building, hopefully with gold and silver and precious stones, and when the day appears, then that work will appear with it.”

Further Reading

- 1. The Meaning of Jesus. Two Visions.** Marcus J. Borg; N. T. Wright. Harper San Francisco, 1998. *The main points of Wright’s opening comments in the video are also presented in the second section of Chapter 7 (“The Transforming Reality of the Bodily Resurrection”)*

Notes on Jesus' Resurrection 5: The Gospel Writer's Understanding of Jesus' Resurrection

Wright's Opening Comments

Introductory Matters

Gospels were written later than Paul.

The stories of the Resurrection in the gospels are very "simple," unadorned with theological comments or Old Testament references.

The Resurrection itself not described. Rather, they describe the discovery of the empty tomb and meetings with Jesus

Do not Fit with Standard Jewish Expectations of Resurrection

The gospels accounts do not fit in with the standard Jewish expectation on resurrection, derived from Daniel 12, where the righteous who are resurrected will shine like stars. Jesus does not shine like a star – as one might expect he would if the stories had been made up.

Are Not Like Pagan Stories of Apparitions of Dead Heroes

The gospel accounts are quite unlike pagan stories where recently departed heroes come back as apparitions

Free of Old Testament Illusions and Echoes

The resurrection accounts in the Gospels are free of Old Testament illusions and echoes. We cannot accuse that the stories are just weavings of Old Testaments texts.

Emphasize the Surprise of the Disciples

The gospels emphasize the surprise of the disciples to the Resurrection. They were shocked by Jesus' Resurrection and were clearly not expecting it.

Women, Although Not Considered Reliable Witnesses at the Time, Play Front and Center Role in Telling the Story

The gospels accounts have women going to the tomb first and telling the story first.

Yet women were not considered reliable witnesses in the culture.

It is unlikely someone would “make up” a story with women playing such a front and center role.

Strangeness of the Nature of Jesus’ Body

The stories in the gospels accounts of the Resurrection are at their strangest when they talk about the nature of Jesus’ resurrected body.

It seems to be the same body (still has the marks of the crucifixion) but with different properties:

- ◆ pass through locked doors
- ◆ not immediately recognizable in some strange way
 - In John they were afraid to ask who he was (why did they feel any need to ask?) because they knew it was the Lord.

The stories are about a transformed physicality (as Paul discusses), but without all of Paul’s theology and analysis. The mood of the stories seems to be what you might expect from stories derived from eyewitnesses accounts, presented “as is,” unbelievable as they may be. The alternative is the very unlikely hypothesis that each gospel writer took Paul’s earlier accounts, and stripped out all the theology and explanation of the strangeness of the stories to come up with the accounts we find in the gospels.

Puzzles and Problems in the Gospel Accounts

It is difficult to reconcile the various Gospel accounts on matters of:

- ◆ where did Jesus appear after his resurrection? Galilee? Jerusalem? Both?
- ◆ how many women came to the tomb. Which angels did they see?

Yet even today newspapers reports of same event can differ. The discrepancies in such details between the Gospel accounts have a certain “truth” in them: they are the kinds of discrepancies in details one might expect in different accounts of the same event.

Differences Among the Gospels

Matthew and Mark are similar accounts; but Mark breaks off (Wright feels we have lost the actual ending of Mark)

Luke tells the story of the Resurrection as story of a New Creation.

John has more character vignettes. “John’s invitation come and have breakfast sounds . . . like the invitation to anyone who has toiled all night and taken nothing now needs to meet the mysterious stranger on the beach.”

Discussion

Why Four Gospels and Not Just One?

The four gospels are a four-fold witness that gives us the full Jesus.

Consider biographies – each may tell us something about the person that the others do not.

The apocryphal Gospel of Thomas – Wright feels is a late gospel, largely derived from the other Gospels.

Wright doubts the existence of a source “Q” (a hypothetical source of stories and sayings about Jesus that was available to Matthew and Luke but not to Mark).

