

23T09 – an Engineer's View of the Resurrection (Written by Dr. Kip Wehrman,

Hello my friends. Thanks for joining me today for an @ the PUNLA coffee table. I would like to share with you a paper I have just written titled an Engineer's View of the Resurrection.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father please guide our discussion today. Help me to stay out of the way, so you can use me. If I say anything wrong, please don't let them remember my errand words but remember what you want them to hear regardless of my words. We trust you and we know you have promised the wisdom we need to understand your word in the Bible. Help us to let the Holy Spirit lead us and guide us. Bless our time together and I pray all these things in your name Lord Jesus. Amen.

Introduction

As a scientist and engineer professionally, I am compelled to make a hypothesis, test and observe. This is often referred to as the scientific method. I actually disagree with the title; I believe this is God's method. Everything around us in the world seems to work this way, it's God's design. God however is not part of His design; He is the designer. So, when God intervenes in human history it is by definition supernatural or from outside of the design. There lies the conundrum. When looking at events we have not personally observed how do we process what people say happened, especially when these events are supernatural. I personally appreciate Thomas in the Bible account because He says what many of us would say. How is this possible?

Hypothesis, test and observe. In choosing our method, we have to choose between Credulity and Skepticism. The selection comes down to a combination of knowledge of the source writer and plausibility of the content. As the plausibility goes down, then skepticism in turn must increase.

For the purposes of this paper, I want to concentrate on two aspects of the Resurrection of Jesus. First, the overcoming of the cultural barriers in the story of the resurrection. Second, the disciples apparent sudden change in the behavior. Both of these arguments will be used to support both the historicity of the resurrection story, but also the psychological state of the witnesses.

Cultural Barriers in the Resurrection Story

The origin of Christianity is no doubt rooted in the story of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul tells us quite plainly in 1 Corinthians 15:12-14 (NIV¹) ***12But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.*** Paul obviously believed the bodily resurrection of the Jesus was the cornerstone on which our Christian faith is built. However, the resurrection story is filled

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:12-14 NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc)

with violations of social bias which would have been barriers for both Jews and Gentiles.

In the book, *Defending the Resurrection*², Holding describes the social barrier associated with the shame of the Crucifixion. The first century Jews, Greeks and Romans were all centered around the culture of honor/shame. More importantly people in the first century had a clear understanding of what would constitute dishonor or shame. In our world today, many shrug of the shame of the crucifixion as “no big deal.” But be very certain, the enemies of Jesus and Christianity know very well the disgracefulness of the death of Jesus of Nazareth. Within the 2nd Temple era Judaism, to say the Messiah had been killed, let alone disgracefully crucified a criminal’s death would be beyond ludicrous. If Jesus was the Christ, then how could he be killed. The reason the Sanhedrin was so adamant Jesus should be crucified was to completely disgrace the name of Jesus. Additionally, in the Greek and Roman gentile cultures, the concept that God would allow himself to be killed was considered ridiculous. Any leader who died such a disgraceful death of crucifixion would be disregarded as irrelevant.

Another social barrier in the resurrection story is the primary witnesses were women. Our modern culture often disregards this argument, but there is no question this was an issue with the resurrection account for many in the early centuries. In her article Pheme Perkins³ stresses the first-century prejudice against women as public witnesses. Many have suggested that the women’s testimony was not incredible at all but an emotional wishful thinking. In fact, this sentiment is actually captured in the gospel Mark 16:10-11 (NIV⁴) *10She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. 11When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it.* So, even the inner circle, the disciples did not believe the witness of the women. Setzer⁵ states that, *“In spite of implied or explicit statements that no one believed Mary Magdalene or the women’s report of the empty tomb, the narratives make clear that someone believed them, because others act on their report.”* The others we know to be John and Peter, who ran to the tomb to verify the story the women had told them. Setzer also makes an excellent point of the importance of Mary Magdalene and the other women to the story of the resurrection. The Bible states they witnessed the death and burial of Jesus. The women, especially Mary Magdalene, provide us with a continuous witness to these events. In Luke Chapter 24 we find the story of the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and another anonymous disciple. Luke 24:19b-24 (NIV⁶) *19b“About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this*

² James Patrick Holding, *“Defending the Resurrection,”* Maitland: Xulon, 2010, 185-195.

³ Pheme Perkins, *“I Have Seen the Lord (John 20:18) - Women Witnesses to the Resurrection,”* *Interpretation*, 46 No 1 (January 1992) 31-41.

