

Lecture 10: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ:

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Lecture 10 of 12

We will inform ourselves of 9 major theories on the resurrection of Jesus Christ by people who do not accept the plain teaching of the Bible which clearly proclaims that Jesus rose bodily from the dead, showed himself to his disciples, and later ascended into heaven. The importance of being aware of these ideas is obvious. If Jesus historically rose from the dead, then his claims are vindicated and our Christian hope is secure; if Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, our faith is futile. If we marginalize the resurrection of Jesus, then the N.T. is not a credible witness.¹

I. Overview of Methodology:

A. Historically, the traditional belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ involves a three-fold apologetic:

1. **The Gospels are authentic:**
2. **The Text of the Gospels is Pure:**
3. **The Gospels are Reliable.**

This apologetic method (which presumes the authority of Scripture) fell on hard times in the 19th and 20th centuries due to the rising skepticism of the reliability of Scripture from the impact of German Higher Criticism and experiential subjectivism.

B. Another methodology is to contend for three historical, independently established facts using a cumulative case method:

1. **The fact of the empty tomb;**
2. **The fact of resurrection appearances;**
3. **The origin of the Christian faith.**

If these three facts can be established no plausible explanation can account for them, then one is justified in inferring Jesus' resurrection as the most plausible explanation of the data.

C. **Orthodox Christianity claims that Jesus rose bodily from the dead.** However, there are nine major theories that contend that Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead; these false theories may be divided into two categories: (1) occupied tomb theories; (2) unoccupied tomb theories.

¹ This presentation is adapted from William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994); H. Wayne House, *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 63-65.

1. Occupied Tomb theories:
 - a. Unknown Tomb (Charles Guigenbert)
 - b. Wrong Tomb (Kirsopp Lake)
 - c. Legend (Early Form Critics)
 - d. Spiritual Resurrection (Gnostics)
 - e. Hallucination (Agnostics)

2. Unoccupied Tomb Theories:
 - a. Passover Plot (Hugh Schonfield)
 - b. Body Stolen by the Disciples (Jews)
 - c. Existential Resurrection (Rudolf Bultmann)
 - d. Resuscitation or Swoon Theory (18th Century Rationalists)

D. The Resurrection Appearances:

1. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8:
 - a. Paul's testimony proves the disciples saw appearances of Jesus
 - b. The Gospel accounts of the Resurrection Appearances are historically reliable.

2. The resurrection appearances were physical bodily appearances (Luke 24:36-43 cf. John 20:24-29).

E. Explain the Origin of the Disciples' Belief in Jesus' Resurrection:

If one denies that the resurrection itself was real, then one must explain the disciples' belief in the resurrection as the result of either Christian influences, pagan influences, or Jewish influences. In other words, where is the source of the idea of for a singular bodily resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ?

1. The idea was not generated from Christian influences.
2. The idea was not generated from pagan religions.
3. The idea was not generated from Judaism.

F. Conclusion:

The origin of Christianity owes itself to the belief of the earliest disciples that God had raised Jesus from the dead. That belief cannot be historically accounted for in terms of either Christian, pagan, or Jewish influences. Even if one was to grant, for the sake of argument, that the tomb was somehow emptied and the disciples saw hallucinations (which we have proven to be false), the origin of the belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection still cannot be explained. Such events would only have led the disciples to contend that Jesus had been translated, not resurrected. Therefore, the origin of the Christian faith is inexplicable unless Jesus bodily rose from the dead.