Some Elements in the Stories That Provide Continuity with Jewish Tradition

Women would be expected to anoint the dead body

Jesus does not dazzle; although God’s messengers do, as they do in Old Testament Stories from Jewish tradition.

A Gospel Without the Resurrection?

If there had not been an resurrection, one might still imagine continued stories about Jesus. But it would not be good news (“gospel”) – it would just be a story of another failed Messiah – descriptions of poignant or perhaps provocative memories. It would be part of a greater story – the Old Testament longing for a Messiah who would bring God’s justice and peace to the world – that was still in search of an ending.

The Jesus Seminar

Jesus Seminar starts with assumption that dead people don’t rise.

Attempts to then explain the resurrection stories starting with this assumption has lead to wildly improbable scenarios.

God is Always Mysteriously Present

God is not outside the world, occasionally intervening.

God is always a mysterious presence, sometimes a grieving presence, and at times a powerful presence where God does things we did not expect – as in the story of Israel, and most unexpected of all, in Jesus and the Resurrection.

How Does a Suffering God Help Us?

God suffers with God's people. But the Resurrection tells us God suffers *in order to* take the evil and pain of the world and deal with it.

God does not suffer just to “wallow” along with us.

A powerful God who strides through the world oblivious to pain is not appealing. At the same time, if there had not been a Resurrection, a suffering God would be a “negative pantheistic god” -- a god who feels our pain but will never do anything about it.

Event and Meaning

There is a great challenge in getting the message of the Resurrection across to modern skeptics and “Bored Christians.”

We should read John's gospel as poetry, feeling the symbolism and metaphoric meaning.

We have tended to separate event and meaning in our culture: but we can believe both that the events in the bible happened, and the levels of meaning implied in the stories.

John is very alert to the symbolism of numbers. Note that in the Burial and Resurrection of Jesus in John, on the seventh day God rested in the tomb – the work of creation finished. Then Jesus rises on the first day of the week: the beginning of the New Creation. We are the beneficiaries and agents of God's New Creation.

How Do We Know Things?

What is truth? A modern point of view is that truth is only the stuff you can put in a “test tube” (or the historical equivalent of a test tube): scientific truth and objective history.

Bernard Lonergan, a Catholic philosopher, turns this modern notion around when he claims that the *primary mode of knowing is love*.

This Resurrection stories are about the love of the creator God, saying to whole cosmos “its okay. I've got you. We're coming through this one.”

The “truth” of the beauty of music, scenery, literature, a sunrise, is far more “important” than just the “truth” of objective facts. The Resurrection encompasses both kinds of truth.

Summary

Wright's Closing Comments:

“Now there is a whole new world. That whole new world began on Easter morning. It is continuing with the work of the Spirit, God's spirit, Jesus' spirit, giving new life to people and to the world now. It will reach its own consummation in God's eventual

New World, but in this process -- although of course we learn to be suspicious of knowledge of this sort and that, and to test things out -- we are basically offered a way of looking at the world which is a way modeled on love, on the love of God for creation, on the love of God for Jesus, and on that Jesus-shaped suffering and victorious love of God, coming out through Jesus, coming out of the tomb on Easter morning to say to us, its okay, we're coming through this one and you are my people now for the world.

Reference

Video. **Jesus' Resurrection. Then and Now.** N. T. Wright. Tabgha Foundation, Minneapolis. Available from CARES (Center for Advanced Religious External Studies), P.O. Box 863, Forest, VA, 24551. 800-665-2149. <http://www.caresonline.com/>

Notes on Jesus' Resurrection 6: The Meaning of Jesus' Resurrection for Today

Wright's Opening Comments

The Resurrection and The Problem of Accounting for the Rise of Christianity

It is difficult to account for:

- ◆ the rise of Christianity,
- ◆ the rise of the Resurrection stories,
- ◆ Paul's developed theology of Resurrection

unless something remarkable actually happened.

The early Christians believed the New Age that the Jews had been longing for had indeed begun. They proclaimed that in Jesus, the "Resurrection" had arrived -- and they acted as if it had arrived. Yet this New Age was not what most Jews had imagined it would be -- so what caused the early Christians to believe that the New Age had arrived even if it was not quite what everyone had initially imagined?