⁴ Mark 16:10-11 NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc)

⁵ Claudia Setzer, *“Excellent Women: Female Witness to the Resurrection,”* *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 116 no 2 (Summer 1997): 259-272.

⁶ Luke 24:19-24 NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc)

took place. ²²In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.” In this story the disciples are relating the story of the past few days’ events, and the women’s testimony. So, whether the disciples believed the women’s testimony or not, the women’s testimony was discussed as if it had actually happened. This story corroborates the women’s testimony with additional testimony of the empty tomb and additional proclamations that Jesus was alive by some of the other apostles.

Another often overlooked cultural barrier in the resurrection story was biasness against people from rural areas. Holding⁷ details this in his book. The fact Jesus and most of his followers were from Galilee and Nazareth would have been very off putting to most in the first century. Peter and John and many of the other disciples would have been dismissed. “People of the land” or poor rural folk were not considered to be reliable witnesses because they “could not be trusted.” *“The social status of a witness was of considerable importance both in the Israelite as well as Greco-Roman courts.”*

In addition to these three, many other Cultural Barriers existed in the story of the resurrection. The common argument is always that the whole story was made up. This argument is refuted by the many cultural Barriers that the story as recorded in the gospels created. In the first century, why would you include women as the primary witnesses if there was a prejudice again women’s testimony? The only plausible answer is this was honestly what the women told the disciples, and it was what these women believed they experienced. If the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Jesus is only a made up story, then why crucifixion? Crucifixion was intended to shame the victim. In the first century, if your objective was to glorify your leader who was killed, you would never mention crucifixion. Death by crucifixion was disgraceful. How would you explain away the criminal’s death your leader endured? The only reason is Jesus must have been crucified and then bodily resurrected on the third day.

And if you were concocting a story to deceive people in the first century, then why would the prominent character be poor rural people. The only plausible answer is most of the prominent characters were poor rural people. Shameful death, witnesses are low class people and disregarded women, so how is this convincing. Well, it is if it’s the truth. Jesus died, then three days later he was made alive again. His physical resurrected body was seen by women and poor rural people, as well as more than five hundred others. The story is plausible because it is so counter cultural and ignores the many social barriers that would have inhibited the acceptance of the story.

⁷ James Patrick Holding, “Defending the Resurrection,” Maitland: Xulon, 2010, 233-234, 239-240.

Apostles' Behavior

The Apostles behavior is to me the most compelling proof for the bodily resurrection of Jesus. What can change a person's behavior from complete defeat, fear and despondent mourning to a jubilation and complete commitment even until death.

Kathy McCamis⁸ writes, *"So let me remind us all: Jesus was well and truly dead. Crucified. One does not bounce back from crucifixion."* I am so thankful for Thomas who I think is far too maligned by contemporary scholarship. In John 20:24-25 (NIV⁹) *²⁴Now Thomas (also known as Didymus a), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."* McCamis goes on to say, *"Thomas's declaration, "My Lord and my God!" puts the exclamation mark on his example of belief, of trust in Jesus."* For Thomas seeing was believing but his declaration is one of the strongest recorded in the Bible. What could possibly change Thomas from a sullen, despondent, defeated soul, to My Lord and my God? Only a physical reembodyed resurrected Jesus.

Peter is one of the most profound behavioral changes. Philip Towner¹⁰ discusses how in 1 Peter, Peter speaks of the resurrection as historical fact. In his letter Peter stresses how the early Christians could endure their present suffering by looking forward to Christ based on the truth of resurrection. Remember the people Peter was writing to were suffering because they proclaimed Jesus. They faced extreme persecution and death because they were Christian. Peter stresses the importance of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Janusz Kucicki,¹¹ writes about how Peter was a consistent and steadfast witness to the *"Resurrected Messiah"* even until his death. Luke shows in his account of Peter, how the disciples were acting by the will of God in direct contradiction to the will of the Sanhedrin. Peter went from denying he even knew Jesus and running away, to loudly proclaiming the resurrected Jesus. Peter faced torture and death, but never wavered from the re-embodiment of Jesus and the empty tomb. What can make a person change their behavior so drastically? What can change a denying coward into someone willing to die for proclaiming Jesus had been made bodily alive? The most plausible answer is Peter saw a reembodyed resurrected Jesus. Peter spoke to and ate with a resurrected Jesus.