In Wright's view, what caused the early Christians to believe in the arrival of the New Age was exactly what they said had galvanized their belief: that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was not intended as a "metaphor," some fuzzy way of speaking about a spiritual experience of God

Circumstantial Evidence for the Event of the Resurrection

There is also circumstantial evidence pointing to the event of the Resurrection.

1. The day of worship shifted from Saturday to Sunday (even though Sunday was a work day). This was a huge symbolic change, yet they made the change readily.
2. The burial of Jesus was a two-stage process, providing several opportunities to disprove any rumor that the body was missing, if in fact that had indeed been a false rumor:
 - ◆ First stage: the body was laid in the tomb. Over the next year, other bodies might be placed in the same tomb.
 - ◆ Second stage: once the flesh had decomposed, the bones were collected in a "bone box" (ossuary) and then reburied.

What is the Meaning of All this for Today?

What the Resurrection Does Not Mean

The Resurrection does *not* primarily mean that:

- ◆ there is a life after death – the Jews in Jesus’ day already believed this.
- ◆ Jesus is alive today – This is true, but this reality primarily reflects Pentecost and the gift of the Spirit.
- ◆ the supernatural world exists, or there is an interventionist God. Not true. The biblical view of God is a God who is *always* present. “Heaven” and “earth” are the two dimensions of God’s reality – and these dimensions are not identical to what we speak of as “supernatural” and “natural.”

The Central Meaning of the Resurrection.

The central meaning of the Resurrection is that the New Age, the New Creation has already begun. This is the New Age promised by the prophets through which God’s justice and peace will embrace the world

We are:

- ◆ the covenant community (loosely called the “church”),
- ◆ the people of the Resurrection,
- ◆ God’s renewed people for the world,
- ◆ new human beings, transformed as Paul says, by the renewal of our minds (nous; see below),
- ◆ examples of a new model of “humanness,” a people who should show to the world what God intends human beings to be

who must take the New Age forward until it is finished.

The Christian Hope

The Christian Hope is for:

- ◆ the New Heaven and New Earth
- ◆ the re-integration of the two dimensions of God’s created order

After death there will be a time of rest, of refreshment, and then Resurrection into God’s New World.

Paradise is not the final resting place of the Blessed in Judaism, but rather a resting place until God makes the New World.

“We have in the Resurrection:

- ◆ a vision of the New World that has already begun,
- ◆ a vision of the New World that is yet to be,
- ◆ and an agenda for the present for New People that we are supposed to be in the power of the Spirit”

Discussion

Sin and the Resurrection

The Resurrection is the power through which we have the forgiveness of sins. Paul in 1 Corinthians says that if the Messiah had not been raised, then we are still in the power of sin. It is as though sin was “concentrated” on Jesus as the representative of the world. If Jesus is still dead, then God has not dwelt with sin and death and we are still under the thrall of sin and all that sin brings, including death, decay, corruption.

Christians still do sin. But the key question is: where do we live? Going back to the Exodus stories:

- ◆ Are we still living “in Egypt” – then we still hear the voice of our “slave master”, and we feel we have no choice but to obey.
- ◆ Or do we believe we are free of Egypt, albeit wandering in the wilderness, but on the way to the promised land, and live in that freedom and in the knowledge?

Because of the Resurrection, the forgiveness of sins (as we pray for in the Lord’s Prayer) is now a *possibility*, not merely a *hope*.

Has the New Creation Really Begun? Have Things Really Changed?

It has been 2000 years since Jesus. There is no one to tell us what things were like in Jesus’ day. Are we really “freed from Egypt”? Have things really changed? Are we really living in a New Age? What evidence is there?

Some humility is necessary as we look upon the history of the church. Yet there are saints – many right under our noses.