Paul is another whose behavior changed drastically because of the resurrection of Jesus. Robert Sloan¹² writes that *"for Paul the resurrection of Jesus was not merely the resuscitation/ resurrection of one man, as if God had performed some striking but*

⁸ Kathy McCamis, *"The incredulity of Thomas -An Easter sermon on John 20:19-31,"* Vision (Winnipeg, Man.), 24 no 1 (Spring 2023): 35-41.

⁹ John 20:24-25 NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc)

¹⁰ Philip H. Towner, *"Resurrection in 1 Peter,"* The Biblical Annals, 9 no 3 (2019): 513-523.

¹¹ Janusz Kucicki, *"Witnesses of the Resurrected Messiah. Luke's Presentation of the Main Theological Theme of the Acts of the Apostles,"* The Biblical Annals, 9 no 4 (2019): 671-695.

¹² Robert B. Sloan, *"Resurrection in I Corinthians,"* Southwestern Journal of Theology, 26 no 1 (Fall 1983): 69-91.

absurdly improbable feat. For Paul it was an event that signaled the beginning of the resurrection from the dead.” Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20 (NIV¹³) *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*). Kucicki¹⁴ stresses that the “event at Damascus was purely divine intervention that overcame the hostility of Paul.” Marcel Sarot¹⁵ says, “For Paul, it was clear: With the Resurrection of Jesus, the reliability of the whole Christian faith stands or falls.” This is a strong claim, and Paul makes it about the resurrection and the resurrection only. 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 (NIV¹⁶) *16For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.* Paul never uses any of the many other miracles of Jesus that can be found in the New Testament. William Loader¹⁷ points out that Paul fundamentally asserted the “embodiedness of the resurrection.” Additionally, C.F. Sleeper¹⁸ discusses Paul’s distinction between the resurrection appearances and other spiritual phenomena. Paul’s conversion is so dramatic that many question if the event could have happened. But the history of Paul’s persecution of the early Christian combined with Paul’s own testimony about his persecution of the Church are not contested. Then an abrupt change in his life. From a Pharisee with future in the Sanhedrin to the most hated person in the world by those very same Jewish leaders. Luke details the hatred the Jews had for Paul after his conversion. Larry Shillock¹⁹ writes that, “for Paul, the present and future are irrevocably changed by the example of Christ.” Jesus the Christ, the risen Christ change Paul’s life. In Shillock’s article, he quotes NT Wight, “Messiah-people must learn the way of life that belongs to the future, and practice it even amidst the puzzles that continue in the present.” This epitomizes Paul. Paul went from Christian hater to the most fervent defender of Jesus. What could possibly cause such a drastic shift in behavior? The only plausible answer is a face-to-face bodily meeting with a resurrected Jesus himself.

James is another of the early witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. James describes himself as the brother of our Lord (Galatians 1:19). James is depicted in the gospels as not only doubting in Jesus but actually taunting Jesus. John 7:1-4 (NIV²⁰) *1After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him. 2But when the Jewish Festival of*

¹³ 1 Corinthians 15:20 NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc)

¹⁴ Janusz Kucicki, “Witnesses of the Resurrected Messiah. Luke’s Presentation of the Main Theological Theme of the Acts of the Apostles,” *The Biblical Annals*, 9 no 4 (2019): 671-695.

¹⁵ Marcel Sarot, “*The Ultimate Miracle? The Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus,*” *HTS Theological Studies*, 70 no 1 (2014): 1-9.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc)

¹⁷ William R G. Loader, “*The New Testament and The Resurrection,*” *Colloquium*, 22 no 1 (October 1989): p 45-50.

¹⁸ C Freeman Sleeper, “*Pentecost and Resurrection,*” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 84 no 4 (December 1965): 389-399.

¹⁹ Larry T. Shillock, “*The Walking Flesh: Zombies, Narrative Desire, and the Apostle Paul’s Anxious Account of Embodiment,*” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, 13 no 2 (September 2014): 111-122.

²⁰ John 7:1-4 NIV (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2011 by Biblica, Inc)

Tabernacles was near, ³Jesus’ brothers said to him, “Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. ⁴No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.” ⁵For even his own brothers did not believe in him. Then suddenly after his brother is crucified, James becomes one of the most influential leaders in the early church and a fervent defender of the resurrection. James held to the resurrection as truth and was martyred for his belief in Jesus.

In addition to Thomas, Peter, Paul, and James, the other apostles all made dramatic inexplicable behavioral changes after Jesus was crucified. The apostles scattered in the garden when Jesus was arrested and cowered in fear after the crucifixion. But then they emerged confident and committed. They never recanted and were persecuted, tortured, jailed and martyred for their belief in Jesus.

All of these men had dramatic changes to their behavior. Paul, who was a hater of all the disciples of Jesus, then flips completely. Paul becomes arguably the most influential leader of the early Christian movement. What could possibly explain this complete change of life priorities. Thomas changes from, I won’t believe unless I see it, into a person willing to die to defend the cause of Christ. Peter denies Jesus three times when it really matters, then after Jesus dies, he is willing to die for proclaiming the resurrection. James, the brother of our Lord. What would it take for you to believe your brother was the resurrected son of God? James changed into a person willing to die defending the resurrection. All the other apostles went from fear and despair to victory and boldness. What could possibly change so many, so fundamentally and irrevocably? Changed to the point that they all are willing to die defending their belief. Only a physical bodily resurrected Jesus, sitting, eating, and talking with each of them individually could cause such a seismic change.

Conclusion

Although many have proposed theories to refute the claims of these witnesses. As Dr. Craig details in his book *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*²¹, shows how most have been thoroughly refuted by contemporary scholarship. Dr. Craig goes on the frame the historical basis for the resurrection with three primary arguments, 1) testimony of Paul; 2) gospel accounts are fundamentally reliable historically; 3) accounts of physical, bodily appearances. Dr. Craig follows up with a working explanation for the resurrection appearances. One of these explanations addresses the purely natural alternative to the resurrection, that the contends the disciples saw a veridical vision instead of a reembodied Jesus. Dr. Craig uses the follow points to disprove this alternative, 1) there is no known comparable cases to Jesus’ resurrection appearances in any other historical accounts; 2) the number of occasions on which Jesus was seen over a long period of time is unparalleled in history; 3) veridical visions cannot explain the physical, bodily nature of Jesus’ appearances; and 4) veridical visions of dead persons only occur to individuals who are unaware of the person’s death. Other alternative theories such as mass hallucinations and

²¹ William Lane Craig, “*The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*,” Eugene: Wiph & Stock, 2000.

cognitive dissonance, simply do not fit the story of the resurrection. These types of psychological phenomena have never been shown to give rise to new information or dramatic changes of behavior. Additionally, none of these theories can address the dramatic change in the life of Paul.

David Cramer²² asked some obvious questions about the resurrection story. The story uses words like *puzzled, terrified, nonsense, didn’t believe it, wondering*. These are not words we would use in a story of victory. *“And yet, here they are in Luke’s Gospel narrative of that first Easter morning. Why would Luke include these details?”* The most plausible reason was these events unfolded exactly how the witnesses said they did. Remember, everyone in the resurrection story had experienced intense trauma psychologically, emotionally and physically. Then, just days after this intense traumatic experience, their psychological, emotional and physical demeanor change. Their change was not from sadness to apathy but from utter defeat to victory. Scream from the mountain top victory. The gospels inclusion of these details does not undermine the veracity of the accounts. If anything, it makes it more believable. Ultimately, on that Sunday morning, something happened. We are asked to believe the testimony of these traumatized survivors. Who are telling us about the things they have heard and seen and experienced.

NT Wright²³ calls this a revolution. Most early Christians were Jewish. Wright says, *“origins of Christianity are only plausible if Jesus was actually bodily resurrected after he died.”*

Let’s Pray. Father God, thank you for giving us the resources and sources to answer these tough questions. We know you know all things. When we see how things fit perfectly in your plan. Wow. Only with God is this possible Thank you for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us and help us. Help us to open the Bible and look into history to answer our questions. I pray these things in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

Thank you for joining me @ the PUNLA Coffee Table today, I hope you’ll join us again.

If you liked the message, please share the link with a friend. Send me comments, my email should be on the screen.

Until next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.

²² David C. Cramer, *“Puzzled and terrified - An Easter homily on Luke 24:1–12,* “Vision (Winnipeg, Man.), 24 no 1 (Spring 2023): 31-34.

²³ N T. Wright, *“Christian Origins and the Resurrection of Jesus: The Resurrection of Jesus as a Historical Problem,”* Sewanee Theological Review 41 (2) (1998): 107–23.