Consider: the Roman Empire before and after it converted to Christianity. There were changes for the better after its conversion, for example:

- ◆ new attitudes toward the death penalty
- ◆ caring for the sick
- ◆ change in the status of women

Consider in more modern times:

- ◆ the abolition of slavery
- ◆ the fall of the Berlin Wall

Consider:

- ◆ the arts inspired by religion

The gospel has changed the world, although we must be realistic about the challenges remaining.

Wright's attitude coming out of the Resurrection towards Jubilee 2000: the principalities and powers – the forces of Mammon, of economics -- have been defeated on the cross. The purpose of Jubilee is to bring the world into this reality, to apply the victory of the cross.

The Transformation of the “Mind” = *Nous*

Integrated Mind

Nous is normally translated as “mind” in the New Testament, but implies more than the modern view of “mind” -- in modern times “we think about thinking in a very shrunken manner.”

When Paul refers to the transformation of our minds in Romans 12, he means something much richer than what we think of as “mind.”

Nous does not contain the dichotomy between:

- ◆ “thought” vs. “action”
- ◆ “head” vs. “heart”
- ◆ “left brain” vs. “right brain”

Nous is integrated mind (“left and right brain,” “head and heart,” “head and feet” together).

A New Way of Knowing

The New Age has also brought to us “a new way of knowing, which is being known and loved by God, and hence being set free to know and love one another in the world, to relate appropriately to one another and to the world.”

God’s Wisdom Become Human and Dwelling in Our Midst

Wisdom in the Jewish Wisdom Tradition includes a broad range of knowledge – from simple, basic knowledge such as how to boil an egg, all the way to the name of God and to how to relate within family and work.

In Ecclesiasticus (also called The Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach), Wisdom asks where shall I go and live? And Wisdom decides to live in the temple as “the revelation of the way it is for God’s people.”

The New Testament picks up on this image. Jesus is God’s wisdom becoming human, God’s thought becoming human. John speaks of God’s *logos* (God’s word and idea together) becoming human and dwelling in our midst (a temple image) and we beholding his glory (another temple image).

The Shroud of Turin

Recent carbon dating has suggested it is a medieval forgery. The carbon dating however may have been picking up medieval overlays of paint and/or fiber.

Studies have revealed some extraordinary details: for example, it was customary to lay Roman coins over the eyes at death in the first century, and there are Roman coins on the figure on the Shroud which are from the right period. However it could still be a very clever later forgery.

Although some people may have become Christians based on the Shroud of Turin, it ultimately should not be essential to faith. If the bridge over which you cross to the mainland is rickety, what is important in the end is that you are on the mainland.

Archeological Find of an Ossuary Containing a Jesus son of Joseph

The BBC recently publicized the find of an ossuary in the Holy Land containing a Jesus, son of Joseph, as well as a Judas, a James, and a Joseph.

The find is not really compelling (the Israeli archeologists were the least impressed): these are very, very common names for the time

Wright's Closing Comments

Living Daily with the Resurrection

Paul: all of life is prayed life. The idea that we should “pray” and worship only on Sunday would have been an anathema to Paul.

We do need “sacred” time when we consciously take time to worship God. We must also remember (in Lamentations): God’s mercy is new *every morning*, a Resurrection image.

A morning prayer that Wright uses in his private prayers: “As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence O God set our hearts on fire with love for you now and forever.”

“The rising sun is ‘God’s visual aid’ to remind us that the Resurrection matters today . . . we are to live each day in the light of the rising sun and that by that light we will see clearly to walk all the day through until the day dawns . . . when (as Revelation says) in the New City, in the New Jerusalem, they won’t need any sun or moon any longer because that’s the point at which God’s visual aid becomes reality, and the rising Son of God replaces the rising sun of the world and the Lord Jesus will be the light of that City forever. That’s what we are looking forward to, and in the light of that, we are now living and working, please God, to His praise and glory.”

Reference

Video. **Jesus' Resurrection. Then and Now.** N. T. Wright. Tabgha Foundation, Minneapolis. Available from CARES (Center for Advanced Religious External Studies), P.O. Box 863, Forest, VA, 24551. 800-665-2149. <http://www.caresonline.com/>